

Introduction to Nalbinding

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Goal

This is an introductory class in which you will learn some of the history and uses of nalbinding and you will start a nalbinded piece.

History

Nalbinding is a textile technique usually performed with a needle and thread, in which loops are connected to form an elastic fabric (Claßen-Büttner, 2018, p. 9).

Nalbinding is an ancient technique that “is so old that its roots are hidden deep in the mists of prehistory.” (Claßen-Büttner, 2018, p. 28)

One of the major differences between knitting and crochet and nalbinding is that the former are loop-led with an ‘endless’ thread while nalbinding is end-led with short pieces of thread. This results in a fabric that does not unravel or pull apart when a thread is pulled, instead it tightens down into a knot.

This technique has roots all over the world with artifacts discovered in China, Peru, Egypt, throughout Europe, and beyond. The majority of identifiable historical pieces found in Europe are mittens and socks.

Today you will find artists creating mittens, socks, hats, sweaters, bags, shawls, stuffed toys, and more using this technique.

Materials

All that is needed to nalbind is yarn/string/length of fiber. A needle is typically used, but is not technically required. The most common fiber used is wool (not super-wash!) due to the ease in adding pieces of yarn to your working end. The thickness of yarn, number of plies, fiber content, etc can be decided by the artist. If you plan to use a 'spit join' to join your pieces, yarn with at least 80% wool and non-superwash work the best.

Needles can be made of any rigid material and can range in size from darning needle size to several inches long and nearly ½ inch wide. Each person will have a preference for needle material and size that works best for them and the project they are working on. I have even seen people carve needles from popsicles sticks and the end of a plastic fork!

Stitches

There are endless possibilities in stitch pattern. The most well-known stitches, and their names, are ones that were discovered in certain archeological finds. However there are several naming conventions that exist to describe the same stitches. I will not go into further detail in this class, but you can find more information in the resources at the end of this handout.

Nalbinding will stretch between rows but does not stretch much along a row. When figuring out sizing also keep in mind that once a row is bound on both sides it will have shrunk down from the original length. Each stitch and yarn will shrink a different amount and this should be kept in mind when beginning a project. Swatching can be used to ensure the finished product is the size desired.

The yarn, stitch, connection method, and loop gauge used will determine if the final product is thick and dense, loose and airy, or anything in between. With experience you will learn what combination you like best for the project you are creating.

Some helpful terms: working thread - the thread that is coming through the needle and is the working end. Rear loop - the loop behind the thumb, the loop that was previously on the thumb. Thumb loop - the loop (or loops) that are wrapped around the thumb.

Today we are going to learn the Mammen stitch. This stitch is a good jumping point for learning pretty much all the rest of the stitches. It makes a moderately thick fabric. Because there are so many excellent websites, videos, and other tutorials out there I am not going to include instructions in this



handout. PLEASE feel free to contact me via social media, email, or in person at an event if you need additional help or have any questions.

How to contact me: tyra@westkingdom.org

Facebook: Kristin Guy

Instagram: T_rah1984

Resources

Books: There are only a few books published in English right now. The one I own and referenced above in the History section is: Nalbinding What in the World is That? History and Technique of an Almost Forgotten Handicraft by Ulrike Claßen-Büttner (An Amazon.com search for 'nalbinding' will bring up this book and the others that are currently available).

Needles: I have purchased most of my needles from Etsy. a search for 'nalbinding needle' will bring up a multitude of options. You can also find them for sale on Amazon.com and some crafting websites.

Yarn: You can find suitable yarn in any yarn shop. Craft stores will often have some nice options as well. One of my favorite places to buy (affordable!) yarn online is knitpicks.com. They have some really lovely bare/natural wool and a large selection of dyed wool yarns as well. Some favorite brands besides knitpicks: lamb's pride, alafosslopi (Icelandic wool), and malabrigo.

Facebook Groups I belong to: Nålbinding and US Nalbinding

Website:

<https://www.en.neulakintaat.fi/1> This is my favorite website! I use it for understanding stitches, names, and she has links to some really fantastic videos she's made.

Instagram:

Karin_byom is the main nalbinding account that I follow. She has really excellent stitch-alongs/tutorials and also does a live/youtube live on Saturdays where they do nalbinding and generally act silly.