

THE REAL DEAL

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WEAVINGS GROW OUT OF GULLVI HEED'S WEAVING STUDIO IN MÅLSRYD, VÄSTERGÖTLAND. SMALL BITS OF RAG ARE TRANSFORMED INTO LIVELY RUGS. STRAW TURNS TO GOLD, FLOWERS AND BIRDS PEEK OUT BETWEEN "SLARVTJÄLL" (INLAY) AND TWIST STRIPES.

I made this one after I saw shadows on a wall. Branches and old roses whose shadows fall on the wall. Enhanced with lots of black. Usually I make sketches, but this is probably the one for which I've sketched the least. I wove half and turned and added the embroidery afterward.

Gullvi Heed describes one of her carpets. We'll return to it later in our conversation. We're in her weaving studio next to the classic Swedish house she lives in, red with white details. The small porch features white gingerbread work. She's lived here with her husband Larsåke for 36 years, her children grew up here.

– We were lucky to get this house. We've been happy here, had such fun.

Larsåke has his studio in the room next door. The walls have heard so much laughter and conversation, and they've witnessed concentrated craft. There are warps in the looms and new carpets are being woven.

– But I'm not in a rush. I'm slow. I think it's important to not be in a rush.

Gullvi Heed was born in the heart of the textile area, in Mark Municipality, so when it was time to apply for her first job she ended up at the Kasthall rug factory even though she wasn't especially interested in weaving. It was a job. She went on to work at an ad agency where she drew, worked with images, and set type.

I can't imagine using a pattern that someone else has created, it's tough to even copy yourself.

– I really like letters and words, they fascinate me. Both as forms and the meanings they create. They've stuck with me, whatever I'm creating, and now they are in my carpets.

She presented her works from the agency for the Textile Institute and was accepted to a school for pattern construction for printed, tricot, and machine-woven textiles.

– It was great technical training and I received a good foundation in drafting for machine weaving. I even took a supplemental course with Ulla Cyrus-Zetterström, with a focus on handweaving. My technical weaving foundation couldn't be better!

She then worked as a pattern constructor for a few years, for a machine-knitting company among others, before returning to weaving. This time it was handweaving that she wanted to explore. She got, as she puts it, a "luxury-year" at Väfskolan in Borås with Christina Rinaldo as her teacher. The skills

she had acquired earlier helped her snap up handweaving quickly, and she spent quite a bit of time on techniques requiring multiple shafts and doubleweaves. As the mathematician and pattern-person she is, she found solving technical weaving problems to be a fun challenge. Weaving rag rugs wasn't in the cards at that point, that would come later.

When she graduated in the early 1980s, there were loads of jobs for course instructors. Hundreds of people were on the waiting list to take weaving courses just at the place where Gullvi worked. She was both a course instructor for courses and trained other instructors. She worked to get more resources for the courses and to ensure that every participant could weave in her or his own loom. The Swedish Study Circle Association even arranged courses for the visually impaired, which Gullvi oversaw.

– When I consider the courses, in terms of tools and syllabus, they were of very high quality. The instruction was very carefully planned. The goal was that everyone could get their own loom and work independently afterward. And the number of semesters they were allowed to take the course were limited to that we could keep the waiting list moving. It was such a fun time! And fine fellowship. I know that many of the people who took those courses ended up being lifelong friends. She



Gullvi and Larsåke Heed live a life in close contact with nature and handcraft. Above: Larsåke makes wooden sculptures with elements of humanism and humor.

earned the majority of her salary from leading weaving courses. In her own weaving it was doubleweave she focused on. She shows me a reversible jacket with two different sides. She also wove bedspreads, tablecloths and upholstery fabric. One evening she received a phone call from Ingrid Strömwall, then the Hemslöjd Consultant for Västra Götaland. Gullvi had previously woven a rag rug called "Lingon and Blueberries" for an exhibition. She had been nominated for the Hemslöjd Craftsperson Grant and won. That gave her the opportunity to visit the collections at The Nordic Museum in Stockholm and the museum in Högsbo to examine different types of carpets, especially rag rugs.

– What I saw was that the rugs were thin and woven with a tighter sett than those that were woven in the 1980s. There were colored warps and lots of variation in how the colorway was created. I found lovely rugs in *slarvtjäll* (inlay) and saw how tiny little bits of rags were added to the weaving in different patterns, it was brilliantly done. "Timeless" is a good word for what I saw. And that which is timeless, that stands the test of time, is

usually good. The woven edges also fascinated me. I've never liked fringe. But here I found a delicate solution that I fell for: a tightly woven patterned edge in rosepath. Thanks to the grant, Gullvi has given many presentations for weavers and spread the history of rag rugs.

What is a rag rug, to you?

Now it means many things to me, whereas at the start they weren't so interesting. It's not as simple as a few threads and a few rags. You can work really hard on a rag rug and let yourself take the time you need. I've developed a lot of respect for past generations when it comes to adorning one's existence, how adept they were at making do.

What is a "Gullvi Heed rug"?

First and foremost, a thin rug that's also sturdy with a tight sett and thin rags. And there are stripes in the warp. And it just so happens that I can't stop making patterns. I prefer flowery patterns, stripes, checks, and embroideries. And I like to add words. Like the one in our kitchen, there are both blooms and a little silly poem embroidered on it (page 17).

– It's clothing from Larsåkes wardrobe that is worn out. You have to be able to go a little crazy, she adds. I have fun!

All the patterns come from her own imagination.

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The most recent rug is a composition where Swedish rag rugs and Middle Eastern rug traditions meet.

– I got the idea from a text by Ivan Oljelund where he questions what "the real thing" is when it comes to Oriental carpets. Rugs from the Middle East and Asia have their story, but a rag rug can absolutely also be "the real thing" in its own way.

The rug we discussed in the beginning of this article was the first she wove with that inspiration, the second was lighter in colorway and featured a mirror filled with flowers and birds on a background of rag weft in different hues. The color fluctuates beautifully, just like on knotted Oriental rugs.

Roses and Straw rug, with small slarvtjäll inlays that become water lilies. Weft in shining straw sparkle between the rag wefts. Weaving draft on the next page.

Gullvi Heed has woven often with straw; here, the straw makes acquaintances with a beaded embroidery. A diagonal pattern is created by the straw's joints.

Flowers and leaves decorate Gullvi Heed's rugs. The rug in the center of the bottom row was inspired by hand-woven Oriental rugs—the “real deal.”

Texts and words are recurrent in Gullvi Heed's rugs. Here, the couple's worn-out clothing became a rug with blue flowers and an embroidered text.

