the means of production for her work, and the subject matters as a member of the Communist Party informed how she lived early 1930s to the Vietnam War in the 1960s. Her commitment political turmoil in her lifetime, in equality found powerful expression through her work and life Hannah Ryggen (1894–1970) was is celebrated for her monumental tapestries responding to from the

and blood, supporting themselves. It is an indignity Equality for Hannah Ryggen, things: no ought to be raised capable of man and woman, whether rich one serve others. all mankind. We producing their own food and should be above **Everyone should** are all flesh another.

She rejected the abstraction common to much modern art, expressed her admiration for Pablo Picasso alone amongst to decorate apartments. It is an instrument of war... artist contemporaries. He himself declared, with the latest artistic developments of the European avant-garde Ryggen was educated in painting in Sweden and kept up to date alone amongst her 'Painting is not done and

making heritage and its focus on current affairs once, Ryggen's work is unique in its fusion of Norwegian tapestryact of reclamation and resistance. Both ancient and modern Crafts movement that advocated for craftsmanship as a socialist traditions of the farming working class, to the international Arts and works of art. Roots for this approach range from the weaving The art and craft of tapestry enabled Ryggen to combine her political and aesthetic concerns into easily transportable

Ørlandet (five hours by steamboat to the closest city, Trondheim), she travelled widely and was included in significant international farmers in For many years the Ryggen family made their living as subsistence a remote rural community in Norway. From her home in

Hannah Ryggen, Blood in the Grass, 1966. Courtesy KODE-Art Museums of Bergen. Photo: KODE/Dag Fosse. © Hannah Ryggen / DACS 2017.

Design (NKIM), Trondheim, in return for a monthly stipend group of her works in the National Museum of Decorative Arts entered into an arrangement in later life, which placed the largest except under the direst of financial circumstances; she wished

for them to be in public ownership and exhibited where they were

freely accessible to all as public statements.

end, she

She did not believe in selling her tapestries

to private

represent Norway at the Venice Biennale in 1964

exhibitions during her lifetime, becoming the first female artist to



handmade enterprise, with no easy shortcuts to achieve representational form and narrative structure. Ryggen viewed the with material connections to the domestic sphere, political handloom and its weaving processes as forms of creative labour Tapestry weaving is a laborious, technically skilled, and resolutely struggle

ant carrying one pine needle at a time, stubbornly intent on its goal'. Ryggen is highly unusual in that she controlled her tapestries' entire chain of production. By contrast, tapestries are usually made by multiple people in a workshop The artist described in 1952 how the work made her feel like 'an

provided the wool that she spun and dyed using predominately by geographic necessity, taken to extreme lengths: local sheep Ryggen's work demonstrates an embrace of localism that was close

online: Facebook/YouTube: Modern Art @mao\_gallery Art Oxford Twitter/Instagram: Modern Oxford, Explore

Ryggen

Hannah

Woven Historie

Ryggen expert Marit Paasche points out that the 'conception of the the world', from Greek mythology onwards. Ryggen used her loom act of weaving as both a vehicle for recounting history and as a political act has since been manifested in myriad ways throughout as a storyteller would, weaving self-portraits into her works in subjective response to the world around her, and to protest again

Ryggen deploys a realism that is inflected by symbolic images and interlocking pattern motifs, which connect the multiple sections of the narrative space. The symbolic order is invoked to heighten the most powerful examples of this strategy, in its blending of director Henry Gleditsch, with a fantastical flying Adolf Hitler, the horrific real-life execution of the local Trondheim theatre and (symbols of the Third Reich) emitting from his rendering of seismic matters of war, murder, In her of the

The critical role wrote in 1961: 'Right from my first arrival at Ørlandet, we received Dagbladet in the could follow what was going on in the world, which I at least was occurred on Norwegian soil, to devastating international conflicts media sources Dagbladet – for more than thirty years – and thanks to that we depiction of events, ranging from incidents that shaping of Ryggen's artistic practice is confirmed in a letter Even as a child I was a red revolutionary. taking place hundreds or thousands of miles away. played by the left-leaning Norwegian newspaper Ryggen's tapestries rely on secondary to inform their interested in

experience so that strong as yet is as Hannah Ryggen, <u>(S)</u> shaping my

The only exceptions were occasional government and university commissions in Oslo towards the end of her career

letter to Odd Hølaas, 12 October 1961, NKIM

the many injustices she witnessed.

emotional impact of scenes from life: 6 October 1942 (1943) is one

difficulty it defers life itself. images about

MODERN

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Cover Image 1: Hannah Ryggen, A Free One / En Fri, 1947–8 Courtesy Nordentjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum / Museene I Sør-Trøndelag. Photo: Anders S. Solberg/Nordentjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum. © Hannah Ryggen / DACS 2017. Cover Image 2: Hannah Ryggen, 6 October 1942 / 6. Oktober 1942, 1943. Courtesy Nordentjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum. © Hannah Ryggen / DACS 2017

## **Upper Gallery**

1. We and our animals / Vi og våre dyr, 1934

> This narrative tapestry, like many of Ryggen's, uses the 'simultaneous succession' method (widely used in medieval paintings and tapestries) to represent multiple moments in a character's life within a single compositional space.

## 2. Ethiopia / Etiopia, 1935

An improvised tapestry woven in a trice! Black heads - white diplomats among them clubs and spears, and in everything my will to nail Mussolini with a black man's spear! Hannah Ryggen, 'Etiopia', 1935

# 3. Death of Dreams / Drømmedød, 1936

Ryggen chose to depict the Nobel Peace Prize winner and pacifist Carl von Ossietzky not simply because of his plight as a prominent German political prisoner, but also as a response to a more local controversy in which the celebrated Norwegian author Knut Hamsun roundly defended Göring's condemnation of von Ossietzky. In the tapestry. theprisoner's hands, although cuffed, hold up a caduceus topped with a heart, symbolising hope and tolerance, but equally mourning.

## 4. Liselotte Herrmann, 1938

In Ryggen's tapestry the condemned German Communist Liselotte Herrman is depicted in one panel holding her young son, from whom she was separated only a year after his birth, following her arrest in 1935 for high treason. This mother and child pose is adapted from the classical tradition of representing the Virgin Mary in the Rose Garden. Drawing on an explicitly Christian iconography, Ryggen invests Herrmann with a beatific composure, in heightened contrast to the violence of her fate

# 5. 6 October 1942 / 6 Oktober 1942, 1943

As art historian Marit Paasche observes of 6 October 1942: 'The imagery is a fusion of news photos, visual impressions and imaginings. She utilised elements from diverse sources, ascribed them new colors and placed them together in such a way that the imagery resonated and remained in her mind's eye. She had developed this unique compositional method over some time; as early as 1937 she wrote in a letter to her friend the architect Helge Thiis: "What is dream and what is reality, for me, it all becomes enhanced in their mixing."

## 6. Freedom / Freiheit, 1941

Art theorist Marta Kuzma writes of Ryggen that her 'works often contained figures that neared geometric form and abstained from perspectival illusion. [...] Ryggen adhered to the formal traditions of 17th- and 18th-century Norwegian folklore tapestry. Improvising along this vernacular with an abbreviated awkwardness, she conveyed a particular technical crudeness that illuminated life at its most rudimentary."

## 7. Grini, 1945

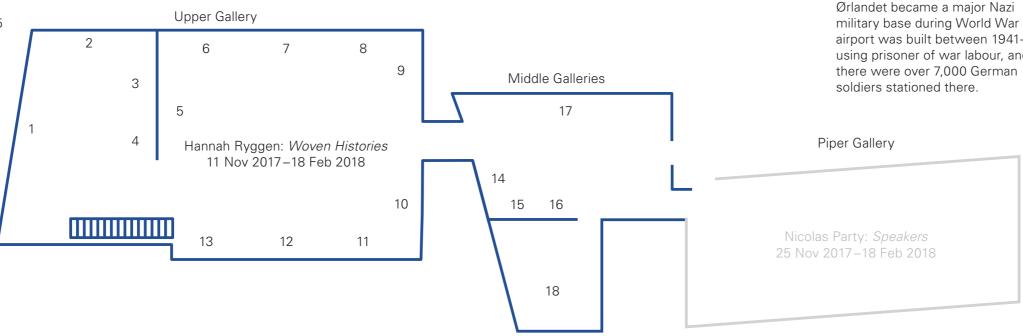
The Trondheim region was of strategic importance to the Germans. military base during World War II: an airport was built between 1941-44 using prisoner of war labour, and

The Ryggens routinely witnessed acts of torture and the movement of starving captives past their home en route to forced labour. While Ryggen would flagrantly display her antifascist tapestries on her washing line for the German soldiers to see, she was paid no attention. Instead, her husband Hans was arrested as a political dissident, and sent to Grini prison camp.

#### 8. A Free One / En Fri, 1947/48

The human pattern – we are all trapped in some grey figures bend their backs and work while we sleep some wear medals and stand above

hand in hand with their ancestors ... Hannah Ryggen, 'En Fri', 1947/48



# 9. Mother's Heart / Mors Hjerte, 1947

'I always weave in a certain rhythm from beginning to end ... I prefer to collect myself and then let loose with explosive effect.' Hannah Ryggen, letter to Dyre Vaa, 22 May 1946

## 10. Poem by T. S. Eliot / Dikt av T. S. Eliot. 1952

The bottom third of this tapestry contains a Norwegian translation of these lines from Four Quartets:

Who then devised the torment? Love.

Love is the unfamiliar Name Behind the hands that wove The intolerable shirt of flame Which human power cannot remove. We only live, only suspire Consumed by either fire or fire

Little Gidding, Chapter IV

## 11. Jul Kvale, 1956

We recall from history Men who suddenly appeared out of the blue – out of the stars? Came forward and expressed their opinion one the exact opposite of what

the entire assembly adhered to A man who said no when everyone else said yes Jul Kvale's no is my no.

Hannah Ryggen, 'Jul Kvale', 1956

# 12. Mr Atom / H.K.H. Atomsen, 1952

'As far as the weaving technique is concerned, it is very simple: a horizontal line is interlaced with or passed around a vertical line. Triangular sections of the tapestry are built up roughly like this [sketch]. This is how the Baldishol and Coptic

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Hannah Ryggen, letter to the sculptor Dyre Vaa, 22 May 1946.

# 13. Blood in the Grass / Blod i gresset, 1966

'America meets with nothing but hatred and curses in South Vietnam.'

This statement is a brutal summary of the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War, published by Dagbladet in a July 1965 editorial. Almost precisely thirty years since learning of Italy's League Nationsviolating invasion of Ethiopia in the very same newspaper, Dagbladet's

coverage once again provided Ryggen with the subject matter for what was to become her final large-scale political tapestry, completed in 1966, just four years before her death at the age of 76.

# Middle 1

14. Fishing in the Sea of Debt / Fiske ved gjeldens hav, 1933

As Marit Paasche argues: 'This tapestry has a special place in Norwegian art history. It is like no other tapestry or Social Realist painting, no doubt because Hans and Hannah Ryggen had first-hand experience with poverty and indebtedness. Nevertheless they had land and kept livestock, and this enabled them to be more selfsufficient than many of those living in the cities. The fact that the land and their few animals sustained

them was politically empowering for Hannah. Producing one's own food and being able to get by was the essence of being."

# 15. Domestic Gods / Hjemlige guder, 1951

### 16. Self-Portrait / Självporträtt , 1914

On the back of this portrait the artist has written:

'This portrait was made in 1914. This is the first picture I have painted in oil and the only self portrait I have ever painted. I was 20 years old at the time.'

17. Hannah Ryggen Timeline

# **Project Space**

Common Threads in the Project Space invites visitors of all ages to respond creatively to the life and work of Hannah Ryggen and the processes involved in weaving.

### Middle 2

18. Hannah Ryggen: Image Weaver / Hannah Ryggen: Bildväverska, 1963. 28 minutes, video transferred to digital file, producer: Lennart Ehrenborg, SVT1.

Please ask our Visitor Assistants if you have any questions.



**ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND** 







Designed by narratestudio.co.uk

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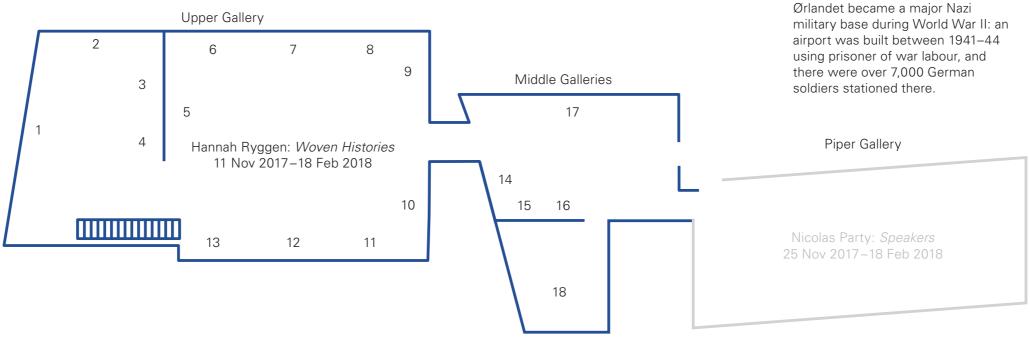
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