



Figure 1. Plant- and hand-dyed wool to be shared by the collective members. Photo: Maria Huhmarniemi, 2023.



Figure 2. Collective member Tanya Kravtsov crafting outdoors. Photo: Maria Huhmarniemi, 2023.

Embroidered Stances as Craftivism and Ecoculture

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The Embroidered Stances art collective revitalised traditional Nordic wool embroidery through the lens of craftivism. A collective of 14 artists, crafters, activists, and artist-researchers used wool fabric and naturally hand-dyed wool yarn and showed the embroideries as an exhibition.

The *Embroidered Stances* exhibition at the Craft Museum of Finland in Jyväskylä breathed new life into the tradition of wool blanket embroidery, situating it within a contemporary societal context. The exhibition explored the aesthetics of traditional materials, such as plant and mushroom-dyed wool yarn, while reinterpreting the visual language of

blanket embroidery to express personal and political themes through patterns and designs.

Though all 14 collective members met in Rovaniemi, they came from diverse cultural backgrounds, including Finland, Russia, Eastern and Southern Europe, and Latin America. Embroidery was embraced as a dialogue-driven practice, providing a platform for sharing and debating social and political issues rooted in the diverse experiences of participants. The gatherings and embroideries by the collective served as a form of activism, using the medium to engage in societal dialogues. Their work addressed topics such as queer rights, biodiversity loss, land use conflicts, and the essence of craftsmanship.

The collective's title in Finnish, *Kirjotut kannat*, linguistically referred to embroidery as arguments and statements. This initiative was deeply rooted in activist approaches within contemporary art, encompassing both craftivism and activism. The Finnish word "kannat"

also embodied cultural origins and ancestral connections.

Collective members also did plant and mushroom dyes for wool yarn. They picked plants and mushrooms, guiding them to follow the year's seasonal cycle. The process with natural dyes, from hand-picked materials to local wool and embroidered figures and patterns, was typical to Arctic art in which making art is interwoven into an ecocultural lifestyle.

Exhibition visitors were invited to experiment with wool embroidery. Visitors of various ages and cultural backgrounds made their patterns on small woollen patches and sensed wool as a material.

The Wool Innovation project collaborated with the collective. The project revitalises the wool crafting traditions for sustainability in the craft and design field and promotes the economic viability of rural regions in Lapland, Finland. Wool Innovation facilitates craft revitalisation

"I can hear my mother's laughs and vague stories and anecdotes about my family. I associate yarn as a family memory that nowadays resonates and feels familiar again through our shared artistic project. Yarn can also become a love language."

– Lola Cervantes,
doctoral candidate



Figure 3. Elina Luiro, *Camouflaw*, 2023. The embroidery portrays the plight of northern animal species visibly impacted by global warming and the decreasing duration of the snow-covered season in the Arctic region. The snowless early winter is fatal for many of these animals, as their white winter coat can now easily be spotted from the dark, snowless background. Photo: Marko Junttila, 2023.



Figure 4. Minna Kovero during the setting up of the exhibition. Photo: Maria Huhmarniemi, 2023.

Figures 5–6. Exhibition visitors embroidered their patterns onto smaller pieces of wool in the Craft Museum of Finland. Photos: Fabiola Cervantes, 2024.

to meet the needs of crafters, the tourism sector, and broader society. The project team documented all aspects of the revitalisation and will produce learning materials for craft revitalisation. The project develops new wool-based products and services. It improves the growth and innovation capacity in the context of crafts and cultural tourism by sharing and renewing the cultural heritage of crafts.

The research contributes to three doctoral studies, while Cervantes, Kovero and Kravtsov work on their dissertations. Cervantes focuses on the sustainability and innovation of wool crafts, Kovero on revitalising traditional patterns for contemporary textile and jewellery design and Kravtsov on two-way integration of long-term locals and newcomers through arts and crafts workshops with natural materials. Dissertations are based on a series of solo- and co-written articles and artistic parts. ●

Read more about the project

Cervantes, F. & Huhmarniemi, M. (2023). Stitching for material sensitivity: From traditional to activist embroidery. *Ruukku – Studies in Artistic Research*, 20(2023). <https://doi.org/10.22501/ruu.1927154>
Huhmarniemi, M. (Ed.) (2024). *Kirjotut kannat / Embroidered Stances*. Lapin yliopisto. <http://www.urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-337-417-1>

INFO

The Embroidered Stances exhibition featured artists Lola Cervantes, Maria Huhmarniemi, Elina Härkönen, Tenka Issakainen, Tanya Kravtsov, Alina Korotovskaia, Minna Kovero, Elina Luiro, Miia Mäkinen, Niina Oinas, Petra Raudaskoski, Misia Siennicka, Ezgi Tanriverdi, and Sannu Vaarala.

The exhibition was shown in the Craft Museum of Finland 13.1. –7.4.2024. The exhibition was supported by the Finnish Heritage Agency, Kansan sivistysrahasto, University of Lapland and WoolInnovation-project co-funded by European Union.