

Shrouding blankets
– a weaving investigation



The research project began many years ago, first as an artistic development work and then later in the form of artistic research studies.¹ In 2017 I initiated a Weaving Research Group at the Academy of Design and Crafts. The weaving is conducted parallel with a clinical study in hospitals. The central topic in the research concerns the questions around small shrouding blankets for children and fetuses who die during pregnancy or delivery. What should these textiles look like? What should the texture feel like in one's hand? And how can they be tested in practice? What can the use of a special textile shrouding blanket mean in a contemporary clinical environment?

Initially I handwove small blankets but during the PhD period fabric was designed and produced so that a large amount of blankets could be handed out to hospitals. Out of lengths of fabric it was possible to cut and sew different sizes of cloth: 90 x 90 cm for full-grown children and 70 x 70 cm for children born too early. When the preparations for the study were discussed, a midwife urgently said: *We should not forget the very very small. We need blankets no bigger than 45x45 centimetres that can be used in the case of late miscarriages and abortions.*

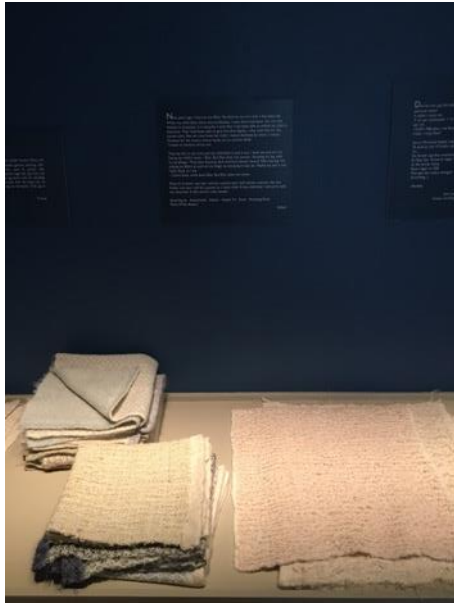
For me the response to her wish was to once again return to the hand woven process as the way to understand and approach the difficult questions about loss and in this specific context, the loss of very young small lives. This came to be the starting point for the Weaving Research Group. I invited colleagues, alumni and students to participate. We are sharing the same loom, equipped with double beams, in the studio where BA, MA and Phd studies and research takes place.



To embrace, to hold and to wrap are the words that leads us and we encourage each other on by saying: let's weave – and let us weave the loveliest we can.

Warping, heddling, pulling the thread, making a new warp, weaving, looking for material and new colours, cutting down, hemming, washing and felting into blanket texture and into the

¹ <http://hdl.handle.net/2077/41662>, <http://hdl.handle.net/2077/28376>



requested size. Maybe adding a few stitches – or not. Cutting loose ends. And last but not least - sewing a little sheet that is to accompany the wrapping cloth.

During the autumn of 2017 the shrouding blankets were shown in an exhibition at Smålands museum. By that time, we had managed to weave around ninety small cloths. Most of them were exhibited and shown together with reflective texts, written by the research group.

Wrapping a stillborn child is not an act that has only been carried out in recent times. It is an integral part of primary healthcare where each pregnancy and childbirth clinic has its own established routines. The study in question, however, takes place in a time and age where death is regarded differently in relation to a stillborn child. Today emphasis is placed on attachment, where parents are encouraged to see their child, and take their farewells. Memories of the stillborn child are gathered – in different ways – and are memories that parents will then carry with them. Also in gynaecological departments where late miscarriages and abortions occur, there is a need for wrapping cloths.

Shrouding blankets and sheets are delivered to the centres that are part of the study, and are used as the midwife finds appropriate and according to the wishes of parents. The wrapping cloths do not involve any cost for the hospitals in question, but are a gift to parents. After a shrouding blanket has been used in cases of death, this is then documented by the staff involved – by them filling in a clinical report form. The questions here touch upon what staff have experienced and observed, as well as them reporting how the small blankets have been used. There are also questions related to the size and characteristics of the textiles chosen.

The wrapping as a textile ritual act is, as I see it, about receiving, holding and embracing – but also about parting, separating and covering.

Members of the Weaving Research Group:

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