



THREAD ART

THROUGH APRIL 2021 ANDREAS ERIKSSON'S LINEN TAPESTRIES WERE EXHIBITED AT THE NORDIC WATERCOLOUR MUSEUM, WITH SARA ERIKSSON IN THE GALLERY LOOM WEAVING IN LINEN. SAMPLES AND SKETCHES WERE ALSO INCORPORATED IN THE SHOW. HOW THREAD WANDERED IN THE WEAVES AND THE FINISHED WORK ITSELF MADE FOR AN IMPRESSIVE AND SPECTACULAR EXPERIENCE.

The show, *Andreas Eriksson – from sketch to tapestry*, at the Nordic Watercolour Museum has just reopened after having to close back in the beginning of December. It will run to the end of April and then move on to the *Museum of Sketches for Public Art* in Lund. We met Sara Eriksson at the show, interested to hear more about how she interprets an artist's sketches in linen thread.

The show begins in a room displaying some of Andreas Eriksson's watercolours and sketches as well as a painting. In the middle of this room is the loom on which Sara Eriksson was weaving. Display cases contain woven samples of techniques that produce a variety of textures with linen threads. Lined up on

shelves along the wall behind the loom are the linen yarns. These constitute Sara Eriksson's palette for her interpretations of Andreas Eriksson's sketches. So that's where we began. The shelf of yarn. Handspun yarns, in skeins, representing a rich range of shades and different types of thread. Fine spun, with a good deal of twist, soft and furry, uneven, smooth, all with their wordless narratives about where and when and by whom they came into being. Alongside are cones of machine spun flax, from dark to light and fine to thick. Singles, plied. I asked her about her favourite yarns.

– Here are the ones I really know.
On the shelf down below lay a little collection of yarns.

– And this one. She took down a skein from a shelf higher up. This one can turn into something extraordinary.

A little ball of thick, soft, light and almost golden yellow handspun flax, uneven and a little furry, which might be just the one for a special moment. The cones of Mattlin (rug linen), yarn specially designed by Wanja Djanaieff for Holma Helsingland with 6 strands of nr 4 linen, intended for rugs amongst other items, are here used for weaving large areas with floats or with the thread divided for denser surfaces. Depending. Common to all the yarn used in the tapestries is that they are unbleached. And like unbleached yarn, they fade in time.

Cover The shelf of yarns.

Page 18 Threads hanging on the reverse inspired the opulent swell of thread in rya knots, *Weissensee No 12*, detail, woven by art weaver Katja Beckman. Page 19 From the top, unbleached linen yarns with a variety of textures depending on how the flax grew, the retting process, the spinning – singles, plied. Andreas Eriksson's sketch for the weave *Djurgården*. Sara Eriksson weaving in the exhibition.

– Fading is a natural part of a textile's life. We know it happens. That too is part of the process. How it fades depends on where the work is hung and its exposure to light. The tapestries are still very new, so exactly how they will change is not apparent, but the textures always remain, the wanderings of the threads stay put like traces of ideas and the presence of the hand, combined with the linen which has its own story. In time the tapestry acquires dimensionality of another kind.

Sara Eriksson has been working as an art weaver for almost six years, in close collaboration with Andreas Eriksson, creating his all-linen monumental tapestries. This began in Lidköping, continued with Friends of Handicraft in Stockholm (HV) and then in Berlin, where she was responsible for the studio, working alongside the 4 other art weavers there: Maria Andersson, Katja Beckman, Siri Pettersson and Ben Smith. Of the work completed there, thirteen tapestries went over to the Stephen Friedman Gallery in London, for a show which was not able to open, prevented by the corona pandemic restrictions. Six of those tapestries are on show here. One has been sold. The looms in Berlin are returning to Sweden to be used for new work, back again in Lidköping.

We went into the room where the tapestries were hung. The response evoked was of rapt attention. Just us in the room. The tapestries were breathing. Suspended low in that space, it was like beholding a landscape, like one could take a step into it, become part of it. Each of them had a narrative, whispered from one to the other. One tapestry gave the impulse for the next. Sara Eriksson pointed out areas created by different threads: a large, light surface formed by one thread, with several strands combined in some areas, single-stranded in others. Floating over a thread, close, tight, over others to create little mounds, shadows, like furrows in the earth. The fruit of technique and sensitivity in deeper dialogue with the artist. The tapestries there, hanging very straight, were set at a little distance from the wall. Getting to that point involved arduous and time-consuming work. Requiring a great deal of knowledge about linen yarns specifically and weaving technique generally.



– Linen yarn always presents some kind of resistance, you need to engage in a close dialogue with the yarn and know how it will behave in the weaving.

To produce a tapestry that hangs really straight, careful planning and insight into the work as a whole are needed. Slits or kelim holes are woven at yarn changes, while other areas are interlaced by twisting wefts together. These techniques also play a part in the construction of the tapestry and its final form. All the work is lined and mounted according to textile conservator Ingeborg Skaar's instructions. Sara described how the tapestry gets built up:

– The upper and lower parts of the tapestry provide stability, so denser areas with smaller surfaces can be woven in between. The warp ends in these latter areas often get pushed out with weft elbowing in and occupying space. This then needs balancing.

As weaving progresses, the tapestry gets rolled up on the cloth beam, so only a little section is visible to the weaver. After doing a number of linen tapestries, Sara has become more and more aware of what is going on with the work as a whole.

– I can get comments like it appears so meditative doing weaving ... this work demands constant mindfulness. Each pick is a decision.

Does she undo it?

– No. The weaving is of itself a process. Once a tapestry has been cut down, we look at the result. We reflect on it with Andreas. What went well? What could be taken further? The following sketch offers new conditions.

– Andreas' instructions are given as markings on the sketches, information about the expression of the surface areas, the feel. Our role as art weavers is to interpret this and with these threads here – she turns and waves her arms like a conductor over all the yarn – create a work.

The exhibition at the Museum of Artistic Process and Public Art in Lund runs from 10 June–10 October.

Read more about the art weavers and Andreas Eriksson in VÄV 2/18.