

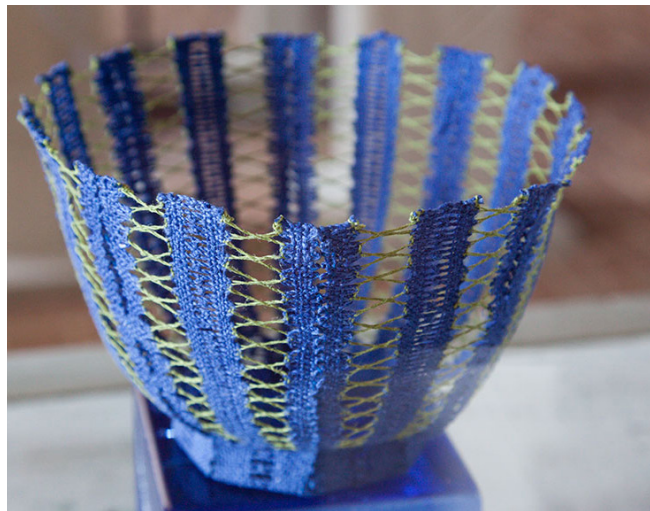
# Trådkonst

## THREAD ART

FOUR DECADES OF BOBBIN LACEMAKING  
SUMMARY by KRISTINA MALMBERG



The Book can be ordered by contacting Kristina Malmberg (author of the book), address at the end of the article.



Birgitta Hulterström, Bowl.

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In recent decades, bobbin lacemaking in Sweden and other countries has undergone exceptional development. Textile artists have been experimenting with technique and material, finding new forms of expression, while lacemakers have taken courses on colour and design. Pictorial lace has evolved, as testified by some hundred pictures in this book. From the 1970s on, I have been keeping records of interviews as well as exhibition, conference, course and association material of interest to me. My intention has been to use these documents in more popular scientific form, to give an account of the course of this development in Sweden and include an international perspective. The book is aimed at people interested in this art form with thread: bobbin lacemakers, artist makers, textile artists and those involved in women's history.

### BOOK STRUCTURE

The content is organized into three parts. The first contains a description of lacemaking practice from the 1970s on, the focus of the book. In the second part, each of the interviews with five lacemaker artists relates to specific events during the various decades. The book concludes with a discussion about this art form - lacemaking then and now – as well as some considerations regarding the future. A bibliography and six different lace patterns for copying or inspiration are given at the very end of the book.

## LACEMAKING FROM THE 1970s TO THE 2000s: WHAT HAPPENED IN THE FIELD OF LACEMAKING?

### 1970s—an experimental and exploratory period

The 1970s, in Sweden, saw practitioners and artists beginning to link up and collaborate in the sphere of bobbin lace. Ever since the 1950s, many handcraft associations had been calling on artists to design and develop new handmade products. The search was on for “a new look at traditional art”, as one writer put it. Bobbin lace was part of this. Swedish lacemakers tried out their own designs and made contact with their counterparts in other countries. International literature was a source of inspiration, especially coming from Czechoslovakia, as it was then. During this period, a couple of spectacular exhibitions were shown at museums and galleries, as pictorial lace began to take root in Sweden. Study circles and adult education organized continuation courses leaning more towards the experimental.

### 1980s –growing international connections

The increase in international connections led to new possibilities and further developments within bobbin lacemaking. Literature made it possible to follow the way artists were renewing traditional forms of lace as well as their experiments with the technique. In Sweden, a comprehensive manual came out, giving the foundations of the technique as well as suggestions and ideas for creative and innovative work. Contact with interested parties in other countries led to Swedish museums showing international lace exhibitions. Similarly, Swedish lacemakers now had the chance to show their artwork abroad to a new public. Associations and groups discussed the aesthetic value in and technical qualities of lace itself. This in turn attracted the attention of the specialist press.

One reviewer had been struck with “amazement at what can be created by abandoning convention and tradition and breaking through boundaries”.

### 1990s—artistry and investigation

Lacemaking threads carried on working their way into ever greater and wider contexts. Opportunities for both children and adults to learn lace were available within the education system all the way to college level and through various associations. Teachers and artists collaborated and course content grew from simply learning the technique and how to execute patterns to practising more personal compositions, such as pictorial lace. Lacemakers crossed borders to meet up at conferences and festivals all round Europe, exchanging their experience. Specialist books on lace were translated. At the same time, it became apparent that all this activity needed to be researched and documented with greater academic rigour. This took place by means of several projects undertaken by groups and individuals, with outcomes such as reports and dissertations as well as in film and image.

### 2000s—further perspectives

During the first decade of the millennium, bobbin lace became visible in a new way to society at large, chiefly through a couple of major exhibitions in public settings, as well as the publication of new books on lace – averaging one a year – by Swedish writers. This led to more attention from the press and social media. Textile expression had “expanded” by incorporating other materials and techniques with bobbin lace.

Literature too had acquired breadth and depth through collaboration with a couple of publishers specializing in cultural studies. Manuals were multi-lingual and others were written with a specific approach, such as from an art or woman’s perspective.

The founding of the Lace Museum was significant in terms of its activity and series of historical publications. Research and development projects led to the study of lace and lacemaking from different perspectives, such as study of the technique in-depth, how lace spread over the centuries to investigations into social affiliation and identification through textile tradition.

The results were discussed at seminars and symposia, bringing new ideas and experiences to the subject and broadening perspectives.

## FIVE LACEMAKERS

### Ulla Fagerlin—artist and teacher

Textile artist Ulla Fagerlin, born in 1920, is one of the most renowned makers in the Swedish lace world and her practice covered a wide area, both in education and as an artist, for some considerable time.

As designer and lacemaker in one, she gradually evolved her own unique form of expression, which often became synonymous with “Swedish lace”. Ulla’s work ranges from one-off unique pieces to patterns for reproducing. Her output can be divided into two main parts: traditional and experimental. Ulla’s lace became well known internationally through five books on pictorial lace and several exhibitions in Sweden and abroad. In view of her contribution to lacemaking, Ulla was awarded the “Lace Rose” in 2003 for her achievements in renewing bobbin lace.

### Hildur Kratz—eminent Vadstena profile

Hildur Kratz (1917–2003) is strongly connected with Vadstena and its lacemaking tradition – partly for her contribution as a teacher over a long period of time, partly for the way she developed lacemaking tradition in historic pictorial form. Hildur learnt to make lace as a child, which was not unusual in this area with its extensive lace traditions. Later, she became a teacher and over the years taught 2000 people the foundations of Vadstena bobbin lace. After some time, Hildur began to find her own way as a lacemaker. Inspired by her historic surroundings, she made lace pictures, with motifs from the Abbey setting and other historic buildings in the town. Lace pictures that became official gifts presented to prominent personalities. Vadstena Commune awarded Hildur several cultural grants for her contribution to art lace. She also collaborated in several lacemaking manuals and composed her own patterns, such as the Abbey Lily.

### Naime Thorlin—artist and consultant

Textile artist Naime Thorlin (1930–2000) combined the handcraft association lace traditions with her own creative lace practice. Her experience was shared through exhibitions, teaching and her involvement in the cultural life of Gamla Linköping Open-Air Museum in Östergötland. Preserve and renew were keywords in the handcraft movement and Naime’s task as a consultant involved giving advice, product development and training. Offering more choice in the provision of courses at Vadstena and later Vårdinge led to a renewal of bobbin lacemaking. Naime’s own experiments with technique, material and form resulted in several shows in Sweden and abroad, attracting the attention of art critics in the press. She also co-authored several books on lace from the 1970s on.

### Birgitta Hulterström—teacher and art lacemaker

Birgitta Hulterström has been a teacher all her working life, but it is lacemaking that has become her signature, resulting in books and exhibitions in many countries. Born in 1937, Birgitta trained as a textile and weave tutor. She has taught at all levels in schools and taught lace at college level. Birgitta moved away from traditional forms of lace and prefers working with pictures in small and large format. Her speciality became three-dimensional forms, such as bowls and big vessels. Parallel with lacemaking, Birgitta developed a method of annotation using international signs, which she used in five different books on lace. Birgitta was awarded a prize in Italy for her contribution to lacemaking and her art lace. She was also appointed a Swedish master lacemaker in conjunction with the 2012 centenary anniversary of the National Association of Swedish Handicraft Societies.

### Ingrid Eggimann-Jonsson

Textile artist Ingrid Eggimann-Jonsson, born in 1936, has a wide ranging textile practice and brings different textile techniques together in collaborative work. Weaving and embroidery might be combined, as well as lace and appliqué. Moreover, she takes textile threads through the world of literature and fairytale – text and textile – in her books. For Ingrid, colour is the start-point of the textile process, regardless of technique. Technique is a means to an end and thread shows the way. Ingrid’s textiles can be found in churches and adorning various public institutions.

Her three-dimensional birds of lace and stitch have attracted interest in exhibitions: one can be seen on the cover of the book, *Trädkonst*. Collaboration with colleagues in Sweden led on to group shows in Sweden as well as abroad. She has a great deal of experience in textile teaching and has published several books.

## LACEMAKING AS THREAD ART OF THE FUTURE

For 500 years, bobbin lace served as decoration and adornment—on garments, household linen and ecclesiastical textiles. Lacemaking was, for long periods, a profession and livelihood for large groups of people in certain parts of Europe. Lacemaking skill was then its own goal. What formerly was professional work has in our time become a kind of leisure activity and a way of expressing oneself aesthetically by means of textile technique and material. The know-how has survived, but taken on new forms of expression. Artists have shown in practice how lace can be incorporated with other textile techniques in a piece of work. This meant that the focus of lacemaking has shifted: while the technique stays the same, it is a means rather than an end in itself. The skills remain, but applied in new and wider contexts.

The book, *Trädkonst*, impacts on these 40 years of lace history, giving examples of how lace technique has continued in new forms. Tradition and innovation go hand in hand. This course of development has been documented in publications - a new book on average annually in Sweden since the turn of the century – and voices have been heard. Collaboration between artists and makers has often moved lace from a purely functional artefact into pictorial compositions, eliciting this comment from an art critic: “a particular technique being used for another purpose is a constantly recurring tendency in art history”.

Internationalization has allowed Sweden, a smaller country with a language not widely spoken, to collaborate with colleagues/lacemakers in other countries, which has a bearing too on the future. To further interesting developments in this form of thread art, access to training, with economic support, is required as is the development by lacemakers of their form language in collaboration with other artist makers. There needs to be encouragement for future generations to do research and development projects, alongside lively debate. This book is a contribution to and part of such a debate.

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