

The Swedish School of Textiles

Borås is Sweden's textile city, with a rich history. The Swedish School of Textiles, (Textilhögskolan) is located here, offering a number of different programs of study within the textile field. The Swedish School of Textiles has repeatedly received international acclaim for its textile programs, which are tempered for contemporary textile production, as well as for the forward-looking research within develops new materials, techniques, and use cases.

Little more than ten years ago, the Textile Museum of Sweden and The Swedish School of Textiles (Textilhögskolan) moved to the Textile Fashion Center in Simonsland, Borås. This environment offers students at The Swedish School of Textiles access to a textile archive, exhibitions featuring both domestic and international exhibitors, as well as a textile museum, all close at hand. This is a part of what makes The Swedish School of Textiles a unique place for students.

The collaboration between the education and the industry has always been important, necessary for developing the school's programs as well as giving the students real-life experience that foster them for the demands of working life. In the full-scale labs, students gain experience in a number of techniques: weaving, knitting, tufting, dyeing, printing and sewing, which no other school in Europe can offer. The programs are very popular, and many students from all over the world apply.

When we visit, it's the end of the spring semester. Senior Lecturer in Textile Design Tonje Kristensen Johnstone and Senior Lecturer Margareta Zetterblom show us the degree exhibition EXIT, featuring thesis work by students from the BA and MA programs in textile design.



Léna Ordroneau's thesis in textile design at master's level awarded *Hybrid surfaces, Textile as a portal*. p.131: Top right photo + detail, Phlox van Oppen, master textile design, was awarded for *Continues flux, weaving life stories of women into multi-layered structures, revealing and concealing different layers and colors*.

In a dark room with suggestive lighting a number of interesting textiles are displayed. A concept that keeps coming up is craftsmanship. Margareta and Tonje emphasize how important it is that the work is well-made, has a clear sustainability angle, and is relevant to the goals set in the work leading up to the thesis. In preparation for their theses, a concrete plan is formulated together with an advisor, leading to an independent result. High technical

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PHOTO: BENGT ARNE IGNELL



proficiency and conscious material design choices, combined with craftsmanship, are through-lines for the students.

Many of the students already have placements after graduation. The degree works will be shown at Dutch Design Week in Eindhoven in October, as well as at 3daysofdesign in Copenhagen.

Some Highlights of the Exhibition:

The first contribution is placed outside the exhibition space. *Léna Ordronneaus* MA degree work builds on the meeting of the physical/tactile and the digital/visual world. A magnificent, material-heavy jacquard-woven sculpture hangs in the room. When it is presented in a virtual 3-D presentation, it shows up in wildly different environments and gives us stories and experiences from the character of a unique textile, in a world where textiles are often experienced scrolling through social media. Her work is part of the new program Artistic Master of Arts in Textile and Fashion Design, with a focus on textile interaction design.



Master student *Mingna Hu* writes on her website that textile is "thinking by doing". She presents a collection made in Swedish overspun wool. When the woven fabric is taken out of the weaving machine the overspun yarn crimp the materials, resulting in three-dimensional, sculptural textiles. Mingna combines craftsmanship with a wealth of artistic ideas, where a number of objects have completely separate expressions. After graduation, Mingna pursues a doctoral degree at Malmstens Linköping University.

Malin Wing's weave design *Distortion*, is part of her degree work *Anamnesis: Woven Structures for the Public Soundscape*. The weave creates a beautiful shadow play on the floor when light from lamps trickles through the woven fabric. The fabrics in the collection affect sound in different ways, depending on which material the sound passes through. The three textiles represent different sound effects, and are placed on an impact scale, from absorption to additive. Wool absorbs and metal affect sound environments in an opposite direction.

Phlox van Oppen's designs in her master degree work offers, at first glance, a surface of waves made of shimmering yarns. After a closer examination, the waves are placed in a number of different layers. These fluid wave patterns represent different women whom Phlox van Oppen has interviewed. In the woven structure, some life-waves are visible, while others are not. Like in real life. The structure of the weave is not permanent, its movement represents the changeability of life. It's a poetic and visual story where the weave carries a lot of history.

Malva Kling has investigated how repetitive, jacquardwoven flower patterns can be designed in a new way in her Bachelor degree work in textile design, *Repeating patterns*. Dahlia, Lupine, and Geranium are the models for her interpretations. It begun with Malva's own drawings, translated into jacquard woven patterns in which four colors, but different wefts, floats, create three completely different textiles.

The Swedish School of Textiles has visitors representing many different manufacturers. One category is the car industry, looking for the future textile designers.

Matisse Garlopeau, is on Mitsubishi's list of four interesting new designers. The title of his Master thesis is *Design Study on Car Seat: a speculative deconstruction of the hyper-industrialised car seat through Jacquard weaving*. It's elegant and very commercial, with sustainability and artistic integrity in focus. The fabrics made me think of unique indigodyed textiles, with a sober design.

We continue our tour in the well-equipped, full-scale lab with Margareta Zetterblom. The machine park is based on the reality students will enter after. Many of the machines have the latest technology. But there are also older machines, which are sometimes necessary. Interdisciplinary work is encouraged, and the doors between the labs are literally open. We enter the Smart Textiles showroom and the material library. It was created in 2010, giving the Nordic region its first textile material library. The students can immerse themselves in techniques and combinations of materials for inspiration and information gathering. There are also samples from research projects in Smart Textiles. Knitting, crochet, and weaving are used to develop structures that can be used in the medical field. There is old moldy



bread on one shelf – a possible component in the making of yarn in the future.

In the Knitting lab, the latest machines stand next to hand-knitting machines. At one point, a secret development project was undertaken with an industrial partner, everything was done behind closed drapes.

In the Print and Dying lab, there are large tables for screen printing. The dyes are mixed in a dye kitchen. There is a growing interest in working with plant dyes from a sustainability perspective, Margareta Zetterblom tells us. Matilda Falk is a doctoral student working with the subject.

We finish our tour in the Weaving lab. Here we find hand looms for material experiments and sample weaving. Marie Ekstedt Bjersing, Lecturer, introduces students to drafting, material studies, and weaving. Some will work as buyers and developers, in which case knowledge of how a weave is constructed, and in which materials, is important. Marie is an alumni from Väfskolan, a weave-education with a focus on advanced handweaving, closed 2009. The focus that previously existed at Väfskolan doesn't exist to the same extent at The Swedish School of Textiles, but both Margareta Zetterblom and Marie Ekstedt Bjersing point out that there are many opportunities to develop handweaving in different projects, and they both point out the importance of "making by hand" as an important step towards more industrial weaving.

All students are offered basic courses in different subjects, such as weaving. They begin with a simple frame or table loom in order to understand the interaction between warp and weft, then move on to treadle looms and dobby looms. Those who have more experience can advance in a faster pace.

Students will learn to work on the weaving machines on their own. Of course, experienced technicians are by their side, but the ideas and the work is done by the students. This means they are well equipped and independent when they work in the industry, says Margareta Zetterblom.

Fredrik Wennersten and Hanna Lindholm are teaching technicians. They both have long experience and knowledge in weaving techniques. Fredrik has also worked in the textile industry.

What knowledge is needed for the future?

HL: We need thoughts about how we can take care of the resources that already exist through reuse, as well as more ideas about how we change fashion production to slow fashion.

FW: Sustainability! Which has been really important in all companies. You have to know a lot about different subjects. Often there is a distance between designer and technician. Students here can weave themselves, no go-between is needed.

Many of Sweden's weaving mills and other textile companies contact The Swedish School of Textiles for advice. Fredrik Wennersten tells us about how they assisted Swedish Wool Initiative when they wanted to scale up to an extended production using Swedish wool.

The technicians in the Weave lab also do warps for weaving mills that don't have warping mills, and they help source machine parts and try to answer all the "thousand questions" a new weaving mill owner may have, which has happened a few times the last few years. There is also an Incubator at the Textile and Fashion Center where former students can develop their business ideas.

We follow Marie to one of the old weaving machines where an order for shawls has been woven for Skansen,



p.132: Mingna Hu, MA, *Self-Forming*.

Top: Matisse Garlopeau, MA, *Design Study on car seat – a speculative deconstruction of the hyper-industrialised car seat through Jacquard weaving*.

Left: Malva Kling, BA, *Repeating patterns*.

Below: Malin Wing, BA, *Distortion*.



a museum in Stockholm. A number were also handwoven by Sara Kånåhols.

At one of the jacquard looms, Hanna Lindholm shows us a woven fabric in many layers, in which crimp yarn creates volume. It could be soundproof or upholstery fabric, depending on the material and how it is woven. Both of these woven fabrics show the breadth of possibilities at The Swedish School of Textiles.

I also ask Margareta Zetterblom and Marie Ekstedt Bjersing about what kinds of knowledge are important for the future:

MZ: Knowledge of and awareness about materials, such as not mixing synthetic and natural materials in the same textile. We're not even close to being able to separate materials. We have to start thinking about how that can happen. Another factor is how we look at the aging of textiles. The industry is built upon that nothing shall change over time, for example that colors should not fade. It might be positive that colors change over time, if we can avoid the usage of strong chemicals. We also have to think about which textiles we really need for a more sustainable production. This is why it is exciting to get a design education in a time of change. But even the education has to think differently: we can't just offer "same as usual"!

MEB: Quality assurance! To be able to evaluate a textile. We have to think about what kind of industry we want. It has to become more flexible and small-scale. We can't keep producing surplus. New tech can be an answer there. Using Drawing-in machine, we can faster prepare a loom with new threading. I also believe in smaller production series of better quality. If we have more picks per centimeter, we get a more sustainable textiles. And it's not as simple as only using natural materials. But synthetics and natural materials should not be in the same textile.

Before we leave, we look at specially-designed clothing for the guides at the UN in New York. A prestigious assignment given to The Swedish School of Textiles. A collection emerged in which sustainability and flexibility are at the center. Next step is accessories, design-students on a masterlevel have worked together with students from Central Saint Martins - University of the Arts, London.



Top left: Fredrik Wennersten.
Top right: Marie Ekstedt Bjersing and Margareta Zetterblom.
Bottom left: Hanna Lindholm.
Right: The UN collection for guides.
Photo: Agaton Ström

TIMELINE

It all began when Borås Tekniska Väfskola (The Borås School of Weaving) was founded in 1866. The reason for starting a school in Borås was that there was already a well-established organization for home-industry, many talented weavers, and a growing industrial sector in the city. New knowledge was needed, and the school was one of the first to teach weaving on a jacquard loom. The school had its first name change, to Textilinstitutet, in 1948. The change to The Swedish School of Textiles came in 1996, and a postgraduate study program for artistic research was established in 2010. The number of professors and doctoral students has grown over the years, and the research regularly receives international acclaim, especially for the innovation platform Smart Textiles that was founded in 2006.