



Rosy-fingered dawn¹ (softness, (self)care and recuperation)

A textile work on the wall says *everything is great*. On the one hand, words inscribed into fabric by Arna Óttarsdóttir read as empty phrases — things we say often to friends, family, and strangers to keep our true feelings safely hidden from view. On the other hand — these slogans, handwritten in innocent scrawl amongst images and objects, overflow with defenceless intimacy and personal meaning. Instead of a foil for true emotion, Arna's large-scale textiles live in the realm of journaling and the confessional — self-expression as the gentle tending of a soft flesh wound. Speaking, silently, here in The Living Art Museum, these works create space for larger conversations about softness², (self)care and recuperation.

Coral, salmon pink, hospital pink, crabapple jelly, pale, blush, shrimp cocktail, rose, rosy, dawn, dusk, sweet, sweetheart, sunrise, sunset; Arna colours her words. Soft, hushed tones of pink fade and sharpen on these works, and cultivate warm metaphors throughout the exhibition: rolls of skin, food at fancy parties, tenderness, rawness, insides, outsides, medicine, nostalgia, arousal — *all things are tickled pink*. Aside from historical reference or connotative gender association, the artist's choice of colour and materials feels subconscious, arriving out of intuition and feeling. *Everything Is Great* is a soft palette that offers different shades of meaning.

(loom, quilt, object)
Arna is a self-taught weaver. While all weaving connects to the home and the history of women's work, her personal technique and practice lives outside of a strict domestic context, and sits comfortably within the evolving space of contemporary feminism. Through embracing — or rather welcoming — a powerful gaze that breaks the frame of the horizontal and vertical axis of the loom, as an artist-weaver, Arna carefully attends to a new, circular narrative.

The loom, as we know, is mechanical. Weaving is a process controlled by the loom, but also conditioned by the warp (vertical threads running longitudinally in the right angle of threads) and the weft (the horizontal threads that cross them). Traditionally, beyond initial colour and material choices, there is little derivation from the straight line. Arna's works give the viewer insight into moments of resistance to a predestined outcome on the loom. She creates new patterns based in fluid, non-linear details such as wandering curves, pockets of slouching fibres, and flowing gradients of colour. Imperfections arise in the threads where tight; straight lines surrender into sagging material and fall away from the surface of their own structure. Weaving transforms from a process of repetition to one of recuperative mend. Of patience, and time.

Woven into these works is a notion of carefulness, not for perfect seams and symmetries, but a willingness to abide by irregularity and chance. Creating each over long stretches of hours, days, weeks. The idea of closeness carries further into Arna's materials. As textiles, these recent works also make use of the familiarity and comfort of homemade quilting. Moving away from the geometric patchwork of traditional patterns, Arna creates loose compositions of intentional and haphazard edits. Recalling earlier works, she quilts without batting or backing. Radically expanding the definitions of

pattern and fabric, the artist saturates, or entrusts her works with drawings, doodles and small notes taken from her sketchbook or found laying around in her studio or domestic space. Traces of day-to-day life exist as relics or reified personal ephemera. Snippets, notes, moments and memories are held up to the light, just like raindrops glinting in the fragile threads of a spiderweb.

Looking closely, tactility (weaving, quilting) and tradition (the domestic sphere) give way into our current realities of the screen and digital processes. Arna uses digital photo editing software such as Photoshop to transform some of her sketches into a digital image, later incorporating the evidence of this interpretation (visible eraser-mark edits, deleted drawings and play with patterns) into her textile work. Sculptural garments (t-shirts), found material (such as dried flowers, pink latex and peg board) and sculptures also appear across the soft surfaces of *Everything is Great*. The unexpected forms of the objects create space — almost a break in the treads of the longer conversation and with a quick satisfaction.

(a pause)
Arna's practice is a slow and steady, constantly inching forward into new territories of the digital, and circling back to the traditions and comfort of weaving and quilting. As tapestries or quilts, each as a collection of activities, thoughts, ideas and internet-shopped³ materials lifted from their ordinary beginnings, or everyday settings. Apparently insignificant, flawed or unfinished, personal artefacts become talismans of love, nearness and time — references that ground the process of weaving into a much longer and organic method. Mistakes, idiosyncrasies and unpredictable results all carry their charm.

Cast in hues of soft pink, the exhibition invites questions on play and passion, care and desire, tenderness and calm. In asking for pause to consider the meaning (and sincerity) behind words and phrases such as the title's namesake "everything is great", Arna's works could not be timelier. There is a soft and quiet power in the ideas and conversations Arna's work invites and encourages. In her actions, there is ritual; a dedication to making things, loving things, spending time with them, caring for them, and then endearingly letting them out into the world.

1 Homer personifies daybreak in *The Odyssey*, using the phrase "rosy fingered dawn" in reference to the colour pink that appears in the morning sky. *The Odyssey*, Book XII, translated by Samuel Butler.

2 See Katharina Wendler's text *A Soft Power*: www.xn--plus-poa.de/exhibitions/2019/arna-%C3%BCttarsd%C3%B3ttir-a-soft-power.

3 This exhibition presents works using materials that are a slight side-step from Arna's established practice of sketching, calculating, testing colour and hand-dyeing.

Rósrað dögun¹ (mýkt, umhyggja og endurheimt)

Everything is great (Allt er frábært) stendur skrifð í einu textílverkanna á sýningunni „Allt fint“ í Nýlistasafninni. Orðin, sem Arna Óttarsdóttir hefur ofið í efnin, má lesa sem merkingalausa frasa — eitthvað sem við segjum gjarnan við annað fólk til að skýla okkar rauverulegu tilfinningum. En þessi slagorð, handskrifuð græskulaust inn á milli mynda og hluta, eru full af berskjaldadri nánd og persónulegri þýðingu. Í stað þess að hylma yfir sannar tilfinningar má líta á stóré textílverk Örnú sem dagbókarskrif, játnigar og sjálftjáningu. Hér í sýningarráminu skapa verkin rými til samræðna um mýkt, umönnun (sjálfsins) og endurheimt.

Kórallitluð, laxableik, spítalableik, föl, rjóð, sæt, kokteilsósa, rós, dögun, rökkur, ástin, sólarupprás, sólsetur; Arna litar orðin. Mjúkir og mildir bleikir tónar dofna og skerpast í verkunum og kalla fram hlýjar myndir: húðfellingar, pinnamat, blíð snerting, hráleiki, innvortis, útvortis, lyf, nostalgía, örvin — allt unaðslega bleikt. Burstséð frá sögulegum eða kynbundnum tilvísunum er eins og litaval listamannsins komi frá undirmeðitundinni, innsæi og tilfinningu. Sýningin „Allt fint“ er í mildri litapallettu sem býður upp á mismunandi blaðbrigði merkingar.

(vefnaður, teppi, hlutur)

Arna er sjálflærð í vefnaði. Vefnaður tengist heimilinu og vinnu kvenna í gegnum aldirnar en með tækni og handbraðgi Örnú færst hann út fyrir ramma heimilisins og öðlast sess í femínismá samtímans. Með því að tileinka sér kraftmíkla sýn sem brýtur upp láréttu og lóðréttu ása vefnaðarins, sem listevfar, stígar Arna af natni inn í nýja, hringlagra frásögn.

Vefnaður, eins og við vitum, er vélraenn. Að vefa er ferli stjórnad af þræðinum, en einnig skilyrt af uppistöðunni (lóðréttu þráðunum) og ívafnu (láréttu þráðunum sem ligga þvert á uppistöðuna). Í hefðbundnum vefnaði er ekki mikil val um annað en lit og efní. Í verkum Örnú sér áhorfandinn móttöðu við hina fyrirfram ákvæðnu stefnu vefnaðarins. Hún skapar nýtt mynstur með lífrænum, ólínulegum smáatriðum eins og bugðum og beygjum, vósum úr lafandi þráðum og flæðandum, stígkinni litum. Ófullkomleikinn kemur fram þar sem þræðirnir ráðast í beinar, þéttar línrínur en hniga undan þunga efnisins sem ögrar uppbryggingunni og sundrar yfirborðinu. Vefnaðurinn umbreytist úr endurtekningu í endurheimtingu. Með þolinmæði og tíma.

Verkin eru ofin vandlega og af varkárin en á sama tíma fær efnið að ráða ferðinni eða möguleikinn sem það býður upp á. Endarinn eru ekki endilega fullkomlega frágengnir eða symmetriskir, það er óregla í reglunni. Hvert verk tekur langan tíma í vinnslu, marga klukkutíma, daga, vikur. Þessi alúð og nálægð vefu sig í efnin. Sem textílverk bera þau með sér kunnugleika og hlýju heimagerða teppa og bútasaums. Með því að snúa baki við hefðbundnum mynstrum og géometriskum samsetningum beitir Arna meðvitnuð gáleysi og skapar verk með lausum og opnum endum. Á róttekan hátt víkkar hún út hefðbundinn skilning á mynstrum og efni. Hún blandar teikningum, skíssum og litlum minnismiðum úr skissubók sinni, vinnustofu eða heimili, við vefnaðinn. Á minningar um daglegt líf endurspeglar hið tímabundna, eins og minjar. Úrkippum, minnispunktum, augnablikum og minningum er haldd upp í ljósíð, glitrandi eins og regndropar í örfinum kóngulóarverf.

