

## EPITAPHS 1)

The medieval Black book (Cyprianus) was a book of sorcery containing magic formulas, with which people thought they were able to evoke spirits and force the evil one to obey them. Cyprianus was according to the legend a heathen wizard that turned over to Christianity, became bishop and was martyred in A.D. 290. Already in the early Middle age there are books of spells in his name found in Latin and Greek manuscripts. The Danish and Norwegian Black books are from the 18:th and 19:th century and include besides the usual incantations of spirits and devils also medieval black magic and relics of heathen magic formulas, often in Christian disguise. The Black book was commonly small and written with red letters. It did not burn in fire and you could not get rid of it without throwing it in flowing water.

Without a certain obsession, creative work is not possible. At the same time a work lacking reflection is unreleased. For me, to write is a parallel to the creative act of making images. Before even the most crude sketch for an image, during and in the afterthought of distance from the stream of images, lies meditations and incantations in writing. The act of writing is sometimes also a help to get rid of certain ideas. "Why execute an idea when you have already dreamt about it?", as Leonardo said. On the contrary writing can also be of help to hold fast to an evasive idea, suggest contexts and necessity in working with images.

Art makes art. Each artist refers to aspects of ones own art from different phases of the artistry, processes and cites in this fashion oneself. But to the same degree, we are having these "conversations" with the rest of the artistic field, not least with art history, where the dead are still living in us and populate our loneliness. They challenge our thoughts and images, they correct us and put us on the right track of the individual way we all have to take. This is quite natural. Just as we whisper with our dead parents or the absent lover, just as obviously we whisper with other chosen artists, the ones that are pregnant enough to take shelter within our own creative life.

The access to our own dreams is a substantial source both to creative work and as a means of getting to know ourselves. The American artist Janine Antoni is often rather direct and physical in her performance related work. Her technically most advanced

work so far was shown the spring 1994 in London. *Slumber* is a work about the dream and the unconscious. Through a whole month she slept in the gallery. During the night she was hooked on to a medical apparatus that registered the movements of the eyes. When a human being is dreaming the eyes are moving differently than during ordinary sleep. The machine translated these movements to a computer programmed printer that was connected to a loom. With a starting point in this print she was weaving. "During daytime I was weaving what my unconscious had produced during the night. The tapestry grew steadily larger. After a while I could sleep underneath my own dreams." The circle was closed, the woven dream tapestry was returning back to the body as a protection.

The thread is not exclusively a concrete work material, it is also a highly charged symbol. Chapter 12 of the text Ecclesiastes, in the Old Testament, starts with: "Remember now the Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not," /.../ and continues in the sixth and seventh verses with (my italics): "Or ever *the silver cord be loosed*, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern / Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it".

The music of Magnar Åm has one of its starting points in Norwegian psalms. He deepens the religious dimension in his piece for string quartet from 1995. *The Silver Cord* cultivates musically the biblical silver thread as "the fragile line between the side of our being that is one with everything and that which is separated from everything".

The painter Agnes Martin's importance as an artist in America after the second world war has an important addition in her reflected texts and lectures for young art students. She put severe demands on herself, and suggested concerning the mission of an artist that "*to hold on to the silver cord*, that is the artistic discipline".

Within Sufi mysticism the calligraphic / scripture's structure, composed of horizontal and vertical strokes is considered to be synonymous with the structure of the woven piece. Both are symbolically loaded. The verticals of scripture, like the warp of the loom, demonstrates an ontological coherence and a bearing structure for the motive, while the horizontals of scripture, like the weft of weaving, corresponds to the creation and the development of the fundamental intension. It is through the

harmonic interweaving of horizontals and verticals that the unity is achieved. The vertically and horizontally woven corresponds to the active and passive qualities of all things. Like scripture is interwoven to a unity of horizontals and verticals, so is also the mystic in his spiritual condition through continuous and recurrent invocation united in his own internal opposites. This is called Hadrat (=presence). Sufi comes from the Arabic word for wool = Suf, since the Sufis were wearing rough woollen coats.

The inscription is the material aspect of the soundless experience of language, in that the way of the hand over the empty surface leaves irrevocable traces. Our era's preoccupation with scripture's physical side could be the result of sorrow due to the lost sensuality of language. During the last 20 years, with the emergence of computers, the typographical expertise has been marginalized, and handwriting even more so. Ever fewer are the irrevocable gestures. Ever rarer the presence that is realized by what can not be done again or be recalled. "A letter", wrote Seneca, "carries real marks from the absent friend. Because a friend's handwriting offers us that what is so joyful when you see him again, the feeling of recognition."

The text is thus a trace, but also a weave: the Latin *textus* means just weave. The first marks on the empty surface that received the looks of humans consisted of, apart from the triangles that are often associated with the female sex, of net patterns. In these Paleolithic "ur-texts" without alphabet the inscription was thus coexisting as trace or crack with the inscription as weave.

Concretely, to weave an image is to fill a given surface with letters. The letters consist of points and lines that must follow certain regulations in order to form meaning or constitute a textual body. Depending on the linguistic area in question the written page is filled from the top or from the bottom of the sheet, towards the right or left, not unlike when I start "writing" my image from the lower rim of the warp, while gradually to fill the sheet of the linen, line by line, point by point, until the upper margin of the image/warp is reached.

Sometimes it is obvious in this way to literally think about building an image as building a wall: first the foundation wall (the *soumak*-edge) and the framework (the warp), then level by level of stones, joints, gaps and panel (the *weft*).

*Spruce-fur*. The image consists of three layers: in the first distinctly thin light lines/signs are lying as an over-text. The second, underlying layer of darker, faintly coloured, shaggy shadows of signs and lines are forming an under-text. As a third layer lays the large bottomless darkness. The image's span in colour is reduced approaching the black-grey-white.

In a way I now weave my image *Forest* from 1982 again (not only *Hiding places* or *Breach*, that are easy to recollect), but I do so nota bene with 24 years of experience of making images in between. This last woven forest of mine is attached to the landscape that is more mine than any other one. The title hints the anthropomorphic traits of the forest, skin covered with hair like the body of the forest's needles, and hence both nature that "writes itself" and the human that writes itself into nature. *Spruce-fur* is never the less more script similar than reminding of a forest. The forest is a memory. The scripture is an epitaph to her that brought me into the forest, my mother.

Even if I move away from here, from my forest, my ancestral farm on mother's side and my only childhood home in a nomadic upbringing, the forest will remain with me. Even this century old house, inhabited by me for the last 25 years and my most important haunt, I would bring along with me, like the snail carrying its own house, its walls, floor and roof.

"At times I have a curiously strong feeling that I can hear a rushing sound from far off, from the age-old primeval forest, from the immeasurably sweep of the sea. / I have tall houses around me, streets, public buildings, theatres, stretching far and wide. But on some evenings it is as though a gust of air reaches me from some far distant place where it is wild and where there are things no human hand has planted. / And I get the feeling that this rushing sound is stealing in among the press of buildings, through the huddle of streets and such like – from the age-old primeval forest and the immeasurable sweep of the sea. / Imagine if the echo of this sound were to vanish from the soul of man. I do not know why but the thought of a time when Man has analysed and re-cast all things makes me shudder with fear. / A time when the face of the earth is covered with buildings and schools and kitchen vegetables, and when the waves of the sea are by some trick reduced to silence. / I think my heart could not

beat if I did not know that somewhere – be it never so distant – my soul might encounter wild forest that no human hand had planted.”

(Sigbjørn Obstfelder, from A priest's diary.)

Among my oldest memories of images are these two: grandmother's square-tapestry (Norwegian ruteåkle) from Hardanger, from around the year 1900, and the garden image of Jacob Weidemann, a painting from the early 1950:ies.

The tapestry is small, approximately 40 x 60 centimetres, and consists of two eight-petal roses that together form a mandala with two wheels. The characteristic zigzag rim (Norwegian lynildbord) delimit the tapestry at the sides. When the grownups were taking an afternoon nap and the house should be silent, I lay wide awake on the veranda divan and stared at the small tapestry on the wall. The two roses' rotation became with the child's urge of systematics a sign of infinity. The colours were already then bleached, and in a way reduced to only light-dark. The threads were rather thin and it astonished me to see how it was possible to join threads so finely and precise into a whole that was larger than each single thread, like tiny building stones, and I imagined that in such a way it was possible to build a whole universe!

The blue-green painting of Weidemann was hanging in the living room, and was carrying with it promises of adventurous exploratory wanderings into a secret garden where shimmering rooms were succeeding one another inwards in the surface of the image, like in a labyrinth. With the child's need to build caves or huts of leaves, remove itself from the grownups and establish its own world, this image appeared as solely mine. The image represents a turning point from the informal painting of the 1940:ies of Weidemann. It has another concretion and with its closeness to nature gives notice of the *Forest floor*-images that would come a few years later.

You don't choose your first language. It is given to you. Like your own body. Even love is choosing us, and if it finds us ready to receive it and the amount of work it demands from us, then we are its trustees. What is given to us is an invocation, and it is then up to us to answer, in order to become the one we are.

The tapestries *Ceiling* and *Forest floor* represent two extreme points: heaven and earth. Architecturally viewed ceiling and floor are symbolically equivalent. In a textile context the canopy was such a ceiling or star strewn heaven, often magnificently worked out with indigo, gold or purple heaving itself over the terrestrial, the human. In the same way the floor, especially in churches, was symbolizing the stations on the road of life, the pilgrims journey compressed to a labyrinth (like you can see for instance in the cathedral of Chartres).

The image *Ceiling* is inscribed in an octagon, and the eight armed starry vault implies the heavenly wheels' movements. The main timbre is sienna – umber – indigo.

Structures of numbers permeate every part of our existence in time and space. Implicit and explicit numbers can be traced as organizing principles in both poetry and art, most clearly however in architecture and music. It is tempting here to mention Leibniz' famous definition of music as "a secret practise in arithmetic performed by a sense that has forgotten the fact that it counts". The symbolic dimensions of numbers are known, as well as their incantatory character: to repeat something a certain number of times strengthens the message.

The image *Forest floor* is a numeric-magical cosmogram. Its starting point is a cross composition within the fivefold timbre yellow – violet – green – red – blue (simultaneously the five liturgical colours and the main tone of my tapestry *By the river*). The colours are laying partially transparent against a dark underlying bottom. 10 x 10 crosses are forming the tapestry's square. One cross is missing, its place is empty and the total number of crosses is thus 99. Of these every twelfth cross is red, representing time. Green is also carrier of time, and each seventh cross is green. 5 stands for the physical realm, five world continents and the creator's hand / my hand. These five are blue, and asymmetrically placed. The colour violet and the number 4 indicates the four cardinal points east, west, north and south, anchored in the margins of the tapestry, where the fourth cross of each corner is violet. The cardinal points are like this marking the cosmic rotation of the tapestry. 3 is the number of light, three differently shimmering golden crosses stand like points in a triangle, at the centre of the tapestry, in dialogue with the number 1, the absence and darkness. 33 crosses are carriers of quantified colours. Remaining are 66 crosses that are equally divided according to the dichotomy warmth – coldness. 33 umber- and 33 indigo-variations are alternating every second cross.

The cross is not primarily meant as a Christian symbol; it also signifies the basic structure of the weaving. This universal symbol for meeting between two opposites can be found in most cultures. From the ancient form of the equal armed cross the archaic Indian sun cross arose (unfortunately profoundly misused by the Nazis, but not owned by them). The beautiful swastika puts the stationary cross form in motion, and in its rotation transforms the cross into the circle. This dynamic principle is a buoyant artifice by painters like Serge Poliakoff and Piet Mondrian, and less conspicuous could be traced to the works of many other artists.

Kryžin kulnas (the Cross height) in northern Lithuania could sort during Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopy (from Greek heteros = other, different and Greek topos = place, spot). The place is not large, but visible from a long distance with its myriads of crosses, taken there by people in secret, at times forbidden, over a timespan of 700 years. Some are only a few centimetres in height, other ones several meters, from crocheted like small potholders to massive logs or stainless steel in cross shape. Some crosses have sunken deep into the earth and are on their way towards dissolution, others are brand new and carry regards to dead ones all over the world. Regardless of the crosses this is not a pure Christian place. History is obscure and ambiguous. In the Lithuanian pre-Christian tradition the deployment of crosses have been a sign of resistance against oppression and occupation. Since the Middle age the Cross height has been a charged zone and a symbol for suffering and hope. It is not a graveyard, even if it is teeming with regards to the deceased. It is an area for the living, and perhaps for communication between living and dead or for communication between past, present and future. The place has been levelled with the ground on three occasions, but each time people came back with their crosses and recreated it. In 2002 the Cross height became a world heritage of the UNESCO.

But there is another, less well known place with crosses in the Baltics, hidden in a spruce forest on the Estonian island Hilumaa. The crosses in Ristimägi are not salient like the Lithuanian ones. They are made of pebbles put into the bog, consisting of sticks, grass, living trees that are suited to forming crosses from. These crosses are somewhat like funnel chanterelles; if you have first seen one, you see a lot on the forest floor.

The map, like the labyrinth (of which many can be traced in my images over the years) is an abstraction of reality, but not a pure abstraction. Maps reproduce reality condensed and/or symbolically. Both *Entrance*-tapestries have emerged as paradoxes. They have entrances, but equally clear are their secluded areas. *Entrance.Ashes* depicts a completely symmetrical subdivision of the rooms in a house, a building plan, a yard or all of these together. The title allude that the object of the plan is burnt, and the image accordingly an imaginary map of something that is no longer existing, or at the most a ruin or a residue. In a way *Entrance.Ashes* is the result of *Entrance.To Yellow*, but was created first, as if it by it's advent asked a question on cause, and demanded an answer. Like this the yellow one was created later. This more pronounced labyrinthine construction map is burning, and could be called a map of combustion. The thin partition walls in the building body exist a meted out time, before the fire devours and transforms them to ashes.

It could happen that one in the artistic work is related to other artists (living or dead), however not consciously, not before other persons have pointed it out. This was the case with some of my tapestries from the early 1990:ies, that somebody found being related to Olav Strømme. This is correct. I believe that what connects me with Strømme is music. Quite a few of his paintings from the 1970:ies are variations over the fugue. My tapestry *Fugue* reflects the music genre of the fugue, that Johann Sebastian Bach was one of the most prominent exponents of. His last work, unfinished, *Die Kunst der Fuge*, stands in an exceptional position. On another level my image is a wall where the bearing and what is being carried, the gaps and the horizontal themes, are contrapuntally woven together. An inevitable further theme in textile a context is stripes, and stripes are the structures each score is relying on.

The complex music of Bach gives us modern human beings, shut up in our own brief present time as we to quite some extent are, a breath of eternity. The tonal density and fullness of the music, rushing out of the traditions and valuations of the 17:th century, have for me its contemporary diametrical opposite in a composer like Morton Feldman. Feldman's floating masses of sounds, that often have its starting point in modern painting, but also in old woven art (important works are *Rothko Chapel* and *Coptic light* for large orchestra), dwelling in quietness, simplicity and slowness. Against the fullness of the one stands the creative emptiness of the other. In order to lead the metaphoric use back to visual art, Feldman's music is a



child of our time, on this side of the monochromatic. And whereas Bach is clearly anchored in a Christian context, Feldman can be said to incorporate both Jewish and a more eastern Christian tradition.

My curiosity in Feldman's music was excited by the fact that another American composer saw one of my tapestries of the late 1980:ies (a longish lead red composition), and pointed out its affinity with Feldman's music. My curiosity was answered by that it had something to do with the slowness of reading...

*Verdigris.* To regard this image in a concave and convex way is equally valid. The ambiguous consists in being both outside a dome/rock face and inside a vault/cave. At the same time this is mythical stuff: to become bewitched, disappear, be transformed. The portal opens and closes. The transformation of the metal turns from red-golden to chromium oxide green. The empty inside of the vault is a room of timbre and resonance.

*By the river.* The five liturgical colours create five vertical ribbons that are lying transparently above a grey water mirror. The water both reflects the colours and absorbs them. The image is referring to both the rich tradition of stripes in textile history as well as to for instance the paintings of Agnes Martin.

The liturgical colours originated in the 12:th century. White (with yellow, golden or gilded as alternatives) – red – green – violet – black (alternatively blue).

*Rime frost.* Four opened books with a thin layer of faintly coloured areas (green earth – sienna – ochre) are lying innermost. In the next layer the right half of the image constitute a tower, the left half two T-crosses and a crown. The image is covered by a white frozen wall. The heavenly ladder/spine is the mid axis of the image.

There is a simple small drawing in Pädagogisches Skizzenbuch by Paul Klee, from 1925, about how to see and understand. It is obvious that the drawing could represent both a facade looked upon below off centre or a floor seen off centre from above. The one way of seeing is not excluding the other; they are so to say both correct at the same time. This duplicity or ambiguity make up an enigmatic and somewhat upsetting uncertainty that reflects our own existence's very uncertainty. To see or to see as is not the same. A triangle could "mean" many different things.

According to the "aspect seeing" of Ludwig Wittgenstein the famous puzzle picture that can both look like a hare and a duck occurs. A third view could be described as to see in images as opposed to the much more widespread linguistic usage of looking on images. This is a question for psychology as much as for art theory and linguistics.

Previous to each of my tapestries lies a sketch, usually in pastels, charcoal, acrylics, gouache or water colour. From my artistic starting point in painting and drawing, it is yet natural that some images "remain" paintings and drawings. This is intuitively shown early on in work. If an image has character of being a sketch to a potential tapestry or if it is complete on paper or canvas, is hence varying. To be chosen as a sketch is an honour for an image. But the sketch is as it is, crude, a hint of a vision, a note, a promise of a future dwelling in thread. To weave is to interpret the essence of this sketch and retell it in the language of weaving, never word by word, but converted, rewritten.

Time. A sketch is seldom or never immediately woven. It has to wait. I trust that time will help me to choose which of the sketches that is interesting enough to continue to work from, that has endured the storing, the time of waiting. It is like with wine, some are getting better with storing, other turn to vinegar ... Sketches are created all the time. They are stored, they are worked over again in my mind and remembrance, often over many years before they are mature. Meanwhile some are in the loom and get most of my attention, my care and my love, month after month. Sometimes I don't dare to tell how long a time it takes, when somebody asks. It sounds absurd, in our time, where value and justification readily is measured in saved time, diametrically disproportional to preferences like mine. In the continuation of this occurs the equally absurd focus on timestamp of works. What is a "new" image, what is an "old" one? I could answer: this image I have worked on for twenty years; it is new.

This heretical approach to time and modernity is thoroughly reflected in my choice of the vertical loom (French Haute lisse) as my most important image tool. And since contemporary art in an exaggerated way is concerned with "the new", it is useful to seek refuge in other art forms and their rhetoric and formation. Within the musical field it could seem that one is less dogmatic considering what is

contemporary or called "the new". The musical inheritance gives resonance to contemporary music. To choose repertoire from different epochs is natural for contemporary musicians. To write new music for old instruments is a matter of course.

The German 12:th century abbess Hildegard von Bingen operated with three concepts of time: profane time, preliminary time and holy time. The first period contained all life's practical everyday chores. The second was dedicated to prayer, to turn ones senses towards God. The third time span you couldn't reach without having gone through the first two, and was the time of grace, inspiration and the divine.

Hildegard's three notions of time has relevance for my artistic activity. Each single day contains potentially her three time zones; all grey, cold mornings of displeasure, making fire, tuning today's timbres, winding thread, the meditative repetitions of weaving, waiting for the grace time of inspiration, the one that awakes the slumbering visions back to life and gives meaning and direction to the work.

I look at the sketch on the wall. The tapestry in the loom is barely started. Some few centimetres are forming a diffuse dark stripe. It is one of the thousands of ordinary days in the atelier, one of my innumerable tapestries is begun. The sketch is alien and locked. It rejects me and my approaches. It is heavy, but from experience I know that it is always like this. I recognize the resistance from all the other beginnings. Even though the whole image is existing in the form of the sketch in front of me, it nevertheless does not want to translate, rewrite. It is magic in this.

Patiently I mix the threads. Thin linen- and silk threads are breaking the woollen timbres in what I believe corresponds to the intension on the wall and for my inner eye. Some surfaces and lines are set in the almost empty warp. Nuances emerge. Gradually the stripe is growing to a larger field. The "stranger" is opening itself up to me. After about a fourth part, towards halfway through I am on the inside of the new being, that gradually is living a life of its own, and I obey the image's own voice.

When the tapestry finally is finished and should be cut down, it is with an equal resistance as in the beginning. The difference is that an "individual" is now fully grown; but I know that when this new entirety is rolled out of the loom, where it has

been encapsulated during the work, it is once again an alien. On occasions I am astonished over the created, as if I saw it for the first time, sometimes mildly recognizing.

*Topology of an imagined city.* I believe that it was in Krakow it all started. That with the walls. During the years there, the early 1980:ies, as a student at the Academy of Fine arts, I sometimes walked about in Kazimierz. Nobody was living in the houses. That part of town was somehow icebound in an motionless picture from the 1940:ies, the last years of the war. Although not completely; the decay had started, empty window frames exposed the darkness within like blind eyes. Wall plaster crackled and fell off, the bricks that were visible were rather more grey than red. Fissures in the walls implied slow settling damage. Humidity was mixing itself with the soot in the coal heated polish winter air. The whole of Krakow was covered by this thin grey-black film, but more black than everywhere else it was in Kazimierz. The synagogue stood close to a demolished site, the only demolished area I could find. Mostly it was like nobody touched that part of the city, neither to tear it down nor to repair.

Differently than these houses' silent testimony Warsaw carries its memories of the war. Warsaw was emphatically bombed, and of the ruins one reverentially chose to rebuild most of the city, from the foundations of old drawings and maps. The exception was the Jewish ghetto, that was levelled to the ground and on top of the area was built the Polish railroad's central junction, plus in immediate proximity the Soviet gift of the Culture Palace. No walls could any more tell their story. Collective forgetfulness was established. If you, as happened in the case of certain sensitive individuals, were not moved by phantom pain while at the platform between arriving and departing trains... The amputation was still aching 35 years later. Even if this mass of buildings was not part of my body – I was not even born when it happened – I realize that I am also a part of the European continent; it's beautiful and cruel history.

Architecture is corporeal civilisation. The walls are the thick or thin skin surrounding our existence, with wounds and traces of time.

My first sketches from this time were simply called Kazimierz. They were put away, but was indirectly giving birth to a whole series of other images of walls, houses, stair runs, towers, gates. Perhaps it was the walls in Paris that delivered them, ten years later. There, in the Marais- and Bastille-areas, during my second

long stay abroad, these later walls gave in their fragility nourishment to the one large sketch that a few more years later in time became the tapestry *Topology of an imagined city*. The image carries in itself the duplicity that it can be seen both as a frontal wall and as a from above observed plan over a whole block of buildings and street grids.

Topology = theory of the place, also a branch of mathematics studying the concepts of location and coherence, and attributes of geometry that are unchanged by continuous changes.

“I don't know if I've already said that this is the wall I mean. But it was, as it were, not the first wall of the existing houses (that should have been understood) but the last wall of the earlier ones. You could see inside them. On the different floors you could see walls with the paper still sticking to them, and here and there signs of where floors or ceilings had been fixed. Adjoining the inside walls and running the whole width of the house was a dirty-white expanse of wall across which crawled in unutterably disgusting, worm-smooth, bowel-like form the open rust-flecked groove for the toilet pipe. There were grey dusty marks at the edge of the ceiling where the gas pipe had been, and they went this way and that before they suddenly turned right round, ran to the painted wall and into a dark hole that had been ruthlessly torn open there. What was most unforgettable, though, were the walls themselves. The dogged life that had been lived in these rooms refused to be obliterated. It was still there; it clung to the nails that were left, it lingered on the remaining strip of floor boarding, it was huddled up under the little that was left of a corner section. You could see in the paintwork how, slowly, year by year, it had changed blue into a mildewed green, green into grey, and yellow into an old, stagnant, putrefying white. And it had actually got into fresher-looking places behind mirrors, pictures and cupboards because it had traced and retraced their outlines amid the spiders and dust even in these hidden places that were now exposed. It was in every patch where the paint had peeled off, it was in the damp pockets at the bottom edges of the wallpaper, it swayed in the hanging shreds and sweated from the nasty stains that went back ages. And from these surfaces that had been blue, green and yellow and were now framed by broken runs of demolished partition wall, arose the air from these lives, this tenacious, shiftless, fuggy air that no

wind had yet dispersed. Lingered there were the midday meals and the illnesses, the breathed out air and the years old smoke and the sweat that seeps from the armpits and makes clothes heavy, and the stale breath from mouths, and the boozy odor of fermenting feet. Lingered there were the pungent smell of urine, the stinging smell of soot, the dull steam-damp smell of potatoes, and the heavy, oily reek of old fat. Also there was the sweet lingering smell of neglected breast-feeding babies, and the smell of anxious children setting off to school, and of the muggy beds of older lads. And a lot of the smells were those that had come up from below out of the chasm of the street; they'd evaporated; and others had dripped down in the rain which over cities is not pure. And many had been brought here by the feeble, tamed house winds that always kept to the same street, and there were plenty more that had come from goodness knows where. I did say, didn't I, that all the outer walls had been demolished bar the last? Now this is the wall I've been talking about all this time. You might think I'd be standing in front of it for ages, but I'm willing to swear that as soon as I recognized the wall I took to my heels. Because it's the fact that I recognized it that makes it horrible. I recognize everything here; it passes into me without further ado; it finds a home in me."

(Rainer Maria Rilke, from Malte Lauridz Brigge.)

To create presumes that one is part of some contexts. It is easy to see the affinity of the woven image with other pictorial medias, in particular with painting and drawing. The challenge of composition, the essence of colour and the surface versus the line and the point are in common. I therefore would like to emphasize some obvious differences. Even the physical genesis of these images is different. Where in drawing and painting, one operates all over the whole pictorial surface at any given time, and can reach a final result within a short time span. With tapestries, one is bound by the warp and the weft for technical reasons, and the time aspect required in weaving. The resistance of the loom is stronger than the easel's. To master the loom could be compared to mastering a musical instrument. The time it takes to perform is part and parcel of the work, and gives it an added dimension. The finished tapestry has on top of it a physical weight and a fall that is unique for this medium. A work's weight or lightness evidently does not say anything about the particular work's immaterial weight. However I would like to say that the woven image qua its physical presence and its slow creation has another pictorial body than works in other genres.

This sort of knowledge about a given artistic field is, as is well known, acquired not only through individual experience, but also through learning. Personally, I have been favoured by education on a high level during an era when such an education still existed. Seen from the perspective of today's art education, the medium tapestry is ruled by a big void. A conservatory student in composition that would want to write symphonic music is dependant of an available orchestra. As obvious it is for an art student that there are colours or canvas as well as computer equipment and looms in addition to competent teachers within the means of expression the student concerned is choosing.

The lack of relevant education on all levels in the textile subjects does not solely have consequences for the recruitment of future artists; it also impoverishes the theoretic approach to the field when it comes to competent art criticism today and for future curator and conservationists mission. Academic research with a focus on art history evidently run out of personal commitment. Differently put: how do you fall in love with somebody that you have never met? Norway has during the last 15 years dismantled almost all its textile subject expertise, this during a time when at least the economy was stronger than ever. Possibly the responsibility for this branch of our artistic- and cultural heritage is handed over to future archaeology?

The so-called textile field is however too large to allow anyone individual to identify with it. It has to be subdivided into separate concerns and categories, from what is close to everyday life, surrounding us all and that we also wear on our bodies, to the solemn and expensive. The segment of textile art that is of interest for me is primarily tapestry, historically and contemporary. It is to this that I have devoted the major part of my artistic life.

The golden age in European tapestry was from 1300 to the 16:th century. The ateliers were mainly situated in Flanders (Tournai, Arras and Brussels) and in France (Paris). The commissions from the church or aristocracy were extensive. The generally strong economy was one of the reasons behind this rich flowering season, just like the situation was for Dutch painting in the 17:th century, where the economy was an equally strong driving power.

One of the French major works early on in the period is *The Apocalypse* in Angers, from approximately 1380. The work is in the gothic sense a dramatic and expressive creation of the last book of the Bible. Against alternating indigo and crimson background tones the revelations of Saint John are unfolded in 75 images, across the more than 100 metres long series of images. Each double image is 4,5 metres in height and brought together in six large sequences (originally the work consisted of 100 images, the row was six meters in height and 144 metres in length). The tapestries of Angers belong to world art, and are evidently "a pilgrimage" for those interested in art.

Another zenith is *The lady with the unicorn*, from late 15:th century, permanently on display in the Cluny museum in Paris. Six separate tapestries, in size varying around 3 x 3 metres each, are forming a gathered circle about our five senses, La vue, L'ouïe, L'odorat, Le gout, Le toucher and finally the sixth À mon seul desir (To my single longing). In them all there is this oval blue island, floating in a red universe, inhabited by the unicorn and the seeing, listening, smelling, tasting and touching virgin, sprinkled with the innumerable plants that should give a name to a whole genre of tapestries, Mille fleurs.

The European tapestry is technically characterized by a simple plain weave where the weft completely covers the warp. The surface is divided according to the figurations and is woven in sections. Vertical lines are built up by slits, "hachures" and weft interlock. The warp is usually linen, the weft wool and the loom vertical. Since the basic technique is so simple, it offers the weaver optimal freedom.

In Anatolian Chatal Hüyük there are wall paintings from around 6 000 years before Christ imitating geometric kelims just like they are still woven in this area. These can be said to be the origin of what we later on call tapestry. The oldest fragments of tapestries are from Egyptian pharaoh graves from 1 400 to 1 300 BC. Within the Coptic and Byzantine culture during the first millennium of our chronology, the tapestry was in strong development, and the impulses spread all over the European continent.

In a Norwegian context the fragments from the Oseberg find (9:th to 10:th century) are the oldest intact woven images, even if the technique is slightly different, namely soumak weave. Thereafter what is known is only the Baldishol tapestry (12:th century), as an individual Norwegian phenomena, this one also exclusively in fragments. *The Man of April* and *the Rider of May* have most likely



formed a series of images of the twelve months of the year. From approximately the same period you could find pictorial kinship with both the German Halberstadt tapestries and the embroidered Bayeux tapestry in Normandie.

Atelier des Gobelins was established by Ludvig the XIV in 1661, in the house till the dyer family of Gobelin. With this state run atelier the king wanted to mark the national pride that was associated with the “tapisseries”, and the name gobelin gradually became the general name for woven images. The tapestry weavers in Europe were still men, apart from in the cloisters, where the nuns also created important works of sacred character.

In Norway the term was at first weave from Flanders (Norwegian flamskvev) and the first professional weavers were women. During the Inquisition some of these prominent women were regarded as knowledgeable in black magic. Johanne Flemish weaver, lived in Bergen, where she owned a house and gave young girls training in the arts of colouring and weaving images, was burned as a witch in 1594.

Regions close to the coast, with plenty of foreign contacts due to shipping where the ones that first received the European impulses. Little by little these spread to the inland, particularly the Østland- and Trøndelag-districts. Biblical motives were frequent in Renaissance tapestries, and the motives spread. In contrast to the urban anchoring of the tapestry ateliers in Mid-Europe, in Norway it was the rich freeholder farming communities' women that managed and renewed the European models to a pronounced flat style. This one could – with today's perspective 350 years later – be called a link between the two dimensionality of the early medieval era and a pictorial language of the 20:th century!

As independent artists in modern times particularly Hannah Ryggen, Synnøve Anker Aurdal and Jan Groth have had a decisive importance for my own development as a pictorial weaver. You could say that these three artists' greatness would have been unimaginable without the weaving. The vertical structure of the images and nerve of the lines are conditioned by the threads' regulating construction. These influence the details as well as the whole composition. Could one even imagine the magic blue of Ryggen as something else than the shimmering chamber pot blue (piss blue) on hand spun yarn? Or Groth's heartfelt blackness in any other form than as dim black wool, where the very presence of emptiness appear by the immense amount of time

and care for each of all the tiny points that these surfaces are made up of? Very few artists have the energy that is necessary to weave images. It is in many ways absurd, but in certain fortunate cases it is nevertheless worth the effort.

The material and the technique's influence on the aura of the artwork are not only of relevance for tapestries. This is even more evident within the major part of the sculpture field. The axed pieces of Kain Tapper's world of figures, with all its scratches, wounds, caresses, all the grindings and layers of patination are emerging somewhat like from a conversation between the artist and the wood, where both have a voice. Likewise, the enormous flakes of Richard Serra, sides of ships, walls and labyrinths of rusty iron are testimonies of resistance, persuasion, temperature and time. They remind us of our earthly existence. The abstractions are carriers of thoughts and paradoxes, but they are concrete and present. Anish Kapoor in some of his works lets the material in its crudeness be synonymous with the expression, most striking in his seemingly bottomless black (pigment)hole in the ground, in Kassel's Documenta in 1992.

Even a distinctive spiritual artist like Agnes Martin, that in her pictorial language seek an extreme level of abstraction and immateriality, shows a strong sensual presence in her painting. With opposite signs, artists like Giorgio Morandi and Wilhelm Hammershøi have started from the existence of the things in the world, the light falling into a room, the silent interplay between simple items, almost transcending and reaching a sublime spirituality.

Epitaphium: memorial with an inscription placed on the church wall, often in stone, but in Norwegian churches of the Middle age also in wooden carvings. The epitaphs could in the side aisle of the church on and off replace the altar. It has also occurred that epitaphs were woven; the most well known is the Leksvik-epitaph, probably woven in Rostock in the 16:th century.

EPITAPHS have been growing, one image after the other, over several years. They are not sprung out of a unified plan. That they now constitute a whole, reflects an insight concerning the inner affinity that has matured along the way. This wholeness

does not free each single image from its individual separateness; however they join together like individuals in a family.

The ten tapestries are consistently square and come in large sizes (approximately 2 x 2 meters). They are all woven in classical gobelin-/tapestry technique and the materials are linen, wool, silk and nylon.

The exhibition is a personal mourning, but also a coded series of references tied to general art history, as well as to music, literature, psychology and philosophy.

The idea to collect *the Epitaphs* in one circle of images, to a "chapel", must be seen against the background of two pictorial chapels of decisive importance for my artistry. These two are: the six 15:th century tapestries *The lady with the unicorn* in the Cluny museum in Paris, and Rothko Chapel's 14 meditative paintings in Houston, Texas, from 1971. In one sense my imaginary universe is situated in the span between these two. The Cluny-tapestries represent the European gobelin heritage that I stand in debt to, and for me, Mark Rothko's pictures constitute some of the essence of modernist painting. This double foundation is an enrichment.

Marianne Mannsåker

English version: Anna Staern

Notes 1):

The exhibition EPITAPHS in Ram gallery, Oslo 2007 consisted of ten tapestries: *Ceiling. Fugue. Verdigris. Topology of an imagined city. Rime frost. Sprucefur. Forest floor. By the river. Entrance.Ashes. and Entrance.To Yellow.*