

# NORWEGIAN TEXTILE LETTER

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## SJONALEISTAR (BEAUTIFUL SOCKS) AT VESTERHEIM

by Susan Kolstad-Onken

During the *sjonaleistar* ("beautiful socks") course in Bergen, Norway (June 2011), some discussion was held about the *sjonaleistar* sock collection at Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum. The collection, according to Textile Curator, Laurann Gilbertson, consists of one pair. I had seen and photographed this one pair, but did not have detailed photographs to complete an accurate chart to replicate the sock design. A road trip and appointment at Vesterheim were necessary to better do this!

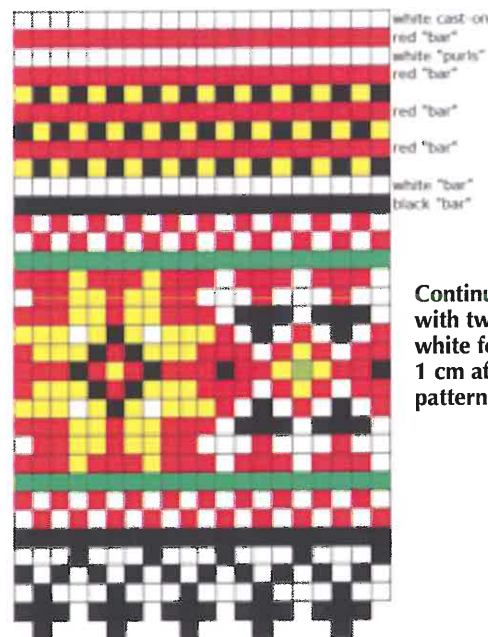
On July 18, 2011, one of Minnesota's record-setting hot days, Jan Mostrom and I traveled to Decorah. I had set up an appointment with Laurann to chart and photograph the sock. She had brought the sock out of the archives and set me up in the Vesterheim Library at a comfortable library table. I went about charting the sock and photographing it.



Vesterheim's *sjonaleisten*, LC0298. Photo by Susan Kolstad-Onken, 2011.

During this time, I developed an admiration for this humble, yet stunning, piece. Acquired by Vesterheim in the 1920s through direct purchase, the sock was an addition to the men's costume of Hardanger. While the sock seems quite small for a man's foot, it has been displayed with the man's bunad. The sock may date previous to 1920; however, no further history is available.

In the *sjonaleistar* course, we learned that white stitches were knit with linen thread for more "white" color; however, in the Vesterheim *sjonaleistar*, white or



Continue  
with twined  
white for  
1 cm after  
pattern.

Chart of Vesterheim's *sjonaleistar* by Susan Cklstad-Onken.

natural wool was used. The sock had one silver hook to fasten it, with an additional sturdy loop sewn approximately 1" forward on the sock, possibly for a closer fit around the ankle.



Detail of Vesterheim's *sjonaleisten*, LC0298. Photo by Susan Kolstad-Onkon.

The socks showed little wear; however, they did have some small holes around the upper part of the sock. The heel and toe construction was the same as or very similar to the *sjonaleistar* course instruction in Norway.

While inspecting the sock, my observation turned to affection. This was the only pair of *sjonaleistar* socks owned by Vesterheim. And, the only piece of twined knitting in their textile collection. Special, undoubtedly, and I had the

opportunity to share time and space with this artifact. The affection included not only admiration for the piece, but also for the knitter and the wearer. Kind care was given to the construction of the socks as well as to the wearing of them. My small colored x's on graph paper and photographs were a small task compared to knitting and caring for this sock.

I came home honored to have had this opportunity and smitten with Vesterheim's *sjonaleistar*.

**PHOTOGRAPHS OF SJONALEISTAR APPEAR IN THE FOLLOWING:**

*Dikt i Masker* by Solveig Hisdal. Oslo: LibriArte, 1997: 10.

*Nordic Knitting* by Susanne Pagoldh. Loveland:

Interweave Press, 1997: 50.

*Poetry in Stitches* by Solveig Hisdal. Petaluma: Unicorn Books and Crafts, 2010: 10.

*Rekonstruksjon av sjonaleister* by Maria Lie-Matthiesen.

Bergen: 2004.

*BUNAD Magazine* Number 2: 2009.

**Susan Kolstad Onken is an avid knitter. Her Norwegian Tree-of Life mittens appeared in the July/August 2009 *Piecework Magazine* published by Interweave Press and will be reprinted in *Knitting Traditions* in the fall.**

**TRANSLATION PUZZLE--BEAUTIFUL SOCKS**

The -ar or -er ending is a dialect phenomenon. In Bergen the ending will always be -er, but the reason will be our German heritage. It is actually more correct regarding the area of use of these socks (Hardanger) to write *sjonaleistar*. Ingebjørg Monson

*Sjonaleisten* is the definite singular (the sock)...Heather Torgenrud

## VESTERHEIM'S 2011 NATIONAL EXHIBITION OF FOLK ART IN THE NORWEGIAN TRADITION

**BLUE RIBBON AND PEOPLE'S CHOICE AWARD:**

"Camino Agua" (Water Road)

Wall Hanging in Krokbragd Technique

Judy Ness, Eugene, OR



Judy Ness, *Camino Agua*, cotton warp, wool weft, 50"x30."

Being a lover of water and boats, it was natural to navigate 2

to this place inspired by the wet. Hanging upside down from a kayak in the McKenzie River (rather too frequently) offered an unusual perspective. This woven piece is a slice, a 3D cross-section, of the underwater panorama. It's quiet down there. The current runs swiftly above the riverbed, through the grasses and roots along the bank, tumbling everything that enters, racing the very air. Everything goes by so very fast. Yet time and space doesn't exist as we are traveling at the same immediate pace. The past is gone, the future unknown, the present is all there is. The single intent is to return. Rivers are roads to the sea. The sea is Mother. Fast or slow, she's going home. **JUDY NESS**

**HONORABLE MENTION:**

Table Runner in Doubleweave Technique

Betty Nelson, Decorah, IA



Betty Nelson, double weave, Rauma spelsau yarn, 14"x15."

The inspiration for the designs came from the Överhogdal tapestry at Jamtli, the museum for Jämtlands Län in Östersund, Sweden.

**BETTY NELSON**

**BEST OF SHOW—WEAVING:**

"The Old Pattern" Krokbragd and Sheepskin Coverlet

Robbie LaFleur Moore (Gold Medalist), Minneapolis, MN

The krokbragd piece mounted on fleece was the original piece done to replicate "The Old Pattern," as discussed in the August 2010 issue of *The Textile Letter*.

The krokbragd piece is mounted on a fleece in the technique of a traditional *skinnfell*, a sheepskin coverlet. The graphic impact of light and dark works well in this piece as a wall hanging. Normally textiles mounted on fleece coverlets for bedding would have been lighter in weight.

During the skinnfell class at Vesterheim, Britt Solheim explained that many of the skinnfells covered with a textile have printing on the skin underneath. I liked this idea of secret symbolism adding power to a



textile. In my case, adding the symbols had a second useful purpose. It was my test piece to help learn the block printing process; to understand just how much pressure was best and how much ink to use. It was the year of my marriage, so I used a traditional image of a Halling couple, separated on the top and together at the bottom. Heart symbols in the center made a lot of sense, too!

**ROBBIE  
LAFLEUR  
MOORE**



Robbie LaFleur Moore, *krokbragd*, Norwegian åklægarn weft, linen warp, 21"x 35-1/2." The dimensions of the skinnfell as mounted are 26" x 40."



"Secret" printing under the *krokbragd*.

## MY PATH TO A GOLD MEDAL

BY ROSEMARY ROEHL

Those of us who have been exhibiting for many years (28 for me) in The NATIONAL EXHIBITION OF WEAVING IN THE NORWEGIAN TRADITION, Vesterheim's annual Nordic Fest exhibit of weaving, have lamented the recent decline in the number of entries. Although many have taken classes offered by Vesterheim, most of these new weavers are reluctant to enter this exhibition. For this reason I agreed to describe my own path to a Gold Medal which I received in 1992.

I am a self taught weaver and I knew very little about Norwegian weaving when I sent my first entries to the Vesterheim exhibition in 1983. Earlier, after visiting relatives on the Nordfjord and seeing magnificent weavings in their homes, I had decided to learn something about weaving, hoping that eventually I could use traditional Norwegian techniques. Taking a community education class in St. Cloud in 1980, I learned how to dress a loom and then purchased a six harness 20" Kessenich table loom. I did a few simple weavings and then started working with a *tavlebragd* pattern I had received from the mother of a Norwegian student from Børsa who lived with us at the time. My first entry used this technique.

Realizing that my first entry was amateurish, I looked



forward to the judges' comments. I was encouraged when they wrote that it was nicely woven with good selvages. Negative comments proved to be helpful too. One judge said of the weaving pictured above that it was "psychedelic" and another said it feels "dead." These comments helped me realize that my color choices were not good. I also found observing other weavings in the exhibit helpful. I learned that the design of this weaving was much too large for the size of the runner which measured 12" by 24" and was woven with a wool blend on cotton warp. A judge had noted the "disproportionate imbalance" which became more obvious to me as I studied other weavings.

For my 1984 entry I used the judges' comments from 1983 for guidance. I wove a wall hanging, using *tavlebragd* but making it longer with narrower blocks and more subdued colors. The weaving measured 51 1/2" x 11 1/2" and was woven with wool on a pearl cotton warp. Feedback was positive on the weaving technique and on the use of color. This was encouraging. An important lesson I learned this year was to have a focus and/or alteration in the design.

How a weaving is displayed is also important. Judges pointed out that a different type of rod and a shorter fringe would improve the appearance of the wall hanging. I trimmed the fringe and used a different rod. With these changes, the weaving received a Blue Ribbon at the Minnesota State Fair in 1986.

In **1986**, three years after my first Nordic Fest entry, I won my first ribbon--white. This was another in *tavlebragd*. I used the same warp and weft yarns as I had in my 1984 weaving. It measured 52" x 18½". And it did have a focal point. In **1989** I earned a Blue Ribbon, a White Ribbon and a Runner up Ribbon for three table runners all using the *tavlebragd* technique. This year I applied everything I had learned from past entries. I also used Norwegian yarns on a light beige warp. The comments from the three judges were very positive, particularly for the Blue Ribbon piece pictured below. One referred to its "elegant and rich design," and another said it "had magic." The third said it "gave a clean impression." Vesterheim Museum purchased this weaving,



1986 entry



1989 entry Vesterhum acquisition #1989037001

gaining points toward achieving a Gold Medal, I earned two white ribbons in **1991**. By **1992** I needed only one more point to earn the Gold Medal. This year I received a



1992 entry

Red Ribbon for a table runner using rosepath, *lynild* and *åklevev* techniques. In 1986 a Norwegian relative who lived on the Nordfjord had given me a small weaving which combined these techniques. This weaving measured 32" x 17 ½" and used Norwegian yarns. I received the highest score from all judges for both technique and creativity.

### I had achieved the Gold Medal!

I continued to enter pieces in the exhibition and In 1994 I earned Best of Show and People's Choice Awards for another table runner using rosepath, *lynild* and *åklevev*. I used light beige and colors similar to those in the apron and bands I wove for my Nordfjord bunad. Again the three judges referred to "super colors," "a well crafted piece, beautiful and dynamic." One even said it "rivaled any weaving in the Vesterheim collection."



1994 entry

I received another People's Choice Award in 2003 for my first attempt using the *vestfoldsmett* technique. Although Gold Medal winners can compete for Best of Show, we usually do not receive feedback from the judges. But I continue to learn by studying books and other weavings, adapting different techniques and exploring color combinations.

I've tried to indicate in these paragraphs that participating in Vesterheim's Nordic Fest Exhibition can be a positive experience for all weavers whether they are beginners or advanced. Take the first step and enter your weaving in the 2012 exhibit. It doesn't have to be large. Large is not always better. All of my weaving has been done on a 20" jack loom. You will find the judges' comments helpful. It will be even easier to enter again in 2013. GOOD LUCK

Mark your calendars! The deadline for the 2012 National Exhibition of Folk Art in the Norwegian Tradition is May 25 (with paperwork due May 18). The exhibition opens June 7 and runs through Decorah's Nordic Fest in late July. You can find the rules at [vesterheim.org](http://vesterheim.org) under "Exhibitions" or request a copy from Laurann Gilbertson ([lgilbertson@vesterheim.org](mailto:lgilbertson@vesterheim.org), 563-382-9681). Both traditional and contemporary weavings, completed within the last three years, are welcome. We want to see your weavings! Approximately 4,000 people will go through the museum during the run of the exhibition to be informed and inspired.



# VISITING THE VESTERHEIM COLLECTION

BY JAN MOSTROM (GOLD MEDAL WINNER)

I have enjoyed visiting the Vesterheim textile collection to research their wonderful treasures. This will be the first in a series of articles that looks at Vesterheim's ryas and the weave structures of these ryas.

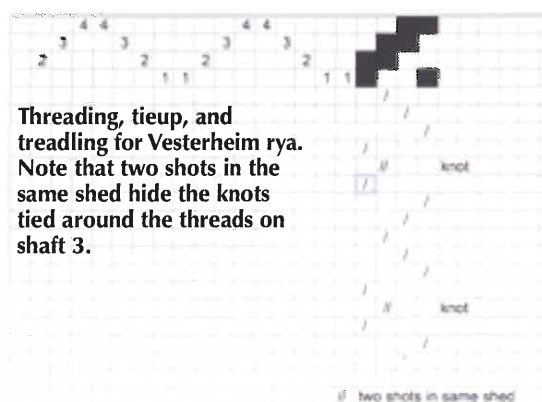


Vesterheim rya #1979.083.001 donated by Marion and Lila Nelson.

The warp sett is 22 epi and the weft is about 16 ppi.



Detail of Vesterheim rya.



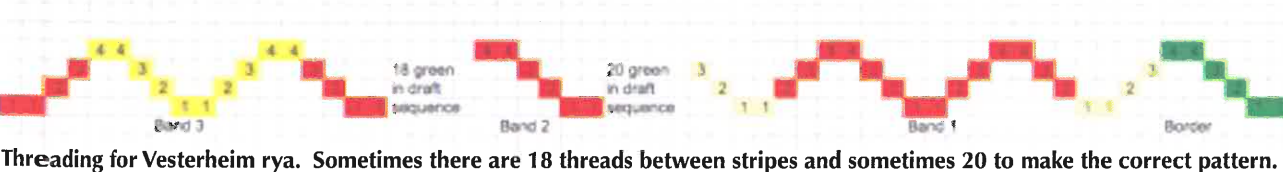
Threading, tieup, and treadling for Vesterheim rya. Note that two shots in the same shed hide the knots tied around the threads on shaft 3.

When recreating this structure, I used Rauma Åklægarn for the warp and weft as well as the knots. The knots were tied on a shed that raises shafts 2 and 3. The knots are tied around the threads on shaft 3 and the ends come up between them. They

are hidden by the weft shot which is thrown twice in the same shed. I used a floating

selvage to make this easier. The double shots create a bit of a ridge in the weaving but hide the knots well.

I think this is the way the original was woven.



Threading for Vesterheim rya. Sometimes there are 18 threads between stripes and sometimes 20 to make the correct pattern.

This rya's backing is a point twill variation in dark green, red, gold, and natural white warp stripes. The knots are in whites with borders of 5 red and gold knots. When the rya is hemmed, the warp which is knotted creates a border on those two sides of the rya blanket and helps frame the white knots in color. All of the weft was woven in dark green.

I used this backing for a rya wallhanging. It was inspired by the protective symbols painted in white on the dark walls of a medieval house in the Hardanger Museum. I made my knots in blacks and dark grays and browns and in white and off white shades. I liked the green, red, white and gold of the Vesterheim rya so much that I retained those colors in my backing. The brighter warp knots give a nice contrast to the neutrals of the other knots the colored threads need to match the right spot in the draft.



The backing of the Protection rya, in the manner of the Vesterheim rya.



Jan Mostrom, Protection rya, 19"x56."

## MY TRIP TO NORWAY AND WHAT I LEARNED ABOUT CULTURAL SKILLS

BY KAREN AAKRE

I left Minneapolis on the 18<sup>th</sup> of June with the Vesterheim textile tour. (More details about the trip can be found in *The Norwegian Textile Letter* August 2011 and November 2011.)

After a couple of days in Iceland, we flew to Bergen and spent six days there. Among many unique sights, the log houses with the grass roofs at an outdoor farm museum were particularly interesting. I learned that birch bark under the dirt kept it from seeping through.

I snapped many loom and spinning wheel pictures. This was a trip of a life time. We stayed in Skei and Fagernes, and eventually made it to the Oslo airport where I separated from the group to proceed on to **RAULAND AKADEMIET**, where I would study *skinfeller* from the 30<sup>th</sup> of June to July 8<sup>th</sup> when I would fly home.

I had spent a year and a half tracking down Britt Solheim to take this class and was so excited to have it happen.

The class was taught in Norsk, and it was hard for me to keep up. Every morning I joined in singing Norwegian folk songs and we had class 9-5 most days and worked till ten at night most nights.

I started with a small skin for a chair cushion and then started to tackle a three skin *skinfeller* which took me a couple of days. I would pull the needle through with a pliers, and stuck my fingers many times. The blood on the skin was said to bless the hide.



Karen Aakre's Skinnfell.

I used Gottland sheep for this one, and then I made one of spelsau which took two hides and I also made mittens, booties, two scarves, a head warmer, wrist warmers, and a pillow top. I left Minnesota with one suitcase and returned with three. I bought 14 birch blocks from Britt to make more here and I am weaving a Sami rock loom piece and will sew this in the Norwegian technique to skins I have at home. I had a hard time getting back to Oslo as I missed the bus in the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup> and a kind lady drove me to the nearest station. Then if the flight hadn't been delayed two hours, I might still be in Norway. Wow what a time! The hardanger, the rosmaling, the weaving, the carving I saw were so beautiful. I took 2000 digital pictures and 14 rolls of film and will cherish the trip for the rest of my days.

**Karen lives on a farm outside of Underwood, Minnesota. She invites school groups to visit the immigrant cabins on her property..**



# **SOME PIECES FROM THE RYA STUDY GROUP EXHIBITION AT VESTERHEIM**



**Judy Ness, rya pillow.**

Contemporary ryer (plural of rya) still employ the pile structure of the ancient ryer but may use more elaborate design elements. Early ryer were discovered in Norwegian ship burials, evidence of the great respect and value of these magnificent textiles. Ryer are passed down over the years as prized family heirlooms and continue to enrich Scandinavian life, honoring a rich past in handicraft. Today, ryer have taken their place in the world of contemporary textile art.



**Marion Marzolf, Fire in the Night, rya.**



**Betty Johannesen, rya with runes.**



**Gayle Bingham, pillow with Icelandic style knots.**



**Barbara Overby, Ice Fishing, rya.**

**Sharon Marquardt, "Veske," rya handbag.**



**Corwyn Knutson, rya.**

More pieces from this exhibition will appear in future issues of the *Norwegian Textile Letter*.



Textile Artist and NTG member, Judy Ness, will be teaching at:

Convergence 2012 - Long Beach, CA  
July 20-21, 2012  
Krokbragd Rug Technique  
[http://www.weavespindye.org/pages/?p=convergence2012/Friday\\_classes.html&loc=8-114-00](http://www.weavespindye.org/pages/?p=convergence2012/Friday_classes.html&loc=8-114-00)

Fiberarts at Ghost Ranch - Abiquiu, NM  
Natural Dyeing Yarn with Extracts and Indigo: A Rainbow Palette &  
Chakra Journey  
April 23-29, 2012  
[http://www.ghost ranch.org/catalog?page=shop.product\\_details&flypage=flypage\\_course.tpl&product\\_id=940&category\\_id=16](http://www.ghost ranch.org/catalog?page=shop.product_details&flypage=flypage_course.tpl&product_id=940&category_id=16)

Norwegian Textile Guild member Heather Torgenrud is available to translate Norwegian text into English (or the reverse). \$10.00 per hour. Please contact her at [fjord@blackfoot.net](mailto:fjord@blackfoot.net)

John Capone has created a DVD of the Vesterheim Travel Study Tour to Iceland and Norway in 2011 with slides, short movies, and background music. John says: *The trip was a great one. I enjoy sharing my images because they bring me back to that time and place and I hope that they do so for others.* If you would like a copy, send \$3.00 to:

John Capone  
1838 Overlook Ridge Road  
Brookings SD 57006-3258

Syvilla Tweed Bolson  
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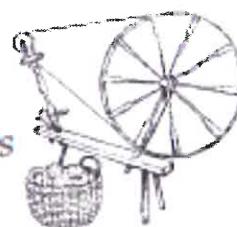
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Mary Lønning Skoy, editor  
7200 York Ave. South #120  
Edina MN 55435 USA  
952-831-4512  
[maryskoy@hotmail.com](mailto:maryskoy@hotmail.com)