

FELTMAKERS FROM SWEDEN

Over the following four pages we showcase the work of talented felt makers who live in Sweden. In this issue we focus on the work of three makers, **Gunilla Paetau Sjoberg**, **Yvonne Habbe** and **Annelie Richardsson**. In our June issue this spotlight continues with a gallery of work from, **Vera Zhotkevich**, **Erik Torstensson** and **Carin Elofsson**.

We extend a warm thank you to Sue Pearl and Johanna Rösti for coordinating this feature and the artists who have generously shared their stories and work. 'Spotlight on Sweden' commences with an introduction from **Carin Madsen Kollberg**.

CARIN MADSEN KOLLBERG

Swedish Felting by Carin Madsen Kollberg, September 2013

In Swedish there are two words referring to felt, 'tova' and 'filta'. 'Tova' was an archaic word but is now again in common usage. 'Filta' is a verb describing the felting process with the word 'valka' used as a name for the last fulling process of the felt, getting a really sturdy felt.

Felt has its roots in the north of Sweden where it was used to create practical, warm garments for the long cold winters. Felt socks, hats and mittens could protect against the moisture and cold. It was also a way of taking advantage of the wool produced by the sheep. In the mid 1900s with new technology bringing in new production methods, felt was about to die out but in 1976 Katarina Agren published a book, 'Tovning' based on research carried out by Katarina along with Karin Lundholm to celebrate the old traditions. This was the start of a renewed interest in felt, which grew during the 1980's, and in 1994 the felting artist, Ginilla Pateau Sjoberg published her book 'Tova'. This is still in production today and has been translated into both English and German.

During the last decade there has been a progression from the old traditional craft into new forms of modern expression. Although felt is not making headline news, its potential is growing across the country with local craft schools and feltmakers organizing weekend course and workshops, such as Ullakademin in

Kyrkerud, Gotland Folkhogskola on the island of Gotland, Stenebyskolan in Dals Langed, Handarbetets in Stockolm and Backedals Folkhogskola in Sveg. Swedish feltmakers also have many exhibitions, with 'Farfesten' as the biggest. It is held annually in Kil with about 6000 entries in 2012.

Swedish wool is lovely and thick and easy to felt. Gotland is probably the wool that most feltmakers outside of Sweden have heard of, but there is also Rya, Swedish Finewool and Gute. Rya gives long, often wavy tops with the staple being 15-30 cm and is mainly in white, black or grey. Gute, which has been bred from Gotland, has grey wool varying from off white to nearly black. It is a soft fibre and easy to work with but can be quite kempy. Swedish Finewool gives a soft, glossy wool in colours ranging from white, brown to black, with good quality throughout the fleece.

More information about Swedish feltmaking and textile crafts can be found at these websites:

RESOUCE LINKS

www.kyrkeruds-folkhogskola.regionvarmland.se/kurser/ull-akademin/ull-akademin-kyrkeruds-folkhogskola

www.gotland.fhsk.se/index.php?option=com_bookit&puff_id=20&Itemid=62

www.steneby.se/

www.hvskola.se/kortkurser/

www.kyrkeruds-folkhogskola.regionvarmland.se/kurser/ull-akademin/ull-akademin-kyrkeruds-folkhogskola

ANNELIE RICHARDSSON

I started to felt 2008 at a course. Before that I sewed clothes and wanted to do my own wool fabrics. There are so much more we can do with wool and blending of wool and fabrics, Today, I felt things to wear and felt to make items that can be used at home. I particularly like to create pictures of animals. I enjoy thinking and practicing whilst I observe what is working and not working. Even if what I had hoped to create doesn't work as I thought it may, I do not throw away wool and inclusions. All materials are usable and may be of value in some other creation!

Often I make a pre-felt base that I needle pictures to. I then insert the picture onto something, like

a kitchen couch or pillow. Besides working on my own felting projects, I run felting courses in my home on the Orust island in the west coast archipelago. When not felting sometimes I do acrylic and oil paintings. I have also practiced a lot of sewing techniques. I think there are still a lot of skills to learn, which will offer me fun and excitement in the future!

You can see AR Design Orust Sweden at Facebook and my homepage.

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YVONNE HABBE

For me, it is a great freedom to work with a technique where the rules are not cemented and nothing is really right or wrong. I think the whole felting process is fascinating, from the choice of wool to the finished product. At the beginning of the felting process one has to be so careful and as your project develops the wool can be manipulated with considerable energy at the end. It's simply a technique that you communicate with more through the hands and eyes, than with words!

I have an academic degree in archaeology and am most interested in traditional techniques. This interest of craft has been there as long as I can remember. In 2002 I made a trip to South Siberia where I got the chance to visit a nomadic population in their yurts and even spend a night in a yurt. These circular dwellings had wool walls which dampened the outside sounds while the stars shone brightly through the opening in the ceiling. Two years later, I went for six months training at Gotland Folkhögskola to learn felting. In the summer thereafter I went to the Folk Art Festival in Budapest. It was there, when I saw so many amazing

feltmakers, from many different parts of the world, I realized that felting was what I wanted to do. I especially remember Inge Bauer, Jorie Johnson and Heidi Greb and how I was impressed with how they could work the wool with their hands.

In my own felting, I always use local materials such as Swedish fine wool, but I can also use merino. Swedish fine wool has a good formability while the merino has a nice elasticity. My choice depends on what I will do.

I've been thinking about how valuable wool is in terms of function. Who or what decides what is valuable? One of my projects which were wool crowns, I gilded with 23.75 karat gold. The aesthetic encounter between the matt wool and shiny gold and the contradiction between the cheap wool and expensive gold attracts me. Who has a right to say that the wool is the least valuable of the two mediums? For me, wool is the most valuable.

RESOUCE LINKS

W www.habbe.nu/HABBE



PHOTOS 1. BLADMATTA. 2. YVONNE HABBE 3. KRONA.

GUNILLA PAETAU SJOEBERG

FINNISH/SWEDISH FELT ARTIST

WOOL IS ALWAYS ON MY MIND!

At the beginning of the 70's I was living in Sweden with my Swedish husband and two sons. I was educating teachers in textile subjects at the university in Uppsala. All textile techniques were familiar to me, except feltmaking. Feltmaking is a very old technique in the Nordic countries, but was in Sweden only practised by a few persons in the north. Thanks to Katarina Ågren this ancient craft was revived.

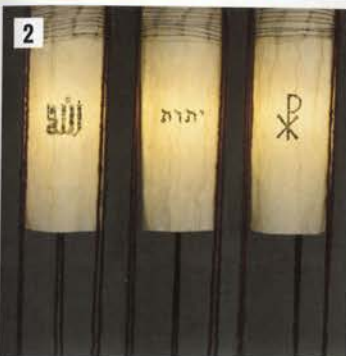
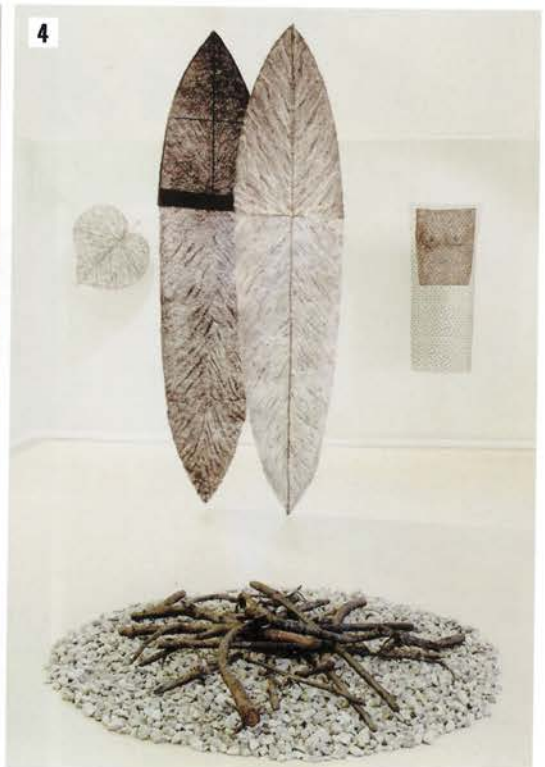
My recent works are called Room of Light are thin, fragile and transparent. They deal only with light, structure and spirituality. Room of Fire is a combination of all my Rooms, a kind of frieze of life. My interest in the room as a concept has been growing. Hanging/standing together in the room they can tell me secrets, connections and contexts I did not see earlier. And the room can be filled with a special feeling.

I have done several works for hospitals, churches, schools, hotels etc. It is a challenge to cooperate with architects, to find out how to communicate

with the architects ideas in the best way. In Sweden we are happy to have the tradition to use textile art in public buildings. It gives textile artists the opportunity to create bigger works. Textile art is also accepted in most of the museums. Several of them, for example The National Museum, have bought my art.

I have the feeling, even after working with felt for 38 years, that there is still so much to discover with feltmaking. The first international felt art exhibition was held in Denmark in 1991 and I still remember how exciting it was meeting with other felt artists, the very first in the world! Chad Alice Hagen, Karen S Page, Jorie Johnson and Anette Damgaard, among others, are still going strong. And I met the felt legend Mary Burkett! Feltmaking has given me opportunities to meet interesting people all over the world. Wonderful experiences among sisters (and one solitary brother)!

I especially want to mention my fantastic weeks in Hungary, Mongolia and Belarus. To be working together sharing ideas and knowledge – what could be better!



PHOTOS 1. GOSPEL IN GREEN, AN ALTAR-PICE IN A MODERN CHURCH. 2. GRATIA (LAT. MERCY), HEIGHT 65 CM, DIAMETER 65 CM, FROM THE SERIES ROOM OF LIGHT. 3. GUNILLA PAETAU SJÖBERG. 4. STREAMS OF LIFE, MADE FOR A CHAPEL.