

Interview with Anu Raud

Helen Kästik, Ave Matsin

Anu Raud (born 10 May 1943 in Russia) is an Estonian textile artist, writer and long-time faculty member of the Viljandi Culture Academy and the Estonian Academy of Arts. In 1994, at her initiative, a department of farm design and native handicrafts was opened at the Viljandi Culture College, of which she became the first director. Anu Raud currently lives on her father's farm at Kääriku near Viljandi and is devoted to the development of the area. The rich collection of antique handmade objects that she has gathered over a lifetime is stored nearby in the Heimtali Museum. For the Estonian National Museum's 100th jubilee, Anu Raud donated the Heimtali local history museum to the Estonian republic.

Anu Raud has done extraordinary work, and the attention she has drawn to the area of native crafts has been remarkable. Her handwoven tapestries have been shown at nearly 70 personal exhibitions. In April 2018, a retrospective entitled "Fatherlandscapes" was opened at the Estonian National Museum to celebrate Anu Raud's 75th birthday. Since 2009, Anu Raud has been professor *emerita* of the Estonian Academy of Arts, an honorary member of the Estonian Artists Association, and, since 2016, a member of the Estonian Academy of Sciences. She has received a number of prestigious awards, such as the Order of the White Star, III (1998), the Kristjan Raud award (1978, 1994), several awards from the Cultural Endowment of Estonia, the University of Tartu award for contribution to Estonian national identity (2013), the state cultural prize (2014), and the award for lifetime achievement (2018).

On the occasion of Anu's 75th birthday, Ave Matsin, head of the Native Crafts Department of the University of Tartu Viljandi Culture Academy and folklorist Helen Kästik, a project manager of the same department, had a conversation with Anu about her work and her artistic journey. Much has been written about Anu Raud's art, with particular emphasis on her message and the national awareness expressed in her tapestries. There has been much less spoken or written discussion about the dusty, practical work of doing handicrafts and their position in society. These are the topics we focused on during our meeting



Photo 1. Anu Raud at the Viljandi Culture Academy Native Crafts conference, 2014.
Photo by Malvo Tominga.

in June at Kääriku farm. We are convinced that the work-related choices of this renowned artist reflect more general issues concerning the position of folk-art-based artistic creation in Soviet Estonia and the Estonian Republic.

You were born in Russia, but you grew up in Estonia. What was the world of your childhood like? What role did handicrafts play in your family?

I was born in Ostankino, and my mother talked about how much poverty there was at the time, how in the hospital they served nettle soup, which was good, healthy food. Because she was sent from one hospital to another, she developed childbed fever, which was very dangerous. One nurse looked around at the babies there and said, “they look like they haven’t been finished yet, they’re so weak“. Although I was born in Russia, we came to Estonia in 1945, so I don’t remember anything about Moscow. After that, I lived basically in Tallinn pretty much until independence came. This Kääriku house, which used to belong to a sharecropper, was our family’s country home, and the country was the best environment I could have asked for. There is nowhere in the world where I would rather live than here.

My mother liked to knit, but when I was a child, it was also a necessary activity. One object that I am sorry was not kept was my grandfather’s sweater. I was in first grade when Grandfather died. He took the organisation of kolkhozes very hard, as well as being deprived of his horses. He had a grey sweater in fisherman’s rib. He was a very thrifty *mulk*:¹ he had punched holes with an awl in old coins from different currencies. He used those coins of different sizes as buttons.

As a child, I had a babysitter from Võrumaa, and she brought me a little piece cut from an old Võrumaa blanket for a doll blanket. Oh, how I admired the beautiful colours! She was handy at all kinds of things – she had been a chambermaid at a manor and knew how to organise her work so that all the mittens got knitted, the children were cared for, and the food was prepared. What a wonderful housekeeper! She would make fly-pattered mittens, and then I would put them on and go outside to make more snowmen.

So that’s how we lived. And handicrafts, homemade things – I paid attention to them as a child. I loved old things. I cut the knees off my warm pants because I wanted checkered knees, darned ones. But before the checkered ones, I got my “stripes” (I was punished).

1 ‘Mulk’ denotes people whose ancestors are native inhabitants of Mulgimaa, a traditional region in Southern Estonia, located south of the town of Viljandi. – Editor’s note.

So you noticed and appreciated ethnographic materials around you when you were a child. Thus it isn't surprising that in the 1990s, you nurtured and built the Heimtali local history museum, to which you contributed a rich collection of handicrafts. How did you collect these 'old treasures'?

Yes, from a young age I developed a tremendous liking for old things. Ethnographic objects interested me in themselves every time I saw an old chair or old buildings. Later, when I was a young artist in the native handicrafts masters' group, Uku, I travelled around a great deal and saw many things. I had a great passion for collecting. Some things were given to me for free, and I also bought as much as I could. And those are the things that are now in the Heimtali museum.

My mother also valued old things and kept them. In the museum is my mother's tiny, intricately knitted christening hat. My maternal grandmother was not a handicraft person, so someone else must have knitted it.

You are known for your tapestries. Please tell us more about your interest in handicrafts more broadly – what other kinds of handicrafts have you done? How did you obtain the skills – for example, who taught you how to knit?

It was my mother who taught me how to knit. I wouldn't say that I was terribly handy at it. I have enjoyed knitting the most, particularly mitten patterns. We had Manninen's folk costume books at home, and as a child, I copied the patterns onto graph paper. My first mittens, which actually didn't turn out so well, were in the Rapla wheel pattern.

When I was with my students on a practicum in Kihnu, Kaerametsa Siina taught me how to knit the European way: she picked up her flyswatter and said, "first learn how to knit, and then you can make densely textured mittens." "Learning to knit" meant throwing the yarn over the finger, so all my intricately patterned gloves are knitted that way. In Kihnu, it was our custom to continue working all day on Saturdays. On Saturday night there would be a sauna, and after that a bottle of homemade wine would be brought up from the cellar and something good to eat. Then we chatted, but knitting wasn't allowed. If anyone even dared to mention the proverb "Saturday night is the lazy ones' work time", out would come the flyswatter again!

As a result of going to Kihnu, I began knitting lovely, intricate gloves. We had just bought a car, but there was a shortage of gasoline. There were terribly long queues for gasoline – you could inch the car up a little, then you'd have to stop again. I put the time to good use: I opened the car door, dangled my legs and knitted and knitted.

I'm not the kind of person who is interested in very many things or who has a great many skills. But sometimes people think that, so someone might

call during the news broadcast and ask “I’m sorry to bother you, Anu Raud. How do you bind off the pleats on a Kodavere sleeve?” I can’t say I’ve ever tried to do that!

You received your education as a textile artist in the years 1962–1967 at the Estonian State Art Institute. How did you get the idea of studying there?

When I was still in high school, I attended preparatory courses. The first time I took the entrance examinations to the State Art Institute was in painting. I got a very good grade for the painting itself, but the drawing... I drew and drew and erased and erased until I wore a hole in the paper. I got a grade of two (unsatisfactory). That made me very unhappy, and to console me, my mother took me to the Crimea. Aet Maasik’s mother, Olga, asked me, how about studying textiles? That was the best advice I have ever had in my life. The next time around, I applied to the State Art Institute’s textile department because my ethnographic interest and textiles were a perfect fit. I started weaving on my own, and the final project for the course was a large Gobelin tapestry. Not yet an ethnographic tapestry, but it was connected with nature and the earth.

Tell us a little about your studies. What did the schedule look like at that time? What were you being trained for – to be independent artists or artists in an industry?

The course of study lasted five and a half years. I liked it very much at the Art Institute, both as a student and later, when I was teaching there. When I was a student, the training was much more artistically oriented than it is today; perhaps today the approach is more pragmatic. Of course, we made handwoven fabric, printed textiles, jacquard fabric. On the printed textiles, we often used ethnographic motifs. And what I really enjoyed was interior design. The main teacher was Leila Pärtelpoeg, but there were others, too. We were given a space and then we had to design textiles for it. Embroidery was taught, but not very intensively. And I remember well how we visited the ethnography museum and they told us about *nålbinding* (*nõeltehnika*). None of us knew how to do this, not even the teachers. It is wonderful to see how the Academy of Art has developed all the knowledge and skills they have now! Everything has been thoughtfully considered “chewed through” as it were, written out carefully. In my time, many things had been forgotten. In school, in handwork class, I made a dustpan out of tin and a carrot grater.

I may not have had the best grades when studying at the Art Institute, but the most important thing was showing up in drawing class at 8 in the morning, and there were two hours of drawing a day. There was painting, too; working with colours suited me better. I thought that was powerful!

Who were your teachers?

At the time, all the most renowned textile artists were working for the department: Mall Tomberg, Mari Adamson, Leesi Erm, Merike Männi. Natalie Mei was the director. I was very shy back then. I remember that once I was weaving a nondescript green cloth – I can tell you now that there was no beauty in it at all! But Natalie came and praised it: “What lovely colours! How wonderful, how pretty!” She would always recognize us and praise us. I am glad I was able to meet her; she was very important as a personality. She was not director for long, and after that, Mari Adamson took her place. I liked the people there.

Since there were so many faculty members, you would find a “common blood group” with someone in a creative sense, and then you would find your direction.

Could you describe your direction, your blood group as it were, at the Institute? In those days, schoolteachers were assigned to jobs after they completed their university studies. When you were assigned to Uku after graduation, how did that suit your “creative blood group”? Were you afraid of being assigned somewhere else, or did you perhaps hope for a different assignment?

I respected Mari Adamson very much, and it was also very interesting that her husband was a renown artist Adamson-Eric. Their house was chock-full of art. Sometimes when I visited them at home, Adamson-Eric would look at my drawings: this one I like, and that one I like. Mari had a deep respect for folk art, and she had Kristjan Raud’s “Peasant Room” on her wall, one of Kristjan Raud’s most beautiful paintings, in my view. I have been the godmother for many of Mari’s works, baptizing pictures and tapestries. Mari Adamson was the supervisor of my final thesis. My research topic was the Kuivastu tavern in Muhumaa, and in that respect, architect and interior designer Leila Pärtelpoeg was very important to me: she was a genius at designing spaces; when she entered an empty room, she would take just one thumbtack and attach just one thing to the wall, but the space was completely transformed by this. Or a dusty, empty table – she would go out and buy some fruit – watermelons, pumpkins, and some drapery – and the room became grand and beautiful. Both of these teachers invited me to their homes. That was a very important aspect, and I have done the same thing with my students. There were other good teachers, too, but my graduation and transition to a job were connected with these two artists.

I could almost predict that I would be assigned to Uku, because I was interested in the ethnographic side of things and in folk art. The Chair at the Art Institute was quite wise in its recommendations, and my supervisor, Mari

Adamson, understood that it would be a good place for me. My position had just been created. Uku was at most a year old at the time, very fresh and new. Uku's youth was the most interesting time, as it turned out.

You have emphasised the importance of travel in your life. It has been an important creative impulse for you. University is a time of opening one's eyes; did you do much travelling as a university student?

As university students, we travelled on our own in the summers. For example, I wandered for about 600 km along the northern Dvina and in the Urals along the Tsussova River. I took note of ethnographic items in the villages there and gathered what I could.

My trips to Kihnu also began during my university years. In the Uku period, I would go to Kihnu almost every month, sometimes even twice a month. Of course, that continued when I started taking my students there for their practical work. I went on folk art practicums in Kihnu for 12 years straight. That means I really have been to Kihnu a great deal, both as a student and in my Uku days.

I was also on a practicum to Setumaa. It was autumn, and we helped out with work at the local farms. We were offered local food and drink and music, and they showed us things from their dowry chests. I would ride around on the postal horse when I didn't have access to a car. I was looking around for things to draw and collect.

You started out at Uku in 1967, right after graduating from ERKI, The State Art Institute. Uku was founded on 1 November 1966. The model was a stroke of genius – to offer work to people skilled in handicrafts all over Estonia, thereby consciously preserving and nurturing the popularity of traditional handicrafts. How did the model work when you looked at it from the inside? What was your specific job?

My official title was "Uku artist", and besides me there were others who specialised in textiles: Regina Guli, Lea Resev, and Malle Orglaan. Besides textiles, there were artists in wood- and metalwork, and probably small wooden objects were the most important.

It was interesting work – I would come back from one assignment and leave right away for the next one. It was my job to deliver materials to local workers and to inspect the finished items to see that they were of good quality and would pass muster. The regions were divided among us: I went to the islands of Kihnu and Ruhnu and to south Estonia – Võrumaa, Viljandimaa, Tartumaa. The islands of Saaremaa and Muhumaa were very attractive, and sometimes I would have a chance to go there, too. But mostly

Regina Guli and Malle Orglaan were assigned there. If there was a car, I never went alone, but always took someone else along. I would often go with Leila Pärtelpoeg, who by then was also working at Uku. We would go to places in the country and often stop overnight. Sometimes I would travel by sled or by boat, sometimes even by motorcycle – I would have to arrange my own transportation.

My work involved going to locations in the different regions. In Kihnu, Kaerametsa Siina was the Uku leader, the local brigadier in the terms of that time, who collected all the items. Siina had a bad leg; she would sit in state in her Kaerametsa farm, and all the women would bring their items to her. She looked them all over: as beautiful as the things might be, she would say, but the thumb here is too wide or too short, so she would make the craftswomen do the work over again. There was a leader like that everywhere. We also visited homes to see the women knitting. For example, one woman in Võrumaa used a special technique, *teljepilu*, on loom – and we visited her to find out how she did it.

I was very protective of all the things the women made. But when I came back to the city, my colleagues would say to me, “these things smell of manure!” Of course, the women are doing their knitting everywhere, taking it along to the stable, the barn... ! I went home and washed their handwork in my bathtub to get rid of the smell. So, as I said, my responsibility was to deliver the materials to the crafters and bring back their finished items. It was also my job to make recommendations from an artist’s point of view, whether something should be wider or narrower... It was the artist’s responsibility to propose plans for the items. Actually, I did not supervise the women very much. Instead, I was absorbed in learning, figuring out which items would be worth making.

As I was travelling around, I always kept my eyes open to find new things to make – for example, when I saw a basket with a lovely shape, a knitting bag, a wooden sword for belt-weaving, even something that had nothing to do with textiles. So if the original plan was to produce mittens, and you would go to Kihnu and see the baby’s caps, five-gore, tasseled boys’ caps and girls’ hats that are three-gore and lined... And when you find some beautiful thing like that which you think might be suitable to make at the moment, they would get right to work. First I would ask for a sample to take along, or try to find the master in basket-weaving or textiles. Sometimes I would have a new sample made, which was submitted to the artistic council. Our chief artist, Helen Sirel, belonged to the artistic council. The membership varied, and it also included officials. The council would then either accept or reject the sample. If it passed the council, the sample had to go on to another large, local ministers’ council of industry, where market specialists judged what would sell or not.

Sometimes, very lovely things would turn up, such as reins, but if people no longer had any horses, what would you do with reins? Then we would invent something, making bag handles or a belt out of them.

When you had an idea, something that inspired you in the ethnic material, there was an experimental loom workshop in Pääsküla. The leading weavers worked there, but I could try out some things on my own. I would draw up a pattern, and then we would go and find out what could come of it. I mostly made patterns for weaving on the loom; I am less familiar with embroidery. As opportunities presented themselves, you would have to put things together on your own. I very much liked the finely woven shawls from Suure-Jaani, and we decided that it was a good time to make some. Then some new yarn came in from Russia, mixed with cellulose fibers. We distributed the materials to our workers: here are the colours and this is the yarn you have to work with.

I am from Mulgimaa myself, and woollen shawls from there are very nice. They were woven from carded wool yarn and gently felted. So I started making five-coloured Mulgimaa shawls. I visited the Estonian National Museum, looked at the ones with broad checks and the ones with small checks. I studied how they had combined the five colours – black, red, yellow, green, and white. Then I figured out the proportions. Muhu shawls were also very pretty, but they only came in two colours, brown and white. That was another decision to make: do people need them? Some would say they were unnecessary; they were boring, let's just make orange ones. Diplomacy was important in trying to make one's opinion prevail.

I remember one more story. I really liked sawdust dolls. But at that time, everyone was used to the ones with nice porcelain or plastic faces. I had some sawdust dolls made and painted faces on them myself. I thought they were very nice! But then the important officials saw them, and they laughed and made fun of them: what kind of ragdolls are these? We just couldn't get the project off the ground. Once a little girl came in to the room, and the women asked her whether she liked the dolls. Of course they were hoping that the girl wouldn't like them at all: "So which one is prettier?" The girl answered, "None of them are prettier." So the dolls didn't pass that time, but a little later there was a demand for them. What was needed was changing people's views, and sometimes that worked. So sometimes the market specialists would get it wrong, but you could try again a little later. But some of them were know-it-alls, and if they got their word in, that would be the end of it. But many things passed nicely, such as several types of blankets and rugs woven with a tapestry technique. There were only a few of these, but thanks to Uku we had them again. For this I really appreciate Uku.

What aesthetic and ideological preferences affected Uku's production? Can you focus on attitudes toward traditional folk art, its elaborations and stylisations? To what extent was the question of authenticity relevant – or was this not discussed very much? Did understandings of what was prestigious match inside Uku and in society at large?

In the experimental workshop, there were master weavers. I had made careful designs for them, and the head artist, Helen Sirel, did the same. Sometimes Helen would tend to make the designs more tasteful, tone them down some. As my teacher, Mari Adamson, used to say, Estonian folk art is not as tasteful as people may think – it has been bleached into a tasteful form. And so Helen Sirel would design things to be tastefully bleached from the outset.

But I have to say that at Uku, a more authentic attitude toward folk culture did develop. Common people worked for Uku, and they were authentic themselves. Of course there were arguments about the products – what I liked wasn't necessarily liked by others, and it especially wasn't liked by the women who worked in the office.

However, as far as prestige is concerned, at the beginning there were haughty voices, ah that Uku... But Uku quickly became prestigious; so if you were invited to a birthday party, you would have it made if you had something from Uku to bring as a gift – a linen sauna towel, for example. When we released a new item, and not too many of them had been made yet, people would ask, can you get me one of those somehow, I've been invited to a jubilee.

As far as you know, is the Uku model unique, or have such things also been made elsewhere?

Ars was different, and it had existed for much longer; it grew out of the old Home Crafts, Ltd. They were similar in some ways: for example, Uku started filling large orders of folk costumes. When the song festivals came, full sets of folk costumes were ordered. Earlier, this had been one of Ars' activities. Ars didn't like it that Uku was doing this, too. There were artists at Ars; it was small, elitist, aimed at intellectuals. Uku was a large enterprise and included craftspeople all over Estonia.

The Uku model was very special, but maybe something like it exists somewhere else. I had great respect for Uku; it was a very social institution. Maybe it had a preference for full-time workers who spent all their time knitting mittens. But everyone had a chance to earn a little extra money through it; for example, a young mother with a baby or an invalid. That was wonderful. Uku's standard was high, and it kept on rising.

But as it is with most things, when they get larger, they get worse. At the beginning, everything was so colourful at Uku: the artist herself went everywhere and met with people. Everything was livelier and juicier. Later, bureaucracy intervened: the artist made things and the dispatcher sent them out.

When you think back on the Uku period, what was most special about it for you?

The letters that the workers sent me. One man made lovely chests out of tree roots, tightening them with his teeth. Once he wrote me a letter apologising that he couldn't make them any more, because his last tooth had fallen out. And then the letters from the Setu girls. I reread them even now! Relationships with people were important to me.

While working, one would always meet someone and get to know them, and you would come upon the most amazing things. There was always an interesting cloth hanging out from somewhere. I saw very special places – once there was an old man in Setumaa who was sleeping in a bunk bed, and the roosters and chickens were pecking for grain around him.

It came along with the territory that if you wanted to get along well with someone and they ate fat and drank moonshine, then you had to do the same. One old fellow had a little bit too much of the moonshine one time, and then he brought out his Peko. Oh what anguish there was the next day when he was recovering from his hangover and realized that he had shown his very own Peko that belonged to his house to a bunch of city ladies!

I also have wonderful memories from Ruhnu. One ancient, wonderful family was Peeter Rooslaid and Mariina Rooslaid. They would always tell interesting stories about how life was organised in Ruhnu, and I brought some things back from there, too. Wasn't that nice – a young person is sent on a work assignment to Ruhnu in the spring, and every morning the announcement came over the loudspeaker, "No airplane today!" And then you start noticing what the beds were like, the blankets, the edge of a sock or a mitten is peeking out from somewhere. That was how things were. If you found something nice and you succeeded in making a good sample and you got lucky, then wonderful things would come of it!

I can also tell you about bribes! Maybe that crime is outdated. Some knitters wanted to get a better mitten pattern; we, the artists, made the patterns and distributed the work. They preferred an easy pattern that was simple to knit. So sometimes they brought us eggs, or raw chicken, sometimes a bottle of wine. Our craftspeople were wonderful, and I still have a good attitude toward bribes.

You stayed at Uku until 1970, and then there was teaching: over 20 years at the Art Institute. In 1994, you made a major turn in your life and moved from Tallinn to Kääriku. This was an intense time, and the beginning of the republic meant many more beginnings in your own life: the old farmhouse needed to be put in order; you were building up the Heimtali museum. You took part in creating a new department at the Viljandi Culture College and began directing the brand-new department of farm design and folk handicrafts.

I came to Viljandi because we were forced to move out of our house in Tallinn when freedom came to Estonia. It was a shocking life change; coming here was quite rough, both psychologically and physically. At first we didn't have water, so a push-sled was our express transportation to the outhouse. Then we made life more pleasant. I very much liked being in the country, but I regretted my job. I was so used to things at the Art Institute. I had to find a new job in Viljandi. When I shared my thoughts with Enn Siimer, director of the Culture College, he was very supportive, and that was how the department was founded. In 1994, I started in Viljandi, but I still had a few hours of teaching in Tallinn.

When I was given the Jakob von Uexküll Estonian Rebirth Award (1994) for keeping and valuing tradition, I bought this museum and started bringing students here for their practicum. But on the topic of the museum, I'd like to talk about my dreams for its future. Museum expositions keep getting more and more abstract. There can be a whetstone on display, a scythe, or an axe – people don't know how to use them. But it's all different if you have meadows and forest and a farm. It's especially grand if a museum has workers who have rabbits, chickens and sheep. In addition to the museum, there are rooms where creative people can rest. At present, during my time, this has been a place for some people to better the world, mend the world. My dream is that, after me, university students will continue to use it as a practicum base. My very great dream is to be able to buy one more farm behind the museum. It is an old historical place where forest wardens have lived. This could become a country home for creative people, where they could pick mushrooms, ride horses, write poetry, paint, sing... The surroundings are wonderful: there are places to swim, horses, woods, and pastures. Even some wooden stumps by the lake where you can fish sitting down.

However, what I am afraid of is the cruelty of bureaucracy. Right now, we may have a wonderful minister of culture, but after the next elections, there will be another one. You don't know when ENM will get a new director. Maybe he or she will think that Heimtali is too far away. Let's shut it down, take the things to Tartu, sell the buildings – and for that sum, you can pay for

something trivial, like the January heating bill. It can easily happen that your life-work is destroyed with one wave of the hand. In the chess game of my life, I value little places and try to preserve them.

In the eyes of the wider public, you are best known for your personal artistic creations, your tapestries. How did your personal creative journey emerge? You've already said that your foundation came from the Art Institute.

In the Art Institute, courses in the major field began at 12.30. I would get up at 8 or 8.30 in the morning and start weaving before I went to the Institute. If I was alone, I would go to the art club, KuKu, meet friends there, eat lunch, come home, and then continue weaving until one or two in the morning. My parents, who were freelancers, were away in the country. We had a large house in Tallinn where I could weave tapestries. The first ones I made all by myself. All the old ones are my own creations: "Foremothers" (1976), "Night in the City" (1979), "Fir Grove" (1980), "Dawn" (1983), "Seven Plumes of Smoke" (1984).

At least half of my pieces I have woven myself. But I also designed for Ars. These were author's orders, so five copies would be made of each tapestry. These included "Free standing" (1990) and "Solstice Night" (1990). Merike Lond was one of the weavers there. Every few days, I would do the author's follow-up, watching how she was weaving my tapestries. So Merike and I got to know each other, and I asked her to be my helper. In the 1990s, I began using weaving help. How much depends on time and energy: the better known you are, or the more work you have, the more help you need. When I was young, I had more energy to weave until two in the morning. Now before the exhibition,² I wove several tapestries myself, so I enjoyed the weaving. I made "Tower", "The Last Loaf" (2018) and "The greatest among us is a little rooster" (2016). On this last one, Reita Taalmaa and I worked together. And when others are weaving for me, I am never far away. I keep watching, adjusting things: a little shorter here, warmer here. In each of the large tapestries, there are one, two, or three places I have woven myself.

Recently, a retrospective was compiled of your creative work, and this has been a time of looking back on your accomplishments. Have you managed to count up all the tapestries you have made? What will be the fate of these tapestries?

No, I haven't counted them, but there must be over a hundred of them. Their fate is such that none of them belong to me, except for one. They are

2 Anu Raud's retrospective "Fatherlandscapes" was shown at the Estonian National Museum from April to November 2018. The exhibition was devoted to Anu Raud's 75th birthday.



Photo 2. The Anu Raud Stipend is awarded to university students in the native crafts department who have been recognized for their research and application of material cultural heritage. At the 2016 awards' ceremony: from left, stipend recipient Marit Külv, head of the department Ave Matsin, Anu Raud, director of Viljandi Culture Academy Iñaki Sandoval Campillo and stipend recipient Malvo Tominga. *Photo by Mariitta Anton.*

in the private domain, but very many of them are also in churches or public buildings. There are about 15 tapestries in the Museum of Applied Art. All of those are early ones: during Soviet times, there was an applied art exhibition every year, and each year one tapestry would be purchased for the museum. During the entire era of independence they have purchased a total of one tapestry.

Some of them have been taken abroad, mainly by private individuals, but there is one in the Estonian House in Stockholm. My “Three Sons” (1995) is in Washington, in the World Bank building. There is a copy of it in Viljandi, in the centre for county development. One of my pieces is in the Estonian Embassy in Washington, and another in a creative arts school in Moscow.

There have been arguments about taking my tapestries abroad. “Threshing Barn” (2012) was supposed to go to China. It was in an exhibit, and someone asked where it was going. When I said, to China, then murmurs of discontentment arose: “This is an Estonian tapestry, how can it go to China?” Architect Andres Põime bought the tapestry and paid me for it. It belonged to him. The Estonian National Museum together with Krista Aru started to want it very badly and asked me where it was and to whom it belonged. And then Viljar Pohhomov, together with the ENM, bought it back.

My tapestries are intricately woven, and making them takes a great deal of time. But usually it has been that as soon as I finish one, someone buys it. My latest tapestry with the Kihnu women³ was liked by so many people that I can't even count how many of them would have wanted it for their own. My own favourite is "Lights of Home" (1977); I won many awards for that one.

Your tapestry creation is technically in a certain groove, and you don't change much in that: you have worked out your own density, the thickness of the materials, and other such features that you don't play with very much. Instead, you work more with colours and stories. I've never seen a nondescript one among them that is just a play with colours.

I would say that the message and the idea are most important, the image and the colour work together, to some extent. You're right, unlike Mall Tomberg, I have not used different thicknesses and played with them. The thickness somewhat depends on whether you are working on a frame, how you mount it on the frame, for example. Now I have a frame with one set of screws with two strands to a centimetre. I weave in an average of five double-stranded yarns – that's about the thickness. Actually I might consider making different kinds of tapestries. Right now, I'm working on one with a field, all kinds of browns coming together. I'm thinking it would be fun to play with alternating every two or every one. But it is quite a large piece. If I were weaving alone, I wouldn't be able to finish it, but those are just the kinds of things one wants to do alone.

Talk a bit about the technical process of making a tapestry. Perhaps the general process is predictable – you start with a small design and then you make a large working drawing. But tell us in more detail: how many design drafts do you make for a tapestry, how many do you choose from? Maybe you have one firm idea and then you follow that?

Sometimes I do make several drafts. For example, I'm working on one now; I have a tapestry entitled "Dwelling" (1992), and now I'm making a coloured version of it, ordered by the Ministry of Education.

I have plenty of designs that I haven't woven. I keep unwoven and woven designs in separate folders. There are always people who want to purchase the designs. I have tried to refuse all such requests: they are not available for purchase. My tapestries are scattered all over the world, so let the original designs, at least, be all together in the same place.

3 "Birdsong" (2018).

When the design is finished, I make a large working drawing. I used to do them all by hand, but now the last two are printed out. I'm thinking that's how I'll keep doing it now: it was painful to do all that kneeling and crawling. But if you draw precisely with a very fine pencil, then the printout looks more like itself than if you enlarge the small one yourself.

And then comes winding the loom and weaving. How much of a shrinkage percentage do you take into account?

Yes, then it gets put on the frame. Then there are the spaces on the frame, the shuttle, the heddle and the warping stick and the work of weaving. I don't set the tapestry up at a larger width. I set it up at the width I want it to be. It doesn't shrink at all; I weave tightly. I tuck in the ends as I'm weaving. If it is a simpler surface, I tuck the threads in alternately, as on a rag rug. But my helpers pull all the ends into the weaving, so the tapestry is clean on both sides. In the large book "Estonian Textile Art 1915–2015", the photograph of my tapestry "Not at Home" (2014) shows the wrong side, you could see all the channels of the linen threads.⁴

The last part of the work is finishing the details. Slits occur during the weaving, and we sew these closed. Finally, you have to tie the fringe and create the channels. If it seems like the tapestry needs a little stretching, then it gets nailed to the floor and wet sheets are placed on top. For weights, I use rag rugs, however many of them we happen to have. But recently, no one has needed to nail them because they are woven so precisely. They just need to rest for a week or so under the wet sheets.

What kind of yarn do you use? How do you combine the colours? This must be complicated if someone else does the weaving.

The yarn is woollen. I always try to work only with natural wool, and seldom use a little cotton thread here and there. Earlier, the dyeing of the yarn was very important, but not so often nowadays. I have done so much weaving that I have all kinds of colours: even when I'm designing now I think to myself, I have so many colours, I should weave them all up. I am always the one who chooses the colours, even if someone else is doing the weaving. I make samples for the weavers. When you get started, things begin to emerge and change. I am always there for that part.

4 Because the photo of the wrong side of Anu Raud's tapestry was included in the book, the compilers had a separate postcard printed of it, which was tucked into the book as evidence of the correction of the mistake. – Editor's note.

Let's return from making to the ideas. You say that the most important aspect of a tapestry is the story. What stories do you consider most important to share?

Take for example "Seven Plumes of Smoke" (1984). This is something very important to me. I have visited so many Estonian villages when the snow is crunching underfoot, it is very cold, and plumes of smoke are rising from the chimneys. You walk around, but you don't know what's inside those farmhouses. Maybe there is something in that tapestry of the times when we would go from village to village for Uku.

Or "Gatherer" (2008–2009), where there are lots of ladders. Every collector knows that once you can get up to the attic, you'll be sure to find something there.

In every one of my tapestries, there is the smell of Estonia, some mark of Estonia, like salt or pepper, so to speak. But some of them have inspiration from somewhere else; for example from expeditions with Kaljo Põllu, Norse motifs came in.

On your tapestries, you use motifs and patterns from folk art, and sometimes these have been blended into the whole as very small, discreet details. What is your relationship with these? Do you think it is important to study their background and meanings?

I have many motifs from mitten patterns; the table-leg motif is one that I love. My father has a very lovely poem entitled "Mitten Pattern". The story of that is that when my mother was still his girlfriend and they went on a date, he lost a mitten. Mother went home and – just like every Estonian woman knows how to knit, she took black and white and green yarn and knitted him a new mitten. The pattern for that one was the table-leg pattern and the sieve pattern. And then there is the beautiful story of how the new mitten is always much warmer, and seems like it is greeting me. For my mother's 90th birthday, my brother and I had the mittens from that poem knitted again. And the cross pattern, of course, I use that a great deal.

However, I don't go anywhere in particular to study them. I just look at mittens and socks: how a small cross starts to grow, how it becomes fuller and fuller into a larger and larger motif. Today people want to know exactly what everything means. That doesn't really interest me, and I don't believe most of those explanations. What I like about Tõnis Vint's show is that he, as the child of scientists, has combined the artist's fantasy with the world of science, so he talks about belts of flower stems and cosmodromes and the big bang and past life on earth and messages from the other side. But like him, I don't believe it all.

What I like best is Ants Viires' attitudes toward patterns. In Kihnu, I have asked many questions about their patterns and what they mean. "What is it supposed to mean – it looks like a rooster's tail or a piece of silk or a cat's paw or something with claws..." In Kihnu, there are many patterns derived from family signs. What they do say is that claws and teeth are protective. And that's logical. On sock patterns, too, the bottom pattern is toothed. You flash the teeth at other men from under your skirt, and someone might also notice the lovely sock patterns. And then there is the judge's pattern: once someone gave a judge mittens and bribed him, and the pattern of the bribe is on the mitten. But such explanations are relatively rare. In Mulgimaa, there is the whipping post or hell's post pattern, which was put on the door of a sheepshed during a wedding to protect against theft.

Sometimes I have the feeling that it isn't possible to do your own work if you read too much about what other people are doing. It's better to know less.

Today, interest in folk art has been steadily declining in Estonian university-level art schools, and sometimes one even senses contempt for it. Do you think of yourself as an artist or a craftsperson?

I am an artist, but I make my art by hand. I am a professional tapestry weaver, one of whose sources of inspiration is folk art; the other is nature. Most of my tapestries are connected to folk art in one way or another. Of course, there are some pieces where there is no native motif, such as "Waterlily", one of the rya tapestries I made for a school assignment.

I have also noticed that there are haughty attitudes toward folk art, "They're the craftspeople over there." There used to be a big difference between applied art people and visual art, which was thought to have a different spirit. For some people, I'm the "ethnic lady", hopelessly behind the times; people can't understand why anyone would bother with all that. When independence came, young people found everything that came from abroad terribly interesting. Their own bones had not finished growing when they went to discover other cultures. My mother always used to say, you need to have mastered your mother tongue first, then start learning foreign languages.

One can see the same attitudes in the folk art practicum. When I was studying, the teachers didn't come with us. We went to the ENM ourselves, and the ethnographers showed us everything. I chose a small tapestry from Ambla and made the best drawing I could of it. Nobody supervised. From 1972 on, I have been the supervisor of the folk art practicum; I've dragged students into the Ural mountains and everywhere from Setumaa to Hiiumaa. Earlier, the practicum would last for 14 days, now it is 5 days, transport included. During

the practicum, my students would knit at least one pair of mittens. So now it's really come down to a quick-dry matter.

But now people are actually shoving their way into my practicum. A girl from the Lycee Francaise comes, saying she wants to come for herself; she doesn't need any credits. Imagine that! I have recently had 3 practicum students, and they are quite young. I can't even figure out whether it is my tapestries or the whole way of life that they are interested in. I understand now that I am renowned and loved. When I went to give lectures, the women from eastern Virumaa came and helped carry my bag of books: "You have made weavings out of everything we have carried in our hearts and souls". In my spirit, I am an artist, but I can feel that my work matters and is understandable for simple people.

Hasn't the ethnic topic tired you out?

No, it hasn't. Today it is the fashion that you always have to be doing something new. Life is so short that if one day you want to do one thing, something else the next day and a third thing the following day, then you disperse it all and nothing is left. But if you contribute continuously to one thing which you have chosen, which you love, then you keep on making it more whole; you enrich it, take it to the next level. Thoroughness is what is important, not fluttering around all over the place. Nowadays, people often say that it is unsuitable to work for too long in one job because one exhausts the work, and one has to move on in life. That may be right to some extent, but think about it: someone comes up to you and says, your work has exhausted itself, let someone else try. How often it happens that the new person turns everything upside down and has no idea how things came to have a certain shape.

I see the same thing in the folk art practicum. Someone says, I have a camera. One second they take a picture, then the next second they forget all about it. There is no comparison between that and taking one thing in your life and working it over painstakingly with a number one brush. There has to be at least something in your life that is thorough.



Photo from private collection.

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Photo by Kristi Jõeste.

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