

Reflections on Weaving

by Adriana Donner

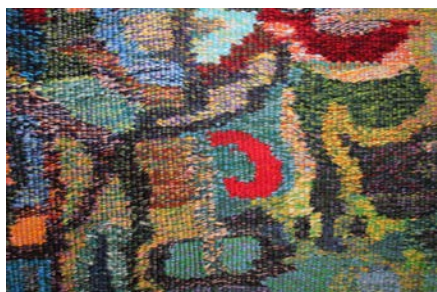


Muistiin Kudottu/Woven Notes [Because I could not hold your hands. . . O. Mandelstam],
1997, 220 cm x 200 cm, wool. Photo Credit: Ilkka Hietala.

Experience which deviates from the daily pattern may suddenly lead our thoughts in a totally new direction. This may happen when I have to move to a new environment, when a new child is born or when a close person passes away. These impulses are external. And they tend to arrive unexpectedly.

Writing and weaving seem to have much in common. The black notebook serves as a diary. It is a container of scattered observations, newspaper cuttings, small sketches, photographs, paper objects; the cover of an exotic cigarette box, a map, a concert program or a receipt that may become vital resources in the creative process. That's how I associate seemingly unrelated fragments of daily experience and thought.

I also have a dialogue relation to poetry and novels. Mandelstam, Chekhov, Makine and Brodsky are part of my own cultural heritage. The poets Edith Södergran, Bo Carpelan and Gösta Ågren are from the geographical environment where I grew up. Auster, Sebald, Pamuk and Pratt seem to be part of the immaterial luggage that I have collected while moving around from one place to another. This time it was Henry Miller who gave the momentum. Was it sheer chance or a juncture to some hidden geometry of life?



Pitka Punainen Vuosi/The Long Red Year
2001-2002, 270 cm x 235 cm, wool, cotton, linen, silk



Kuhmoniemen Paivakirja, 2001 Kuhmoniemi Diary, 2001
2001, 250 cm x 185 cm, wool, cotton, linen

"Writing, like life itself, is a voyage of discovery. The adventure is a metaphysical one: it is a way of approaching life indirectly, of acquiring a total rather than a partial view of the universe. The writer lives between the upper and lower worlds: he takes the path in order to eventually become that path himself." (Miller)

In reorganizing cosmos, I always have to begin on earth before I try reaching heaven. We first have to organize the earthly warp, before we can delve into the heavenly weft. Hard to explain the reason, but this is how every new exploration seems to start.

During work, the annual cycle pulsates as an iron stream following its own inevitable logic. The change is as slow as the work, and many bypassing details become woven into memory. The four seasons of Finland vary from the vibrantly flourishing colors of the summer to the clean, archaic forms of our winter. The darkness of the cold season continues during daytime. Although earth may seem dead, the nightly heaven is full of life and the gentle shadows slowly embrace the landscape from all sides. When the orbiting globe has reached the other extreme, it is again summertime and the landscape is full of light. And so are the bedrooms of sleepless weavers.

"I have no beginning and no ending, actually. Just as life begins at any moment, through an act of realization, so the work. But each beginning, whether of book, page, paragraph, sentence or phrase, marks a vital connection, and it is in the vitality, the durability, the timelessness and changelessness of the thoughts and events that I plunge anew each time."
(Miller)



Seiso in Rannalla / By the Waterfront (An interpretation of a poem by Bo Carpelain)
2011, 180 cm x 240 cm, wool, cotton, linen. Photo Credit: Ilkka Hietala.

Composition is the grammar that structures the story that I'm telling. The artist develops her own language. In addition to a number of recurring symbols, the vocabulary of a work may consist of poetic text fragments and signs of eastern writing systems. Color and pattern form ornaments of the surface layer. Being the source of all kinds of associations, they seem to pose their never-ending rhetorical questions to the artist and observer.

When the work is eventually completed, I'm full of energy to begin the next project, which long ago started to emerge in my mind. There is a higher level of continuity which may be hard to perceive: the ongoing tapestry is flowing into the next work, which develops and completes the story that the preceding work was telling.

"Like the spider I return again and again to the task, conscious that the web I am spinning is made of my own substance, that it will never fail me, never run dry." (Miller)

I'm weaving from the reverse side. The texture becomes a mirror of everyday experience. The upright, *haut-lisse* loom is more than two meters wide. There is something minimalistic in this creation process which advances only a centimeter each day, sometimes two. As life is full of offshoots and surprises, so is the textile. That is why tying together all aspects of the whole is so slow. Are we consuming our never ending passion and limited physical strength in trying to defy the forces of nature? Every weaver knows about the everlasting patience and worn joints. And so does the outsider, who is able to read the grim message of our hands.

"My charts and plans are the slenderest sort of guides: I scrap them at will, I invent, distort, deform, lie, inflate, exaggerate, confound and confuse as the mood seizes me. I obey only my own instincts and intuitions. I know nothing in advance. Often I put down things which I do not understand myself, secure in the knowledge that later they will become clear and meaningful to me." (Miller)

Our audience would like to learn about premeditated design. Unfortunately there is none. My sole plan consists of black sketchy lines on white paper. It is the loose thoughts which evolve in my mind that are most essential. Detail, form and composition find their explicit expressions during the ongoing work. Choices of form, color and mixture of yarns are matters which flow through my hands. They reflect and extend my thoughts. In a way I'm exploring a world that I couldn't yet see.



Surunauha/Ribbon of Sorrow (work in progress)
width 210 cm, wool, cotton, linen, silk

This spring my mother passed away. Disrupted life forced me to construct something new. During the past weeks I've been weaving her into the ongoing tapestry. As I was sorting out her belongings I found old letters and volumes of the Finnish literature magazine *Parnasso*. I took some issues from the 60s to have something to read in the train back home.

One of the magazines contained an essay on the essence of the author's work. Henry Miller's paper was called 'Reflections on Writing.' The article surprised me by unraveling a connection between the author's abundant thoughts and my own weaving. I made my first acquaintance with Miller's text when I was 18 years old. In this prolonged dialogue over past decades, his words had now become clear and meaningful to me. No wonder that I sometimes experience tapestry as a visual paraphrase of written text.

All quotes are from: Henry Miller: 'Mietteitä kirjailijantyöstä', *Parnasso* 4/1963 s. 151-156. Translated from 'Wisdom of the Heart', New Directions 1941.

Adriana Donner (Finnish)

