



Embroidery

From Heritage Craft to Contemporary Art and Design – From Participatory Art to DIY Kits

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The revitalisation of craft heritage is not about preserving techniques unchanged, but about reactivating embodied knowledge, material relationships, and cultural meanings in contemporary contexts. In the case of wool embroidery, revitalisation has involved engaging with heritage, experimenting with materials, creating large-scale exhibition works, and developing DIY craft kits that translate tradition into accessible forms of making.

Revitalisation is understood as a process in which knowledge, skills, materials, and meanings are re-engaged and reinterpreted in contemporary

contexts, rather than the preservation of craft traditions in static form. In the VillaInno project, the tradition of wool blanket embroidery has been revitalised through artistic and pedagogical practice (Huhmarniemi et al., 2024; Kovero & Kravtsov, 2024).

The process began with familiarisation with the wool blanket embroidery tradition, including natural dyeing of wool yarns, learning embroidery stitches, and exploring the symbolic meanings embedded in embroidered motifs. In Finland, large folk sledge blankets were traditionally embroidered on black wool fabric using hand-dyed wool yarns (Grönlund & Lehto, 2003). These textiles functioned both as practical objects and as carriers of cultural knowledge, identity, and aesthetic values.

In the first phase of the process, team members collaborated with the Embroidered Stances collective.

► **FIGURE 1.** Wool embroidery artworks by members of the Villalno team are on display in Nurmee at the East Finland Wool Festival (*Idän villafestari*). Photograph: Minna Kovero, 2024.

► **FIGURE 2.** Villalno is exhibiting wool embroideries and hosting workshops across Finland: Tornio, summer 2023; Jyväskylä, spring 2024; Nurmee, summer 2024. Photographs; Tatiana Kravtsov, 2023 (1.), Minna Kovero 2023–2025 (muut).





FIGURE 3.
*Stitching Light
through Boundary Lines*
—artwork and its collabora-
tive creative process.
Photograph: Minna
Kovero, 2023.

They created large-scale wool embroidery works as exhibition pieces (Huhmarniemi, 2024). These works brought the tradition into contemporary art and design contexts, allowing traditional techniques and visual languages to dialogue with current themes and artistic approaches (Figure 1). Through this phase, embroidery functioned as a medium for reflection, commentary, and renewed visibility. Based on this shared practice, they have presented their work at international academic symposiums, organised exhibitions at museums such as the Finnish Craft Museum in Jyväskylä, and facilitated craft workshops in Nurmes, Tornio and Rovaniemi (Figure 2). These activities fostered knowledge and experience exchange while engaging with the revitalisation of wool embroidery traditions in a contemporary context.

In addition, a craft project organised by Kovero and Kravtsov brought together newcomers from Ukraine to explore and embroider together symbols of the sun and female sun goddesses that have crossed borders and generations from Ukraine to Karelia and the Arctic. Crafting together resulted in a collaborative art piece titled *Stitching Light through Boundary Lines*, which was presented at the Relate North exhibition in Umeå in 2023 (Figure 3). Collaboratively, through craft practice with naturally dyed wool, they explored revitalisation of sun symbolism and its empowering aspects (Kovero & Kravtsov, 2024).

In the second phase, the artists translated this embodied and expert knowledge into accessible DIY craft kits. Some designers also extended themes from artworks into these kits (Figure 4). Each kit includes the story behind the pattern, instructions, and materials: a piece of black wool fabric, a needle, naturally dyed wool yarns, and an embroidery pattern inspired by tradition. The kits were designed to enable participants to engage directly with the material practices of wool embroidery, thereby supporting the continuity of craft heritage in a contemporary context.

Through this multi-layered process, revitalisation emerges as a practice that connects past and present, professional artists and wider communities, and cultural heritage with everyday creativity. By combining artistic production, craft education, and participatory formats, the VillaInno project demonstrates how craft traditions can be sustained and renewed through shared practice, material engagement, and contemporary interpretation.

References

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► **FIGURE 4.** The DIY kits by Kovero and Kravtsov continue the motifs of their artworks. The sun embroidery workshops also influenced the thematic focus, guiding it toward symbols associated with goddess figures, flowers, birds, and vitalising circular motifs. Photographs: Minna Kovero, 2023–2025 (1-2, 4.); Rasmus Haahti, 2025 (3.); Tatiana Kravtsov, 2025 (4., 6-7); Maria Huhmarniemi, 2025 (5.).

