

Talking about Weaving

IT MOVES, SPINS, BENDS. GOES FROM STRAIGHT LINES AND CLEAR STAPLES TO FLOWING FIELDS AND PULSATING PLAINS. CAREFUL THREADS, PERSONAL PALETTES, FAST AND SLOW. A CONVERSATION WITH NANNY RÅDENMAN AND SANDY LAMB, BY MIRIAM PARKMAN.



Sandy Lamb

is a weaver based in Montréal, Canada. See more of his work on Instagram: [hautbeau](#).

Nanny Rådenman

is a professional weaver based in Stockholm, Sweden. See more of her work on Instagram: [nannyradenman](#).

I often say that "the warp is my paper and the weft my colors, my hand my brush". A plain tabby warp can be the beginning of pretty much anything - and each new weave carries the next idea.

I spoke to Nanny Rådenman and Sandy Lamb, two professional weavers also captured by the magic simplicity of tabby and tapestry. Nanny graduated the year before me at Handarbetets Vänner (HV) and is today active from her studio in Gustavsberg, outside Stockholm. Sandy has been an Instagram friend of mine for several years, from Montréal, Canada. The master thesis of Nanny, "The laundry room", remains one of my strongest textile experiences. A few years after came the next big crush: small, intricate tapestries in delicate threads, patiently woven weft by weft to slowly evolve into organic, geometric images. When I first found Sandy's work on Instagram, I was immediately captured by the geometrical, precise expression, where incredible transitions in colors caused the surface to seemingly simmer, almost vibrate. It was like a more organized, better calculated version of my own imagery where some colors played along fully with my own scheme and some challenged and surprised me. Both Nanny and Sandy use the loom in a way close to my own, and yet it's so entirely different. I began to speak with Nanny.

M: How and when did these tapestries come to life for the first time?

N: It was very sudden when I had left-over warp from a rag rug project. Spontaneously; "I'm gonna try and make a tapestry". I was surprised, since I never liked the tapestry class at HV, but something came loose, it was free

and I felt a great happiness from this new way of expressing myself in weav-ing. It resulted in seven images, shown in an exhibition called *Sexy Food* in 2019. It felt like a little secret, that I spent the summer working on those tapestries. I fell in love and got caught.

I think I will work with tapestry weaving my entire career but with slight alterations, since there's so much to discover.

NANNY RÅDENMAN

M: What does your process look like? Do you weave freely or with a sketch as your guide?

N: I very rarely use a sketch, if I do it's very simple: just a felt tip pen to trace the lines. A work sketch. But what I often do is collect the yarns I want, and feel attracted to, like a palette; a foundation or base. But speaking of sketches! I recently got a mentor, through the Swedish Arts and Craft's centre; Kirsten Hennix, a Dane who for many years has lived in Sweden, graduated from Konstfack when it was still called Tekniska. I've bought lots of yarn from her and along with them came her old overhead projector. "How do you scale up your sketches?" she asked. "Oh I never do sketches!" I replied. But when she told me how this works it felt possible even though I'm very un-technical - which I like - but it's now in my studio awaiting the next project.



4 Spheres 2021,
Sandy Lamb.

Räddaren i nöden in progress in Nanny's loom.

Testing, testing (the studio keep me sane) by Nanny Rådenman.

Knotting a work in progress by Sandy.



M: How does it feel when you weave, what affects the process positively and negatively?

N: Negatively – if I've slept badly, I feel tired. It's the body, the physical. If I feel a bit unstable mentally it's the contrary, it's a relief to work. When I started with the images it felt very therapeutic. Then, what's positive... it can sound a bit – sometimes it's so hard to talk about your own work! – but I never really struggle to find inspiration. Just taking the bus out to Gustavsberg – I might see something in the traffic. Nature, life – everything becomes your practice. Everything in life is inspiration. Then comes the material – now that I've purchased a lot from Kirsten and the studio is stocked it's a lot of fun to arrive there and see all the randomly put together colors and qualities. I think I will work with tapestry weaving my entire career but with slight alterations, since there's so much to discover.

M: It's so much fun to mix colors in tapestry weaving I think but it's hard!! My lesson is that it has to be garish in close up, otherwise it won't be like I wanted it seen from a distance.
N: But in the loom it can feel like "WOW this is taking up a lot of space"! But then the more experienced you get, the more daring one can become.

M: Well put! Now you have to tell me more about the project *The time of Nornor*.

N: It takes a start in the *Överhogdal tapestries*, 1000 year old woven pieces found in Överhogdal, Härjedalen county. They are now a part of the Jamtli museum collections in Östersund, close to where I grew up. They've always been there. At HV, teacher Lisa Hartman often spoke about them but I just didn't get it. When I had a residency in Iceland I wove an interpretation of the *Baldishol tapestry* from Norway. Researching that one, it finally clicked about the *Överhogdal tapestries*. Obsessed!! I've studied and gone through so many theories of what they depict now and that has led me into nordic mythology. "Nornorna" spun the "threads of destiny". Sometimes it says that they were sisters, sometimes not, but the youngest of them wove what the others spun. It has developed into a quite deep work for me as I've learned so much, but that said, the future spectator doesn't have to know it's about nordic mythology. I've worked with this since summer 2020 and to begin with, they will be exhibited at Järpen cultural center January 7–21st 2023. I'm very happy to have my first solo exhibition at home in Jämtland! At HV I mostly wove tabby yardage ... now I've transitioned into something more traditional,

something I thought was mossy then. But it isn't! And what if textiles had been preserved better through the ages of time, then the Iron Age might have been called the Flax Age instead.

M: Wow, yeah that's true ... That mindexperiment will have to round off our conversation, it's time to get back to work!

The next day, a zoom call is scheduled between me and Sandy. Afternoon coffee for me, morning coffee for him.

M: How and when did these tapestries come to life for the first time?

S: I used to do a lot of scarves, over shot techniques and such, but when I found weft-faced tapestries I just stopped. I do weave other things still from time to time but I generally moved away from the functional. It takes so much time to find a format, a structure – I've chosen to put this effort on tapestry.

M: What's in the small format, and the big format?

S: I've got one bigger loom and a smaller loom, the bigger one for more time-consuming, long projects and the smaller one for things I want to try immediately – they become samples

that I sometimes also sell. They're 14x14 inches. When I'm working on a larger piece I prefer a width that's within my own reach so that I won't have to move my chair back and forth. Then it comes to patience ... do you see yourself as a patient person?

M: No!

S: Me neither! People often assume that you have to be that if you're working at a loom. What I think about patience ... if you're sitting next to a person that's really annoying, then you have to have patience! But if you're doing something that intrigues you, that you enjoy – it's different.

M: *What does your process look like?*

S: I try to do some sketching every day on paper, and plan out the week. How many inches do I want to make this week, what ideas do I want to try out, what do I see for the future. I guess it's the same for you, every piece and idea is flowing into the next?

M: Yes!

S: There's never a shortage of ideas!

M: No, Nanny said the same thing as well. But I have seen pictures of, to me, very advanced photoshop sketches?

S: Yeah I use photoshop a lot, I scan sketches and then I have a tablet where I finish them. I never use a sketch underneath the warp while weaving, like you do, I just keep the tablet next to the loom with the sketch open.

M: *But what about the colors? The amazing gradients?*

S: It's just a lot of sampling! And calculating. Like, if I wanna cover this much distance, say 24 inches, I need two skeins per inch and then I need this many skeins for the whole piece, in this many shades of colors. It's months of sampling and years of dyeing to get to this point! Now that I have all of that knowledge, weaving isn't that hard.

M: I have wondered and thought about the fact that you always use the same type of yarn, consistently, in every piece. Sometimes I just want to send you a few skeins of shiny, hard spun, Swedish or Norwegian wool yarn and challenge you. Possibly see what you would make of it – "my" material in your skilled hands.

S: Haha I'd love that! I would like to work with more different yarns but then I also have to do all the sampling again. I just like it that way ... and I like the consistency.

Right now I'm making my first big rya piece and enjoying it quite a bit! Then I've had this idea for five years, now I have the skills and knowledge to finally make it.

SANDY LAMB

M: *How does it feel when you weave, what affects the process positively and negatively?*

S: Hmm...usually I listen to a podcast and just zone out. It feels good. All the jobs I've had ... like tree planting. It's so repetitive. Dishwasher – I love it. It works for me. Then what affects negatively – if I'm anxious or restless, then I can't focus.

M: *Is it important / tedious / enjoyable / other if the process is slow or fast?*

S: Now that I'm making a rya ... I posted a video of me rya knotting on Instagram stories the other day, filmed above the loom. People's reactions were "Why bother doing that?" "Are you a machine?" "Wow you gotta have so much patience!". Another weaver messaged me and suggested I could weave a canvas-like structure instead and then use a rug punching tool which is just ... so fascinating. I could do that for sure but it would still take me time to learn that technique and then I could also just send a sketch to be made in India. The process is the most important part!

Are you a creator or are you an artist? The art world is now co-opting the craft world, as in textiles, ceramics, and my impression is that they want to adopt the craft look into the world of art because it's trendy and so they want to learn it fast, which is contradictory. But when it comes to tufting, for example, you are really limited in what you can do, compared to the loom. In weaving I

constantly see new things that interest me, inspire and surprise me. Tufting is so far very commercially driven and less about exploring the technique. Working slowly is a political statement. Which also helps in not worrying about copycats! They're never going to put down as much time as I've put down in the studio anyway. And if they would – they'd find their own expression. I like to encourage people if I can.

M: *What are you currently working on, and what comes next?*

S: Right now I'm making my first big rya piece and enjoying it quite a bit! Then I've had this idea for five years, now I have the skills and knowledge to finally make it.

M: Exciting!

The conversation is interrupted by a man simply walking into the studio with a big bag in hand, asking if we sew curtains at this joint. A week later, we have a final conversation, all three of us.

M: *A final question, do you ever feel like you "have to" or "should" make functional/sellable objects just because you can?*

S: From the start I thought what I would do, was to find a product that I would develop and remake over and over again, perfecting it, in time grow faster and therein find my goal. But it turned out to be the opposite – the process is my goal, what fascinates and motivates me.

N: Sometimes I think that I should weave functional textiles. It would of course be simpler, economically speaking, but right now I just want to spend time in the loom with my images. I experience that slower pieces feel bigger in the end!

S: Yeah, there is only so much time. You have to go with your gut, to know what to spend it on.

Miriam Parkman is a professional weaver and textile artist based in Stockholm, Sweden. See more of her work on Instagram: miriamethe