

The Forest, the Knife, the Table

In the exhibition «Brytningstid» (Era of change), artist Veslemøy Lilleengen invites us into a forest landscape of textiles and natural materials such as earth, birch, limewood and polypore. Here we encounter a craft-based practice grounded in sustainability, reuse and community.

Lilleengen is a Trondheim-based artist, born and raised on Ørlandet. She works from traditions of craft, inheritance, frugality and what might be called survival knowledge. Her practice is site-responsive and explores connections between humans and nature, and her own attachment to landscape and history. The exhibition at Trøndelag Centre for Contemporary Art is the most comprehensive presentation of Lilleengen's work to date.

The scent of birch wood may be the first thing that meets us as we enter the exhibition space. From the entrance, an 8.5-metre-long runner of birch brushwood stretches like a path towards an old kitchen table placed at the centre of the room. In the forest Lilleengen gathers birch shoots, tightly binding them with cord to form the floor-based work *Heimvei*. Birch brushwood is a near-extinct craft technique with long traditions as outdoor matting and as flooring in Sámi turf huts and other dwellings. The work sets the tone of the exhibition and heightens our awareness of smell, movement and bodily navigation through terrain.

Another tradition-bearing technique foregrounded in the exhibition is *vidjespenning*. Here, root shoots of birch are braided into withies – a traditional method of binding and fastening. Withies become extremely strong and were used for everything from timber floating to tethering livestock. The monumental wall sculpture *Sølje* consists of more than one hundred such bindings. The technique has deep historical roots and remained in widespread use in Norway until the 1950s. The work carries local history both through the material's and technique's utilitarian past and through its sculptural form.

The wall installation *Til minne om Lind (1904–2025)* consists of 121 forms carved from the old tree that once stood at the centre of the family farm garden, recently felled by a storm. Each form corresponds to one year of the tree's life and is assembled into an irregular, organic composition readable as abstract signs. The slow, time-consuming labour functions as an embodied approach to time and belonging. Lilleengen has previously worked in a related manner by shaping clay spheres, where repeated hand movements gradually transform the material. The meditative process of carving 121 wooden elements thus becomes an exploration of attachment to place and of how materials carry memory.

The 5 × 5 metre plant-dyed textile *Himmel over Ørland* covers the art centre's window surfaces in varied blue tones and fabric compositions. Like a topographic patchwork, it carries traditions of repair and reconstruction and countless hand-stitched hours. The work forms part of

Lilleengen's life-long project *Norsk Bauta* (2021–). The textile is dyed with potteblå, one of the oldest methods of producing durable blue with indigo in textiles and historically considered a distinctively Norwegian tradition. In this process, textiles are immersed in an indigo vat in which fermented urine functions as a reducing agent. The fellow Ørlandet native Hannah Ryggen also employed this dyeing technique in her tapestries, and inspired by her Lilleengen writes herself into this tradition by using urine collected from her own community – specifically from women artists. In this way she makes visible both the collective bodies behind the colour and gendered beliefs surrounding potteblå, including the myth that male urine yields a stronger hue. At the same time she points to imbalances in art historical representation and acquisition practices. *Himmel over Ørlandet* is thus rooted in tradition, care work and female communities.

The works in the exhibition are closely connected to the artist's family history and may also be understood through an autoethnographic approach, in which personal experiences, relationships and everyday materials form the basis of artistic inquiry. A central work draws on Lilleengen's Forest Finn roots in Hedmark. In *Arv*, nightwear from the family has been hand-sewn into a large banner in shades of white. The garments, once worn close to the body, are gathered into a new collective textile bearing traces of labour and lived life in forest and field. These everyday fabrics show signs of use, wear and care. Lilleengen invites us to see the beauty of the worn and the seemingly valueless, elevating the everyday into a tribute to generations of lived experience. The work reflects on inheritance as both material and experiential, shaped by landscape, labour and dependence on natural cycles. The narrative is personally grounded yet opens onto a shared cultural memory.

Text and storytelling are also central to Lilleengen's practice. The titles alone carry a rich associative world and open small poetic narratives of everyday life and recollection, as in *Min bestefar lærte meg å reparere lommelykter og min mor har sett en ufo*. This work consists of 54 flashlights of the Wonder brand, collected and repaired by the artist over time and mounted in a strict grid on the wall. The intense light is blinding and disorienting to the gaze; the visual field becomes indistinct and it becomes difficult to determine what we are actually seeing. In the xenon-based light of the lamps – an element whose name, translated from Greek, means “foreign” and which is also used in spacecraft – the work's suggestion of something extraterrestrial is intensified, a wonder. Between the sober arrangement and the fabulating title a tension emerges between practical knowledge and imagination, between repair and fantasy.

Gummi cumulus / O mio babbino caro consists of twelve small, abject tin sculptures placed on simple wooden shelves around the room. The forms resemble small cloud formations – cumulus, or cauliflower-like heaps. The sculptures are cast in recycled tin from the artist's father's chewing-gum shapes: small pellets formed through constant chewing after he quit smoking in the 1970s and left in clusters throughout the family home on Ørlandet, to the mother's pronounced frustration. In casting, this fleeting and bodily material is transformed into durable, shimmering

objects. The title refers to Puccini's aria *O mio babbino caro* – “Oh my dear father” – lending the work tenderness and a humorous familial resonance.

Another imprint of another's action appears in *Varde / Hallvard*: a cement sculpture cast from a hole dug by hand by the artist's uncle on Ørlandet. The hole was originally made to set a satellite dish but emerges here as a negative imprint of bodily labour and site-specific action. The sculpture is placed on a Europallet, as if still situated within a working landscape. Like the casts of the father's gum forms, the work transforms a fleeting, everyday gesture into a lasting object, making visible the quiet labour and formative force of what otherwise remains unseen.

«Brytningstid» is a personal family chronicle and an ode to the birthplace Ørlandet and to Lilleengen's Forest Finn roots in Hedmark. The title simultaneously points to a present marked by rupture, transformation and contradiction – a world in transition where established lifeways, knowledge traditions and relations to nature are shifting. The exhibition explores how knowledge is transmitted through labour, materials and community, opening a space for sharing experience and for the continuation of traditions across generations. It also asks how the past can cast new light on identity today.

This leads us back to the old kitchen table placed at the centre of the exhibition. Here visitors are invited to sit down. The table is a fundamental gathering point in everyday life – a place for both work and meal, conversation and the sharing of experience. In «Brytningstid», conversation becomes as essential as materials; the works are interwoven with oral storytelling and a Trøndelag culture of sharing that explores how knowledge is shaped, transformed and passed between people and generations.

During the exhibition period, visitors are invited to participate in a Trøndelag cake table and a storytelling session with Lilleengen's brother-in-law, as well as a workshop in *vidjespenning*. The cake table, known for its principle of abundance and its strong roots in regional tradition, functions here as a social and cultural space for the transmission of stories, techniques and community.

Welcome to sit down. Would you like a cup of coffee?

Text by Margrete Abelsen, Exhibition Producer, Trøndelag Centre for Contemporary Art.

Gummi Cumulus / O Mio Babbino Caro

In 1977 my father quit smoking because he didn't want to die and leave us. He started chewing gum instead. He began placing the chewed pieces in small towers on his bedside table, on the bedpost — sometimes elsewhere in the house. Gradually, little cloud formations emerged, which my mother regularly removed in a mixture of gratitude and exasperation. I studied them with great fascination throughout my childhood.

"You know the wind moves counterclockwise," my father said. "It's the white altocumulus that lure it. If we're lucky, mammatus will form."

I am a fortunate man — Audemor and three daughters — I am loved by women; there is nothing better.

In Memory of the Linden. 1904–2025

The linden stood in the middle of the garden and, strictly speaking, should have ranked beneath the carefully selected yard tree, the ash — but Vestråt has its own rules.

Under the linden everything important happened — garden parties, outdoor cinema, hide-and-seek, tent camps, concerts, a legendary BBC interview — beneath it was the final resting place of one beloved dog or two. We climbed toward its ever-higher crown, and there we sat, swaying in the wind like dizzy weather vanes, touching the sky. Always to my mother's admonitions to be careful — with the linden, that is.

"I love that tree," my mother said. "It has been here all my life. The linden knows my sorrows and joys and all my secrets — it is my friend," she said.

It became my friend too.

I, who can barely remember my own name, can without effort close my eyes and look up along the thick trunks, feel every branch and glimpse the sky in brief flashes as the canopy shifts high above. I can hear the trickling sound of the leaves, but just like my grandfather's famous baritone, I can never share it — for neither Grandfather nor the linden is here anymore.

Heimvei

My sisters, those magnificent sisters, clear every path for their little sister — and I am the little sister. I am fifty years old and they care for me as if I were four. They push and coax, they pull me forward and upward, boast about me quite shamelessly.

My sisters radiate warmth toward me like a runaway boiler. They are icebergs that would sink the Titanic for my sake. They would not hesitate to create catastrophe and Ragnarok just for me. The little sister.

"Nooo!" they say, "you exaggerate. We do nothing. We could do more," they say, while lifting the sea and moving mountains on an ordinary Monday and declaring, "This is nothing at all." I trot after them like an eager little dog and bask in their glow — they can do anything. And people say, "Oh, those sisters of yours — I want some too!" "I know, I know," I say. "I am a lucky cheese."

Traveling Cloak

I have no secrets. I tell everything, both lies and truth, everything I remember and what I have forgotten. With me there are no hidden stitches, and the backside is a crow's nest.

In a hundred years I will be forgotten — thankfully. While the patterns continue to wander, from hand to hand, without borders.

Veslemøy Lilleengen
28 February

Veslemøy Lilleengen - *Brytningstid*

Verksliste

1. **Heimvei** (2026) 50.000 kr.
Løper av bjørkeris og streng.
2. **Til minne om Lind 1904 – 2025** (2026) 120.000 kr.
Installasjon av 121 spikkede pinner av lind.
3. **Gummi cumulus / O mio babbino caro** (2026) 25.000 kr.
12 stk. tyggegummi, sandstøpt i resirkulert norsk tinn. (Uendelig opplag)
4. **Reisekappe** (2026) 75.000 kr.
Broderi, håndsøm
5. **Min bestefar lærte meg å reparere lommelykter og min mor har sett en UFO** (2026) 45.000 kr.
Installasjon av 54 lommelykter av merket Wonder/lanterne.
6. **Våpenskjold for liten skog Amadou** (2026) 35.000 kr.
Tekstil fra knuskkjuka
7. **Tanker som løste seg opp mot kveldshimmelen før februar mens jeg stod stille** (2026) 45.000 kr.
Tekstilsulptur, lerret malt med jordpigment fra industriområder, armeringsjern og remmer fra Norsk Remfabrikk på Kolbotn.
8. **Arv** (2026) 75.000 kr.
Nattøy/undertøy fra min skogfinske slekt på Ringsaker, håndsøm.
9. **Sølje** (2026) 120.000 kr.
Vidjespenning av bjørk.
10. **Varde / Hallvard** (2026) 45.000 kr.
Avstøpning i sement av hull gravd for hånd.
11. **Himmel over Ørland** (2026), del av prosjektet «Norsk Bauta» (2021-) Pris på forespørsel
Silke, bomull og lin farget potteblått

