

<https://doi.org/10.7577/formakademisk.3536>

**Astrid Hus**

Assistant Professor  
Faculty of Humanities, Sports and Educational Science  
Department of Visual and Performing Arts Education  
University of South-Eastern Norway  
astrid.hus@usn.no

**Kirstine Riis**

Associate Professor (PHD)  
Faculty of Humanities, Sports and Educational Science  
Department of Visual and Performing Arts Education  
University of South-Eastern Norway  
kirstine.riis@usn.no

# To catch with your eyes and feel with your hands

## Exhibition as aesthetic communication and didactic approach to teaching

### **Abstract**

*Presenting products and materials in didactic exhibitions can be an important support for teaching and guidance in the practice of a textile teacher. Finding materials for the exhibition is an important preparation for me as a teacher, as the creative work helps me dive into the theme, I wish to teach the students. In this study, artography - a methodology, alternating between the different roles of artist, researcher and teacher - was used as a methodology. During a teaching period in which exhibitions were used as a didactic approach to teaching, observations were made on the students' experiences. In addition, a survey was conducted with 10 students, who answered a questionnaire on the possible benefits they had derived. The analysis conducted in this study indicate how exhibitions can be used as a form of aesthetic communication and how this didactic approach to teaching can strengthen a holistic teaching process and provide inspiration for teachers in creative practices.*

**Keywords:** exhibition, didactic approach to teaching, aesthetic communication, dialogue

### **INTRODUCTION**

For several years I have been teaching textiles at university. At the beginning of each year, I introduce students to cultural traditions through objects from different ages and using different techniques and materials. In order to inspire and motivate the students in terms of concrete creative processes with textiles, an exhibition of objects on wall panels has a didactic approach to teaching that I have found useful as a start to students' own work with textile craft and design. Initially, the exhibitions were meant to be inspirational, and I expected the students to use them without further presentation, but I have since integrated them more into the teaching process, both with assignments and as part of lectures.

With textiles, we are constantly developing new techniques and trying out new materials, at the same time as building on knowledge that previous generations have acquired. As a textile teacher, I take care of products, both clothing and utensils. These textiles tell us about the time they were created, the material that was available, and the diligence and knowledge that is important for good work. Knowledge that was previously passed down from generation to generation is no longer as accessible to today's students in a time where many visual impressions come through a digital screen. Through exhibitions with various fabrics, clothing and objects from different epochs, students can work hands-on with different materials and techniques.

Thus, working with exhibitions has become an important part of my preparations for a teaching period. This is a creative process, where I try out different variants and designs for the show. I turn trousers upside down, attach a dress to the wall, fold up a sleeve, emphasize a closure, frame a collar, hide a part of a skirt and hang a blouse on a mannequin. If it becomes too ordinary, I change, creating a new shape from the garment, attaching it to the wall and adding a shoe that has a contrasting colour. What can I achieve by putting a dress upside down in the lapel of a tuxedo jacket? What happens if I let a man's shirt stick out of the sleeve? What expression is created if I hang men's jackets upside down and fasten ties on their back? What is signalled with a skirt placed over the shoulders of a mannequin instead of on the hips and with a zipper loosely hanging over? When I work like this, I am the artist and my impulsive and spontaneous actions give surprising results. In this way, the role of the artist alternates with that of the teacher when I consider what I want to communicate to the students. For me, the goal is to enable students to have an aesthetic experience in addition to receiving academic content.

In this article, I want to investigate how exhibitions as a form of aesthetic communication and didactic method can contribute to improving teaching in textiles. The survey is based on the exhibition "Visual key-words in our textile everyday life and celebrations", which was developed in connection with a teaching period for a textile study. I used artography (Springgay et al., 2005) as a methodology, alternating between the different roles of artist, researcher and teacher. The three roles are closely linked, but emerge in different ways at different stages of the process, which will be explained in this article.

This paper is based on an auto-ethnographic study of Astrid Hus. Though it uses the pronoun "I" throughout, the text has been written together with a colleague, Kirstine Riis. She also has a background in textiles and has followed Hus's teaching practices and use of exhibitions as a didactic approach to teaching for many years. Riis has contributed to the theoretical framework of the study and acted as an analysis and discussion partner to give the article a broader and more general character.

## **VISUAL KEY-WORDS IN TEXTILE EVERYDAY LIFE AND CELEBRATION**

The exhibition discussed in this article was created at the beginning of a teaching period in the first semester of the study in textiles, for the art and design course at the University of Southeast Norway (USN). The exhibition was designed using textile fibres, materials, products, photos and illustrations. The objects were presented so that they could be touched, turned over, taken on and off the mannequin, tried on, hung up and studied thoroughly.

When creating the exhibition, I started with basic textile products created from fibres and then moving on to products using decor techniques such as printing, embroidery and surface design (Figure 1). The exhibition showed clothing from different epochs, including party dresses, old coats and modern Norwegian fashion (Figures 2 and 3).

The exhibition was available to students throughout the semester and changed following introductions to new themes and assignments in the course of the autumn term. In this way, it reflected the progression of the course, and served as a source of information and inspiration for students, teachers, and other observers.

For example, when students were to explore closures, folds and pockets, one of the wall panels was filled with products where these features were used in different ways, both functionally and decoratively. Inspired by this, students were challenged to explore different types of pockets and closures in the garment themselves (Figure 4).



**FIGURE 1.** Part of the exhibition showing wool fibre in felt, and as yarn used in knitting, crochet and weaving. (Photo: Astrid Hus)



**FIGURE 2 AND 3.** Party clothes in different materials and from different epochs. (Photo: Astrid Hus) (figure 2). Norwegian fashion represented with a dress and trousers from Moods of Norway (Figure 3). (Photo: Astrid Hus).





FIGURE 4. Clothes showing different pockets and zippers used for both functional and decorative purpose. (Photo: Astrid Hus).



FIGURE 5. Part of the exhibition showing different closures with buttons, hidden closure and decorative buttons. (Photo: Astrid Hus)





**FIGURE 6.** Surface designs in different materials and techniques. Curled paper, feather boa, plastic grass and silk ruffles can provide different visual and tactile material experiences. (Photo: Astrid Hus)



**FIGURE 7.** A floral dress is turned upside down in a tuxedo jacket, while a ruler acts as a piece of jewellery and tie pin. (Photo: Astrid Hus) Figure 8. Men's jackets turned up or down to form an unexpected shape. (Photo: Astrid Hus)

As another example, the wall panel with fiber, yarn and thread techniques was replaced with garments where buttons and buttonholes were the focus: sewn-in buttons, press studs, decorative buttons, button and loop and hidden button rows (Figure 5). For the study period of textile design and sewing clothes, the exhibition focused on pattern construction and clothes with different shapes, from simple cuts to body-hugging shapes.

The last change in the exhibition was made in connection with a task in material experimentation. Here a collage on the wall was made up of photos and my own material experiments, in addition to other garments (Figure 6).

Each exhibition was closely linked to whichever theme was being taught, with me referring to new items in the exhibition when I was introducing new subject matter. During my presentation on materials, for example, I was able to explain such techniques as flossing, ruffles and folding through both the physical product and photos, to show how these were used in the garment.

The exhibition was characterized by colourful compositions, where even objects that do not usually belong in combination were put together in surprising and playful ways (Figure 7). Figure 8 shows how a product goes from being a normal garment (men's jackets), to being primarily a sculptural form when turned upside down.

## **EXHIBITION AS AESTHETIC COMMUNICATION AND APPROACH TO TESTING: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE**

When I work with an exhibition, I feel a great engagement. The various products I work with give me excitement and anticipation for further work. Here I find a parallel to what artist and university professor in ceramic art, Caroline Slotte, describes as tension between the recognizable and the enigmatic, the ordinary and the unexpected (Slotte, 2010, p. 11).

All the time I have been driven by this tension, which becomes a great driving force in my work: What happens if...? I have to find out, explore further, see how the material in a skirt fold if I turn the garment upside down on the mannequin or attach it to the wall. The humanistic psychologist and author Rollo May describes the feeling of being completely focused on a task, and explains it as follows: "the feeling that comes with sharpened awareness, the mood that emerges with the experience of realizing one's own latent possibilities" (May, 1994, p. 48).

Slotte also writes about what it means to be concentrated when working with the material: "It is important to be responsive to the material and put yourself in a state of 'focused attention'" (Slotte, 2010, p. 11). You must take your time and be attentive to the work, which I personally experience working with the exhibitions. professor of philosophy, Bengt Molander, uses the term "attention" and refers to it as "attention in action" (Molander, 2006). He states that this can only be learned through various forms of dialogue and participation. Furthermore, he says that "attentive" may not be quite the right word, because it steers too far in one direction. Instead, he prefers the concept of "presence" because it refers more to an alternation between different "attentions" (2006, p. 21). Molander also refers to Donald Schön, who uses the term "conversation" when referring to a situation. One must let the material be expressed and "listen" to it. The work process with the exhibitions is often characterized by a dialogue when I flip and turn garments and objects and discover new properties of them.

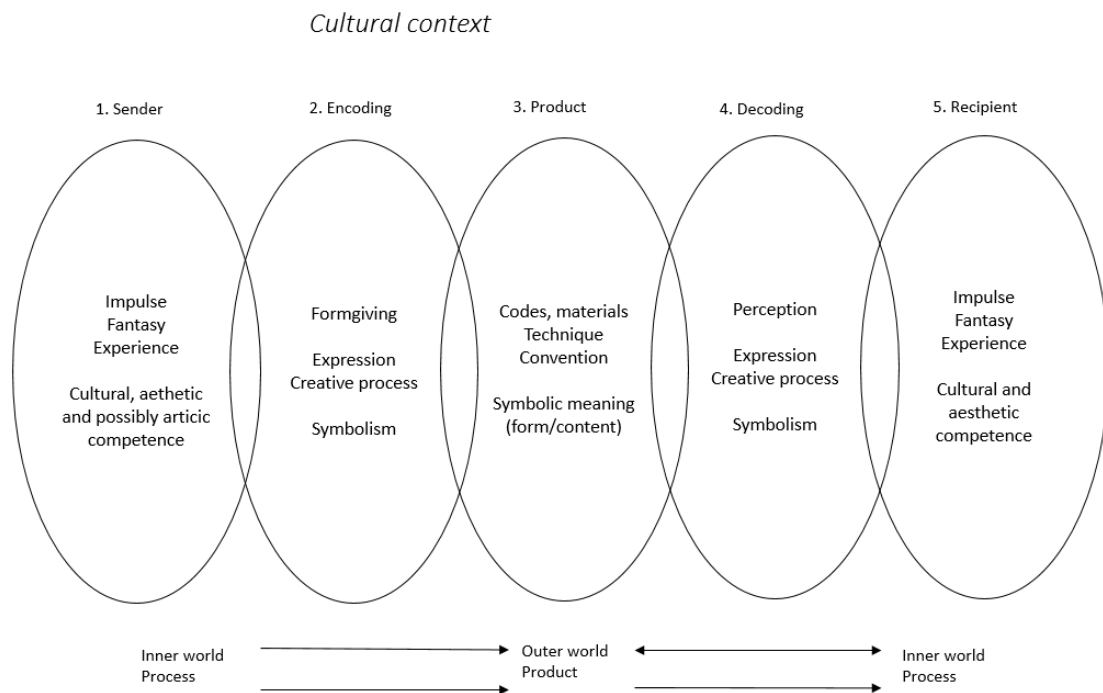
When a material is transformed into a finished product, it has new properties. The fabric is sewn into garments, the yarn becomes a fabric, crochet or knitted product; it appears as a result of a conversation between the material and the designer. Lecturer in design, arts and crafts, Ann-Hege Lorvik Waterhouse, says: "Expressing oneself in materials is language, a form of aesthetic conversation – interaction between those who create and the materials they create, and those who experience what is created" (Waterhouse, 2013, cover).

My own artistic experiences through the work of creating an exhibition are essential to work, while at the same time the main goal is to communicate knowledge and inspire the students in their own work. The items assembled to compose an exhibition might form installations, assemblages or collages. Objects in themselves can constitute forms of expression, and may not need to be worked on further, "but they must be composed from an idea, an artistic goal, to a new entity with artistic aesthetic qualities" (Waterhouse, 2013, p. 83). Well-known elements can be combined and given a new meaning or rediscovered. "The art experience can manifest itself as a narrative in things" (Waterhouse 2013, p. 83).

Benny Austring and Merete Sørensen write in the book *Aesthetics and Learning* (2006) about aesthetic communication, which they argue involves three main factors: the sender; the meaning or product, understood as a unit of form and content; and the recipient (Austring & Sørensen, p. 73). The sender encodes a meaning into a linguistic or material form. In this article, the terms "meaning" and "product" are used both for the exhibition as a material form, and also in linguistic terms as the act of

communication related to the exhibition and teaching process. The sender forms the product – i.e. the exhibition in this context – by using symbolic forms, here understood as *formed features* (p. 49), which in the field of textiles might be cloth, a ball of yarn, textile experiments, photos, etc. According to Austring and Sørensen, the exhibition or product is “(...) a meaning of both form and content, which represents an edited and mediated version of the original impulse” (Austring & Sørensen, 2006, p. 75, authors’ own translation).

Austring and Sørensen (2006, p. 75) present a model for aesthetic communication, which is used in this article to structure analysis and the results of the empirical material from the teaching with the exhibition, “Visual keywords in our textile everyday life and celebration” (see Figure 9).



**FIGURE 9.** Austring and Sørensen's model for aesthetic communication (1988, p. 75) illustrates the processes, phases and competencies that are at play in aesthetic communication.

The model shows the different phases in aesthetic communication: sender, encoder, product, decoder and recipient. In the research presented in this article the sender is I/the teacher, the product is the exhibition, and the recipient is the students. The model of Austring and Sørensen shows that the sender and recipient are equal. They also emphasize that decoding, much like encoding, is an active creative process in which the recipient must invest their attention, their knowledge of the current media and their cultural and aesthetic experiences. “The more open or abstract the meaning appears, the more (co)creative the recipient must be” (Austring & Sørensen, 2006, p. 74). Both the process of creating expression and impression into an aesthetically symbolic form appeals to and challenges the recipient's sensory and emotional experiences (Austring & Sørensen, 2006, p. 70).

The phases of the model are explained with different concepts. Austring and Sørensen assert that both sender and recipient are part of an active creative process. This is emphasized by the fact that the same terms – impulse, imagination, experience of the world, as well as cultural and aesthetic competence – are mentioned for both parties. In addition, the creative process and symbolism are used in both encoding and decoding. The differences between two participants are that the sender designs and creates the expression, while the recipient senses and perceives an impression. In addition, the sender's artistic competence is mentioned as an important possible aspect. Although this is not mentioned in Austring and Sørensen's model, artistic competence is also linked to the recipient (the

students) in this context, because they continue to work with creative processes. When decoding is seen as an active, creative process, it is understood that the recipient creates their own understanding of the product. In this way, cultural and aesthetic competence is emphasized by both sender and recipient and recipients can be socialized into a different culture of coding and symbolism than that of the sender (Austring & Sørensen, 2006, p. 75).

There may also be situations where the recipient does not perceive the medium as the sender intended. For example, certain recipients may lack interest, or add another unintended meaning to the product. The sender may also be vague in their expression; they may have created expressions that compete or confuse. Austring and Sørensen mention this as “sources of noise” for aesthetic communication (Austring & Sørensen, 2006, p. 74). The model shows the phases as interconnected, but coherent in line. Under the model, arrows show the route between a) the phases expressed as senders’ and receivers’ inner worlds or processes, and b) the outer world and product as the central point. The arrows indicate the prevailing direction of flow from the sender to the product, but the arrows between recipient and product show back and forth movement. This indicates that the recipient moves to and fro between the product and the process.

Referring to the research presented in this article, it is thus the students who alternate between the exhibition, the decoding and their own learning. The arrow between sender, product and recipient will also have two directions and even form a circle: through changes to the exhibition during the semester, the processes are repeated, both for the teacher's creative process within the exhibition and the students' learning process. At the same time, this means that there is alternation between the roles of artist and teacher. The alternation between different roles is elaborated on in the following section on the methodological nature of the study.

## **EMPIRICAL DATA AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH OF THE RESEARCH**

After several years of using exhibitions as a teaching method, I intended to investigate to what extent and in what way this approach affects teaching about textiles. In this article, I seek answers to the question: How can exhibitions as a form of aesthetic communication and a didactic method strengthen teaching in textiles?

This question is explored in an interplay between experiences from my creative work with the exhibition, teaching and an evaluation of this teaching. The work thus has methodological references to artography (Springgay et al., 2005), which is a form of art-based research methodology (Barone & Eisner, 2011). An artographic methodological position enables us to take and emphasise the three different roles of artist, researcher and teacher as a premise for this study, without undermining the legitimacy of the roles or the research. Artography emphasizes that the three roles not only complement or illustrate each other, but are woven together with the intention of creating new and additional meanings (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 899). This makes research possible at the intersection between knowing and being, and is both playful, exploratory and expressive (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 897, 900).

In line with Austring and Sørensen's model for aesthetic communication, which has been used as an analytical perspective in the study, artography draws the recipient into the meaning-creating process:

Inasmuch as the art and text are enacted in relation to each other, so too the viewer/reader figures into the process of meaning making, adding layers of inter-textual dwelling. Each informs and shapes the other in an active moment of lived inquiry (Springgay, Irvin & Kind, 2005, s. 899-900).

The empirical basis for this article is threefold and closely linked to the three roles mentioned above. First, the empirical data for the study is a combination of photos and reflections on my own preparation for teaching and creating the exhibition, “Visual key-words in our textile everyday life and celebrations”. Secondly, the students' work was observed during a teaching period in which this exhibition was used as a central didactic tool. Thirdly, a questionnaire was distributed which the students answered at the end of the teaching period. My subjective experiences from the artistic process and teaching, and the



external expressions that were registered through participatory observation and questionnaires, together form the empirical basis for the investigation.

The text in the introduction to the article and the section “Visual keywords in our textile everyday life and celebrations” presents excerpts from empirical data from my own work with the exhibition. The creative work and observation of the teaching were collected in the form of photos and reflection notes. The questionnaire, which was distributed at the end of the semester, was structured with follow-up questions and was similar to a semi-structured interview. The students had to answer in writing, and the questionnaire had open answer options. There were thirteen questions, the last of which allowed for additional comments. For several of the questions, the students were encouraged to give a basic or detailed explanation, and to give honest, nuanced and comprehensive answers. I taught the students throughout the semester and was familiar to them, which may have affected how they responded to the questionnaire.

The analysis is characterized by an abductive approach and a focus on the dynamics between preconceptions, empirics and theory (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2008, p. 55, 58). A preliminary analysis of the empirical material focuses on the use of an exhibition as a didactic tool. An analytical perspective was taken towards the creative processes behind the exhibition, the teaching and the students' answers, and the meanings in the interactions between them. Austring and Sørensen's model for aesthetic communication was then used as an analytical tool to further develop knowledge of how the exhibition was created, used and understood throughout the teaching period in terms of a relationship between sender and recipient, process and product, and internal and external process (Figure 9).

In the academic year in question, there were eleven students, two men and nine women. The students in the survey took a year of study in textile art and design, where the academic year was part of a bachelor's course. Four of the students were in their third year and had had textiles in their studies earlier. Six of the students did not have a background in textiles from a college or university, but some had textiles from high school while others had experience with textile hobby work.

The research was conducted in a limited group and so cannot be greatly generalized, but still gives an impression of how this exhibition was received. In addition, there is research on a specific process and my own teaching methods, something that can easily lead to a subjective assessment of the survey. This is further discussed in the concluding section of the article.

## **ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

In this section, the analysis of the empirical material is presented. Here, we have used Austring and Sørensen's model for aesthetic communication (Figure 9) to develop knowledge about the exhibition as a form of aesthetic communication and didactic approach to teaching. Analysis and results are presented below based on the five phases in the model. Phases 1-3 and 5 are based on empirical material from observations. Phase 4, decoding, is primarily based on students' answers from the questionnaire.

### **Sender**

When I start planning the teaching period, I begin with a PowerPoint presentation and look for digital images. In this case, I did not feel very engaged at first. Around me I had many textile products lying around: a colourful wool sweater, an embroidered children's jacket, some yarn, a felt bag with a red flower and an orange party dress. These tactile and colourful objects stimulated a desire to be creative. I moved away from the PC screen and the two-dimensional presentation of textile products, and instead I turned to creative dialogue with the specific products. The impulse I got from the physical materials immediately led me to the work of designing an exhibition. Nevertheless, the desire for creation and expression can be seen in connection with a rational, formal need for teaching planning. It was crucial for this planning that I, as the sender, could work artistically and creatively. This gave me a feeling of excitement, anticipation, engagement and motivation.

Even though the academic content was in focus, I was able to work creatively and used my own expertise in textiles and artistic tools. My cultural, aesthetic and artistic competence is characterized by

my background, where I have worked with different handicrafts and traditional crafts, with an emphasis on basic craftsmanship in sewing and weaving, as well as education in design subjects, characterized by experimental work with materials and techniques without definite answers. In this way, respect for the craft and materials have gone hand-in-hand with a playful and exploratory way of working with materials and objects. This interaction has characterized both my teaching and my own artistic expression through work with exhibitions throughout my teaching career. This interaction also forms the framework in this article for an interpretation of how the various formal media can be used for communication, and what these should convey.

### **Encoding**

The relevant objects, photos and material are assembled in an alternation between choices and reflections on what I need for teaching, and experimental work with material. I use experiences from previous work with exhibitions and activate my professional knowledge about material, sewing technique, aesthetics, form and composition. The concept of an aesthetic conversation characterizes my work with compositions for the exhibition. As an artist, I constantly ask questions about the aesthetic choices. I make and receive impulses back in terms of what academic content. As a teacher, I want to communicate to the students, and I am in an aesthetic conversation with the material and work in the dynamics between creating spontaneous and intuitive expressions. At the same time as I activate compositional principles such as tension, calm, contrast, repetition, in addition to Itten's colour contrasts. I work with an aesthetic setting (Waterhouse, 2013) and try out different compilations with various background materials and add or remove objects and colour elements. Here I experience being "attentive in action" (Molander, 2006. p. 21) when I, in dialogue with selected objects, try to place them in the exhibition.

The various forms/designs such as jackets, seam samples, yarn bundles, buttons and photos give me ideas, associations and impulses to try out new compositions. Familiar elements are put together and given a new meaning. I work in the field of tension between my expectations of the exhibition as the dissemination of professional content, at the same time as I challenge conventional expectations for professional dissemination through my artistic expressions. I select products and objects as good examples of material use, colour combinations or sewing technique and assemble them as a whole of form and content "with artistic aesthetic qualities" (Waterhouse, 2013, p. 83). Through the work I get to know more about the different products and see how they are made. They make me think about who has used them. This is how I recognize myself in what Slotte experienced when she walked into an empty house where her grandmother had lived, and where, through dialogue with the objects, became better acquainted with them: "The more I talk, the more eager I become, because it is as if the connections between things become clearer while I talk – as if everything in here is intertwined and that the only thing I need to do is look around carefully" (Slotte 2010, p. 5). I experience this "connection" myself both by selecting objects for the exhibition and in the process of putting them together in composition.

The formed features in themselves makes the basis for encoding meaning. The patterned knitted wool jacket and knitting sample on needle size 12 (Figure 1), the black lace dress and the rough work trousers with large pockets (Figures 2 and 4), the textile experiments with different textures (Figure 6), and others are different symbolic forms and a starting point for creating my own meaning about knitting strength, thread, materials, form of use, and surface manipulation, among other things.

When building an exhibition, I focus, for example, on starting with the simple and basic, and give the exhibition a clear "reading direction" presented by felted children's slippers and yarn, – products created with different thread techniques – before moving on to products with decorative techniques such as print, embroidery and surface designs. The exhibition in question showed clothes from different time periods, party dresses, old coats and newer Norwegian fashion. Thus, it utilized conventional techniques of the chosen formed features (Austring and Sørensen, 2006, p. 75). At the same time, I also challenged these expectations through playful breaks and surprising moves, for example, when the dress was given a tie with a Smurfe figure print fastened with a ruler as a tie pin, or when men's jackets were turned upside down and form a new shape (Figure 8).

Through the design and work with the exhibition, I was able to immerse myself in the subject matter and prepare myself through a creative process. By studying the garments, turning them over and over, I repeated to myself whatever knowledge was to be passed on to the students. Through the process, I developed a relationship with the subject matter and experienced a sense of excitement and an expectation to convey this to the students.

### **Product**

The exhibition, as a product of Austring and Sørensen's model for aesthetic communication, is presented in the section, "Visual keywords in our textile everyday life and celebrations". Figures 5 and 6 show the exhibition's character of assembly and composition of different materials and products. As aesthetic communication, the product has both a visual and an oral form:

The visual form was not a finished one, but a dynamic form with several phases, where the product was adapted in relation to the progression of the study process. The exhibition was changed several times throughout the semester, to convey new subject matter. By having several phases within the exhibition and continuously changing its makeup, both the exhibition and the creative processes of sender and recipient were updated and activated several times. For me as a teacher, a change in an exhibition creates new commitment and motivation. Parts of the exhibition were therefore replaced with new, current products and material for concretization of ideas and inspiration. In this way, the sender follows the recipient through the entire process, and the recipient can thus also be the impetus for the sender's new design process.

Within an exhibition, students can feel the materials, discover the tactile differences in cotton, wool and silk, and see examples of products where each material is used. To understand material knowledge, it is beneficial to have a product available. For example, wool, which is so different when it comes straight from a freshly cut sheep, is washed, carded or dyed before being used with a range of procedures in different textile techniques. Examples of techniques used in different ways were presented so that students could be free to make their own choices.

The oral form enabled me to activate the exhibited products by explaining techniques and form, and at the same time refer to different ways of entering into a dialogue with the form and content of the exhibition. As the students had different aesthetic and cultural skills, they wanted to see a variety of examples, and to build on and develop their own skills in, for example, surface techniques, where both different techniques and materials were shown and explained through oral communication.

An exhibition conveys professional content, at the same time as being characterized by the sender's personal form of expression. Although composition and colour theory are not specifically textile content, it is the intention that the exhibition will stimulate students' understanding of composition and aesthetic communication, both through the clothing they themselves create and by communicating their own processes.

### **Decoding**

Although decoding in Austring and Sørensen's model is referred to as the "inner world", the students' answers to the questionnaire help operationalize aspects of their learning process and thus make them "external expressions". In this section, the students' answers are intertwined with their own observations of the teaching process and are seen in the light of Austring and Sørensen's fourth phase: decoding.

The exhibition is decoded by the students through their senses. The exhibition was built so that each recipient could be in sensory dialogue with the formed features, whereby they could touch and turn the different materials, clothes and products. In this way, students could experience different material qualities or study sewing technical details, which could provide concrete impulses for learning. One student replied: 'we get closer to the material, see concrete step-by-step examples of how one proceeds, and how different materials behave using the same technique' (Student C).

The students actively searched for textile knowledge in the exhibition, as one said: "for the textile experiments in the first assignment, I studied the exhibition to get inspiration for testing technique with ruffles" (Student E). Two students emphasized the importance of being able to see how

a garment is sewn through good examples. Another two said they received visual impulses when they were able to study a product during the process. One of the students said that “for me, the most important thing is to be able to reflect on things we have learned in class in order to understand specifically what it can look like, and also fashion history” (Student I).

The students also emphasized the advantage of being able to turn things around by hand, and thus see the technical application and acquire technical knowledge. “By experiencing the materials tactilely and feeling them, it provides insight into how one can work with textile materials, techniques and garments” (Student F).

One of the arrows in Austring and Sørensen's model, which goes in two directions between product and recipient, product and process, was clear in the way the students alternated between workshop and exhibition. Someone looked at the exhibition every day, but used it especially carefully when there was something they were stuck on. “If there is something we learn in the class that I may not have fully achieved, I can use the exhibition to explore it, for example buttonholes” (Student E). A student said that “since the exhibition is there, I always look at it and discover new things all the time. It clearly gives inspiration to the work we are doing at the moment with regard to ruffles and folds” (Student G).

The dynamics between product and recipient are also expressed in the students' assessment of the exhibition as an alternative to PowerPoint presentations: “We see the exhibition every day we come to school, which we do not with a PowerPoint” (Student A). Several students mentioned that with PowerPoint, the gaze is directed in one direction, and one does not have the same freedom to make choices as to what or where one wants to see or how long one can linger on a specific thing. One student wrote: “I think the exhibition works very well because we can look more closely at specific examples and not just photos. We can feel the garment/material, whether it is smooth or matte” (Student B). Another student further emphasized the importance of the exhibition being used over a longer period of time and in several ways, in another difference from a PowerPoint presentation. Through the exhibition “we get information from the teacher about each garment and a photo, and we can see it every day for an extended period” (Student F). One student gave a more nuanced answer, saying it is important to vary teaching styles. “I am very fond of both PowerPoint and exhibition, and it gives different results. But in this subject, perhaps a concrete product is the most suitable. At the same time as PowerPoint is sometimes also very exciting” (Student G).

The students emphasized that the variation in the exhibition over time was positive. It gave them new inspiration, made them more curious, inspired new ideas, and created greater focus on exactly what they have been working on. One said they were happy to see new aspects of the exhibition. “It has been good because the exhibition changes in line with new tasks. It gives us new input, knowledge and inspiration that suits our current assignment” (Student A).

On the question of oral communication, the students were in agreement that this form of communication was important. One of them said: “the fact that the teacher uses the exhibition in teaching gives it more meaning, and we understand that it is selected garments that are represented” (Student C), while another said that it was “quite important, because I do not study it as thoroughly on my own” (Student H).

Oral communication thus creates a connection between the encoding of the academic content in the symbolic forms and the recipient's decoding of these. Thus, product and subject matter are more interesting when the students gain information and knowledge about elements in the exhibition. The oral element was supportive, for example, when technical methods were explained in the workshop and then shown through exhibits. “I think it's nice to get a review, so that I get a more thorough insight into the garment/image and why exactly this was exhibited” (Student F). A student also said that the oral presentation must not be too extensive, because “it is also important to keep it short and precise so that one does not distract, since it is so much different” (Student H).



## Recipient

As demonstrated, an exhibition can be used as a didactic approach to teaching tool and the students' decoding of the exhibition thus not only leads to impressions, but also to academically relevant learning and as inspiration for their own expressions.

During the teaching period, it was clear how most students were inspired by texture techniques, material use and the shape of garments. Concrete details such as buttons and buttonholes, shapes and textures for the surface and ways of utilizing the folds, were studied carefully and worked on in their own garments. The students expressed that after the teaching period they understood details and sewing techniques better. One student took direct inspiration from the exhibition, and started by imitating and repeating what they saw, while another found inspiration to do something completely different.

The students' cultural and aesthetic competence forms the basis for decoding, at the same time as experiences from the teaching lead to this competence being developed. As the students have different backgrounds within textiles, they may have different expectations of the teaching process and different prerequisites for understanding the various techniques. An exhibition can be used for focused studies of such details. Recipients can also pick up samples and objects from the wall, take them to the workplace and study them more closely. The exhibition can give them an aesthetic experience as a colourful and complex whole, through an assembly of many different materials and products.

## SUMMARY

In this section, experiences from my own process, teaching and research with students are discussed, and some of the most important findings are pointed out. The intention is to answer the research question: How can exhibitions as a form of aesthetic communication and didactic tool strengthen teaching in textiles?

When I initially create the exhibition of a product that concretizes the teaching process, I also work on a theme for the coming teaching period. Through the creative process of exhibition, I can prepare myself for the academic content I intend to convey, and can prepare what the students need guidance in.

At the same time wanting to be well prepared for teaching, I have a driving force being in a creative process working with the exhibition. Creating an exhibition in parallel with the theoretical preparation and facilitation of the teaching gives variety to my work. It also gives a feeling of excitement and joy when I put together different elements related to textiles. I work with an aesthetic attitude, exploring different combinations and seeking to create something wholesome with aesthetic qualities. Yarn, buttons, historical garments, woven rugs and colourful photographs are put together as an assemblage where I explore contrasting colours and materials. Creating an exhibition takes time, but the joy and thrill of being creative during busy days, gives great motivation for my work and an experience of being able to use my latent possibilities (Rollo May, 1994).

As an artist and teacher, I am the "sender" of the exhibition, understood as aesthetic communication, where I encode textile knowledge in the exhibition. The students are the recipients of the exhibition, but as a teacher and sender, I do not deliver the product, but participate through teaching and guidance in the students' decoding and learning process. The exhibition is thus a common frame of reference for teachers and students throughout the semester.

Based on the students' answers, oral communication has helped the students to study the product in the exhibition more actively and more thoroughly. I have personally experienced that it is useful to be able to deepen some of the intentions I have with different parts of the exhibition and thus support the students in decoding the symbolic forms therein and give them a greater understanding of what is represented here.

By utilizing the exhibition in the teaching process, I as a teacher can take the students into concrete dialogues with material. If my students get stuck, I can take them to the exhibition and concretize the subject discussion. The exhibition functions as a reference book for the students throughout the assignment period, and for teachers as support in the teaching. Students emphasized

the importance of being able to see the exhibition every day, and being able to return to it when unsure of how to proceed with their assignment. This argument was also used to emphasize the value of an exhibition in comparison with a PowerPoint presentation, which is often shown only once. The process of repetition also gives teachers the opportunity to deepen the subject content, if necessary. The fact that an exhibition lasts for a longer period of time can also work well for students who work at a slightly different pace.

An interesting finding from the study is the use of active verbs in the students' answers. This shows that the exhibition engages them and supports their own initiatives to learn through studying the exhibited products: they can "look closely", "feel the material", "examine" (in an example of something they did not quite get), or "flip and turn the product" (quoted from several students' answers). The specific products also work well in support of procedures explained in books, because one can see them in a three-dimensional form. This also reflects the title of this article, where "catch with your eye and feel with your hands" refers to a thorough way of examining and the tactile experience and knowledge that comes through being hands-on with a material.

As a didactic tool, the exhibition was transformed during the teaching period. Creating new elements in the exhibition was important to me as an artist in working creatively through the process, and as a teacher to create new engagement and follow the students' progression in the study. With the changes in the exhibition, the process between sender and receiver was more dynamic and circular than as presented in Austring and Sørensen's model for aesthetic communication (Figure 9). The changes allowed me to adjust the exhibition based on the needs of the students' learning. Following the changes associated with the exhibition, the students showed renewed interest and motivation to learn more. The students were introduced to new subject matter, but also discovered new aspects to parts of the exhibition that they had seen earlier. That they were able to look with new eyes at what had previously been conveyed, may also indicate that they had learned something that added a new context of meaning in their decoding of the exhibition.

An exhibition can present students with certain impressions which challenge their sensory and emotional experiences (Austring and Sørensen, 2006). The students emphasized that they could engage more of their senses by looking, touching and feeling and experiencing the material tactilely and see how the product is made. As a didactic approach to teaching, it is important that the objects can be good representations for technical and thematic content in the taught course. Several of the students stated that they have further explored examples from the exhibition that captured their interest, such as particular materials or details. One student said that she was not only inspired by a certain product, but was inspired to make a nice, finished garment herself, with challenging patterns and techniques.

By using the exhibition as a form of aesthetic communication and as a didactic approach to textile teaching, I also show my own cultural, aesthetic and artistic competence. As mentioned earlier, this is an interplay between an emphasis on material and craft quality in interaction with playful, colourful, expressions and compositions. The exhibition is shaped by a desire to stimulate students' textile learning processes. I chose to include examples in the exhibition that could be good representations for both materials and techniques, while also displaying a creative process. I want to give the students an aesthetic experience that can strengthen their textile learning processes and be an impulse for the students' development of their own expressions in their work with textile products.

Austring and Sørensen mention that it can be a challenge in aesthetic communication if the sender and recipient have different design language and the meaning is therefore not communicated due to "sources of noise". When it comes to choosing objects in the exhibition, it is of course possible that the students and I have different perceptions and preferences, and that they may thus be less interested in objects I have presented. In the survey, no questions were asked about the individual products or their aesthetic expression, but one of the answers was perceived as a comment on this: "The most important thing is that I could see with my own eyes that everything is allowed. That one can actually create fashion from, for example, crumpled paper" (Student H). In this way, I hope to inspire the students to be playful and to explore and challenge conventional expectations of artistic expressions.

The survey shows that exhibitions as a didactic tool can support students' learning, supporting the argument that exhibitions and specific products should be included in the teaching process. Even

though the research I am referring to is related to textile teaching, some of the general knowledge is transferable to other subject areas. It is time-consuming to create an exhibition, and must be prioritized in a busy everyday life. For me, creating an exhibition is a personal and wonderful interest and, as the study shows, working creatively is essential for both motivation and preparation for teaching. When the students in the survey say they acquire knowledge through specific products, it is an encouragement to continue to make exhibitions or to start with them. This, of course, depends on the teacher's professional competence, interest and prerequisites.

In order to create an exhibition, you need rooms that are available for a long period of time. Textiles can be hung on the wall and are easy to replace, while other products may require more floor space, something that can make it difficult to have the exhibition standing for a longer period. Many institutions may have common areas that are otherwise empty and where changing exhibitions can inspire those walking by. Some of the students commented in their answers to the questionnaire that the corridor had been very gloomy and boring without an exhibition.

Artography as a methodological approach provides an opportunity to weave together the three roles of artist, researcher and teacher. I have not only researched what an exhibition means for students' learning, but through the research I have looked at how the exhibition as a didactic approach to teaching is holistic, whereby working artistically is an important part of the job as a teacher. In this way, the roles together form a new and larger meaning (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 899). My experiences from the creative process, where I explore and play with material, expressions and compositions, and the teaching process, where I utilize them, form in interaction with my observations, reflections and analyses a form of research at the intersection between knowing and being (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 900). I create, design, express, analyse and understand and share through this many of the same processes that the students go through.

Springgay et al. write that artography facilitates research that is at once playful, exploratory and expressive (Ibid, p. 897), and that the recipient also has a central role in the meaning-creating process. This is in line with Austring and Sørensen's model for aesthetic communication and something I want to emphasize here in my conclusion. The art and the text, the sender and the recipient, the teacher and the students, and knowing and being, shape each other.

## CONCLUSION

This study indicates that exhibitions as a form of aesthetic communication and didactic tool can strengthen textile teaching. This can probably also apply to other teachers and with other groups of students. The study shows that presenting specific products in an exhibition linked to oral communication can form the basis for creative dialogues with concrete materials. Through the process of the exhibition, "Visual keywords in our textile everyday life and celebration", several senses are activated, both when I choose and put together textile products and other objects for an aesthetic communication, and when the students are in dialogue with them. The closeness to material can be a good alternative and supplement to digital impressions. Students who participated in the survey expressed the value of having tactile experiences in addition to the visuals, ensuring that you *catch with your eye and feel with your hands*.

## REFERENCES:

- Austring, B. D. & Sørensen, M. (2006). *Æstetik og læring* [Aesthetics and learning]. Hans Reitzels Forlag
- Alvesson, M. & Sköldberg, K. (2008). *Tolkning och reflektion. Vetenskapsfilosofi och kvalitativ metod* [Interpretation and reflection. Philosophy of science and qualitative method]. Studentlitteratur.
- Barone, T & Eisner, E. W. (2011). *Arts Based Research*. SAGE Publications.
- May, R. (1994). *Mot til å skape* [The courage to create] (K. O. Jensen & T. Arneberg Trans.). Aventura forlag. (Original work published 1975)
- Molander, B. (2006). *Håndverk og kunnskap* [Crafts and knowledge]. Tapir akademisk forlag.
- Slotte, C. (2010). *Closer. Närmare*. Kunsthøyskolen i Bergen.
- Springgay, S., Irwin, R. L., & Kind, S. W. (2005). A/r/tography as Living Inquiry Through Art and Text. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 11(6), 897–912. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800405280696>
- Waterhouse, A. H. Lorvik (2013). *I materialenes verden: Perspektiver og praksiser i barnehagens kunstneriske virksomhet* [In the world of materials: Perspectives and practices in the kindergarten's artistic activity]. Fagbokforlaget.