

#44

Zeszyty Artystyczne

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TEXTILE ART
In the face of contemporary times

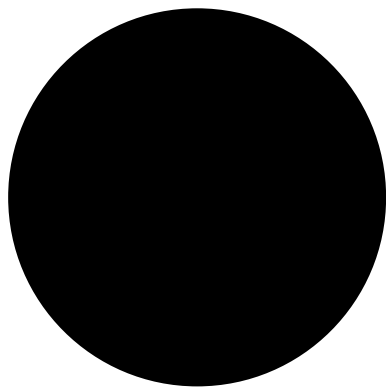


Uniwersytet Artystyczny
im. Magdaleny Abakanowicz
w Poznaniu

2(44)/2023

Interview

Magdalena Kleszyńska



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Head of the II Painting Studio at the Department of Art Education and Curating in the Interdisciplinary Department of the Magdalena Abakanowicz University of Arts in Poznan. Artist working in the field of broadly understood contemporary artistic textiles. The range of creative and research interests are issues related to memory, the past, the history of everyday life, both considered through museum artifacts and stories spun by people. Since 2011, she has presented her works in national and international exhibitions, both solo and group, and has participated in residency projects.



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Zeszyty Artystyczne
nr 2 (44)/2023, s. 493-533
doi: 10.48239/ISSN123266824414

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Interview with **Beatrijs Sterk, Janis Jefferies** **and Cláudia Melo**

Questions: Magdalena Kleszyńska

July–October 2023

Let's start by giving a definition to this *contemporary textile art* label. How would you define it and what does it mean (to you) in today's art world?

Beatrijs Sterk: For me, contemporary textile art is an art form that needs a special set of skills. Without such skills, it is just art that happens to be made using textile materials, and I am not interested in that. Therefore, I perceive textile art as more interesting than simply fine art.

Janis Jefferies: Many years ago in 1981, my friend and colleague Marysia Lewandowska undertook a similar project when she was in her studio after graduating in art history from Jagiellonian University in Kraków. As it was described then and as we called the UK-based exhibition group, FibreArt, Marysia noted how slow the practice of making was, with long periods of isolation in a space with immense concentration. I recognise this experience all too well and we had long discussions about naming

complex material practices on her arrival in London in 1982. Marysia wrote to several artists who were producing a pamphlet entitled, *Artists' statements on tapestry* (January–June 1981). I have a rare and personal copy in English.

Part of the discourses at the time were whether or not a definition was necessary. The differences between what was happening in Poland, in particular, were very different to what was happening in the UK or the USA, whereas Western-based definitions and education were locked into canons of conventions and the historical legacies of French gobelin traditions. Whilst it is a mistake to ascribe a pre-eminent role to any material or technique, material has been used to differentiate works of fiber art from other practices, like painting or sculpture.

Cláudia Melo: I always prefer the definition “textile in art”. It is undeniable that textiles have a strong and pervasive presence in life and in what constitutes it. They are a crucial element, with all their facets and processes (as material is deeply ingrained and influential in history, integrated into sociological relationships, in the creation and definition of geographies, as creators, transformers, and landscape and architecture shapers). For example, consider how cities emerged in a particular location because water nearby served as a transformative factor in the economy and international relations. As textiles have been present since the beginning, they bring an invaluable contribution to art.

When we think of textiles in an artistic dimension, we can consider them as a medium with endless possibilities for expansion, harnessing the potential of the material while preserving or reviving traditional textile-making techniques, or innovating through new technologies in the search for more sustainable materials. Alternatively, we can think of this medium as complete and distinct in art.

Textiles inherently carry a rich multiplicity of meanings, articulating many layers of social and political significance, manifesting in various material forms. Although textiles are among the oldest cultural technologies, they have been assuming an increasingly significant role in culture and the arts. This is evident in the growing public interest, artistic endeavors (with artists and cultural institutions placing increasing importance on textiles), and academic exploration over the past decades.

The universality and transversality of the potential of textiles and their capacity for signification in art, their uniqueness, authenticity, and material nature are embodied in contemporary art pieces. This occurs through their (re)appropriation and a new way of understanding and working with the medium, which is capable of connecting or expanding this textile universe, its essence, and its repository of knowledge as a genuine need for expression and representation. Whether in the foreground,

as metaphor, or as essence, textiles serve as a vital means of creative expression in our world.

You have been traveling a lot, visiting and taking part in many exhibitions, conferences and shows in the international spectrum for many years, and I am sure that you notice how – let’s say – new textile art transforms, how it develops, evolves and how it separates from craft or the traditional, historical textile world. Can you discuss some key characteristics or elements that distinguish contemporary textile art from traditional textile art forms? How do contemporary textile artists bridge the gap between fine art and craft, and is there a distinction between the two in this context? Or maybe fine art has never been independent and separate from craft?

Beatrijs Sterk: The notion that there can be art without any skills has led to teaching students in modern art that ideas and concepts are essential, but that the execution can be left to skilled craftspeople. In my eyes, this is an unhappy development. I grew up with the Lausanne revolution in textile art, which was a reunion of the artist and the making.

Yes, I perceive contemporary art to be always in connection with the process of making, and I consider this essential in textile art. I do not see a “new textile art”, but I do see many fine artists now turning towards textiles because of the emotional and haptic qualities that textiles can convey. Curators who include textiles in fine art exhibitions (beginning in 2014 in Central Europe) state that textiles are chosen because viewers are fed up with computer screens and want to see and feel something real. Many of these art textiles are not that interesting, but artists can create excellent works of textile art whenever they take the process of making seriously.

The question is not how to bridge the gap between fine art and craft, but how artists create their art; the further removed they are from the process of making, the less integrity will be felt by the viewer.

The art market is very conservative, and at last it is in line with this new trend of accepting textiles as fine art and selling works of the older textile artists from the Lausanne period. For instance, Anni Albers had a show of her weavings at the Tate in London in 2018, where weaving was declared “ART” all of a sudden, and in 2022 she and her husband Josef Albers had a joint show in Paris where they were on an equal footing. To this day, Josef Albers’ paintings sell for far higher prices than Anni’s weavings.

Janis Jefferies: I wrote an extensive response to this question in my 1982 *Contemporary Textiles: The Art Fabric, Histories, terms and definitions* conference paper at Kassel, Germany, where I first met Marysia. It was published in Jefferies, Janis K., 2008. *Contemporary Textiles: The Art*

Fabric. In: Nadine Monem, ed. *Contemporary Textiles: The Fabric of Fine Art*. Black Dog Publishing, pp. 34–62. ISBN 978-1906155292. I will quote some of it in the next section.

Cláudia Melo: Contemporary textile art is a dynamic and multifaceted field that defies easy categorization. It incorporates elements of traditional textile art while pushing the boundaries of materiality, concept, and artistic expression. By bridging the gap between so-called “high art” and craft, artists contribute to the ongoing dialogue about the nature and definition of art in the 21st century. While traditional distinctions between the two often centered on function and aesthetics, contemporary textile artists intentionally challenge and break down these boundaries.

I believe that the aesthetics of everyday life is one of the important considerations in contemporary art, and craft and artistic conception co-exist within this aesthetic, complementing and sometimes even confronting each other, which is not necessarily a bad thing. The clash between them is perhaps one of the best things that can happen because if I were to support this proposition using the laws of physics, I would say that craft and contemporary art are an action–reaction pair. They exist distinctly on their own but are at their best when they interact (with respect and ethics) with one another. Regardless of which force is called action or reaction, they hold equal value, only with opposing directions (disagreeing with this opposition and advocating for complementarity here). And the force they generate is tremendous.

But what I truly observe in contemporary artistic creation is an inclination to “return to the earth”. This involves bringing together material, the body, the collective, and reconnecting with ancient knowledge and oral traditions. These factors, viewed in the light of contemporary understanding and in a spirit of collaborative or co-constructive action, often serve as a way to reestablish this connection, which may have been somewhat obscured by the digital and virtual age’s enchantment. Craft carries with it the capacity for storytelling. We are incapable of dissociating it from the body that created it and the stories it carries. This state of imbued connection becomes essential for current artistic creation, which is a dynamic and ever-evolving field. Intellectual conflict is an intrinsic part of the contemporary artistic experience.

How do contemporary textile artists navigate the balance between traditional craftsmanship and contemporary artistic expression? Can we focus for a moment and say something about the influence of cultural heritage and traditional textile techniques on contemporary textile art? Can you give some examples of artworks or artistic attitudes?

Beatrijs Sterk: Some examples of cultural heritage and traditional textile techniques: Cecilia Vicuña has used inspiration from “quipus” for her large installations; in her textile books, Louise Bourgeois uses the old technique of patchwork to process her childhood trauma by means of household textiles; using the old technique of weaving, Diedrick Bracken, a young black artist, expresses his stories as a queer person – the forms of masculinity, the tenderness and the violence he’s experienced; Severija Inčirauskaitė-Kriaunevičienė uses the technique of cross-stitch embroidery on metal by drilling holes in metal surfaces.

Janis Jefferies: Please see: Jefferies, Janis K. 2008. *Loving Attention: An outburst of craft in contemporary art*. In: Maria Buszek, ed. *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*. Duke University Press. ISBN 978-0822347392

Cláudia Melo: In Portugal, there is currently growing interest in textile practices, viewing textiles as both a signifier and signified. Textile materials are being rediscovered as a highly malleable, adaptable element with immense transformative potential that can generate new forms while carrying a historical, social, political, and economic context close to its surface. The conceptual depth embedded in the “textile system” holds tremendous significance for contemporary artistic production because it addresses pressing contemporary issues.

Artists who incorporate textiles into their current productions often navigate a delicate balance between traditional craftsmanship and contemporary artistic expression. This equilibrium involves an interest in cultural heritage and traditional textile techniques, while simultaneously pushing the boundaries of what is possible in contemporary art.

They combine preservation and innovation by merging styles through the integration of techniques and motifs from different regions or time periods, creating pieces that reflect a global and interconnected world, demonstrating the interaction between cultures and traditions. They engage in a reinterpretation of traditional techniques in a contemporary context, altering their original purpose or meaning. On the other hand, artists also use textiles to explore themes related to their own heritage, migration, or the impact of globalization. They may incorporate symbols, stories, or materials from their cultural origin to create meaningful narratives.

I’ll provide an example of a guest artist: Ibrahim Mahama at the 2022 edition of *Contextile – the Biennial of Contemporary Textile Art*. The work he produced in a site-specific installation for the Biennial, titled “Historical Garments”, was installed at the Guimarães Design Institute,

a former tannery factory. Mahama employs material transformation as a tool to explore concepts related to commodities, migration, globalization, and economic exchanges. Often, in close collaboration with the community, his interventions incorporate materials collected from urban environments. As he himself states, “I am interested in how crisis and failure are absorbed into his material with a strong reference to global transaction and how capitalist structures work”.

“Historical Garments” is a sculpture-installation that involved the conceptualization and construction of large-scale looms, inspired by the industrial heritage and architectural structure of the space. The public could use these looms to produce fabrics that combined materials from two different places: Tamale (the artist’s hometown) and Guimarães.

The artist emphasizes glitches and spontaneity in creation, contrasting with the precision of large-scale machines and programmed production. The work incorporates local materials and involves the community, creating layers of history in the places where it is exhibited. After *Contextile*, the piece gained a practical function at the Savannah Centre for Contemporary Art, a project led by the artist in Tamale, Ghana, where he resides. This initiative is part of democratizing art and integrating global transaction networks.

Can you try to “map” the contemporary textile world and explain how contemporary textile artists push boundaries and challenge conventional notions of textile art? How has the world grown? Probably, we all know about the importances of the exhibitions in Lausanne, of the fantastic 50’s and 60’s, of the beginning of the separation of textile art from tapestry, from painting. Starting with experimentation with techniques, materials, sizes, 3D form, topics, can you say something about the most important subjects that artists and curators touch on in their practices or techniques?

Beatrijs Sterk: Since the exhibitions in Lausanne came to an end, there has been continuous development in textile art, the most prominent of which is the digital revolution in weaving which started in textiles in the 1980s and continued in the 1990s.

With her digital hand jacquard looms TC1 and TC2, Vibeke Vestby provided weavers with a tool to do their own experiments in weaving without any limitations. There are several excellent digital jacquard weavers with a good understanding of the technique, such as Lia Cook from the USA. In Europe, the artists best known for jacquard work in textile art include Grethe Sørensen and Lise Frølund from Denmark, as well as Philippa Brock from the UK. Many fine artists have their paintings translated

into weavings by technicians, without any understanding of the actual technique. Such works are then called “multiples” instead of weavings.

There is also a focus on other digital techniques, such as digital cutting and 3D printing. One good example of 3D printing is the work of fashion designer Iris van Herpen.

In the period following Lausanne, there was also a return to weaving in old and new ways, such as weaving with fiber optics, like Astrid Krogh and Włodzimierz Cygan. The very slow technique of tapestry weaving has found a new base in Denmark, where the European Tapestry Forum was founded in 2001. Preparations for the 7th “Artapestry” Triennial scheduled for 2024 are now underway.

The European Quilt Triennial is even older, dating back to the Heidelberg Textile Museum in 1986. The 8th Triennial held in 2021 showed how this medium can develop into interesting textile art when organizers have an open mind.

Embroidery, too, has seen a global revival and is becoming internationally more significant. This technique has been very present at the Rijswijk Textile Biennial. Outstanding examples are also presented at various textile exhibitions in Europe, and there is an increasing stunning wealth of hand embroidery works. This highly personal and very slow diary-like work is creating a new kind of intimacy. Young people in particular seem to like this intense form of expression.

Other techniques are currently not presented in special exhibition formats but are still part of textile art, such as felting or use of felt, knitting, crochet and free applications of them, appliqué and collage techniques using textile materials, bobbin and needle lacemaking or machine embroidery, and dyeing techniques and their interpretation in two-dimensional and three-dimensional space. Ever since Lausanne, various disciplines of textile art have had their limelight moments as part of major shows or exhibition series. The time has come to rewrite the history of contemporary European textile art in the post-Lausanne period in order to do justice to every movement in textile art, and to counteract the world’s ignorance of fine art as textile art is often simply considered unimportant. “Given the undeniable quality of these women’s work, why has it been overlooked for so long? Part of the answer – as in many other parts of the labor market and society at large – is simple sexism”. (The title of the Artsy editorial of 19 June 2017 is ‘Why Old Women have Replaced Young Men as the Art World’s Darlings’)

In general (and very roughly), I see two main directions in textile art: on the one hand, there is a return to slow manual work and craft-related pieces; on the other hand, there are new digital options for textile art, enabling work that is too labor-intensive to be done by hand. A further direction is the search for new materials and techniques, and experimen-

tation with these. I also notice a trend whereby textile art is seen in terms of “femininity” and “care”, a direction I do not perceive as productive since I believe that gender has nothing to do with good textile art. I consider this a new form of sexism.

Janis Jefferies: Recently, many early-career artists trained in fine art (or what I prefer to call visual arts) have been following a path similar to the South African artist, Igshaan Adams, who has been turning away from painting – along with the historical baggage and limitations that come with it – and towards fiber. These artists are using weaving techniques in ways that look a lot like painting. But these artists take the material as an invitation to center personal and social histories, often from historically marginalized perspectives. Natalia Nakazawa, an artist of Japanese and Uruguayan heritage, based in Queens, New York, first trained as a figurative painter at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD). In critiques and studio visits, she experienced what she called “terrifying” conversations, rife with exoticizing tokenism, about the brown female bodies in her paintings. After exhibiting figurative work at the Queens International in 2006, she “close[d] ... that chapter”. Today, she uses textiles to address cultural heritage, diaspora, digital circulation, and institutional power. “One reason why I gravitated toward textiles was to escape obsessive conversations about the body’s particulars”, she said during my visit to her studio in Long Island City, New York. “I wanted to talk about ancestry, history, past, present, future. I wanted to talk about globalization and markets – how images are translated from one medium to the next and are sold”.

A recent textile, *Demons and Protectors: Say their names* #GuiYing-Ma #ChristinaYunaLee #MichelleAlyssaGo (2022), features images of three Asian American women who were murdered in New York during the pandemic, alongside images of beasts and fragmented sculptural hands. There is a “fragile quality to how much we can honor and protect our own community members”, Nakazawa said.

This new generation of artists freely mixes fiber and painting, addressing formal and political concerns in works that are dyed, woven, embroidered, and sewn rather than rendered in oil or acrylic. Ironically, tapestries frequently dominate the wall space, typically given to painting.

There are many shows now that rethink materials, practices, concepts, theories often with an identity drive, modes of storytelling, merging autobiography with fiction and ritual. Natalia Nakazawa’s work is concerned with the representation and rupture of the migrational experience and makes reference to socio-political issues of today. What might be termed contemporary hybrid art practices also include aspects of the moving image, installations, text works, sculpture, garment making and performance. For example, “Re-Materialized: The Stuff That Matters”. Millennial

artists working in figuration – like LJ Roberts, who makes embroidered portraits of queer and trans individuals; and Erin M. Riley, whose tapestries often depict her own tattooed body, captured in iPhone selfies – were included, along with the great innovators from the 1970s, like 80-year-old knotted-rope artist Françoise Grossen (Switzerland/NYC).

The turn from paint to textiles is a trend that has been happening for some time. Remember I studied painting first (1969–1974) before moving to woven sculpture, influenced by feminism (the great political movement of my day) and the work of Polish artists, like Magdalena Abakanowicz and Tadek Beulitch, and Romanian artists, like Ritzi Jacobi, and from the former Yugoslavia, Jagoda Buic.

Histories, terms and definitions

In 1982, I wrote a paper which was presented alongside the Documenta international exhibition in Kassel, Germany. It was written to coincide with an experimental show of work that related to a hybrid combination of what was called ‘fine art’ and textile practices or ‘soft art’, which formed the foundation of K-18 Kassel. I argued that the twentieth century had witnessed many experiments in the ‘arts’ initiated by new concepts and the use of new materials and techniques. Social, political and economic factors had radically altered the definitions of art and thus changed its meaning. Contiguous with these shifts, the nature, role and status of decoration and the decorative arts need to be reconsidered. I asked why “art after Duchamp easily includes postcards but not tapestries, Xerox but not weaving”.

This question was based on the exhibition and book that Mildred Constantine and Jack Lenor Larsen organized and published in 1980. Entitled, *The Art Fabric: Mainstream*, both the exhibition and the book presented a range of textiles (called fiber in America), placing an emphasis primarily on technique; the central chapter is titled “Expansion of Materials and Techniques”, with subheadings such as “Paper”, “Leather”, “Felt-ing and Fabric Embellishments” and “Dye Techniques”. The research was based on their first collaboration, *Beyond Craft: The Art Fabric*, itself a 300-page volume representing the history of art fabric in the 1960s, which usefully provides several criteria for their usage of the term ‘art fabric’. The definition of the term includes everything from actual constructions (formed on or off the loom), parameters for understanding a work’s relationship to tradition, and notions of authorship. This was a benchmark moment in which the proliferation and use of a wide range of materials to create aesthetic parallels to painting and sculpture was pursued. Constantine and Larsen included many illustrations of work, such as wall hangings and environmentally based installations and assemblages, noting that

cloth – wrapped, compressed, or non-utilitarian – had played an early and important role within twentieth-century art concepts. Beginning with Man Ray (a Dadaist who wrapped up a sewing machine) and continuing to Christo and Jeanne-Claude's clothed objects and wrapped Reichstag in Berlin, fabric was becoming highly visible within the visual arts. Even earlier, in the "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture", Umberto Boccioni had advised it was important to affirm that even 20 different materials can compete in a single work to effect plastic emotion! Let us enumerate some: glass, wood, cardboard, iron, cement, horsehair, leather, cloth, mirrors, electric lights, etc. etc. Two generations later in a pioneering essay on Jackson Pollock, and in a similar manner to Boccioni, the 'happenings' performer Allan Kaprow suggested that objects of every sort are materials for the new art: paint, chairs, food, electric and neon lights, smoke, water, old socks, a dog, movies, and a thousand other things will be discovered by the present generation of artists.

In one sense, both Boccioni and Kaprow were right; indeed, many artists, the art world and its institutions have dispensed with historical hierarchies of genres, materials and techniques. But, as forcibly argued by Constantine and Larsen, "the crafts, even when clearly outside the category of utility, are generally assigned a lower status than the 'fine' arts". In these arguments, textiles are positioned within the category of craft and its many problematic histories and discourses. Nonetheless, what was and remains unique about *Beyond Craft: The Art Fabric* and *The Art Fabric: Mainstream* is that a number of marvelous installation shots – from large exhibitions such as the Lausanne Biennials in Switzerland, to small ones like the miniature textile biennials held at the British Crafts Centre in London from 1974 to 1980 – are included in full color with biographies on all the cited artists. A number of installation photos were drawn from the international Lausanne Biennials, which characterized the increasing interest in the art fabrics, their structure, and analysis of their socio-historical importance. Constantine and Larsen remain amongst a handful of art critics and writers to have explored the evolution of art fabric and the prestige of the decorative arts in contemporary art practice.

In an influential attempt to address an audience beyond the art world, *The Art Fabric: Mainstream* begins with a historical framework identical to *Beyond Craft: The Art Fabric*, providing a summary of concepts introduced earlier and initiating an interesting and important discussion on the large scope of works produced throughout the 1960s. Works by Sheila Hicks, Jagoda Buic and Magdalena Abakanowicz were influenced by the oversized canvases that are elemental to Abstract Expressionism, notably Jackson Pollock, Sam Gilliam and Lucas Samaras.

We can critically ask – in the 21st century and with reflection – was art fabric at its height of recognition in the early 1980s? Many of my contemporaries believe that it was. ‘Art fabric’ can be summarized as bringing into perspective the history of fabric in a larger sense. This includes the characteristic flexibility and softness of textile works – the multiplicity of forms of a creative language that is unique to fiber and the qualities of decorative art. Ideas around decorative art were certainly in vogue with a number of artists not represented in Constantine’s or Larsen’s work, but their contribution did much to bring these methods and materials to the fore of critical discussion. Significant influencers in this field include Eva Hesse (latex and cheesecloth), Michelle Stuart (paper and rope), Robert Morris (felt), Barry Flanagan (dyed hessian cloths), as they drew attention to both the nature and identity of the fabrics used and the structures that support them. Similarly, Robert Rauschenberg’s *Bed* (1955) used paint as well as cloth in the form of a found quilt, and Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen’s *Soft Bathtub (Model) – Ghost Version* (1966) employs canvas stuffed with kapok, which is used to reproduce familiar household objects on an enormous scale. Christo and Jean-Claude’s wrapped objects, soft packages and 5,600m³ package for Documenta 4, Kassel (1968) are other examples of this very ‘fine art’ preoccupation with textile as material. These soft sculptures were intended as sensual experiences and a commentary on our material world, drawing the viewers’ attention to their haptic qualities. The emphasis on touch is physically intrinsic to art-making and our engagement with its surface materiality in close proximity. All depiction in painting and sculpture implies a haptic response to some degree, but the concept of touch is much expanded in the works cited above through specific choices of tactile or ephemeral materials. In this context, fabric, cloth and anything that can be considered a textile is useful both as a material term and as a conceptual strategy operating in the transformative power of metaphor, interweaving between words and things, surfaces and skins, fiber and material, touch and tactility. In fact – to the exclusion of all other senses – the literature on aesthetics and art history focuses largely on sight (see, as just two of many possible examples, Hal Foster’s *Vision and Visuality* and Jonathan Crary’s *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*). This is, in itself, an instance of a larger phenomenon as sight has historically been the most privileged of all the senses. That is to say, the role of touch in the production, appreciation, and handling of artifacts from a wide cultural base has been neglected, perhaps in part due to the philosophy that the senses cannot be the medium of an elevated aesthetic experience. In a visual culture such as the West, touch has only recently re-emerged to take a place at the forefront of the senses.

Until the 1960s, there had been a general agreement within visual arts practice that fine art consisted of two categories: painting and sculpture. As a young woman and painting student studying fine art at art college in the early 1970s, I can testify to this statement, although I was also part of a generation that challenged these categories in order to break down the rigidity of the old system of craft/art hierarchies. Whilst some of my contemporaries ventured into 'happenings' and performance, I went 'off-canvas' to 'off-loom' constructions and continued to work with materials and form. I discovered that shapes could be more structural when formed through the off-loom process of weaving. It was a moment of entering the 'other' – the textile domain and its uneasy relation to the middle ground that my work occupied between art and craft. The sex of the artist mattered, and it was a time of intense reading, argument and re-writing of the canons of art history. Rosizka Parker and Griselda Pollock's book, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, was a key text of the time. Their writing traces the ideas and value systems regarding art, artists, femininity and creativity to demonstrate the position that women have occupied within culture and art history. It is worth recalling a seminal concept from one of this book's texts – first printed in the journal *Spare Rib* (UK and now held in the University of Sussex) in 1981 – that outlined this book's genesis in the art history collective to which Parker and Pollock belonged.

The division in so-called 'fine art' extends to the distinction between art and craft, at least within Western countries. Women's practice in forms of art that use needle and thread has been dismissed as painstaking and merely dexterous, while great art is defined as intellectually testing and truly inventive – qualities that are only exercised by men. These differences have been misrepresented to us as a hierarchical division between great art and lesser decorative crafts. Art history represents this division as self-evident and natural, whereas what women make is accorded lesser value and regard.

Now viewed as a classic feminist text, *Women, Art & Ideology* paved the way for a re-thinking of themes that are repressed in Modernist aesthetics. The decorative, craft and the domestic became challenging ideas that women in the fine arts could engage with through work involving textiles. Though their achievements in this sphere are often highly thought of, the fact that painters like Nathalie Goncharova, Alexandra Exter, Lubov Popova, Annie Albers, Sophia Tauber-Arp, Vanessa Bell and Sonia Delaunay were involved in textile design, weaving, tapestry and costume-making has equivocal implications. On the one hand, for a woman artist to 'return', as it were, to a prescribed traditional role in the minor arts (the decorative, craft and the domestic), which is generally less conducive to fame and financial gain than a career in painting or sculpture, can be seen

as a step backwards from a feminist point of view. It therefore becomes highly problematic, even contradictory, for women artists to acknowledge textile practices within their work without recognising the underlying hierarchical value system and hierarchical divisions outlined by Parker and Pollock. The interventions of these Modernist pioneers in mainstream art history gave confidence to many women of my generation. Textiles and the decorative art offered them the possibility to rethink their contributions as part of a broader women's movement, while still remaining within the mainstream of visual arts practices. Now, there is a huge reassessment of this period, hence the TATE Britain exhibition, 'Women in Revolt! Art, Activism and Politics', which opens in November 2023. It is based on *Framing Feminism: art and the women's movement 1970–1985*, an anthology of essays and reviews, compiled by Griselda and Rose in 1987.

Many young women studying painting at art school in the UK in the late 1960s and early 1970s became disillusioned with the dominance of masculine and Eurocentric tendencies in art. The critical rhetoric of Clement Greenberg and his formalist purism symbolized closure for many young practitioners and formed a telling structure for discussions of changing values at the time. For Greenberg, self-referential autonomy, a fixed point of origin of identity, assumed it was possible to draw boundaries around the aesthetic 'frame'. The critic's role within this model was to pay attention to the specifics of the practice in question. Greenberg's view was based on a moral judgment, namely that 'purity in art' was a means of preserving a living Western culture. However, for Jonathon Harris, Greenberg established a kind of closed judgment about values of good and bad art and what constituted 'authentic' art practice. In his now famous essay, "Avant Garde and Kitsch", Greenberg holds mass culture responsible for creating a new kind of kitsch and 'low' culture, and he fills the gap between the latter and Avant-Garde art with a wealth of anti-decorative rhetoric.

Many Black British artists, like Yinka Shonibare, have challenged Greenberg's ideas of paintings being polluted with ideas of the decorative and the feminine by citing colonialist tendencies that extend ideas of pattern and decoration to explore colonial themes. Shonibare paints on patterned textiles and plays with their identity to create visual chaos. This ambition is evident in his paintings from the 1990s, like *Double Dutch* (1994) and *Feather Pink* (1997). These works are usually installations of small squares – painted panels of 'African' fabric. The history of the fabric used and the ambiguous materials and motifs of West African textiles seem to symbolize the rich complexity of post-colonial cultures in that while the patterns and colors are thought to be authentically African, they actually originate from Indonesian Batik work, a technique which was industrialized by Dutch traders historically active in Africa. Shonibare

underlines the visual pleasure of the amoebic textile patterns as his work becomes a metaphor for excess and exploitation. His symbolic use of textiles is perhaps most clear in the work *Maxa*, a vast wall painted blue and covered in discs of different sizes and patterns.

Of course, the feminist movement challenged this kind of patriarchal way of presenting art and thus a lot of the art that has developed since.

Other landmark shows foregrounding textiles and craft include “Fiber: Sculpture 1960–present” (2014), at the ICA Boston; “Outliers and American Vanguard Art” (2018), at the National Gallery of Art; “Quilts and Color” (2014), at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; and “Making Knowing: Craft in Art, 1950–2019” (2019–2022), at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Many of these exhibitions built on the legacy of feminist art history by reclaiming contributions to formal innovation created in domestic settings, celebrating collective practices and leveling the hierarchy between fine art and folk art. In the process, they revealed how gender, race, and class underpin aesthetic biases.

Cláudia Melo: Exhibitions, biennials, conferences, and events more focused on textile art or textile-based art have multiplied and gained prominence over time. Furthermore, major institutions, art entities, curators, and auctioneers are showing an increasing interest in works that incorporate textiles, whether in material or conceptual form. They are also incorporating such works into their collections and exhibitions.

The Lausanne Biennial was, in fact, the event that initiated a significant shift in the understanding and presentation of contemporary textiles in art. It provided a platform for textile artists to showcase their innovative creations and encouraged experimentation with new materials, techniques, and approaches. A notable example was the introduction of new synthetic fibers and textile production technologies at that time. This included the exploration of new materials such as nylon and polyester, as well as the adoption of new printing and dyeing methods.

The biennial also served as a forum for discussing issues related to textile art, such as the fusion of traditional craftsmanship with industrial production and the influence of technology on textile creations. Currently, we can identify these examples: Biennials such as *Contextile – the Biennial of Contemporary Textile Art*, Guimarães Portugal, whose mission is to place textiles in the context of contemporary art in Portugal and connect with global textile culture territories. It establishes strategic partnerships with national and international cultural entities that promote the artistic dimension of textiles, their artistic and technological potential, and their intersection with other disciplines. This initiative simultaneously fosters an open discussion on fundamental issues such as identity, sustainability, and innovation.

Institutions like the Textiel Museum in Tilburg also contribute to expanding the understanding of museums as laboratory spaces. They present inspiring exhibitions in the fields of textile design, visual arts, and industrial heritage, as well as historical presentations reflecting contemporary textile developments.

Furthermore, textile culture centers, such as the Centre for Heritage, Arts, and Textile (CHAT), aim to bring together diverse perspectives, areas, and methods within the textile universe. Through the historical textile industry of the 1950s, CHAT represents a new beginning in the evolution of textile arts in Hong Kong and Asia. It honors the industry's history while redefining textile arts through innovative narratives and contemporary engagement. It's worth noting that there are many other excellent examples as well.

The key points that curators and artists are currently interested in revolve around contemporary issues. In this context, identity and cultural heritage play a fundamental role, providing a platform for exploring cultural roots and personal identities. Additionally, sustainability has emerged as a growing concern, with textile artists adopting more environmentally friendly materials and addressing issues related to environmental awareness and climate change.

Gender equality and feminism also find expression in contemporary textile art. This artistic field, often associated with domestic work and women, becomes fertile ground for deconstructing gender roles and exploring feminist themes.

Narratives about migration, displacement, and belonging find a powerful voice in the hands of textile artists. Textiles have the power to tell the stories of displaced populations and express the experiences of belonging to different places and cultures.

Memory and nostalgia also hold a prominent place in contemporary textile art through the evocation of powerful memories and a deep sense of nostalgia. This allows artists to explore both personal and collective memories.

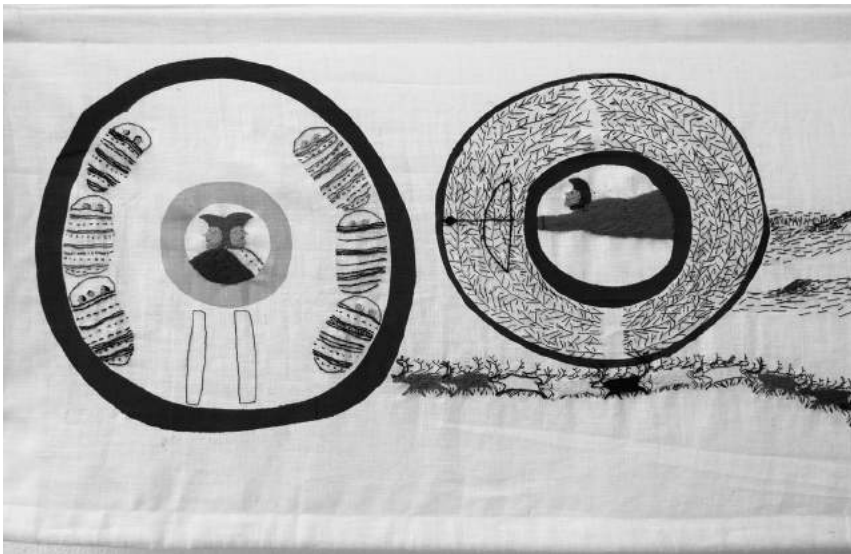
Finally, contemporary textile art does not shy away from addressing social and political issues, including human rights, inequality, and activism. It also delves into the complex interactions between the real world and the virtual world, highlighting the underlying individualism in matters of artificial intelligence and the virtual realm.

There are many artists that work with significant topics and by their art they want to be involved in the modern/current discussion about society, politics or the environment. I am aware that there are a variety of problems and issues in different countries and communities – on different levels. But how does contemporary textile art engage

with the social, cultural, or political issues of our time? Would you try to make some point about it? Can you share some influential contemporary textile artists and their contributions to the field?

Beatrijs Sterk: Here are some names of artists who engage with the socio-political issues of our time. Firstly, there is Yinka Shonibare, who was apparently asked by his teacher at art academy to explore his “African-ness”. In doing so, he came to deal with African wax fabrics that have a highly complex cultural history.

Secondly, Chilean artist Cecilia Vicuña has been an activist throughout her creative career, and black weaver Diedrick Bracken works on a small loom used by hobby weavers but makes statements that strongly connect with his own experiences as a gay person. I could mention many others, like the Sami artist Britta Marakatt Labba, who acts as an activist for the rights of the Sami people through her art, as well as Igshaan Adams from South Africa, another young black textile artist who uses his art to heal himself and his family. Polish artist Malgorzata Mirga-Tas has created an impressive textile manifesto of Roma identity and art.



Il. 1.

Britta Marakatt-Labba: "History" 2003-2007, 24 m. hand embroidery with motifs from Sámi history, shown at the Documenta in Kassel. Photo Beatrijs Sterk



Il. 2.

Igshaan Adams, South Africa, 1982: "Bonteheuvvel/Epping", tapestry; Adams large-scale tapestries are stitched together with wood, beads, shells, strings and rope they are linked to commodity tradings and local environs in postcolonial Africa. Photo Beatrijs Sterk

Work by the last three of these artists was on show at the 2022 Venice Biennial. I have mentioned some of the more famous names, but concern about society and the environment was apparent in nearly every work at this year's "Quo Vadis" Textile and Fibre Art Biennial.

Janis Jefferies: One tendency is the juxtaposition of historical textiles with contemporary artists' work, which can be explored through form rather than content. However, the São Paulo Biennial reframed categories such as craft and manual labor, which are traditionally rejected as 'fine art' in the West. These categories were given a new focus of attention as they formed a central part of local artistic traditions. On one level, this was an act of reclaiming the traditions of indigenous cultures that formed part of places, landscapes and identities that were recovering from violent colonial occupations. On another level, such events ask us to think about the relationship between geography, time, place and space.

Cláudia Melo: For me, artistic production or conception is always political, whether it is presented in more or less overt forms, or whether it is more or less guerrilla-like. The textile industry is one of the most polluting industries in the world, as we all know. It is inevitable that this truth is not absent from this artistic practice.

Other everyday issues such as housing shortages, war, displacement, poverty, consumption, identity, sexism, and race are still very much present themes in contemporary art.

For me, an example would be the work of Tania Bruguera, a Cuban artist who works with various mediums, including textiles. Her work often addresses political and social issues such as censorship, state control, and freedom of expression.

Another example would be El Anatsui, a Ghanaian artist who creates large-scale sculptures from recycled and found objects. His works evoke the aesthetics of traditional African textiles and address issues such as globalization, waste, and cultural exchange.

Or even the Gee's Bend Quilters Collective, a group of women from the Gee's Bend community in Alabama, known for their extraordinary quilts. Their creations often reflect the history and politics of the African-American community in the southern United States.

Tau Lewis is also a good example, I think. She is a contemporary Canadian-Jamaican artist known for her unique and deeply personal approach to textile and sculpture art. Her work often explores themes of identity, memory, race, and the diasporic experience. Her practice exemplifies how contemporary textile artists can use their chosen medium to address complex social, cultural, and personal issues. Her work is a testament to the power of textiles and sculpture in conveying deep and meaningful narratives while engaging with the broader discourse on identity and heritage.

Because we have many possibilities to travel and experience different cultures, ways of thinking, and ways of making art, can you discuss the role of interdisciplinarity and cross-cultural influences in contemporary textile art? How does it influence how artists protect their cultural boundaries and national tradition? How do contemporary textile artists address issues of globalization, migration, and cultural hybridity in their work?

Beatrijs Sterk: Crossing boundaries between different art disciplines has led to completely new areas in textile art, for example Diana Scherer's creations using plant roots, or new fabrics made from mycelium, fungi filaments that are currently researched as an alternative to leather. I see interdisciplinarity and cross-cultural influences as positive assets in the process of making textile art. They will give artists a wider perspective. Hopefully, there will be no need to become protective of one's own cultural boundaries or national traditions. I heard that some of the smaller countries in Europe struggled with these issues in the past, but I hope that there are no such restrictions left. However, if an artist feels strongly

about protecting their national culture, they should of course take up this subject.

The issues of globalization, migration and cultural hybridity are topics expressed in the works of many textile artists who choose to deal with them. The latest Riga Triennial, themed “Quo Vadis”, presented many such expressions, for example Yosi Anaya’s statement that “ancient valued ways seem to have gotten buried in humanity’s past”; Cornelia Brustureanu, who says that “my work is a warning, a cry of alarm and an opportunity for critical reflection (on globalization)”; and Irmgard Hofer-Wolf’s idea, “Transparency – that is what we allow, voluntarily or not, in our private sphere and we don’t seem to care”.

Janis Jefferies: Arguably, the greatest concentration of textile-formed work in a Western-based biennial was held at the Arsenale Corderie as part of ‘Viva Arte Viva’ in 2017. This was the main theme of the Venice Biennial. Textiles were everywhere in the form of embroidered sculptures, large-scale installations, knitted dolls and painted dresses. Led by curator Christine Marcel, director of the Centre Pompidou in Paris, as an exhibition that would reflect on how “art bears witness to the most precious part of what makes us human, especially in a world full of conflicts and shocks”. Largely addressing statelessness and migration in particular, themes were mostly addressed in the abstract – as existential rather than material conditions that frame current practices in a largely apolitical way. Entering the Central Pavilion, a Sam Gilliam drape piece misrepresented a practice that interlocked the histories of painting and textiles. In the *Festival of Colours* pavilion, there was an abundance of stuff, from Sheila Hicks to self-taught artist Judith Scott’s yam-wrapped sculptures.

One of the most striking moments was Ibrahim Mahama’s *Occupation and Labour, Railways* (Ghana, 2014), which dominated the walk between the Arsenale and Giardini at the 2015 Venice Biennale and consisted of a long corridor of draped jute sacks representing global exports and international trade.

Ibrahim was the artist in residence at CONTEXTILE 2022. By expanding the idea of what an artist is, an ecosystem of integrated pedagogical and artistic production is developed. So, from the opening of the 2019 Savannah Centre for Contemporary and Red Clay projects, Ibrahim and his many local collaborators were able to link the village of Tamarle with the environment that surrounds the village: sacred forests, the urban city nearby and international spaces. The local becomes international. Through intergenerational conversations, young people use the archaeological museum to make new artifacts; they learn inside donated airplanes converted to classrooms; they access technology, engaging with robot-

ics and handling drones to become skilled young adults. Planes became playgrounds. Another kind of art school emerges: an integration of art and textile, agriculture and architecture, informal spaces of learning and sharing, reworlding the local in very different ways to University-based, global institutions. Ibrahim's methods and methodologies partly answer your last question around education.

Another example is the anthropological turn. For example, FRIEZE London 2019 included a curated section called WOVEN by Cosmin Costinas, writer, critic and Executive Director/Curator of Para Site (Hong Kong). There were solo displays by non-Euro-American artists working from different generational perspectives – Brazil, the Philippines, China, India and Madagascar were prominent. Working with the vernacular, the indigenous, or traditions that may seem subversive – employing textiles and weaving, either in a direct way or as an expanded interpretation of their cultural roots – intergenerational histories reveal stories of migration and identity politics. These special events build on Verbanov in FRIEZE Masters 2017 and London-based dealer Paul Hughes' 2,000 Years of Abstract Arts, highlighting this little-known "confluence" by pairing Andean feather pieces dating from AD 800–1200 with Albers' geometric textiles.

In February 2020, "Relief avec deux collines" ("Relief with Two Hills") by the Polish sculptor Magdalena Abakanowicz (1930–2017), a powerful textile work from 1972 that is made from sisal, sold at Sotheby's London for £52,500 plus premium. On the face of it, this is not a spectacular result: the estimate had been £50,000–£70,000, in line with a previous result at the Polish Polswiss Art auction house in December 2016, when Abakanowicz's dramatic Abakan Rouge III (1971) achieved €74,082 on an estimate of €43,000–€57,000. And the figure does not approach the record €2.9m paid at Polswiss Art in December 2021 for Abakanowicz's Bambini installation: these 83 haunting, headless figures, made from concrete, wood and resin between 1998 and 1999, made a record price for an artwork in Poland. I have drawn much of the discussions from the October 2022 issue of Apollo. For Emma Baker, head of Sotheby's contemporary art London, the Sotheby's result "is an indication something is happening in her market". The previous highest price at Sotheby's for an Abakanowicz textile was \$20,000 for Cercle Clair (1971) in New York in 2008. At Christie's London later in 2020, another 1971 work, Brun, fetched £55,000 (est. £18,000–£25,000). On the eve of Tate Modern's major presentation of Abakanowicz's Abakans from the 1960s and 1970s – a series of free-hanging, three-dimensional textile sculptures – which opens in November, these results suggest that market recognition for this artist's textile work is catching up with the fame of her figurative sculpture (TATE Modern November 2023 to May 2024).

Abakanowicz is just one of a group of female artists – mostly from Europe and North America, but including Olga de Amaral from Colombia – whose textile work has come to be understood as fine art. These artists joined the strong fiber art movement then developing in the United States, which included pioneering figures such as Claire Zeisler (1903–1991) and Lenore Tawney (1907–2007). Meanwhile, Olga de Amaral (b. 1932), who lives and works in Bogotá, studied fiber art from 1954–1955 at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan, founded in the 1920s under the direction of the Finnish architect Eliel Saarinen and his wife Loja Saarinen, a textile designer. By contrast, Sheila Hicks (b. 1934), for whom textile has also been a primary medium, studied under the artist Josef Albers at Yale University.

It has been argued that the success of the fiber art movement limited curatorial and market appreciation of fiber works as fine art. During the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, work was collected and understood as fiber art. A major exhibition in 1969, ‘Wall Hangings’ at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, made a prominent display of many of these artists’ works, but in a context where most, including Abakanowicz’s “Yellow Abakan” (1967–1968), had been acquired for the design department. In the 1990s, however, the market focused on fiber declined. Nonetheless, a group of contemporary conceptual artists who engaged with stitch, knitting, fabric and textile began to attract attention. Louise Bourgeois (1911–2010), who came from a family of tapestry restorers, Rosemarie Trockel (b. 1952) and Tracey Emin (b. 1963) are among a number of women artists for whom textile – and its association with the feminist dialogues of the 1980s – became important.

Currently, it is these artists whose works are mostly highly valued.

Trockel’s record work at auction is “Untitled” (1985–1988), which achieved just under \$5m at Sotheby’s New York on 14 May 2014. This also represents a record for a textile at auction. Tracey Emin’s second most highly valued work at auction after “My Bed” is the appliquéd quilt *Mad Tracey from Margate. Everyone’s Been There* (1997) sold in 2014 at Christie’s London for £722,500 (est. £700,000–£1m). By contrast, Anni Albers’ record stands at \$104,500 for *Untitled*, sold at Christie’s New York in 2009, and Sheila Hicks’ record is \$125,000 for *Untitled* (1975), sold at Los Angeles Modern Auctions in 2016. The disintegration for both artists and audiences of distinctions of value between disciplines, genres and media has led to a revaluation. Tate’s Anni Albers exhibition in 2018, Hepworth Wakefield’s (UK) recent show ‘Sheila Hicks: Off Grid’ and the exhibition ‘Olga de Amaral: To Weave a Rock’, which toured from the Museum of Fine Arts Houston to Cranbrook Art Museum in 2021, have all brought serious institutional attention to the field. Tessa Lord, a specialist

and head of the post-war contemporary art evening auction at Christie's London, says, "These retrospective exhibitions give audiences an opportunity to explore an entire oeuvre and help to expand the collector base". Emma Baker at Sotheby's suggests that these exhibitions have enabled a "rediscovery of aspects of art history". "Sheila Hicks, for instance, is a smart person to collect", she adds. "I feel her work is undervalued".

Going forward with the topic of areas and methods that artists and curators use, how important is research (science and inner realms like memories, personal experiences, and experimentation) in the creative process of contemporary textile artists? Can you clear the path and distinguish some areas of methods? Are there any strategies?

Beatrijs Sterk: I consider research very important, but openness is still more important for the creative process. There is a recent book on creativity, "The Patterned Mind – Creative Methods in Surface Design" by Laura Isoniemi from Finland, a textile artist and designer. In this book I rediscovered all the ideas I encountered in the late 1960s while working for a creativity center in the Netherlands. They include playfulness and the importance of the hand rather than the brain when it comes to being creative. I highly recommend this book for any strategies on creativity.

Janis Jefferies: In 2022, THE MILK OF DREAMS, The 59th Venice Biennial, curated by Cecilia Alemani, provides a very good indication of how strong curatorial research is with a focus on all kinds of practices and materials.

In taking the title for her show from Leonora Carrington's children's story, Alemani made the link to the 20th-century movement explicit from the start. The Witch's Cradle was the first of five historic "time capsules" that brought together Surrealist women. As the art historian Alyce Mahon puts it in the catalog, women Surrealists "aimed to re-educate through re-enchantment", often adopting and reimagining the forms and narratives of fairy tales. There are marvelous things in this vein by Remedios Varo, Toyen, Dorothea Tanning and Leonor Fini. Marvel at the range and diversity of material. For example, the inclusion and brilliant staging of the late Indian artist Mrininalini Mukherjee's hemp figures, and Cecilia Vicuña's post-Surrealist paintings and flotsam-and-jetsam sculptures.

Another tendency is the slogan "Let's change the history of the future". So says a cyborg to her human avatar in Lynn Hershman Leeson's *Logic Paralyzes the Heart* (2021). This video is one of a cluster of works by this digital art pioneer and was positioned close to the end of the Milk of Dreams exhibition – Cecilia Alemani's rich and often thrilling biennial show – which took place at Venice's Arsenale. It is a time-warping exhi-

bition where everything is uncertain and in a state of flux – fiber, textile, and artworks related to digital data.

Cláudia Melo: Research is a multifaceted and indispensable element within the creative process for contemporary textile artists. It encompasses historical, material, personal, collaborative, environmental, and conceptual dimensions. By embracing these diverse forms of research, textile artists can enrich their practice and contribute to the dynamic and continually evolving realm of contemporary textile art.

To address this question, I can provide an example from the working methodologies of the artistic residencies associated with Contextile – Biennial of Contemporary Textile Art. Artists selected for these residencies come to inhabit the territory for a month or more. Since they come from various parts of the world, preliminary work is always conducted before their arrival in Guimarães, Portugal.

During online meetings, all the artists who will be participating in the residency are brought together. This provides an opportunity to get to know their projects and personalities, identify general or specific points of interest, and initiate my research and connection work with entities and communities that can provide additional contributions to the focus of each residency project. I also introduce them to the territory of textile culture and the specific location where they will be presenting their results. Ideas are exchanged, experiences shared, and concepts discussed before their arrival at the location. However, when the artists physically encounter the territory and/or local communities, the narrative may take a different turn. The artists' interaction with the territory and local communities can be a transformative process – either solidifying what we had previously conceptualized or leaving it behind because presence and immersion in the current moment bring about new perspectives.

Residencies always begin with visits to places of interest for the projects, including local industries, artisan workshops, and interactions with communities. Research, whether in the form of traditional scientific inquiry or more subjective exploration of inner realms like memories, personal experiences, and experimentation, plays a pivotal role in the creative process of these artists. We engage in both collaborative and individual research efforts, encompassing historical research, personal memory and experience, material experimentation, cross-disciplinary collaboration, environmental and social research, as well as conceptual and theoretical exploration.

I mentioned the inner perspective that has an impact in the artworks and in the process of collecting inspirations (because artists not only correspond with the idea of outside issues and subjects, but they

also turn to their inner world). How do contemporary textile artists explore the concepts of memory, nostalgia, and personal narratives in their creations?

Beatrijs Sterk: I think that textile artists have always had a strong relationship with their inner world due to the meditative aspects of their work. Looking at some of the works from recent exhibitions, I found the following examples: Thomas Cronenberg's tapestry "Regret" from the Nostalgia series (Riga, 2023); Eli Eines' "A Hole in the Heart", a two-part embroidery about her father (Lodz 2022); Ewa Kuryluk's "White Kangaroo" (Venice 2022) with stitched self-portraits; the "Internal Line" installation by Chiharu Shiota (Leipzig 2021), expressing memories and time; and, finally, Ieva Krumina's "Private Endlessness" at the Baltic Mini Textile in Gdynia in 2022.

Janis Jefferies: This does not interest me so much unless there is a play with autofictions and historical critiques of nostalgia, particularly as a critique of colonialism. A great example for me would be Hew Locke and his magnificent *Procession commission* at TATE Britain in 2022, which finished in January 2023. *Procession* invites visitors to "reflect on the cycles of history, and the ebb and flow of cultures, people and finance and power". Tate Britain's founder was the art lover and sugar-refining magnate Henry Tate. In the installation, Locke says he "makes links with the historical after-effects of the sugar business, almost drawing out of the walls of the building", also revisiting his artistic journey so far, including work with statues, share certificates, cardboard, rising sea levels, carnival and the military. Throughout, visitors saw figures who travel through space and time. Here, they carry historical and cultural baggage: evidence of global financial and violent colonial control embellished on their clothes and banners, alongside powerful images of some of the disappearing colonial architecture of Locke's childhood in Guyana, a former British colony.

There is a recording of my interview with Hew (January 27th 2023) from the Victoria and Albert Museum, London https://youtu.be/7_HKlmsiAjs

Can we discuss the role of sustainability, ethical production and eco-consciousness in contemporary textile art a little bit? Have you noticed this trend? Have artists or curators that work with textile as a medium, a material, or an idea been thinking about it? And what about the collaborations between productions and art?

Beatrijs Sterk: Sustainability, ethical production and environmental awareness play an important role for most textile artists. Many items are

made from waste materials, such as the work of Peteris Sidars, who presented “The Missing View of the Landscape” at the 2023 Riga Triennial, a piece made entirely from plastic bottle tops. Ieva Kruminā goes as far as melting old plastic bottles into a square shape which she then dyes and embosses; both were on display at the recent Riga Triennial. I am taking this opportunity to mention my all-time favorite artist, El Anatsui, who uses waste materials to create his large “cloths”.

Although very big and heavy, his works are actually composed of small metal bottle tops which have been flattened, cut, twisted, rolled, squeezed and joined together with copper wire. His assistants make them up into coloured “blocks”, which are then arranged by him and assembled by his helpers. Because of his way of working like a patchwork artist, I consider him a textile artist.

Janis Jefferies: Production and consumption are on the rise, with severe environmental and social implications. Only 12% of the material used for clothing is recycled. A popular way to dispose of clothes is to give them to charity shops. But many of these donations end up in countries in the global south, where there is big trade in secondhand clothing. The latest UN figures say the UK, for example, is the third-largest used-clothing exporter after the US and China. The top two destinations are Ghana and Pakistan, while the fastest growing importer is Chile.

These countries are becoming overwhelmed with clothing in poor condition that cannot be resold, as well as their own waste. Faced with this crisis, a growing number of entrepreneurs and designers collect textiles destined for landfill and recycle them into new garments and home furnishings. There are many interesting artist-designers from various parts of Africa who use recycled materials – especially as so much stuff has been dumped around that continent over the past decade. For example, Ghana’s Kwabena Obiri Yeboah (KoliKoWear), Ghana’s Yayra Agbofah (The Revival), Pakistan’s Ume Kulsum Hussain (East Rugs), and Chile’s Rosario Hevia (Ecocitex).

See Jefferies “Crocheted Strategies: Women Crafting their Own Communities” (2016), published on Taylor & Francis Online. It is available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14759756.2016.1142788>.

Cláudia Melo: As I’ve mentioned before, the textile industry is one of the most environmentally harmful industries worldwide, therefore it is inevitable that this topic is addressed in our discussion.

In recent years, there has been a notable increase in interest and awareness regarding sustainable practices, ethical production, and environmental responsibility in both the textile industry and contemporary textile art. Many artists who use textiles as their medium and material,

as well as curators working with these artists, have been dedicated to addressing and exploring these issues in-depth. This includes considering the environmental impact of materials used, such as organic fibers and eco-friendly dyeing, as well as working conditions in textile production.

Many artists explore the concept of “upcycling”, which involves the reuse of existing textile materials to create new artworks, thus reducing waste. Furthermore, awareness of fair trade and ethical production also influences how artists approach the use of textiles in their works.

Regarding collaborations between production and art, we increasingly see artists partnering with local businesses and artisans to create unique and sustainable textile pieces. These partnerships can be mutually beneficial, promoting ethical production and providing artists with access to specialized materials and techniques.

Contextile – Biennial of Contemporary Textile Art takes pride in promoting sustainable practices in its organization and logistics, as well as in challenging artists to incorporate these concerns into their work. The preference for using innovative and sustainable materials is evident, such as in the case of the artwork “entangled fragments and the vague”, produced by artist Johanna Rogalla during the Contextile 2020 artistic residency. In this piece, she used cork-derived yarn in the jacquard fabric she created.

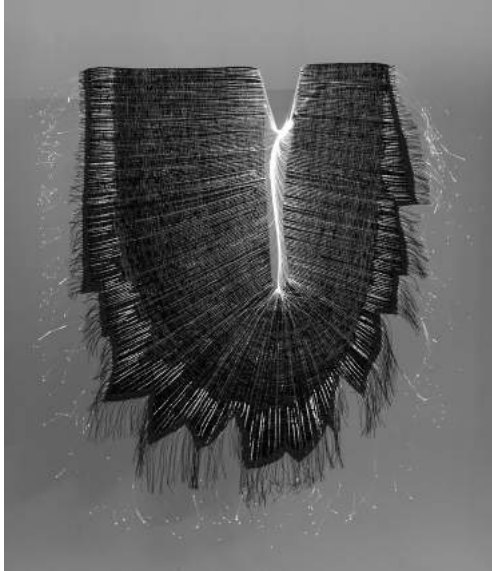
Furthermore, the selection of artists whose practices inherently address environmental convictions and policies related to textile industry pollution is a notable aspect. An example is Lars Preisser, whose work consistently carries a critical perspective on finding the perfect textile machine in its relationship with humans and the environment. During his Contextile 2022 artistic residency, Preisser created the “Unweaving the machine” artwork, an apparatus that can be used to unweave industrially produced fabrics. This machine reverses and rewinds processes that have become increasingly problematic for our ecosystems. Operating this slow and seemingly unproductive machine offers the two operators an opportunity to collectively rethink the normative directions and logics of production (as described by the artist).

The major themes proposed by Contextile in each edition also call for these and other pressing reflections. In 2022, with the theme “Re-Make”, Contextile encouraged reflection on “doing better”, a reevaluation system, and a more conscious and critical approach to the world.

Could you provide examples of innovative techniques or materials used by contemporary textile artists to create their work? And how (artists) incorporate technology or digital elements into their practice? Of course there are new but traditional machines that support artists in building their artworks, but what about the technology itself? Have you experienced some artworks, some artistic practices

– can you extract some examples when technology and new media were a clou and not only a tool?

Beatrijs Sterk: As regards novel techniques, I already mentioned Ieva Krūmiņa's innovative use of waste materials as well as Astrid Krogh's and Włodzimierz Cygan's use of fiber optics.



Il. 3.
Włodzimierz Cygan: "Organic 2", 120 x 160 cm, 2019, weaving; polyester, linen, fiber optic, LED light generator, photo Thiswaydesign

Many well-known artists now use digital weaving thanks to the TC hand jacquard looms developed by Vibeke Vestby, as well as digital embroidery, digital cutting and 3D printing. In the early 1990s, I organized a digital weaving project and several digital embroidery projects for textile artists. In each case it was a collaborative effort with industrial companies. I see these as the most important projects I have initiated, because nothing has come closer to the Bauhaus ideal of artists and industry working together!

If I had the chance, I would like to experiment with a digital bobbin-lace machine to make car parts because there are no seams in this type of lace, which makes it stronger. In all my projects of this kind, the challenge was to unite the creative partners with the technicians. Initially they looked at each other with suspicion rather than trust.

Once the technique is more accessible, I also envisage many more experiments with 3D printing in textile art.

Janis Jefferies: Technology has impacted what remains of the textile industries (globally), and then there are major universities and labs, like MIT, USA, that have combined technology and textile to promote comfortable, form-fitting fabrics that recognize their wearers' activities, like walking, running, and jumping.

Smart textiles and fashion technology innovation centers, courses and patents are on the increase. In the textile art field, artists are producing wearable art, gallery installations, and public art by collaborating with scientists and engineers. Some work explores visual communication or conceptual approaches involving the intersections between art and technology. I worked on several projects with my colleague Professor Barbara Layne, Concordia University, Montreal, Canada over a period of 22 years. *The Enchantment* features new work made between 2015 and 2019. This project explores textiles in museum collections and uses traditional techniques, materials and structures to create a textile antenna that connects one object to another. Unlike traditional geometric antennas made of hard metals, these new antennas are flexible and can be made in the shape of referential things (animals, flowers, logos etc). This interdisciplinary research included a team of engineers, artists and cultural researchers and was funded by the Social Science and Humanities Council of Canada. *The Enchantment* includes three groupings of objects: The Branko Belt Project (4 garments), Maxwell's Equations (3 garments) and The Enchanted Environment (9 interactive objects). In several essays, I addressed the importance of historical research in textile collections and the revival of techniques and structures in the development of current textile technology. Our first joint publication, *Electronic Arts: Hacking the Museum*, was based on a series of conversations on trains and by email on the occasion of Layne's solo show of the same title at the Glass Box, Salford, University of Manchester in 1996. The results of our first major collaborative project, Textiles and Transmissions, included the Black Wall Hanging, originally shown at The Hub in Lincolnshire, UK in 2006 and further displayed in Boston, Washington DC and Marseille, France. A paper on this work was presented at TSA in Toronto (2006), entitled *Text and Textiles: New Writings from Spam Tales*. The interactive cloth included a flexible, handwoven LED display that presented phrases from spam but also information on the former seed factory that has now become The Hub. It also included quotes from the scientist Isaac Newton, who was born in Lincolnshire. As the piece traveled to new locations, more texts were added to the cloth's displayed memory – just as any textile picks up signs of wear and use from its own life's journey.

However, we are arguably best known for our *Wearable Absence* project, with assistance from a diverse team of specialists and students, including Dr. Mohammed Soleymani, Hesam Khoshnevis, Diane Morin,

Jake Moore, Andre Arnold, Meghan Price, Maryam Golshayan, Professor Robert Zimmer, Miguel Andres-Claveras, In-young Cho and Helen Watson. The Wearable Absence system includes an interactive jacket that responds to biometric data mined from the body. Calibrated to a particular individual, it can analyze a person's emotional state and seek out an "appropriate" response from the online database of a friend, lover, relative, etc. Corresponding texts, sounds, or video files are then played back through the garment in order to provide the wearer with "what they need". The project was funded by the Hexagram Institute, Government House of Quebec, London, Arts and Humanities Research Board, Social Sciences and Humanities. Please see: Jefferies, Janis K. 2012. Wires and Wearables. In: Jeremy Pitt, ed. *This Pervasive Day: The Potential and Perils of Pervasive Computing*. UK: Imperial College Press, pp. 150-160. ISBN 978-1-848-16748-3

Cláudia Melo: Faig Ahmed is an Azerbaijani artist known for his innovative approach to traditional Azerbaijani carpet patterns. He digitally distorts and manipulates the patterns, creating visually striking and often surreal textile art. His work challenges the viewer's perception of traditional motifs through the lens of digital manipulation.

Or there is Hella Jongerius, a Dutch designer known for her innovative and experimental approach to design. Her statement about 3D textiles potentially replacing concrete and cement in construction suggests an exploration of alternative materials and techniques for building and construction.

The concept of using 3D textiles in construction is not entirely new and aligns with broader trends in sustainable and eco-friendly architecture and design. Here are some key points to consider regarding this idea: sustainability, flexibility and lightweight, insulation and energy efficiency and aesthetic possibilities.

Another example should be EJTECH, for sure. Comprising Judit Eszter Kárpáti and Esteban de la Torre, the artistic partnership known as EJTECH delves into a wide range of disciplines. They utilize hyper-physical interfaces, programmable matter, and augmented textiles as their creative mediums, with the primary objective of examining the intricate connections between the sensory experience and conceptual understanding, seeking to unveil emerging structures and inherent causality within the realm of realistic metamaterials. Central to their work are the fundamental elements of sound, space, light, and time, which they employ as the foundational building blocks in their artistic endeavors. EJTECH's focus lies in scrutinizing the intricate interplay between technology and the human body, leading to the development of performative installations, multi-dimensional sound sculptures, and dynamic surfaces.



Il. 4-5.

Judit Eszter Kárpáti, Esteban de le Torre, "Dung Dkar Cloak", 2023, interactive installation, digital jacquard weaving, custom electronics. Photo: Dávid Biró, Krisztina Biláks

Another, I think, important topic that sometimes appears in artworks, artist's practices or curatorial ideas is addressed to the issues of identity, race, gender. Have you witnessed art practices like this in the contemporary textile world? We can see many examples in other art fields, but what with textile/fiber? And how do contemporary textile artists navigate the boundaries between personal expression and social and national commentary within their work?

Beatrijs Sterk: As for identity, race and gender, there are several artists working on these issues. I already mentioned Diedrick Bracken, a young black artist who expresses his stories as a gay person with regard to the forms of masculinity, tenderness and the violence he experienced. His exhibition at Kunstverein Hanover in the autumn of 2022 was a real eye-opener. I also mentioned Igshaan Adams, born in South Africa in 1982, another gay black artist who uses his textile art to come to terms with the violence and rejection he experienced in his life. I am sure we will see further examples of this kind.



Il. 6.

Diedrick Brackens: "the crawling star's signal", 2021, cotton and acrylic.
Photo Beatrijs Sterk

Janis Jefferies: Rosalind Krauss has argued that the specificity of a medium is not to be found in its tautological self-identity but, paradoxically, in its 'constitutive heterogeneity' – the fact that it always differs from itself. What we are currently witnessing is the 'emigration' of textile from itself

– as can be seen in the work of many contemporary artists. I have stopped using ‘fiber’ as a term now because it designated a particular set of ideas and practices in the 1970s. Let’s rethink textile.

Has textile become foreign to textile? A stranger to itself (to mobilize a term from Julia Kristeva) in the sense that it is estranged from any restricted notion of textile – no longer bound or limited by its own self-closure or territory but open to multiple directions in form and content?

As I wrote in 1995, “textile... is always ‘not quite’ there and also ‘not quite’ that... never quite settles in the same space, can never be read in the same place in the same way twice”. Textile, its signs, practices and languages, had already shifted when I entered the debates in the mid-1970s. My research and writings since 1980 have rethought the 1960s and 1970s from a period of exuberance and rebellion. Textile as a medium appeared to have no rules; it seemed to me to be naturally deconstructive, using techniques of collage and layering to manifest additive or subtractive structures with multiple referents. It proclaimed its presence by moving off the walls and becoming sculptural, painting itself into fabrics and decorative mayhem. It perhaps finds its most contemporary expression in Hew Locke’s *Golden Horde* mixed-media installation at the ICA in 2006.

Perhaps we might talk not of art textiles but of art exiles. Exile can be imposed by others, but we may also choose exile because moving away from hostile, unproductive forces can be a deliberate strategy. Many key practitioners who started in the late 1960s and early 70s expanded their thinking beyond painting and sculpture, choosing their ‘exile’ in textiles rather than being forced into it. Theirs was not a wound-licking retreat but rather a regrouping in a self-determined site of investigation. I would count myself in this ‘category’.

In offering materials and surfaces that contain all reality that one wants or needs, textile carries not only sensory pleasure but also a political charge and a weight of critical language. It can be something that you cannot quite put your finger on, like the tip of a needle, but it can also be as cerebral as its head. It is a broad and diffuse field, without which new modes of contemporary art practice and thinking could not flourish or survive, and which major generic forms will always flirt with, refer to, and mischievously include. Contemporary art does indeed, after Duchamp, easily include textile, but it depends where you look – and by looking I would now use a technological term like searching. Weaving, webs, holes and networks are all textile terms and mobilized within descriptions of the internet, participatory worlds and tactile feedback.

The relationship between textiles and technology is now well established and richly explored in Sadie Plant’s book *Zeros + Ones*, in which she insists that textiles are literally the software of all technology. It is also

extraordinary to learn that Ada Lovelace, who worked with Charles Babbage on his Difference Engine, would connect the weaving of patterned silks with her own research into “algebraic weaving”. This, as we now know, led in turn to “Digital machines of the late twentieth century (that) weave new networks from what were once isolated words, numbers, music, shapes, smells, tactile textures, architectures and countless channels as yet unnamed”.

After these few descriptions about, in my opinion, the most current topic, let’s move to shows, exhibitions and conferences, so the moments where we as artists, we as educators, we as viewers and we as theoreticians can encounter the real pieces. What, nowadays, is the role of exhibitions, biennials, and other art events in showcasing and promoting contemporary textile art? Are there any topics that are the most recognizable and repeated in the last few years? Have you noticed some breaking points or movement to one bigger side?

Beatrijs Sterk: The role of exhibitions, biennials, triennials and major gatherings, such as those of the European Textile Network, cannot be overstated. For artists, it is essential to meet other artists face to face. Because of the pandemic, that has not been possible for some years, and it was a disaster not only for musicians and actors, but also for textile artists. Themes have become more serious since the pandemic and the war in the Ukraine, which is logical.

Janis Jefferies: The South African artist Igshaan Adams’ exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, London, UK (June 2021) follows his first solo museum show at SCAD, Savannah, USA (2020). This gallery recalls the region’s violent past as it is built in a masonry style from Savannah Grey bricks created by enslaved African Americans in the Antebellum South. In *Getuie* (an Afrikaans word that translates into English as “witness”), the title is a pertinent reminder of political trauma.

Readers may have viewed Sanford Biggers’ exhibition, *CONTRA/ DICTION*, online. As Biggers noted in his rescheduled Textile Society of America keynote address of December 5th, 2020, “There is a lot of code and a lot of layers to what you’re looking at”.

This comment can also be applied to Adams. In the flesh, his highly embellished tapestries incorporate beads, glitter, shells and painted stones into the warp. Adams’ family traded old clothes for Xhosa baskets. As a boy, he would make work from an old palm tree in their garden. Now, his materials are rope, steel, found fabric, wood, bone and all kinds of discarded material stuff. Some are sourced from the homes of the working-class, mixed-race communities of his native city, Cape Town, while others are

made with the help of up to four women weavers and his family members, who are regularly involved in his practice. The work intimates a sense of community and a strong sense of solidarity

Kicking Dust takes as its exhibition theme the traces ‘we’ leave, whether as unwelcome tourists or navigators of tricky dirt tracks, or, like in “*Agter Om*” (Afrikaans for “Around the Back”) (2020), the path trodden by a family across a linoleum floor in their home in Bonteheuwel. Bonteheuwel holds personal significance for Adams as an area of the Cape Flats where he grew up. *Om Die Hoek* (Around the Corner) (2020), a fringed tapestry of pale yellows and blues, highlights a passageway. This liminal space is imbued within all of the works – the transitioning to and from racially demarcated spaces, spiritual followings, and ethnicities. Adams is particularly interested in the transitional spaces between South African communities traditionally pitted against each other in the Apartheid era but now forming new lines of solidarity and communication. It shows me that whatever the official narrative, people mutually support each other by vocalizing hidden histories of troubled pasts and segregated communities.

Like Biggers, Bisa Butler, Diedrick Brackens Pacita Abad, and many others working in the fluid and adaptable medium of textiles, Adams often mines his own personal history in his practice, revisiting the complexities of his personal life, embedded in the social, economic and political environment that surrounds him.

This will often mean that artists like Adams and Ibrahim, and the two women artists below, work with local and indigenous communities in what has become known as socially engaged practice.

VICTORIA UDONDIAN – OFONG UFOK

Developed through long-term relationships with a wide range of immigrant communities in New York, including a partnership with *Stitch Buffalo*, a textile center near the artist’s studio that facilitates refugee and immigrant women in creating handcrafted goods to find economic empowerment. Victoria has collaborated with and compensated community members, weaving with them and creating sculptural casts of their clothing whilst collecting their stories to create this monumental artwork.

Acaye Kerunen’s radical repositioning of heritage artisanship into the league of fine art has established this artist, storyteller, writer, actress, and activist as a resonant voice in contemporary artmaking. She is recognized for her multidisciplinary practice across media, performance, and advocacy. Her continuous engagement with women’s issues – from liberation and the dismantling of colonial and patriarchal structures to poverty and domestic violence – is embodied through her many artistic activities. In 2012, *Vogue Italia* featured Kerunen as a social activist to watch in Africa.

The processes of unmaking and remaking are central to Kerunen's practice. She has explained that African women's artmaking has been confined to utilitarian practices, such as weaving to produce mats and baskets rather than weaving for the sake of artmaking. Kerunen collaborates with primary artisans, mostly women, to produce the woven, dyed, and hand-crafted materials in her work. Her practice incorporates the many cultures of the Great Lakes region, of which Uganda is a part, in order to represent a deep involvement in the connection to making and being as a manifestation for change. Drawing on the natural environment, Kerunen's work utilizes materials including raffia, banana fiber, stripped sorghum stems, reeds, and palm leaves. The titles of her works are in Alur, Swahili, or Luganda, representing her family background and the women artisans she employs, many of whom speak Luganda.

Acaye's work was in the most exciting Pavillion at Venice, 2022: the Ugandan pavilion.

The voice of those once written about or represented in visual and material culture is coming back in writing and in art works that decenter White Euro-American people from a postcolonial perspective. 'We' look, 'we' listen, 'we' learn, activating new kinds of solidarity, new action, in work as in life.

Which international exhibitions (shows / biennials / triennials, etc.) are the most important? Who are the most influential opinion-makers? Who are the leaders that we should focus on? Why is it so important to be visible?

Beatrijs Sterk: Some of the important exhibitions are:

- The International Biennial of Contemporary Textile Art (World Textile Art)
- Fiberart International, Pittsburgh, USA
- From Lausanne to Beijing, China
- The Lodz International Tapestry Triennial
- Contextile, Guimaraes
- Riga International Textile and Fibre Art Triennial
- The European Quilt Triennial, Heidelberg
- Textile Art of Today, Art Museum Bratislava
- Miniartextil Como
- Baltic Mini Textile, Gdynia
- And many more!

Opinion makers: Anyone involved in such events and teachers at art academies with textile departments.

Why it is important to be visible: It is essential for any visual artist's work to be seen, heard and talked about! Taking part in international exhibitions is one good way to achieve that goal.

Janis Jefferies: The Venice Biennial is still important and CONTEXTILE offers a research platform and open artist calls for participation. If you are not visible, you get written out of history, or as a feminist, herhistories. For example, the work of Billie Zangewa, whose panoramic collages made from hand-stitched silk challenge the historical stereotypes used to objectify and exploit Black women. Zangewa's autobiographical drive contrasts melancholy with hope, strength with disdain, and independence with prejudice.

Zangewa's earlier works reflect her practice and experience as a Black woman living in Johannesburg. These early works, described by Zangewa as 'acts of daily feminism', show an intimate, confident sense of self and female identity.

And maybe (almost) the last but not least question will be about education, because it is the future. It is the way of teaching the next generation, the way we pass on knowledge and guide young artists towards significant areas, ultimately influencing their impact. So, if you can just speculate or give some advice, what should we focus on?

Beatrijs Sterk: As I said already, I see educators as important opinion makers. If teachers were to ask me what to focus on, I would point them to Lidewij Edelkoort, the trend forecaster, who is sure that crafts will have a glorious comeback. I would look at the Dorothy Waxman Textile Design Prize for students, which is presented every year during New York Textile Month; look at past catalogs of this event and discover new ideas and inspiration. Personally, I would love to see weaving taken seriously again since so many art academies have thrown out their looms. Many young people are interested in learning to weave again – as I have been hearing from members of the Nordic Textile Artists for some time now. There is also the International Contemporary Textile/Fibre Art Competition, which is open to textile artists under 35 years of age. The Valcellina Award was established with the aims of stimulating curiosity in young artists about contemporary textile art, fostering new talent, encouraging new artistic research, and advancing experimentation.

Janis Jefferies: Collaboration and cooperation, including partnerships outside universities. Ibrahim's practices and activism are good examples of this.

Cláudia Melo: Education is the foundation of everything. I am also a teacher at the Polytechnic Institute of Porto, Visual Arts Department, and this is a crucial topic for me. As the old saying goes, “Art should be the basis of all education” (Read, 1943). We should advocate for “Aesthetic Education”, which encompasses all forms of individual expression, including music, dance, drama, visual arts, verbal language, literature, and poetry. This aesthetic education, in its broadest sense, seeks to establish a harmonious relationship between the human being and the external world. It enables the construction of an integrated personality, one that is connected to situations and values that empower individuals to make their own decisions independently.

This educational approach goes beyond merely teaching the arts; it promotes the idea that education can be effectively conducted through the arts. Its primary focus is not on the arts themselves but on education, recognizing the arts as the most effective approaches to achieving comprehensive education in all aspects: emotional, cognitive, social, and physical. This model can be considered the only existing one to date that places emotional and affective education as its primary goal. To achieve this purpose, artistic expression is used, involving the manifestation of feelings and emotions through the arts, and the promotion of creativity, both artistic and aesthetic, with a deep emotional connection.

I’ll provide you with an example from Contextile – Biennial of Contemporary Textile Art, which exemplifies this approach. Since its first edition (when I was a participating artist in the International Exhibition in 2012 – not the artistic director of Contextile), the biennial has included a section called “EMERGENCIAS – Artistic Teaching and Textile Creation” in its program. The education system is a central piece of Contextile’s effort to give new centrality to the artistic component of textiles. The Emergencies exhibition, which has been a feature since the first edition of this biennial, intersects artistic education and textile creation, with projects created by students from Portuguese schools that have curricular units in textile artistic education, in response to the thematic proposal of each edition. In 2022, we initiated a special edition of Textile Talks dedicated exclusively to education, proposing a program for sharing and discussing teaching and learning practices in textiles at artistic schools, both national and international. This program was conceived with the aim of fostering meaningful connections among various stakeholders and organizations that have affinities with regions with a strong tradition in the textile field. Our purpose is to elevate the standard of textile education and highlight its artistic and cultural facet. We aspire not only to understand but also to share the unique pedagogical and methodological approaches of the textile universe when it intertwines with the creative and intellectual sphere. At

the same time, we encourage research and the dissemination of the most excellent practices in this field.

Would you like to add something? Is there anything we should be aware of, point at?

Beatrijs Sterk: Yes, I see it as a pity that textile artists have to pay so many charges when sending their works to exhibitions abroad. It is time to remind the established art circuit that textile artists are part of it. They need good places to exhibit and a chance to form small groups exhibiting together; they also need funding to ship their works. The time has come to ask for this support because textiles are now more popular than ever with the public; curators and other decision-makers should be reminded of that.

I also hope that textile artists are not only looking for “fashionable” subjects like the ones mentioned earlier but also have the courage to simply follow their sense of beauty and create something stunning. Themes need not always have socio-political relevance. Jack Lenor Larsen, the legendary New York designer, used to say that the first quality an art work should have is “presence”. I agree with him!

Janis Jefferies: Just a list of references that could be helpful to those interested in reading some of the debates further.

Interested readers might want to look at the following publications:

- *Handbook of Textile Culture* (ed., Hazel Clark and Diana Wood Conroy) London 2015, Bloomsbury Academic.
ISBN: 9780857857750
- Jefferies & Weinberg. „Around the World in 80 Biennials: Curating Lausanne, Hangzhou, Kaunas.” *W: A Companion to Textile Culture*, ed. Jennifer Harris. Wiley Publishers 2020,.
ISBN: 978-1-118-76890-7
- Magdalena Abakanowicz. *Every Tangle of Thread and Rope*, Tate Modern, 17 November 2022 to 21 May 2023, TEXTILE,
DOI: 10.1080/14759756.2023.2191385, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14759756.2023.2191385>
- *Textile Talk's book* – Educational Futures. Contextile 2022 networks, <https://contextile.pt/2022/>, and also at <https://lab2pt.net/>.
The edition is published by Pluriverse Publications with the support of the National Documentation Centre – ePublishing Platform, funded by the Creative Commons Global Network Communities Activity Fund, designed by These are a Few of our Favorite

Things and released under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 international license (CC BY-SA 4.0).

- *Textile Modernism: Transcultural readings of Maryn Varbanov and abstract weaving from East to East, from Local to Global*, ed. Bu Dogramaci, Institut für Kunstgeschichte, LMU München 2019, Textile Modernism for Bohlau Verlag's „mode global” series in German and English.
- Polish Ghosts' in Abakanowicz: *Metamorfizm/Metamorphosis*, ed. Marta Kowalewska, Centralne Muzeum Włókiennictwa w Łodzi, 2018.
- Fray „Art and Textile Politics,” Julia Bryan-Wilson, *The Art Bulletin*. 101:2, 146-149, DOI: 10.1080/00043079.2019.1569946.
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- *Performing and Provoking' in Transmissions Critical Tactics for Making and Communicating Research*, ed. Kat Jungnickel in which researchers rethink tactics for inventing and disseminating research, examining the use of such unconventional forms as poetry, performance, catalogues, interactive machines, costume, and digital platforms. MIT Press 2020 978-0262043403
- 2019, *‚Breaching Borders’ Curatorial Text*. 2019 Łódź Triennial at Centralne Muzeum Włókiennictwa w Łodzi (Museum of Textiles, Poland, ISBN 978-83-60146-73-6.
- 2019, book chapter. *‚Polish Ghosts’ in Abakanowicz: Metamorfizm/Metamorphosis*, ed. Marta Kowalewska, Centralne Muzeum Włókiennictwa w Łodzi. ISBN 978-83-60146-72-9
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Beatrijs Sterk

Textile education in Holland and Finland in the 60s. With Dietmar Laue founders of Textile Forum magazine from 1982 to 2013; the European Textile Network was initiated in 1990; first ETN Conference in 1991 Erfurt/D. ETN secretariat from 1991 to 2015, with 17 conferences in Europe. Since 2014 publishing Textile-Forum-Blog (www.textile-forum-blog.org)

Beatrijs was a juror in numerous textile exhibitions: Red Textil Iberoamericana; 2017 Montevideo: World Textile Art Biennial; 2017 Rijswijk Textile Biennial; 2019 Neuhaus Castle, Austria: “Garden of Eden”; 2022/23 Riga International Textile Art Triennial. In 2000 William Morris Prize by the Society of Designer Craftsmen, in 2019 World Textile Art Prize at the WTA Conference in Madrid, in 2020, Denmark: Member of Honour of the Nordic Textile Artists.

Janis Jefferies

Emeritus professor of Visual Arts, Goldsmiths London. With a long-standing engagement in how fibre intersects with feminist practice and art-based textiles. Jefferies’s work considers issues of gender and identity subjectivity. Her later research and practice have expanded to encompass

sonic art, digital art, and haptic technology, considering access and impact for different audiences. Exhibiting in 'Women in Revolt! Art! Activism and Politics,' TATE Britain, UK (November 2023 and touring). She is co-chief editor of the 10 volume Bloomsbury Encyclopaedia of World Textiles with Dr Vivienne Richmond, due 2025.

https://research.gold.ac.uk/view/goldsmiths/Jefferies=3AJanis_K=2E=3A=3A.html

Cláudia Melo

Curator, consultant, and Independent Artistic Director. Lecturer in Higher Education (ESE-IPP, UTC VISUAL ARTS). Visual artist. Trained in the artistic area, since 2012, he has assumed coordination, artistic direction, curatorial and artistic consultancy practices in public (municipal) and private entities. Coordinates and / or leads (in private or public (municipal) projects) application and financing projects for national and European funds, being responsible for different tasks in each project: conception, strategic development, structure and programming design, curatorship and artistic direction. Artistic Director of Contextile – Biennial of Contemporary Textile Art, Portugal. Curator in the European project Magic Carpets – European Platforms – Creative Europe. Member of the Management Board Committee Magic Carpets - European Platforms – Creative Europe. Graduation in Fine Arts – Painting, from the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Porto. Attended the curricular components of the Master's Degree in Contemporary Artistic Creation, University of Aveiro, and the curricular component Doctorate in Contemporary Art, College of Arts, University of Coimbra. Was a researcher at Citar (Center for Research in Arts Theory, School of Arts, Catholic University).

Keywords:

history, textiles, fiber, technology, colonialism



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#44 / 2023 / rok XXXII

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ISSN 1232-6682

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w Poznaniu 2023

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Stworzenie anglojęzycznej wersji publikacji –
płatne ze środków Ministerstwa Edukacji i Nauki
na podstawie umowy nr RCN/SP/0363/2021/1
stanowiących pomoc przyznaną w ramach programu
„Rozwój czasopism naukowych”.

nakład 100 egz.

ISSN 1232-6682

