

# Sculptural Diversity in Fibers and Wood

Anni Bloch and Sigurjón Ólafsson







## *INTRODUCTION*

The long history of textiles, from the time man begins to work on the fibers until today, when machines have largely taken over the work, has always fascinated me. The simple, as well as complicated, methods people have come up with to treat the materials at hand, to render them useful to us. The oldest sewing needle we know is 40.000 years old – an instrument which hasn't really changed much in the course of time.

I am spellbound by thread. A simple length of thread can be used to join different parts of a garment together, to decorate surfaces, and if we join many threads together the result is a cohesive piece of textile.

While working on my textile sculptures, I rarely have a preconceived idea as to the nature of the ‘thing’ that’s going to ensue. But during the creative process it sometimes happens that a ‘thing’ turns into something familiar, often something that brings to mind organic forms; probably influenced by my surroundings and the climate in general, both of which are much on my mind. And when I can see the germ of an idea coming into being I consciously take control and determine the final look of the piece in question.

I work a lot with a type of silk, organza, its a pliable yet firm material, and it has a semi-transparence that adds depth to whatever you want to bring forth. I work on the silk with needle and thread, and the exciting part is finding out to what extent one can use the stitches to define form. What happens, when I hold a piece of textile in my hands, add a few stitches and then rein them in? To what extent can I shape the material as it is, and is it actually possible to strengthen the material by way of the thread? Sometimes this process gives birth to quite extraordinary three-dimensional forms.

As a schoolgirl my mother had a very bad experience of handicrafts classes. There were embroidery assignments that didn’t pass muster and had to be redone. And there were many tears shed in the process. Which is why I grew up in an embroidery-free environment, never learnt to embroider as a child. Thus I was never presented with firm rules as to what embroidery should look like and how it should be done. Therefore, when I take up the needle, I have no need to break free from anything. This has been a huge advantage in my work on embroidery sculptures.

As a special feature, I have brought with me a few materials that I don’t normally use, as a tribute to Sigurjón Ólafsson, himself a master of many materials. It has been a new and exciting experience to work with copper filament alone, doing stitches without recourse to either textile material or needle.

*Anni Bloch*

## *SCULPTURAL DIVERSITY IN FIBERS*

The pieces in this exhibition were all hand-crafted by Anni Bloch. They have come into being through her knowledge, imagination and concern for the world we live in. They have been created with materials she has collected throughout her life and through her travels in distant countries. But they have also come to her through their own raw authority, have manifested themselves through a process which needle and thread have hitherto not been associated with, and have taken on unforeseen shapes.

As embroidery craftsperson and artist, Anni Bloch allows herself to rein in her threads and reshape her textiles. In the sculptures that she creates we see her put her needle and thread to the test. In her hands, everything she knows, all the means of her craft, become instrumental in her elegant and imaginative break up of forms and reinvention of a new formal language.

### *The freedom of the new*

Anni Bloch's artistry is manifested through her original and unique shaping of thread. Her methods are uncommon, and something quite unprecedented happens in her works. As a textile artist, Anni Bloch is virtually in a league of her own. It's also a question of courage. Speaking of her own works she says: "It is a great pleasure to sit and watch what happens, when one reins in the thread a bit more than one is allowed to do in classical embroidery."

### *Sometimes things happen of their own accord*

Things don't always work out the way you expect. For a while arm strain (sewing related) prevented Anni Bloch from working with needle and thread. But during this period she was able to go to work on a 14 metre long piece of rope she had lying around, by tying a series of knots on to it. This created in her the desire to work on other materials. A chance event created the stimulus to embark on a new formal path.

Anni Bloch says of her sculptures: "They all come into being without knowing what they are going to look like. Now I know what is going to happen to them. But when I started I didn't. When you sit close to them, many of them look quite familiar."



*Red Creatures*

*Fantastic organic forms*

There is indeed something familiar about Anni Bloch's sculptures, because she invariably employs nature's own language of forms. The colours of her threads are in nature's own range; there are also tinges of reds and copper as well as touches of Nordic cool. And now, as the textile artist displays her work at the Sigurjón Ólafsson Museum, she pitches her delicate filaments against a traditional sculptor's more durable materials. Nevertheless the works in the exhibition room share an organic ancestry.

Anni Bloch has also been thinking of Iceland. Of boiling mud pits; others will see references to lava in her works. Some of the sculptures have an organic aspect. One thinks of sea anemones, hovering in the

depths of the ocean. She also tells us: “In Iceland, more precisely in Stykkishólmur, I once visited a gallery with 24 high glass cylinders containing water from 24 glaciers. One of the cylinders contained water from a glacier which has now disappeared, so that this water is the only thing that remains of it. This was an installation by Roni Horn. Here was a woman singing a song of praise to Iceland, and what she did was very beautiful indeed. The undulating cylindrical work named *Glacial water reimagined*, was made with this place in mind”.

### *Ripeness is all*

Nature and the climate, biodiversity and the state of the planet are all important concerns for the artist. It is important for her to use the materials at hand. Anni Bloch’s career as an embroidery craftsperson and textile artist is also closely connected with the idea of ripeness, in the way she addresses her materials.

“I spent 15 years gathering what I could from handicrafts and diverse artistic skills, immerse myself in materials and threads, and now I want to use my remaining time to make something of all of it”, the artist says. In the show there is a sculpture made of silk, jute and Icelandic horsehair; all materials that Anni Bloch bought 10 years ago. She still remembers the name of the woman who spun the horsehair for her. The hemp used in the work *The Knot* was bought in an alley in Madrid, and the copper filament comes from a shop that caters for hobby fishermen.

### *Anni Bloch*

Anni Bloch graduated as an embroidery specialist from the Haandarbejds-ets Fremmes Seminarium. “Thankfully, I still enjoy embroidery very much. But I am always driven to put extra work into what I do, experiment a bit more”, Anni Bloch says. Her enduring inquisitiveness as an artist has enabled her to liberate the handicrafts side of her work and bring into existence the sculptures we see before us today.

In turn they awaken an inquisitiveness in her viewers. We are confronted with wondrous flying objects, cruising at high altitudes, and fantastic forms of life floating in worlds of their own. We are drawn to these things, because we want to discover how the textile artist with her delicate filaments and copious stitches has managed to infuse her sculptures with such originality.

*Anton Pihl*

*Curator, Greve Museum, Denmark*





*Upwards*





Born in Iceland, **Sigurjón Ólafsson** (1908–1982) studied at the Royal Academy in Copenhagen and lived in Denmark for almost two decades. He was regarded as one of Denmark's most prominent artists. Moving back to Iceland in 1945 he became one of the pioneers of abstract art in Iceland and the leading portrait sculptor of his time. After he passed away his widow founded the *Sigurjón Ólafsson Museum* in

their home and his former studio. The museum hosts a wide range of musical and cultural activities as well as exhibitions of his and other artists' works.

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### *Sculptural Diversity in Fibers and Wood*

Exhibition of sculptures; in textile by Danish artist Anni Bloch and in various materials by Sigurjón Ólafsson.

Sigurjón Ólafsson Museum, Reykjavík. June 1<sup>st</sup> – September 15<sup>th</sup> 2024.

The museum is open daily, except Mondays 1–5 p.m.

The museum's 2024 summer concert series begins on July 2<sup>nd</sup> and runs until August 13<sup>th</sup>. See program at [www.LSO.is](http://www.LSO.is).

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Front page: *White Creatures* by Anni Bloch.

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