

VARIABLES

Five poems by Thor Sørheim based on textiles by Runa Boger

I

Are we in fact able to see a pattern in the dark?
When we enter the format of the grid pattern to find
the way back to the game of chance, the first Christmas hampers
appear, made by stubby fingers, and woollen sweaters
knit by grandmothers with smooth dress material
well over the knees. The women in the neighbourhood cut
strips out of old pillowcases and worn towels that were
transformed into rag rugs by the local weaver. Red dots
fall like juicy strawberries over childhood hiding places
where we sampled tempting summer fruit and feared
nettles slapping against our ankles. We cannot doublestrike
an existence that has brought us to a point where
to look forward also requires us to peer into
the loopholes so as to recall what was left behind us.
The soft and the smooth material. The textiles which gave us
warm feet, and hessian sacks with flour. We must concentrate
on assembling all this into a sustainable pattern.

II

When we had placed the third border diagonally over the past, we discovered that it was quite insufficient to conceal the dark sleepless nights, the worn stairs in the development and the diagonal hopes of reaching up to a light that would never go out. We were in the process of realising that the skewed and the reverse, the good and the hopeful must be intertwined. We are all pieces in the game of chance we call life, and must learn our parts by heart in a series of images. That can also be mistaken for the view from a train window one rosy morning when the mist lifts, and we feel day tracing its long lines through the body's nerve fibres. Blood is pumped through veins that haunt us from top to toe before we travel through a cornfield. Certainty slowly rises like a glowing sun. We are part of a larger pattern.

III

Colours are an unreliable source we keep on a lead
and in geometrical forms like a faithful dog.
The house is red even if that is only true on the sunny side,
the descending darkness does not take on the blue from the sea,
the colours retain their identity even if we mix
and dilute them. We even give their extraordinary
names: ultramarine, magenta and terracotta, or something
as prosaic as pot-blue. Hannah Ryggen's guests
were told to pee in the pail in the barn. Colours
are a part of us, varying according to the light. We can
collect and mix them on surfaces and in deep nooks and crannies.
We can use them as a symbol of our nation
and of political enemies. Colours comply, but deep
down they learn from us. They understand our longing to cut
and paint so as to make sense of this strange existence.
Those who wish to find truth, the colours say, must follow the rainbow.

IV

A blue grid against a black background, we see and we say.
Without going over it with a fine tooth-comb, without discovering
that the black which we define as background is just as much
foreground. The blue strips still submerge
into the blackness. That is how it is if we dare to take
the world in over us. We live in an intertwined world. Grids exist,
but they are not necessarily bars. A rusty, blown-over
fence that has lain in the grass for a long time becomes a ready-measured
patch for seeds sown on open land. Something moves in the squares
we have followed with our eyes through the game of chance of which we
are a part. It is as if I can hear the sound of pick-a-sticks falling
onto the floor and drumsticks in a rhythmic dance through the night.

V

There is something in motion in all constructions.
An evasive movement, an attack against a rigid pattern.
We see and do not see it. A long time may pass before we
understand that the straight line we send round the earth must
inescapably become curved if it is to return from the other side.
We have not as yet attempted to grasp what time is, if it comes
or goes, or rotates in an extrasensory drum. At the very centre
of the grid pattern it is likely that we will glimpse spiral galaxies.
This network of circles that precisely coheres. In distant
stellar nebulae, and in our own Milky Way. Myriads of white stars
and Black Holes. It tingles in us when we let our fingers
carefully glide over some woollen material with a familiar pattern.