

# *Warps & Waves in the Fabric of Time*

Industrialisation revolutionised both the concept and the experience of time. The lives of wage labourers became synchronized with the pace of machines and the clock card, as standardised time spun a web of interdependence across the globe. Linear time seemed to speed up, detaching from the natural cycles that sustain life. An urgent question today is how the relationships between these different temporalities can be restored.

Unfolding across the city, the Borås Art Biennial 2026 engages with the interwoven societal and ecological transformations accelerated by industrial modernity. With artworks tracing the legacies of the textile industry, the Biennial sets out to unravel and mend the fabric of time stretched between the river and the factory, here and elsewhere, then and now. Local and planetary circulations of water form the fluid coordinates of the exhibition. Rivers, winds and ocean currents guide the navigation and remind of the intimate bonds across vast distances.

The artworks in the exhibition attend to the lives and labours that have been foundational for industrial development, like warps in a loom, yet which often remain overshadowed by the roar of technological progress. The exhibition weaves narrative and material threads across time and space between the migration of people and knowledge, women's work and movements for social justice, and the vital more-than-human labourers making it all possible.

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The history of Borås is closely intertwined with textiles. During the Industrial Revolution in the early 1800s, some of the first weaving mills in Sweden were established here. The city's industrial development was built upon an existing cottage industry that had thrived in the region for centuries. The shearing scissors in the city's emblem recall the significance of locally produced wool.

Geography also played a crucial part. Borås has access to the port of Gothenburg and maritime routes and this brought new technologies and expertise, alongside raw materials such as cotton. Thanks to the westerly winds the local climate is humid - a necessity for textile production - and the river Viskan provided a ready supply of water for the thirsty industry.

Like the industry itself, the Borås Art Biennial 2026 spins out from these local and regional networks of exchange towards planetary entanglements. Mobility of materials, people and knowledge across the globe is unprecedented today in its pace, but it is not new, as humans, along with their artefacts and inventions, have always travelled.

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The exhibition contends that the past is not behind us, but persists in the present. As the environmental crisis deepens and advances in AI threaten livelihoods, existential questions concerning the circulation of matter and the value of work come to haunt us. Attending to these ghosts in the machine, the exhibition sidesteps both apocalyptic and techno-utopian scenarios, searching instead for potential pathways for futures built on connections and confluence through time and across geographies.

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The Biennial exhibition is concentrated in the two museums, as well as along two axes running through the city centre between them, and by the river Viskan. The river weaves through the grid structure of the modern urban fabric, while the route from the railway station to the city centre follows the Atlantic winds.

The public artworks centre on the life-sustaining labour of the river alongside narratives of workers, human and more-than-human alike. They also examine the role of textile in public life, challenging distinctions between private and political spheres. Flags claim and shape public space, calling for recognition and formation of collective identities.

At the Textile Museum, housed in an old factory built over the river, a historical banner of a local women workers' association welcomes the viewers. The exhibition focuses on the interdependence between local struggles grounded in lived experiences and the power of global solidarity, which the banner articulates in its beautiful simplicity.

At the Borås Art Museum, the exhibition opens with the painting *Weaver* (1980) by Ulla Zimmerman from the museum collection. In the spirit of the depicted factory worker and her empowered gaze, the exhibition offers a multifaceted prism onto the knowledges embodied by people in migration, across generations, rooted in and uprooted from the land.

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Journeying across the Nordic-Baltic region and the Atlantic, to the Middle East, West Africa, and Southeast Asia, the artworks in the Borås Art Biennial 2026 reflect both colonial histories and the unequal distribution of wealth today. Yet, in tracing the legacies of textiles and industrialisation, they also weave another web of tales and testimonies of agency and alliances. Under the weight of these stories and bodies of evidence, the deterministic linearity of time wavers and warps, giving way to alternative imaginaries of the times yet to come.

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