



Hanne Friis' exhibition 'Torrent' explores materiality and colour as a language

Norwegian contemporary artist Hanne Friis responds to changing the way of life with the pandemic, specifically around the use of material in our urban lives.

by Dilpreet Bhullar
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Even when the global pandemic has gradually receded, its repercussions are long borne. The creative force if does not run the course of charting the flow of the pandemic, it beholds the power to represent its aftermaths. The Norwegian artist Hanne Friis was not untouched by changing way of life with the COVID-19 when she witnessed a toll of materials transported near her apartment, for a short time, at the Cité des Arts in Paris in the autumn of 2021. The changing scene conjured the work Hell by the artist Gustav Vigeland Helvete in her mind when she travelled to the Rodin Museum to ponder upon what entails The Gates of Hell. As a creative response to the changing dynamics of life, Friis made 15 works within a span of 12 months for her exhibition at the Vigeland Museum. The contemporary art exhibition Torrent by the textile artist currently on at Galerie Maria Wettergren in Paris brings forth a selection of crucial works from the Vigeland Museum in Oslo.



Shiny Wave, 2020, Natural dyed viscose; hand-stitched

Image: Øystein Thorvaldsen,
Courtesy of Hanne Friis and Galerie Maria
Wettergren

Made with sewing techniques and handmade folding, Friis creates layers of fabric to have an abstract form to the textile installations. Standing at the borderline of body and nature, the art installations like *The Sky Is The Limit*, *Dance*, *La Vague* and *Flood* have their presence felt from the air to the floor. Many of her sculptures have titles that refer to movement, transformation and motifs from nature, such as *La Vague*, *Flood* and *Shiny Wave*. The curious mind is keen to know more about the title of the exhibition *Torrent* and how it speaks to the form and shape of the textile art sculpture. In an interview with STIR, Friis mentions, “The title may also refer to overwhelming emotions. The black *La Vague* has a dramatic and almost aggressive form; *Flood* is a lighter piece, while *Shiny Wave* is more indefinable. The transparent cyan plastic piece *The Sky is the Limit* hangs from the ceiling; it is hard to tell if the shape is going to collapse or transform into something new.”



Working with textiles could come up with its own set of benefits and challenges, the contemporary artist mentions; in her hands fabric takes a mode of clay. “I like working with different types of textiles because of the flexibility of the material. I model the fabric with a folding and stitching technique that transforms the material into a compact mass. The challenge of working with the material is the same as the advantage; the flexibility can make it a bit difficult to mount the piece and find the perfect position. I prefer to be there and check that everything is turning out the way I want it to,” confirms Friis.

The amalgamation of organic forms as well as synthetic materials, if paradoxical, opens the indispensability of coexistence across the natural and artificial way of life. She has combined naturally dyed fabrics with sculptures made of imitation leather and plastic. Materials are never neutral. The plastic materials remind us of the challenges we face with over-consumption, pollution and the climate threat that leads us to heat waves, rising sea levels, melting glaciers and warming oceans. By transforming the material into organic structures, she creates a kind of new nature. Simultaneously, the viewer oscillates between the attractive as well as abhorrence tendency of the sculpture. To illustrate this, Friis says, *Shiny Wave* is made of viscose, which is naturally coloured with oak extracts and iron water. The piece may not be the best example of the abominable, I would describe it as melancholic, with the brutality and beauty of life and death. The surface is shiny like silver, parts of the sculpture consist of loosely hanging textiles, and other parts have powerful forms.



La Vague, 2020-22, Imitation leather, steel; hand-stitched

Image: Øystein Thorvaldsen,
Courtesy of Hanne Friis and Galerie Maria
Wettergren



The Mountain, 2022, Faux leather, steel; hand-stitched
 Image: Øystein Thorvaldsen,
 Courtesy of Hanne Friis and Galerie Maria Wettergren

The time required to create a sculptural mass is key to the creative process. Since it requires concentration and energy, the consumption of time is an extension of the bodily experience to create an abstract form of nature out of textile sculptures. The approach to the sculptures transmutes to be an “expressive interpretation that is both wild and controlled.” Through this exhibition, Friis is exploring materiality and colour as a language. The tactility of the sculptures forces the viewer to be present with the body and the senses, and through this to reflect on what it means to be human.



The Sky is the Limit, 2022, Plastic, hand-stitched
 Image: Øystein Thorvaldsen,
 Courtesy of Hanne Friis and Galerie Maria Wettergren

Academically trained in sculpture and painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Trondheim between 1992 and 1996, Friis is a name to reckon with when it comes to textile art. Her works are exhibited globally including a major solo exhibition at the Vigeland Museum in Oslo, Norway in October 2022-2023. Her works are included in several important public and private collections—to mention National Museum of Art, Oslo; the National Museum of Decorative Arts, Trondheim, Norway; Haugar Kunstmuseum, Tønsberg, Norway; West Norway Museum of Decorative Arts, Bergen, Norway and the Norwegian Parliament in Oslo.

