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Denmark in New York

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Grethe Wittrock on flying above Nordic currents

The Danish fiber artist tells us about her Arctic inspirations



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“The sea and the feeling of flying above the Nordic countries, when you enter the room at the gallery, I hope that will be the feeling I can convey,” — Grethe Wittrock.

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Currently working from her studio in Washington DC, Wittrock's exhibit in May — [Nordic Currents](#) at the Tenri Cultural Institute — was her first solo exhibition in New York.

When our Consul General, Ambassador Anne Dorte Riggelsen, visited Wittrock's exhibit, #DenmarkInNY decided to break the ice and ask about her inspirations and the daily life of a Danish artist far from home.

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Grethe Wittrock with Ambassador Anne Dorte Riggelsen.

What can you tell us about your new exhibition Nordic Currents?

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and because Greenland is a part of my native country Denmark, the fragility of the Arctic ecosystem is important to me. So in this exhibit I have been working to show how used materials and discarded items can display the unrivalled beauty of the Arctic.

I have designed sculptural installations of bird-like constructions made from weather beaten ships' sails that I have been donated from Danish yachtsmen. In fact, these huge weather beaten sails tell me stories that I do not find in a new fabric. Each of them reveal their distinct history and each wrinkle marks a story about stormy weather. It's like a face that gets wrinkled over time, so the sails are also full of lines, wrinkles and scars. I then use these stories to guide me in cutting, painting and shaping the sails to resemble the striking coolness of Arctic nature.

How do Greenland and the Arctic inspire your work?

I have always been fascinated by flying; to look down at the snow and ice and rock landscape of Greenland and the Arctic from the airplane when I fly from Denmark to the US. I've been observing that landscape, and I want that presence to be in the gallery. The sea and the feeling of flying above the Nordic countries, when you enter the room at the gallery, I hope that will be the feeling I can convey.



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In Wittrock's work, used materials display the beauty of the Arctic.

What have been some of the major challenges when working as an artist in the US?

One of the challenges for me in the beginning was to be on my own, to find affordable studio space, to find the art scene and colleagues in Washington DC. It's a challenge to find new ways of working techniques because I do not have my studio equipment and where to buy all the materials? The tools are different too. But then I was lucky to be selected for the [Halcyon Arts Lab Studio](#) program in Washington DC, which provided me with an enormous light studio in Georgetown within walking distance, fellow artists and a marvellous network, which I still love to be a part of.

What advice would you give Danish artists who decide to come and work in the US?

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included. They can answer all the questions you have.

Grab the chance on the spot, when offered one — don't hesitate — in the US things go fast and decisions and chances are made here and now. Being a meditative type like me, it's still something I have to learn.

Art

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