

Spread #01

Plying and weaving

While the hands weave the basket, our mind is calm and concentrated. Evey has visited basket weavers in many countries and has studied the creative process of this craft in depth.

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Spread #02

“Every weekend I am at the woods in Berlin to teach myself about plants and how I could use them for my woven artworks. I was pretty persistent.” says Evey. The graphic designer is from Malaysia, lived and worked in Berlin for thirteen years and discovered basket weaving almost four years ago. But first she was on the lookout. There was a feeling that her life needed an immersion into slowness: “I wanted to immerse myself more in the real life, listen to the stories of people from the countryside, of craftsmen and farmers, and to take an interest in them. Their stories interest me very much because these people work with their sensory experiences. This is what I have been missing for a long time in my own existence”. At first she tried her hand at pottery, foraging and making tinctures, until her path gradually led her to basketweaving.

Evey lives in Berlin's inner city district of Wedding in a postwar apartment block. In an apartment that looks like a very specialised museum. On the walls hang treasures from many of her journeys; baskets and woven objects, which she brought back from her excursions and research stays in Kalimantan, Spain, Scotland and southern Germany, as well as her own works. She pours cold-brewed tea into cups and tells us what she likes about basketweaving: “I reach a state of mind in which I only concentrate on one task at a time and not on many other things at once. For me this mental focus is therapeutic. Basketweaving gave me the same feeling.”

Her exploration with basketweaving started in the oldest village of Berlin, Lübars. “I went on a search and tried out which plants I could work with and what I could make with different branches, grasses and tree barks.” In the process, Evey reached her limits and decided to learn from experienced artisans around the world. During her travels, she learned to appreciate the openness and community spirit of basket weavers. “Weaving is an activity traditionally carried out in a group. For me, it is something very special, because here, stories from all walks of life are exchanged.” One basketmaker led me to

another. The common interest in a craft that is becoming increasingly rare unites people. She is still in close contact with many of her teachers today, speaking of intimate enduring relationships.

“What I like most about basketweaving is this very sensual and fundamental feeling of creating something tangible. I have teachers who came from different cultures. Although we barely understand each other linguistically, there is a common understanding between cultures which connects us.” says Evey while she is reminded of her deep impressions in Kalimantan, Borneo.

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“I think our lives is too three-dimensional and far from practical. We often lack an understanding of design and hand skill solutions.”

Here she met people for whom craftsmanship was not just a profession, but shaped their entire lives. They passed on their knowledge from generation to generation. Many of the basketmakers learned the craft from and within the community and without a directive teacher. She is reminded, "When I visited an indigenous village, I could not speak with the local people, there was a language barrier. However, the craft itself provided the communication. Just by observing hand movements and eye contact, a connection sparked and we entered into a relationship with each other. I found that very interesting.

Along the way, she also consciously observed the posture of the weavers as the craft requires great physical effort. The indigenous communities work on the ground at about the same level, which is best suited to the activity. Working tables are inconceivably unsuitable due to a limited visual plane and little freedom of movement. It is the interplay of hands and body that distinguishes basketweaving. “When we work on a woven form and exert pressure on it, we feel the tension of the material, as it were, as an inner tension in our body. A kind of symbiotic relationship develops,” Evey describes. “Even if we have a vision of a form, it is far from certain that we can create it. Only when we put pressure on the material, increase and decrease the tension, do we gradually feel our way towards the

form we have in mind. In this respect, basketweaving is perhaps similar to pottery. Only through experience do we learn to control the form.”

Evey grew up in the urban of Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia. For a long time she perceived the tropical forests of her homeland as a threat. These were places where snakes, spiders and dangerous animals lived. Today, when she returns to her hometown, she sees nature with a different view. Through basketweaving she got to know and appreciate the forests. The alienation of humans from their natural environment is something she views with concern. She explains that we have lost our senses to nature and can no longer live harmoniously with it nor to be a part of it. For many years she has earned her living as a freelance Graphic and UX-Designer. And although this form of creative work also has an aesthetic dimension, she feels its limitations. “Sometimes I feel like a machine operating a machine. In a way, my work dehumanizes me.” She is convinced that we humans are destroying our natural environment because we no longer know and therefore no longer appreciate its power. With her work she would like to establish a connection to nature, to develop empathy and respect for it. Weaving helps her to realise it.

Although Evey describes herself as a novice in basketmaking, she founded an initiative called “futurprimitiv” since 2018. She has been developing experimental teaching formats and organizing workshops since 2019, where she shares her experience of closeness to nature and intuitive working methods. During the first course “Found Weaving” in the artists’ village Gerswalde in the Uckermark, she accompanied the course participants on an excursion through the nature, ranted about plants and showed them which ones are well suited for weaving. With the collected materials she taught basic techniques of basket weaving in the studio and encouraged the participants to conduct their own experiments. “It was a great surprise to me that people who hardly had any artisanal skills could come up with something so brutal, sculptural and beautiful.”

While traditional workshops focus on learning techniques, Evey focuses on creative experiments and a sensual-haptic immersion during the creative process. Her courses are site-specific and based on improvisations with local limited resources. “I find this approach very interesting because we can observe failed attempts, but at the same time we discover surprises through these attempts. I believe that people in prehistoric times began their work this way. It is an intuitive learning process.” For her students she creates a space where they can learn to observe and explore their natural environment very closely and to enter into a creative process through interaction with nature. Evey asserts, “The next time the participants return to the forest, they see nature with different eyes.”

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"I use weaving as a ritual to remind myself of the power of slowness and to create a balance in my life."

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Three Questions for Evey

What is your purpose?

During my research trips I was inspired by the encounter with traditional forms of basketweaving. Much of this knowledge and stories provide us with important insights into the resilience of cultural forms and a ritual that respects nature. This knowledge could be significant in dealing with the impending climate crisis.

What is your vision?

With my work I would like to question how we learn, and I am fascinated by the approach of experiential learning. Claude Levi-Strauss described the importance of the untamed state of mind in the creative process. I would like to make this method of lifelong learning accessible to the public.

What do you want to pass on?

It is important to me not only to weave and produce objects, but also to lead children and adults in handling materials and to perceive their surroundings attentively. I see it as a process of self-development in which the individual and the collective world develop together and shape each other.

Sweeping with tradition

A traditional whisk broom is a useful tool. It only makes a quiet noise, needs no electricity, and those who make it themselves feel proud and satisfied afterwards.

Anyone who likes to slice fresh, crispy bread knows how far the crusty crumbs can fly over the table. Most of the time we push them together with the edge of one hand and collect them in the surface of the other hand. Or a salt cellar falls over. On many occasions, we could call for the electric hand vacuum cleaner, which will dispose of everything cleanly and thoroughly with a loud engine noise and recharge it at the power outlet. That cleans fast.

If you use a small hand brush instead, you are almost as fast, at best you hear the soft sound of the bristles and can often put the swept particles directly into the compost bin. Finally, we are just rediscovering how beautiful and useful it is to do things by hand. Or even making them ourselves.

For example, putting order in a garden, baking a loaf of bread, knitting a sweater, sewing a cap, making a table. Or knotting a hand broom, that's pretty easy. Our instructions show how to make a very special, traditional broom. Because this hand broom is a cultural heritage from the area of Albacete and Murcia in southeastern Spain. The broom is for a common good and, like all traditional woven objects, it was not created for a specific geographical area. The knowledge and technique for the production of this cultural object are freely available to all people. This must remain exactly the same in the future. The production of this broom in other cultures is welcome as long as it is not for commercial purposes.

(Translation for pg. 112-115 is unavailable)