

# TEXTILES IN THE EXTENDED FIELD OF PAINTING

RECONSTRUCTING THE PAINTER'S  
CANVAS BOTH CONCEPTUALLY  
AND LITERALLY THROUGH WEAVING

USING PLANTS AS A SOURCE OF  
PIGMENT IN CONNECTION TO  
A PLACE OR A PERSON

Hildur Bjarnadóttir, June 2016

Reflection on an Artistic research project 2012-2016  
Bergen Academy of Art and Design  
The Norwegian Artistic Research Fellowship Programme

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## Introduction

The project *Textiles in the extended field of painting* was conducted in the Department of Fine Arts of the Bergen Academy of Art and Design during the years 2012 - 2015. The research project has two overlapping aims: One is to explore the relationship between painting and textiles through weaving, while the other is to explore a plot of land in the south of Iceland, Púfugarðar, which I recently acquired, using the plants that grow there to explore issues of belonging and ecological disruption. The project was supervised by Hilde Hauan, professor of textiles at Khib, and the artist Anne Katrine Dolven. The artistic outcome was presented in the solo exhibition *colors of belonging* at Bergen Kjøtt in November 2015. This text contextualizes and articulates the process and the outcome. Together the artistic work and the reflection constitute the formal result of my fellowship project within the Norwegian Artistic Research Fellowship Program.

These reflections have been written before, during and after the three years research period and the final exhibition. They are written from within the project and are not intended as an explanation or interpretation of the artwork. The artwork is the research, the research is in the artwork. The relationship between artwork and text/language is for me a challenging one. I claim that my research is embedded in the artwork, but there is no denying that the written text that accompanies my work does open doors into its core, which would otherwise have remained closed both to me and others. A part of my research has been to contemplate the balance between these two elements, stories and artwork, as well as active reflection and language. The story of the making of the work reveals layers that are difficult to access through the work and shed a light on its meaning which might affect our understanding of it. It might seem contradictory to say that the artwork contains the research and, at the same time, acknowledge that writing can work wonders on the sideline. I have found it to be a welcome task to tackle my work through the tool of writing. It has revealed information to me; things that work well in spoken language require a closer look when fixed onto paper. This has forced me to explore my ideas on a different level, acquiring clarity through the nature of written language. I would say that writing about the work has contributed to a deeper understanding of the work's meaning, function and existence; it has affected the way I understand and talk about my work and will have an affect on its progress. I tend to agree with Aslaug Nyrnes's view on the relationship between written language, rhetoric and artistic research, which she puts forward in her article *Lighting from the Side*: "There will always be verbal language - spoken and written - surrounding or embedded in the art or the artistic process. This is the case in the creation of art, the reception of art, the art research process, and the guidance of art

research. This is so, even though the artistic research mainly uses the tools and language of the discipline itself. Instead of ignoring the encompassing verbal language, one ought to focus on what it does to diminish or strengthen the work of art.”<sup>1</sup>

Ignoring the role of writing and language in artistic research equals not seeing the elephant in the room. This is not to say that all art needs to be accompanied by written text, but rather that this relationship has to be contemplated in terms of how it works as an opening into the content of the work, how it functions as a research tool and how it should not be used. I have found it helpful to distinguish between research through art, for art and about art. I see this text as a combination of the "research for art" and "research through art" or this might possibly be a fourth research category "research on and through one's own art".

This text is a parallel side view, offering a glimpse into the process, turning points, methods, development of ideas, context in the present and the past, and other thoughts around the work. It is a thinking tool, a research tool and a co-thinker, it should open doors into the work, reveal layers and ideas. This is my view, it is personal, subjective and written from the perspective of myself as the artist. I hope this text will help to inform me and the reader about the content of the work, clarify its function and meaning. This written part of the research is a continuation of the reflection which goes on constantly through the making of the work. This text is analytical, unraveling, explorative and critical.

In the following chapters I will first discuss and describe the *colors of belonging* exhibition. I will then use one of the 15 woven paintings in the exhibition, a work titled *tuning in and out*, 2016, as an example to discuss the content of the woven paintings in the exhibition and the role of color in the work, as well as the woven structure. This will lead me to discuss the plant-dyed silk in the exhibition, its relationship to the woven paintings and the installation as a whole. In the second half of this text I will continue with further discussion of the themes related to my work, such as painting, color, plants, belonging, site specificity, grids and context in the past and the present. This thesis shows the multi-layered context my work takes place in, my thoughts and the thoughts of others which make up this context.

<sup>1</sup> Aslaug Nyernes, *Lighting from the Side*, Sensuous Knowledge No.03. (Bergen: Bergen Academy of Art & Design, 2006), pg 11-12.

## *colors of belonging*

Bergen Kjött 14 - 29 November 2015

The title of the exhibition refers to two elements that are important to my approach: "color" and "belonging". In my work color is a material; what it looks like is less important than where it comes from and what it contains. The color as material I use in the exhibition points in two different directions in the works exhibited: the plant dyed wool contains the context of Þúfugarðar through the plants that grow there. They carry information within the color about the place they come from, they function as recording devices to the social and ecological environment they belong to, taking in information from the soil and the air. The acrylic paint brings with it the context of painting, it is bought in art supply stores and its purpose is very clear, it has no connection to a place like the plant color, but refers instead to a long history of painting. This is the inherent content and context of the acrylic paint I am using.

The second element in the exhibition title is belonging. My interest in the concept of belonging comes from contemplating my own rootedness in a specific place through nature. Belonging can mean different things to different people, a sense of belonging can be a complicated issue and does not only involve being tied to a certain place as it does in my work. Every individual has his or her own miscellaneous background and connections or non-connection, to a certain environment, place or people. I am interested in this feeling of rootedness, how that is formed and what it contains. Through the characteristics of color I explore issues of belonging, locality, rootedness, up-rootedness, sustainability and ecological disruption. My work enters into a dialogue regarding these confusing issues of belonging to a place today.

In order to understand the connection between belonging and color it is useful to look at a project I made eight years ago in connection to my grandmother and a piece of land she owned and took care of for 70 years. My grandmother grew up on a farm called Ferstikla, in Hvalfjörður. When she moved from Ferstikla to the closest town, Akranes, she acquired a piece of land from the Ferstikla farm with an old community house on it. When my grandmother took over this 6000 square meter plot of land it was barren with very few plants and trees growing on it. My grandmother built a fence around it to fend off the free roaming sheep. She was interested in cultivating the land and that would never have happened if the sheep had not been prevented from eating the plants. By doing this, the plants that were already there started growing and trees emerged. She also brought in many new plants from other parts of the country. Today, seventy years later, there is a small forest on the land, a huge variety of low plants, mosses, berries, bushes and lichens. When

I was growing up, my family used to spend weekends or an occasional day in the summer-house during the summer with my grandmother. Much of the time there was spent walking around the area, learning plant names, picking berries or attending to the vegetable garden and the plants in one way or another. Most of the trees and plants have grown during my lifetime; I have seen the land develop from a gravelly area to a flourishing forest through my grandmother's interventions. Through this I started to see my grandmother in these plants. Without her tending to them for all these years they would not be there. Spending time there and studying my grandmother's relationship to this place has made me think about belonging and its connection to place and plants and our influence on the environment. In a body of work I exhibited at Hafnarborg Museum in Iceland 2011. (pic. 1) I extracted color from many plants on my grandmother's land and dyed wool to make crochet work (pic. 2)



1. *Coherence*. Hafnarborg Art Museum. 2011

and watercolors. (pic. 3) Both works had to do with my grandmother, because of the place the plants are rooted in and my grandmother's influence on them through the years. The plant color carries this knowledge from many years back, which has to do with my grandmother and the condition of the place, as well as other elements that influence it, such as weather and ecological interventions in the area. The works in this exhibition also have a meaning in context to my belonging to this place through my grandmother and my great grandmother and great great grandmother on the farm Ferstikla. To me my grandmother's land is a place of deep belonging and rootedness.



2. *Garden*, 2011  
 Crochet wool, plant dyed with plants from my grandmothers land  
 size variable. (smallest 25 x 25 cm and largest 35 x 41 cm)  
 each panel contains one plant



3. *Plants*, 2011.  
 Watercolors made with plants from my  
 grandmothers garden  
 47,5 x 37,5 x 2 cm each

The piece of land I am working with in *colors of belonging* is situated in the south of Iceland. In the middle of farmland, flat, with a far extending view of the surrounding mountains and towards the ocean. Nothing has ever been built or grown there; it is relatively untouched by human influence and I had no connection to it beforehand. It is 2 hectares in size (20,000 square meters). Its contours are defined by a road to the north, a fence to the east and the south and a natural stream called Þorleifslækur to the west. It has diverse rich flora, which is typical for that part of the country, such as meadowsweet, northern bedstraw and stone bramble. The land has three different types of ground: one is a grassy area, another has many tussocks and the third is wet and swampy. Each area has its own selection of plants which grow there. In the swampy area there are many straws with names such as spiked woodrush, cotton-grass, smooth meadow grass, marsh horsetail and grass-like sedge. On the tussocks there are lower plants such as dwarf willow, alpine lady's-mantle, thyme, goose tongue and black crowberry. There are politics, friendships and collaborations going on in the field. Some plants avoid certain plants or don't thrive in their presence and certain mosses live in the shadow of the trees. There is also yellow rattle which steals nutrition from the roots of neighboring plants and a low growing dwarf willow where a male plant develops a fungus and pretends to be a female plant for some odd reason. Spending time on the land gradually uncovers new experiences, like tuning in to a frequency that is only reachable after spending time there, or at a certain time of day or in specific weather conditions. In my project I work with this piece of land, its meaning as a place of my own, a place for me to form roots in and contemplate the issues mentioned above. What does

it mean to own land today? The project with my grandmother deals with the past and the Þúfugarðar project deals with the present and the future. These themes of color as material with reference to history, origin and place, and of belonging in the context of rootedness, are what the title of the exhibition refers to. The specific place that functions as a site of study is Þúfugarðar as explained above.

In the exhibition I showed two types of work: 16 plant dyed silks in various sizes and 15 woven paintings in 3 sizes. The silks were hung in the center of the space using the structural framework of the building and the paintings were hung on the walls, evenly distributed around the space. The text which accompanied *colors of belonging* was available to the guests on an A4 sized flyer both in English and Norwegian. This short statement is intended to give a glimpse into the ideas in the exhibition. On the back side of the flyer there was a map of the space with numbers, titles and material descriptions of the 31 pieces in the exhibition. Next two pages show the flyer as it was printed for the exhibition.



Þúfugarðar



# colors of belonging

## Hildur Bjarnadóttir

The works in this exhibition explore the desire to find one's place in the world, a place of one's own. Three years ago, I acquired a piece of land in the south of Iceland. I had no previous connections to this place and have, since then, been forming roots and planning a future on this land. It is situated in the middle of farmland, flat, with a far extending view to the surrounding mountains and towards the ocean. It has diverse rich flora, which is typical for that part of the country, such as meadowsweet, northern bedstraw and stone bramble.

The exhibition *colors of belonging* takes this piece of land as its point of departure. For me the land functions as a platform to contemplate issues of belonging and ecological disruption. Through this land I position myself in time and space, personally, politically and artistically.

The plants on the land act as recording devices of the place they grow in and the ecological and social system they belong to, collecting information through the soil and the air, as well as their roots, petals, flowers and leaves. This information is passed on in the colors I extract from the plants and which I have used to make the works.

Key elements in the project are woven paintings and plant dyed silk. The paintings are made from plant dyed wool and linen thread covered with acrylic paint. By using these two types of color systems, one industrially made and the other a natural system, I sharpen the characteristics of each color and create a dialogue between two different substances. In my work I use the color as a material, I am more concerned with where color comes from than what it looks like. Each silk is dyed with the color of one type of plant and I use the supporting structure of the building as a framing device for the display of these pieces.

All works in the exhibition are specific to a certain place and time and can be seen as systems, which bring out different information, feelings and elements of the land, taking a look at it from different angles. These are my systems, they are artistic, subjective and autonomous, and give a structure to the pursuit that has resulted in this exhibition.

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Hildur Bjarnadóttir is an Icelandic artist who shares her time between Bergen and Reykjavík, as well as Þúfugarðar in the south of Iceland. She holds a BA degree from the Textile Department of the Icelandic College of Art and Crafts and an MFA from the New Forms Department at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York. Her work has been presented in solo and group exhibitions at venues such as: The Reykjavík Art Museum (IS), The Iceland National Gallery (IS), Stenersen Museum, Oslo (NO), Kunstnerforbundet, Oslo (NO), The Mint Museum, Charlotte NC, (USA), The Museum of Art & Design, NY (USA), The Bronx Museum, NY (USA) and the Boise Art Museum, Boise, ID (USA).

This exhibition marks the conclusion of a three-year artistic research project called *Textiles in the Extended Field of Painting*, conducted through the Norwegian Artistic Research Programme at the Bergen Academy of Art & Design's Fine Art Department. The Programme is parallel to other research educations organized as academic PhD programmes.

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Very special thank's to: Hilde Hauan, Anne Katrine Dolven, Ólafur S. Gíslason, Andreas Siqueland and many others.

Artworks 1-15 are plant dyed wool, acrylic paint on linen thread, hand-woven. Artworks 16-31 are plant dyed silk.

1. *I can hear the ocean when the wind is blowing from the south*, 2015  
common sorrel, water avens, garden angelica, northern bedstraw, yellow rattle, sea mayweed, meadow buttercup, meadowsweet, northern bedstraw

2. *late summer*, 2015  
yellow bedstraw and stone bramble

3. *untouched land is political*, 2015  
yellow rattle, common cottongrass, water avens, winter cress, garden angelica, cup lichen, sea mayweed, woodland geranium, wild thyme, lady's mantle

4. *making order where there is chaos*, 2014  
woolly willow, autumn hawkbit, cottongrass, cup lichen, water avens, common sorrel, wild thyme, meadow buttercup, spiked woodrush

5. *convoluted unity*, 2015  
meadow fescue, garden angelica, dwarf willow, autumn hawkbit, common sorrel, cup lichen, stone bramble, woolly willow, yellow bedstraw, water avens, garden angelica, spiked woodrush, wild thyme, common cottongrass

6. *early spring*, 2014  
garden angelica, water avens, meadow horsetail, tea leaved willow, yellow bedstraw, meadowsweet, spiked woodrush, stone bramble, lady's mantle, woodland geranium

7. *an inexplicable or mysterious transmuting*, 2015  
meadow fescue, garden angelica, dwarf willow, autumn hawkbit, common sorrel, cup lichen, stone bramble, woolly willow, yellow bedstraw, water avens, garden angelica, spiked woodrush, wild thyme, common cottongrass, lady's mantle, meadow buttercup, meadow horsetail, woodland geranium, tea leaved willow

8. *relationship between different kinds*, 2014  
meadowsweet, northern bedstraw, bellardi bog sedge, stone bramble, meadow horsetail, alpine lady's mantle, common meadow-grass, yellow bedstraw, common horsetail, tea leaved willow.

9. *grounding*, 2014  
stone bramble, water avens, yellow bedstraw, lady's mantle, garden angelica, meadowsweet, tea leaved willow, meadow horsetail, woodland geranium, dwarf willow

10. *secret moment*, 2015  
common sorrel, water avens, garden angelica, northern bedstraw, yellow rattle, sea mayweed, meadow buttercup, meadowsweet, woolly willow, lady's mantle, couch grass, winter cress, tea leaved willow, spiked woodrush, fjøllblom, woodland geranium

11. *different substances mingling together*, 2014  
garden angelica, water avens, meadow horsetail, tea leaved willow, yellow bedstraw, meadowsweet, spiked woodrush, stone bramble, lady's mantle, woodland geranium

12. *tuning in and out*, 2015  
common sorrel, water avens, garden angelica, northern bedstraw, yellow rattle, sea mayweed, meadow buttercup, meadowsweet

13. *certain mosses live in the shadow of the trees*, 2014  
woolly willow, autumn hawkbit, cottongrass, cup lichen, water avens, autumn hawkbit, common sorrel, wild thyme, meadow buttercup, spiked woodrush, tea leaved willow, garden angelica, meadowsweet

14. *some plants get along and others don't*, 2014  
woolly willow, autumn hawkbit, cottongrass, cup lichen, water avens, autumn hawkbit, common sorrel, wild thyme, meadow buttercup, spiked woodrush

15. *politics, friendships and collaboration going on in the field*, 2014  
garden angelica, water avens, meadow horsetail, tea leaved willow, yellow bedstraw, meadowsweet, spiked woodrush, stone bramble, lady's mantle, woodland geranium

16. *common sorrel*, 2015

24. *sweet grass*, 2014

17. *meadow horsetail*, 2015

25. *common silverweed*, 2014

18. *sea mayweed*, 2015

26. *variegated horsetail*, 2015

19. *water avens*, 2015

27. *northern bedstraw*, 2015

20. *meadow buttercup*, 2015

28. *tea leaved willow*, 2015

21. *couch grass*, 2015

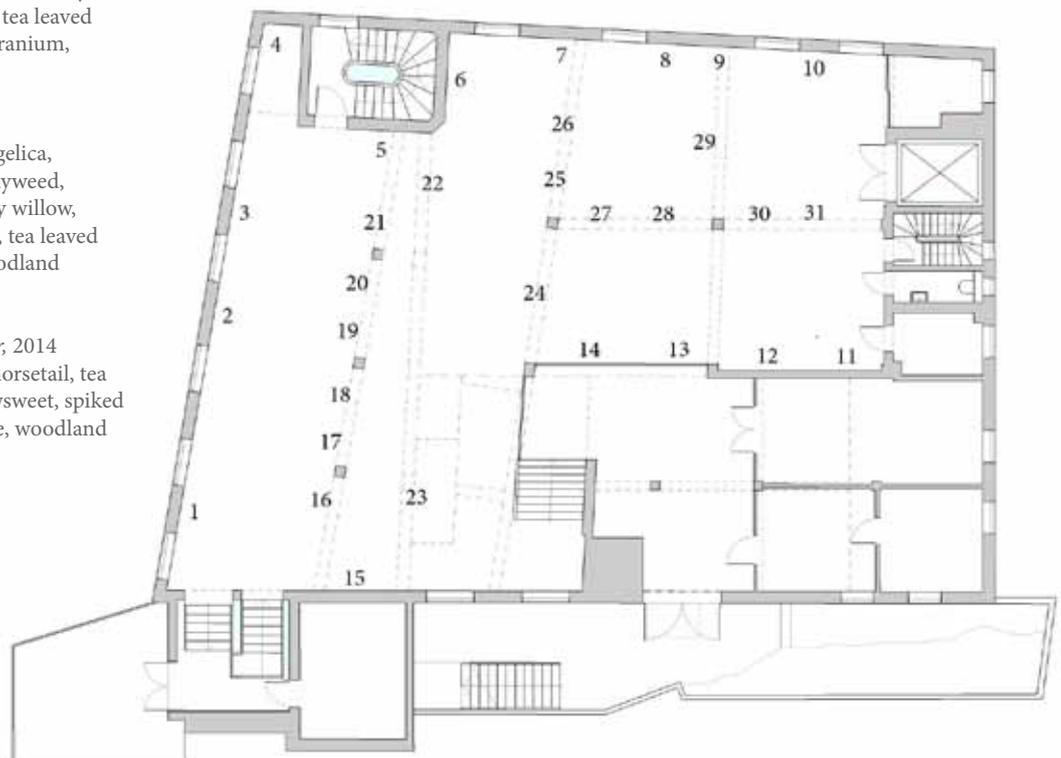
29. *yellow bedstraw*, 2015

22. *yellow rattle*, 2015

30. *common cottongrass*, 2015

23. *crowberry*, 2015

31. *woolly willow*, 2015



After exploring the exhibition venues available in Bergen I decided to exhibit at Bergen Kjøtt, an old meat processing factory in the neighborhood of Skuteviken in Bergen. I chose Bergen Kjøtt because of the high ceilings and the challenging and interesting texture of the walls, I wanted to make a large scale installation and Bergen Kjøtt offered an opportunity for that which was difficult to find in other spaces. (pic. 4) This was a challenge I wanted to create for myself in this exhibition to explore the potential of the plant dyed silk in a large scale. In the fall of 2014, I exhibited at Kunstnerforbundet in Oslo, among other pieces I showed large silks hung on the wall, this created a response that had to do with experiencing the work on a more haptic level through the whole body and through different sensory functions. Not many spaces in Bergen have high ceilings and interesting architecture and Bergen Kjøtt has both these elements. In addition to that the space has an interesting texture on the walls. The walls have not been painted or fixed for decades, making layers of paint visible as well as traces of former exhibitions and events. The space therefore has a layer of history embedded in the walls which I was interested in exploring in context with the woven paintings and the plant dyed silk. It was not my intention to reference the exact history of the space in a literal way but rather play with the fact that it has a visible history, as in opposition to my work which has history embedded in it but in a more subtle and hidden way. The color and texture of the walls were also in similar color tones as the work in the exhibition and could therefore work with or against the work itself. The likeness of these two surfaces, the work and the space, was also meant to sharpen the character of the pieces, since it started a dialogue between the two different surfaces. In the space there was one added white wall, a glimpse of a white cubic space where I hung two of the woven paintings. Again this brought out a slightly different experience of the woven paintings without the visual connection to their environment or the wall behind it.

Bergen Kjøtt is run as a culture house, housing a gallery/concert space on the 2nd floor and above that there are studios for musicians on the upper levels. The exhibition space on the 2nd floor is approximately 550 square meters in total, with a ceiling height of 3,65 m, 4,85 m 4,95 and 7,55 m. The entrance to the exhibition space is through a staircase from the ground floor, the space you enter from there is rather long and this leads quickly into a larger area with a higher ceiling. Both spaces have columns, three in the smaller space and two in the larger space. The columns lead to visible support beams which come down from the ceiling approximately 40 cm. The whole ceiling is covered with sound insulating foam. On the 2nd floor exhibition space there is also a balcony which is open to the public and offers a view of the space from a higher perspective. There are ten glass tile windows in the space, which let the daylight in, although you cannot see outside. Towards the end

of the larger space there are various doors leading to a bathroom, elevator and storage areas. These areas were all kept closed during the exhibition. Under the balcony in the larger exhibition space there is a white wall. I did not have a clear view of how to install my work in this space when I decided to exhibit at Bergen Kjøtt. I wanted to allow the building to influence the final outcome of the installation and make me think about the work in a different way than in a white cube space.



*4. colors of belonging, 2015*  
Bergen Kjøtt, installation view

## *tuning in and out*



5.



6. Detail.

**Work:** *tuning in and out*, 2015

**Material:** plant dyed wool, acrylic paint on linen thread, hand-woven.

**Size:** 35 x 30 x 2 cm (pic 5, 6)

**Description:** Woven fabric stretched onto a wooden stretcher bar, hand-woven by myself in a floor loom using two different types of thread, wool and linen. The wool is dyed with plants and the linen thread is painted with acrylic paint before it is tied into the loom. For this piece I used eight types of plants and eight different colors of acrylic paint. The plants are common sorrel, water avens, garden angelica, northern bedstraw, yellow rattle, sea mayweed, meadow buttercup and meadowsweet, and were all collected during the summer of 2014 and 2015 at Þúfugarðar. When I made the warp for *tuning in and out* I only used each thread once at a time so that there were never two threads of the same type or plant next to each other. When the weft is added into the warp there is a constant meeting between different plants, different colors and different substances. I use the same 16 threads in the warp and the weft. The thread count is 13/100 which means that there are 13 threads per cm. In this piece there are 494 threads in the warp.

**Installation:** The piece is hung with its middle at 168 cm above the floor of the space. The distance between pieces in the exhibition are, on average, between 2.5 to 5 meters from the next piece. The woven paintings in the exhibition are in three different sizes: 35 x 30 x 2 cm, 40 x 33 x 2 cm and 49 x 33 x 2 cm.

The woven paintings are hung rather high for a number of different reasons: for one, the ceiling height of the space influences the installation in this way, it fits better visually to have them somewhat higher on the wall than I am used to. Tuning in and out is a piece you are meant to look at directly, the scale of the piece is slightly larger than a human face, which is why it is logical to hang it close to the approximate "face and eye level" of an average person. The piece can be experienced through thinking, that is to say, it can be read and analyzed by spending time with it, as opposed to a haptic or direct sensory experience, this is another reason why it is important to hang it close to the head and the eyes. It is positioned between 2,5 and 5 meters from the next piece in the exhibition space to give each piece enough space to capture the viewer, but not too far from each other so that they can also be looked at two or three at a time. The architecture of Bergen Kjøtt is also a factor which plays a role in the installation. Two walls in the space have glass brick windows, making the wall space in-between them small. I hung one woven painting on each small wall. Four walls in the space have enough room to fit two pieces on the same wall. Each piece is an independent work to be looked at directly by standing in front of it both close up and from a distance. It is rich with details, has its own logic, number of threads with plants and acrylic paint and a specific system of how the threads are placed within the piece. (pic. 7 and 8) All the woven paintings in the exhibition resemble each other but when looked at more closely you notice a different rhythm, different colors and a slightly different size. They can be seen as a family, relatives with a likeness but still as strong individuals. The woven paintings should be seen as a series of individual works, they are not one piece, they can be shown on their own and in a group of as many or few as a space or exhibition calls for. It takes time to get a grasp of the system going on in the piece and it is not necessary for the viewer to understand it completely, but rather to realize that there is a system. It is the idea of a system that is important and to spend time with it and get lost in this system. This is why I find it appropriate to have 2,5-5 meters between the pieces. It gives the viewer the option of an intimate experience with one piece but does not cancel out looking at more than one piece at a time.



7. *late summer*, 2015  
35 x 30 x 2 cm  
yellow bedstraw and stone bramble, plant dyed wool,  
linen thread, acrylic paint, hand woven



8. *object of clarity*, 2015

49 x 33 x 2 cm

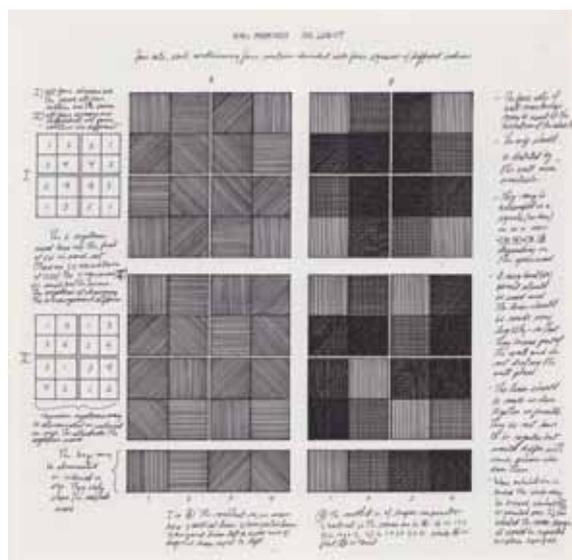
yellow rattle, common cottongrass, water avens, winter cress, garden angelica  
cup lichen, sea mayweed, woodland geranium, wild thyme, lady's mantle,  
plant dyed wool, linen thread, acrylic paint, hand woven

## Decision-making

Questions that suggest themselves regarding these works would be why I make a series of them? What does one piece add to the next? How do I make a decision on what happens in the piece I am weaving and also in the next piece? Why make another piece? There is a logic within the chaos of the colored threads; each colored thread is only used once at a time, there are never two threads of the same color next to each other, and within this system there is a random order of the threads that have been selected for the piece. The same plant dyed wool such as meadow sweet could appear three times within one centimeter and then not again until after five centimeters, and the same applies to the other colors and threads. In the end the piece does not have an equal amount of each color in it, a few colors could be more dominant in one area or in the whole piece for some random reason and others might have less presence. When I weave and make the warp I "randomly" pick the next thread, without thinking, this can of course be questioned. Through this process the randomness is still somewhat contemplated, I do see the thread I am picking and must therefore subconsciously or consciously make a decision to not pick this one or pick another one through a selection based on: do I like the color? What is the color next to it? How do the few centimeters before look in comparison to what comes next? All of this influences my decisions at the same time as I call them random. It is possibly more precise to consider this method as contemplated randomness.

Concerning my decisions about how the next piece should be, there are again a few factors that come into play, but the most important one would be my dialogue with the process of weaving a piece. Each piece sparks an interest and I start thinking: what if? What if I use less dark colors? More bright colors? One color in the warp? Weft? Chose colors that are close together? Distant? More of the acrylic painted thread? More of the plant dyed thread? What if I put some kind of order into the chaotic pattern? What if I make them smaller? Larger? Each piece continues to "tell me" what to do next, it is a contemplation and a dialogue with the possibilities of the material and method I have chosen to work with. The woven paintings are possibility theories and could be seen as materializing the aesthetics of possibilities. They are about potential, variation, change, repetition, adaptation and nuances. In this sense the woven paintings reveal a connection to the artist Sol LeWitt, his almost obsessive use of the grid and his mathematical gymnastics in exploring the seemingly infinite or actually finite possibilities within that structure, have a clear connection to the possibilities of the warp and the weft, the horizontal and vertical grid, which the loom offers as a limitation and possibility, and which I have chosen as my artistic method for the woven paintings and to explore the piece of land Púfugarðar. According to Lucy Lippard "While

LeWitt does not discover by making - the traditional artist's method - he still discovers by doing<sup>2</sup>. As I mentioned before, my decision making happens very much through the making of the woven pieces. What Lucy Lippard is referring to here is how LeWitt employs others to make his work, which is often large scale and time consuming. He sketches out ideas on paper and hands them out to others to make. (pic. 9) My system is not mathematical in the same sense as Sol LeWitt's work is; it is flirting with possibilities and mathematics without entering it in a scientific and literal way. My woven paintings will never exhaust any possibility except in a subjective way when I feel and decide I have conceptually exhausted the potential of this method. The possibilities in the woven paintings are also much more complex, since they deal with plants, color and place, and therefore it is impossible to claim any finite ending to the investigation going on in the fabric of the woven paintings.



9. WALL DRAWING. 1969  
Sol LeWitt  
Pencil. Installation

2. Lucy R. Lippard, *SOL LEWITT The Museum of Modern Art*. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1978) p. 23

## Third space

The woven paintings can be articulated from many different angles. The following are a few contemplations on how they can be contextualized. None of these thoughts are more correct than others and they are not exhaustive. These are but a few examples of reflections that have developed when I consider their potential. These thoughts have grown through my own experience of the woven paintings, conversations and reading I have been doing during the last three years around subjects that interest me and I find relevant to my work. John Locke might have described these theories as secondary characteristics, meaning that the work itself, i.e. what you see and have in front of you, are primary characteristics, ideas that the objects produce beyond their physical appearance are secondary characteristics. These writings would then be secondary characteristics, the ideas in this chapter are produced through a potency within the artwork.<sup>3</sup>

The term "social fabric"<sup>4</sup> readily comes to mind when contemplating the woven paintings, since social fabric refers to the diversity of a certain locality, usually aspects such as ethnic composition, education levels, employment rates, regional values and wealth. The term social fabric is often used to describe a community, how well it functions together as a whole, the threads being the individuals who bind together and interact with each other. This creates a strong and stable weave of social structures, weak threads can break the fabric and weaken it, therefore it is necessary to build strong and sustainable threads and a strong weave to sustain the social fabric as a whole.

The visible surface of each color in the painting *tuning in and out* is 1 mm x 1 mm, here and there on the picture plane, making it more like a dot or a pixel than an area of color, these dots form lines, horizontal and vertical, variably clear depending on the brightness of the color. When standing in front of the painting, approximately one meter or closer, you start to notice the dotted lines meeting "themselves" or other similar colors cutting in from the side, leading the eye to follow this line until it is interrupted again in another intersection of similar colors. (pic 6) This also forms squares, closed sections of various sizes, framing a certain color range in the center of that square. The eye can wander all through the picture plane discovering new settings of squares and color combinations. Stepping back further than

<sup>3</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book I: Innate Notions*. (IN, USA: Hackett Publishing Company Inc. 1996), First published 1689.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/social-fabric.html>

one meter, the dots/pixels start to blend, eventually forming a new color, a third substance, which is a sum of all the 16 colors in the piece, a mix of acrylic paint and plant pigment. I want to contemplate the meaning of this third color in connection to social and urban theories of Thirdspace also known as Third Place. "In its broadest sense, Thirdspace is a purposefully tentative and flexible term that attempts to capture what is actually a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances, and meanings"<sup>5</sup> These are the words of Edward W. Soja, an American postmodern political geographer. Soja encourages people to think differently about space and locality and points out the "growing awareness of the simultaneity and interwoven complexity of the social, the historical, and the spatial, their inseparability and interdependence."<sup>6</sup> According to Soja, Third space is an attempt to reconcile many different and complicated elements present in societies today. Different theories of Third space are all concerned with the merging of cultures in societies and the use of space within them. The third color in my work is exactly this: a reconciliation of complicated substances, an awareness of simultaneity and an interwoven complexity.

The urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg has a more concrete view of social spaces in cities, referring to public space as a third place. He considers one's home a first space, the work place a second space, and various public places, such as coffee houses, diners, beer gardens and city plaza's as third space: "Essential to informal collective effort is the habit of association, and essential to informal association are places where people may gather freely and frequently and with relative ease"<sup>7</sup>. Places where people get together and interact, facilitating communication and ideas. This coincides with Soja's concept of third space as a space of change, a creative space for communication and thinking. I realize I am simplifying these complex theories and bending them to serve my interest, but I do believe there is a link there that is worth following, a link that helps me to envision what this third substance in my work can entail. If the plant color in the woven paintings is considered as first space and the acrylic paint the second space, then the third color is the third space, the space of creativity, potential and thinking, an alchemy and blending of different histories and contexts. These correlations between the

<sup>5</sup> Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace, Journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined places* (MA, USA: Blackwell Publishing, 1996) p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace, Journeys to Los Angeles and other real and imagined places* (MA, USA: Blackwell Publishing, 1996) p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Ray Oldenburg, *Celebrating the Third Place: Inspiring Stories About the "Great Good Places" at the Heart of Our Communities* (USA, Marlowe & Company, 2001) p. 2.

social theory dealing with third space and the blending of colors in my work offer a way to think about the work in a specific context, the woven paintings are not meant to be illustrative of these theories. The work was made before I researched these social theories of third space.

## **Open and closed locality**

In their book *Rock the Boat*, Tere Vadén and Mika Hannula speculate on what they call open and closed locality. These considerations seem to have roots in the Third space theories mentioned above. They focus on the challenges of different localities having to get along and merge in some way at the same time as they keep their individual characteristics, in other words: being democratic and local at the same time. In this chapter I claim that my woven paintings are open locality paintings. I also discuss why I use both plant color and acrylic paint in my works and what that has to do with open and closed locality

Using both types of color sharpens the character of each substance. It brings together two different worlds, the acrylic paint demands that the plant color is seen on a painterly level after an absence of about 150 years. Before the development of color matching systems such as Pantone and industrially produced paint, pigment came from natural substances, mostly minerals. These two substances share a root in the history of painting before artificial colors became available. In the work tuning in and out, these substances meet on an equal basis creating a dialogue between these now very different substances. I use the word substance because it has a feeling of importance, of something substantial. The word substance can be applied to many different substances, and in that sense it is an open word and can apply to both plant and acrylic color, the content of the word is open. If the word substance is looked up in a dictionary it is described as: "a material of a certain kind"<sup>8</sup> "the quality of being meaningful, useful, or important"<sup>9</sup> as well as "matter of particular or definite chemical constitution"<sup>10</sup> all of these definitions of the word substance can apply to the way I see the plant dye and the acrylic paint, as well as the new substance that forms by putting them both together. The word substance reinforces the emphasis on the content of the color I am working with.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/substance>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/substance>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/substance>

The land I am working with in my project, Þúfugarðar, is my land. I have ownership of it. This fact brings with it some presuppositions in the current social context. An important one is the assumption that I intend to be completely self sufficient when it comes to living and working from the land I have ownership of. That is to say: to only use material that comes from the land, have my own flock of sheep and harvest the wool to use in my work, and so on. In German this is called "Austeiger" to step outside, and in the USA this is called to go "off grid". The assumption is that buying a piece of land outside of a city is meant as an act of isolation, an act that implies being self sufficient, and not dependent on society. Henry David Thoreau is often mentioned in this context. His project at Walden Pond outside the small town of Concord Massachusetts where he spent 2 years exercising self-sufficiency and meditating on the natural surroundings by his cabin and the lake.<sup>11</sup> Thoreau was critical and skeptical of the effects of industrialization, moving from an urban setting to a rural one was a political statement as well as an existential exercise for him which he wrote about in the book *Walden*. It is not my intention to be one hundred percent politically correct with my land, or completely self sufficient and, of course, this is impossible, everyone contributes to the ecological problems of the world. The Þúfugarðar project is not meant as a solution but rather as a platform for observation. I operate from this piece of land to contemplate issues of belonging and ecological disruption, in both a local and global context and will exercise care when it comes to working with the plants on the land. Letting in foreign or non-native elements such as the acrylic paint in the woven paintings is therefore a necessary and logical component in this process. In the Þúfugarðar project I want to avoid any kind of "purism", "holiness", "exoticism" or "glorification". The piece of land is a non-exotic place. Mika Hannula and Tere Vadén claim that democracy and locality or openness and locality are not opposites but should be regarded as partners. They discuss ideas of open and closed localities, and argue for "an alternative sense of the local, of a locality that implies self criticality, self reflection, tolerance and openness."<sup>12</sup> I want to conceptualize my land as an open locality, open to outside influences mixing with the land. My weavings are open locality paintings with different substances mingling together to create a convoluted unity. Or as Hannula and Vadén put it: "Bringing ideas together means not only sharpening and clarifying conceptual borders and flows of arguments, but also unlearning, dissolving

<sup>11</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (CA, USA: First published 1954, later 8th March, 2013)

<sup>12</sup> Tere Vadén and Mika Hannula, *Rock the boat, Localized Ethics, the Situated Self, and Particulari sm in Contemporary Art* (Köln: Salon Verlag, 2003) Pg. 10.

and deconstructing habitual concepts and notions."<sup>13</sup> Just as Hannula's and Vadén's ideas build a new concept of the local, my woven paintings build a new ground, mapping the place they come from through the substances they are made from, letting in a foreign substance such as the acrylic paint. The collision or dialogue between the plant color and the acrylic paint is again a space for thought, as Hannula and Vadén put it: "We want and need more productive collisions and comparisons of thoughts and ideas."<sup>14</sup> Hannula and Vadén contemplate ideas of locality and highlight the notion of experiential locality: "We are located in experience, in its web of connections, meanings and un-chosen obligations, beyond and before physical reality."<sup>15</sup>

The woven paintings have as much to do with each viewer's personal history as mine. It serves as a space for the viewer to think about places they have connections to, whether it has to do with rootedness or up-rootedness. The piece tuning in and out can therefore be thought of as a hyperobject.<sup>16</sup> According to Timothy Morton, a "hyperobject is something that is so massively distributed in time and space as to transcend localization"<sup>17</sup>, Morton is referring to things beyond our scope of vision and understanding, such as plutonium and styrofoam, which will outlast us all by many hundreds of years – substances that are not rooted in one place, they are everywhere and nowhere at the same time, right in front of us but still somewhat invisible.<sup>18</sup> I want to propose that the woven paintings can be seen as hyperobjects even though they seem to be located in one physical space. They transcend the viewer into their own place or connection to a place where they have roots. In that sense it is difficult to locate the piece, it is here and there at the same time. In Morton's theory the hyperobject refers to a negative substance, it is the invisible enemy which is causing an ecological disruption and climate change. I want to think of the woven paintings as a positive hyperobject, an object that can transform, transport and unite.

<sup>13</sup> Vadén, Tere and Hannula, Mika, *Rock the boat, Localized Ethics, the Situated Self, and Particularism in Contemporary Art* (Köln: Salon Verlag, 2003) Pg. 11.

<sup>14</sup> Vadén, Tere and Hannula, Mika, *Rock the boat, Localized Ethics, the Situated Self, and Particularism in Contemporary Art* (Köln: Salon Verlag, 2003) Pg. 8.

<sup>15</sup> Vadén, Tere and Hannula, Mika, *Rock the boat, Localized Ethics, the Situated Self, and Particularism in Contemporary Art* (Köln: Salon Verlag, 2003) Pg. 19.

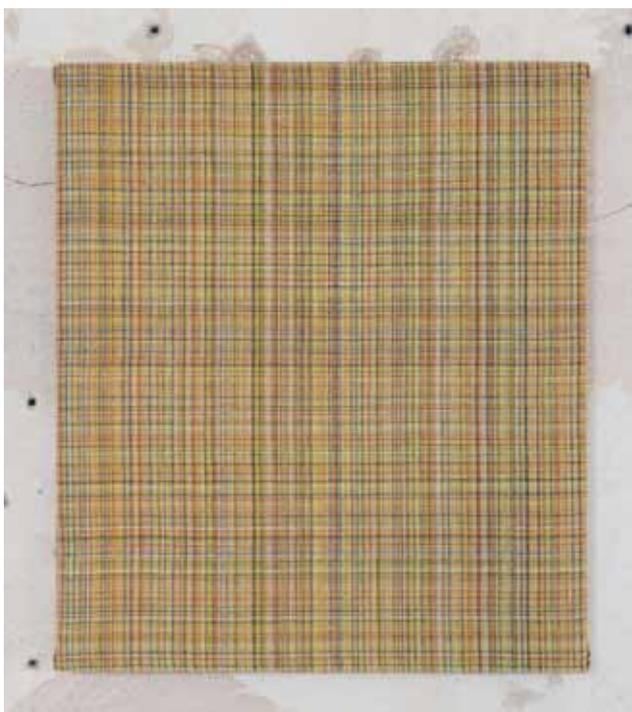
<sup>16</sup> This hypothesis springs out of a conversation with curator Per Gunnar Eeg Tverbakk, where he proposed the idea of the artwork as a hyperobject.

<sup>17</sup> Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press) 2010. Pg. 130-35.

<sup>18</sup> Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press) 2010.

## Tartan

Although I grew up partly in Scotland it is not through that experience that I connect the woven paintings with the tartan fabric of the Scottish Highlands used to make Scottish Kilts. I do admit that the sound of bagpipes does bring feelings of my past bubbling to the surface. Connecting the woven paintings to the tartan fabric happens after the work is made and becomes clearer after I start making variations of the work. In light of my interest in color and place it is logical to explore the history of the tartan in this connection. It is widely known that each tartan design and color combination belongs to certain regions, they are commonly referred to as district tartans as opposed to clan tartans. What has been less explored is the connection to place through the natural dye stuff used before chemical dye production was commonly available in Scotland. In the book TARTAN by Jonathan Faiers (2008), this is taken into account and explained that there is a wave of interest in this specific aspect of the tartan history due both to an increased interest in natural dye processes and improved technology and chemical processes available to provide more detailed analysis of the dye used for the tartans. Faiers remarks: "Returning to pre-industrialized tartan production, however,



10. *secret moment*, 2015  
35 x 33 x 2 cm  
common sorrel, water avens, garden angelica, northern  
bedstraw, yellow rattle, sea mayweed, meadow  
buttercup, meadowsweet, woolly willow, lady's mantle,  
couch grass, winter cress, tea leaved willow, spiked  
woodrush, fjøllblom, woodland geranium, plant dyed  
wool, linen thread, acrylic paint, hand woven



11. Þúfugarðar

we find that early Highland weavers and dyers experimented with organic, locally found minerals, vegetable materials and plants. Bark, moss, heathers, brackens, roots of various kinds, onion skins, bog myrtle and ragwort were all typically used to produce dyes."<sup>19</sup>

Since the mid 19th century the tartan has been the topic of a heated debate between scholars who consider its history in terms of region and others who argue its connection to the Scottish clans. It is generally believed that the connection to clans is a 19th century sociopolitical invention. It is obvious that there was some use of imported dye stuff such as indigo and madder to produce blue and red colors. They were then also used to mix with the commonly available yellows from the region to acquire a greater color range such as orange, purple and green. There might also have been ways of manipulating the local colors into a broader color span, for instance by using copper and iron pots which can change the color extracted from a plant. This might be the explanation of why ancient tartans are quite colorful despite the fact that most local plants would produce a yellowish color.

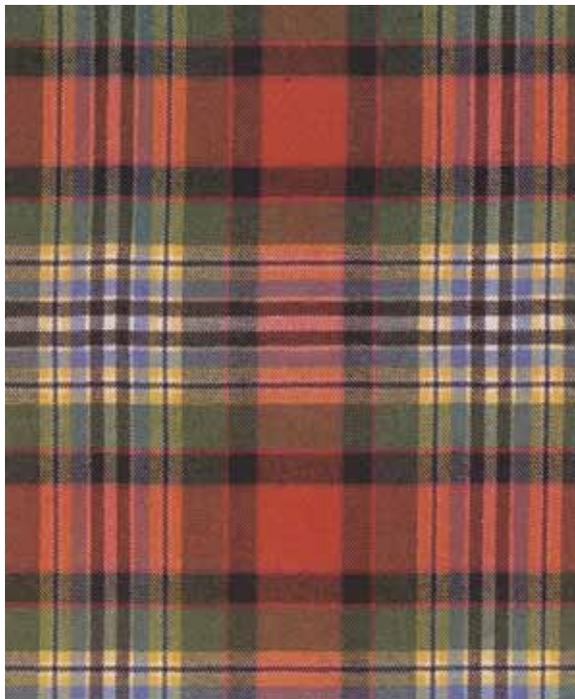


12. *Origin*, 2013  
110 x 200 cm  
Woven wool, plant dye

<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Faiers, *TARTAN* (Oxford - New York: Berge Publishers, 2008) Pg. 24.

As can be seen in my woven paintings, even with the acrylic paint being present in many different colors, the dominant color is in the end yellow since I use exactly the color the plant releases. I do not use any chemicals or tricks to change it. It has also been documented that tartans were probably designed for a specific purpose, for hunting, social, mourning or as casual ware, and this influenced the color combination. The camouflage tartan was designed in a muffled color tone, meant to blend into the landscape, the social tartan was designed in brighter colors and the tartan used for mourning was generally black and white. This is a 19th century development which came about due to increased availability of synthetic dyes and better weaving equipment through the industrial revolution which made it into the small cottage waving industries.

There are interesting stories about the tartans from the local color supply being harmonious with the appearance of the landscape so that the Highlanders would blend in with the environment. (pic. 10 and 11). The tartan seems to have been used as a camouflage to blend in and not be seen both when in battle and when hunting. "The image of the early Highlander dressed in tartans dyed using the plants from the local area and blending harmoniously with the landscape is persistent. Reports by travelers to the Highlands as far back as the sixteenth century commented on this unity of dress and landscape, with writers such as George Buchanan, in his *Rerum Scotticarum*



13. Dundee. Designer Wilson of Bannockburn.  
Date pre 1819



*relationship between different kinds*, 2014

35 x 33 x 2 cm

meadowsweet, northern bedstraw, bellardi bog sedge, stone bramble, meadow horsetail, alpine lady's mantle, commonmeadow-grass, yellow bedstraw, common horsetail, tea leaved willowplant dyed wool, linen thread, acrylic paint, hand woven

Historia of 1581, emphasizing its tactical advantages:" The majority now in their dress prefer a dark brown, imitating very nearly the leaves of heather, that when lying upon the heath in the day, they may not be discovered by the appearance of their clothes."<sup>20</sup>

I would like to extend this idea of the relationship between man, nature and color through a different angle. It can be argued that not only does the Highlander dress in the product of the land, but he himself is also a product of the land. It can be assumed that he is eating local vegetables and eating meat from animals that also nourished on local products and in that sense takes in the same substances from his surroundings as the plants. He breathes the same air and drinks the same water. In 2013 I made the work *Origin*, (pic. 12) which I wove from wool dyed with stone moss from Réttarholt on the Reykjanes peninsula in Iceland where my mother's side of the family originates from. The moss gives a color that is close to a particular red hair color, which I have and is common in that side of the family. My grandmother's sister, who was born on the farm, had this red hair color. Today her descendants still live there and some of them have that same red hair color. I find it interesting that this red color, which is hidden inside the moss on the ocean cliffs outside of the farm, is also within the people that have been living there for decades who, just like the Highlanders who share the same surroundings as the heath plants, have been breathing the same ocean air as the moss is taking in and eating the animals that feed on the moss and the plants in the area. From this it is possible to claim that there is a connection between nature and the people living in the same place in terms of the chemistry or nutrition existing in the earth and air of a place, which materializes in a red color. This is not a scientific idea, since there is no biological evidence for this, but I still see a connection there between color, place and people, which I materialize in the piece *Origin*

The District Tartans bear the name of the place they come from as opposed to the name of the clan, such as: Edinburgh, Dunbar, Cornwall and Dundee. (pic. 13) Some tartans are identified as both belonging to a specific clan and as a district tartan. Not many samples of the tartans produced before the industrial revolution have been preserved, but a few samples exist showing muted uneven colors and threads. The old tartan cloth might not bear much resemblance to the same design made today, the technique of spinning, weaving and dyeing has since then become more unified and creates a more stable outcome. The old tartans had obvious variations in

<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Faiers. *TARTAN* (Oxford - New York: Berge Publishers. 2008), Pg 25

the nuances of color and thickness of the thread, creating, in my opinion a greater depth and character in the cloth; they contain more of a story and more to look at and contemplate. My woven paintings function much like the old tartans, being hand woven and hand dyed both with local plants and acrylic paint. They have obvious characteristics of a connection to a person. Clues, such as mistakes and unevenness, are a vital part of the structure of the piece. In a sense the woven paintings are simultaneously a district and a clan pattern, connected both to identity and a place. Just as the tartans draw up a certain portrait or image of the place and the people who live there, the woven paintings can be seen as a portrait of the land and myself.

## Method

When looking closely at the piece *tuning in and out*, the viewer might also notice a different texture in the threads and different color nuances. These are hints or clues as to whether the thread is dyed with acrylic paint or a plant. The linen thread dyed with acrylic paint is generally of a brighter color and has a slight shine or plastic feeling to it. I dye the linen thread by winding the thread of a cone into a skein, a lengthy round bundle of organized threads, winding it loose enough to take in color from all sides, but still contained enough for the threads not to get tangled up. I use acrylic paint, either straight from the tube or mixed with another color. I dilute the paint with some water and dip the skein in and rub the color into it. I take it out and lay it to dry. This process might have to be repeated depending on the thickness of the color. The more color I put onto the thread the stiffer it gets and more visibly acrylic. The wool threads, which are dyed with plants, are also first wound into a skein. The wool skein is then placed in a pot containing water and alun.<sup>21</sup> Alun is a natural mineral used to prepare the



Process, summer 2014

<sup>21</sup> "True "alums" by historical definition are double salts of aluminum such as potassium aluminum sulfate" [www.earthhues.com](http://www.earthhues.com)



Process, summer 2015

fiber to absorb the plant color. I then pick the plant I will use, put it in a pot with water and boil it for a few hours until it has released its color. The plant is then removed from the pot and the wool dropped in and kept in there for a few hours. The longer it stays in the pot the stronger the color becomes. I then take it out of the pot and lay it to dry. The colors that come from most plants at Þúfugarðar are yellow, all green plants give a yellowish color. I cannot get reds, blues or strong greens from the plants on the land, I would have to import them from other countries or use chemicals to change the content of the dye bath. That is why when you look at the pieces you can assume that the yellowish colors are various plants from the land. There are a few exceptions to this where I have obtained dark gray colors and fairly green ones and beige, still this is not a strong color palette in the usual sense of the term. I always use the color the plant releases, I never reject a color, as long as it is from Þúfugarðar it has the right content to be used in my work.

### *tuning in and out, last look*

At first glance, tuning in and out, 2015 might seem like a formalist and abstract work. However, it is quite the contrary. The concept of the piece lies in the content of the pigment that I use to dye the threads. I expect the viewer to look beyond the formal aspects of the work and focus on what it contains and where it comes from. The plants I use in this piece function as recording devices of the ecological and social system they grow in, taking in information through the air and the soil, through their leaves, petals, stems and root systems. This captures a specific season and a long history, each plant/thread captures the weather of that year, has it been rainy? Dry? Warm or cold? Was the plant picked in the spring or in the fall? How has it been affected by humans or animals? Has there been an eruption affecting the atmosphere and the ground? Is there a polluting industry in the area or even further away? How are industries in the world affecting the weather which then again affects the plants on this land. These questions and method resonate with Timothy Morton's ideas about the hyperobject<sup>22</sup> as well as the proposal of a new geological time scale called the Anthropocene. "The Anthropocene defines Earth's most recent geologic time period as being human-influenced, or anthropogenic, based on overwhelming global evidence that atmospheric, geologic, hydrologic, biospheric and other earth system processes are now altered by humans"<sup>23</sup>. The earth is considered to be 4,54 billion years old and its past has been organized into periods which are defined by what happened geologically within each period. Exploring the issue of a new man made geological epoch makes it very clear that I, in fact, only have this land on loan and in the large scheme of things I also don't control its future or destiny on my own. It also makes me contemplate the geological layers of Púfugarðar, its age and certainly gives a perspective into the miniscule time frame in which I am responsible for this particular piece of land and also of the microscopic 150 years in which human beings have managed to affect the earth on a geological scale. The lava field which Púfugarðar is on is from an eruption in Lakagígar in the middle of Iceland 8000 years ago,<sup>24</sup> the lava is called Þjósárhraun and it is the largest lava field both in terms of volume and area that has ever flowed in Iceland. The soil gradually accumulated through sand getting stuck on the lava, plants starting to grow and disintegrating and eventually forming fertile soil. The land is now on average about one meter above the Þjósárhraun lava field with a very fertile, diverse and rich soil.

<sup>22</sup> See page 10

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.anthropocene.info>

<sup>24</sup> [http://icelandroadguide.com/index.php?cmsszd=places&cmsszs=en&POI\\_G=56bfa500-0842-43a3-bf6a-d6d99f129c4f&tqIPOI\\_G=56bfa500-0842-43a3-bf6a-d6d99f129c4f](http://icelandroadguide.com/index.php?cmsszd=places&cmsszs=en&POI_G=56bfa500-0842-43a3-bf6a-d6d99f129c4f&tqIPOI_G=56bfa500-0842-43a3-bf6a-d6d99f129c4f)



8-7000 years old sand stone



7-8000 years old birch tree branch

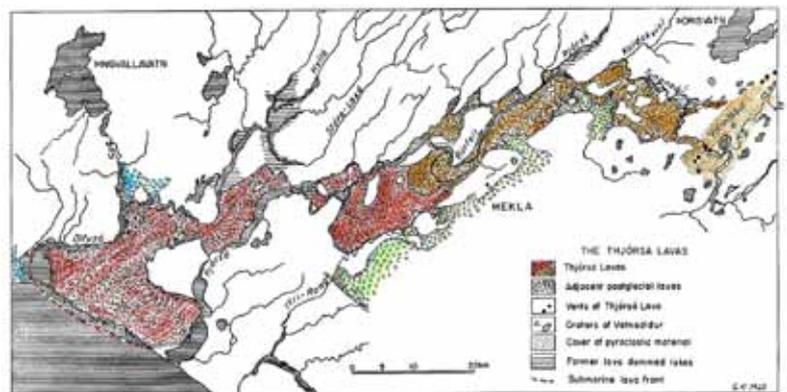


Grass, straw and plants braking down and making earth for new plants

In the work that had to do with my grandmother's piece of land, which I mentioned on page two, I was exploring the relationship of one person to a specific piece of land. I realize now it is not so simple, there are other elements affecting the environment on a larger scale that have to be taken into account. One of the hyperobjects discussed by Timothy Morton is global warming, which has affected and snuck into every molecule on earth, every single living entity has in some way been affected by it and my piece of land is no exception. Of course, Timothy Morton did not introduce me to climate change but he describes it in a new and comprehensive way as a hyperobject, making me realize that the Þúfugarðar project, unavoidably, has to do with ecology on a global scale. It is impossible to avoid the context of global warming when working with plants today. Two hundred years ago when an artist painted a landscape it was a painting of the landscape, pure nature; today every single piece of art picturing nature is about climate change, the changes in the content of all biological things has affected all nature. All landscape painting or artwork about nature now have an element of climate change in their content whether the artists intend it or not.



Þúfugarðar



Þjórsárhraun lava field shown in read



Þúfugarðar

## *yellow bedstraw*



13.



14.

**Work:** *yellow bedstraw*, 2015

**Material:** plant dyed silk

**Size:** 3.47 x 1.66 m (pic 13, 14)

**Description:** The piece *yellow bedstraw* is dyed with the plant yellow bedstraw picked at Þúfugarðar during the summer 2015. It is sewn together in a sewing machine.

**Installation:** The piece is hung vertically and hangs on a wooden strip 4.5 cm x 166 cm x 9mm, the wooden strip is attached to a support beam in the ceiling with screws. The silk is then pinned onto the wood with sewing pins, which are cut off 2-3 mm away from the silk. In the exhibition there are 16 plant dyed silks that all hang from the support structure of the space. They vary in size, the smallest piece is: *common silverweed* 136 x 94 cm (1.27 m<sup>2</sup>) and the largest is: *tea leaved willow* 2.6 x 3.38 m (8.78 m<sup>2</sup>).

I use the silk as an armature, a grid or a net, that catches and holds the content and essence of the plant, making it visible. Due to the scale of it, the viewer is surrounded by the plants, walking into a usually hidden universe of the earth. The plant-dyed silk is an atmosphere and a mental space where the viewer can experience the color quite physically through their body. Now back to the woven paintings for a second, when you look closely at the threads in the warp and the weft where they are crossing and appear like dots, the picture plane looks pixelated, as if you were zooming in to on an image on a computer screen. The plant dyed silks take one of those

pixels and look at it in greater detail and depth by enlarging it up to a gigantic scale. This context, oddly enough, makes the weavings, a macro view and the silks provide a micro view of a molecular dimension. The silks thus become a macromolecule, which is a rare type of molecule that can be seen with the naked eye.

One of the challenges of showing at Bergen Kjøtt was how to hang the plant dyed silk. I had 10 months to contemplate this, from when I booked the space. I had never shown the silks as a spatial installation before. I had hung them flat on the wall in two exhibitions in 2014, at Hverfisgallerí in Reykjavík and at Kunstnerforbundet in Oslo. I wondered how I would hang them; this called for a structure which would then bring in additional forms and materials: metal, wood, plastic etc. What should the structure be like? Would it reference a dwelling? Curtain? Tent? Shelter? Painting? I could not find the right way to build an armature for the silk that I was content with, every addition and solution felt like an intrusion on the silk. For two years before the exhibition at Bergen Kjøtt, I had been studying how to build a house, with the intention of building one at Þúfugarðar. Through this I had met structural framework specialists and this had brought the structural framework of buildings to my attention, both aesthetically and functionally. It became obvious to me that it made sense to use this important structure at Bergen Kjøtt for holding the plant dyed silk. It functions as a stretcher bar or an armature for the work, without adding anything to the space. I could bring the work into it in a seemingly effortless way. Hanging the plant dyed silk on the support structure not only had a functional purpose but also a conceptual one. It made sense to me to use this strong and vital structure, which keeps the building in place, to hold the plant dyed silk pieces, which carry Þúfugarðar with them and to me that has to do with groundedness, balance and stability, just like the stable support structure of Bergen Kjøtt.

## Hindsight

Reflecting on the experience of the silks in Bergen Kjøtt I am increasingly inclined to consider them as a spiritual space, together they seem to inhabit a dose of idealization or sublimity which I had not anticipated. This, I suspect, is the result of the scale of the pieces. The idea of the sublime in my work is new to me; I did not deliberately create this atmosphere in the exhibition. The sublime has had many different functions through the ages. It has been used to manipulate and to suppress, and it has been connected to fear and helplessness. The word was first used in the 17th century about things human beings did not understand. From the mid eighteenth century, the word was used in a different context which: "reflected a new cultural awareness of the profoundly limited nature of the self and which led artists, writers, composers and philosophers to draw attention to intense experiences which lay beyond conscious control and threatened individual autonomy"<sup>25</sup> Precisely these notions of the sublime have a strong relevance to contemporary concerns about climate change and the impossibility of the situation in terms of human influences on the earth. This description of the sublime seems to fit well with the experience of the silks in the space. In the exhibition it seemed like the gaze of the viewer detached itself from logic and expanded when it came to viewing the plant dyed silk, transporting the experience into a complex condition of being in the moment, but still suspended in time and space. It is not my intention to claim that this is what the viewer should feel or will feel, I can not assume I know what each person is feeling. This is a study of the response I received after discussing the exhibition with viewers, as well as my own experience of the plant dyed silk at Bergen Kjøtt. These are thoughts I will take with me into the next exhibition when I work with the plant dyed silk, either to strengthen the aspect of opposite nature and the infinite gigantic context we must respect. Images of Stonehenge<sup>26</sup> also appear, (pic. 15) the 5000 year old prehistoric stone structure, which was used for mysterious worship ceremonies. I think it is safe to say that Stonehenge is a place where human beings become humble in the face of history, time and scale. When standing amidst the plant dyed silk pieces you also become

<sup>25</sup> Simon Morley, *THE SUBLIME, Documents of contemporary art* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Gallery, London, MIT Press, 2010) pg. 14-15.

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.stonehenge.co.uk/about.php/>

humble and small towards nature, ecology, earth and time. The plant dyed silk turns around the anthropocentric position human beings have taken towards nature for over two hundred years. Acknowledging the plant dyed silk in this context also connects the work to the Mark Rothko Chapel in Houston Texas,<sup>27</sup> which was commissioned and founded in 1964, intended as a meditative and intimate sanctuary to be used by people of every belief for seminars, yoga, meditation, music, lectures etc. The chapel consists of 14 large scale purple paintings by Mark Rothko which together, with a specially designed building by Rothko himself, form one artwork. Visitors are able to sit on benches in the room and experience the atmosphere of the paintings. I must admit I am skeptical towards the ideas of worship or the sublime in the context of my work. I fear there is a risk of the work becoming too emotional, which can



15. Stonehenge



*colors of belonging*, 2015  
Bergen Kjøtt, installation view

also function as manipulative. I am apprehensive that this feeling of worship or holiness could take over other readings of the installation. However, this quite possibly adds a layer that is not subtractive or negative. Handcrafts and textiles also have a quality to them that can create an overload of admiration, an awe that I often fear will distract the viewer. I have always been aware of this and tried to stay clear of this overload, for the sake of focusing on the concept of the work. I will continue to contemplate on these issues in future installations with the plant dyed silk and this needs to be taken into account

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.rothkochapel.org>

when I reflect on the exhibition colors of belonging. I wonder, however, if it is possible to produce the sublime, to manufacture it and stage it. It has been mentioned that the Mark Rothko chapel does not have the same spiritual feeling to it as individual works of Mark Rothko are claimed to have on their own. Might something have gone wrong in the plan to magnify the sublime feeling his paintings produced individually? Because I am skeptical towards the sublime dimension of my work, I would like to once more discuss my intentions in the exhibition and how the space adds to that.

The installation at Bergen Kjøtt can be seen in the context of the sublime, but it is also many other things and I want to elaborate more on the relationship between the woven paintings and the plant dyed silk.



*colors of belonging, 2015*  
Bergen Kjøtt, installation view

### **Three dimensional pigment**

Painting is by default a two dimensional object; it has a front and a back. There is something on the front that the artist wants to be seen and looked at, it is a method of focus, the viewers gaze and attention are directed to this defined picture plane. This is my intention with the woven paintings. I place them in the context of painting and I stretch them onto a stretcher bar to create focus. Because the thread is dyed before I weave the work, the canvas looks the same in the front and the back, the foreground and the background have merged. The pigment I use to dye the threads, plant pigment and acrylic paint, creates a space within the woven structure. There is three dimensionality in the weave, as well as the painted thread. Even though the woven paintings have this spacial dimension to them, they are placed on the wall as paintings and therefore have a front side and a backside that is not meant to be seen. The plant dyed silks, however, are meant to be seen from both sides. They do not have a front and a back side. The plant pigment goes all the way through the threads and the fabric, and is the same from both sides – it is pigment in space, three dimensional pigment. The plant dyed silk emphasizes the three dimensionality of the woven painting. There are nuances within the color in the silk, which might not be the same on both sides. The plant dyed silk creates different spaces on each side of the fabric and the viewer can experience the pigment in three dimension. There is a certain spacial perception towards the plant dyed silk that I set up in the space through the installation of the silk pieces. By installing the pieces like this they offer a wide range of experience possibilities that have to do with distance, proximity and scale. They can be looked at upwards, downwards, sideways, one at a time or many at once. In other words, there is a deliberate staging going on in the exhibition. There is a set where objects are to be seen in a certain way, the woven paintings from the front and the silks from all sides.

### **Inner and outer architecture**

There are various principles that get established in the process of making the pieces in the exhibition colors of belonging which determine the scale and the appearance of the work. The scale of both the plant dyed silk and the woven paintings in this exhibition echo the method, process and time it takes to make them. The silks have the potential to become very large, the process of making them is quite instant and immediate at least in comparison to the rather complicated and time-consuming process of making the woven paintings. The scale of the plant dyed silk follows a curious logic. There is always a dialogue going on between the material, the technique, the plant

and the final outcome in terms of scale and structure. The silk is bought by the meter, it is 1.40 meters wide from the manufacturer, it is readily available and not woven by myself. I boil it in Alun<sup>28</sup> to prepare the natural fibers to better absorb and retain the plant color. After boiling a plant in water for a few hours, the plant is removed and replaced by the silk. The silk stays in the dye bath for a few hours up to a few days, it is then removed from the pot, rinsed, ironed and sewn in a sewing machine. This is a rather straightforward process and makes it possible to produce large pieces by sewing the silk together to attain almost any scale. There is also a connection between the type of plant, the color and scale of each of the pieces. This can be seen in the piece *varigated horsetail*, 2015, (pic. 16) which is 2 x 2.5 m. It takes a long time to pick enough of this plant to even fill a small pot, either the piece is then smaller and has a darker color or, if it is larger, it will have a lighter color. The varigated horsetail plant is well hidden in the swampy wet area of the land. It is unsustainable to pick more of this sort of plant; this would affect the plant for the next few years in terms of its survival and it would take too much time. This is a logic that is based on what is available, sustainable and doable within reason and affects the scale and the color of the plant dyed silk pieces. Pieces such as *tea leaved willow*, 2015 (pic. 17) which is one of the largest pieces in the exhibition, 3.38 x 2.60 m, reflects the fact that there is quite a bit of tea leaved willow on the land, which is easy to access and fairly quickly picked so the color will become darker and the piece larger.



16. Left: *Varigated horsetail*, 2015  
Size: 2 x 2.26 m  
Plant dyed silk



Varitgated horsetail



Varigated horsetail, detail

<sup>28</sup> The most common mordant for wool is a powdered substance called alun or alúm in Iceland. This is an aluminium compound, alumenium-salt, where the active ingredient is alumenium ion (AL+3).

Further contemplations on decision-making regarding the scale of the silk also relate to the way it is sewn together. If I want a piece to be larger than 1.40 meters I will have to add to it by sewing it together with another piece. In the sixteen plant dyed silk pieces in the exhibition the viewer can see lines which are the result of sewing pieces of silk together. The seams are there for mostly functional reasons, but at the same time the seams create geometrical and structural drawings in the work. I am not creating a deliberate composition with the sewn lines in the plant dyed silk, but I am aware of the strong line drawing that appears when I sew the pieces together. The sewn lines display the inner structure of the work, the architectural pattern-making. They reveal a closeness to the handcrafted aspects of the work, the fact that it was sewn together by a person becomes visible through the seams. The seams are not perfectly straight, they are uneven and make it obvious that they are sewn by a person. The seams also create a small frame around the edge of each piece, making it finite and giving it a deliberate and clear edge. There is an interesting relationship that happens between this inner structure of the work and the support structure of the building which is the outer structure of the work. The seams are folded three times over before sewing them together, this also creates a darker color since they are layered. This makes them stronger and is also necessary to ensure that they look the same from both sides.



17. Left: *Tea leaved willow*, 2015  
3.38 x 2.26 m  
Plant dyed silk



Tea leaved willow

## Collecting and selecting

In Púfugarðar there are at least 90 different plant species, counting, all low plants (undergrowth), mosses, lichens and trees. When I examined what plants were on the land, there were no surprises and no disappointments either; all plants are quite common in the area. So how do I make a choice between which plants to pick? What determines which specific plants are "chosen" to be used together in a painting? Or why is one plant chosen to be used on its own in a silk? There are a few reasons that guide my choices, they are: subjective, compositional, practical and aesthetical. Each plant has a certain character: a certain size, resilience, shyness or openness, or function as edible or possibly medicinal. It has a certain way of distributing seeds, it has a gender and even has flowers that are sometimes bi-gendered. I tend to not pick plants that are about to distribute seeds. I also don't pick plants that are so small or rare that it would be unsustainable to pick them both time-wise and in terms of the plant surviving into the next year, and I never collect the plants with their roots. Knowing the plants quite well at this point, my choices also depend on what color they give, do I want it to be close to the other colors in the piece or different? I sometimes wonder if the color they give reflects their character in any way, do aggressive plants have a stronger color? And how do their names sound together? Their titles are almost like poetry so there is also a compositional thought going on there. I don't follow any strict rules when it comes to my choices except that it has to be sustainable.





Picking plants at Þúfugarðar

## Terminology

In the discourse about the two types of work in the exhibition colors of belonging I have chosen to talk about the smaller pieces as woven paintings and the silk as plant dyed silk. This is the conclusion of a careful consideration of the meaning of the terminology that could possibly be used to define the existence of these works. The plant dyed silk could certainly be defined as paintings. It can be argued that they have a pigment and the silk functions as an armature much like the painter's canvas and the stretcher bar function to hold the color in place. However, I want to emphasize their existence as independent objects. By calling them paintings I force them into a dialogue which is very specific and will block out other viewings of the plant dyed silk. Although the title of my project in the Fellowship Program is *Textiles in the extended field of painting*, that does not mean that all textiles need to be discussed as paintings, but they can be discussed in the context of painting. The silks stand on their own as individual works within or outside of the painting discussion.

### *an inexplicable and mysterious transmuting*

Titles are an important part of my works. In the exhibition *colors of belonging* each of the weavings has a specific title. The titles can be looked at all at once, almost like a poem, or fragments of a poem about a place, and as thoughts, questions, atmosphere, feelings etc. The titles are selected from texts I have written about Þúfugarðar, comments from other people at lectures that have made it into my notes, things I find interesting, relevant and open up the mind. The title of a piece is not supposed to explain the work, it is meant to be thought-provoking, even to disorient the viewer by creating a struggle to find their own position within the context of the work and the title. The woven paintings in the exhibition have titles such as: *secret moment, tuning in and out, an inexplicable and mysterious transmuting, early spring* and *I can hear the ocean when the wind is blowing from the south*. A title such as *tuning in and out* describes a feeling in connection to the land. You can tune into it and you can also pass it by. When I am picking plants to use in my work it demands me to sit on the ground for a long time and carefully pick a certain plant, I get to know the plant on a very intimate level and the plants around the plant I am picking through smell, touch and time. I get to know the characteristics of the different areas in the land, the tussocks, the grassy area and the swampy area. The first summer I experienced this, I felt like I had tuned in to a frequency that was exposed to me through spending this time with the plants on the land, a frequency not available to anyone except through this channel of time spent with the plants. The title *secret moment* and *I can hear the ocean when the wind is blowing from the south* refers again to these sort of experiences on the land, discoveries that are only available to the person who slows down and tunes into the frequency of a place. *Relationship between different kinds* is a part of the dictionary definition of the word symbiosis, which refers to all kinds of relationships, between colors, substances, animals, human beings and plants. I selected the titles from a long list of sentences, words and comments I have collected for three years. I then randomly distributed them between the woven paintings; there is no selection process in terms of a visual or content relationship exactly between each piece and its title. A title of one piece could have landed on another, a title like *early spring* could very well have landed on the darkest piece. It is not important to me to match the work with a title; I see the titles also as an independent experience, a poem and an atmosphere that exists in the space as a whole and an independent layer.

In the exhibition *colors of belonging* the plant dyed silk all carried the title of the plant it was dyed with, the title is descriptive and informative and not distributed randomly. I keep a precise archive of dyed silk and plant names. The titles in the exhibition are in lower case letters, this is intentional

and has to do with balance, openness, equality and aesthetics. By keeping all the letters the same they become equal, this also implies them being in the middle of a sentence with no beginning and no end, the title could possibly continue in each direction. For my work the material description is also important. This usually accompanies my exhibitions on a piece of paper with numbers on a map referring to the pieces in the exhibition. I realize that without these facts and the title it might be difficult to grasp the content of the work. I have always resisted giving out much information to explain the work, I rely on an active and alert viewer to unravel the work for himself each time, there is a lot of information in the pieces if they are given time to reveal themselves. The story about the plant pigment is also information you only have to receive once. After that the viewer will take that knowledge with him to the next exhibition, then you know these facts, colors in my work have a story, come from somewhere for a reason.

## Elements of painting

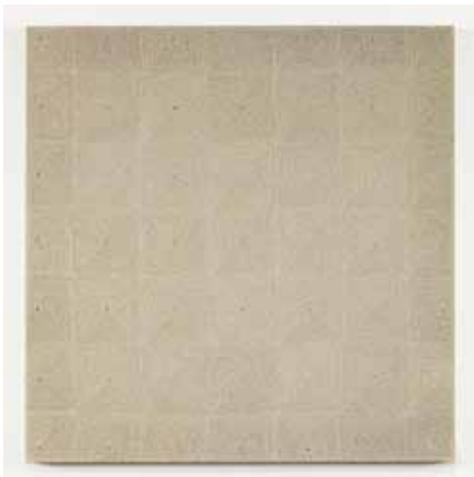
In this chapter I will take a look at aspects of the medium of painting, where my work is rooted, and the elements of painting I am working with today. From 1994 until 2000 I lived in New York City, taking in American art history first hand at the Museum of Modern art and the gallery and museum spaces in the city. Since then I have been interested the material and methods of painting, deconstructing painting and working with its material background; the painter's canvas.

In 2002 I made a work called *Reconstructed Canvas*, (pic. 18) The canvas was made up of small crochet squares that created an op art like pattern inside the canvas. This was the starting point for my works where the image and the material support merge, fusing the foreground and background into one. In the piece *Reconstructed Canvas II*, from 2003, (pic. 19) I used a canvas that can be bought in an art supply store, unraveled part of it, and reconstructed it, by crocheting it back together and attaching it again to the original canvas. I was twisting the function of the painter's canvas and raising questions about the different value systems attached to painting and textiles. Through these works, I discovered the canvas itself as a subject for my artistic practice and my work started to deal with painting as a subject by reconstructing the painter's canvas both conceptually and literally. I was interested in the handcrafted aspect of the canvas in relation to the standard mass produced canvas. The unevenness of the handcraft became an important aspect of my work. In continuation of this, I discovered the painterly dimension of the thread, by painting the threads beforehand and weaving them together. In the *Gingham*, 2006 (pic. 20) series the picture is viewed on the surface and refers to geometrical abstraction, at the same time as the pieces obviously copy the mass-produced Gingham tablecloth fabric. These pieces contain an element of illusion, since they are both a woven tablecloth and a painting of it at the same time. Just like in Jasper Johns' 1955 *Target* paintings, the object, or in this case the table cloth, could almost be replaced by the real thing. In Johns' words: "Using familiar objects gives me room to work on other levels"<sup>29</sup> Referencing a recognizable object makes the viewer question what they are looking at and, in the case of my woven gingham paintings, directs the viewer to the method and material used to make them, which is the key to understanding the piece. These aspects create friction in the work. I am dealing with some of the same subject matters that painters deal with,

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.moma.org/collection/works/78393?locale=en>

but my way of dealing with them is through concepts, as well as the visual qualities of the object, and through the method of weaving, rather than using a brush. These works deal with the spacial aspect of painting through the woven canvas.

Through handicrafts I have a different premise and starting point than a painter. This demands a different reading of the pieces and gives a different value to my work. There is a certain “twist” that happens between painting and textiles that has to do with value and methods. The handcrafted aspect coming from the textiles and the act of the painting process have a twisted relationship in these works. In the *Equivalent*, 2006 (pic. 21) series I started weaving single colored canvases that can be seen as monochrome paintings, although the process of making the pieces, by painting the threads beforehand and weaving the canvas, is completely different from the methods they are in context with. Painting the linen thread before weaving the canvas creates



18. *Reconstructed Canvas*, 2002  
74 x 74 x 4 cm  
Crochet linen thread, stretcher-bar



19. *Reconstructed Canvas II*, 2003  
127 x 53 cm

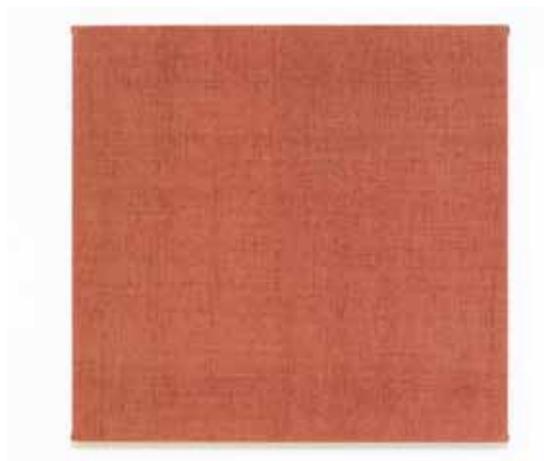
Crochet cotton /unraveled painters canvas) and canvas

a complex space within the seemingly monochrome surface, the spacial/ woven element in the canvas creates both the background and foreground at the same time.

I weave the paintings with the basic plain weave, also known as tabby weave and linen weave, the 50/50 over and under structure. This is the most common way to make a cloth and the most common method used to weave a painter's canvas. Plain weave is the basic, one thread over and one thread under weave. This weave has an inherent idea of equality and balance in it. Due to the fact that you can see an equal amount of the warp and the weft, they both play an equal role in the strength and the appearance of the cloth. By dyeing the yarn before weaving it, the back and the front of the canvas are identical, there is no front or back anymore, the foreground and background have merged, dissolving traditional divisions of roles in the painting. I do not favor one over the other, plant or acrylic pigment, wool or linen thread, they are all equal in the pieces.



20. *Gingham, Phthalo Turquoise*, 2006  
80 x 80 x 1.5 cm  
Linen, acrylic paint, hand woven

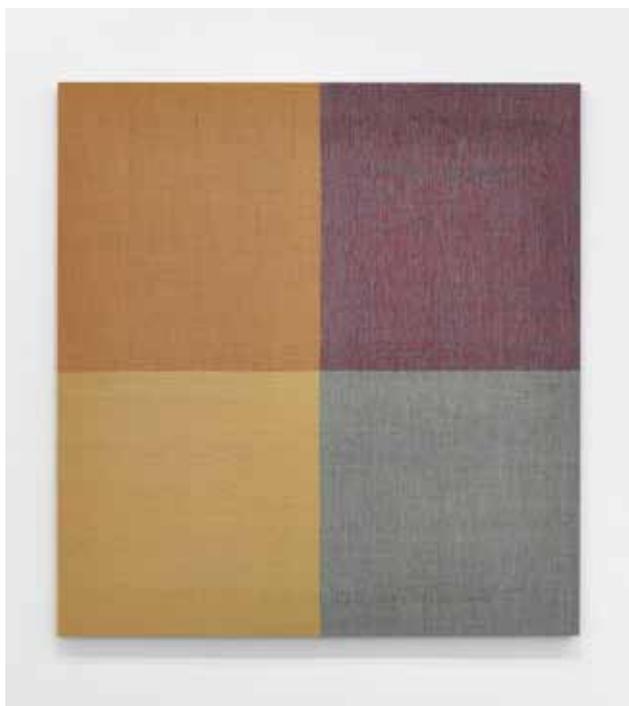


21. *Red Iron Oxide*, 2006  
65 x 65 x 0,75 cm  
Linen, acrylic paint, hand woven

## *Mapping a piece of land*

In the spring 2014, I had a solo exhibition at Hverfisgallerí in Reykjavík. (pic. 25, 26) This was the first time I showed work publicly that I had made during the program. The exhibition title was Mapping a piece of land. In the exhibition I showed eight weavings and two plant dyed silk pieces. The weavings were woven from plant dyed wool and linen thread with acrylic paint. The exhibition was accompanied by an A4 flyer with a small text written by Gunnar J. Árnason art philosopher. Many of the woven paintings I made before starting in the Norwegian Artistic Research Program had a direct reference to the Gingham tablecloth fabric. They had a recognizable source as a usable domestic object, tablecloths, dress-fabric, dishcloths etc. and through that they referenced a discourse about value systems and hierarchy. In the exhibition at Hverfisgallerí the reference to the usable object dissolves. (pic. 22, 23) The checkered pattern is still visible in some pieces, but in the exhibition it completely detaches itself from the recognizable reference to an object.

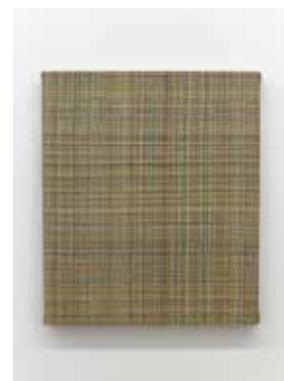
The connection completely dissolves in the smallest piece in the exhibition title: *Meadowsweet, Northern Bedstraw, Bellardi Bog Sedge, Stone Bramble, Meadow Horsetail, Alpine Lady's Mantle, Common Meadow-Grass, Yellow Bedstraw, Common Horsetail, Tea Leaved Willow*, 2014, size



23. *Angelica and tea leaved willow*, 2014  
90 x 90 x 2 cm  
linen, acrylic paint, wool, plant dye, hand-woven



22. (middle image) *Crowberry, angelica, willow, common meadow-grass, stone bramble I*, 2014  
50 x 50 x 2 cm  
linen, acrylic paint, wool, plant dye, hand-woven



24. *Tea leaved willow*, 2014  
35 x 30 x 2 cm  
meadowsweet, northern bedstraw, bellardi bog sedge, stone bramble, meadow horsetail, alpine lady's mantle, common meadow-grass, yellow bedstraw, common horsetail, linen, acrylic paint, wool, plant dye, hand-woven



25 - 26. *Mapping a piece of land*, 2014  
Hverfisgallerí, Reykjavík Iceland

33 x 30 x 2.5 cm. (pic. 24). This also happens through my use of plant color. The use of plants to dye the wool thread also starts to point to a certain place, the context of that place becomes important, its meaning to me and to a much wider discourse that has to do with ecology, politics, belonging, uprootedness and rootedness. Through the plants the context of the work became much larger and more complex. At first glance, the works in this exhibition appear to be abstract and formalistic, but when the viewer realizes the source of the color it becomes figurative. The pieces carry the content of the plant and the context of the land in them, they are not a spiritual or abstract representation of the land, but a very physical representation. I use the color as a material, the appearance of it is less important than where it comes from, its place of origin. I expect people to look beyond the surface. In the woven paintings in this exhibition I use both plant-dyed wool and linen thread dyed with acrylic paint. These colors belong to two very different color systems, one belongs to a natural system of colors, but the other, the acrylic paint, is part of a unified man-made industrial system of colors, where pretty much no color is lacking and you can get the exact same color on the other side of the world, whereas the plant color is more like a wine, it varies according to seasons and you can only get it once, next year it will change slightly. The plant colors are a natural system of colors which cannot be matched to any other color.

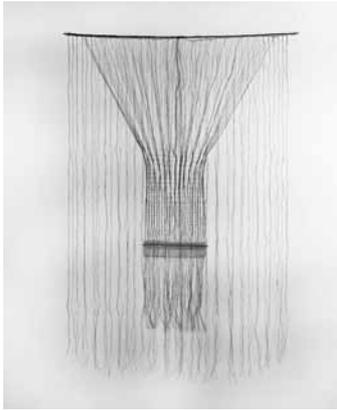
Through my interest in the painter's canvas and the structure of the grid, my observation turned quickly to artists such as Agnes Martin and Sol LeWitt, and I have found that my work still communicates with theirs. At first I was interested in Agnes Martin's connection to textiles, or what I read into her background and work as a connection to textiles. In her formative years as a painter, in the late fifties and early sixties, she shared a studio with the weaver Lenore Tawney. Since my years in New York I was convinced that Lenore's weft inspired Martin to do structural line drawings of grids. Martin has always claimed that her work has no figurative starting point, and the grid is ultimately "meditations on innocence, beauty, happiness and love."<sup>30</sup> Thus claiming that it did not originate in Lenore Tawney's weave (or any other representational origins) but was a form of meditation. It was not until I read the catalog for the exhibition *Art & Textiles* at Wolfsburg Art Museum that I found support for my theory. "Also part of the closely linked community of artists in the New York of the nineteen-sixties was the female pioneer of

<sup>30</sup> Arne Glimcher, *Agnes Martin, Paintings, Writings, Remembrances* (London: Phaidon, 2012) pg. 11.

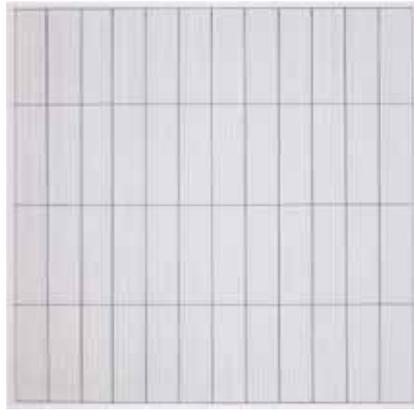
Fiber art, Lenore Tawney (1907-2007), who was well acquainted with Martin. Tawney had learned weaving and old Latin American textile techniques from the former Bauhaus artist Anni Albers. She implemented these experiences in free, artistic weaving works, which from the very start ventured to step from the wall into space. It defined this as sculpture consisting of networks of threads, which, as in the work *Lekythos* (1963), are even reduced, to a great extent, to freely hanging material. The linear, grid which soon became Martin's signature image, echoed the horizontal and vertical lattices of string in Tawney's work<sup>31</sup> (pic. 27, 28). This supports my thoughts of a connection between Martin's grids and the warp and the weft. Later, Martin moved south to New Mexico where she started to paint horizontal lines and used pale pastel colors easily connected to the flat landscape of New Mexico and the desert colors. There is a strong visual connection between her paintings and Central and South American weavings, shawls and skirts, which appeared after her move south to Taos. (pic. 29, 30, 31, 32) This was the second connection to textile I found in the work of Agnes Martin. She, however, never admitted to any figurative starting point, I find this very interesting also in light of what is considered to be her last artwork, a small line drawing of a flower which she drew in the last year she lived. (pic. 34). This makes me wonder about the relationship between place and artwork, if you can ever escape the place where you work. What influence does the environment have on the work? This question will not be answered here, but I want to mention the painter Andreas Siqueland who has made this the topic of his investigation for some years now. Through his three year research project in the Norwegian Artistic Research Fellowship Program, *A Place for Painting*, he returned to outdoor painting to explore the influence of place, weather, color and nature on the painting itself. In his own words "It has often struck me that artists who change their whereabouts often change their style and way of working along with it."<sup>32</sup> Although my work explores the connection to place in a different way to Andreas, there is a strong connection between our work. In my work the relationship to place is very direct through the plants; it contains the same elements that Andreas is researching, color, weather and nature. This also supports the theory that Agnes Martin has maybe unavoidably or unintentionally been influenced by textiles and the landscape of New Mexico when she moved south to Taos.

<sup>31</sup> Markus Brüdelin, *Art & Textiles, Fabric as Material and Concept in Modern Art from Klimt to the Present* (Germany: Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2013) pg. 177-178.

<sup>32</sup> Andreas Siqueland, *A Place for Painting*. An unpublished critical reflection by Andreas Siqueland (Norway: Oslo Art Academy and The Norwegian Artistic Research Program).



27. *Lekythos*, 1962  
Lenore Tawney  
Linen, 127 x 78 cm



28. *Untitled*, 1962,  
Agnes Martin.  
Pen and ink on etching proof  
34 x 34 cm



29. *Untitled #3*, 2002  
Agnes Martin  
Acrylic and graphite on  
canvas, 152 x 152 cm



30. *I Love The Whole  
World*, 1999. Agnes Martin  
Acrylic and graphite on  
canvas. 152 x 152 cm



31. Antique Peruvian shawl



32. *Untitled #20*, 1974, 2002  
Agnes Martin  
Acrylic, pencil and gesso on  
canvas. Detail 182 x 182 cm



33. *Untitled #4*, 1990  
Agnes Martin  
Ink on paper, detail  
23 x 23 cm



34. *Untitled*, 2004  
Agnes Martin's last drawing  
Ink on paper  
9 x 7 cm

Another parallel between my work and Agnes Martin's is the relationship between scale, process and the body. For most of her professional career, Martin's paintings were done in the same size 183 x 183 cm, later in her career, when her health started failing, she made her canvases smaller, 152 x 152 cm to better be able to move the work around herself. Making her canvases smaller was not an aesthetic decision, it had to do with practicality. The scale of my work has a similar relationship with practicalities and the possibilities of my methods and what is humanly possible or sensible in a reasonable timeframe. The woven paintings in *colors of belonging* are all quite small because of the complicated process behind them. It is not humanly possible or sensible to make them much larger. The width of the loom I work on technically has the potential to make larger works, but the process of using one type of thread at a time limits the work to a small scale, whereas the silk pieces have less limitations and can quite easily be made large. There is a relationship between the scale of artwork that has to do with human ability within the boundaries of the material and the method and I believe this is visible in my work and the work of Agnes Martin.

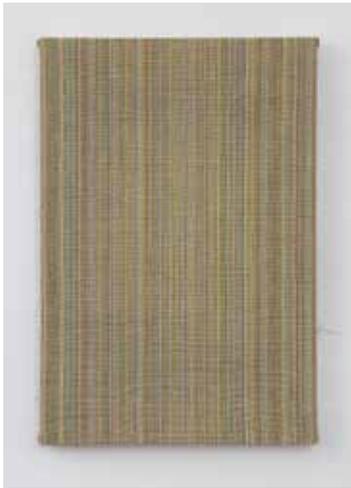
### *making order where there is chaos*

The woven paintings have a firm and clear grid structure embedded in their making; it is the grid that develops the "image" or the pattern in the picture along with the colored thread. It is deliberate that the woven cloth stretches around to the back of the piece, it does not stop at the edges of the stretcher-bar, it is whole and the cloth is the same seen from the front and the back. (pic. 35, 36) There is no illusion of space within the picture, it is complete, without a facade. In this aspect my grids and Agnes Martin's are different. Besides the conceptual meaning of her grids as a form of meditation, the appearance of them on the picture plane is also different from the woven paintings. Martin's grids end right before the edge of the picture, both in her paintings and her drawings. In the larger paintings some of the lines are drawn over the edge but do not go all the way to the back. (pic. 32, 33) This, in my opinion, makes Martin's paintings a two dimensional picture plane rather than an object. She deliberately directs the focus within that frame. For me there is a difference there that has to do with painting as an illusion of space and an image, or painting as a three dimensional object such as the woven paintings. In my contemplation of the grid I use the article "Grids"<sup>33</sup> by Rosalind Krauss from the year 1979 as a main source. In the article she is analyzing the 20th century modernist grid and the absence of the grid in the 19th century. There are a few things she clarifies in the article, which parallel my use of grids in the woven paintings that I want to mention here.

First of all she states that "logically speaking, the grid extends in all directions, to infinity. Any boundaries imposed upon it by a given painting or sculpture can only be seen - presented as a mere fragment, a tiny piece arbitrarily cropped from an infinitely acknowledgement of a world beyond the frame".<sup>34</sup> The woven paintings reference the outside world through the infinite grid in the weave. They point to a world beyond the frame by being stretched all the way to the back and also through the material content of the dye, plant and acrylic paint. The canvas is woven as one piece, the threads reach all the way through, both horizontal and vertical, the front side and the back side are identical.

<sup>33</sup> Rosalind Krauss, *Grids* (New York: The MIT Press, October, Vol 9, Summer, 1979).

<sup>34</sup> Rosalind Krauss, *Grids* (New York: The MIT Press, October, Vol 9, Summer, 1979) pg. 60.



35 - 36. *grounding*, 2014

49 x 33 x 2 cm

stone bramble, water avens, yellow bedstraw, lady's mantel, garden angelica, meadowsweet, tea leaved willow, meadow horsetail, woodland geranium, dwarf willow, linen, acrylic paint, wool, plant dye, hand-woven

Krauss shows that grids within the artwork portends the picture plane being either centrifugal or centripetal, meaning pointing outwards or inwards. The grid is "cheerfully schizophrenic" meaning it has had the potential of being both at once.<sup>35</sup> Staying with Krauss's terminology, I would say the woven paintings are centrifugal artworks, meaning that they point deliberately out of the picture plane through the infinite existence of the grid and the content of the plant dye in the piece which directs the focus to a specific place outside of the object. Krauss distinguishes between the different grids of the 20th century; such as grids by Agnes Martin, Mondrian and Malevich and grids used prior to the 20th century such as grids used to capture perspective. Grids appear frequently in the art world through modernism and in the 20th century the grid is described as "Flattened, geometricized, ordered, it is antinatural, antimimetic, antireal. It is what art looks like when it turns its back on nature".<sup>36</sup> When Krauss explores the use of grids prior to the 20th century she finds them mostly in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries perspective studies of Uccello or Leonardo and Dürer "where the perspective lattice is inscribed on the depicted world as the armature of its organization"<sup>37</sup>, although perspective is not really early instances of grids it was "the science of the real, not the mode of withdrawal from it. Perspective was the demonstration of the way reality and its

<sup>35</sup> Rosalind Krauss, *Grids* (New York: The MIT Press, October, Vol 9, Summer, 1979) pg. 60.

<sup>36</sup> Rosalind Krauss, *Grids* (New York: The MIT Press, October, Vol 9, Summer, 1979) pg. 50

<sup>37</sup> Rosalind Krauss, *Grids* (New York: The MIT Press, October, Vol 9, Summer, 1979) pg. 52

representation could be mapped onto one another, the way the painted image and its real-world referent did in fact relate to one another – the first being a form of knowledge about the second<sup>38</sup> It seems that my woven paintings fit better in with the definition of the grid belonging to pre-20th century rather than the modernist grid definition. The grid used in Renaissance paintings was a tool to capture reality. In that sense the warp and the weft in my work have the same function as the perspective grid, they are a tool. The grid in the weaving captures reality, nature and the essence of a place, in a similar way as the study of perspective in the Renaissance aimed to achieve perfection. My work is real, it is not an illusion or an abstract representation or a metaphor. The work has a real substance in them, which is the place the pigment comes from. The grid in my weavings is also organic, an organic system, it reveals nuances in the crooked threads, the different thickness of the thread or the color in and on the thread. It shows where the canvas has been stretched more in one spot and less in another. The grid holds much information in place and makes the person or the handcrafted aspect of the weaving visible.



37. *subjective systems*, 2014  
Kunstnerforbundet, Oslo

<sup>38</sup> Rosalind Krauss, *Grids* (New York: The MIT Press, October, Vol 9, Summer, 1979) pg. 52



38. *sensing: northern bedstraw, angelica*, 2014  
 front: 203 x 136 cm back: 153 x 137 cm  
 plant dyed silk



39. *core: field horsetail, meadowsweet, cup lichen*, 2014  
 46.5 x 36.6 x 3.5 cm  
 plant watercolors, acrylic paint

The grid becomes a system of order. In my exhibition at Kunstnerforbundet in Oslo, in the fall of 2014, the title of the exhibition was *subjective systems*, (pic. 37) this had to do with making order where there is chaos, making sense of my environment through my methods of painting: watercolors, weaving and dying silk. These three methods are different by default, the weaving is a strict grid system, with strict rules and a strong sense of order, it has limits and possibilities within the clearly defined set of rules. The silk is a lighter structure, trapping the color and giving the possibility of different scales. (pic. 38) The watercolors are a smaller system, allowing the plant color to reveal itself in a direct way. (pic. 39) All three methods in the exhibition can be seen as systems which bring out different information, feelings, and elements of the land, taking a look at it from different angles. Subjectivity is in a way a contradiction to a system, if you think of a system as something fixed and accepted, possibly something scientific and the subjectivity as something, personal and changeable. But even scientific systems are man-made in the first place and are therefore also subjective. In the exhibition I showed my systems, they are autonomous and alternative and might not be logical to other people or seem like systems at all and they might also be considered as unsystematic. They give a certain structure to my thoughts that the viewer can relate to on his own terms.

Throughout her career, the German artist Hanne Darboven also worked on what can be called a subjective system, an autonomous, complicated and exaggerated categorization system, un-decipherable by others. (pic. 40) It seems to be an encrypted language, weaving together: letters, note pages, numbers, grids, postcards, objects, drawings and images to build a personal system which embraces order. Darboven worked on long-term projects through her career, which she named Cultural History (1880-1983). This included many exhibitions and individual works. In her work she took on the role of a historian and a cultural researcher, exploring European cultural history such as: minimalism, Picasso, war and labor struggles. Even without knowing her exact logic, the viewer can read her work in their own way, in fragments or as a whole. Her system is part scientific and part intuitive. She frames the various visual and textual information she is working with and displays it in large installations of grid structures, which fill each wall in large exhibition spaces. The grid seems to be used here as a form of organization, to create order where there is chaos and to bring focus to a mass of information. There is a connection in the way I use the grid structure of the weaving to organize information and Darboven's grid structure of images and written information. Each picture and each pixel in my woven paintings is a part of the puzzle and important fragment in the concept of the work, displaying certain information. Darboven's grid structured images can be experienced as a whole and through the various details within them in a similar way as the woven paintings. I would like to make another connection between our work and that has to do with time and rhythm. Darboven's background lies in music, she transfers elements from music into her system, such as rhythm and repetition. Her work has a musical rhythm to it and there is a visible progression of time in her work, like counting or jumping from one music note to the next. There is a build up of material and objects which are displayed in a specific order and can be read almost like a page in a book



40. *Construction Drawing*, 1968  
Hanne Darboven

with a movement from one image to the next.<sup>39</sup> Time is an important factor in my work on a few levels as well. Time becomes a material through the growing of the plants. The plant is a scale of real time and of its environment, collecting information through the passing of time. Weaving is a clear system of time, there is a rhythm and a build up which happens step by step. This I find has a connection to Darboven's grid structure and method of displaying time in her work.

### **Time as a material**

I would like to continue contemplating time and use the date paintings of On Kawara to explain some aspects of time in my own works. The woven paintings are a certain type of date (or time) painting, they capture a specific season, each plant/thread captures the weather of that year, has it been rainy? Dry? Warm or cold? Was the plant picked in the spring or in the fall? How has it been affected by humans or animals? Has there been an eruption affecting the atmosphere and the ground? What is going on in that place and what has been going on for years before the moment the plant is picked? The plants take in this information through their roots, stems and flower petals. This is the back-story of the woven painting, and directly influences what information is within the plant when it is picked. Kawara often showed a newspaper clipping from the day when he painted each piece, which shows events that were going on that day. By doing this he gives a glimpse of the back-story of the painting, a back-story which can be different, depending on where Kawara was at that time. When showing my work, the issue of the back-story comes up quite often, the story of the land, the plants and the making of the pieces. The question of how much information to give with the pieces and how much the pieces should speak for themselves is a very relevant one. I choose not to give more information than the piece itself, titles, material and method description and usually a little text to go with the exhibition, leaving the rest up to the viewer. Kawara usually does not show the audience more than the hand-painted date paintings, it takes time to grasp the reality and depth of his work. You have to spend time with them to access their core. It does not happen immediately, it is a learning process and requires the participation of the viewer on many levels. According to Jonathan Watkins, Kawara's work springs from experiencing the atom bomb on Hiroshima at

<sup>39</sup> Dan Adler, *Hanne Darboven, Cultural History, 1880-1983* (London: Afterall Books, Central Saint Martins, 2009).

the age of 13 and the collective shock the whole nation experienced.<sup>40</sup> His date paintings (pic. 41) speak about this in a very subtle but powerful way through the passing of time. Their meaning is quite concealed and difficult to access except through time and some consideration of Kawara's past. The woven paintings also need time, the plants need time to grow, it takes time to pick the plants and process the color, set up the weave and it takes time to grasp what is going on when you see them in an exhibition. Without the time dimension, the piece would not exist or exist as another concept. This time factor is the content/basis of my work and is therefore very important. I demand a lot of the viewer, without spending time with the work you will not pick up the nuances of color and materiality in the hand-woven canvas which are necessary clues to its making and origin. My work is by default time-consuming. There is much preparation happening before I can make the pieces; they take time and there is an important back-story to the work, which is a part of the work's concept. All this information is in the completed artwork, it is visible through the structure and the material, it will reveal itself through spending time with the work. The act of looking is understanding, the viewer cannot look passively at the work, he is required to activate the meaning by looking.

Through time the plant color in the woven paintings will disappear, it will fade, how quickly depends on how much sunlight it is exposed to and how strong the color was in the beginning and probably some other chemical factors that I don't have knowledge of. In maybe a 100 years the woven paintings will look completely different, they will most likely have a somewhat beige background with brightly colored threads going both vertical and horizontal. The plant color will fade and the synthetic acrylic paint will last longer. The plant color is organic, this is a part of the work, it has time embedded in it also into the future. This, of course, also happens to all artwork, colors will fade, glue will disintegrate, material will crumble, everything is subject to the passing of time. Still this is a large factor in my work and will become more present with the passing of time

<sup>40</sup> Jonathan Watkins, *On Kawara* (London: Paidon 2002).

## Place and artistic practice

Since it first appeared in the late 60's, the subject of site specificity has become increasingly complicated and later detached from its original meaning as a political, anti-idealist, anti-commercial art phenomenon where artists claimed public space as their own, taking the site and its context into account when making their work. Since then, site specificity has been used for a range of different art activities in public space. The word site specificity frequently appears when the project with Þúfugarðar is discussed. What does site specificity mean in relation to the exhibition colors of belonging and my work with the site Þúfugarðar? Considering the traditional concept of site specificity as an art phenomenon, the work in the exhibition colors of belonging does not fit that definition, in that sense it is therefore not site-specific. The term site-specific does seem to fit the theme of the exhibition, since it is so closely tied to a certain place, but the work made in relation to Þúfugarðar is meant to be transported away from the Þúfugarðar site, it is not meant to be exhibited there and has never been exhibited there. The work fits well in a museum, gallery and white cube situation, but can also be adjusted to other types of places, such as Bergen Kjøtt. The exhibition space affected the installation of the work in the space but not the making of the work itself.

Þúfugarðar is to me an extension of my studio, my cosmos, a place I connect to and want to study, it is the conceptual and material source of my work. By extracting the essence of the plants and dyeing wool and silk, I make the site transportable. Þúfugarðar still exists in its place, the plants grow again and little has changed, it exists in the color I have extracted and travels through the work. As a comparative study I want to briefly mention the works of three artists, Dieter Roth and Ian Hamilton Finley. In the works of these artists there is a site where the work materializes, a site that matters



42. *Solo Scenes*, 1991-1998  
Dieter Roth



41. *July 20*, 1969  
On Kawara 1969, from "*Today*"  
series, 1966- "*Man Walks On Moon*"  
Acrylic on canvas, 154 x 226 x 3.8 cm

in itself, it has content which is transported in different forms away from the place of origin and into exhibitions in the art world. There is a transfer of thought from the artist to the place, and from the place to the mobile work. For Dieter Roth it was his studios which later travelled in the form of used table tops and floors, which he had used and displayed marks of his art production. He also documented himself extensively in his studio by filming, as a form of diary and material collection. The video work Solo Scenes 1997-98 shows 131 video monitors with footage of Roth in his studio during the last year of his life. (pic. 42)

The British artist, poet and gardener Ian Hamilton Finlay worked on his 5 acre garden, Little Sparta, for most of his life.<sup>41</sup> I think it is safe to say that Little Sparta was a case study for all of his work. According to the Finlay website "The garden of Little Sparta has been described as "the epicenter of [Finlay's] cultural production, from which his other works in a sense emanate"<sup>42</sup>. Finlay started as a poet and moved on to inscribing poems onto stones and gradually creating a garden which was a universe of objects related to Finlay's diverse interest. The themes that appear in and throughout the garden are: the second world war, the French revolution, sailing, poetry, philosophy and gardening as a political act. The garden became a "place provocative of poetic, philosophic and even political thought."<sup>43</sup> It was a platform for contemplation in the same way as I see Þúfugarðar.

The piece of land I work with, Þúfugarðar, is my studio. There is a fine line between my studio and the land, and I predict this connection will become stronger in future works, merging the studio and the land completely. During the second year of the fellowship program, I mapped out the possibilities of this situation, place - work -studio - exhibition space. This drawing (pic 43) maps out the possibilities my artistic project with Þúfugarðar had revealed to me at that point. It shows how different production paths are possible, the work does not need to go through all these different steps of transformation and end up in a gallery/museum setting. It can parachute out of this production line at any step. In the colors of belonging exhibition I have followed the complicated process shown in the bottom of the drawing, but I am eager to study other options in future projects.

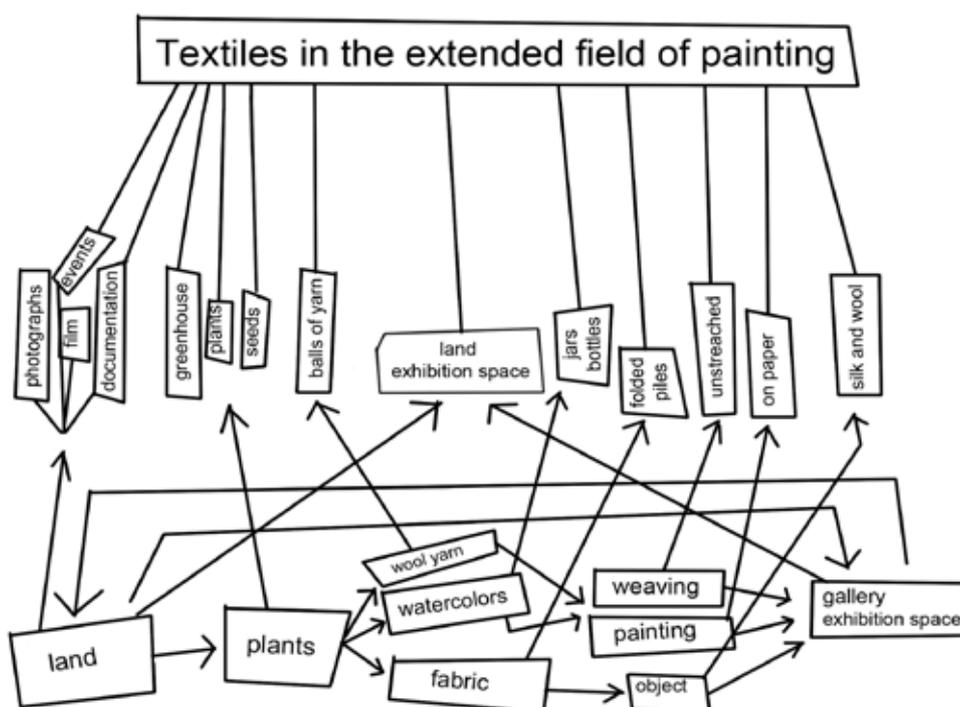
<sup>41</sup> five acres equal two hectares which is the same size as the Þúfugarðar land.

<sup>42</sup> [http://www.ianhamiltonfinlay.com/ian\\_hamilton\\_finlay.html](http://www.ianhamiltonfinlay.com/ian_hamilton_finlay.html)

<sup>43</sup> [http://www.ianhamiltonfinlay.com/ian\\_hamilton\\_finlay.html](http://www.ianhamiltonfinlay.com/ian_hamilton_finlay.html)

<sup>44</sup> <http://geir.balkong.net/index.php/om-about/>

My work with plants connects to a theme that has been increasingly prominent in the art world in the last 20 years, i.e. the relationship between man and nature. This relates to rising environmental consciousness and the ecological crisis of global warming. Artists are working more and more with their local environment and issues of their art projects. In 2003, Geir Tore and Sørssa also initiated Sørfinnset skole/the nord land in Gildeskål, northern Norway. " This ongoing project includes focus on the exploitation of nature, ecology, exchange of knowledge and small scale architecture."<sup>44</sup> In both these projects, with their farm and Sørfinset skole, Geir and Sørssa work with the importance and context of a certain place which functions as a platform of exploration and artistic production.



43. Map of possibilities

## Belonging

When I was 3 months old, my family moved from Iceland to Scotland where my father was studying to become a doctor, we lived in Dundee for five years where I started pre-school at 5 years old. We then moved to London where we lived for two years and I attended Christ Church School in Hampstead. When I was seven years old my family moved back to Iceland where I started 2nd grade at the local elementary school. Speaking both British English or Scottish and Icelandic at that point, I remember a strong feeling of being British and Scottish, having spent almost all my life at that point in Britain and Scotland. After moving back to Iceland this feeling slowly faded away and I eventually started to feel Icelandic. I have a tape recording from 1976 of me speaking and singing in English, capturing the last moments of my British and Scottish-ness, right before we moved back to Iceland. "Multicenteredness"<sup>45</sup> is a term coined by the American writer and art critic Lucy Lippard in her book *The Lure of the Local* in 1997. This term resonates well with my interest and experience of rootedness. In the book she analyzed the idea of the local from an experiential and personal viewpoint, describing how today people have many roots: they live in more than one place, come from another and vacation on the forth with parents and grandparents often from many ethnical and religious backgrounds. She calls this multi-centeredness and claims that people today have many roots, but they have to be rooted. The story of me growing up in Britain and Iceland is not special in any way and, in fact, it is a very mild version of multi-centeredness. Nevertheless, the tape of me speaking English and Icelandic crystallizes or materializes this "no man's land" or "border space" of multi-centeredness. In my work I believe the sense of belonging is a basic human desire, regardless of the form in which it materializes. A person can feel a sense of belonging to a place or places they have never been to, or feel closer to people who have passed away than those who are in the room right now. In their book "Rock the Boat", which I mentioned earlier, Tere Vadén and Mika Hannula talk about this as "experiential nearness"<sup>46</sup> the sense of belonging, existing as a metaphysical state. A sense of belonging is a subjective, abstract and sensitive issue. "We are located in experience, in its web of connections, meanings and un-chosen obligations, beyond and before physical reality".<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Lucy R. Lippard, *The Lure of the Local, Senses of Place in a Multi-centered Society* (USA: The New Press, 1997).

<sup>46</sup> Tere Vaden & Mika Hannula, *Rock The Boat* (Köln: Salon Verlag, 2003) pg. 12.

<sup>47</sup> Tere Vaden & Mika Hannula, *Rock The Boat* (Köln: Salon Verlag, 2003) pg. 19.

It is impossible to mention belonging and not acknowledge the refugee crisis in the world right now. The issue of belonging brings out stories of refugees, who have been chased away from land they have lived on for centuries and who sometimes carry with them earth from that place in jars as a connection to the place where they belong. Artwork is always read in context with what is going on in the world at that moment. When I talk about owning land and contemplating my roots, it quickly slides into a discussion of an opposite situation: people who are chased away from their place of belonging, where they feel rooted and are forced to form new roots in a new place.

A year before starting the program in Bergen, I was invited to exhibit in Hallgrímskirkja, (pic. 46) the largest church in Iceland, located on the top of the hill in downtown Reykjavík with one of the main roads, Skólavörðustígur, leading up to the church. The church is a landmark in the downtown area, built during the years 1945 - 1986. The exhibition program has been run in the church since 1982. The exhibitions mostly take place in the lobby of the church, but have frequently been stretched into the church, the tower and the area outside. I took a long time to contemplate what to exhibit. The exhibition was postponed once and then ended up being scheduled for December 2013 through January 2014, after my first year in the program. I had spent the summer of 2013 exploring the piece of land in the south of Iceland I was working with in my project. I had been collecting plants all summer, counting them and cataloging. Plants were very much on my mind and I wanted to use the exhibition at the church to somehow make experiments for my work



44. Þúfugarðar plants in Reykjavík, 2014

with Þúfugarðar. Following the plants on my land into the fall, I witnessed how they started to form and distribute seeds. I had collected seeds from the land to use in my project. I wanted to explore their potential to talk about rootedness, up-rootedness and displacement, by bringing them to Bergen, planting them and possibly using them in the final exhibition. The experiment with the seeds and seedlings from Þúfugarðar ended as a transfer to my living room in Reykjavík, they never made it to Bergen, but I did wake them up from a winter sleep in December just as an experiment. (pic. 44).

The question facing me was how could I work with the context of a church I did not know much about, and develop my ideas revolving around plants and seeds at the same time? I have little experience of going to church and I am not very religious in the sense of practicing a religion or taking part in religious ceremonies. I wanted to find an angle on this theme which did not deal with the church as a religious institution and started to think about the church as more of a community house, a social place where people gather, a place of light, warmth, nutrition in various ways, a place of caring and of shelter and nurturing life. By taking this viewpoint towards the church I started to see a connection between the role of the church and a greenhouse.

I started collecting seeds and root stems from weeds in the downtown area around the church. This was the region that belonged to Hallgrímskirkja, it was also my neighborhood in Reykjavík. In September I collected seeds and root stems from the neighboring streets, sidewalks, back alleys, back yards and vacant lots. I dried the seeds and put them in envelopes and into my refrigerator. The root stems were stored outside in boxes in my back yard. The seeds and root stems were dormant, taking their winter sleep during September and October until they were brought to Vernharður Gunnarsson, a horticulturalist at Storð Plant Nursery where he planted them in soil and placed them in a warm greenhouse with growth lights. The seeds and root stems responded as if it was spring and started to grow. The exhibition opened on the 1st of December; the plants had been tricked into behaving as if it was June. Their world had been turned upside down, December was June and January was July, they were in the wrong season, the wrong time and the wrong context.

The exhibition took place in the lobby of the church. (pic. 45) There were two existing walls on each side, defining two spaces, one on the left and one on the right. The churchgoers had to walk through the installation on their way into the church hall. On each side there was one large table top on three metal sawhorses. (pic. 48) The tables had a 5 cm edge and were covered with white plastic used to catch the excess water from watering the plants. There were approximately 80 plants on each table, in black flower



45. *Flora of weeds*, 2014  
Hallgrímskirkja Church, Reykjavík

pots. They sat directly and tightly together on the white plastic. Above them were three growth-lights on each side. The lights were pink. This has to do with what sort of nutrition the lights give, since white lights give a certain type of nutrition to the plants and the pink another. The pink growth light fits the weeds best. This affected the installation hugely and added to the surreal experience of walking into the exhibition. (pic. 46) The plants grew well in the lobby and under the lights. For the first few days and weeks they were small, but they grew well and started to bloom and develop like they would outside in spring time. (pic 47)

My choice of plants for this exhibition was very deliberate, according to the dictionary definition weeds are "a plant that is not valued where it is growing and is usually of vigorous growth"<sup>48</sup>, clearly stating that they are perfectly fine plants, but because they behave in a way that is not suitable to human needs and in places we do not approve of, they are unfairly labeled weeds. I have for a long time been interested in issues of categorization and hierarchy, choosing weeds for this exhibition speaks about hierarchy and categorization outside and inside the church. It also speaks about belonging: who and what belongs where. Many weeds are not considered Icelandic, even after being here for over 60 years. The neighborhood around the church is one of the most diverse neighborhoods in Reykjavík. The nearest elementary school has the only specialized department for immigrants and new citizens in Iceland. The neighborhood is diverse and so are the plants. Placing these

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/weeds>

plants in the lobby of the church challenged tolerance and understanding. The guests of the church had to face these plants in a new context where they were placed "high" in pots and as a center piece in the lobby at the busiest season of the church calendar. In the same way the plants also had to adjust to the situation. During the exhibition guests frequently interpreted the weeds as a metaphor for the community, the diverse flora of people living in the parish of the church. I did not mention this myself in the small A5 flyer (pic. 49, 50) accompanying the exhibition; this was an interpretation left open for the viewer. It happens naturally that plants are seen in parallel to human beings, since plants have characteristics that can be seen as human. They move, seem to think, communicate, hunt, defend themselves etc. All these are considered human characteristics.

Quite a few surprises occurred during those two months, other things woke up in the soil under the warm lights, spiders, worms, flies and other insects started to appear, some flying around the church and into the church hall. Walking into the church was like walking into spring, and it could be felt in a number of ways, such as through smell, for instance since the lobby smelled like plants and soil. It smelled like spring, the flies would be flying around as they would during spring and summer. These surprise visitors in the church during its most hectic season were met with mixed feelings. At the same time as people wanted to show tolerance, there were worries about the newly restored organ, if the flies would wander into the pipes and it would have to be cleaned out later. Some guests sitting at mass during this period were not too happy with the flies, while others said this was a very welcome sign of spring during the darkest part of the winter. The church employees were faced with a somewhat ethical question of selection: could they welcome the plants but not the insects? There is a symbiotic relationship between plants and insects which should not be interrupted, they go together and live



46. Hallgrímskirkja church December 2013



47. Various weeds in Hallgrímskirkja

together. Can you select one over the other depending on convenience? The exhibition ended up being very much about control over nature, messing with nature and taking it out of its natural environment. After the exhibition had been open for about three weeks, the plants started to appear weak and gray. My sister, who was taking care of them at that time, contacted Vernharður who came to take a look at the sickly plants. He instantly saw that there was a lice epidemic going on; lice were eating the weeds and there were no insects to defend them. Out in nature there is a richer variety of insects so there is more competition, lice do not get to spread as much, since they are eaten by other insects. Taking the plants into the church had created an obvious imbalance which had to be dealt with. This raised the question of what to do? Should I save the exhibition by spraying insecticide on the lice to exterminate them? Or should I let nature have its way and prove the point that messing with nature is a bad idea? In the end my sister was sent into the church after 5pm and sprayed the plants with insecticide. The plants quickly recovered and no one knew about this intervention into the process of the exhibition. Working with a living medium like plants created interesting questions, which I would like to explore with plants from Þúfugarðar in the future, as I intended in the beginning. Questions about plants as living thinking creatures, which identify family and communicate, hold great potential for future work. The plants look back at us, what are they thinking and how are they reacting to being uprooted and displaced and taken out of a natural balance? Do the plants bring the place with them when displaced?



48. One table with approximately 70 - 80 pots of weeds



46. View from inside the church hall

## Flóra Illgresis

Illgresi er planta sem vex á rögum stað og oft í miklu magni. Plöntur sem teljast til illgresis eru gjarnan duglegar að dreifa fræjum og eru því mjög algengar og þessa vegna taldar óæskilegar. Þær finna sér bólfestu þar sem þeim er ekki artleað að vaxa, eins og á milli gangstéttarhellna, á miðjum garðbletti og í beðum, innanum aðrar plöntur sem þykja fallegri og minna ágangar. Þegar betur er að gáð þá eru plöntur sem teljast til illgresis duglegar, harðgerðar og fallegar plöntur sem eru margar ætar, notaðar til lækninga og í te. Það er huglægur dómur fólks að flokka þær sem illgresi. Með hugafarsbreytingu er hægt að sjá þær sem hæfileikaríkar plöntur sem blómstra fallegum blómum og eru til margs nýtsamlegrar. Þær eru hluti af fjölbreyttu samfélagi plantna sem þrífast kringum Hallgrímskirkju.

Síðastliðið haust safnaði ég rötum og fræjum úr umdæmi Hallgrímskirkju, aðallega úr



Þingholtunum og Norðurmýrinni. Fræin og ræturnar hafa legið í dvala síðan í haust, ræturnar í köstum úti í garði og fræin í kæli. Í byrjun október voru ræturnar og fræin vakin úr dvalanum, setti í mold og undir gróðurljós í hlýju gróðurhúsi. Við sýningaropnun halda plönturnar að það sé komið vor og að nú sé tími til að hefja vöxt. Þær eru á rögum stað, staddir í rangri árstíð og einnig í röngu sambandi. Mér finnst áhugavert að skoða illgresið í sambandi kirkjunnar. Fordyri Hallgrímskirkju verður tímabundið að gróðurhúsi. Hlutverk gróðurhúsins og kirkjunnar er um margt líkt, að veita næringu, yl, skjól og hlúa að lífinu.

Fyrst var farið að skrá plöntur á Íslandi árið 1750, plönturnar í þeirri skráningu eru taldar gamlar plöntur í landinu. Ómögulegt er að vita fyrir vist hvaða plöntur voru hér áður en mannlíkt settist að á Íslandi. Plöntur sem skrýðar eru eftir 1750 teljast aðfluttar og ilendur, sem þýðir að þær teljast til íslensku flórunnar hafi þær tekið sér bólfestu hér í dögóðan tíma og séu farnar að koma sér

það vel fyrir að ólíklegt þyki að þær hverfi af-  
tur. Slæðingar eru plöntur sem koma og fara,  
berast hingað víð og víð en ná ekki bólfestu.  
Það er skilgreiningum háð hvaða plöntur teljast  
til hinnar íslensku flóru. Af þeim plöntum  
sem ég safnaði í kringum Hallgrímskirkju eru  
þjár sem ekki er getið um í Flóru Íslands eftir  
Stefán Stefánsson, fyr en í þriðju útgáfu árið  
1948, sem þýðir að þær numu land á árablinnu  
1924-48. Þær eru nýlega ilendar ef horft er á  
langa sögu landnáms plantna á Íslandi. Þetta  
eru spánarkerfíl, krossfífil og höfífífil. Einnig  
birtist gleym-mér-ei fyrst í annari útgáfu af  
Flóru Íslands, sem þýðir að hún nam land á  
árablinnu 1901-24. Aðrar plöntur sem eru í  
sýningunni hafa verið hér mun lengur.

Á því tveggja mánaða tímabili sem sýningin  
stendur munu prestar og starfsfólk Hallgrímskirkju  
hjálpast að við að vökva plönturnar. Sýningin  
stendur frá 1. desember 2013 - 2. febrúar  
2014.

Plöntur á sýningunni:  
Hvóni, vallhumall, spánarkerfíl, túntífil,  
haugarfi, krossfífil, hjartaarfi, höfífífil, ókur,  
skriðsólei, gleym-mér-ei, lambaklukka,  
skammkrækil, vegarfi, túnsúra.

Þakkið frá:  
Venharður Gunnarsson, garðyrkjufræðingur  
Gróðranstöðinni Stórð  
Starfsfólk Gróðranstöðvarinnar Stórð  
Ólafur Sveinn Gíslason, myndlistarmaður  
Ingólfur Guðnason og Sigrún Reyndóttir,  
Gróðranstöðin Engi Laugerási  
Guðrún Bjarnadóttir, náttúrufræðingur  
Höður Kristinnsson, grasfræðingur  
Ingunn Óskarsdóttir, garðyrkjufræðingur hjá  
Grasagarði Reykjavíkur  
Guðrður Helgadóttir, garðyrkjufræðingur,  
Landbúnaðarháskóla Íslands

Listvinafélag Hallgrímskirkju, 32 starfsár  
www.hildur.net

## Flora of Weeds

Weeds are plants that grow in the wrong place and often in large quantities. They tend to be efficient at distributing seeds and are therefore very widespread and undesirable. They settle in places they are not supposed to grow in, such as beside sidewalks, in the middle of yards, and in flower beds in between other plants that are considered more beautiful and less aggressive. Upon closer examination, the weeds are efficient, tolerant and beautiful plants. Some of them are edible, medicinal and used for tea. It is people's subjective judgment which categorizes them as weeds. If one changes one's thinking they can be seen as talented plants that produce beautiful flowers and can be useful for many things. They are part of the diverse community of plants that prosper around Hallgrímskirkja.

Last fall I collected roots and seeds from the region of Hallgrímskirkja, mainly from Thingholtin and Norðurmýri. The seeds and roots have been dormant since the fall, the roots in boxes in my yard and the seeds in the refrigerator. At the beginning of October the roots and seeds were awoken from their sleep and planted in soil under growth lights in a warm greenhouse. By the opening of the exhibition, the plants will think spring has arrived and that it is time for them to start growing. They are in the wrong place, in the wrong season and also in the wrong context. I find it interesting to view the weeds in the context of the church. The lobby of the church is temporarily changed into a green house. If you look at the role of the greenhouse and the church they have many things in common. Both offer nutrition, warmth, shelter and cherish life.

Plants were first registered in Iceland in the year 1750. The plants in that register are considered old plants in the country. It is impossible to know for sure what plants were here before the first human

settlement on the island. Plants registered after 1750 are considered immigrant plants but naturalized, which means that they are considered to be part of the Icelandic Flora, since they have planted firm roots in the country for a long time and have settled so well that it is unlikely that they will disappear again. Scatterings are plants that come and go; they arrive here frequently but don't manage to settle down permanently. The plants that are considered to be a part of the Icelandic Flora therefore depend on definition. From the plants that I collected around Hallgrímskirkja there are three which are not mentioned in the Icelandic Flora register by Stefán Stefánsson until in the third edition from 1948. This means that they settled Iceland between 1924 - 1948. They have therefore only recently been naturalized, if you look at the long history of the settlement of plants in Iceland. These are Sweed Cicely, Common groundsel and Coltsfoot. Forget-me-not's also first appeared in the second edition of the Icelandic Flora Register, which means that they settled in Iceland between 1901 - 24. Other plants in the exhibition have been here much longer.

For the duration of the exhibition, the priests and staff of Hallgrímskirkja will share the responsibility of watering the plants.



Plants in the exhibition:  
 Angelica, (*Angelica archangelica*), Yarrow, (*Achillea millefolium*), Sweed Gooly (*Myrrhis odorata*), Dandelion, (*Taraxacum* spp), Chickweed, (*Stellaria media*), Common groundsel, (*Senecio vulgaris*), Shepherd's-purse, (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*), Coltsfoot, (*Tussilago farfara*), Fringed Willow herb, (*Epilobium ciliatum*), Creeping buttercup, (*Ranunculus repens*), Forget-me-not, (*Myosotis arvensis*), Hairy bittercress, (*Cardamine hirsute*), birdseye pearlwort, (*Sagina procumbens*), Mouse-ear chickweed, (*Cerastium fontanum*), Sorrel, (*Rumex acetosa*).

Thanks to:  
 Vernharður Gunnarsson, Horticulturalist at Stórð nursery  
 All staff of Stórð nursery  
 Ólafur Sveinn Gíslason, Artist  
 Ingólfur Guðnason and Sigrún Reynisdóttir, Engi Laugarási nursery  
 Guðrún Bjarnadóttir, Natural scientist  
 Hörður Kristinsson, Botanist  
 Guðriður Helgadóttir, Horticulturalist at Landbúnaðarháskóla Íslands  
 Ingunn Óskarsdóttir, Horticulturalist at the Botanical Gardens in Reykjavík

Hallgrímskirkja Friends of the Arts Society, 32nd season. [www.hildur.net](http://www.hildur.net)



## Flóra illgresis / Flora of weeds

Hildur Bjarnadóttir



*colors of belonging.* 2015.  
Bergen Kjøtt, installation view

## Conclusion or new beginning

It is interesting in the context of a conclusion to take a look at what has happened and the challenges along the way. Did what I had envisioned in the beginning materialize? Is the title *Textiles in the extended field of painting* still relevant? Over the past three years I have questioned this title many times: is it still relevant or have I moved away from it? The first part of it, *Textiles in the extended field of painting*, functioned as an umbrella term for the project and refers to the methods I use: textiles and painting. The second part which I had as a sub-heading: *Reconstructing the painter's-canvas, both literally and conceptually, through weaving and exploring site-specific properties of plant dye in connection to a place or a person*, is about the painter's canvas and the potential of plant dye to carry and mobilize information. During the middle of my fellowship I felt like my project had drifted away from this title and was contemplating new titles. I felt like the main title did not communicate my research accurately, that it was missing the importance of the site, color, ecology and belonging. Changing the title never happened; the search for a new title became more of an exercise to capture the essence of my work. Today I believe the title gives a fairly accurate description of my project as it appears in the colors of belonging exhibition. I do, however, think that the "re-" prefix in "re-constructing" in the sub-heading refers more to works I did before I started the program, where I was dealing with the painter's canvas as a main concept in my work. What has happened during the program is a shift from dealing with the medium of textiles and painting to the work being about, more precisely, the colorants and the information and content of a specific color. In the project description I talk about how these two themes in the two sub-headings will merge. I was not sure how that would happen, but I was pretty sure this would happen in some way. I did not envision using them together in a weaving, but this turned out to be one of my main research topics. Using both acrylic painted linen thread and plant-dyed wool mixes together two complicated color systems. The content of the color and these two color substances together formed the topic of my research. There is a conflict between these two color substances which has to do with natural and synthetic materials, social diversity, meetings between different groups, systems and ecology. These conflicts are actual and current social issues, which my work enters into a dialog with. Using acrylic paint with the plant dye strengthens this critical voice in the work, using only plant dye is idyllic and unrealistic. Synthetic materials, such as plastics, have become a part of nature, it is a fact that we have to deal with in reality.

Through this project it has become clear to me that my research is not about textiles, i.e. it is not textile research, it is artistic research about color. During the course of this project and the years that preceded it, I have had

a twisted relationship with textiles. My background is in textiles and I have always used textiles as a material and method to materialize my thoughts as a main method. I am well aware of the traditional role and history of textiles, but in my work I am not referring to this history, I am using textiles to explore other issues. I load the thread with information through the colorants I am working with. The silk and the thread is an armature to hold the color in place and make it visible, the textiles open up the dimension of the color. The structure of the weave has meaning in my work, but still serves the concept of color.

The installation aspect of my work has strengthened during the course of the program and the importance of the space itself has gained significance. Through the colors of belonging exhibition I discovered the spacial potential of the plant dyed silk by transferring the silk from the wall and into the exhibition space. This created a spacial dimension that had to do with experiencing the color in three dimension on a haptic and sensory level. The installation of the work in the space is a factor, which I elaborated on in these writings, but I do not find necessary to tackle in a historical context as a complex artistic field. It is clear that I will explore this further in future works. The response to the work in the space opened up to me a dimension, which had to do with the body and scale as well as a haptic experience, and these provide rich grounds to work on in the future. The difference in character and scale between the woven paintings and the plant dyed silk was an exercise in direction, focus and experience of the work, which I found was quite successful and was strengthened through the space they were exhibited in. In the colors of belonging exhibition I challenged the ability of color to mobilize information through subjective artistic systems.

Discussions about the importance of active reflection through the work and through different methods has contributed to the progress of my work. I have developed my own system for reflection, which is an addition to how I worked before. I have chosen to hand in the reflection on my work and process in a written form. The writing is a personal process guided by my own intuition and interest. I would have liked to linger on this approach much longer. It is sometimes difficult to read and write alongside making the work. During the program most of my time was spent making the work, weaving, picking the plants, exploring the land, making dye, dying wool and silk. There is a difference between reading and writing along the way and reading and writing to make a focused text. During the program I have vigorously collected information, spent hours online, read books and taken notes and written texts around seminars, presentations, tutorials and lectures. Many of those texts have contributed to this writing, but most of it has been written within the last few months and with the intention of producing a coherent

reflection on my work. In the end both type of readings and writing inform the work, the during and the after. I do not read only to write a text, I read and write to reflect and inform my work. The writing and reflecting influences the work I will make in the future. Initially, I envisioned this text to be more useful to others than myself, I think this has turned around. I almost want to say the text is, in the end, written for myself. In the process I have let myself travel freely through thoughts and followed them in various directions. These thoughts could have drifted into other directions as well. It is impossible to cover all the conceivable aspects, concepts and thoughts that spring to mind through this sort of reflection process. What appears in these writings is the tip of the iceberg, a selective and focused contemplation – other thoughts will be processed in the future.

## **Acknowledgements:**

Since starting the Artistic Research Program in the fall of 2012, I have had the good fortune of talking to experts in various fields. It is amazing to me how generous and willing people are to share their thoughts, knowledge and time in order to deepen my research and this I am grateful for. I must especially acknowledge: Hilde Hauan, Anne Katrine Dolven, Ólafur Sveinn Gíslason and Jóhannes Dagsson, who have all contributed significantly to my project in various ways.

Others are listed here in alphabetical order: Aashild Grana, Alice Creischer, Alistair Payne, Andreas Siqueland, Anne Helen Mydland, Ásthildur Magnúsdóttir, Bjarte Bjørkum, Brandon LaBelle, Brian Fitzgibbon, Carina Hedén, Cecilia Gelin, Didier Semin, Eamon O'Kane, Erna Elínbjörg Skúladóttir, Esther Leslie, Dimitri Thomas-Kommisarov, Duncan Higgins, Geir Harald Samuelson, Geir Tore Holm, Gerd Tinglum, Gerður Bjarnadóttir, Gunnar J. Árnason, Guðrún Bjarnadóttir, Guðfríður Helgadóttir, Hildigunnur Gunnarsdóttir, Ingrid Aarset, Janne Cruse, Jeremy Welsh, Jessica Hemmings, Jeannette Christensen, Johan Sandborg, Jon Pettersen, Jorunn Veiteberg, Kari Dyrdal, Kari Merete Paulsen, Kiyoshi Yamamoto, Linda Marie Westgaard, Lise Finne, Margrethe Kolstad Brekke, Mari Arree, Marie Skie, Marteinn Tausen, Mette Lorange, Michelle Teran, Olga Schmedling, Per Gunnar Eeg-Tverbakk, Signe Halle, Sigurður H. Magnússon, Søsja Jørgensen, Snæfríð Þorsteins, Steven Dixon, Tao Sambolek, Tone Saastad, Vernharður Gunnarsson, Yuka Oyama.

## **Photo credit**

Vigfús Birgisson  
Bjarte Bjørkum  
Øystein Thorvaldsen  
Hildur Bjarnadóttir  
Ólafur Sveinn Gíslason

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