

Finished with Bergen Arts and Crafts school in 1970 Sissel Blystad began to weave tapestries with stripes. The tapestries were so careful they appeared very daring. To weave tapestries where the composition consisted of horizontal bands of blue, red, yellow, purple, green and pink, what could this then mean? Of course the weaved stripes in tapestries do have reference to other, folk art, traditions, especially those on the Norwegian west coast, but this was something else, something different. Even if the tool was an ordinary flat loom, the weaving was a matter of picture-making: space, horizons, at home within our modern art concept.

Five years concentration on the small variational possibilities within field of craft is to create your own tradition. For those who perceive, such persistence can hold provocation. Even if the intention was not one of defiance, Sissel Blystad's minimalistic project is of consequence as part of the Bergen arts large renewal and progression, which was started by "Group 66" thirty years ago and reached its peak in the 70's. The Finnegård circle, the Lyn Group, Gallery 1, the West Norway Art Academy, the Artists' Centre and the free textile artists are catchwords, perceived as a continuous line of provocations by the established art society. This was after all, among many other things, the time for the liberation of the textile arts as a visual expression. With its challenges Bergen established itself as an alternative centre of Norwegian art and the Bergen textile artists soon were looked on as their own Bergen Group.

After the five years of horizontals Sissel Blystad's stripes began to slope and then a lot began to happen very quickly. A period of a figurative element passed as fast as lightning - approx. five tapestries - and a few with tufts (but none with tassels and ropes). The future path was clear for the weaved zigzag motive to come into its own with one dramatic movement after another. Luxurious coloured lightning strokes in both simple and organic twisted patterns evolved until a new motive appeared: the curl. It took the appearance of both scrolls and organic forms which resulted in a structured confusion. The order restored, then came the short chopped diagonals and slanted diamond epoch of two years duration (1990-1992).

In the approach to this exhibition in Bergens Kunstforening (Bergen Art Association) in the autumn of 1996 comes a series of compositions characterized by a large and complex hold - on an underlying heavily masked grid the individual areas are often variations on the same basic motive ("Memories", 1992, "Fiord", 1993, "Energy", 1994). Yet, even six to eight years ago Sissel Blystad weaved compositions of free forms inside a large compositional structure where the colours contributed to a deeper visual space. ("April", 1988 - property of Vestlandske Kunstindustrimuseum, "Landscape", 1990). They conclude in "Summer" (1995), and in compositors which are still, while I am writing

this, on their way from paper and data screen to finished design/drawing on the cartoons. They will be exciting to see on the walls of Bergens Kunstforening in September.

It is in the nature of the woven image to set restrictions on any improvisation or change in design after the warp is strung and the cartoon set up. The work is predestined with the only scope for choice in the subtle tones of colour even if the colour kettle stands simmering; the irrational factor is determined in the early stages of the process. This is how Sissel Blystad works.

All these factors: order, plan, clarity, design, repetition and variation should point to the tapestries being ornamental, indeed some critics have claimed so: that in large format they are a form of monumental decor. I do see essentially more in them; even if the compositions are built up on the repetition of small basic elements they are supported by an underlying experience, such as the horizon of a landscape, a space, or a condition in an inner sphere, perhaps signals of tension or excitement, an uneasiness, a sway of emotion or an expression of great happiness, fun, celebration! The tapestry is a picture of something - maybe beautiful, but too active to be pretty. Sissel Blystads tapestries are alive, they continue to disturb.

Translated by Gillian Carson