Structures of a depiction which I no longer remember.

Katja Beckman

Number of pages
Tutors: Hans Isaksson, Marie O'Connor
Writing tutor: Katarina Sjögren
Konstfack
Master 2, CRAFT! Textile
Spring 2016
Abstract

I'll make a big, yellow tapestry.

In the project I'll examine textures and surfaces in a monumental tapestry, and the translation of an image into a tapestry through reliefs and materials.

I'm a tapestry weaver, and in this project I'll work with structures and the sculptural aspect of weaving in an abstract tapestry. My aim for my textiles in general is to give the viewer a sublime feeling when they meet my work.

In an extended scene this is a textile version of a photography. When I look at something for a long amount of time, it'll turn into structures, then the image itself is not so important anymore but the memory of it. This is a tapestry where I have turned this memories into structures in textile material.

This project is a research in many various woven structures and techniques, which is arranged intuitively. It doesn't have a specific message but to re-create the sense of many and complex feelings. The different structures portrays the process of memories, like solitude, fears, tenderness, abstraction/imagination and concrete reality. This tapestry is the result of many experiments with the form and structure.

#Tapestry #Textile #Craft #Yellow
Index:
Overview of the paper Page 4
Research Question Page 4
Background Page 5
  1.2 Why yellow Page 7
Theory Page 8
Method Page 9
  1.1 Choice of motif; Page 9
  1.2 Translation: from sketch to textile, Page 10
  1.3 intuition, Page 12
  1.4 working in a loom or in a frame, Page 12
  1.5 material and techniques, Page 13
  1.6 colour, Page 14
  1.7 Weaving. Page 14
Conclusion Page 15
Discussion Page 15
Overview of the paper:
The paper will be divided in the different stages on preparing/making a tapestry. About the choices I'll take regarding quality, techniques, quality, colours etc.

I'll start talking about my background and give an introduction to this work. After the introduction I'll present my research question and my method which is my main focus. I'll also talk shortly about the sublime in art and the Stendhal’s syndrome.

What I strive for in my art for in general is to create textile structures and reliefs. I work with tapestry and in this work a monumental one. I'll talk about this in the method chapter and in my discussion, which are my two final chapters before the conclusion.

Research question:
- How can I transform an image into a tapestry using only different structures/textures in a monochrome colour scale? How can I create an illusion of light and depth?
Background:
Since I started my foundation year in textile art in 2009 weaving has been my main technique. I have a graduation from a three year-course in hand weaving from Handarbetets vänner. At that school, the tapestry course is the only course I decided not to take.

Since 2014 I have worked as tapestry weaver for the Swedish artist Andreas Eriksson. I translate his oil paintings into tapestries. For this job I had to learn the techniques quickly and as I went along, and I fell deeply in love with it. I think it's a fantastic job, and it has made me look at my own practise in a different way, -to study and dig deep in the colours and brushstrokes in the painting to create the same depth and direction in the fabric. Which surface should be above the other? Is this the yarn too rough for this surface? It's about structure, choice of materials, the lustre etc.

Surfaces are what made me interested in weaving, I find it a bit hard to explain why, but for me textile is about the tactile experience, how you can “see” the textile with your hands and not with your eyes. How to create surfaces, dense or sparse, depending on the material, thickness of the thread or how many warp threads I go over or under.

In the spring of 2015, when I was in Barcelona on research, I visited the Joan Miro museum to study his tapestries. There I found the answer to a question I've had for a long time. How do I want it to feel like when you meet my weavings? When you encounter something that makes you lose the perception of your own body. It is one thing to feel like an anonymous person in a big city, or feel small when you stand on a mountain. But when you stand in front of something and you lose your sense of your own size. It measures 5x7, 5 m. It is a tapestry, woven by Josep Royo in large, sharp reliefs. Rya-knots large as a man's hand. It is woven in that rather pompous way from the 1960-80's. I had to sit down when I looked at it, it felt like somebody punched me hard in the chest. At the same time, I did not want to leave the room, I just wanted to sit there and look at it. There was another tapestry in the room, hanging on the wall next. I can't remember how it looks.

I went back to the museum a couple of days later, to see the fabrics they had in archives. I am very impressed by the duo Joan Miro / Josep Royo and how Miro worked so free with their weavings, when he glues on plastic buckets or umbrellas or paint them afterwards. If you pick out the part of some, it may sound cheesy, but the composition becomes something else entirely. I.e. if you explain to someone about this tapestry with glued-on plastic buckets, they might think it sounds like a silly idea but somehow it seems natural when you look at it.
As a comparison, European tapestries from 14th -1700, like the one you'll see at national museums or at a castle have never affected me in the same way. They are technically impressive but that’s it for me. It’s not that I don't like them, because I do but in a neutral way, they are to picturing for me to be triggered to look or to gain more interest in them.

Although my tapestry will only be a quarter in size, I hope that I can achieve the same feeling.

I will start from a photo/sketch and translate it into textile, structures and reliefs in a yellow shades.

---

1 Tapestry Joan Miro, Title: Tapestry of the Fundació 1979, 750x 500cm. MIRÓ/ROYO
2 Photo: Private 2015
Why yellow?

Yellow is a colour contradictory. It's a colour of warning, in medieval times, the yellow flag hoisted the boats when they came from countries where the crew could have been affected by the plague or other diseases.³ It could also be the colour of wisdom and power. In ancient China (Ming- and Qing-dynasty) yellow was a colour of power and only the emperor and his sons were allowed to wear yellow.⁴ Goethe writes “in its highest purity it always carries with it the nature of brightness, and has a serene, gay, softly exciting character.”⁵

“If, however, this colour in its pure and bright state is agreeable and gladdening, and in its utmost power is serene and noble, it is, on the other hand, extremely liable to contamination, and produces a very disagreeable effect if it is sullied, or in some degrees tends to the minus side. Thus, the colour of sulphur, which inclines to green, has something unpleasant in it.”⁶

This textile will take place in the room! It should be firm and not apologize for itself. It is not just to be there for decoration or to create a more pleasant sound. You will not be able to defend yourself. Yellow is the colour that draws the eye to it. It warns and alerts, while it is calm, it doesn't stress, which allows it to fit well in a room. Yellow is getting bigger than it is and it has a wide colour spectrum. “Yellow is a light which has been dampened by darkness”⁷

By working with only one colour I think it'll be more sculptural and abstract. You won’t have any colours to guide your eyes to look for a motif. You're forced to look at reliefs and shapes rather than look at the colours. To take away one element (colours) gives me a bigger challenge to work with light and depth of materials.

³Stil i p1. Susanne Ljung, 4e mars. 01.10min
⁵Goethe's colour theory 766. p169
⁶Goethe's colour theory 770. p169
⁷Goethe's colour theory 502
"As I emerged from the porch of Santa Croce, I was seized with a fierce palpitation of the heart; the
wellspring of life was dried up within me, and I walked in constant fear of falling to the ground."
8
There is a phenomenon called Stendhal’s syndrome, one could see that as an extension of a sublime
experience. A Psychosomatic disorder that causes rapid heartbeats, fainting, feeling of suffocation
and even hallucinations when an individual is exposed to an experience of viewing the great art in
Florence.9
There is still a debate whether this symptom scientific exist or not, but the contemporary Italian
psychiatrist Graziella Magherini has observed over 100 cases, mostly among visitors and tourist in
Florence over the last 20 years.10

This phenomena interest me a lot, how we can get such a physical reaction to art, not to the
“beautiful” art but in the sublime and the overwhelming feelings when you react with your body
and not with your mind. “The beautiful concerns harmony, a perfection which arises out of a
synthesis of a reasons and knowledge, while the sublime represent chaos, breakdown and anti-
aesthetics.”11

In relation to this I work with structures and abstract images in textile. A work that states a kind of
desirable oneness with nature and something terrifying, a non-romantic longing and to be
susceptible beyond your senses.

“How can we look cleanly, without wanting to find in things what we have been told is there but
rather what is simply there”12 Antoni Tàpies asks in his essay. I ask myself the same question, how
we can look at art, but forget our consciousness to see how it really looks and not to look at the
things we think should be there, e.g. trying to find the “original” or the model of the image or an
agenda with the work. It is about the experience.

For example Josep Royos big tapestries made for Joan Miro shows no representational motifs that
bind the work to something that has to do with recognition. This huge coloristic buildings act, as it
seems rather freely and adds colour elements like building blocks to each other, creating a vast,
monumental and architecturally stunning composition.

“Look, look deep! Let yourselves be guided fully by what resounds you in
response to what our gaze grasps, as one who attends a concert in a new
suit and an open heart looking forward to listening, to hearing in all its
purity demanding that the sounds of the piano or the orchestra represent a
certain landscape, or the portrait of a general, or a scene from a history.
This is how we’d want painting to be.

Let us learn to look like one who goes to a concert. There are sounds forms in music
composed within a hunk of time. In painting there are visual forms
composed within a hunk of space”.13

My aim in this work is to find structures to translate an image and in the process,
try to create some sort of sublime experience.

---

8Stendhal, Marie-Henrie Beyle. The telegraph 28jul 2010
9Per Magnus Johansson, Institutet P3 mindf**k 14 April 2012
10Stendhal syndrome, Wikipedia 16march 2016
11...on the sublime... Bo Nilsson p14
12Antoni Tàpies, “The game of knowing how to look”, 1967
13Antoni Tàpies, “The game of knowing how to look”, 1967
Method:

I'll divide my method in sections which divide the process in the different stages I'll take making this tapestry.

The sections are: Choice of motif, Transformation: from sketch to textile, intuition, working in a loom or in a frame, material and techniques, colour, weaving.

Choice of motif:

For this tapestry I have a sketch made out of two images. It's a rough sketch, just to get hints for lines and balance of the image. The work will be done intuitively, but I'll have some guidelines so one side won't be more dominant or heavy than the other.

In previous tapestries have I worked from an original painting. I don't paint myself but photography is an important element in my own practise, I use it to present my textile as images instead. This time I'll do it the other way around, use a photo to translate into textile.

This could be seen as a contradiction since I think I don't have the same relation to paintings as I do to Photography, but my aim for the tapestry is to create a painterly and abstract effect rather than a figurative. It is not the figurative that triggers me in textile but structures. I choose to work with only yellow to “force” the viewer to see something else than the image. To capture the experience of the work rather than understand the image or a specific agenda.

One of the images that I've used is not my own, the other one is. I used an image I saw from the air plane when I flew to Tokyo, Japan in November -15. I think we were over Siberia somewhere and I liked the shapes that was created between the mountains. The other image is a photo of an underwater volcano eruption, I choose this one because of the structures and energy. This photo is not taken by me, but it is not important for me, the energy of the picture was more important than that I took it myself.

14Sketches for the tapestry, made with pencil and collage.
I like natural disasters, not that I think they are fun or anything but I like when nature fights back or fuck with humans. When I started this work I was looking at images of mushrooms and volcanos. I'm mesmerized by the structures of the ash-clouds.

“It's so exciting! Things that you have no control over! You can see this big great storm coming towards you and you can’t do anything about it”15

This work is not about volcanoes or making a standpoint about the environment but the translation of an image into weaving. A volcano eruption is energy, almost only energy and fire. It will bring out fear. But seen from a distance or at a picture you can appreciate it, the shapes and structures and the massive energy. I choose to work with the volcano-pictures as the inspiration for structures and energy in the textile, but I won’t address that in this paper. I'll talk about the translation. In an extended scene this is a textile version of a photography. When I look at something for a long amount of time, it'll turn into structures, then the image itself is not so important anymore but the memory of it.

Translation/Transformation; from sketch to textile:

For the past two years have I worked as a Tapestry weaver for another artist16. From these projects I've learnt a lot about translating paintings into tapestries, to find a technique to grasp the brushstrokes, aspects of colour, textures and depth, how to work with light using different material of the yarn. “An interpretation process that also establishes the technology, etc. that can pass on the original artistic vision in as true a way as possible”17

Translate paintings in to tapestries can be seen as the tradition of the field. I chose to work on the basis of a photograph. I wanted to challenge myself and see what changes and challenges that could occur working from a photograph, where I don't have the structures and direction as I do when I work from an original painting.

What is the difference? When I work from an original the brush strokes are very important, as is thick lumps of colour, is it painted with a thick paint or can you see the canvas shine through? I won’t have the same elements when I translate a photo, but the depths and shadows become more important. And as an extended version, what happens when I take away all the colour from the image? When you don't have to find the right colours? The material will be more important, and the lustre of the material. This will be a bigger challenge for me.

15Moomin – the dessert Island 1990 18:50min
16Andreas Eriksson, Medelplana Sweden
17Handarbets vänner och konstnärerna, Liljevalchs Katalog nr 410 p.53
Intuition:

At my previous school Handarbetets vänner we became trained in planning our weaving very carefully. Every decision was made before we started to weave. So when I talk about working with intuition I mean I'll not plan everything in advance. Instead of having a map to follow where I know exactly which yarn-combination I will use, will I take active decisions on material while I'm weaving.

I'll have a more organic way of working with this tapestry, to find a structure for a specific area, and then trust that structure for my next decision for the part next to it. What happens when I do that? It could be a harder way of working, and I have to dare to experiment. I'm interested in what will happen in that process.

Using a loom or a frame:

The initial plan was to work in the loom, and then mount pieces on a board. That would be like a collage technique. Some parts would be woven and some sewn on to the board. Working with that technique would be freer than working in a loom.

Reflecting on what that would do with the finished result, if I made the picture in the collage technique, that would still be small pieces that are assembled into something big. It is a completely different expression than a large tapestry. I want to do it big! And how you approach and take on a large textile that is woven is something completely different than a collage. It's big, the warp consist of thick threads, and everything is built in to each other. It's a completely different thing and a different expression than collage, that's still small pieces that are assembled into something big. I felt the feeling I wanted to achieve, could only be achieved in a tapestry. I could probably get the same expression in the collage. Perhaps even more interesting structures. But this is not about the individual structures involved. That wouldn't be grand in the same way.

---

18Photographs of tapestries for Andreas Eriksson. Photo: Katja Beckman.
I built a frame, 230x230 cm. On the back of the frame, there are attached hooks that allows me to move the warp when I weave. I will therefore not be able to see the entire size of the warp, it has to be moved once in the end, but I don't think that will affect me. If I had been working in the loom, I had been limited to see about 40 cm at a time.

Practical aspects when I choose to weave in a frame is partly that we do not have such large looms at the school that I could work in this size in one piece, and roll up a piece this large where the structures are different would make it difficult to keep the tension even in the warp.

Working in the frame will take more time because I have to use different techniques, I cannot shuttle yarn that goes across the entire warp. However, I can see the (almost) full size in front of me, I can view it from a distance and experience the size in a different way. It's also a way of experience the weaving directly as I weave it. The fact that I work in a sculptural and almost painterly way, I think this is a better option.

**Material:**
The work will primarily be about investigating and creating materials, how they act and react with each other, creating/twisting together new yarns and build up an image/depth/illusionary light in a surface.

To achieve the expression that I want I need thicker yarn. The warp is made out of linen yarn 4/6. The weft-yarn will be yarn mostly used for rugs in wool and linen, I'll also make my own yarn by spinning multiple yarn together. It's not supposed to look like a bunch of thin threads without a direction.

---

19Photo: Katja Beckman
The yarn that I've used the most are Mattlin 4/6, Linvarp 8/5, mattull, åsborya, Mattull, chenille yarn for rugs.

Example of yarn-combination I:
8 chenille yarns, 4 Rug wool and 1 rug linen 4/6. Twist them together very tightly. It's easier if I have an assistant in the other end.

Example of yarn-combination II. 4 Linvarp 8/5. 3 mattull and 2 linen 12/3. Make a yarn boll.

**Colour:**
The weaving will be made within the various shades of yellow. All material will be hand dyed by me in a very bright yellow / cold yellow spectra.

I'll use colours like “briljantgul E-3G” rather than “gullockra”. A cold yellow can be a quiet colour in a room, even though it has a lot of energy, but in a warmer tone it can be very demanding, “...a perfectly yellow-red surface, the colour seems actually to penetrate the organ. It produces an extreme excitement, and still acts thus when somewhat darkened. A yellow-red cloth disturbs and enrages animals...”20 It demands attention and can be very stressful. (I do not want to work with it since I become both stressed and in a bad mood by a yellow-red colour.)

The colours that I've used to dye the wool yarn are yellow in shades of 0, 5-2% and for linen “Briljantgul E-3G, -----, -----, in a 3-5% shade.

I also dyed some yarn in even lighter shades, down to 0, 1% for wool for highlights.

---

20 Goethe colour theory #776 p.170
**Weaving and techniques:**
Since it [the tapestry] will be made in a frame it's easier for me to relate to the shapes and materials while I'm weaving more than I am in a loom. It's easier to change the direction in the weft to create movements in the motif.

It will be made out of different tapestry techniques and rug techniques. My most used techniques are twill, rya and soumak.

The actual weaving are almost made block by block. Since I work in a frame I can work in one specific area at one time. If I want sharp lines between two blocks I can work with one shape at a time, until I need to support the weaving with a new area. If I want an overlaying effect or dissolved lines I have to work with two or three different parts at one time.

Since it's so many different parts and material in the tapestry this was a good method, I could've worked over the whole width at the once, but the different thickness of materials would've made the work much harder. At some parts there are over 20 different sections over the width.

I twisted threads together to create a thicker yarn. If you add new yarn threads in every new section you'll create an increasing structure. Twist the yarn more while you weave with it to make it stand out more from the warp.

- Go over eight threads, go under four, and go over eight threads.
- Go over ten threads, go under and back five, go over ten again, go under and back five.

Rya-knots. To create a rya knot as big as your hand you'll need approximately 15-20 thick threads. Twist them as tight as you can before your start weaving. In that way they'll appear as one yarn thread instead of many. To make them thicker and stand out more from the bottom layer, twist the yarn between the knots no make a skein-like tassel. You can use four threads in each knot section.

Rya-like weaving: At some parts I've woven a plain weave with loops sticking out. Use two (or more) threads like a panama, pull out one (or more) threads from the weft to create the loops.
Conclusion/Discussion:

It makes me so glad to see that people start to have a bigger appreciation for craft again! When I started my first education in weaving, this was a constant topic, “how to raise an interest for weaving” and to talk about “craft and handmade textiles” This was 2010 and the interest of handwoven thing in Sweden was very low, I was often asked “why” in different context, why I did it and what I did it for. But for the last ~two years I've really noticed the change of interests. In this exhibition I got a lot of positive response and people asking how it was made whit a genuine interest. The most common question is still “how long time did it take?” but when I tell them they seem to appreciate the time. People seems to enjoy the craft now.

In the exhibition I had a conversation with an older tapestry weaver from Gothenburg who was active under the “tapestry boom” during 60’s-70 which I enjoyed a lot.
**Weaving:**
The tapestry is woven in many various structures and techniques I used a full size sketch, mounted behind the warp in the frame. That is something I learnt to use when I did my previous tapestries. Simply because I find it easier to stay focused and not think I'm done with a part sooner than I am just because I get impatient.

Some struggles on the way were to get the right tension in the warp, I didn't dare to have as strong tension as I needed in case the frame would break. In the end it worked out fine and the frame didn't break.

When I had woven two meter I needed to move the warp in the frame to be able to weave the final meter. Moving the warp was much harder than I expected, or the actual moving wasn't that bad (when I had someone helping me), but, since the weave gave the warp more tension I had to untie all the knots to be able to move it, and to tie them back was hard. The tapestry's weight differ a lot at different spots so to get the warps tension even again was hard. In the end I had to add sticks and bubble-wrap to build up the warp and get the right tension.

I tried to forget what I looked at (the different parts of the original image) and to only be conscious on the structures, just to focus on the structures and not to portray the original image. Sometimes I wove 'the wrong' structures, i.e. I knew I had to take that away later and weave it again, but I needed to put something there to be able to see the next step I had to take. I'll keep working with this kind of monumental tapestries and in the next one I'll dissolve the lines between the different parts more. And now I know more about “big” in material. Even if I did big reliefs I won’t them to be even bolder. So for the next one I'll work even more with the “big”.

One challenge were to convert my mind from paintings to photo, I couldn't look for guidelines in the sketch as much as I'm used to. I had to create that myself. I knew when I started that I wanted the most dense/heavy part to be at the top, so you'd had an overwhelming feeling, or the feeling of being surrounded by it. From that, I worked with the other parts, to find a balance. Some parts are sparse, you can see through them, they become almost like holes in the image while some are very dense.

Another challenge was to find out what “big” is for me. To constantly step away to see the size, and really dare to do big. I'm happy with the structures I made for this one, but for future tapestries I want to use even bigger material, and find a way of making my own yarn.
Colour:
When I started off I thought I could mix my hand-dyed yarn with factory-dyed yarn. But I soon found out I couldn't, first reason was they were not spot on in shades. I started to weave with one polyester thread but those parts became peach-coloured, and I had one wool quality that turned out green next to my own yarn.

I'd say that the reason the tapestry almost has a glowing colour, is because it's hand-dyed, the colour “pops” in a way that factory-dyed yarn can't. I compared my yarn next to the factory-dyed and they look almost dead in colour, then don't have any lustre.

I had a conversation with Maria Lantz about this colour, and what would happen if I had used another one, that would resemble nature to much, like green would be a field and blue would be water, grey rocks etc... But yellow don't really do that in the same way, of course it does in like, “the sun and the light” but not in a motif or structures. Now the motif is from the nature, but the colour makes it harder to see it straight away.

Exhibition:
When building the spring exhibition I had plans for building a bench for people to sit on. A way for me to decide how you will see it, distance and also to make the viewer smaller in relation to the tapestry. I left the bench out in the end but it's still something I want to try if I show it again.

In the exhibition I hang it quite high, I wanted a exposing that resembling kind of an altar, therefor the bench, but I think I could achieve the same effect by hanging it and use the light instead. It hanged under the windows in the ceiling in vita havet, so in the afternoon it was almost like [the tapestry] were glowing.

When you enter konstfack from the main entrance you can see it straight away which made people drawn to it from the very first start.

In the exhibition I’ve seen a lot of people standing very close to the tapestry, looking at the structures and pointing at details. I got positive response for it and a lot of people mention the colour, and that it is something with this yellow, many said it made them happy. I also got some attention in the news and social media.21

---

21SR P4 Stockholm 12/5, Dagens Nyheter, kulturbilagan 15/5
Reference:
Printed:
- Matthaei, Ruprecht, Goethe's colour theory, arranged and edited by Ruprecht Matthaei. 1971, German edition SBN 289 70143 0

Antologis:
- Handarbetets vänner och konstnärerna. Katalog Liljevalchs nr 410 ISB-nr 91 86828 23 1
“en tolkningsprocess där också man slår fast vilken teknik etc. som kan föra vidare den ursprungliga konstnärliga visionen på ett så sant sätt som möjligt” p.53


Unprinted:
Radio show
Intitutet, Mindf**k, Sveriges radio /produktionsbolaget munk 14/4 2012

Film:
Moomin – the dessert island 1990, Directed by: Hiroshi Saitô, Telescreen Japan inc. Visual 80

Image reference:

Image 1 Joan Miró, Tapestry of the fundació, 1979, wool, 500x750cm, MIRÓ/ROYO, Image from Fundació Joan Miro, Register number FJM 8651

All other images belongs to Katja Beckman.

Sponsorships
Kasthall
Holma Lingarn
Klässbol lin
Tärnsjö garveri