

# SPOTLIGHT ON EDUCATION

## Vulnerable Weavings

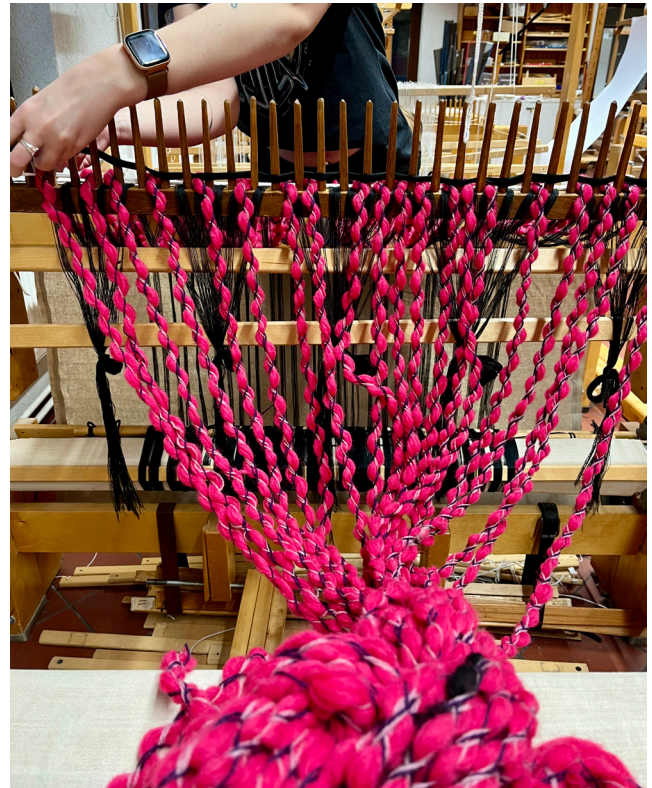
by Kadi Pajupuu

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When we learn to weave, we begin to admire evenness and strive to avoid mistakes or any semblance of error. However, under the guidance of young weaving teacher **Mari-Triin Kirs** and fashion designer **Anu Samariüütel-Long**, a handweaving course at **Pallas University of Applied Sciences** (Tartu, Estonia) in the fall of 2023 offered a refreshing perspective. (The course is part of the project “Warp and weft manipulations on handlooms”.) Instead of shunning imperfections, students were encouraged to embrace them as opportunities for creativity and expression.

Since 2017, my fellow Estonian artist Marilyn Piirsalu and I have hosted weaving courses titled “Loom Hacking,” where weavers are encouraged to question the traditional construction of handlooms. This innovative approach has seen looms “hacked” not only in Estonia but also in Finland, Sweden, Iceland and the Netherlands. We actively design and construct experimental tools for handlooms, including the RailReed<sup>1</sup> for warp density control, the Stepping Reed for creating wavy weft patterns or adjusting gaps between warps, as well as reedless weaving and rigid heddle modules for twisting warp groups. Special materials are also produced for this weaving course on industrial braiding machines at Haine Ltd in Tartu. Chunky and voluminous yarns are made using raw fibre as a core and a minimal amount of braiding spools.

Under Kirs’ mentorship, second-year textile students explored weaving with those rebellious tools. Far from being flaws to be corrected, the “mistakes” made with the help of these tools became symbols of vulnerability, wounds and scars woven into the fabric. Each deviation from the norm served as a reminder of the human touch, infusing the textiles with a raw, authentic quality that transcended mere craftsmanship. Students learned to view imperfection not as a hindrance, but as a source of inspiration. By embracing the unexpected, they discovered new avenues for self-expression and artistic innovation, redefining the boundaries of traditional weaving techniques.



**Hanna-Maria Org**, *STARK* (in progress), 2024. RailReed-woven special chunky yarn. Photo: Lisette Laanoja. Model: Ingemari Randaru.



RailReed weaving (in progress), 2019.

Through this unconventional approach, Kirs and her students demonstrated that true beauty lies not in flawless uniformity, but in the richness of imperfection woven into every textile. Kirs advocates for embracing the inherent vulnerabilities of handwoven fabrics—like wavy selvages, slits, and varying densities—as integral components that imbue the fabric with



**Hanna-Maria Org**, *STARK*, 2024. RailReed-woven special chunky yarn. Photo: Lisette Laanoja. Model: Ingemari Randaru.





**Christina Kasesalu**, *WOLF IN A SHEEP'S CLOTHING*, 2024. Reedless-woven wool. Photo: Lisette Laanoja. Model: Ingemari Randaru.

meaning and value. Central to the learning experience is the appreciation for the uniqueness of handwoven properties. Rather than shying away from imperfections, students are encouraged to celebrate them, recognizing their role in creating truly distinctive designs. Imperfections within a handwoven garment can imbue it with personality, character and a profound sense of empowerment for the weaver and for the wearer. In embracing these flaws, we become warriors, proudly carrying the banner of individuality. The photographer Lisette Laanoja captured the mood of those textiles, the wrapping and floating of lighter fabrics and the contrast of heavy thick pieces connected with calligraphy of bindings.

Weaving at Pallas is more than just a series of courses; it's an exhilarating journey into the world of textile design. Once students grasp the fundamentals, they eagerly delve into experimentation, pushing the boundaries of traditional techniques. Wearability is also a key focus. Students strive to create fabrics that are not only visually striking but also



**Grete Käärma**, *PEARL*, 2024. Reedless-woven wool and synthetics. Photo: Lisette Laanoja. Model: Ingemari Randaru.

wearable. Through ingenious pattern variations, they reduce the necessity for extensive sewing, utilizing warp ends to connect garment parts.

In essence, the weaving courses at Pallas are a fusion of tradition and innovation, where students learn to weave dreams into tangible, wearable art.

<sup>1</sup> Kadi Pajupuu, "Weaving reed for adjusting warp density while weaving: the inventing of a tool" *Studia Vernacula*, Vol 15, 2023. 152–181.

–Kadi Pajupuu is a textile artist and inventor working as a professor at Pallas University of Applied Sciences. Her main interest is pushing the limits of existing textile tools and developing new methods for weaving 3D textiles.

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