

NORWEGIAN TEXTILE LETTER

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Vesterheim's Norwegian-American Museum's 2007 Textile Study Tour to Norway and Sweden Part I - Norway

by Lila Nelson

OF JOURNEYING, THE BENEFITS ARE MANY: THE FRESHNESS IT BRINGETH TO THE HEART, THE SEEING AND HEARING OF MARVELOUS THINGS, THE DELIGHT OF BEHOLDING NEW CITIES, THE MEETING OF UNKNOWN FRIENDS, THE LEARNING OF HIGH MANNERS.

_Sadi 1184-1291 A.D. Persian

Our 2007 Textile Study Tour to Norway and Sweden did indeed provide the above satisfactions (with the possible exception of learning high manners, since I truly believe we comported ourselves admirably from the start).

The idea of a Norway-Sweden tour was a natural continuation of Vesterheim's October, 2005-February, 2006 exhibit, *A Common Thread: Weaving Traditions of Norway and Sweden*. Guest curator of that exhibit Kay Larson (author of *The Woven Coverlets of Norway*, published in 2001), and Laurann Gilbertson, Vesterheim's Curator of Textiles, had already made basic plans prior to the exhibit, and they proceeded to meet with Ingebjørg Monsen of Morvik in March of 2006. (Your May 2006 Norwegian Textile Newsletter gave a tempting report on that wintry excursion.) The advance descriptions of the tour were so enticing that 21 registrants signed up the first three days after its announcement with the last 6 openings filled in the following three weeks.

Thanks to Brekke Travel and Laurann, most of our questions and concerns were addressed and answered, including how to deal with the knitting needles, crochet hooks, scissors, or other items viewed suspiciously by airport security. A personal discovery I made was the practicality of rolling up wearing apparel into tight individual balls; and then I learned that this has long been standard practice for back packers.

Finally, around 12:00 noon on June 21, about ten of our total group were taxiing down the runway at Minneapolis' Lindbergh Airport in various stages of excitement, tension, and positive expectations. The city with its string of lakes, green areas, and car-filled roads gave way to neat squares of townships and farms; and then we were above the clouds. In the United Airlines flight magazine, I read, "Akinawans have the only documented society in which women are divine priestesses, which for reasons not fully understood, lowers stress and increases life expectancy."

And I think, "But of course!"

A brief and uneventful trip and a successful transfer to SAS in Chicago found everyone on schedule though not seated as a group. Our route took us north toward Greenland and touching the southern edge of Iceland; and we arrived in Stockholm on schedule, changing to a smaller SAS plane to Oslo. There the entire group assembled for the first time (with all baggage mercifully in hand) and were led to the bus which took us north along Lake Mitsu to Lillehammer and the Rica Victoria Hotel, our first stop.

Forewarned of hefty food and drink prices, many of us located nearby shops and bought up such edibles as crackers, cheeses, and fruits to serve for midday meals while classes were in session.

After a typical smorgasbord at the hotel (salads, meats, boiled potatoes, vegetables, breads, sauces, and fromages) we met in one of the classrooms to see slides of the innovative work of Kristin Lindberg, who will be teaching exploration in contemporary variations on traditional tapestry weaving techniques.

On Saturday, June 23, after a standard Norwegian breakfast (meats, fishes, eggs, cheeses, breads, sliced fresh fruits, fruit sauces, fresh sliced vegetables, cereals, waffles, milk, coffee, etc.) classes began in meeting rooms at the Rica Victoria.

Classes were:

Room 101 Art Tapestry/Kunstveving
Kristin Lindberg
Room 103 Bandweaving/Bandveving
Anne Grete Stuksrud
Room 104 Voided-Pile Weave/Halvfloss
Ingebjørg Monsen

In the late morning, I entered each to request that a class member write up their class experience for this newsletter. In each room, students had the absorbed, expectant, slightly tense air familiar to all of us as classes begin. I exited quietly as soon as my requests were granted. (Glenn Skoy and Lee Sexton, two non-weaver husbands on the tour, also agreed to report on their adventures while classes were in session.)

At 2:45 p.m., classes ceased to recognize Midsummer and the annual lively countryside welcome to the return of the sun. Sadly, the weather was sullen and uncooperative. It was dark, drizzly and sometimes downright wet, making the usual picnics, bonfires, lighted boats on the rivers, and general hilarity conspicuously absent. However, we were given a fine tour of the modern museum building at Maihaugen by Kirsti Krekling with Ingebjørg Monsen standing by as interpreter as needed. Kay Larson gave an enlightening and absorbing explanation for the varied styles and motifs

on pillow covers, bench covers, and similar objects in tapestry weaving, objects smaller than the professionally executed bed covers and wall hangings and done by more adept farm women. Often the smaller pieces were based on sections of the larger objects. The skybragd or stylized pomegranate pattern was unique to Norway, a demanding motif which had been woven in several variations. The other many motifs and shapes included diamonds, hearts in halvflossa, cross-like designs in flossa and halvflossa, tree of life variations, the eight pointed star, and others. A rapt audience asked many questions.

A soft but steady rain did not inhibit some tour members from visiting much of Maihaugen's impressive outdoor collection, which includes many original log farm buildings from the area as well as an altered stave church. But the weather did seem to cancel most of the usual midsummer's night revelry.

Sunday was a quiet day and ideal for continued classes. I walked past the stately church that dominates the street en route to Maihaugen, through the large cemetery surrounding the back and one side of the building, and the inviting park leading up to the street. A number of people, including several women wearing the festive dress of the area, were entering the church for Sunday services. A church has graced the location since 1577, but the present building is a 1959 restoration of an 1882 edifice. Students worked through the day and into the evening: concentrated, challenged, and showing definite progress.

Already in the early stages of the tour, people began to be aware of how fortunate they were in the compilation provided for them by Vesterheim and the Tour Leaders of selected readings and a word list of both Norwegian/English and Swedish/English. The following articles, presented in full, were invaluable in adding to an understanding and appreciation of what we were experiencing:

A Common Thread. Weaving Traditions of Norway and Sweden.
Katherine Larson.

Gudbrandsdalen. About the Herod Tapestry of 1613 from Sjøk. Roar Hauglid, translated by Eva Hovde Douthit.

Nord-Østerdalen. Ein Tekstilskatt i Nord-Østerdalen. Torbjørg Gauslaa. English summary by Ingrid K. Hanssen.

Sør-Trøndelag and Trondheim. Primitive Norwegian Sheep. Amy Lightfoot. The Story of a Woolen Sail. Amy Lightfoot. Meråkervev, A Woven Technique Rich in Tradition. Author unknown. Translated by Christine Spangler. Weaving Bewitchment. Gerhard Munthe's Folk-Tale Tapestries. Laurann Gilbertson and Kathleen Stokker.

Knitting in Norway and Sweden. The History of Knitting in Norway. Jody Grage Haug. Tvåändsstickning: Sweden's Two-End Knitting. Nancy Bush.

Word Lists. Norwegian/Swedish/ English.

Monday, June 25, included a long final day of classes, followed by a 3:00 p.m. closure. Works were then exhibited on tables in one of the classrooms for discussion, well-deserved congratulations, and photography. Diplomas were formally presented at the baked salmon dinner which followed, ending with a slide talk about Norwegian weaver Synnove Aurdal, whose work we were to see in Trondheim.

Tuesday, June 26

Gudbrandsdal Valley, through which we travel north, must be one of the most dramatic and lovely anywhere. The road seems chopped apologetically out of rocks and trees, as minimal an intrusion as possible and seeming in constant immediate possibility of being buried again. Farmsteads are clinging flattened against the steep slopes with no obvious route for either animals or humans. Aspens, birch, and evergreens line the slopes to the river far below. Train tracks follow the river on its western side. One can see why King Haakon and his family avoided capture by German armies in World War II by escaping via Gudbrandsdal Valley.

The rationale for bridge barns becomes apparent here. They are built on the natural hillsides with the hill providing a "bridge" into the upper level of the barn for hay storage. The lower entrance on the bottom of the hill is for the animals in their first floor area.

We climb on Rondane mountains above tree level to see patches of snow, some scrub growth, and the thatched roofs of small seter houses. There are trailer parks near the edge of the tree line. A lone farmer watches his scattered flock of sheep. Lichens provide some food for reindeer. We are told that in summer the sheep are now driven to the high areas in trucks. Flocks are marked for identity and sheep dogs help to gather them in the fall. Owners come occasionally to supply salt blocks and check on the flocks. After a brief lunch stop at Atmosjo Kafé, which offers a grand mountain view, we head down through rolling hills to Tynset and the Nord-Osterdalsmuseet, where we are shown an exhibit of the area's specialty, bands woven on a bandgrind and used in a great variety of ways. Some are fairly substantial swaddling bands used for children up to age one. Others are sewn together to produce cushions, bench covers, and table pieces. Our guide, wearing the regional bunad with its long jacket, split into sections below the fitted waist, was especially impressive in explaining and demonstrating the way various bands were made and joined. The visit concluded with treats from the area: delicate lefse served with a sweet layer and geitost (goat cheese), and very thin pastry squares joined with a spread of butter and syrup.

On the road to Røros we pass green meadows, some sheep farms, and then forests, arriving around 5:00 at the Rica Bergstadens Hotel. There is time before the late dinner to walk several uphill streets and to discover why Røros is on UNESCO's World Heritage List. Once a copper mining area, it has retained its narrow streets and rough stone walks bordered by totally connected buildings: flat fronts of vertical sidings with some of the original log structures. We were told that the town was fortunately not destroyed during World War II, unlike much of north Norway, and that a concerted community effort helped retain the unaltered character of the town. It also contained an especially well stocked husflid.

Wednesday, June 27

A visit to the Røros-Tweed factory on the edge of town revealed the mechanized steps involved in producing their blankets, from warping a loom, weaving, checking and correcting errors, washing, dyeing, fluffing, and final drying. A separate machine produced twisted fringes which were added to some blankets when they were cut apart. At the conclusion of this interesting tour, and the obligatory stop in the shop, we each were given a soft 17 inch wool square with a label identifying it as a

memento of our tour. This imaginative substitute for the usual carry-all bag is now serving me as a soothing pad on the seat of my weaving bench.

We continue north to Trondheim, enjoying the warm sun but cool dry air. Wooded areas are broken by mountain streams or a small town near the highway, only to be overtaken by forests again. Occasional cows and sheep dot the hillsides. We descend following the mountain stream and then cross it on a narrow bridge, which our bus driver miraculously navigates. Steep hillsides show evidence of previous snow slides. Salmon fishing is beginning, and we learn that people whose land adjoins the stream can give or deny fishing privileges. A few houses cling to the steep hills in precarious isolation, surrounded by heavy forests. We cross the mountain stream again, seeing more small farms and clusters of houses. A surprisingly flat area is shared by a group of farmers where both hay and garden foods are produced. We enter Trondheim, a city 1010 years old, to spend three nights at the SAS Royal Garden Hotel. Dinner at the hotel is followed by Anna Grete Sandstad's absorbing slide lecture on the project in which, from 1998 to 2000, she helped register more than 6,000 coverlets in Sør-Trøndelag.

Thursday, June 28, included a bus ride to Åsen to visit the Meråkervev double weaver Else Torkildsen. The Meraker area has specialized in the type of double weave given its name, a system with two layers in which one is picked up to give clear sharp edges to the designs, the "wrong" side a rather fuzzy edged duplicate of the image. This was followed by a visit to the impressive Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum (Trondheim's applied arts museum) where a guided tour introduced us to weavings based on the painter Gerhard Munthe's works, 14 large tapestries from the hand of Hannah Ryggen, and the individual style of Synnøve Anker Aurdal. Each of these are too major to say more here than that they are key figures in Norway's tapestry world. Free time in the afternoon gave us endless options in this historical city. Pam Davis and I wandered into the university's archaeological center, where we discovered a pre Viking age warp weighted loom in an ignored corner of an upstairs room. Some modern tapestry weaving had been done on it, but no one knew or seemed to care about the object, which had decoratively carved elements and was generally attractive.

On Friday, June 29, we were gently but firmly impressed with the importance of making the ferry on time (and we did) in order to reach Stadsbygd and a farm, which our

host Axel Becker said was "thousands of years old" with a truly glorious view of low lands and distant mountains. There, after some years of training in East Germany, Axel has done blåttrykk (block printing and indigo dyeing). This incredibly time consuming, complex, elusive process, dependent on so many variables that can alter results, is something that Axel does because he wants to. He has no desire to teach, write about, publicize, or generally be concerned about passing it on to future generations. He seems to relish that he can never be totally sure of the results of any step in the many processes involved, from priming the cloth to choosing the blocks, dipping the cloth into the rather intimidating round open pit in the middle of one room with a dye bath about as deep as up to Axel's neck (and he is a tall man). He says that the process is done in India, where the dyers start with a prayer. He allowed that he sometimes does that too, because "it doesn't hurt." The totally absorbing visit concluded with purchases from a number of dyed pieces for sale.

A later morning visit to Kystens Arv, a museum concerned with coastal life, introduced us to the importance of fishing and of cod in particular. This museum has the woolen sail produced by Amy Lightfoot, which is an accurate copy of those used in medieval times. Her in-depth research and production, based on actual pieces of early sails found used as insulation in windows and boats, has been described by her in early issues of the Norwegian Textile Guild newsletters.

Some tour members opted to return to Trondheim; others continued on the bus to Selbu. A large lumber center, the town was bustling with an open market in the town square. The museum made sure that visitors knew what was important in Selbu; two painted mittens of mammoth size framed the door, each with two eight-pointed star motifs and the message "SELBUVOTTEN 150 AR." Further mittens were painted on other sides of the building. A guided tour takes us through an 18th century farm home with over twenty buildings. A large entry includes mural painted walls with images of everyone living on the farm at one period, each doing his particular job. A well-stocked husflid had many knitted items but it did not neglect other objects fitting to the area.

As we returned from Selbu to Trondheim, crossing the Nidelven reminded Ingebjørg of the song composed by a young soldier from World War II, who did not survive the war to learn how famous his song has become. He expresses his longing to return to the river again. She

sang the song for us.

NIDELVEN

tekst og melodi av Oskar Hoddo. 1916-1943

Langt i det fjerne bak fjelkne bla
Ligger det sted jeg har kjaer,
Dit mine tanker og drommer vil go
Alltid du er meg so naer.

Nidelven, stitle eg vokker du er
Her hvor jeg gar og drommer.

Drommer om deg som jeg hadder so kjaer
By er det bare minner.
Den gamle bybro er lykkens portal
Sommen vi seller i stjernes korall.
Nidelven, stille og vakker du er
Her hvor jeg gar og drommer.

Leaders

Laurann Gilbertson
Vesterheim Museum
Decorah, Iowa

Kay Larson
Bainbridge Island Washington

Textile Guide

Ingebjørg Monsen
Morvik, Hordaland
Norway

Teachers

Kristin Lindberg
Noresund, Norway

Ingebjørg Monsen
Morvik, Hordaland Norway

Anne Grete Stuksrud
Lillehammer, Norway

Participants

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Free Union, Virginia

Linda Brimacombe
Seattle, Washington

Verona Capone
Brookings, South Dakota

Jane Connett
Roseville, Minnesota

Pam Davis
Little Canada, Minnesota

Lisa Ellis
Atlanta, Georgia

Kathryn Evenson
Nampa, Idaho

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Susan Kolstad-Onken
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Carol Kosciak
Monona, Wisconsin

Jan Kroyer
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Bob Lewis
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Solveig Storvick Pollei
Tacoma, Washington

Lee Sexton
Greenville, Tennessee

Nan Sexton
Greenville, Tennessee

Glen Skoy
Edina, Minnesota

Mary Lonning Skoy
Edina, Minnesota

Heather Torgenrud
St. Ignatius, Montana

Margaret Trussell
Warwick, Maryland

Marianne Vigander
Norris, Tennessee



Laurann Gilbertson and art weaving teacher Kristen Lindberg with gift.



Margaret Trussell with her art weaving project.



Bob Lewis with his half-floss project.



Paula Pfaff, Kay Larson, and others enjoy a selection of half-floss and tapestry cushion covers brought out of storage.

Maihaugen Museum, Lillehammer



Mary Skoy with her bandweaving projects.



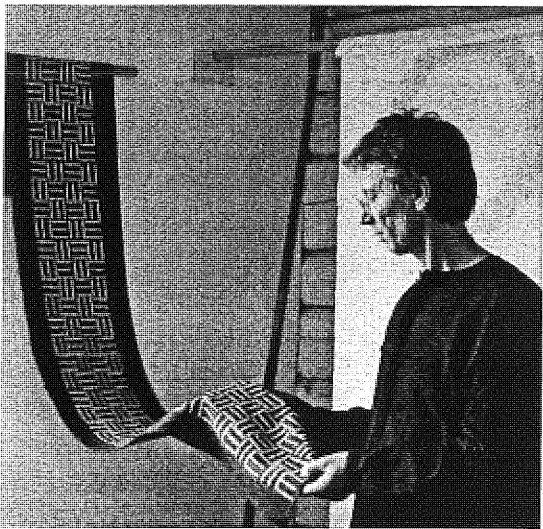
Veronna Capone weaving "parband".



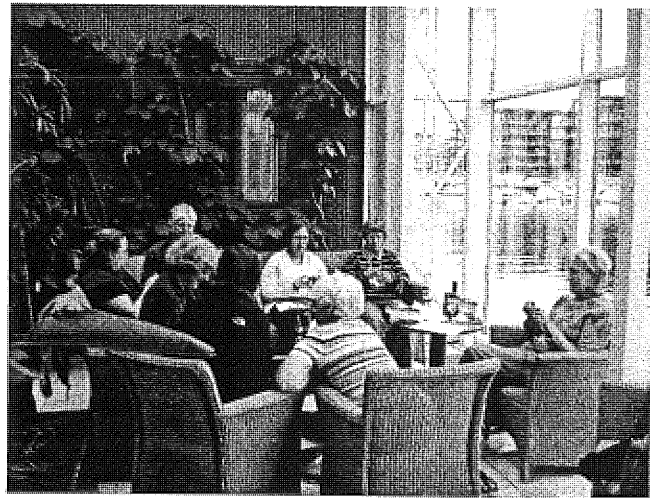
Heather Torgrenrud and Helga Reidun at Nordøsterdalsmuseum, Tynset.



Helga Reiden Nesset at Nordøsterdalsmuseum, Tynset.



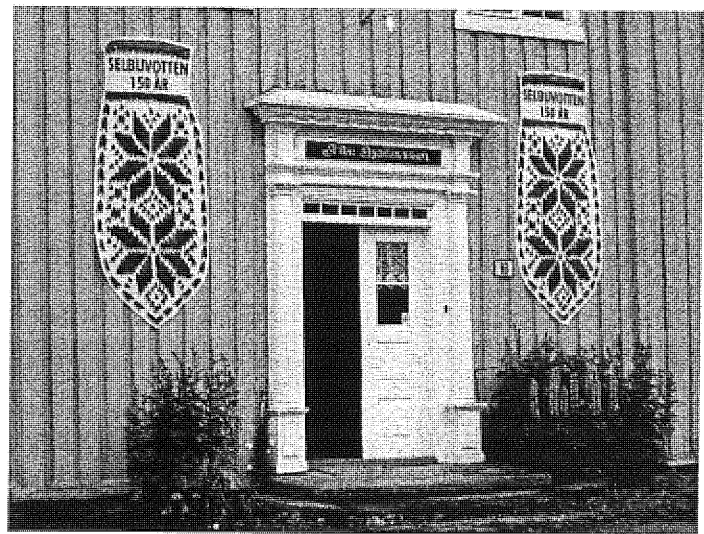
Axel Becker with blåtrykk (block printed and indigo dyed textiles).



Relaxing and knitting, SAS Royal Garden Hotel, Trondhiem.



View of the Trondheim Fjord from Kystens Arv (Coastal Heritage Museum), Stadsbygd.



Selbu Bygdemuseum celebrates 150 years of pattern-knit mittens in a big way.

Photographs by Lairann Gilbertson

Norwegian Textile Guild Members Win Big!

Eight members of the Norwegian Textile Guild (* = NTL members) won awards in Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum's 26th annual Exhibition of Weaving in the Norwegian Tradition. Congratulations weavers! There was a wonderful variety of weaves, sizes, functions, and styles on exhibit this year and the public loved it.

The judges were Carol Colburn, weaver and professor of theatre at the University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls; Marta Kløve Juuhl, weaver from Indre Arna, Norway; and Connie Strom, retired art instructor, Decorah, Iowa. Their choices were:

Traditional Category

Blue - Jeanine Ehnert* (Frazee MN): "Selbu" skillbragd wall hanging and Norma Smayda* (Saunderstown RI): "Telemarken" wall hanging in Telemarksvev

Red - None awarded.

White - Virginia Wekseth* (Onalaska WI): "Norwegian Joy" wall hanging in double krokbragd
Honorable Mention - Norma Taylor (Buffalo MN): "Office I" krokbragd wall hanging

Contemporary Category

Blue - Marcy Daley* (Bainbridge Island WA): "Pastel Trio" bandwoven bookmarks and Susan Gangsei* (Minneapolis MN): "Slaying Your Dragon" tapestry wall hanging

Red - Nancy Ellison* (Zumbrota MN): "Rambunctious" tabby wall hanging with inlay

White - None awarded.

Honorable Mention - Marcy Daley* "Jewel-Tone Trio" band bookmarks and Marty Davidsohn* (Sioux Falls SD): "Red on Beige" rug in doublebinding technique

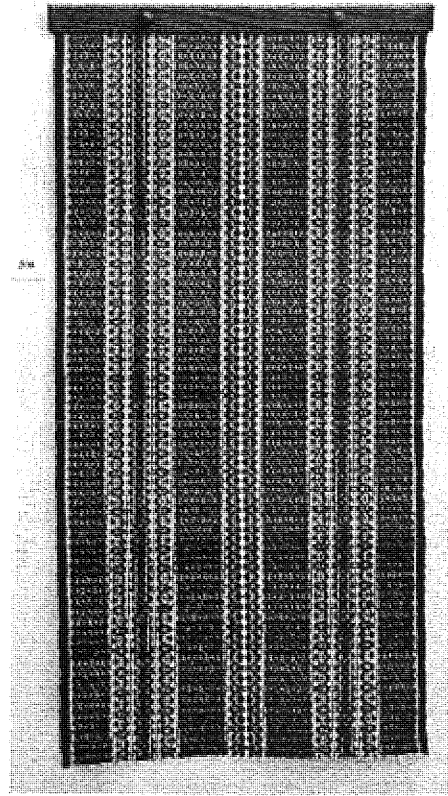
Best of Show weaving: Betty Johannesen* (South Bend IN): Voss-style rya bed cover

People's Choice (popular vote): Susan Gangsei*

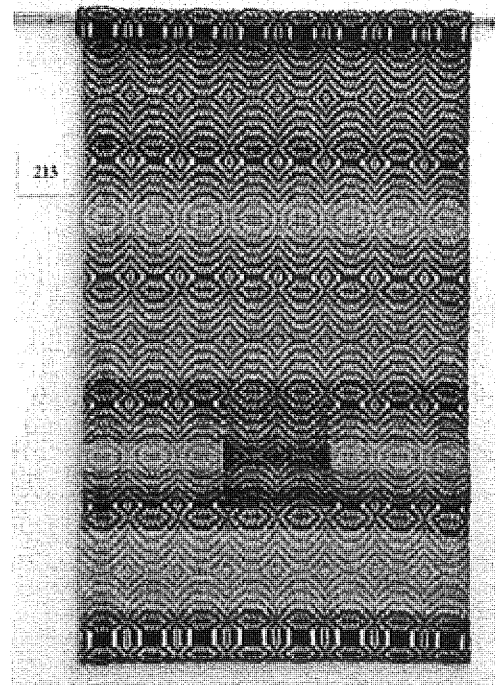
"Slaying Your Dragon" tapestry

Gold Medal: None awarded.

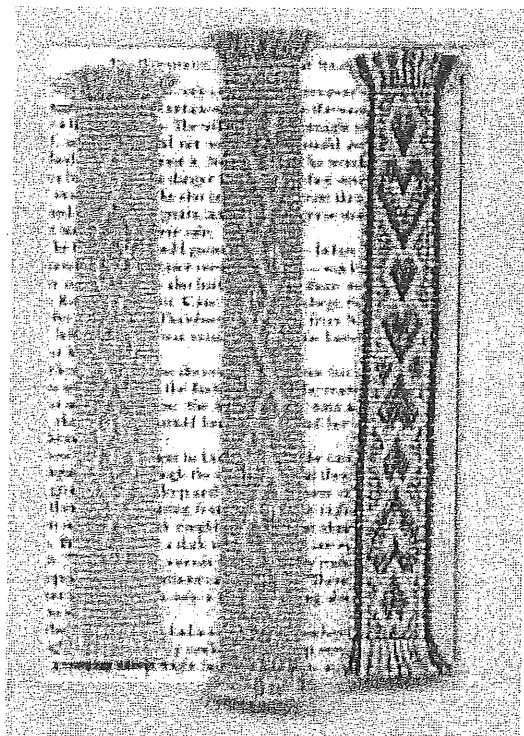
-- Laurann Gilbertson



Skillbragd Wall Hanging
Jeanine Ehnert



Telemarken Wall Hanging
Norma Smayda



Bookmarks
Marcy Daley



Slaying Dragon Tapestry
Susan Gangsei



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New: hand dyed wool roving

