



ØSTFOLD KUNSTSENTER
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GABRIELLA GÖRANSSON
Origins



Returning Home, Roaming the World: - Thoughts about the Origins Installation

Gabriella Göransson receives me in her studio in Rodeløkka in Oslo. It's late in the winter and the snow still lies grey and heavy in the streets. She is on the verge of finishing the installation that is to be shown at Østfold Kunstsenter when spring is hopefully well under way. Inside the studio, large paper sheets held together by coarse sisal threads hang above one another, surrounded by weighty white brick walls. She explains that the paper is to be mounted in double rows and occupy the entire gallery room in such a way that spectators may both look through and move around the work. My visit gives me an exclusive glimpse into the final stage of trial and error, that part of an artist's exhibition process where everything seems to hang in the balance. But her paper provides a contemplative tranquillity, as enhanced by the table fan that slowly but surely circulates air back and forth above the freshly made paper that has been set to dry.

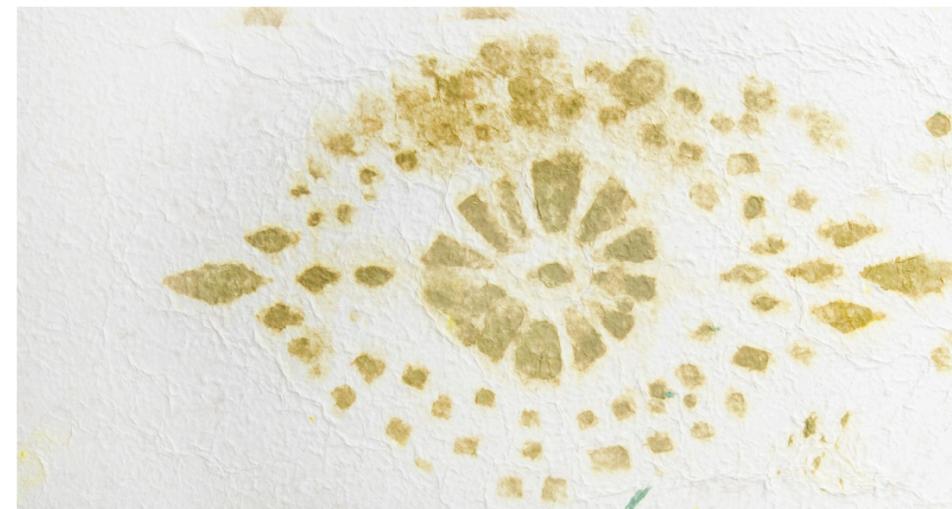
Coarse and patently handmade, Gabriella Göransson's paper has something tender and vulnerable about it. The paper's uneven, translucent edges reinforce this impression. It is as though the outermost fibres, seeping out from the paper's solid core in a number of undulating movements, formed a kind of delicate framework for the surface itself. She is known for working with paper in a sculptural way. In her hands, the paper is more corporeal than neutral, and unexpected events that crop up during the process - even so-called mistakes - have a tendency to be included in the final work of art.

The cast paper on display in the studio is distinguished by a variety of minor ornamental additions. In some places, coloured fragments of patterns and borders can be seen; elsewhere, some patterns have been punched out to form lacelike holes, while others have been

raised up from the surface as reliefs. The colour fields have not been printed on the paper. They have been created by coloured pulp that has been added directly to the paper while it was still wet, so that the uncoloured and coloured bits of paper were merged together in a shared genesis. The formal and aesthetic choices Gabriella Göransson has made are exploratory, almost inquisitive. They suggest rather than declare, as though they are part of a wider conversation that continues to unfold. For her, they are what drive her preparations for the exhibition, which is of course about much more than designing patterns.

The first clue to the installation may be found in its title, *Origins*. It is a charged, slightly formidable word, related to beginnings and ancestries, with familial connotations being even stronger in the original Norwegian title (*Opphav*). And it is precisely the link to her own family origins and background, specifically in the guise of a stack of inherited homemade stencils, that the title alludes to. Her paternal Swedish grandfather, who was a housepainter and wood carver, made patterns for his decorative works for farms and chateaux in Sweden. After his death in 1981, these patterns came into her possession. They have finally been taken out now, as though they were lying in waiting all these years for the right moment to turn up. With great care and attention, she has explored parts of these delicate patterns, which were once designed to beautify the domestic surroundings of unknown people.

The title also suggests time and transience. The events of the past have significance as long as there is someone who remembers them, upholds them, and passes them on.



*ORIGINS - detail - installation
handmade paper*

The use of the patterns is about an awareness-raising encounter in time and space, even as the work itself is quintessentially Gabriella Göransson. Her experiences and insights into her own craftsmanship give the project form and style even as she engages in a dialogue with her grandfather's praxis. In *Origins*, attitudes to craftsmanship manifest themselves across life and death.

The work on the installation has made it possible to reflect on what it means to be part of a historical and artistic lineage. In that way, the title is interwoven into the work itself - it is not just a theme that narrows down the project.

Gabriella Göransson herself says that she regards her paper as "transformed textile". For this exhibition, the paper has been made from cut-up and soaked cotton rags. Small remains of cotton threads are actually visible here and there, incorporated in the paper. Paper made from textiles? In fact, that was the state of the art until the mid-nineteenth century, when wood pulp became the common raw material used to manufacture paper in Europe. Such textiles were not sold by the yard. They were diligently gathered by so-called ragpickers, she tells me. Such ragpickers were poor and often itinerant people who had a very low standing in society, even as they underpinned a vital industrial sector in this same society with the work they did at the margins of consumption. When Gabriella Göransson herself uses cotton fabrics for her paper, she continues a fascinating history whose human dimension gives food for thought.

I came to think of the German philosopher Walter Benjamin when I heard of the ragpickers' strenuous way of making a living. Ragpickers played an important symbolic role

in his understanding of history. In their alienation and their treatment of society's waste, Benjamin saw a rejection of and disbelief in a society that uncritically believed in progress and pursued change. The ruins of the culture lay, so to speak, in all the rubbish.

In a similarly symbolic way, one can perhaps also say that the artist has something of the ragpicker in her. The ability and willingness to identify seemingly random elements in a chaotic world, and then reveal layers of meaning through new relationships, is not an entirely unknown method for many artists. The sublevels of culture, the overlooked and forgotten, contain the seeds of resistance and of alternative actions. Gabriella Göransson's patterns, such as she draws on them in *Origins*, can also be understood within this perspective on artistic activity. Divested of their original context, these patterns were themselves neglected and somewhat shabby fragments from an obscure past, without any real hope of being used again until the artist saw the potential in making new and untried connections.

With the development of *Origins* Gabriella Göransson has in a way returned home. Returning home in this way is significant on several levels: physically and metaphorically, emotionally and existentially, aesthetically and substantively. For the artist, a homecoming may entail exploring new artistic avenues with the certainty of having made new experiences. And of course, returning home does not exclude the possibility of going out into the world again.

Anne Karin Jortveit