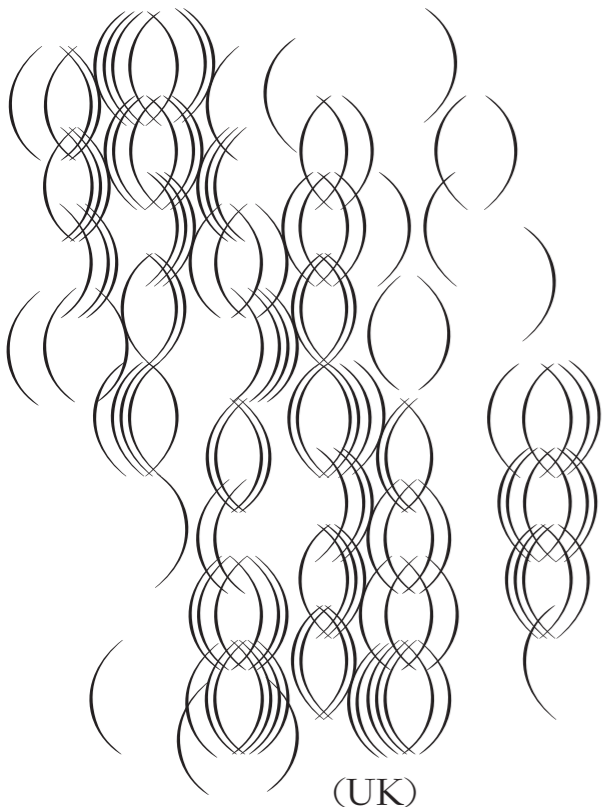


Annette Holdensen: *Wild, Warm, and Cautious*

2 April – 22 May 2022



(UK)

This last decade, the contemporary art scene has experienced renewed focus on the potential and history of textiles. To view this development from a wider perspective, O—Overgaden looks at one of the Danish pioneers who has insisted on securing textile a firm place in visual art: Annette Holdensen (b. 1934).

Sustained by a feminist outlook, tapestry weavers' collectives, and an erotic curiosity, Annette Holdensen describes her practice as "wild, warm, and cautious", and based on these key qualities, she has worked to bring weaving into a sculptural sphere for more than half a century. At O—Overgaden's inaugural exhibition in 1987, Holdensen showed her characteristic *Willow Monoliths* and now, 35 years later, she returns with a retrospective exhibition of selected works from 1970 to 1994 in O—Overgaden's two column galleries. Besides revisiting *Willow Monoliths*, visitors can experience a multitude of boats and dimensional tapestries.

Holdensen's choice of materials extends across a wide spectrum, from clothes factory remnants to natural materials such as chest and beard hair, ponytails, dog hair, sheep's wool, willow, and eel skins. Irrespective of the material, Holdensen transforms it into spatial shapes that appear sombre while, at the same time, acting as cocoons in which to screen oneself from the world. Where, for example, the Norwegian tapestry weaver Hannah Ryggen worked very daringly in terms of motifs, but traditionally in terms of technique, Holdensen has, since the 1960s, strived to develop tapestry work via a more experimental approach to textiles. Instead of keeping her weaving within a flat and strictly defined area, she blurred the structural regularity of textiles, dissolving their two-dimensionality. This is evident, for example, in the exhibition's earliest work, *Hammer Knot* from 1970, in which loose frayed edges makes it seem like it is dissolving. The work examines contemporary gender roles with its depiction of a man and a woman, while several works from the 1970s – such as *Mythological Fragment* and *Lightning* – contain distinct erotic features with holes and crevices from where, at times, shapes protrude.

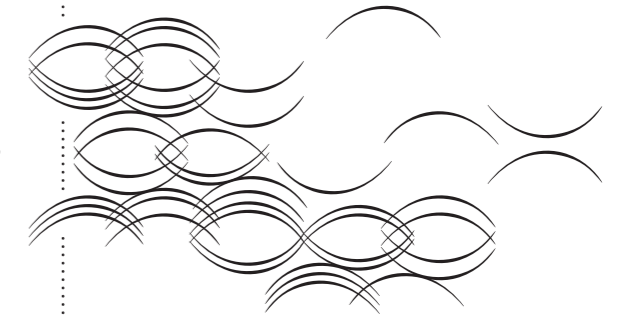
Holdensen's development from flat to three-dimensional was inspired by the Polish artist Magdalena Abakanowicz, who created coarse textile objects. The culmination of Holdensen's development towards textile sculpture was her work *Witches' Coats* from 1983, a series of large woven sculptures incorporating bristles, pockets, and plaits. Inspired by widows' outfits, they appear like mysterious and sorrowful figures. At the same time, their small pockets, sewn-on objects, and unruly manes make

them obstinate and titillating figures, alternating between alluring and dismissive. After *Witches' Coats*, Holdensen developed the possibilities of textile sculptures even further with the work *Willow Monoliths* made of wickerwork: an extended form of weaving, since willow, like thread, can be interwoven. At O—Overgaden, the anthropomorphic figures stand as they did in 1987, looking towards the viewer with a ghostly vitality. Their height mirrors exactly that of a person, making us identify with the figures and experience them with our entire bodies. The work was created in the wake of the tragic nuclear accident in Chernobyl, while the position of the individual pieces in a circle references a Nordic stone ship: a pointed oval grave shape used from the Bronze Age until the Viking Age as a memorial to the dead.

On the ground floor at O—Overgaden hangs Holdensen's work *Boats* from 1994, composed of a range of materials from metal and rubber to pig's guts – a choice of material emphatically indicating that these boats were not made to keep anyone above water. Rather, their full-size forms look like shells for the body, perhaps intended for the final journey. The raw expression in Holdensen's works invariably evoke ideas of mortality, not unlike her contemporaries Anselm Kiefer and Eva Hesse. Post-war loss of hope and utopia drove artists to break with sculpture as a monument of tribute, instead examining the clashes between materials and their decomposition.

With grieving and spiky body shapes, Holdensen indisputably evokes a sombre mood, but the works could also be viewed as cocoons, protecting the body from this

very decomposition. The boats resemble bodily sarcophagi, the willow monoliths look like caves, and you can warm yourself beneath the witches' coats. They all represent a kind of refuge where one could hide from the world. Since textiles have always acted to shield our identity or to protect us against scratches, sunburn, and cold, Holdensen's works facilitate a reflection on the things we use to protect ourselves but often take for granted.

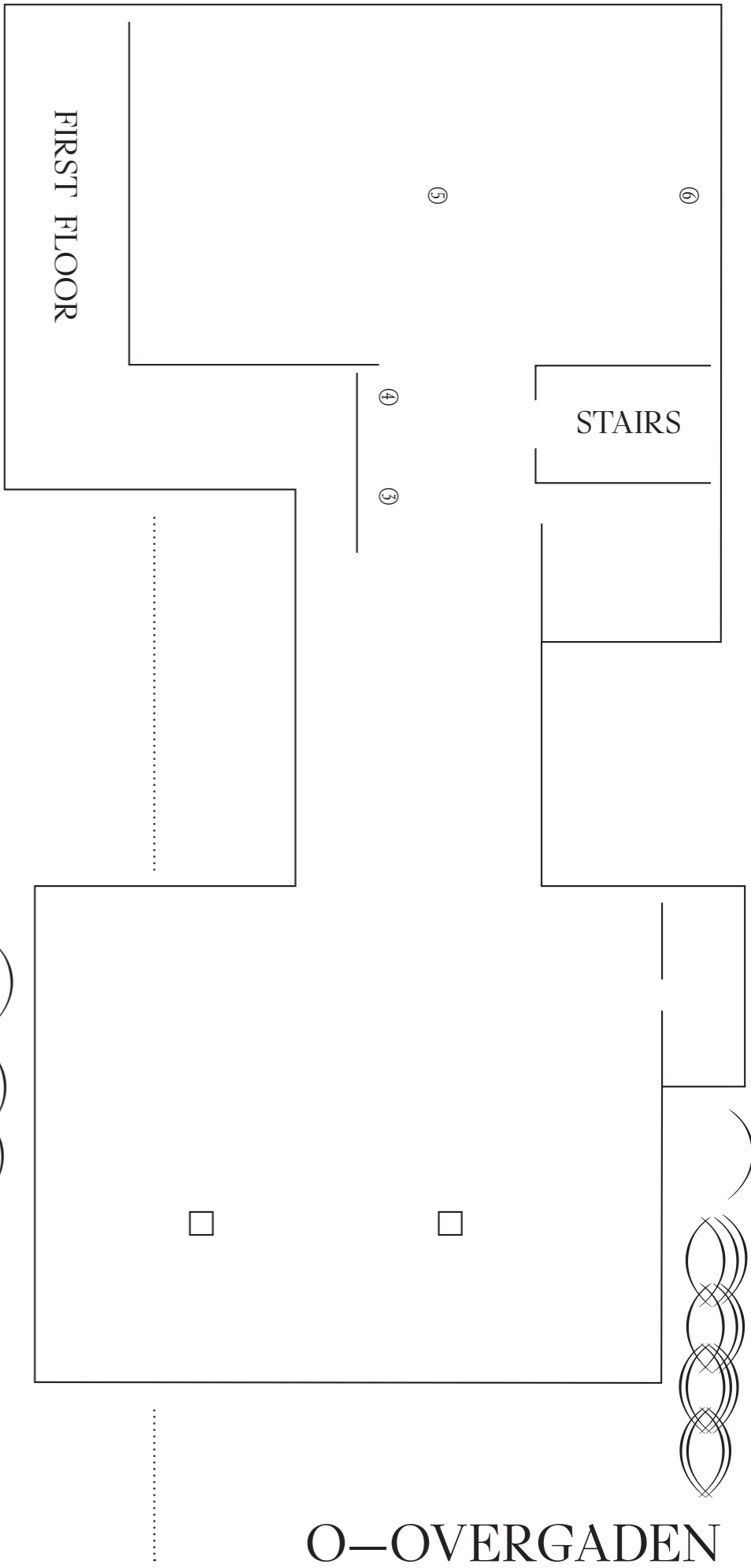


Annette Holdensen (b. 1934 in Sneum, DK) has exhibited internationally, including at the Berkeley Arts Center (US), International Minitextil (MX), the 6th International Triennale of Tapestry in Lodz (PL), the Sardinian Ethnographic Museum (IT), Kulturhuset Stockholm (SE), Anna Norlander Museet (SE), Vadstena Castle (SE), Hamar Kunstsenter (NO), Lillehammer Kunstmuseum (NO), Trondheim Kunstmuseum (NO), and Nordens Hus (FO), as well as in Denmark at Ribe Kunstmuseum, Vejen Kunstmuseum, Johannes Larsen Museet, Kunsten Museum of Modern Art Aalborg, Designmuseum Danmark, Gl. Holtegaard, and Brandts. Holdensen is represented in the collections of Brandts, Designmuseum Danmark, Nordenfeldske Kunstindustrimuseum, Trondheim Kunstmuseum, Vejen Kunstmuseum, the Danish Arts Foundation, and the New Carlsberg Foundation. She was awarded the Danish Arts Foundation's lifelong grant in 2007.

In connection with the exhibition and inspired by *Willow Monoliths*, young people from social housing areas close to O—Overgaden are making caves for a playground in collaboration with the Amagerbro Helhedsplan and Fabrikken for Kunst og Design. Moreover, Laboratory of Aesthetics and Ecology is publishing a catalogue for the exhibition. We would like to thank Annette Holdensen's family and Laboratory of Aesthetics and Ecology for their collaboration and Designmuseum Danmark, Lis Langaard, and the school Osted Efterskole for loaning us their works.

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⑥

STAIRS

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③

FIRST FLOOR

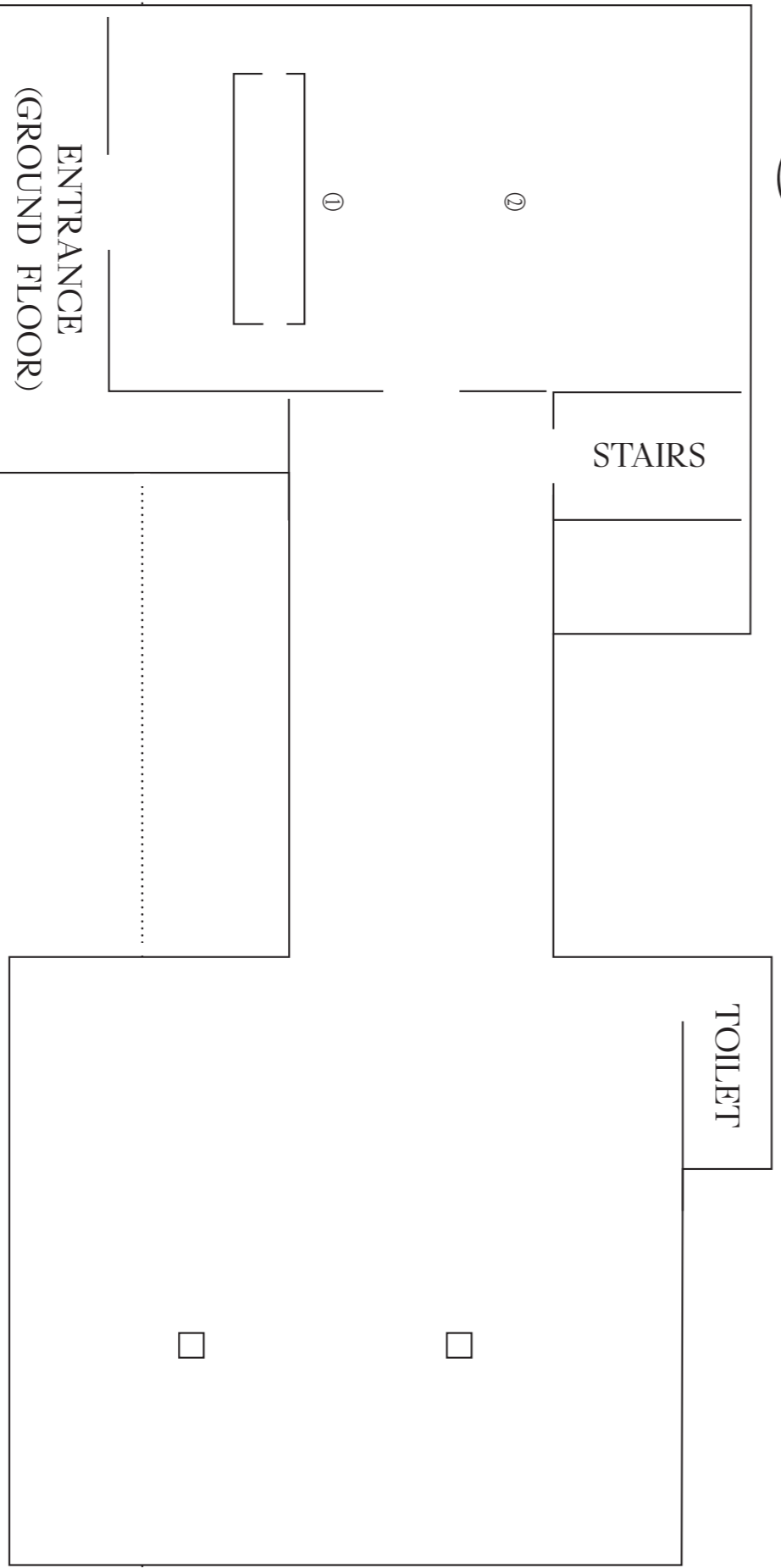
O—OVERGADEN

③ *Hammer Knot*, 1970
 220 × 133 cm
 Wool, linen, sisal, human hair,
 and animal hair

⑤ *Willow Monoliths*, 1986
 Variable dimensions
 Willow and shellac

④ *Mythological Fragment*, 1971
 130 × 90 cm
 Wool and brush
 Private owner

⑥ *Witches' Coats*, 1983
 3 × 186 × 56 cm
 Tar, sisal, piassava broom,
 copper wire, metal, bamboo,
 crepe de chine, ribbons, cotton,
 beech sticks, silk taffeta, iron,
 and bamboo.
 Design Museum Denmark



TOILET

STAIRS

②

①

ENTRANCE
(GROUND FLOOR)

① *Lightning*, 1978
 230 × 160 cm
 Wool, horsehair, and sisal
 The Danish Arts Foundation
 deposited at Østved Efterskole

② *Boats*, 1994
 Variable dimensions
 Mixed media

