

NORWEGIAN TEXTILE LETTER

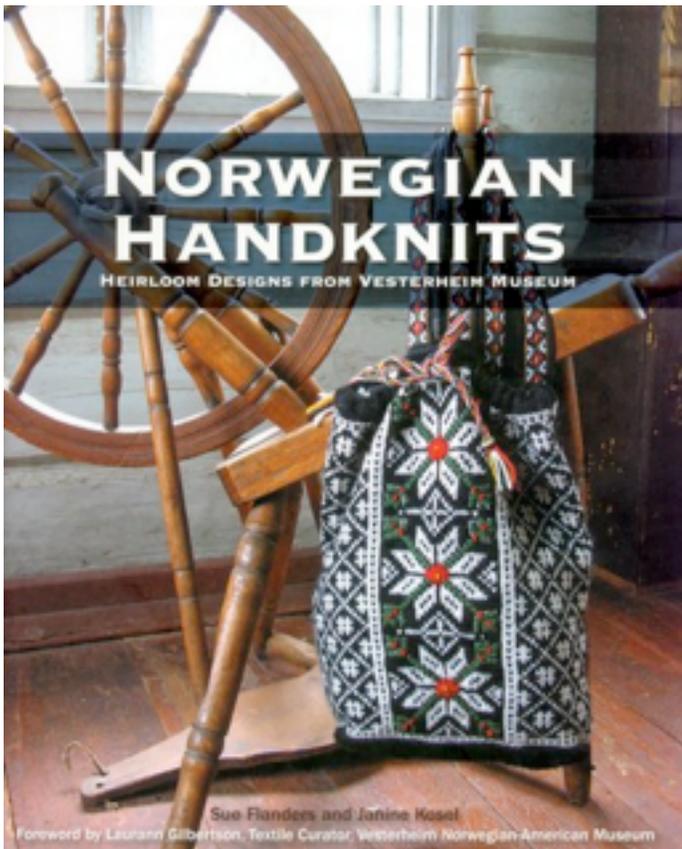
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NORWEGIAN HANDKNITS: HEIRLOOM DESIGNS FROM VESTERHEIM MUSEUM by Sue Flanders and Janine Kosel (Voyageur Press 2009)

REVIEWED BY MARY SKOY WITH PERMISSION FROM VOYAGEUR PRESS AND VESTERHEIM MUSEUM

In her foreword to *Norwegian Handknits: Heirloom Designs from Vesterheim Museum*, Laurann Gilbertson, Vesterheim's Chief Curator, uses the Norwegian word *flink* to describe the book's authors, Sue Flanders and Janine Kosel. Gilbertson defines *flink* as "adroit, clever, creative, ingenious, skillful, resourceful, and gifted" (7). These words also describe this lively and informative collection of new designs for knitting and embellishment.



Mother and daughter on the road, Rauland, Telemark, Norway, 1890s GAUSTA COLLECTION VESTERHEIM ARCHIVE (71)

The book begins with a short history of Vesterheim and of Norwegian and Norwegian-American knitting. The introduction includes a beautiful picture of Seed Savers, the heirloom seed farm near Decorah. The authors realized that their work—preserving tradition and nurturing new designs from old—paralleled the Seed Saver mission. Throughout the book are nineteenth and early twentieth century photographs of people engaged in textile-related activities.

Readers who have visited Vesterheim will recognize many of the artifacts that inspired the authors. The Selbu star on a pair of mittens becomes the main motif on the knapsack seen on the book's cover, at left. Traditional leather waist pouches inspired a messenger bag. The red and black entrelac knee socks on display at the museum inspired patterns for a pair of Entrelac Wristers and cute Entrelac Sheep. The authors have included old and newer embellishment techniques—embroidery, felting, and pile

shag as well as needle felting and beaded knitting (28) and instructions for applied I-cord, twisted cord, and the Japanese braid, *kumihimo*. The instructions for the more than 34 projects are clearly explained with stitch by stitch graphs and beautiful, detailed photographs of both the museum piece and the new piece.

Here's an example. The mittens below, from Vesterheim's collection, were brought from Hallingdal to the U.S. in about 1875.

These mittens provided the inspiration for the needle felted motif on the Rosemaled Shag Bag shown top right. As the authors state: "The idea of adding shag around the



top rim of the bag came from a pair of gloves that were most likely made in the early twentieth century in Numedal, Buskerud County, Norway. The familiar rosemaled motif was inspired by the embroidery on a pair of mittens that featured four similar motifs" (39).



Detail of needle felting on the "Shag Bag" (41)



Rosemaled Shag Bag (39)



The knee sock at left from Vesterheim's collection inspired the pattern for Cross-Country Ski Socks (50-55). As with the other patterns in the book, the directions are carefully written and the charts are clear.



Cross Country Ski Socks

Laurann Gilbertson says that "[Sue and Janine's] joyful designs honor and celebrate history, tradition, and needleworkers" (7). This is well deserved high praise for this very good book.

A GALLERY OF PROJECTS FROM THE NORWEGIAN TEXTILE GUILD



In response to Sue Flanders and Janine Kosel's book *Norwegian Handknits: Heirloom Designs from Vesterheim Museum*, Norwegian Textile Guild members were asked to submit photos of pieces they have created and to tell about what inspired the piece.

**WHAT FOLLOWS IS A SAMPLING OF THE BEAUTIFUL WORK
PRODUCED BY OUR MEMBERS.**



SUSAN KOLSTAD's hand knit "knucks," inspired by gloves from Vesterheim



Kitchen towel 37"x24" point twill by Gayle Bingham



Rya Runner 78"x19" goose eye twill by Gayle Bingham



Close up of gloves and socks from Vesterheim's archives—inspiration for Susan Kolstad's contemporary versions



Kitchen rug 55"x35" point twill by Gayle Bingham



SUSAN KOLSTAD's hand knit "Pinhead People" socks inspired by socks from Vesterheim's collection

The rya runner, used on a chair, is of Tencel and the towel is of rayon chenille with a tencel warp. Both are to be used by my cat, Frija, because she is allergic to cotton. The rya rug is of cotton for my kitchen floor.

GAYLE BINGHAM

A GALLERY OF PROJECTS FROM THE NORWEGIAN TEXTILE GUILD



“Summer on the Laramie Plains” by Larry Schmitt

This piece of upholstery fabric was woven in “double warp technique” as described by Emelie Von Walterstorff in *Textilt Bildwerk*, 1925, Nordiska Museet (published the same year in English as *Swedish Textiles*).

In this piece, woven bands 2 and 3 cm wide are hand sewn together—approximately 43 x 81cm overall—in the manner sometimes seen in Scandinavia. The text is taken from the poem “Amerikansk September” by A. M. Wergeland. I

wanted to give voice to an American text.

Both of my parents were weavers, and their guidance long ago was pivotal, this many years later, to my approach to double warp technique. The literary research and weaving was completed—off and on—during 2010, with last bits of assembly in January 2011. **LARRY SCHMITT**



This rya was woven in 2008 as part of the Rya Study Group. All wool is Oleana mill ends. The warp is striped and woven as a plaid. The draft is a goose-eye twill from Betty Johannesen, with rya knots showing on the smooth side in a color-assigned pattern.

**JUDY NESS
RYA AND
DRAFT**

VossRya File: VOSSRYA.DES
Rnda 1-76 Picks 1-33 4 Shafts DRAWDOWN



Cathy Forgit's wall hanging 11"x15 1/2"
“The Old Pattern”

Here is my version of “The Old Pattern” (see *NTL* August 2010). I used Rauma tapestry yarns from previous projects purchased from Syvilla Tweed Bolton several years ago.

**CATHY
FORGIT**

A MINIATURE COVERLET BY WENDY STEVENS

In the summer of 2001, our Oneota Weavers Guild in Decorah, IA, was reproducing a christening blanket that had been done in single-interlock tapestry technique. We were weaving on Vesterheim's 1898 counterbalance loom. I was originally taken aback with the bold red, white, blue, and yellow diamond pattern. Being familiar with the faded tapestries in the museum, I had no idea Norwegians in the late 1700s would have chosen such vivid colors. But Lila Nelson, previous textile curator of Vesterheim, assured me that these were indeed the correct hues. As I worked with those bright yarns, I fell in love with the colors and the pattern. I decided this would be a perfect project for my small scale, small format tapestry. The equipment and materials are basic: a frame loom made of copper tubing, nylon upholstery thread for warp, two strands of embroidery floss for weft, and tapestry needles for guiding the weft.

The original christening blanket tapestry is 6 ends per inch (epi), woven in single-ply, hand-dyed wool. My tapestry is proportionally smaller; it has an epi of 26 and is woven with two strands of embroidery floss. I took samples of the yarns to choose embroidery floss, and when I couldn't get the exact match, I blended two shades. For example, the white is actually one strand of white floss and one strand of ivory.

One challenging aspect of weaving was maintaining equal spacing of the warp. There is no reed or other mechanism for spacing warp on the copper tubing frame loom, and some warp ends tended to spread. In other places the warp pulled together. The warp is continuously wound onto the frame, and I suspect that the tension in various areas of the warp across the weaving varied slightly. Achieving straight side edges and uniform width of the piece was another challenge. I pulled the edge warp ends toward the lateral edges of the frame and tied them to angle out slightly; as I wove, that warp position counteracted pulling in of the weft while maintaining proper tension in the turn of the weft at the edge of the piece. Finishing the weaving varied slightly from the original. The nylon upholstery thread I used for warp was not suitable for fringe, so I used a four-strand braiding technique of the warp across the bottom and top selvages to get a relatively smooth edge, hiding the loose warp ends on the back.

The final piece measures 8 x 12 inches. The picture was taken at Vesterheim's National Exhibition of Folk-Art in the Norwegian Tradition, 2009. If you do the math, you will discover that my piece was eight years in the making. During some months I made excellent progress; my teaching schedule, however, produced entire semesters of no weaving at all. A few periods of not knowing how to proceed were definitely part of the learning curve. But overall the process was enjoyable and very satisfying. I have started another reproduction of a different museum rutevev in small scale, small format – still intrigued by those tiny “stitches.”

WENDY STEVENS



Wendy Stevens' miniature christening blanket 8"x12" inspired by the christening blanket in Vesterheim's collection below



Rutevev coverlet used as a christening blanket, Nordfjord, Norway, ca. 1850. Vesterheim 1980.



A GALLERY OF PROJECTS FROM THE NORWEGIAN TEXTILE GUILD



Rosemary Roehl's "Best of Show" table runner inspired by the family heirloom below



Kristine Vanberg's lightning and rosepath weaving



Rosemary Roehl, woven bands and apron on bunad, holding rutevev

I first visited my ancestral farm near Olden on the Nordfjord in 1978. My great-grandfather left there in about 1876. The homes of my relatives were full of weavings and there was a large loom in one house. That is when I decided to learn how to weave. I am a self-taught weaver and earned my Vesterheim Gold Medal in Weaving in 1992.

When we visited the farm in 1985 I gave Kristine Vanberg a hand knit shawl. At the time, she was elderly and blind. Wanting to give me a gift, she took a weaving off the chair she was sitting in. It was the small weaving with rose path and lightening designs pictured at left.

Because I am a weaver I was able to weave the bands and apron for my Nordfjord bunad. I am pictured holding a small weaving I was commissioned to do for the recent 100th anniversary of the Bydelag for the Nordfjord. The colors are similar to those used by Kristine Vanberg and in my bunad apron. The weaving was influenced by old weavings found on the West Coast of Norway.

ROSEMARY ROEHL

I was part of a group who traveled to Gjørvik, Norway to make a skinnfell with instructor Britt Solheim in June 2010.

After sewing together four Norsk Spelsau skins, I chose from dozens of wooden printing blocks to decorate the leather side of the skinnfell. Each block is a traditional and personal symbol. Starting at the bottom of my skinnfell, these are the symbols I chose:

The DRAGON IN

THE HEART SHAPE is a motif from Viking times. Next, WATER IN THE WAVES. Norway has a strong marine history and the diamond shape represents the mountains of the West Coast where my grandfather came from.

In the lower right corner are NORWEGIAN DANCERS. The FISH SYMBOL is a Christian sign and also represents the wonderful variety of seafood in Norway. The other symbol is Sami representing THE SUN TRAVELING ACROSS THE DAY.

The HORSE represents the fjord horse and the Icelandic horse.

To the left of the horse is a CELTIC-LIKE KNOT IN THE SHAPE OF A HEART. It represents how the Vikings explored and settled in the British Isles and Normandy, France; and, I believe, made it to Kensington, Minnesota and many places we will never know.

The center of the skinnfell has a Viking-Celtic motif, the very center representing the SUN WITH A CIRCLE OF HEARTS around the sun. The CROWN represents the monarchy of Norway.

The oblong design represented the VIKING LONGBOATS for me.

Across the top, I printed A DOVE WITH THE OLIVE BRANCH, representing the Nobel Peace Prize. I have discovered the Nobel Peace Prize Forum, sponsored by the 5 Norwegian colleges in the upper Midwest as a wonderful opportunity to hear past Nobel peace laureates.

The middle symbol represents SNOW, WINTER, AND SKIING which the Norwegians have shared with us.

The DRAGONFLY is my transition symbol representing a non-profit begun at my church by a young girl to remind us all that even as death takes our loved ones from us, they are in a new form and still with us, maybe landing on our hand or shoulder.

KAREN WEIBERG



Karen Weiberg with her Skinnfell, 47"x64,"with Lake Mjosa in the background

Just so you know I am 3/4th Norwegian heritage. I have also prepared and presented a PowerPoint presentation on our class to groups interested in Norwegian culture and heritage. I am available to do presentations for a small stipend. Karen Weiberg



MARION MARZOLF's vadmél jacket woven and constructed in 2008, using traditional techniques

Marion Marzolf's jacket, inspired by traditional vadmél fabric, was made at the *Refashioning Vadmél: a Weaving and Design Workshop* in Telemark, Norway led by Carol Colburn in 2008. According to the website web.me.com/carolcolburn "the workshop seeks to revitalize traditional Norwegian weaving and fulling techniques and promote the continued breeding and husbandry of spelsau sheep...Participants weave, cut, and shape vadmél using traditional methods of production, fashioning their cloth into distinctive contemporary garments. [which]celebrate the adaptability of handwoven cloth."



Close up of LILA NELSON's card woven sash, inspired by the costumes from Norway's Telemark region

In the early 1970s I was attempting to learn and then introduce traditional rural Norwegian weaving through Vesterheim. The lovely belts for traditional women's costumes in Telemark, card woven of very fine and richly colored wool, totally intimidated me, so I decided to start by using a heavier wool and the back beam of my floor loom for tensioning. After weaving the sample, shown above, I had the courage to order the lovely, fine (and expensive!) Telemark wool that is used for the belts for the costumes even today.

LILA NELSON



**"Mateus am I and Hakon's son who smote thee thus with the sword."
Counted cross-stitch 21"x9" by Marianne Vigander**

My story is easy. I thought to do a cross-stitch for my son Hakon after his father, Svein, died. And I was determined to keep an accurate recording of the number of hours it took to complete. So in 1991, I began this piece from the book *Scandinavian Folk Patterns for Counted Thread Embroidery*.

I had to choose the colors for the sky, lakes, grass and lettering background—none were provided. Then somehow, or other, it was 2009!!! So I decided to make the work for my new grandson, Mateus Svein, so his name and his father's name were substituted in the text, as well as *Farmor*, father's mother, which is what Mateus calls me. The text is from the old "Poetic Edda" set down around A.D. 1000 in which courageous and honest Sigurth, son of Sigmund, bravely slays the dragon. I showed the final product to a Danish friend. Naturally she immediately turned it over. After a few moments, she looked at me and said "my mother would be proud of you." I really cannot think of a higher compliment.

The piece is counted cross-stitch worked in DMC floss, two strands with 14 stitches to the inch. AND it took me 375 actual working hours to complete.

MARIANNE VIGANDER



Ellen Willson's runner from handspun Spelsau sheep 17.5" x26.5"

At left is a runner I spun and wove from the Spelsau sheep on my Norwegian "family's" farm. I was very fortunate to spend a college year (many years ago) in Norway and luckier still to spend the summer living on Kruke in Heidal in Gudbrandsdalen Norway. The buildings on the farm have sod roofs and many are centuries old. It is very picturesque sitting on a hillside overlooking a fast moving river which splits the valley, and in the distance are snowcaps. A few years ago, I went back to visit and show my husband this paradise. I was given some fleece from the farm. When I got back to Michigan, I sorted the fleece for color and found enough light tan to contrast with the

mostly medium brown. I spun a 2 ply yarn and wove 2 rosepath runners with various patterns on a linen warp. One of the runners I mailed to Kruke just in time to celebrate May 17th. The other runner, in the photo above, is a wonderful reminder for me.

ELLEN WILLSON

CHRISTINE SPANGLER'S TC-1 HAND-WOVEN HANGINGS



Bestemor's Aakle 27"x 39"



Coverlet landscape 26"x 37"

Here are three Norwegian-inspired pieces all woven on the TC-1. [ed. note: TC-1 is a computer-driven Thread Controller loom which has jacquard-type pattern possibilities (each individual thread can be manipulated separately), and is designed and produced in Norway].

- *Bestemor's Aakle* (Grandmother's Coverlet) is inspired from a picture in Katherine Larson's book, *Norwegian Coverlets*. The design was manipulated to look like it was rumpled, but the piece is flat. The colors are also changed from Larson's book. It was woven in samitum, and was purchased by Gerhardt Knodel, Dean of Cranbrook School of Art in Michigan.

- *Coverlet landscape* had its origin in another piece from Larson. In this case I used only the outline of the blocks that had originally been woven in an interlock tapestry technique. This one is double weave and the color gradations are meant to depict a mountain and valley landscape.

- *Sor Tronderlag* is inspired by a double weave in the Norwegian Folk Museum in Oslo. I have also used this design in a damask technique for a shawl, but this one is in doubleweave.

CHRIS SPANGLER



Sor Tronderlag 26"x 26"

BAPTISMAL NAPKINS BY NANCY JACKSON

[I embroider on] heritage fabrics, that is, old and beautiful fabric I've found or been given. Old hankies are especially nice and soft, since they sometimes have beautiful handwork already on the edges. All stitching has been done with DMC cotton embroidery floss using anywhere from 1 strand to 4 strands in the needle, depending on what I'm trying to accomplish in the image. You may have noticed that I often use the Celtic Knot as a symbol for the Trinity. I use other symbols too, but I like that one best for these napkins.

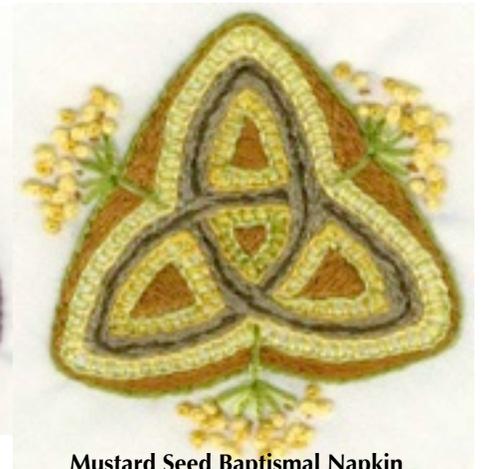
My inspiration came from two men, not a textile.

A young but mature man began to attend our church intermittently some years ago. He was a friend of a man in our church who was a member. Both of these men had lived their lives on the edge, including experiences with drugs and prison. Our member's friend attended church on holidays only. After quite a while, he began talking about being baptized. I was inspired to embroider a baptismal napkin for him, which I called "The Leather & Chains Baptismal Napkin," shown at right. Since then, I have embroidered many baptismal napkins inspired by different people, cultures and sometimes by nature.

NANCY JACKSON



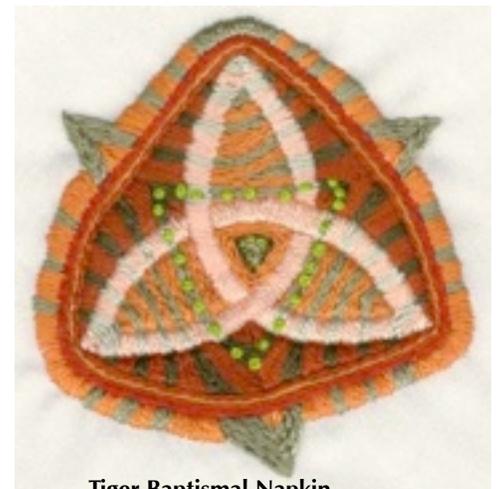
Kuba Kings Baptismal Napkin



Mustard Seed Baptismal Napkin



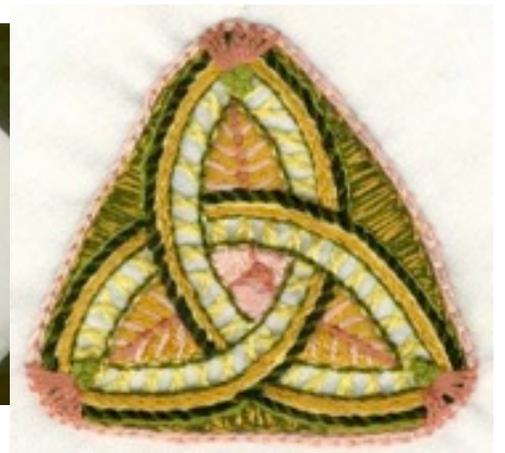
Laotian Baptismal Napkin



Tiger Baptismal Napkin



Leather & Chains Baptismal Napkin
full size, approximately 5x5" when folded



Virginia Woolf's Baptismal Napkin

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Crocus inspired table mat 36 cm x 33 cm

INGEBJØRG MONSEN'S HOMAGE TO SPRING

Spring 2011 was a cold one in Minnesota. Ingebjørg hoped that this project would "raise your mind to the spring season coming up."



Norske krokus



Detail of table mat (*Lunsjbrikke* in Norwegian)—"false" double weave on four shafts



Weft yarns were combined to duplicate colors in photograph.

DOBBELTVEV PÅ ENKEL RENNING/ DOUBLE WEAVE ON A SIMPLE WARP

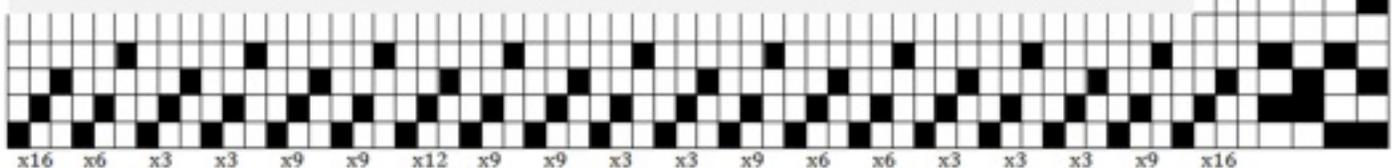
The warp is a Cotton/Linen blend (60/40) 22/2 (6400 m/kg), distributed as outlined below. (We always try to inspire people to make their own distribution of warp threads!) (412 threads)

The weft thread is made by combining leftovers and new yarn of cottolin, linen, and/or cotton. Variation in the threads is here making an extra and positive effect.

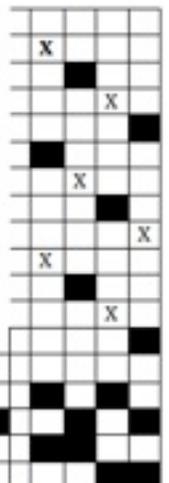
Your inspiration will tell you what colours to combine to create the weft yarn.

Wind all threads for the weft yarn simultaneously on a warping mill, making as many turns as possible/ necessary, and then wind the combined threads onto a rug shuttle.

Reed: 50-10 (1-2) (=> 10 tr/cm) Width: 41 cm



Warp tread distribution by Elsa Mowinckel. Weft inspiration by Ingebjørg Monsen





THE STORY OF MY VERY WARM URNES COAT

BY EDI THORSTENSSON



Woodcarvings on the stave church at Urnes in Sogn inspired the painting on the back of Edi's jacket.

Jacket made from a wool fleece batting by Edi Thorstenson

The batting had been made from a Lincoln fleece, washed, carded, and covered with cheesecloth. For years, it filled a tied comforter that kept my son Martin warm during winter nights when the Jøtul wood stove in our rural Minnesota home had gone out, and cold filled the house. The long-staple fleece was never meant for that purpose, however, and, over time, its fibers worked their way through the fabric cover, rendering the comforter too scratchy for use, even inside a duvet. Martin went off to college with polyester blankets.

Years later, I took the old comforter out of the closet, cut out the ties, and stripped off the fabric. Inside, the fleece batting was intertwined with its cheesecloth shell, matted and felted into a beautiful landscape. I saw in it a reminder of my practical ancestors and the possibilities of re-use. To stabilize the fabric, I wet-felted the fleece as a whole, finishing the process on the kitchen table using a lèse

rolling pin. Once it had dried, I cut it for shaping and stitching. I chose to make a loose, warm, short-armed coat to wear over hand knit sweaters, using every inch of the felted wool. Nothing went to waste.

The finished product has a closure made from Icelandic sheep bones, coral, a walrus ivory disk (from a visit made to Tromsø, Norway in 1961), and a silver ornament from India.

In memory and honor of my family's origins in Urnes in Sogn, I used my own version of a gripping beast carved on the Urnes stave church's well-known wood panels as the motif to paint on the back of my coat. The beast on my coat, however, is not locked in combat with the forces of evil, nor does it symbolize the end of the world. To me, it symbolizes the power of nature and history in a beautiful place to which I am connected. **EDI THORSTENSSON**



Ben Blessum, Bride of Setesdalen, Setesdal, 1920s. Oil on canvas. Vesterheim 1994.084.002 and .003 – Gift of J. Harry and Josefa Andersen in honor of Marion and Lila Nelson.

In the November 2010 and February 2011 issues of the *NTL*, we met Ben Blessum, a Norwegian-born artist who lived in Chicago. He made several trips to Setesdal, Norway, to paint landscapes, farmyards, and interior scenes.

“Bride of Setesdalen” shows the many extra layers that were worn when a woman married. In addition to her usual white underskirt with black bands and black skirt with red and green bands, she is wearing a red skirt with rows of silver bobbin lace. The jacket is also trimmed with silver lace. There are two silk scarves over a white linen apron and then several more layers of silver and gold-plated jewelry. Her red wool headdress is also covered with silver and gold-plated ornaments. She has gotten dressed at home and in the background we can see a handwoven coverlet done in *rutevev* or geometric tapestry. In Setesdal these coverlets often had side borders which were not present on *rutevev* coverlets woven on the west coast of Norway. – LAURANN GILBERTSON

For more on Setesdal textile traditions:
 Katherine Larson, *The Woven Coverlets of Norway* (2001)
 Åse Emilie Øy, *Åkletradisjonen i Åmli* (1993)
 Aagot Noss, *Stakklede i Setesdal* (2008)
 Valle Bygdekvinneleg, *Rette klede i Setesdal: Fra vogge til grav* (1999)
 Annemor Sundbø, *Setesdal Sweaters: The History of the Norwegian Lice Pattern* (2001)

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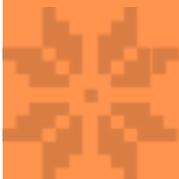
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The Norwegian Textile Letter is published quarterly—November, February, May and August—by and for members of the Norwegian Textile Guild.

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