



Living Fabrics



Nesa Gschwend



When threads and fibers are interlaced, the result is a strong fabric – a totality that is more than the sum of its parts. This image occupies an exceptionally broad space in human consciousness, since it represents our interconnectedness. We talk about «the fabric of life, the social fabric, the fabric of human relations». All humans are tied into a web of interdependence.
(Beverly Gordon)

Nesa Gschwend

Living Fabrics

A Dialogue through Textiles











A Dialogue through Textiles

Janine Schmutz in conversation with Nesa Gschwend

Under the title Living Fabrics, visual artist Nesa Gschwend has developed a long-term art project that centres on and engages with used textiles. Living Fabrics thereby creates a network that goes beyond personal, social, national and cultural borders.

How did the Living Fabrics project come about?

Textile materials are the primary form of expression in my artistic practice. For a long time I concentrated on fabrics from four generations of my own family. This then led me to start thinking about working with used clothing of people I'm not personally connected with. We perceive textiles as something private, but at the same time they are present everywhere and are something we all have our own relationship with.

For years now, I've been collecting discarded clothes, which I use to create objects with. In the beginning I worked with them on my own in the studio. At some point I decided I wanted to incorporate not just the clothes, but also the people who had worn them. The result was a concept in which as many persons as possible create something together out of used textiles.

What, for you, is the key thing about working with textiles?

As a cultural technique, textiles unite craftsmanship, expression and a way of thinking. Textile media are of great importance for human development even today. Knotting, interweaving, tying, winding, braiding and interlacing

are basic textile techniques that we also apply to other areas of life, and through them we try to understand not just human society but also nature. Textiles are something that shape our human existence at deep levels.

What do discarded textiles have to tell?

Used textiles carry traces and stories within them. They save and store our human existence; in the form of clothes, bags and shelters, they are our protective covers and containers.

We are born into textiles, we take them with us on our journeys, and at the end we are once again wrapped in a sheet. There is barely a single moment in our lives when we are not surrounded by textiles and touched by them. Through clothes we define our identity and our belonging to communities.

In what ways are other people involved in the project?

Living fabric is based on a direct exchange in the community. I lay out textile materials, thread, needles and scissors on a carpet object and invite people to participate. The gatherings create a space in which everyone can participate in their own way. Some bring with them clothes they no longer need, others play with the colours and patterns and start sewing new sections. Children cut out small pieces of fabric and give them to their mothers to sew on; women remember stitches they learned in the past. Some just want to be present, to watch and talk. The used fabrics thereby take on a new value, not just at the haptic, material level but also as repositories for life stories.

Conversations usually start up, on subjects that concern people all over the world. I travel with this project from place to place and integrate people from different age groups, social classes and cultures.

What role does the video recording play in the project?

Through the accompanying video, the people and places that come together in this project also become visible. In Tamil Nadu (India) I travelled for three months into villages and slums. Other parts in the video are based on tours through Switzerland, Austria and Georgia. The work process in the studio is also shown, where everything is brought together and the carpet objects are created.

What significance do carpets have as objects and cultural heritage in Living Fabrics?

Carpets were originally created as nomadic objects that can be put down anywhere and which define a personal space. The culture of carpets that extends from North Africa to India encompasses not only many different cultures, ethnic groups and religions, but also countless textile, handicraft and artistic techniques. Carpets have other functions depending on size: there are large carpets for gatherings, small prayer mats, rugs and runners.

After each meeting, I look carefully at what has been create. Some of the pieces of fabric migrate to other places and some I take out and develop them further. In this way, the carpet objects are created in a time-consuming process. Each object is unique and has its own history.

How will the Living Fabrics project continue to evolve?

Since I've been travelling with Living Fabrics, many participatory meetings have taken place with people from over 50 nations. The journey will continue and will weave together new places, people, textiles and stories into living fabrics.

Rolled, carried, unfolded again, originally the carpet is a nomadic object, creates a personal space everywhere.

As a companion on a trip, as a warming cover, as a room divider, as a prayer spot, as the red carpet - connects not only people and rooms together but as a huge cultural asset it also brings the East and the West, South and North together.



Carpet object / Switzerland / 2016 (365 x 215 cm)



Carpet object / Switzerland / 2015- 16 (420 x 310 cm)



Carpet object / Switzerland / 2015-16 (315 x 205 cm)



Carpet object / Switzerland / 2016 (220 x 86 cm)



Carpet object / India / 2017 (315 x 75 cm)



Living Fabrics / 2017 (Installation Rhine bridge)



Carpet object / India, Switzerland / 2017 (700 x 310 cm)



Carpet object / India / 2017 (234 x 154 cm)



Carpet object / India / 2017 (320 x 200 cm)

The textiles
with their colours, patterns, folds, forms
from different places and countries
Embroideries, stitches, threads
the hands and the handling
The narratives during the working process
The creation of the objects
Together they form a Living Fabric
a Dialogue through Textiles



Living Fabrics 2015 - 18

Switzerland - India - Austria - Georgia

51.50 Minutes / HD Video

About 1200 people from all age groups, different cultural backgrounds and over 50 nations attended these participatory meetings in Switzerland, India, Austria and Georgia.

Used clothes were collected, cut up, joined, stitched together and swapped. A look into the studio also shows the labour-intensive process of realising the carpet objects.

Textiles are fundamental for every person. They are full of personal experiences. There is no person or culture without a relationship to textiles.

The participants - the textiles - the exchanges - the places all this creates Living Fabrics.













Carpet object / India / 2017 (234 x 144 cm)



Carpet object / Switzerland, Austria / 2018 (190 x 77 cm)



Carpet object 1+2 / Austria / 2018 (242 x 93 cm / 280 x 113 cm)



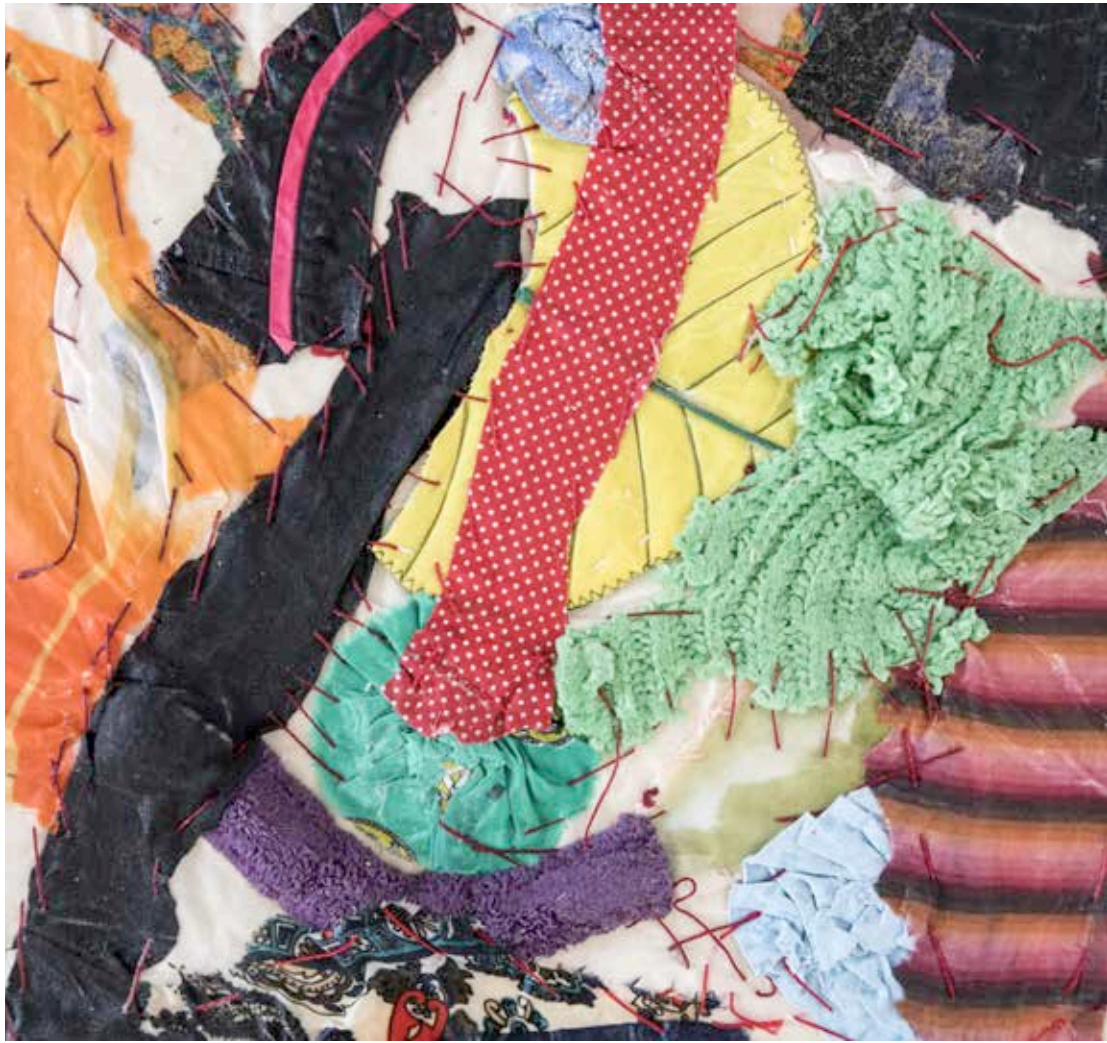


Carpet object / Switzerland / 2018 (224 x 92 cm)



Carpet object / Switzerland / 2018 (227 x 72 cm)





Carpet object / Switzerland / 2018 (270 x 82 cm)





Carpet object / Georgia / 2018 (338 x 122 cm)





Interweavings / 2019 (each 200 x 65 cm / 230 x 140 cm)





Gathering / 2019 (220 x 140 cm) / Carpet object / Switzerland / 2019 (340 x 200 cm)





Gathering / 2019 / 150 x 65 x 50 cm



Gathering objects / 2016 (70 x 45 x 35 cm)



Interweaving / 2019 (200 x 80 cm)





Interweavings / 2019 (Installation / Size variable)





Gathering / 2017 (Installation Marzilli Berne / Switzerland)





Interweaving / 2019 (Installation Landschaftspark Binntal, Wallis / Switzerland)





Interweaving / 2019 (Installation Landschaftspark Binntal, Wallis / Switzerland)

Voices of Textiles 2016 - 18
Indonesia / Italy / Spain / India
21.30 Minutes / HD Video

How do we treat textiles?
What importance do they have in our daily lives?
What do they symbolize for us?

In *Voices of Textiles* we see snapshot of textiles in everyday contexts. Over three years, textile observations were collected in various countries.

Fishermen are repairing their nets. Jute bags are passed from one hand to the next. Lifejackets announce a seaside location. Women attach personal scraps of fabric to a tree dedicated to the goddess. On a tree in the city, someone has created their own space with clothing and blankets. Mattresses in a church are used as an emergency shelter. A derelict building protected by sheeting becomes a dwelling not just for crows.

Whatever situations and actions shape our lives, textiles are always part of it. They are our livelihoods.

There is a language (text) of textiles that we all understand, across countries and social classes.







Nesa Gschwend

Born and raised in the Rhine Valley, Switzerland
School of Textile in St.Gallen
Theatre School in Bologna, Italy
Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK)

Art awards / Artist in Residence

Artist in Residence Cité Paris
Art award Metron Architekten
Artist in Residence Varanasi, India
Artist in Residence Bangalore, India
Artist in Residence Pro Helvetia, Prag
Art award Kanton Aargau
Art award Kanton St. Gallen

Solo exhibitions (Selection) / (C) = Catalogue

Kunsthalle Ziegelhütte Appenzell (C)
Johanniterkirche Feldkirch, Austria (C)
Sankturbanhof Sursee (C)
Mezzanin, Stiftung für Kunst, Schaan
Visual Arts Gallery, New Delhi, India (C)
Kunsthalle Wil (C)
Kunstraum Engländerbau, Vaduz (C)

Group exhibitions (Selection)

Frauenmuseum Fürth (C)
Frauenmuseum Hittisau
Kunstmuseum Appenzell (C)
Kunsthaus Zofingen
Schloss Werdenberg
Imago mundi Helvetia, Venezia, Italy) (C)
Kaskadenkondensator, Basel
Museum Bickel, Walenstadt
E-Werk Freiburg, Germany
Helmhaus, Zürich
Kunsthaus Aarau
Colombo Art Biennale, Sri Lanka (C)
India Habitat Centre, New Delhi, India
Maison Turberg, Porrentruy

Installations (Selection)

TwingiLandArt Wallis (C)
Artur017 Rheintal (C)
JetztKunst, Marzilli Bern
Espace d'une sculpture, Lausanne
Biennale Skulpturens. Winterthur (C)
Tollwoodfestival München, Germany
Kunstsommer Meran, Italy (C)
Nadace Lemberg, Czech Republic
Film/Kunstoffest Schwerin, Germany (C)

Participatory art projects (Selection)

Klyck Basel
Int. Women's Cultural Interaction
Batumi Georgia
Centre for Socio-Cultural Interaction,
Mayagram, India
Psychiatrische Klinik Wil
artlink Bern
Alice project Sarnath, India
Chitrakala Parishad, Bangalore, India
MusE Switzerland

Performances / Screenings (Selection)

Alpines Museum Bern
Gasträume Zürich
Videofestival Kunsthaus Glarus (Jurypreis)
Kunstexpander Aarau
Frauenkulturtage Saarbrücken, Germany
Fri- Scene, Fribourg
Liechtensteiner Almanach, Schaan
Technisches Museum Wien, Austria
Ernst Osthaus Museum Hagen, Germany
Kunstmuseum Bochum, Germany



List of Illustrations

Carpet objects

Back cover

Carpet-object / Georgia / 2018

300 x 148 cm

Used clothes, cotton, yarn, wax, varnish

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Carpet-object / Switzerland / 2016

365 x 215 cm

Used clothes, cotton, yarn, wax, varnish

12

Carpet-object / Switzerland 2015-16

420 x 310 cm

Used clothes, cotton, yarn, wax, varnish

13

Carpet-object / Switzerland 2015-16

315 x 2015 cm

Used clothes, cotton, yarn, wax, varnish

14

Carpet-object / Switzerland 2016

220 x 86 cm

Used clothes, cotton, yarn, wax, varnish

Exhibition view, Kunsthaus Zofingen

15

Carpet-object / India / 2017

315 x 75 cm

Used clothes, cotton, yarn, wax, varnish

Exhibition view, Kunsthaus Zofingen

16- 17

Carpet-object / India / 2017

700 x 310 cm

Used clothes, cotton, yarn, wax, varnish

18

Carpet-object / India / 2017

234 x 154 cm

Used clothes, cotton, yarn, wax, varnish

19

Carpet-object / India / 2017

320 x 200 cm

Used clothes, cotton, yarn, wax, varnish

28

Carpet-object / India / 2017

234 x 144 cm

Used clothes, cotton, yarn, wax, varnish
Exhibition view, Frauenmuseum Fürth D

29

Carpet-object / Switzerland, Austria

2018

190 x 77 cm

Used clothes, cotton, yarn, wax, varnish

30

Carpet-object / Austria / 2018

242 x 93 cm

Used clothes, cotton, yarn, wax, varnish

31

Carpet-object / Austria / 2018

280 x 113 cm

Used clothes, cotton, yarn, wax, varnish

32

Carpet-object / Switzerland / 2018

224 x 92 cm

Used clothes, cotton, yarn, wax, varnish

33

Carpet-object / Switzerland / 2018

227 x 72 cm

Used clothes, cotton, yarn, wax, varnish

34 - 35

Carpet-object / Switzerland / 2018

270 x 82 cm

Used clothes, cotton, yarn, wax, varnish

36

Carpet-object / Georgia / 2018

338 x 122 cm

Used clothes, cotton, yarn, wax, varnish

37

Carpet-object / Georgia / 2018

308 x 156 cm

Used clothes, cotton, yarn, wax, varnish

34

Carpet-object / Switzerland / 2019

340 x 200 cm

Used clothes, cotton, yarn, wax, varnish

Textile objects

Cover

Interweavings / 2019

Installation, size variable

Used clothes, cotton, yarn, robe,
bamboo, rod, varnish

38 - 40 / 47

Interweavings / 2019

each 200 x 65 cm / 230 x 140 cm

Used clothes, cotton, yarn, robe,
bamboo, rod, varnish

42

Gathering object / 2016

70 x 45 x 55 cm

Used clothes, cotton, yarn, wire, varnish

43

Gathering / 2019

150 x 65 x 50 cm

Used clothes, cotton, yarn, wire, varnish

44

Gathering objects / 2016

each 70 x 45 x 35 cm

Used clothes, cotton, yarn, bamboo,
wire, varnish

45

Interweaving / 2019

200 x 80 cm

Used clothes, cotton, yarn, robe,
bamboo, rod, varnish

48 - 49

Gathering 2017

Installation, size variable

Used clothes, cotton, yarn, bamboo,
wire, varnish

Exhibition view, Marzilli Berne CH

50 - 53

Interweaving / 2019

Installation, size variable

Used clothes, cotton, yarn, robe,
bamboo, rod, varnish

Exhibition view, Landschaftspark Binn-
tal, Wallis CH

Videos

2- 5 / 23- 28

Living Fabrics 2018

Switzerland - India - Austria - Georgia

HD Video / 51.50 Minutes

54- 57

Voices of Textiles 2018

Indonesia - Italy - Spain- India

HD Video / 21.30 Minutes

6 / 21 / 59 / 60 / 65

Working process



Acknowledgement

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Aargau / Kunsthaus Zofingen / Panch Performancenetzwerk / Integrationsnetz
Zofingen / Klyck Basel / Schulen Untergoms / Landschaftspark Binntal Wallis
TwingiLandArt Wallis / Kunsthalle Ziegelhütte Appenzell

India / Georgia

Centre for Socio-Cultural Interaction, Mayagram / Centre for young widows,
Karaikkudi / Lady Doak College, Madurai / Madurai Seed - Education centre
for under privileged people / Women centre for Textile education, Madurai
Zoo Tbilisi / Int. Women's Cultural Interaction Batumi Georgia

Austria / Germany

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Kanton St.Gallen  **SWISSLOS**

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