Weissensee no2, 2017. Linen, 301 x 293 cm. On the reverse are the title of the work, the artist’s and the weavers’ names.
NEW LANDSCAPES

ANDREAS ERIKSSON IS AN ARTIST FOR WHOM THE CLOTH HE WAS PAINTING ON BECAME A REVELATION. IT WAS HANDWEAVING THAT MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR HIM TO ACHIEVE WHAT HE WAS AFTER. THERE ARE NOW FOUR ART WEAVERS WORKING IN BERLIN INTERPRETING HIS SKETCHES – FINELY TUNED CRAFTING IN UNBLEACHED LINEN YARNS TO CREATE THESE MONUMENTAL WORKS.

ANDREAS ERIKSSON’S paintings are mostly executed on a linen canvas woven in France. And this is where we begin this story – with the material under his paintings.

– I have always been interested by the fabric, the texture of the linen, often feeling somewhat ill at ease as I applied paint to the textile surface.

He continued to describe the origins of the tapestries he has been involved in creating, how the idea came to him and the path he then followed.

A number of years ago he was asked to design the then annually commissioned unique work for Märta Måås-Fjetterström’s studio in Båstad. When actually there he saw in one of the yarn stores heaps of vintage, unbleached linen yarns, handspun in multifarious shades and qualities. He asked if it were possible to start from these yarns in creating the piece for MMF. No work of art transpired at the time but the memory of this material bank remained and a seed began to grow. Would it be possible to have the yarns woven in some other context?

The first weaves were made as smaller scale tapestries. Various colours were then incorporated. The next attempt, then having the bleached linen yarns woven was in damask by Hans Thomson. The damask weaves were shown in 2014 at Bonniers Konsthall and in 2016 in London at the Stephen Friedman Gallery, as Röta, bråka, skäkta och häckla (Rett, Brake, Scutch and Hackle). Other works shown then were in the technique now employed: weavings, where the compositions came from sections of fields taken from Andreas Eriksson’s painted artwork.

Unbleached linen yarns woven in tapestry technique create texture, a surface, akin to that of linen canvas. As though the soul of the textile was created in reverse, out of the weaving, with textile threads. New landscapes formed. These were woven by Sara Eriksson, Maria Jufvas Persdotter and Kirsi Mattila.

So when in January 2018 we were stood in the midst of his show, Mapping, at Galerie neugerriemschneider in Berlin, his journey from the Båstad yarn store via tapestry and damask to what his practice involves now, huge weaves in tapestry technique, had now brought his work to the art scene in Berlin, into the heart of Europe. Andreas had exhibited painted work before in this gallery, in a group show. Now it was weaving. This was the first time he was exhibiting work of his own there and the first time the gallery had put on a show of textile art alone. It has been highly acclaimed and very positively received.

The five woven works, ”map pictures”, are named after the places where they were woven: Vinterviken in Stockholm, Lidköping close to where he lives and Weissensee in Berlin, where the new studio is located. The black floor running through the whole gallery serves as a calm base, a tarn.

Cutouts of his paintings were used as sketches, yarns are the material and the four art weavers in the studio the interpreters, those with the technical mastery of weave technique.

In a room alongside the exhibition hall was one of Andreas Eriksson’s large-scale paintings. Dense, dark fields with the linen canvas peeping through. The connection between his painted and woven work was clearly recognizable. The paint seeped through without blotting out the texture of the linen canvas. Catching a glimpse of the fields, nuances, material, like skin carrying a narrative. There were two exhibition catalogues. One is like a colouring book, white sheets with black lines but nothing filled in; the other contains photographs from a slow trip up and down the
Lidan river, not far from where he lives. Those images are just as calm, there is no text in the catalogue, no title. A wordless, green cover.

– One might perhaps come across the catalogue after a few years and wonder where it came from, he commented as if to say that it was not he himself that was important. It was rather the art.

A little further along in that room was a smaller, more colourful painting with Andreas Eriksson’s signature finely co-ordinated surfaces inspired by the colours of different landscapes, a canon with traditions in art history when the Romantic painters embarked on landscape painting.

– Yes indeed I do call myself a romantic, but not that I am romantic, more that I paint in that tradition, I am in fact pretty concrete, he stated in an interview given in connection with the launch of the show in Berlin.

After visiting the gallery, where we were also able to see some of the collection there including work by Ai Weiwei, we headed off to the studio where new tapestries were in progress, based on the same idea as those in the gallery.

That Berlin became the base for the studio was largely for economic reasons. It is still possible to rent a sizeable studio there for a reasonable price, something not possible for example in Stockholm.

Two looms, on separate floors of the house, each have two people working on them: Sara Eriksson and Maria Andersson on one work, Katja Beckman Ojala and Ben Smith on another. Sara, who is in charge of the studio, worked with Andreas Eriksson earlier in Sweden and wove the tapestries shown in London 2013.

This skilled, highly trained team working in the weave studio studied variously at the Friends of Handicraft School, Konstfack in Stockholm, HDK Academy of Design and Crafts, University of Gothenburg and at Glasgow School of Art.

Pick by pick, the weft is handwoven in and beaten down, either with the fingers or with a fork. The areas drawn in on the sketch provide
a framework within which the weaver has a
great deal of freedom. Andreas Eriksson af-
firmed that some of the work is determined by
the weaver while weaving and in his view this
freedom gives the work its specific expression.

Seeing Mapping gave me the sensation of
flying over a landscape, with cultivated fields
lying next to each other, watery reflections
glittering in the lakes, separated out by cracks
like watercourses.

The five works in the show all have differ-
ent features. Compositions are created from a
combination of surfaces, textures and tones.
 Certain surfaces are woven densely, others
with longer floats. Slits as in a kelim some-
times form where the fields meet, creating
interesting shading effects and a three-dimen-
sional expression. Other fields are woven tight
together.

The handspun yarns of different weights
and tones are worked very sensitively. Up on
the shelves the yarn bank exudes a rich, varied
palette: gold shimmering, greenish, dark grey,
light grey … depending on where the flax
grew, how its was processed and the degree of
exposure to light.

Handspun yarns, imbued with the history
of conditions prevailing in our Swedish
landscape, are combined with industrially
manufactured yarns, spun abroad. These
are purchased from Swedish companies,
Holma-Helsingland (which also produces
the linen warp thread used in the warp) and
Växbo Lin.

The works are large, some around three
metres wide. This demands huge skill in deter-
mining how the weaving gets planned so that
the tapestry, once ready, will be of the quality
sought after. This makes demands on those
weaving and doing the finishing. All the stag-
es are carried out there in the studio. Ingeborg
Skaar, who has been giving expert assistance
as regards the making up, said:

– Andreas’ requirement was that the work
should hang straight, at right angles. This was
a challenge. Much care and time are needed
to see to this. Stress and pressure won’t yield a
good result.

– Pinning and wet blocking are the first
things done after cutting down the tapestry.
The lining too is washed and wet blocked. To
give the tapestry the necessary support, the
lining needs to be both sturdy and correctly
positioned, providing stability and at the same
time allowing for movement since linen is
such a living material. In fastening the lining
to the tapestry, stitches are made in the direc-
tion of the warp. Each stitch is locked. Strong
webbing is stitched along the long sides, to
which the lining is fastened. The casing on the
top edge runs along the whole width and the
steel bar is then laid into a custom made rail
on the wall, which produces a perfect, straight
hang set slightly away from the wall. After
months in the damp Berlin air, this finish
proved to work really well.

Work in the studio progresses. Today it is the
painted artwork that makes this possible. In
the future something else might provide the
means. A major show for 2020 is at the plan-
ning stage, to be held in London, with seven
works on the same theme.

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