

**GJERTRUD HALS**

**ULTIMA**



*The vessel is an ancient form in which we find the principles of both containment and protection – two of the fundamentals of life. Premature fracture of many fragile protective shells or membranes means almost immediate death or destruction. On the other hand, a cleavage at the right moment may signify life liberating itself or an idea or thought breaking forth and materializing itself in creativity.*

Gjertrud Hals

*Ultima*, Vangedalen, Isfjorden, Norway, 2015



*Ultima, Black Pearl 1, 2015*  
95 (h) × 95 (d) cm  
Linen and cotton threads, pigment, epoxy

# GJERTRUD HALS

## ULTIMA

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### PREFACE

by Maria Wettergren

#### God Bless the Child

I am honoured to present *ULTIMA*, the first solo exhibition in France by contemporary artist Gjertrud Hals. Born in 1948 on the northwest coast of Norway, Gjertrud Hals is considered an important pioneer in the field of Scandinavian fiber art. She has been one of the redefining figures of textile art by liberating the material from the loom and displaying it in space as three-dimensional sculpture. Her international breakthrough came in the mid-1980's with *LAVA*, a series of large urns made of cotton and flax pulp that marked her transition from textile to sculptural fiber art. In 1987, she was granted First Prize in the *Metro Arts International Art Competition* in New York, followed by the Grand Prix in the *Kyoto International Textile Competition* in 1989. Her works have been acquired by private and public collections, such as the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Oslo, the Museum of Contemporary Crafts in New York, the Museum of Decorative Arts in Lausanne and the Bellerive Museum in Zürich.

The title of the present exhibition - *ULTIMA* - is derived from Gjertrud Hals' ample eponymous vessels, delicately knitted from cotton and linen threads and hardened with resin. These one-meter tall, feather-weight vessels hardly touch the ground. Their size and their lightness contradict each other in certain ways. They seem to levitate and appear almost like a

vision. Their ambiguous presence is further enhanced by their incapacity to contain anything (other than themselves) due to their soft, perforated structure. They are self-contained so to speak. Yet, in spite of their delicate transparency they convey a feeling of quiet strength.

The shell form of the *ULTIMA* pieces is central to Gjertrud Hals' art. In the words of curator Tove Lande... "*For Gjertrud Hals, the shell is both an ideogram and an archetypal symbol. She prefers to use dense symbols that may encompass several meanings, and for her the shell is precisely that type of symbol. On the one hand, it represents the protective membrane between life and death; on the other hand, it is a symbol of the jar or vessel. In addition, the shape strongly reminds her of the shells she used to play with as a child on the beaches of Finnøya.*"<sup>1</sup>

With *ULTIMA*, Gjertrud Hals seems to approach, conceptually and technically, the fascinating ambiguity between fragility and force, art and death.

Some artists feel so rooted in their home region that it becomes an integrated part of their life and art, as organically inseparable from them as an arm, as vital as air. In the remarkable portrait movie *Black*

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<sup>1</sup> Tove Lande, "Delicate Pillars. Weighty Threads." In: Gjertrud Hals, Søjlen Lethet. Trådens Tyngde, Kunstmuseet KUBE 2008, pp. 75



*Sun*, Gjertrud Hals tells the gruesome story of how the little island Finnøya on the North West coast of Norway lost half of its population in one single afternoon : Thirteen people drowned during a sudden storm while trying to reach the church on a neighbouring island. This tragic event happened more than a hundred years ago, but it never lost its ambiguous power of terror and excitement to Hals, who was born on the island in 1948. "As a child, I loved stories about shipwrecks and accidents at sea. People who stayed alive on reefs and islets ... or who had raised lots of children, for instance, and then lost them one by one. It sounds weird to say I loved it, but it was in a childlike manner. Joy mixed with terror. In those days we had no horror movies. We only had these stories." Gjertrud Hals' upbringing on the little island of Finnøya is profoundly anchored in her art and heart, and her relationship to the region's nature and culture is deep and complex. So is her inspiration from the Nordic mythology, in which she sees a parallel to everyday life and culture.

Trained in the art of tapestry-weaving in the 1970's, Gjertrud Hals' interest in feminism and women's culture associates her with the new Polish wave of women artists exploring the sculptural potential of textile, such as Claire Zeisler and Magdalena Abakanowicz. The word fiber art appeared in the United States in the 1960's, and the first fiber art exhibition ("Woven Forms") took place in 1963 in New York at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts. Previously, this style had been referred to as "off-loom", and it is the process of binding elements together which comes from weaving that is the common denominator of fiber art.

Binding together does indeed characterize Gjertrud Hals' art, both literally and symbolically. Many of her works are grid structures made of cotton and linen crochets covered with paper pulp. Often strange little objects, *objets trouvés*, such as animal skeletons and feathers are added alongside with plastic capsules or embroideries from India or made by her grandmother. They look a bit like the kind of "treasures" children find. The poetic dimension is further enhanced by the introduction of fragmented words or letters, delicately appearing through the grid structures before vanishing again. Like a spider's

web, these weavings seem to capture the traces of life as time goes by. Like small micro-cosmoses, inspired by mythological story-telling and children's worlds, Gjertrud Hals' works seem to possess their own laws and logics, moving somewhere between delicate neatness and unrestrained inspiration. In the words of the artist, they propose a reflection "... on the relationship between nature and culture, in which the lives of modern humans are moving between chaos and order. Forces of nature and war create chaos, after which a new order is elaborated, always both the same and a little bit different than the previous."

Gjertrud Hals works tirelessly, always seeking out new experiences. She is constantly exploring new techniques, as she weaves, knits, casts, sprays and cuts her way through various materials, mostly natural fibres such as flax, paper, cotton, roots and plants that she elaborates during physical and time-consuming sessions. Her focus on natural fibres comes from her frequent travels to Japan, where she admires the ancient Shinto temples and learns to make paper. The Japanese word *kami* actually means both paper and God, and it is the discovery of Japan's old nature-worshipping religion, Shintoism, that puts nature at the heart of Gjertrud Hals' work. For her, nature is not just an inspiration, but small pieces of natural life that she draws into her works in a direct manner, using roots, lichen and branches, as in the works *Pair and Irmin* : "With all that is happening in the world today, it feels right to focus on a small segment by conserving a small part of it. It reminds me of my collections of shells and insects from my childhood. It has always given me great pleasure to create order out of chaos."

It is also Shintoism that has opened her eyes for Norse mythology. She is struck by the feeling that so many things in today's culture are rooted in these stories.

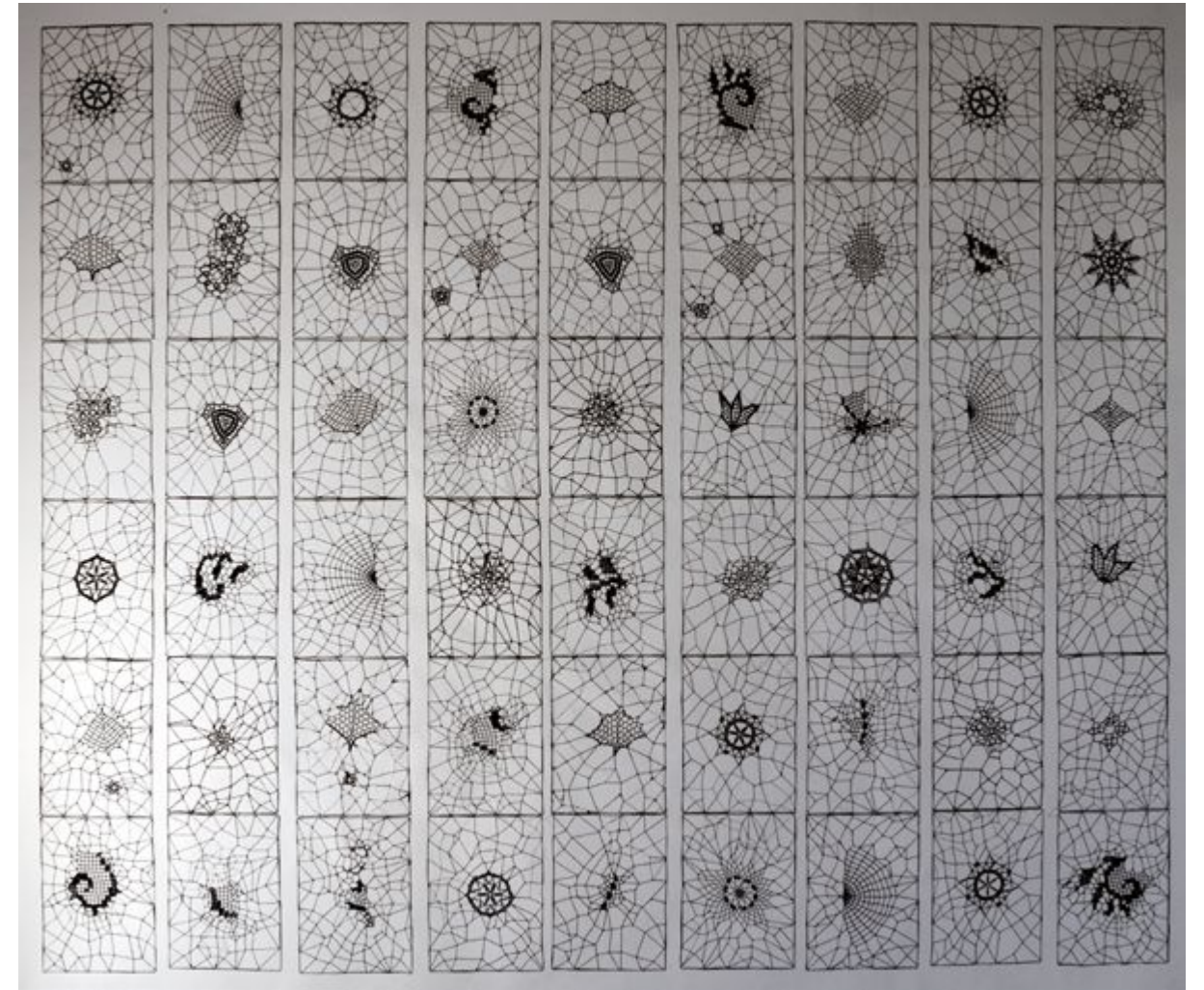
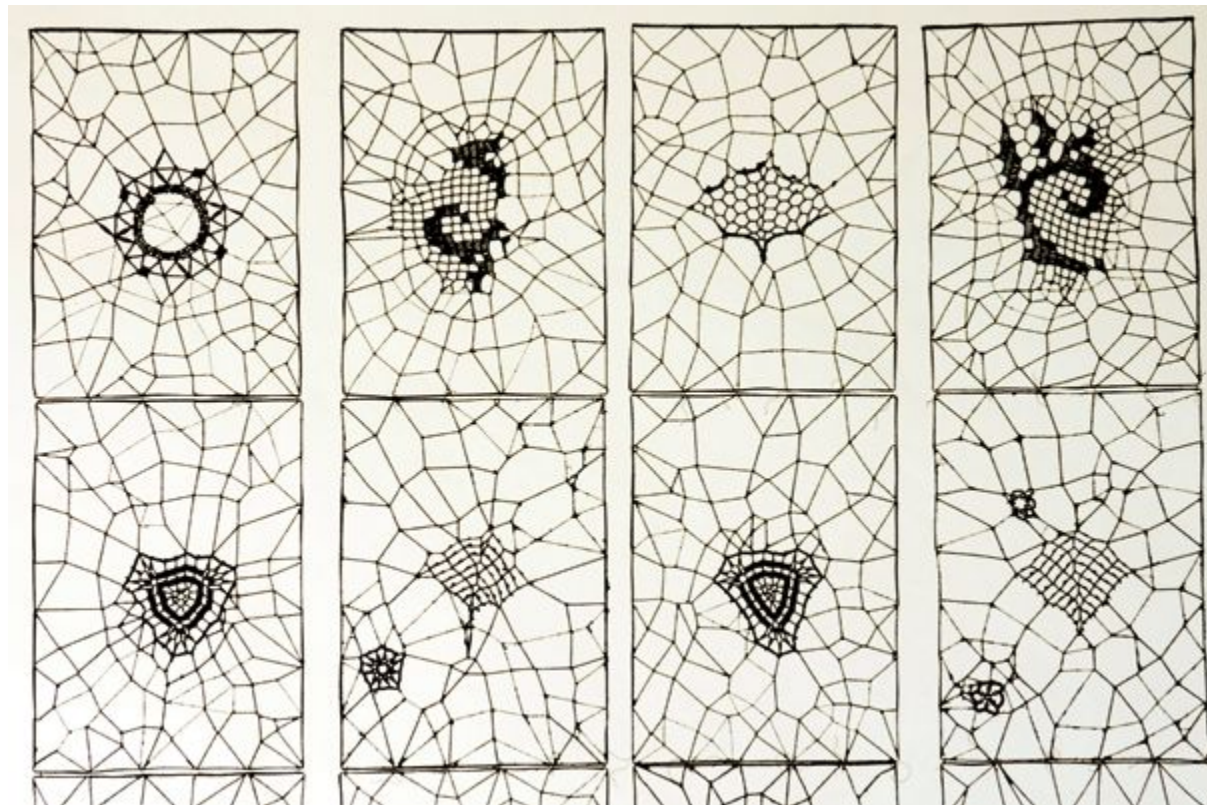
In the documentary *Black Sun*, the artist explains her spiritual approach to art and techniques, "Over the past 25 years, I've had a fling with Zen Buddhism. It focuses on technique but not for show. It's a continued technical exercise. You should exercise so

*Fenris*, (detail), 2006/2015  
245 x 170 cm  
Threads, fibers, found objects

*much that you forget the technique. And, in the end, yourself ... Zen Buddhism is very down to earth. It's about getting in touch with your inner child, and that reminds me of things I know from way back in my culture ... my background ... Christianity ... and the essence of the New Testament. Several times, in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, Jesus says that if you don't become a child again, you're not allowed into the kingdom of heaven. In that way, there is something in common ... this simple down-to-earth mysticism. You can't get there by keeping a safe distance. You must get into to it, take part in it."*

It is all about finding your inner child ... getting into it, forgetting to keep a safe distance, being ALL IN, like a

child - shipwrecks, spiders' webs, snakes, animal skeletons and all. Chaos and order. Joy mixed with terror. Combining big and small, high and low, Gjertrud Hals mixes auto-biographical and feminist themes with legendary story-telling, folk art and fine art, profane and sacred ... a simple down-to-earth mysticism, as she calls it, that beckons the child in us all.



*Arakne, 2015*  
175 x 205 cm  
Threads, fibers











*Ultima*, view from the exhibition at the Baerum Art Hall, 2015. (pages 10-11)

*Ultima, Red Gold*, 2015  
85 (h) × 95 (d) cm  
Linen and cotton threads, pigment, epoxy  
(page 12)

*Ultima, Black Pearl 3*, 2015  
80 (h) × 95 (d) cm  
Linen and cotton threads, pigment, epoxy  
(page 13)

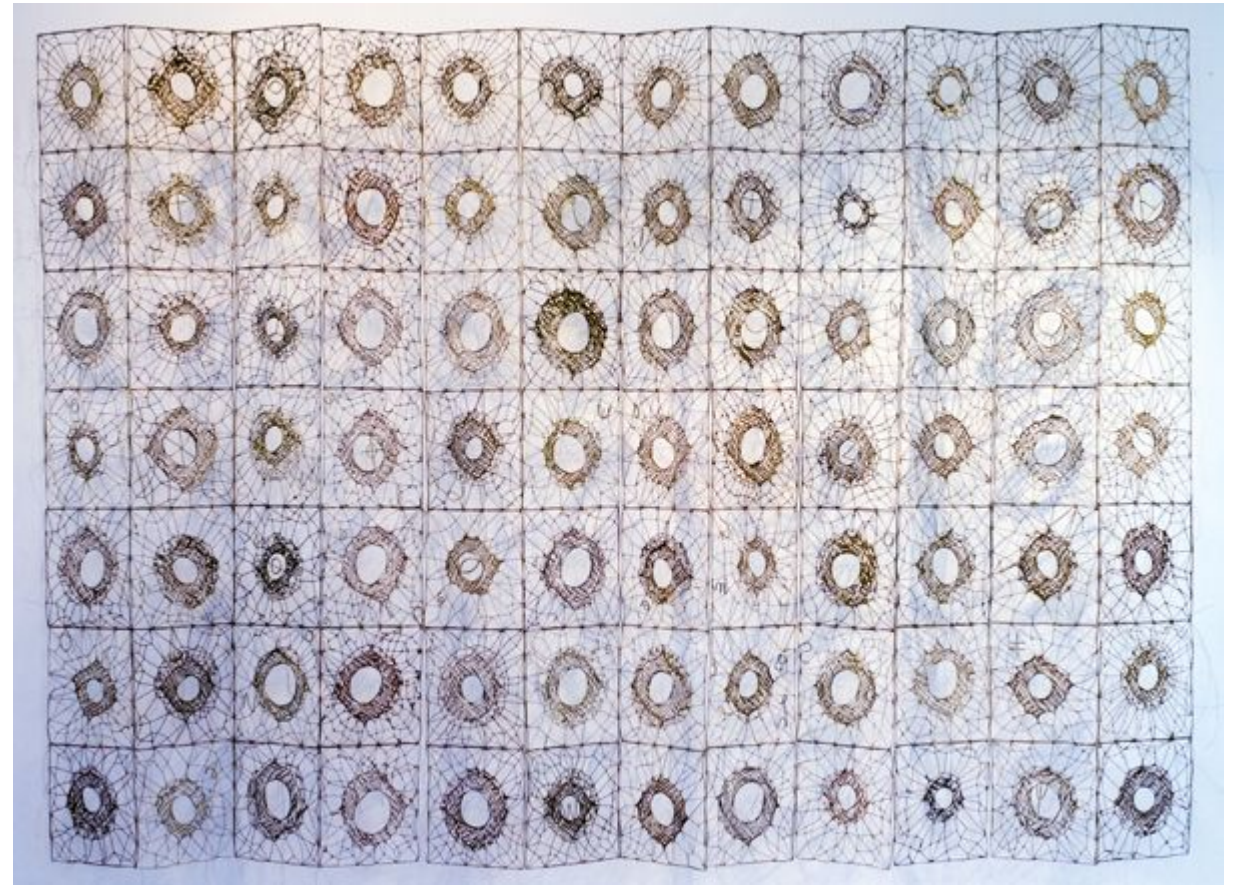
*Ultima, Grey Pearl*, 2015  
90 × 95 (d) cm  
Linen and cotton threads, pigment, epoxy  
(page 14)

*Ultima, Black Pearl 2*, 2015  
85 (h) × 95 (d) cm  
Linen and cotton threads, pigment, epoxy  
(page 15)

*Ultima, Green Gold*, 2015  
90 (h) × 95 (d) cm  
Linen and cotton threads, pigment, epoxy  
(page 16)

*In the northwestern fjords of Norway, people have made lace for centuries. Liturgy textiles and folk costumes have been decorated with lace, and especially the metal lace was popular. It looks very much like the lace from the Toulouse region in France from the early 17th century. Ernst Zeisler, a Norwegian expert in this particular field, has proposed the interesting hypothesis that it might have something to do with the Huguenots, who were expelled from France in the 17th century because of their religious beliefs. Some of them actually ended up in Norway, and it is a known fact that they brought with them carrot seeds and the art of making lace. It is interesting that a group of refugees might be the source of what we today consider our national heritage. It is also interesting to think that while the lace tradition abroad was associated with the rich bourgeoisie, in Norway it was the peasants that decorated their costumes with silk, silver and gold. The story about the Huguenots and the art they brought with them inspired me to do my own version of the metal lace, Aurum, as a kind of homage to the expelled people.*

Gjertrud Hals



*Aurum*, 2015  
175 × 280 cm  
Threads and fibers  
(page 19-21)





*Pair*, 2006/2014  
Ca 25 x 7 x 4 cm/each  
Roots, wires, fibers  
(pages 22-23)

*I began the work *Pair* upon my stay in Vadsø in Finnmark, also known as Vesisaari, the capital of the Finns. For centuries, people have been walking all the way from central Finland to the northwest coast because of hunger. These exoduses took place from the 16th to the 19th century, when it was easier to find food on the coast. Many of the refugees stayed on the Finnmark coast, conserving their language and culture. It was a poor culture based on austerity, and they had to turn themselves towards nature in order to survive. I can see the people wandering, especially the women carrying their children, which led me to the shoes, made with roots and metal wire.*

Gjertrud Hals



Many of the ancient myths deal with the collision of chaos and order. Archetypes like the snake, the tree of life and the cross are found in many cultures, symbolizing human being's experience with chaos and order in the world. Irmin is an ancient Saxon word and is synonymous with the great snake Jormundgandr, the giant sea serpent surrounding Midgard, the world of mortal men in Norse mythology. It may also be connected to the tree of life, Yggdrasil. I'm interested in creating ties between the past and the present, between cultures, between culture and nature.

Gjertrud Hals

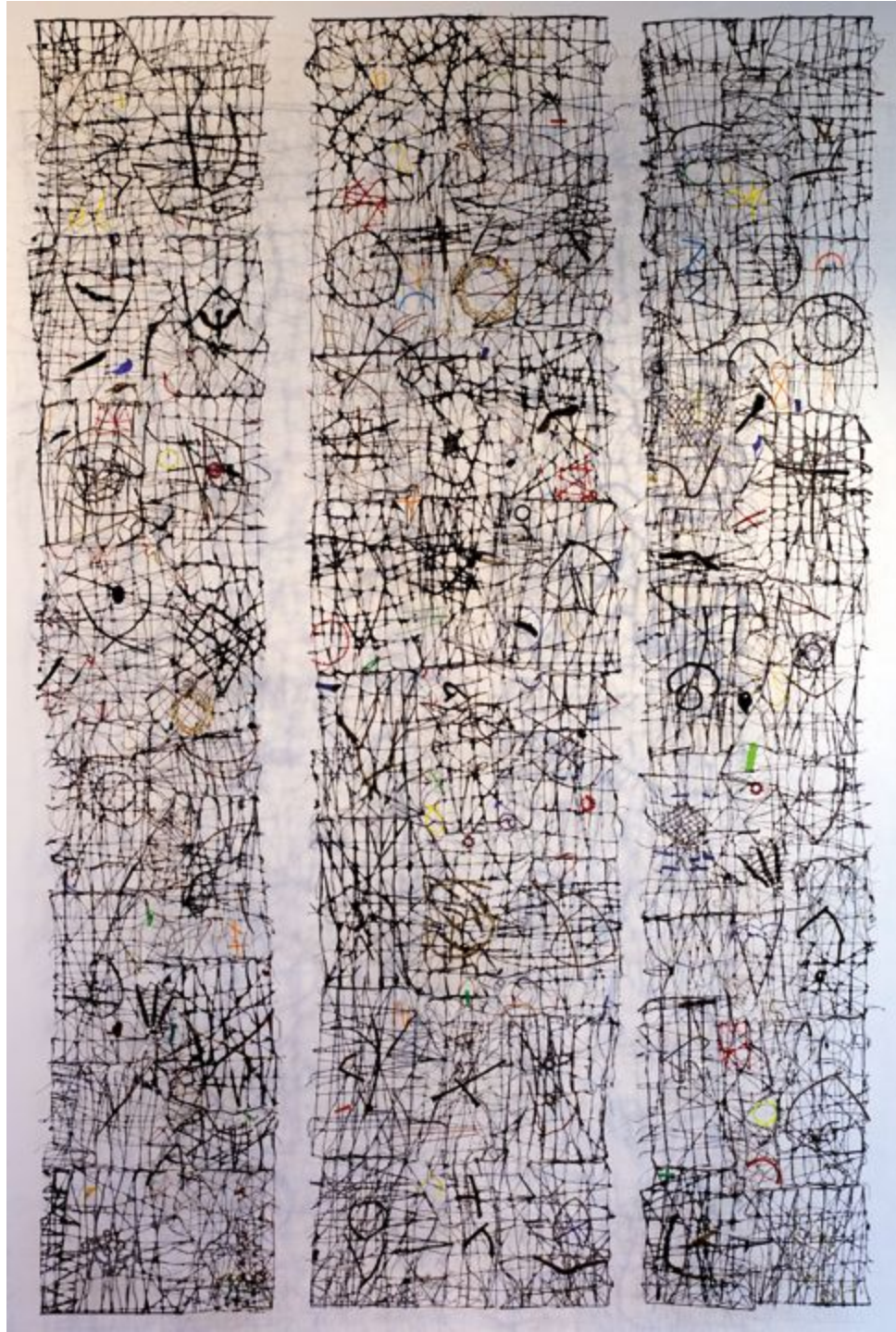


*Irmin*, 2011  
Variable dimensions  
Metal threads, fabric, threads, fibers

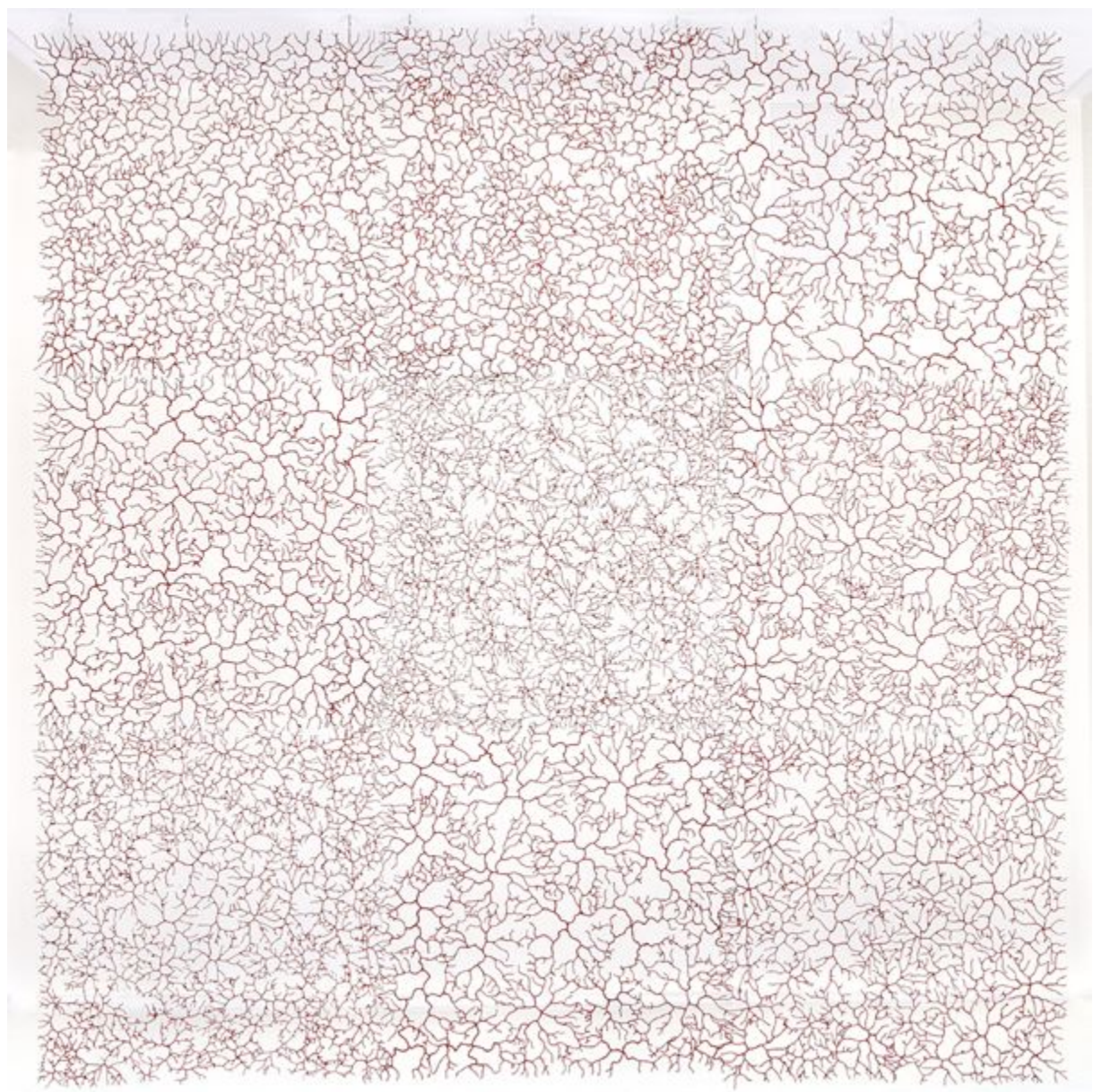


*In recent years I have once again become interested in producing nets. Some of them are combined with objects that I have found. These works are steeped in a desire to explore our traditional roots: the indefinable and timeless quality of human endeavour...When I made the work Fenris, I wanted it to look as much as possible as fishing net put up for cleaning, full of dirt and worthless stuff. It's a recurring theme...the dark forces of chaos, here represented by Fenris, the wolf from the Norse mythology (the Poetic Edda). Fenris was, according to the myth attached with the chain, Gleipnir, that was fine and smooth as silk, but stronger than iron. If the chain broke, the forces of chaos would be loose and the end of the world would come, Ragnarok, the Norse word for the ultimate destruction of the gods in a cataclysmic battle with evil, out of which a new order will arise.*

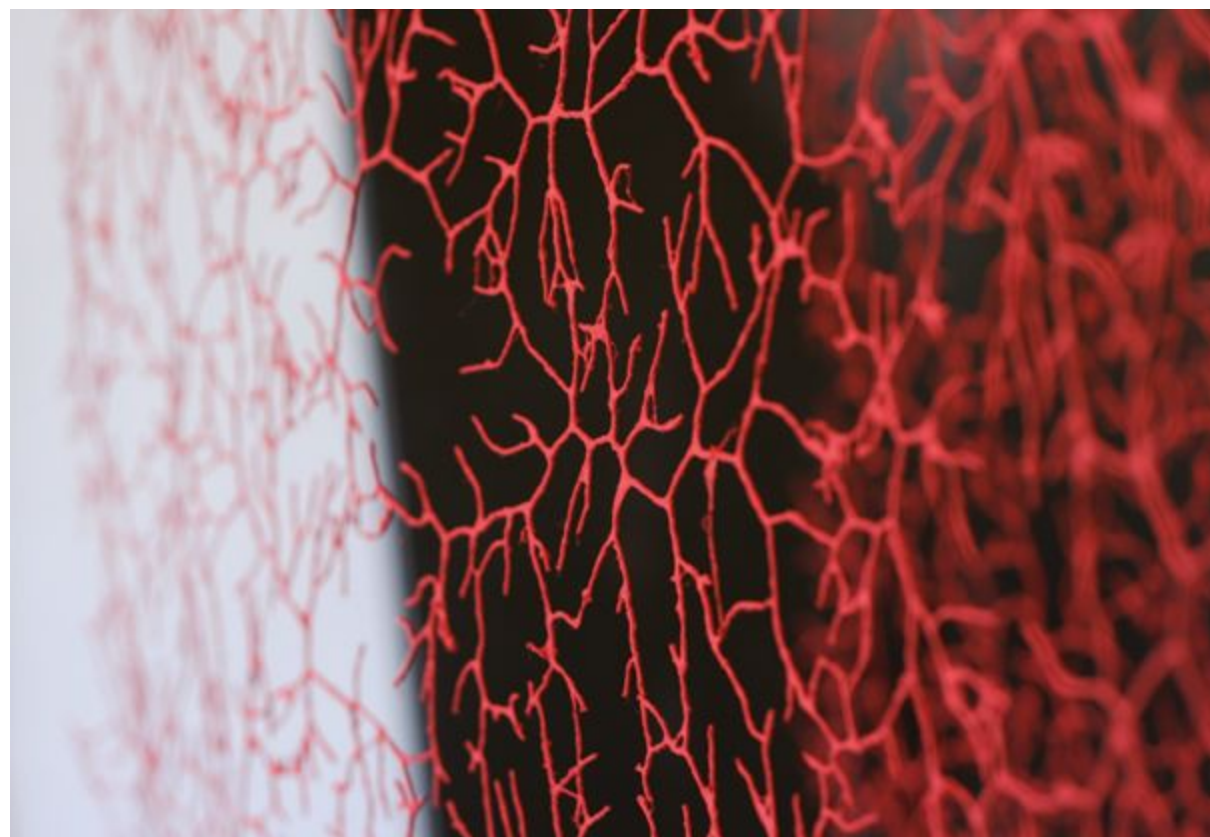
Gjertrud Hals



*Fenris*, 2006/2015  
245 × 170 cm  
Threads, fibers, found objects  
(pages 26-28-29)



*Insula*, 2008  
300 × 300 cm  
Metal threads, fibers  
(pages 30-31)



*Insula* represents an organic grid structure of metal thread covered with 50 layers of paper pulp. *Insula* is the Latin word for island, and it also refers to Insular Cortex, a central structure deep inside the brain believed to be involved with consciousness and plays a role in diverse functions usually linked to emotion and perception. It probably contributes to our perception of ourselves as isolated creatures and to our consciousness of the “self”. *Insula* is an image of the human nervous system, abstracted into a square.

Gjertrud Hals





Portrait of the artist, Vengedalen, Isfjorden, Norway, 2015

## GJERTRUD HALS

Born 1948 in Finnøy, Romsdal, Norway  
Lives and works in Molde, Norway

### SOLO EXHIBITIONS, SELECTED

2015 / Galerie Maria Wettergren, Paris; Bærum Art Hall, Bærum. 2014 / Himmerland Art Museum, Aars, Denmark; Kube Art Museum, Ålesund. 2012 / Gallery RAM, Oslo. 2011 / Rauland Art Association; 2010 / Ode to the roots, KMR, Molde. 2008 / Kube Art Museum, Ålesund; Norwegian Forest Museum, Elverum. 2007 / Vadsø Art Association, Vadsø. 2006 / Gallery Heer, Oslo. 2005 / Gallery Svalbard, Longyearbyen; Gallery HAV, Hustad. 2004 / Gallery Heer, Oslo. 2003 / Gallery III, Oslo. 2002 / Trondheim Art Museum, Trondheim. 2000 / Gallery Elvetun, Sykkylven; Nils Aas Art Studio, Inderøy. 1999 / Gallery Barbara, Sunndalsøra; The Bjørnson Festival, Festival of International Literature, Molde. 1998 / Aukra Art Association, Aukra. 1994 / Gallery Åkern, Kongsberg. 1991 / Levanger Art Association, Levanger. 1990 / North Norwegian Art Center, Svolvær. 1989 / Gallery Wang, Oslo. 1988 / Shæffergården, Copenhagen; Gallery F15, Moss. 1985 / Møre og Romsdal Art Center, Molde

### GROUP EXHIBITIONS, SELECTED

2015 / Herfra. Kube Art Museum, Ålesund; Interwoven. Merzbau Gallery, Miami; Art in Nature. Landart in Vengedalen, Romsdal; Fattig kunst-rik arv. National Museum of Contemporary Art, Oslo; Art Genève, Galerie Maria Wettergren. 2014 / The Salon: Art+Design NY, Galerie MW; PAD London Art+Design, Galerie MW; The Vevring Exhibition, Vevring; Design Miami/Basel Galerie MW; Stavanger Art Museum, Stavanger. 2012 / Lost Garden, Høvikodden; Moving, Ålesund. 2011 / Art in Nature, Landart in Vengedalen, Romsdal; Paper Art Exhibition, Seitenstetten, Austria. 2010 / Goddesses II, the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Oslo; Knitting and Stitching Shows, London; The Holland Paper Art Biennial 2010, Apeldoorn and Rijswijk. 2009 / Art in Nature, Landart in Vengedalen, Romsdal. 2005 / Identity, Kube Art Museum, Ålesund. 2003 / Modern Masters, Munich. 2002 / Masterpieces -Capolavori, Turin; Norwegian Textile Artists 25 years, Notodden. 2001 / SOFA-Sculpture Object and Functional Art, New York. 2000 / International Art Festival - Art 21, Palm Spring. 1998 / Cellulose, International Touring Exhibition in The Nordic Countries; 9th Triennial of Tapestry, Łódź; The Annual Exhibition for Trøndelag. 1997 / Shelter, International Art Exhibition, Trondheim; International Triennial of Tapestry and Textile Art, Tournai; Norwegian Textile Artists 20 years, Oslo; Blue, Haugar Art Museum, Tønsberg. 1996 / Flax and Linnen Biennial, Rouen and Paris; The Annual Exhibition for Northern Norway. 1995 / Art -Material, Brandts Klædefabrik, Odense; International Touring Exhibition in Scandinavia and Spain. 1994 / Paper Art, Gemeente Amstelveen Museum, Amsterdam; Norwegian Art, Gallery Brandstrup, Oslo; Heimdal Art Exhibition, Trondheim. 1992 / Gallery "Kunst und Handwerk", Munich; Ode de la coupe, Museum of Decorative Art, Lausanne; 3. Basketry Invitational, Michigan; Kryss-Crossing Borders, Regional Art Center, Hordaland. 1991 / European Craft, Stuttgart; Crossing Borders, Gallery F15, Moss; Configura, Art in Europe, Erfurt. 1990 / Nordform, art , craft, design and architecture, Malmö; Gallery Ram, Oslo; International Biennial of Paper Art, Düren. 1989 / Splendid Forms, Bellas Artes Gallery, Santa Fe and New York; Nordic Textile Triennial; New Norwegian Textile Art, Museum of Decorative Art, Trondheim; ITF International Textile Competition `89, Kyoto; Perspective on Paper, Maihaugen, Lillehammer. 1988 / Neo Tradition, Museum of Decorative Art, Trondheim; The Tactile Vessel, Touring Exhibition in USA; Textile Art 88, Maihaugen, Lillehammer; The National Annual Exhibition (Høstutstillingen); Metro Art ´s International Art Competition, New York. 1987 / The National Annual Exhibition. 1986 / The Annual Exhibition for Western Norway (Vestlandsutstillingen). 1984 / The National Annual Exhibition; The Annual Exhibition for Western Norway: The 3.Michoacan Int. Exhibition of Miniature Textiles, Mexico; 5th Int. Biennial of Miniature Textiles, Ungarn; The Annual Exhibition for Trøndelag.

1983 / The National Annual Exhibition; The Annual Exhibition for Western Norway. 1982 / The National Annual Exhibition; Nordic Textile Triennia. 1981 / The Annual Exhibition for Western Norway. 1980 / The Annual Exhibition for Western Norway; The UKS Spring Exhibition; Art and Church, Trondheim. 1979 / The Annual Exhibition for Western Norway; The UKS Spring Exhibition Oslo; The Annual Exhibition for Eastern Norway. 1975 / Norwegian Contemporary Textile, Oslo Art Association, Oslo

#### COMMISSIONS

2014 / Kristiansund College. 2013 / NGLMS, Otta. 2012 / Teatret Vårt, Møre og Romsdal. 2009 / Molde District Psychiatric Centre Knausen. 2006 / Shell Administration Building, Aukra. 2004 / Stabekk School, Bærum. 2002 / Bjørnson Concert House, Molde. 2002 / Rica Seilet Hotel, Molde. 1998 / Aker Stadion, Molde; Julsundet School, Aukra. 1997 / Statoil Administration Building, Tjeldbergodden. 1994 / Molde University College, Molde; Frostating Court of Appeal, Molde. 1993 / Brage Oil Platform. 1992 / Draugen Oil Platform. 1987 / Molde Church, Molde; Nord-Heggdal Chapel, Misund. 1986 / Fræna School, Elnesvågen; Kleive Nursing Home, Molde. 1985 / Kirkelandet Chapel, Kristiansund. 1984 / Sunndal Nursing Home, Sunndal. 1983 / Ulsteinvik Day Nursery Home, Ulsteinvik. 1981 / Ørsta Nursing Home, Ørsta

#### COLLECTIONS, SELECTED

Kube Art Museum, Ålesund; Museum Bellerive, Zurich; Museum of Decorative Art, Lausanne; American Craft Museum, New York; Erie Art Museum, Pennsylvania; Leopold-Hoesch Museum, Düren; The National Museum of Contemporary Art, Oslo, The National Museum of Decorative Arts, Trondheim; Arts Council Norway; Bob Kelly Gallery, Gothenborg, Sør-Trøndelag County Art Collection; Nord-Trøndelag County Art Collection; Møre og Romsdal County Art Collection; Finnmark County Art Collection; Bærum Municipal Art Collection; Oslo Municipal Art Collection; Aukra Municipal Art Collection; Daiichishiko Co. Ltd. Kyoto; Aker Stadion Art Collection, Molde; Fjord 1, MRF; KS, The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities; The County Hospital, Molde; Molde University College; Ergon Coastal Defences ( World War 2 Museum), Bud

#### AWARDS

2002 : Bærum Municipal Art Prize. 1989 / Grand Prix, International Textile Competition 89, Kyoto. 1987 / 1.Prize, Metro Arts Intern. Art Competition, New York

#### GRANTS

2014 / BKH Exhibition Grant. 2011 / BKH Exhibition Grant. 2010 / Arts Councils Exhibition Grant. 2007 / Arts Councils Exhibition Grant. 2004 / Arts Councils Exhibition Grant. 2000 / Arts Councils Exhibition Grant. 1998 / Ingrid Linbäk Langaard Foundation; The Inadomi Foundation. 1997 / The National Guarantee Income for Artists. 1992 / The National Work Grant for Artists (3 years). 1991 / Rune Brynstad Memorial Legacy. 1990 / Vederlagsfondet Grant. 1989 / Sasakawa Foundation; Vederlagsfondet Grant. 1988 / Ingrid Linbäk Langaard Foundation. 1986 / Norwegian Artists Legacy. 1984 / National Grant. 1981 / UKS (Young Artists Association) Grant



*Fennis*(detail), 2006/2015

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