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*USIKKER SPINNER: The Masculine Painter
and The Feminine Weaver*

Conceptuality, Femininity, and Materiality in
Contemporary Norwegian Craft

Bachelor's thesis in Art History

Supervisor: Lasse Hodne

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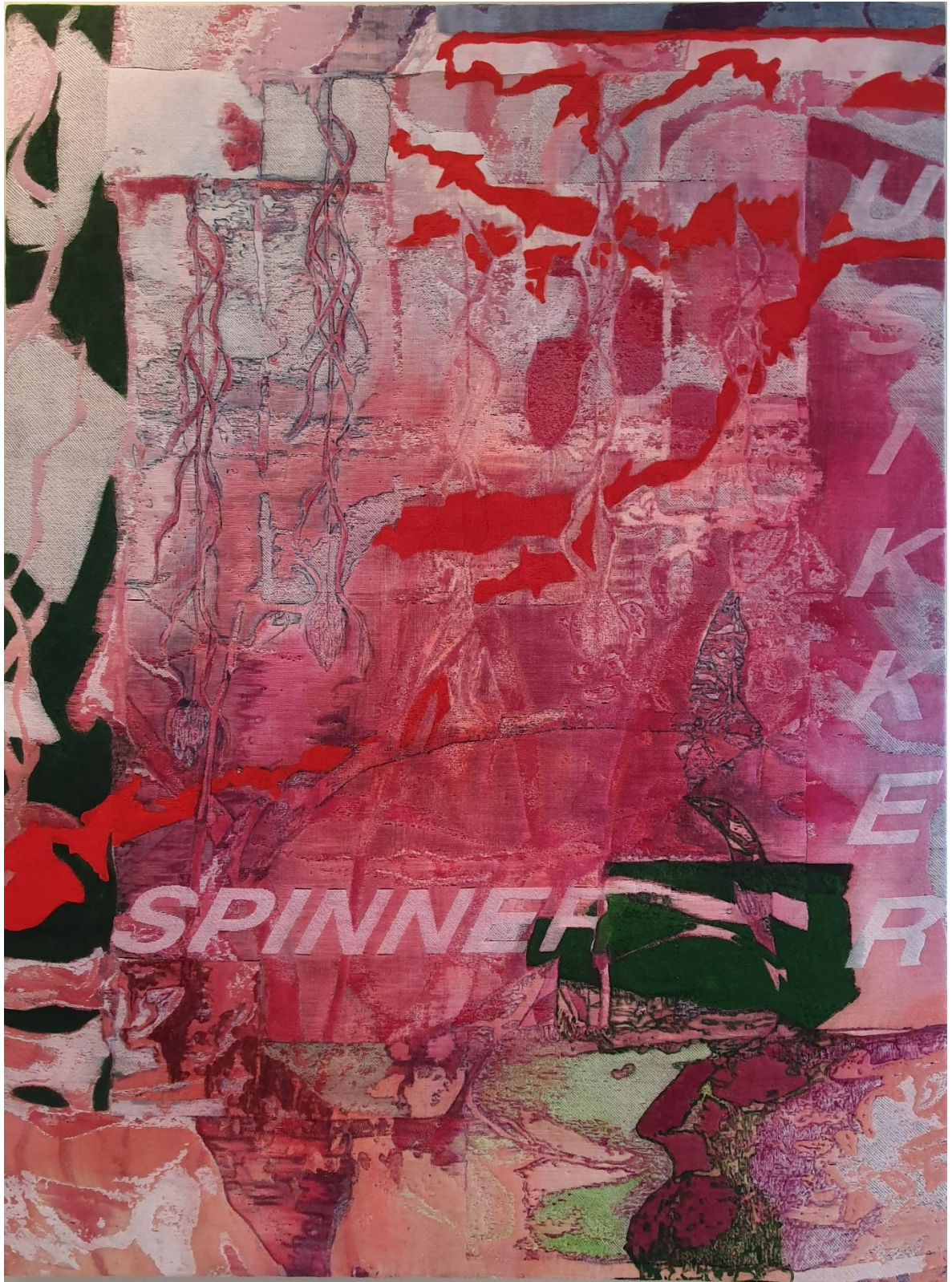


Fig. 1, USIKKERKUNSTJENTE, *USIKKER SPINNER*, Multimedia, 2021, Trondheim Municipality

USIKKER SPINNER

Tematisk arbeider vi med å kommentere på kunstverdens hierakier innen materialer og håndverk, sett fra et feministisk ståsted. Vi inspireres av hvordan kunsthistorien har undergravd og fremhevet teknikker og uttrykk innen abstrakt maleri. USIKKERKUNSTJENTE maler. Hun reagerer på det allerede etablerte motivet i tekstilet med en underliggende hemmelighet. Hva hun vil fortelle, overlates til penselen og tanker om det maskuline maleriet som manifesterer seg på den feminine hvite konstruerte veven.¹

USIKKER SPINNER (Unsure Spinner) is a multimedia tapestry by the artist duo USIKKERKUNSTJENTE which consist of Alexandra Jegerstedt (b. 1986) and Iben Isabell Krogstad (b. 1993). It measures 175 cm tall and 130 cm wide. It is currently owned by the Trondheim Municipality and hangs on display on the fourth floor of Kjøpmannsgata 38, in Kulturenheten's office space. Trondheim Municipality acquired the piece on October 7, 2021, from the Coast Contemporary group exhibition which was held at the BABEL Showroom September 21-26 the same year.² The piece was exhibited twice before its acquisition – for the first time at USIKKERKUNSTJENTE's solo exhibition Tosomisme at the Telemark Art Center and for the last time at the aforementioned Coast Contemporary group exhibition.

The overarching guidelines for the acquisition of all public art in Trondheim implemented in 1998 state that the acquired art should 1) primarily be contemporary, 2) representative of the individual artist's entire production, 3) representative of Trondheim's art scene, and 4) include a variety of forms of expression within art and craft.³ Trondheim has one of Norway's largest collections of contemporary art in public spaces.⁴ The majority of the art Trondheim Municipality owns is commissioned or acquired for a specific location, but a few artworks are purchased on a free basis by an acquisition committee and stay undisplayed until an appropriate location for them is found. *USIKKER SPINNER* was such an acquisition and was placed in Kulturenheten's offices as per request for contemporary young art.⁵ It was purchased for 33 600

¹ Alexandra Jegerstedt and Iben Isabell Krogsgaard, "*USIKKER SPINNER*» (unpublished manuscript, last saved May 11, 2023), PDF file.

² Gathered from Trondheim Municipality's PRIMUS which at the time of writing this thesis has been down for a week.

³ Retningslinjer for innkjøp av kunst til Trondheim Kommune, sak 98/0244.

⁴ Per Christiansen, *Kunst Ute, Kunst Inne 2: Offentlig Kunst I Trondheim 2010-2016 = Public Art in Trondheim 2010-2016*, ed. Grethe Britt Fredriksen, trans. Ingvild Andersen (Trondheim: Museumsforlaget, 2016), 13.

⁵ Ingun Myrstad, conversation with the author, April 12, 2023.

Norwegian kroner, including the 5% art tax.⁶ *USIKKER SPINNER* is categorized as *movable art*, i.e. an uncommissioned small-scale artwork. As it is located in an open floor office plan used for day-to-day operations it is not easily accessible and requires an appointment with Kulturrenheten in order to be viewed.

USIKKER SPINNER has a vertically oriented rectangular format. The motifs are nonfigurative and organic for the most part except for the all-capitalized words “USIKKER” and “SPINNER.” The middle section is made up of varying light shades of pink and blue which bleed together in an almost watercolor-esque manner. Contrasting fields of solid flat dark green and bright red are painted scatteredly throughout the entire picture surface. The red fields travel diagonally across from the lower left section towards the right corner. The red shapes are organic, thin, and slightly jagged. The fields of green are near the left periphery and in the lower right section, and are bolder, thicker, and less jagged than the red. They are also organically shaped for the most part, but the edges are cut abruptly straight on the sides which go inward toward the center. Straight, rectangular sections can be observed throughout the entire surface can be observed if one looks closely. In the middle and the lower section of the surface, the rectangular sections are larger and obscured by the plethora of organic shapes and overlapping colors. In the sections surrounding the center they are emphasized and create a loose margin by the paint following and/or being restrained by its lines - purple organic motifs are vertically restrained on the left side, a jagged red line follows a horizontal line near the top right periphery and restrains a thin rectangular section of blue which is above it, and a small white rectangle in the top left section is contained within a square.

Scattered throughout the surface, but most highly concentrated in the lower section, are also smaller, more intricate motifs. Intertwining braided thick pink lines go downwards from just below the top section. Thin dark swirling lines fill, contour, and go beyond various small and large fields of color. In the lower section, amongst other intricate shapes and lines, are small droplet-like maroon shapes, a field of pale green with a translucent quality to it, and an angular burgundy shape outlined by thin dark green lines.

The word “USIKKER” is woven vertically down the right side of the picture close to the perimeter. “SPINNER” is placed horizontally, ca. two-thirds down from the top. “SPINNER” is

⁶ Ingun Myrstad, email correspondence with theauthor, April 12, 2023.

located on the same vertical axes as the last letter of “USIKKER.” Both words are in a bold and italicized sans-serif font, most likely from a Helvetica font family. They are considerably lighter in color than their surroundings and are easy to make out.

The concrete, physical textural qualities of the different materials (oil paint and fiber) are very visible when the piece is observed in real life. The plush texture of the weave is highly tactile, with the visible staples of the wool fibers and the thick, fluffy chenille yarn showing through most of the painted sections. The original colors of the tapestry show through as well in a grid-like pattern in the sections where the paint is applied sparingly. The sections which are highly saturated with oil paint are matte and seem to almost rest on the top of the tapestry.

The tapestry of *USIKKER SPINNER* is produced through a process of digital fabrication, with the use of a fabrication software and an industrial digital Jacquard loom. More specifically it was woven in Innvik AS, a factory which specializes in industrial-scale production of interior textiles in Innvik, a small town on the western coast of Norway which it was named after.⁷⁸ The digital looms in Innvik differ from those most commonly used for the production of contemporary art in Norway - as an example, several art academies in Norway own digital fabrication looms of the type TC1 and TC2, which are computer-controlled but hand-operated.⁹ These looms operate similarly to old-media Jacquard looms, but instead of using analogue punch cards the shaft movements are automated digitally. The weaver still must physically weave by sending the shuttle which carries the weft (the horizontal threads) back and forth across the warp (the vertical threads). Innvik AS, on the other hand, uses industrial looms which are automated to a higher degree. The weaver does not need to physically weave. The pre-production fabrication process itself is similar on both looms – a CAD/CAM software for textiles design such as ArahWeave is used to design the weave.

USIKKER SPINNER was woven with multiple types of white yarn consisting of different fibers and varying in texture and thickness. Some of the yarn is natural (wool and linen) and some is synthetic (nylon). The plain white weave was then dipped in dye baths which were filled with either synthetic and naturally extracted dyes. The natural dyes used stem from the weld plant (which produces yellow dyes) and from the rose madder plant (which produces dyes of varying

⁷ Alexandra Jegerstedt, conversation with author, April 26, 2023.

⁸ Jegerstedt, conversation with author, April 26, 2023.

⁹ Randi Nygaard Lium, *Tekstilkunst i Norge* (Trondheim: Museene i Sør-Trøndelag Museumsforlag, 2016), 232

shades of pink and red)¹⁰. The fiber content of the yarn is significant to mention because it determines how well the yarn absorbs the different dyes, a property which USIKKERKUNSTJENTE utilized to build up various tones and values in *USIKKER SPINNER*. The tapestry was then mounted on a frame and thin layers of hand-mulled oil paint were gradually built up in patterns that followed the ones already woven into the tapestry.

Theory

As far as I am aware there is no published scholarly writing regarding *USIKKER SPINNER* and USIKKERKUNSTJENTE. To get an understanding of their practice I had to seek out newspaper articles, exhibition texts, and object descriptions, all of which are available on gallery websites – I will not list those as it would be unsightly and overwhelming to insert a long list of URLs, and despite being of great help to me, they are explaining texts and do not count as “studies” as such. The general topics of conceptual craft, contemporary art, feminist craft, and gendering of practices discussed in this thesis, on the other hand, have been such a central part in the art discourse of the last couple of decades that it would be nearly impossible to list them all. I will therefore only provide a brief overview of the central critical literature used in this thesis.

My theories regarding craft rely heavily on Knut Astrup Bull’s body of writing, most notably his 2007 book *En Ny Diskurs for Kunsthåndverket: En Bok Om Det Nye Konseptuelle Kunsthåndverket* and his essay “You In Between: From Aesthetic Difference to Aesthetic Differing” from the essay collection *Material Perceptions*, the fifth volume in the anthology *Documents on Contemporary Craft* by Norwegian Crafts. *Material Perceptions* and the second volume of the anthology, *Materiality Matters*, tackle contemporary craft in Norway in an incredibly concise manner. *Material Perceptions* is composed of essays (most of which are written by new-materialist theorists) on aesthetic theory and the state of the current discourse surrounding craft. The essays in *Materiality Matters* tackle tendencies in contemporary art practice regarding materiality and offer an instrumental insight into the processes of contemporary artists and trends in the contemporary art scene.

¹⁰ Alexandra Jegerstedt and Iben Isabell Krogsgaard, “*USIKKER SPINNER*» (unpublished manuscript, last saved May 11, 2023), PDF file.

Griselda Pollock and Roszika Parker write about art as social practice and the feminine stereotype in *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*. Pollock and Parker elaborate on Marxist historical materialism by introducing gender into the discourse, a theoretical framework known as feminist historical materialism. *Textile Terms: A Glossary* is a collection of short-form essays which critically explore central terms and concepts surrounding textiles.

Important to note is the definition of gender in this thesis - it is reliant on Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler's rejection of gender essentialism, which suggests that gender is a natural or innate aspect of our identity. Instead, it is regarded as a social and psychosocial product, a result of various conventions, norms, and ideals which have emerged in social relations. Central to the discourse of the art and craft divide is the social relation between classes and the gendered division of labor, which is extensively addressed by Parker and Pollock's body of works, both in their solo writings and in their collaborative work.

I met up with Alexandra Jegerstedt, one part of the duo, on April 26, 2023, in her studio to discuss *USIKKER SPINNER*. The conversation was informal, and no transcript exists of it – only brief notes in my note-taking app. They read as follows: “wool nylon chenille, tc2 loom trials, industrial loom in innvik final, machine woven, dipped in dye vats, mounted on frame first then painted on, process”. Two days after the meeting Jegerstedt I received an email from her which contained more detailed information about the fibers used and an unpublished project description of *USIKKER SPINNER*.

Methodology

I set out to conduct a contextual analysis of *USIKKER SPINNER* – to examine the discourses and tendencies that shaped it, how it is reflective of other contemporary craft, and to explore the subject matters central to contemporary feminist craft to then propose a reading informed by the knowledge I've acquired. A large section of the thesis still does exactly that, but in doing so a new point of departure emerged – materialist art analyses require investigations into the making of meaning, resulting in a loosely iconological analysis of *USIKKER SPINNER*'s allegorical content.

Contemporary Craft in Norway

The 1960 craft landscape in Norway was largely dominated by what could be best described as formalistic craft. Craft objects emphasized their materiality and the aesthetic qualities unique to textile and ceramics. Synnøve Anker Aurdal's (1908-2000) tapestry *Telegram* from 1968 is an example of such a work.¹¹ The 1970s, after a period of material experimentation, witnessed a rise in political signaling through figurative tapestries in the vein of Hannah Ryggen (1894-1970), who was at the time one of the few textile artists whose works were purchased by the National Museum. Postmodernism reached Norwegian textile art – disillusion with the modernist separation between art and everyday life led to a rise in critical, political subject matters. Internationally, textile feminist artists in 1970s consciously worked with textile art as a part of a larger feminist project which aimed to highlight and resist the denigration of the feminine in the history of art.¹² Judy Chicago (b. 1983) and Miriam Shapiro (1923 - 2015) are two of the most prominent examples. It seems as if the feminist gusto arrived to Norway a bit later, in the 1980s, with Elisabeth Haarr (b. 1945) and Brit Fuglevaag (b. 1939) as central figures.¹³ In 1974 textile artists were granted a jury in the National Art Exhibition in Oslo.¹⁴ Textile art's status and popularity rose, and as a result it became frequently used as *monumentalkunst*, i.e., large scale art used in the decoration of the exteriors and interiors of buildings, often public. In the 1990s, textile art fell in popularity within art communities. Curator and writer Line Halvorsen writes: "The genre hierarchy in the Norwegian art scene came to expression as follows: conceptual art is smart, but practices focusing on crafts are less good"¹⁵. Perhaps out of this "anxiety for smartness", as Halvorsen calls it, dematerialized conceptual craft emerged. More recently, artists have reverted to material-based practices which "do not favour concepts at the expense of craftsmanship, or vice versa."¹⁶ There is currently a point of contention regarding skill between artists who practice their craft and those who outsource their craft. Of those who practice their

¹¹ Gunnar Danbolt, *Norsk Kunsthistorie: Bilde Og Skulptur Frå Vikingtida Til I Dag*, 2nd ed. (Oslo: Samlaget, 2001), 370-372.

¹² Elissa Auther, "Gender," in *Textile Terms: A Glossary*, ed. Anika Reineke, Anne Röhl, Mateusz Kapustka, and Tristan Weddigen (Emsdetten: Edition Imorde, 2017), 119.

¹³ Frida Forsgren, "Kunstrevisjonisme – hvorfor er det viktig?" *Sørlandets Kunstmuseum*.
<https://www.skmu.no/kunstrevisjonisme-hvorfor-er-det-viktig/>

¹⁴ Danbolt, *Norsk Kunsthistorie*, 372.

¹⁵ Line Halvorsen, "Something Tangible with An Aura" in *Materiality Matters*, eds. Joakim Borda-Pedreira and Gjertrud Steinsvåg, vol. 5, *Documents on Contemporary Craft*, ed. Andre Gali (Oslo: Norwegian Crafts, 2014), 15.

¹⁶ Halvorsen, "Something Tangible with An Aura", 16.

craft, many have a preference for using natural materials with local origin, a tendency seen in contemporary art across the globe.¹⁷ Halvorsen writes: “Even though the art academies downgraded practical work during the last two decades, several younger conceptually oriented artists have borrowed methods and visual languages formerly associated with the schools for craft and applied arts in Bergen and Oslo. These artists wish to move away from the kind of art that is executed and completed on the first try. They would rather pursue a practice that combines conceptual content with physical processes.”¹⁸

Another factor that makes craft practices attractive, according to Halvorsen, is the pleasure one receives from seeing one’s laborious efforts turn into something tangible. Jegerstedt, during our conversation, expressed a similar sentiment about the slow and experimental nature of *USIKKER SPINNER*’s process. The emphasis on the process having value in itself is reminiscent of Process Art of the 1970s.

Developments in loom technology made a wide range of looms and techniques available to textile artists. Sissel Blystad (b. 1944), Åse Frøyshov (b. 1943) and Kristin Lindberg (b. 1950) are examples of artists who use traditional weaving techniques. The younger generation includes Aurora Passero (b. 1984) and Ann Cathrin November Høibo (b. 1979). The inventions of TC-1 loom in 1995 and the TC-2 loom in 2012 by Vibeke Vestby (b. 1954) and their use in art academies popularized digital fabrication. Notable examples are Kari Dyrdal’s 2015 *Ornament – kalkspat på mylonittisk gneis – 60°23’45.96’’N, 5°18’31.96’’Ø* and her series *Jacquardfortellinger*.

¹⁷ Julian Stallabrass, *Contemporary Art: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 30.

¹⁸ Halvorsen, “Something Tangible with An Aura”, 19.

Conceptual Craft

Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972, a seminal book on conceptual art by Lucy Lippard, theorizes what exactly it is that constitutes conceptual art. In the introduction Lippard recalls the “bickering about what Conceptual art is/was” which took place in the latter part of the 1960s.¹⁹ She brings to attention artist and collaborator Sol Lewitt’s distinction between conceptual art “with a small c” and Conceptual art “with a capital C” – conceptual art being art which uses conventional material forms (in Lewitt’s case painting) generated by a central idea and Conceptual art being art in which the material form is unconventional and *dematerialized* and is used solely to convey an idea. *Art Since 1900*, a survey textbook of modern art, describes the first approach as one where the concept is «a quasi-automated machine” and the second as one of “pure intention”.²⁰ *The Story of Contemporary Art*, a contemporary art survey book, defines conceptual art as art which draws “focus on its uncertainty”.²¹ *Art Since 1900* refers to all conceptual art with a capital C. *The Story of Contemporary Art* refers to all conceptual art with a small c. All to say that there is no clear terminological separation between the two approaches. Nonetheless, it is clear that it is predominantly Conceptual art with a capital C which is being written about in these two books.

Following this definition of conceptuality, the term “Conceptual craft” with a capital C could be said to be a term at odds with itself – where conceptual art is defined by its lack of materiality, craft is defined by its materiality. *Usikker Spinner* is not dematerialized – in fact, it is heavily materialized. Materiality here refers to both tactility and existence as a concrete object and the material processes (the work) through which craft is created. Its materiality is loaded with culturally symbolic significance and is therefore central to its allegorical power, i.e., its conceptuality. How are these objects meant to be defined and read? *En Ny Diskurs for Kunsthåndverket: En Bok Om Det Nye Konseptuelle Kunsthåndverket* by Bull aims to revise reading of craft through an art/life dichotomy lens. The division between concept (idea) and craft (work) in idealistic aesthetics is so fundamental to the argument of art as autonomous that the

¹⁹ Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, 2nd ed. (New York: Praeger, 1973), vii.

²⁰ Hal Foster et al., *Art since 1900: modernism, antimodernism, postmodernism*, 3rd ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 2011), 610.

²¹ Tony Godfrey, *The Story of Contemporary Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2020), 47.

concept of “conceptual craft” presents a dilemma.²² A new approach, a paradigm shift, is then needed – one which Bull coins *conceptual materialism*.

Bull claims to observe a shift in aesthetic tendencies within craft from the mid-90s onward from *handverksestetikk* (translated to “handicraft aesthetics”) to *conceptual aesthetics*.²³ Handicraft aesthetics emphasize the crafter’s ability to transform their materials into beautiful and functional objects which is then used as an argument to legitimize them. A handicraft aesthetic requires an *organic understanding*, one where the work is understood as a “union of form and content, where the content is form – and the form is content.”²⁴ The organic understanding, or *organicism*, emerged in 1800s Romanticism and was concretized during the time of Modernism. Central to its philosophical framework is the concept of art as *autonomous*, rooted in the thought that a work transcends its own materiality (the physical world) and becomes self-contained the second it is designated as art. It is no longer a concrete object, but rather an “abstract symbol, a metaphor which portrays and reflects real life.”²⁵ In this view most craft, especially functional craft, cannot transcend life – regardless of how decorative it is, it still cannot depict anything outside of itself. The process through which the craft object was created becomes its main content and it retains its materiality as a concrete, non-autonomous object.

A conceptual aesthetic, on the other hand, requires an *allegorical understanding*. Conceptual craft commonly uses pre-existent cultural symbols and craft objects which are outsourced/premade. The craft objects (which are interpreted by the artist and function as symbols) are put in a discursive new context and their function and symbolism is thus changed, meaning that the objects then require an allegorical understanding and reading.²⁶ Important to note is that when discussing such work, Bull’s examples of conceptual craft are works which engage in discourses regarding art and craft from various entry points, not craft objects which are used to conceptualize other matters. Although conceptual works intrinsically question art itself (as do most postmodernist movements), specific subject matters can vary. Conceptual craft is in

²² Knut Astrup Bull, *En Ny Diskurs for Kunsthåndverket: En Bok Om Det Nye Konseptuelle Kunsthåndverket* (Oslo: Akademisk publisering Unipax, 2007), 20.

²³ Bull, *En Ny Diskurs for Kunsthåndverket*, 15.

²⁴ Bull, *En Ny Diskurs for Kunsthåndverket*, 13. Insert og

²⁵ Bull, *En Ny Diskurs for Kunsthåndverket*, 16.

²⁶ Bull, *En Ny Diskurs for Kunsthåndverket*, 14.

this context defined as craft whose subject matter, the content, is the discussion of the notion of craft itself.

This is when conceptual materialism comes into the picture – such objects refuse the notion that idea and craft are unable to be consolidated. An aesthetic idealism therefore offers no way to approach reading them, so Bull turns to materialism. From Marx’s materialism and Morris’ Arts and Crafts movement’s material aesthetics, Bull extrapolates a new aesthetic theory – one which proposes that craft should not be categorized and read as craft based on its process and visual similarities to traditional craft. By considering craft as a self-reflexing field and as one stretching its own limits, a sentiment parallel to various other theories of practices “in the expanded field” stemming from Rosalind Krauss’s 1979 “Sculpture in the Expanded Field”, an allegorical craft object stays a craft object.²⁷

The wish for an expanded field of craft is in response to what he more lucidly describes in «You In Between: From Aesthetic Difference to Aesthetic Differing” (which functions as an extension of the theory presented in *A New Discourse*) as post-modernity’s art discourse’s strive to “overcome dualism by giving craft the same characteristics as pictorial art.”²⁸ Bull argues that attempting to unify art and craft only reinforces the pre-existing dualism and the oppositional relation between art and craft. It should instead be allowed to exist as a separate, but equal field.

USIKKER SPINNER walks the line between these two aesthetic approaches. The weave, which shows knowledge of its materials and therefore skill and ability, is nonetheless used allegorically as a symbol of the feminine to critique the art and craft division both broadly and more pointedly from a feminist perspective. Conceptual materialism offers little when it comes to reading *USIKKER SPINNER*. But the discourse has evolved since *A New Discourse* was published – conceptual materialism has been postceded by new-materialism, a broad and undefined term whose most relevant stance in this context goes as follows: craft is rematerializing itself, and those rematerialized craft objects hold as much allegorical power as dematerialized craft. Materiality is perceived as signifying a meaning in itself, even if the physical form is

²⁷ Bull, *En Ny Diskurs for Kunsthåndverket*.

²⁸ Knut Astrup Bull, “You In Between: From Aesthetic Difference to Aesthetic Differing” in *Material Perceptions*, eds. Andre Gali and Knut Astrup Bull, vol. 2, *Documents on Contemporary Craft*, ed. Andre Gali (Oslo: Norwegian Crafts, 2018), 43.

conceptually subordinated by an idea.²⁹ *USIKKER SPINNER* wholly embraces this new-materialist notion of materiality holding meaning.

It is from Bull's conceptual materialism's motion for an expanded field of craft and new-materialism's acknowledgment of materiality as allegorical that I propose my reading of *USIKKER SPINNER* as conceptual craft, regardless of its visual similarities to pictorial art – the tapestry, self-explanatorily enough, is allegorical craft. The paint is not as self-explanatory and will require further elaboration.

Digital Craft

I previously made the claim that *USIKKER SPINNER* walks the line between handicraft aesthetics and conceptual aesthetics. This argument bears some defending, as the weave, the conceptual and formal basis of the entire piece, was woven by a machine. In the essay “Digital Craft – How Do We Create with Digital Technologies?” from *Materiality Matters*, KHiO associate professor and digital fabrication enthusiast Trine Wester urges us to “rethink what it means to make, and to be a maker today” because of the widespread use of digital tools in craft.³⁰ She places these craft objects in an expanded field of craft, which goes by many names: “digital craft”, “neo craft”, and “expanded craft”.³¹ Wester writes: “In digital craft materiality not only pertains to physical objects but also to the processes and relations which give rise to the material results.”³² This is true for both traditional and digitally fabricated craft. Craft is not defined only by its ends, but also by its means. Glenn Adamson, in *Thinking Through Craft*, analyses craft as “an approach, an attitude, or a habit of action.”³³ By considering the use of digital tools as simply an alternative material approach of expressing the attitudes of craft, be it the handicraft attitude (digital fabrication still requires considerable skill and knowledge of one's tools) or the conceptual attitude, digital craft can free itself from the idea that it is oppositional to analogue craft, or more broadly, that technology is oppositional to the idea of craft. In the introduction to

²⁹ Trude Schjelderup/KORO, *Materiallets Tale - Kunstens Taktile Språk* (Oslo: Stortinget/KORO, 2019), 21.

³⁰ Trine Wester, “Digital Craft – How Do We Create with Digital Technologies?” in *Materiality Matters*, eds. Joakim Borda-Pedreira and Gjertrud Steinsvåg, vol. 5, *Documents on Contemporary Craft*, ed. Andre Gali (Oslo: Norwegian Crafts, 2014), 50.

³¹ Trine Wester, “Digital Craft – How Do We Create with Digital Technologies?” in *Materiality Matters*, eds. Joakim Borda-Pedreira and Gjertrud Steinsvåg, vol. 5, *Documents on Contemporary Craft*, ed. Andre Gali (Oslo: Norwegian Crafts, 2014), 45.

³² Trine Wester, “Digital Craft”, 46.

³³ Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 4.

the 2020 publication *The Handbook of Textile Culture* editor Janis Jefferies writes: “For many contemporary textile practitioners, the terms, hand- making, materials, processes, technologies, suggest forms of translation rather than the perfection of traditional skill or the ‘pure start’.”³⁴ It may be easier for textile art to adopt digital fabrication tools, as the Jacquard loom and its punch cards - a significant contribution to textile production technology - operated similarly to computers and binary code. The remediation of old and new technologies and the acceptance of the new technologies is thus less challenging. In fact, the punch card mechanism of the Jacquard loom inspired both Charles Babbage (1791-1871) and Ada Lovelace (1815-1852), the inventors of two proto-computers: Babbage’s Difference Engine and Lovelace’s Analytical Engine.³⁵

Women and Craft

Textile arts in Norway are a field which is, and historically has been, dominated by women.³⁶ As is the case with a plethora of other practices and activities performed and enjoyed by predominantly women, it has undergone the process of gendering due to its history of being considered “women’s work”. Unique to Norway is the status which textile-art has achieved and the constancy of women’s presence as weavers, as the gender roles in textile production in the rest of Europe have shifted repeatedly throughout the ages.³⁷

Women in Norway have long had a central role in the production textile art tracing back to the Viking and Middle Age. This is in opposition to many other European countries, where guilds and professional workshops run by men had elevated status due to the tapestry’s popularity in court art. With no court to make court art for, writing about pre-1800s art and craft in Norway is predominantly folk-centric. In Renaissance and Baroque Norway (ca. 1550- 1750) women were not allowed to join guilds and practice professional craft – nonetheless, they were considered a part of the local art communities. Much of folk craft and folk art’s motifs of the time were formulaic and stemming from preexisting model books and matrices. Without the emphasis on

³⁴ Janis Jefferies, introduction to *The Handbook of Textile Culture*, ed. Janis Jefferies, Diana Wood Conroy, and Hazel Clark (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 32.

³⁵ Sadie Plant, *Zeros + Ones: Digital Women + the New Technoculture*, 2nd ed. (London: Fourth Estate, 1997), 18.

³⁶ Randi Nygaard Lium, *Tekstilkunst i Norge* (Trondheim: Museene i Sør-Trøndelag Museumsforlag, 2016), 164.

³⁷ Anne Rohl, “Weaving” in *Textile Terms: A Glossary*, ed. Anika Reineke, Anne Röhl, Mateusz Kapustka, and Tristan Weddigen (Emsdetten: Edition Imorde, 2017), 300.

the individual artist genius and with similarity in creative approach, folk craft and art had similar status in local communities.³⁸

In 1839 guilds were abolished and women were allowed to practice craft professionally if they were above the age of forty. In 1860 the age limit sank to twenty-five. This made textile arts an attractive career option for working class women and a year later, in 1861, Foreningen til fremme af kvindelig Haandværksdrift (The Association for Fostering Women's Craft Production) was established in Kristiania. Foreningen til fremme af kvindelig Haandværksdrift held evening courses in textile arts, reading, writing, and accounting with the goal of stimulating women into establish small business. In 1875 another institution with the same purpose, Den kvindelige Industriskole (Women's School of Industry), was established and effectively replaced Foreningen til fremme af kvindelig Haandværksdrift, which closed down in 1876.³⁹ Textile arts education gradually got increasingly professionalized, and courses in textile arts geared towards women organized by Den Norske Husflidsforeningen and newly established museums of decorative arts (1876 in Kristiania, 1879 in Bergen, and 1883 in Trondheim) were held all over the country. Many women who took such courses continued practicing textile arts as a hobby in their homes. Those who did use their education professionally most often relied on patterns drawn and designed by men, as the courses prioritized technical skill and did not stimulate creative expression. A division of labor within textile arts occurred - the men were the artists, and the women were weavers.⁴⁰ A prominent example of an artist who outsourced manual weaving labor is Gerhard Munthe (1849-1929), a leading figure in what is called "billedvevrenessanen" (the tapestry renaissance) of the 1900 – 1920s.

Tekstilkunst i Norge, the survey book on Norwegian textile art from which I gathered information on Norwegian textile-art, is highly optimistic. The book presents a history of craft (which it acknowledges is dominated by women) as one of opportunities and improved living standards for women and spends time critically analyzing women's position in society and craft. It does not address the consequences of a creative practice being predominantly performed in the domestic sphere by the hands of women amateurs and does not attempt to contextualize Norwegian textile art's status. It is not surprising that *Tekstilkunst i Norge* is written after the recuperation model

³⁸ Liium, *Tekstilkunst i Norge*, 37-61.

³⁹ Liium, *Tekstilkunst i Norge*, 80-81.

⁴⁰ Liium, *Tekstilkunst i Norge*, 83.

(an early feminist strategy which preoccupies itself with rewriting women into art history, usually in a celebratory manner) as critical feminist analyses of art history are, as UiO professor Øystein Sjøstad writes in an article from 2020, “barely existent” in Norway.⁴¹ To better understand gendering of art and craft and its consequences on abstract art by women (particularly Helen Frankenthaler), which I believe is *USIKKERKUNSTJENTE*'s subject matter, I must therefore turn to Griselda Pollock and Roszika Parker's feminist materialist analyses of art and craft production and consumption in England and attempt to draw parallels to Norway.

In *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, Parker and Pollock's analysis of western art-historical literature and surveys shows that women artists were consistently acknowledged until the 1900s, and only suffered a significant decline of representation from 1900s- onward and all the way up the 1970s, when conscious feminist attempts at rewriting women artists back into history occurred. But although it was acknowledged, art produced by women continuously suffered from biologically determinist ideas of an innate feminine characteristic imbuing it. Pollock and Parker write: “The heyday of this special characterization of women's art as biologically determined or as an extension of their domestic and refining role in society, quintessentially feminine, graceful, delicate and decorative, is without doubt the nineteenth century,”⁴² The thoughts on which characteristics were innately feminine changed in accordance with the feminine stereotype. The feminine stereotype is, as Parker describes it in *The Subversive Stitch*, a “collection of attributes which is imputed onto women and against which their every concern is measured.”⁴³ The feminine stereotype in late 1800s Norway was similar to the feminine stereotype in 1800s England – they both frame women as tender, emotional, and with a natural penchant for reproductive labor.⁴⁴

Along with identifying that art by women has been deemed homogenous due to the feminine stereotypes, Parker and Pollock propose the model of public and domestic art which in conjunction with the feminine stereotype seeks to explain to the marginalization of craft and

⁴¹ Øystein Sjøstad, "Hvorfor Finnes Ikke Norsk Feministisk Kunsthistorie?" in *Kunst og Kultur* 104, no. 2 (2021), 114-121.

⁴² Griselda Pollock and Roszika Parker, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 9.

⁴³ Roszika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*, new ed. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 4.

⁴⁴ Heidi Karlsen, «Kvinner i Nasjonalbibliotekets digitaliserte samlinger i perioden 1830–1880: etableringen av en minoriserende diskurs» in *Minoritetsdiskurser i norsk litteratur*, eds. Eleen Rees, Heidi Karlsen, Madelen Brovold and Ståle Dingstad (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2020), 93 -113.

minor art produced by women in capitalist societies. A clear division between public and domestic art emerged in England— public art being painting high up on the genre hierarchy and sculpture, mostly produced by men who had access to the artistic institutions of the time, and domestic art being craft and minor genres of painting, mostly produced by women due to their systematically sexist limited access to the art world. We find parallels to this in Norway - by year 1900, around 50 bourgeoisie women in Norway had a formal artistic education.

Those privileged few who did still suffered from the belief that women were missing the nugget of genius and were incapable of producing “masterpieces”.⁴⁵ Painting, or at least what was deemed good painting, was dominated by men. Women, as previously mentioned, were encouraged to study and produce textile art and many continued producing textile art at home, as a hobby. Weaving moved into the domestic sphere. The consequences of an activity being performed in the domestic sphere is that the feminine stereotype then conditions the way that activity is received and written about. Parker and Pollock’s concepts of domestic and public art presumably build on the feminist Marxist Lise Vogel’s theory of social reproduction which proposes that oppression of women is maintained by a division between productive and reproductive labor – productive labor being that which creates capita, and reproductive work being that which makes effective creation of capita possible. Productive labor is produced in public spheres, whereas reproductive labor takes place in the domestic sphere.

Parker and Pollock use the case study of flower painting to demonstrate the process of through which it was deemed inferior to “high art”. Flower painting, a major genre in Holland during the 1600s, became a common genre for women artists by the late 1700s and thus lost standing in the genre hierarchy – it became minor and was characterized as “petty, painstaking, pretty, and requiring only dedication and dexterity.”⁴⁶ The division between art and craft and the domestic and the public was identified at the core of marginalization of women’s art.

USIKKER SPINNER’s project description states that *USIKKERKUNSTJENTE* is “..inspired by how art history has undermined and highlighted techniques and expressions in abstract painting.”⁴⁷ This quote certainly refers to the way abstract art made by women, particularly Helen

⁴⁵ Liem, *Tekstilkunst i Norge*, 83.

⁴⁶ Pollock and Parker, *Old Mistresses*, 54.

⁴⁷ Alexandra Jegerstedt and Iben Isabell Krogsgaard, “*USIKKER SPINNER*» (unpublished manuscript, last saved May 11, 2023), PDF file.

Frankenthaler, has pejoratively been characterized as too decorative, detailed and representative during the time of modernism. In *Old Mistresses* Parker and Pollock propose that this criticism has its roots in the arts and crafts division – thus tying it all back to craft. Conceptually, the paint is still in the realm of craft discourse. If the field of craft has indeed expanded, then paint can be used as a supplementary aesthetic to craft. The description Parker and Pollock give of Frankenthaler's paintings formulates the visual similarities between Frankenthaler's work and *USIKKER SPINNER* fantastically, so I am going to let it speak for itself:

*The significance of her move pouring paint onto unprimed cotton duck laid on the floor was that it enabled Frankenthaler to assert the notion of the flatness and two dimensionality of the surface of a painting, and thus deny the illusion of three-dimensional space at the same time the floating color saturated into and therefore literally part of its canvas support, creates a sense of ambiguous space through depth of colour, the different forces of colour receding or coming forward. The paintings both conform to and undercut the notion of flatness in a way that brings the maximum number of ambiguities at play.*⁴⁸

Another possible reading of *USIKKER SPINNER* could be that it is the historic division of textile art labor it subverts. The painting in *USIKKER SPINNER* is “determined” by the patterns of the weave. The masculine painting follows the feminine weave – in *USIKKER SPINNER* it is the woman weaver who makes the pattern which the male painter paints after – a subversion of the way decorative textiles were produced well into the late 1900s.

⁴⁸ Pollock and Parker, *Old Mistresses*, 146.

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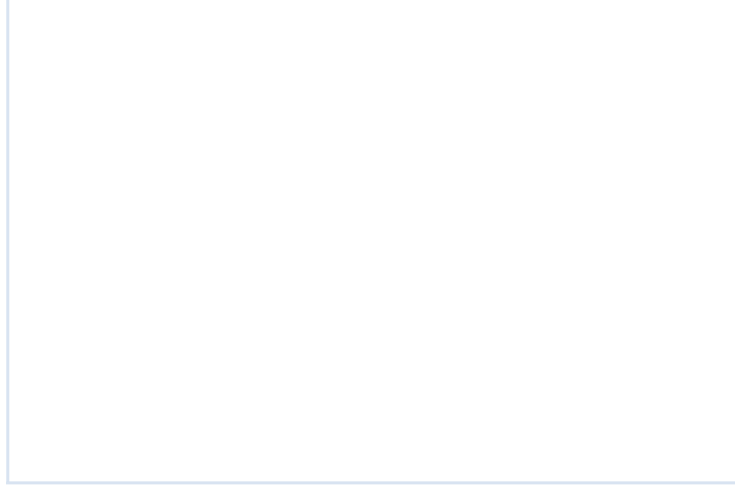
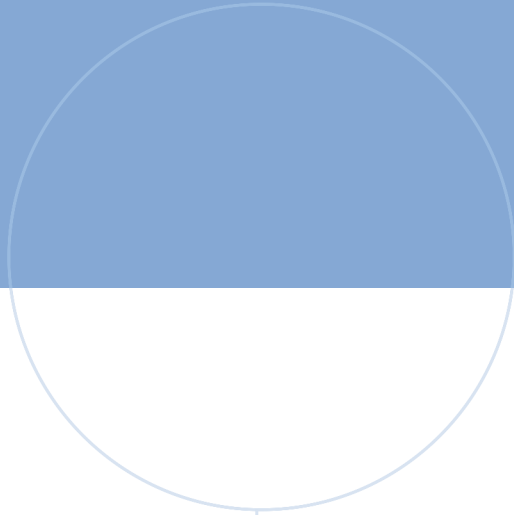
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List of Illustrations

Figure 1. USIKKERKUNSTJENTE, USIKKER SPINNER, Multimedia, 2021, Trondheim Municipality. Photo by Author.



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