Mullavotten – The Mula Mitten

By Ingeborg Nærland Skjærpe

(See the original, in Norwegian, to see the illustrations: https://www.jaermuseet.no/samlingar/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/2016/04/2011.6-Mulavotten.pdf) It was published in Sjå Jæren 2011, the yearbook of the Jærmuseet.

Mula mitten from the collection of Jæren Museum. Photo: Ingeborg Nærland Skjærpe. Jærmuseet

This article is based on a study in museum communication at Oslo University College in the spring of 2009. Starting with the theme "Museum - Collection and Communication," we were to focus on an object that we selected from a collection and about which we wished to communicate to others. Most museums have objects that are not well documented and that have been kept more or less hidden in storage. We could ask questions such as why do we collect, or what kind of values could such collections have? Many objects deserve to be brought to light, but for this thesis I wanted to choose a textile object and decided on a mitten, a "mula" mitten, chosen from the collection of the regional museum in Jæren, *Jærmuseet*. The mitten appeared in an exhibition about herring fishing, but was gray and anonymous and did not make much of a statement. At the same time it fascinated me, lying there large and spacious, with two thumbs.

I wanted to find out more about such mittens. Why do they look like this? How are they made? And who made them? Good mittens were important for fishing, and it was a lot of work for the women to arrange everything the men needed to bring with them. Could this be conveyed to children so that they would understand it? And could it have any meaning for us today?

What is a mula mitten?

My first encounter with the word was in *Hauglandsviså* [Haugland's Song], a song of unknown origin that was released as a record in 1980 by the group "Vind i gardhol" [Wind in the Farmyard]. This song was about someone who does everything backwards when they have to bring in the hay and is played and sung a lot in this area. Although it mentions someone wearing mula mittens it doesn't say much about what a mula mitten is.

The registration card for the museum says the following: the mitten is made of wool, brownish gray, *spøta* (knitted) and a little felted. It has two thumbs and was used by herring fishermen. It came to the museum in 1998 together with other things from the estate of Olav O. Nygård, born in 1906 at Bratland in Varhaug.

This was an everyday work mitten. In Jæren, the words *spøting* and *stikking* both mean knitting and are used interchangeably. “Mula mitten” must be a local name and in Jæren it is still in use among older people. Tobias Skretting writes in the book *Jæren sing i merg og minne* [a book about the Jæren dialect]: “Mula mittens: Home-knitted work mittens that can have one or two thumbs. Those with two have the advantage that they can be turned over and thus distribute the wear. In most work, the mittens wear most in [the palm of] your hand.”

They must have been named because of their appearance, reminiscent of a muzzle on a horse or a cow. In the literature that mention these mittens, they have names such as *sjøvottar* (sea mittens), *fiskjevetter* (fish mittens), skålpavette, and *lovottar* (palm mittens) among others. They were not only used for the herring fishery but also for fishing locally, for the Lofoten fishery and for cod fishing. The word mitten, *vott*, is found in Old Norwegian as *Vottr* and in other places as *Vettir*.

Svein Molaug in *Vår gamle kystkultur* [Our Old Coastal Culture] describes when they were going to go fishing in Lofoten: "They had to have sea mittens, three pairs. The mittens were knitted and well felted."[1] And Gunvor Ingstad Trætteberg writes in the book *Skinnhyre og sjøklær* [Leather Gear and Sea Clothes] that the fishermen's work mittens were *lovottar*. This means that the back of the hand and four fingers fit into the mitten, while the thumb is held separately. She further writes that in western Norway the mittens were called *vavette*. The word vad means line or fishing line. The mittens had long straps that were wrapped around the wrist. For rowing they used *lovottar* (palm mittens) or *roavottar* (rowing mittens). In the 19th century there were two types of mittens in use for fishing: one-thumb mittens and two-thumb mittens. Four pairs of mittens were part of the equipment for a full-time fisherman in Lofoten in 1880, two of each kind.

“The northern Norwegian mittens were particularly good, spacious and made of special wool, so when the ‘southerners’ were in Lofoten, they often bought a few pairs of ‘*skålpavette*,’ as they called them, according to fishermen from Bømlo in Sunnhordland. *Skålpavette* were large, heavy mittens with plenty of room in them, much wider than other mittens.”[2]

Many from Jæren travelled far north to fish, so we can assume that clothing has been fairly similar along the entire Norwegian coast, with some quality variations, and that sea mittens is a generic name for all variations.

Why do we collect things?

Many people are collectors. We collect things that interest and engage us, that have high value or that we enjoy. We can have many different motives. Bjarne Rogan has done some research on this, using three key words to explain collecting: Play, passion and knowledge (science). He has also found that children collect “everything” while young people do not. Many adults collect and there are typically women’s collections and men’s collections. Most museums are built around collections of objects.[3]

Suzanne Keene writes about different reasons for collecting objects, what we can use them for and why we must make them available to people. She calls collections "Fragments of the world." No one can document or preserve the whole of history, but we need many pieces or fragments to form pictures of the world as it is and has been.

Objects are a resource. We need to have thoughts and plans for what we want to preserve and why. We need objects for research. Objects supplemented by photos and texts, written or oral, help us to form a picture of history.

If we want to find out more about, for example, a mula mitten, it is useful to have the object available in order to be able to reconstruct it, count stitches, feel the yarn, and then compare it with what we find described in other sources. When we make museum collections more known to the public, it can also lead to more research projects. Perhaps museum professionals should let go of some control – and let others in, see the value in stories being told from different perspectives, and by people with different backgrounds.

Objects can be used as a source of lifelong learning. For example many with an interest in history, handicrafts and coastal culture can enjoy and benefit from learning more about this mitten. It can provide insight into how people lived along the coast in the past, and be a source of memory and identity. This somewhat anonymous object could be considered of great value to people who have been involved in knitting, fishing or have grown up along the coast. Museums have often taken care of only the "nice" things and only told the stories of people who have somehow distinguished themselves. But in recent years, everyday history and everyday things have been given a greater place in museums. Encounters that lead to people recognizing each other and that awaken memories can benefit museums if we have the opportunity to document the stories that emerge. Museums should be more open to collecting and presenting individual stories from different perspectives and not just the generally accepted, collective history. These stories can make the objects more alive, more colorful and give them even greater value in the future.

Museum objects can inspire creativity. Here, for example, the technique that was used can be continued in new forms. Today, clothes and equipment made of felted knitwear is again high fashion – in new beautiful colors and patterns. In this way, a museum object can inspire new things, or it can just be nice to look at. Things can have different values, aesthetic, cultural, symbolic, authentic, and they can have different values at different times.[4]

What can we learn from objects?

Many museum objects tolerate being on display while other things are hidden away in storage. This may be due to security, to the object's condition or to space considerations. The Internet can be a great place to present collections, where

everyone can get to know what there is and see what it looks like, without compromising safety.

Objects cannot convey much in themselves. We need knowledge and experiences that help us make sense of things. They must be put into context in order to tell a story. The background of the audience is also very different, so it is difficult to assess how much basic information is needed. Ragnar Pedersen believes a general problem is that schoolchildren today lack basic knowledge, without a common platform to build on, for example, when visiting museums. This means that thorough, detailed, visualized plans are needed if we are to give children an understanding of earlier times, for instance past ways of life like fishing and agricultural. Then it can be useful to use objects as concrete, tangible things.

There are and have been many different ways to communicate, and we know that we are different and learn in different ways. When can we say we have really learned something? It is not when we can repeat what we have heard or read, but when we understand it.

Tina Blythe distinguishes between knowing and understanding. Students can know a lot in given contexts, but they are unable to transfer this to other situations in everyday life. She has developed a framework in *The Teaching for Understanding Guide* that she believes can be helpful in teaching contexts. Here are four points that can ensure that understanding is achieved:

1. Choose a complex topic such as a mitten. It can be approached in several ways, through several subjects and in real-life contexts, and the topic can be connected to previous experiences.

2. Set clear goals for what the students should understand. Check that there is a connection between the goals and the activities.

3. Let the students demonstrate that they understand.

4. Finally – constant evaluation of the program.

This is much the same as what Howard Gardner talks about when describing *the many intelligences*. By approaching a subject in different ways, we will achieve understanding with more people. The most effective way to engage larger groups is with a dramatic story. It requires an engaged facilitator and an introduction that captures the interest of the audience. It activates both *linguistic* and *personal intelligence*.[5] Meanwhile others learn best by using *logical-mathematical intelligence*. We can measure the mitten, count the stitches and perhaps work out a knitting pattern. How big was it when it was newly knitted and how much smaller is it now?

We can use *musical intelligence* and sing "*Hauglandsviså*" or songs about sheep and wool and about fish. We can knit and felt and use *physical and visual-spatial*

intelligence. And to stimulate *naturalistic intelligence*, we can look at wool from different breeds of sheep, or at fish. Changing the environment will also affect learning. If the theme is a mula mitten, students will get a completely different experience and understanding by visiting a coastal farm and feeling the atmosphere in the old barn, compared to taking the mitten into the usual surroundings of a classroom.

Learning is a difficult process where the main parts are perception and memory. Perception is affected by experiences - we see what we know and recognize. Learning is also influenced by motivation and attitudes, background and culture, how the subject is presented and who we are with.[6]

Learning involves not only facts, but also experiences and feelings, and you can gain both personal and social benefits. Learning in museums is very much focused on objects. Objects can stimulate learning when we have the opportunity to study them up close. They can create understanding and wonder. There are many methods that can be used in museums for learning. Hooper-Greenhill mentions examples such as storytelling, painting, drama, art, science-centered experiments, costume shows and talking to and listening to museum staff.[7]

Research shows that people “see” museums from their own perspectives, philosophy, hermeneutics and learning theory. Constructivism says that people construct their own values from experiences, through psychology, biography and history. Museums must try to create exhibitions that give people the opportunity to learn what suits them best. Learning can happen in sessions by analyzing objects. If we want to communicate something to the audience, we must achieve communication, and communication cannot go only one way. As a communicator, you must get a response. If this response is received by the sender and affects what is sent out the next time – and continues in a cycle that is constantly adjusted between the receiver and the sender, then you have engaged the receiver. You have created a dialogue, and together have created meaning for the object or exhibition.[8]

The active visitor to postmodern museums can be partly understood through learning theories, but also through communication, literacy and cultural theory.[9] In his article on the constructivist museum, George E. Hein has created a model for learning theory and views on knowledge in which he tries to categorize the different museums. The model has two lines that form a cross. The horizontal line is learning theory. On the far left we find students as passive recipients who must be filled with knowledge. At the opposite end are those who believe that the learner must construct knowledge himself, because learning is an active process. At the top of the intersecting line we find a positivist view of knowledge. Science will arrive at the one correct truth. At the bottom are the views that knowledge must be constructed by each individual from experience. In each corner a field is formed that combines the different learning theories with knowledge theory. At the top left we find the traditional, systematic museums. At the top right we find those who believe that knowledge is there, but that learners must discover it themselves, that they must see and do and not just hear. At the bottom right we find constructivism, knowledge must be constructed and that must be done by each individual. At the bottom

left he has placed behaviorism, a learning theory where knowledge will come as a "response to stimuli," but that there does not have to be an exact knowledge "out there." Constructivism argues that the focus must be on the learner and therefore those who visit museums.[10]

John Hennigar Shuh is more concerned with using the objects themselves. But to use them in teaching, we must learn to read the objects. To engage the students and get them thinking, we can ask questions: What do you see? What do you think it is? Often, the right questions will generate many more questions. Objects can be used and adapted for all ages. Children and other visitors can discover new things that the professionals have not seen or thought of before.

In most contexts, it is the "fine" examples of an object that are preserved. We have many richly decorated mittens, with beautiful patterns in various techniques for fine use. But not so many useful, practical work clothes have been preserved. They were preferably used until there was nothing left of them. And they had little "value" as a collector's item in the past. But the mula mitten can be an example of the great diversity and variations in mittens. Annemor Sundbø has been collecting knitted garments for many years. She describes the mittens she has found as follows:

"... some mittens are specially adapted to the climate and working life, for example sea mittens and palm mittens. They are to be used in snow, rain, salty seas and storms. The mittens were knitted in double size and were felted until they fit the hand. This made them unusually thick and strong. If dipped in water before use, they were also windproof. Wool insulates heat even when wet. Other gloves are clearly made for fine use. They are knitted from very thin yarn...»[11]

Context

According to Ragnar Pedersen, contextualization of objects is about the relationship between object, text and understanding. This can be achieved by a scientific procedure that can be divided into several phases. First one must observe and put into words what can be read directly: form, construction and simple ways of use. To a small extent an item is self-explanatory.

The next thing is to find the various cultural contexts the object has been in over time. Here all types of sources can be used. The various source information must first be based on a sound scientific methodology. This means that text and object must correspond and be bound to each other. This relationship must be substantiated and reasoned. Objects that have functioned in the past require that we construct a historically best possible context. This must then be adapted to today's understanding. That is, a *cultural translation* is required. The context descriptions should be detailed and comprehensive and accessible to people today based on their own preunderstanding and horizon of understanding.

If we study the object itself in the context of human actions in systematic use, and use multiple senses, then we can register multiple things about the object such as visuality, aesthetics and tactility. The best way to document an object is with demonstration. The second best is with an interview, followed by what we find in written sources.

The rationality perspective: It is important to remember that the actions of people in the past had a purpose, consciously or unconsciously. If we try to recreate the cultural framework, we can get an idea of how the actions must have unfolded. The essential thing is that the practice has been understood from some form of rationality based on the actor's own point of view and way of thinking. Functional analysis can be a useful tool for seeing the connections between object and action. It is important to show cultural openness to the past, and to try to find the intentions behind the actions as people actually perceived them.

Ragnar Pedersen uses the butter mold as an example. It was mostly registered with information about form, decoration and inscription, but with little about its use and context. By going through questionnaires and searching further for data, he found information about the social situation, cultural position and context. Taken together, this gives us today a completely different picture of what "value" the butter mold has had.

Jo Sivertsen comments about the classical concept of rationality: “Perceptions are rational if they are established and justified by principles that everyone can realize are necessary.”[12] But we must be clear that we can easily interpret observations based on the expectations we already have. Theories can become self-confirming because we perceive what we want – and want to find.[13]

How are objects communicated in museums?

In a lecture at Oslo University College on February 18, 2009, Ragnar Pedersen touched on many points that were relevant to how the mula mitten could be communicated. He believed that today we lack a common basic knowledge. The communicator stands between the researcher and the audience and must make the past meaningful for posterity – a posterity that we know nothing about. Successful teaching depends on the commitment and knowledge level of the mediator. He must create small and large stories. Objects challenge curiosity, they can support stories and be informative, and they can be used to train the audience to become more visually aware.

An object can be the starting point for many different stories and contexts. It can be a mediator of knowledge in its contexts and provide broader or deeper understanding. But the past must be problematized. We must conduct continuous research and be critically analytical. It is important to be aware that there is no truth, but only something that is the current perception. We must also be aware of the danger of getting caught up in modern festivals, folklore and myths that can be far from reality

Community museums should be rooted in the local and authentic. The message must be personalized so that history represents something. It can be, for example, a person,

a family, building practices, architecture or interior design. We must find methods that engage the audience. Can we kindle magic, superstition, being different? Communication needs a "feeling."

This mitten has been in several different cultural contexts. We can start with the wool from the sheep and the work process from sheep to finished mitten. It can be used as an image of the work the coastal women did in preparation for fishing. Then we can continue to the equipment chest, which shows the quality of the women's work. The mitten can then tell about fishing, about wind and weather, catch and toil, and its eventual reuse for shore work. Finally, it can end up in a collection of mittens and help to show diversity.

Preparing for fishing

Before the men would set off, there was a lot that had to be done, and there was usually a clear gender division in this work. The men prepared, arranged and procured fishing equipment and the like. The women arranged food and clothing. There were rules for how much each man should bring with him and it was a huge job to get everything ready.

In the book “*-Utmed havet” kystkvinners liv og virk 1920–1940* [“–Along the coast” Coastal Women’s Life and Work 1929-1940], which was prepared for the 50th anniversary exhibition of the AOF [Norwegian Workers Education Association], the foreword states: “Women’s daily life and social work have been underestimated and partly hidden in historical writing and research. This is a result of the production system that has placed women and their tasks at the bottom of the ladder in our society, a society that has primarily been characterized by men’s value norms and positions.”

This was in 1981 and fortunately a lot of research and documentation has been done on the subject in the years since. Elin Strøm lets Tora tell the story in her article in the same book: "What chaos it is in January when Father goes cod fishing! Mother is hardly in bed at night. She has to check over and mend all his clothes, and there is a lot of clothing. Huge sweaters and underwear, thick sea boots, sea mittens and wadmal pants. Everything is made of wool. As the saying goes: Cotton does not protect your health.»[14]

The sheriff’s report for Sund and Austevoll, 1861–1865, mention the following clothing requirements for a man engaged in the spring herring fishery:

3 shirts
2 vests
3 undershirts
3 overshirts
3 underpants
3 or 4 pairs of socks
1 oiled or leather shirt

1 oiled or leather trousers
1 sou'wester [hat]
1 pair of sea boots
1 pair of shoes
2 pairs of mittens

The number of mittens varies in different lists. Klausen mentions 4–7 pairs of mittens for the Lofoten fishery in addition to small mittens.[15]

«After used for a time, all mittens became too small and hard like felt. When the fishermen came home in the spring, they were completely worn out and cast aside, looking like a crab claw; new ones had to be made each year."[16]

Wool

The mitten can tell us about wool, the material it is made of and the good properties it has. The sources mention the sheep breeds *vilsau, utegangarsau, trøndersau* and *spælsau* as well as different names for these breeds with extra qualities of their wool. People stay warm even if their mittens get wet. Natural wool [untreated with chemicals] will become felted and thicker in use and warmer afterwards and thus these "fish mittens" were also very good afterwards for using in soil cultivation and stone working. In previous times they were really thick, warm and durable. In the book *Skinnhyre og sjøklær* Gunvor Ingstad Trætteberg writes that sources from the second half of the 18th century and later agree that wool from the *vild-fåret* (wild sheep, *spælsau*) was the best wool for sea use.

This wool has long, smooth guard hair, which allows water to run off and at the same time provides warmth. The wool that was to be used for sea mittens was taken from the back, and halfway down the thighs and sides of the animal. In western Norway, mittens made of wool combined with horsehair and goat hair were also used. These did not shrink like mittens made of pure wool and did not absorb moisture either. She also mentions dog and fox hair, and mittens made of women's hair mixed with wool.

"No mitten was warmer than these." But for rowing, pure wool *rovottar* (rowing mittens) were the best.[17] The women gathered their combed out hair and spun it together with wool into yarn. This made extra strong socks and mittens.[18]

Nordstrand writes in *Kystkvinner; kvardagsportrett frå Hordalandskysten* [Coastal Women; Everyday Portraits from the Hordaland Coast] that wool was the most important product from the *utegangarsau* (primitive sheep) and it was carefully sorted. The animals have long, coarse outer hairs and finer undercoats, fibers very suitable for clothing. The long outer fibers were often collected separately and used to make mittens. This way the fisherman did not freeze even if his hands were wet.[19] The grey Trøndelag sheep was called the *sjøvott-sau* (sea-mitten sheep) because it was well known for having very good quality wool and making very warm clothing. Undyed wool was used because it was the warmest.

How is the mitten made?

The mitten can be a starting point for telling the whole story from sheep to mitten. We can start with shearing the sheep, carding and spinning the wool, knitting the mitten and finally felting it. This will allow one to visualize how much work was needed to provide warm clothing for the whole family in the past. The oldest mittens were made with *nålbinding* (knotless netting). Trætteberg did not find any existing nålbinding mittens used for fishing, the preserved specimens are for finer use. Knitting is newer, but known in Norway from at least the 17th century.

"The finished mitten could be up to half a meter long and have a thumb so big that the whole fist could fit in it. A fisherman from Kanstadfjorden, Lødingen in Nordland, said that the mitten his father used was so big that when he was little, his upper body would slide right into the mitten."[20]

Elin Strøm relates: "Ole (9 years old) has to felt sea mittens. A sea mitten is huge when it is finished, and it has two thumbs. Ole puts the mitten in warm water and it shrinks. He then rubs the mitten against a felting board so that it becomes fluffy. A felting board is a wooden board with grooves. It resembles a washboard. Ole has to rub for hours before the mitten is finished. But by then it has become thick and good. Such mittens keep warm even when they are wet."[21]

In *Det store lappeteppet* [The Great Patchwork Quilt], Clayhills notes that "It could be a matter of life and death. All the clothes had to be extra warm and extra durable. The underwear, the mittens and what the men wore on their feet were literally vital. If their hands froze and went numb, the catch could be lost and the boat capsized. It was woolen garments that made it possible to work despite the cold and wet. ...The sea mittens that Lofoten fishing required were truly super mittens. For these, they used the finest wool, spun into thick yarn. They were knitted on coarse needles and made so large that they only fit after they had been felted and thus became strong and dense. There were several ways to felt. Some dipped the mittens in boiling water, smeared them with soft soap and rolled them on a *tovfjøl* (grooved wooden board). Others folded the tip of the mitten in half and secured it with a piece of thread. When the mittens had felted from use in salt water, they cut off the binding and the mittens were still big enough. Many people carded the mittens on the inside so that they would be extra warm and comfortable."

Such mittens often had two thumbs so that they would wear evenly all around. The sailors had to carry several pairs with them on the boat, to replace those that became frozen solid. One way to thaw frozen mittens was to hang them over the edge in the sea.[22]

Not everyone liked this type of mitten. The extra thumb got in the way during work. The mittens also became very felted and hard when used on both sides. In Jæren, people

started buying the yarn ready-made when the spinning mill came in at the end of the 19th century.

Who knitted – and when?

Everyone had to learn the techniques they needed to produce clothing. Grandmothers knitted while they cradled small children. Everyone knitted whenever they could – even when they were out walking or rowing. From the age of seven, the children had to take part in the adults' working lives. Until the age of ten, both boys and girls lived with their mothers and had roughly the same work tasks. The women usually always had knitting in hand. They fastened the ball of yarn to their clothes with a hook and knitted while they walked. Some men also used their free time to knit. Jørgen Skjæveland from Bjerkreim has described knitting:

"It was primarily women who knitted, but men could also help in the evenings when they had time... women knitted at all times. They knitted wherever they went, when they went to and from the hayfield and the market square, when they hunted the cows and went to other farms. Then they had the yarn under their left arm. Yes, during the midday break when the men took a nap, the women would often sit and knit. They would knit when they were tending to the food, when they were cooking, when they were sitting and reading the Bible. Often the wives would gather on the farm and sit and talk about other people and knit so much that the needles rattled. They didn't have to think about the knitting, it happened automatically. Occasionally they would stick the spare fifth needle up in their hair. They didn't say they were going for a visit, but that they were going "with the knitting"... In the evenings, the grown-up girls would gather and compete in knitting. They would measure out a certain length of thread and tie a knot, and then see who would reach the knot first. They would sit for so long in the evenings that their eyes would droop and the knitting fall into their laps. Then they put a broken match as a small prop on the eyelid so they couldn't fall asleep. This was called a “plunntre.” But on Sunday the needles were put to rest, because it was a great sin to knit on a holy day."[23]

Knitting for extra income

Some women discovered that there was money to be made from knitting. “The women were happy to trade when it was necessary. Especially those who lived near Bergen could make a few kroner at the town market. They often accompanied the men when they went to the market square to sell fish. The goods sold were butter, eggs, berries and perhaps leather. They also sold socks and mittens... ”[24]

Grimstvedt, in the article "Spøt til salg, strikking som binæring i Rogaland før 1900” [Knitting for sale, knitting as a secondary occupation in Rogaland before 1900], indicates that a lot of knitted goods were traded at the market square in Stavanger. Goods were also sent to Flekkefjord, Kristiansand and Arendal. What is mentioned is often socks, sweaters and hats, but in several places the products are only described as knitted goods. Mittens are mentioned in a list of local products sent to an exhibition of

fishing equipment in Boulogne in 1866. Fishing equipment and fishing products were prominent, however out of 57 submitters, ten sent knitted goods.

Grimstvedt has used a fishing mitten as an illustration for the article, so we can probably assume that they are counted among the knitted goods. Grimstvedt has said that she interviewed Magna Kristine Husebø, born in Sirevåg (12/22/1906). She moved to Jåsund, Tanger when she got married. There she knitted mittens and delivered them to *Danielsen Skipshandel* [ship chandler] in the 1930s.

Fishing mittens were knitted large and were felted through use. They often had two thumbs, so that they could be worn on both sides. From Sirevåg it is said that after the mittens were felted for fishing, they were used for stone work. At that time they were called '*lo-vette*' ".[25]

Today

Clayhills ends her book with thoughts about textile work up to the present day. She writes that this is a women's tradition, and if industry now takes over production, women still continue to create things with their hands. This can take the form of copying ready-made patterns, or through using creative, free imagination. But there is a danger that knowledge and techniques will be forgotten if we do not consciously collect documentation, maintain it, and find new uses for old techniques. She points out that the background must be recorded and that textile techniques and women's work must be given a greater presence in rural areas and museums. "…all materials are important, they should finally come out of chests and drawers, even those that have never had status or been seen as nice. All pieces must be included in the great patchwork quilt if it is to have the right pattern."[26]

Fortunately judging from my experience, things have changed since then. But there is still much that can be done, and done better. It is equally important to document, film, and collect the lessons to be learned from those who know how to do things in practice.

In recent years, knitting and felting have become relevant again. The technique has been used in many new patterns for slippers, mittens, *nissar* (elves), scarves, hats, and more. Fashion and clothing designers have made dresses and coats. At the same time, we have knitting cafés as a new alternative to going "with knitting" as they did in the past.

It also seems that sea mitten knitting has experienced a resurgence, as coastal and craft associations have in recent years organized courses in knitting sea mittens. For an exhibition in Vefsn Museum in 2007 called *Masker mellom generasjoner* [Stitches Between Generations], a competition was announced: "Knit sea mittens! The traditional sea mittens were important for fishermen when they were at sea in the old days. But what would they look like if women were to wear them? General Manager at Vefsn Museum, Janicken Olsen, encourages knitters to participate in the competition to knit sea mittens, designed for women."

A workshop in cultural heritage called *iVott* is being organized for grades 8-10 by three groups: *Nordland husflidslag*, *Husflidshandverkerne i Nordland* and *Den kulturelle skolesekken i Nordland* [Nordland Crafts Association; Craftsmen of Nordland; and Cultural Backpack in Nordland]. Using the Lofoten chest as a starting point, they want to inspire young people to develop new, useful products for people today. “The project’s goal is to highlight traditions and past knowledge, and pass that knowledge on to new generations. The majority of young people today grow up in a society where most things are bought ready-made in stores. Clothes and textiles are cheap, and in no way make visible the process behind them. How is a sweater made, for example, from wool to finished garment? Or a pair of sea mittens?”

Today the tradition has been interrupted, it is "no longer practiced as a holistic connection in one and the same place,” according to Amy Lightfoot. She is the American who came to Norway and has taught Norwegians about their own traditions. In the project “Sea Mittens,” she has had to travel to Shetland and the Faroe Islands among other places to gain insight into the connection between sheep farming methods and the production of wool suitable for sea clothing. This also applies to tools and their use in the production of clothing.

“Everyday textiles and their associated craft traditions reflect less visible values. The men's efforts in Lofoten fishing, and the money they brought home, have been appreciated. But the women and their efforts to equip the men for the very same fishing have only been mentioned and valued in recent years. The women prepared men's equipment almost all year round, and only the best was good enough. The women at home were also judged by the contents of the chest!»[27]

Theory and method of communication

This is an important topic to continue working on for new generations. Inspired by Ragnar Pedersen, I will try to create a story around the mitten. I will use storytelling as a method, combined with dialogue, song and practical activity for the sake of variety. In such a plan, it is possible to connect to many theories, but I have chosen Howard Gardner and the multiple intelligences. It is important to create communication plans with themes that can be approached in several ways. In order for the children to get the best possible benefit, we must plan activities that suit the majority. Gardner also writes about how important it is that the facilitator be engaged and capture the children's attention, and that we must use different arenas. This can be a nice way to create atmosphere and life in the old buildings
of the museum.

The Mulavotten in Grødaland

I want to present this as a teaching program for the 3rd-4th graders. It would be a good idea to use the living room in the Old House in Grødaland as the setting. This is a farm

from the 18th century with a house furnished from around 1850. From the living room window we can see the sea, so it provides a perfect frame for the subject. Here I can gather the students around me so that we get a good starting point for dialogue. I want to try out a three-part program. First, I look at the mitten itself. I pass it around, feel it and ask a few questions to get the students to think and talk about what they see.

Then I will take them back in time and they will hear more about this mitten. I want to convey an atmosphere in the room, and at the same time give the students a sense of how much work it was to be a farm wife in the past, how important a job she did, and how everyone was required to help. I will dress up as the wife on the farm, and through stories and dialogue with the children, I will tell about my everyday life. I have to describe who lives in the house. The story could be about my husband going out to fish for herring, and I would then have to describe where he is going, who he is going with, tell about the boat and so on. I have to describe everything he is going to take with him and how we are going to acquire fishing equipment, clothing and food. While we are talking, I will sit and card, spin and knit. Along the way, I can describe how much is ready and how much more needs to be done, trying to convey the amount of work and equipment that needs to be completed. I have to make a large unfelted mitten in advance for them to see.

We can talk about what kind of clothes are used: woolen clothes that had been in use all day during fishing or other work, and were hung around the stove in the living room in the evening to dry.

I can try to describe how cold the house was, and how warm the clothes they wore inside were, to recognize the smell of dirty, wet, warm woolen clothes, mixed with the smell of smoke and the smell of oil lamps (a bit uncertain if this is allowed); discuss what kind of clothes they had, and the reuse of those clothes; and that the mitten could be a starting point for discussion – field work, cultural heritage, mending, patching, knitting and so on.

I also want to try to weave in feelings like being stressed, not getting enough sleep, being afraid that my husband will travel, the fear that something will happen at sea, the responsibility for everything at home, but also how important it is that he can travel and acquire food and income.

In the last section, we move back to the present day and look at where we get our clothes from today. We can compare wool with new materials, fleece and GoreTex, which is light and dries quickly. We can see examples of the wool underwear we can buy today, in appealing designs, for sports and leisure, and show examples of new stylish patterns and models where the techniques of knitting and felting have been given new expression.

In order for the students to get a feel for how this was done, I want to let them try the technique in practice. We can make a simple thing like a cell phone case, wrist warmers, seat pads or mittens. It would be nice if the students could knit and talk at the

same time, but that is not possible, and even knitting with this age group will in most cases take too long. We can instead “cheat" a bit and hand out a finished knitted "patch". The students can sew together and decorate with embroidery and beads, and then we can do the felting process together. Anyone can do this, and everyone can take a finished product home.

I think such a program could be implemented during a one-day or half-day visit to the museum. We need at least three school periods so that they can have some breaks space between sessions. It would also be nice to try a slightly extended program with knitting, for example when we have a holiday club in Grødaland. Then we can let the practical process take place over several days, knitting a little each day, and then felt on the last day.

While we are felting, we can talk together and then we can sing a little. In this conversation I will try to get feedback on whether the students have understood the introductory questions: Why do the mittens look like this? How are they made? Who made them?
How much work did the women have to do to make this happen? And conclude with what this can mean for us today.

Translation by Katherine Larson
Affiliate Assistant Professor
Department of Scandinavian Studies
University of Washington, Seattle

Notes

1 Molaug p. 280
2 Trætteberg p. 162-166
3 Lecture at Oslo University College 19 February 2009
4 Suzanne Keene p.172
5 Gardner p. 189.
6 Falk and Dierking p. 137
7 Hooper-Greenhill p. 21
8 Hooper-Greenhill «Model» p. 35
9 Hooper-Greenhill p. 67
10 Hein p. 73 - 79
11 Sundbø p. 133
12 Sivertsen p. 32
13 Sivertsen p. 116
14 Strøm 1981 p. 15

15 Clause p. 24
16 Trætteberg p. 166
17 Trætteberg p. 163
18 Schrumpf p. 53
19 Nordstrand p. 43
20 Trætteberg pp. 162 - 163
21 Power p. 16
22 Clayhills pp. 83 and 84
23 Grimstvedt pp. 31 - 32
24 Norstrand p. 33
25 Grimsvedt p. 46
26 Clayhills pp. 144 - 147
27 http://www.nfk.no/artikkel.aspx?MId1=582&AId=3714

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Linked from the Norwegian Textile Letter, Vol, 32, No. 1, March 2026.
norwegiantextileletter.com