



Stunning colourist, painter and tapestry weaver





GUNILLA "NILLAN" HOLMGREN

EDUCATION AND TRAINING
 1970–71 Nyckelviksskolan, Lidingö
 1971–72 Gerlesborgsskolan, Stockholm
 1972 Stadsmissionens vävskola, Sth
 1973 HV, Handarbetets Vänner
 1972–77 Konstfackskolan, Textil
 1973 – periodically, Gerlesborgsskolan,
 Bohuslän

SELECTED WORKS IN PUBLIC SPACES

Åkersberga, curtain in the new theatre.
 Falun and Borlänge rehab + hospital
 Kevinge sheltered housing, Danderyd
 Åkersberga, Runö conference centre
 Represented at: Public Art Agency
 Sweden, banks, municipalities and county
 councils.
 Private companies, art associations.

UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS:

2017, 28/1–12/2. Galleri Kvadraten,
 Kristinehamn.
 2017, 8/3 – 3 weeks at Edsvik Konsthall,
 Sollentuna.
 Studio: Länsmansgården Åkersberga,
 (Österåker Art Association)
 NILLAN.SE

– I don't paint things, asserts Nillan. Though this is what she does do. She hunts after the soul, the message within a landscape or whatever lies before her eyes. All with intense, keen deliberation.

GUNILLA "NILLAN" HOLMGREN looks for colour in form and form within colour. Seeing the dark in the light and lightness in darkness. Placing surfaces alongside depth, testing colours against each other so as to convey precisely what it is she is seeing or experiencing. For those looking, it is there to be discovered in her painting and weaving.

In spring and autumn each year, Nillan packs her car with canvases she primes herself, jars of top quality pigment and emulsion for tempera painting, to make the journey across Sweden from Åkersberga to Bohuslän on the west coast.

For several intensive weeks she then paints daily, pretty well round the clock. The many hours of work are taken back with her in the car: generally, around 8–10 paintings each time. Some of the paintings remain paintings. Others she might feel are not quite

finished, or she herself might not be ready to separate from the process she and the painting are undergoing. These pictures often get continued at the loom. Which is where Nillan's particular strength comes to the fore.

The paintings get translated, carefully and lovingly, into sketches and then into the most fantastic tapestries. Her huge stock of yarn consists of hundreds of shades of yarn, which she dyes herself. The finest of fine yarns for blending into telling surfaces. If the very shade she wants for something is missing, she simply dyes it or overdyes until the yarn is as envisaged. Colour blends are nuanced as weaving proceeds, often one strand at a time, to make the transitions interesting and attractive to the eye of the beholder.

– Dyeing my own yarn produces a type of translucency, which looks specially lovely in the work I do, said Nillan.

– Commercially dyed yarn does not give the same result. Plus I get my own colour range.

Behind each tapestry, then, lies a great deal of meticulous work. Each centimetre takes at least ten hours to produce. Counting in the time for the painting and dyeing the yarn. It is not uncommon for a tapestry to stay on the loom for a whole year, but then she would not necessarily be working on it daily. Weaving tapestry differs from painting rather more than might be imagined. A painting is mostly executed upright on an easel in the position the viewer will then see it once hung on a wall. Nillan's tapestries are made flat, but will be viewed hanging and she can only see the small section being worked on at any one time. Knowing what the final outcome will look like requires a great deal of experience and skill in making the composition. Nillan



certainly has these. Persistence and dedication help her elaborate a painting to serve as a working sketch. Care and patience are applied as she follows the cartoon, transferring each shade and surface to the warp on the loom. The image acquires further meaning with the play of colour in a textile medium. Significantly more time is needed to weave a tapestry than to paint a painting. Tapestry weaving provides opportunities in these longer stretches of time for reflection, penetrating the subject more deeply and for recollecting time spent at the easel. Imagery can be sharpened up deliberately; it can also turn more abstract.

– I try to fashion it into a whole picture, one in which somebody with each year of viewing will still find new and appealing colour blends set alongside each other, said Nillan.

Nillan and I crossed the threshold at the same time into what was to be our main place of study for five years: Konstfack's textile department. That was back in 1972 and ever since we have always been there

Tapestries: *Höstafton* (Autumn evening), 2010, 48 x 107 cm.
Blå vind (Blue wind), 1997, 113 x 127 cm.

"The saturated colour language felt like it was urging me on. That was when I began painting myself. I became completely immersed in colour."

for each other, even when separated by distance while settled in different parts of the country. We've enjoyed a warm friendship, remaining close and faithfully following each other's work and family life. Offered each other criticism and advice, as well as collaborated in projects, such as in *Rugs* for Märta Måås-Fjetterström in Båstad.

I asked Nillan at what point she first felt her work might be with art and textiles.

– When I was in the ninth grade, at home in Karlstad, we had an art teacher who presented us with loads of postcard art reproductions to choose from and then try and paint. There was a picture by Matisse which blew me away. The saturated colour language felt like it was urging me on. That

was when I began painting myself. I became completely immersed in colour.

Nillan was allowed to display her paintings down a school corridor. Time went by: she attended the Nyckelvik as well as the Gerlesborg schools in Stockholm. It was at Konstfack that textiles entered the frame and Nillan started weaving. Since then she takes turns at the easel and the loom. There is a kind of interplay between these two art forms. Nillan always has a loom set up with a warp for weaving rag rugs, which also acquire a personalized stamp and colour scheme.

Other initiatives over the years include setting up children's art classes and working with art as therapeutic intervention for prisoners at Österåker Prison and young women at the LVM care home Rebecka.

In 1998, Nillan decided to go further into her love of plants. She applied to the Horticultural School on Gotland and was accepted. Took the ferry over and became a student again, since when she has also helped private individuals enhance their gardens. Best of all, though, is time spent in her studio working at her weaving.

– I don't think I quite fit in with the world out there. Sitting in my studio and weaving >



is perfect for me. Alone with my thoughts and ruminations.

NILLAN'S MANY SHOWS over the years testify to her talents as an extraordinary artist and tapestry weaver. She is much in demand as an exhibitor countrywide. Several international shows have also had the pleasure of showing her textile art.

Most recently, she took part in Artapestry4, a juried exhibition that takes place every three years and travels round Europe for a year. Tapestry is the medium of expression for all 31 participating artists. The final venue this time was at KunstCentret Silkeborg Bad in Denmark, running from 12 September – 16 December 2015.

Nillan has received many awards during her career. Scholarships and prizes. All have been important and gratifying.

In 2012, Nillan deservedly received the *Inez Leander Prize* from the Association of Swedish Women Artists, awarded by the Royal Academy of Fine Arts.

– This award is the one of which I am most proud, said Nillan.

RETIRED AND ACTIVE, she plans to carry on working far into the future. While the joy, satisfaction and energy are there.

Nillan has a huge stock of amazing weaves and many paintings.

Plenty more will be added – all just as beautiful! A

Above / Painting: *Lilac Landscape*, 2011, 70 x 70 cm.

Pigments for painting.

Below / Several fine dyed strands being woven into a linen warp. The wefts meet and turn around the same end.

The shades of yarn stacked on Gunilla's shelves are organized by colour. A contrasting red ball of yarn provides inspiration for prospective compositions.

Right / Tapestry: *Still Waters*, 2000, 115 x 158 cm.

Agneta Mattisson Bojing Designer/Artist, works in a wide range of fields: clothes design, patterns, handknotted rugs, complete interiors with special features, public art, watercolour, installations and illustration.



G. Wilson II