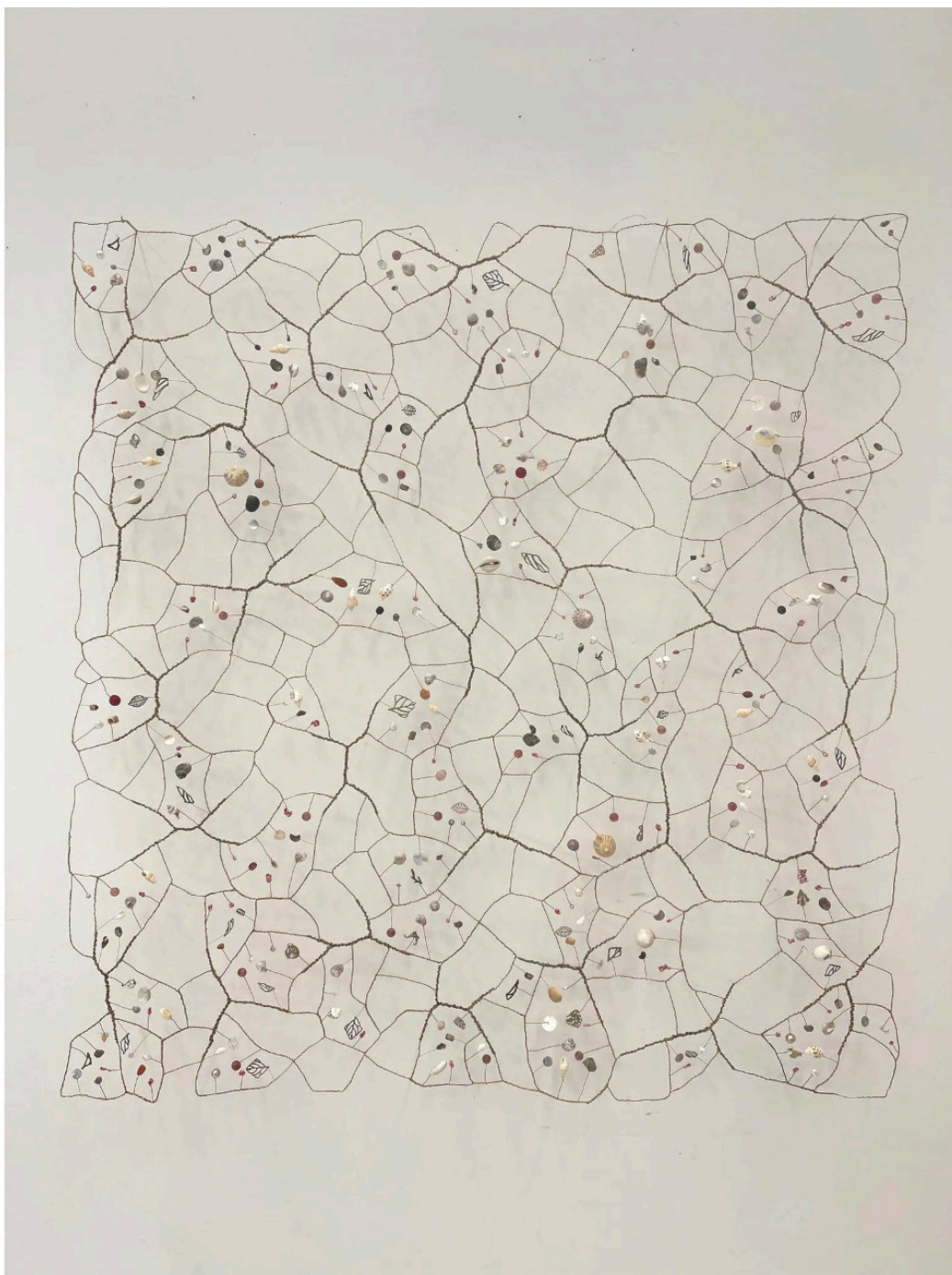


Ecofeminism Returns, Renewing a Focus on the Environment and Women's Rights

A form of artistic activism that faded after its heyday in the 1970s is back and aims to make its mark at TEFAF Maastricht.

Gjertrud Hals



"After the Storm," 2024, by Gjertrud Hals is made of brass, copper and silver-coated wire, stones, shells, amber and pearls. Omar Sejnaes/Courtesy of Gjertrud Hals & Galerie Maria Wettergren

When the Norwegian fiber artist Gjertrud Hals casts about for inspiration, her mind catches elements of women's culture and the environmental destruction she has witnessed. Growing up on the remote island of Finnøya, in the 1950s, she witnessed the overfishing that collapsed the population of fish and whales, forcing many families, including hers, to leave Finnøya.

While living in the Norwegian fjords, Hals watched as a spectacular nearby waterfall was captured for hydropower. A year later, she and her husband launched a successful campaign to save a watershed from being dammed. Simultaneously, the feminist marches of the 1960s and the related push to elevate women's crafts to fine art motivated Hals to learn weaving and embroider feminist quotes.

Today, Hals said she is less political. But ecofeminist themes will subtly saturate her solo exhibition at TEFAF, presented by [Galerie Maria Wettergren](#). Her fishnetlike paper vessels conjure the shapes of seashells and wombs while honoring the feminine tradition of fiber arts and speaking indirectly of womanhood and nature. "On one hand, they are vulnerable; on the other hand, they are strong," Hals said in a video interview.

In a nod to humans' interconnectivity with nature, Hals muddles the natural and the human made. She fashioned shoes from roots and molded Japanese mulberry bark paper into small human heads, which she will display among similar-looking mushrooms plucked from trees.

In "Golden," a copper net weaving has "caught" golden herrings and other animals that Hals cut out from the insides of Norwegian caviar mayonnaise tubes, perhaps questioning the value placed on the living world. In "After the Storm," shells and pearls seem to have washed up into a wire net, offering a hopeful message. "We are in a political situation more and more, not only in Norway but in Europe and generally," Hals explained. "And we are hoping that one day there will be a time after the storm."