





EMPOWERING
DESIGN

Fair and pure design products
empowering vulnerable groups in Africa
- blind and single mothers



*OUR
STORY*



A STORY OF EMPOWERMENT

For the love of craftsmanship

Anna Suoheimo, the CEO and founder of SERA HELSINKI, lived in Ethiopia for five years. She and her children fell in love with the country and its people. Anna loved to work with the local artisans. The nights of Addis Ababa are cold, and together with the artisans, she made woolen rugs for her own home. During that time her children were toddlers and spilled everything on the rugs. Anna was amazed that the wool was so easy to keep clean - even a white rug under the dining table. She started designing rugs which would become SERA HELSINKI's first collection with Finnish nature as the inspiration.

Giving back

Anna wanted to create products that could give back to the country she loved. She started working with eight women who had been knotting rugs their whole lives. The beginning was difficult as the artisans lacked the skills required in making design rugs, such as using a tape measure. Anna herself didn't speak Amharic and found a helpful partner from her driver and friend Abraham Hailemariam who acted as a translator. The initial steps of SERA HELSINKI involved lots of trial and error, but together they were able to create a process and minimalistic designs that our artisans could bring to life.

Empowerment as a starting point

Anna officially founded SERA HELSINKI in 2016 in Ethiopia. From the very beginning, we knew that we wanted to work with the most vulnerable groups in Ethiopia. Every fifth person living in extreme poverty has a disability. Disabilities are also highly stigmatized in many African cultures. SERA HELSINKI wants to show that these people are talented members of their communities and can create beautiful, sought-after products.



OUR IMPACT

Inclusivity And Accessibility Guide Our Path

"Nothing about us without us" is the principle of our work. Our goal is that we include persons with disabilities in all levels of our business and decision-making.

Partnerships For An Empowering Tomorrow

Making society more inclusive for people with disabilities is a big challenge while also working on the grassroots level with vulnerable groups. From the very beginning, it was evident that a single company like SERA HELSINKI can't meet all these people's needs by itself. To better meet these demands, we work together with organizations and experts of inclusivity and accessibility.

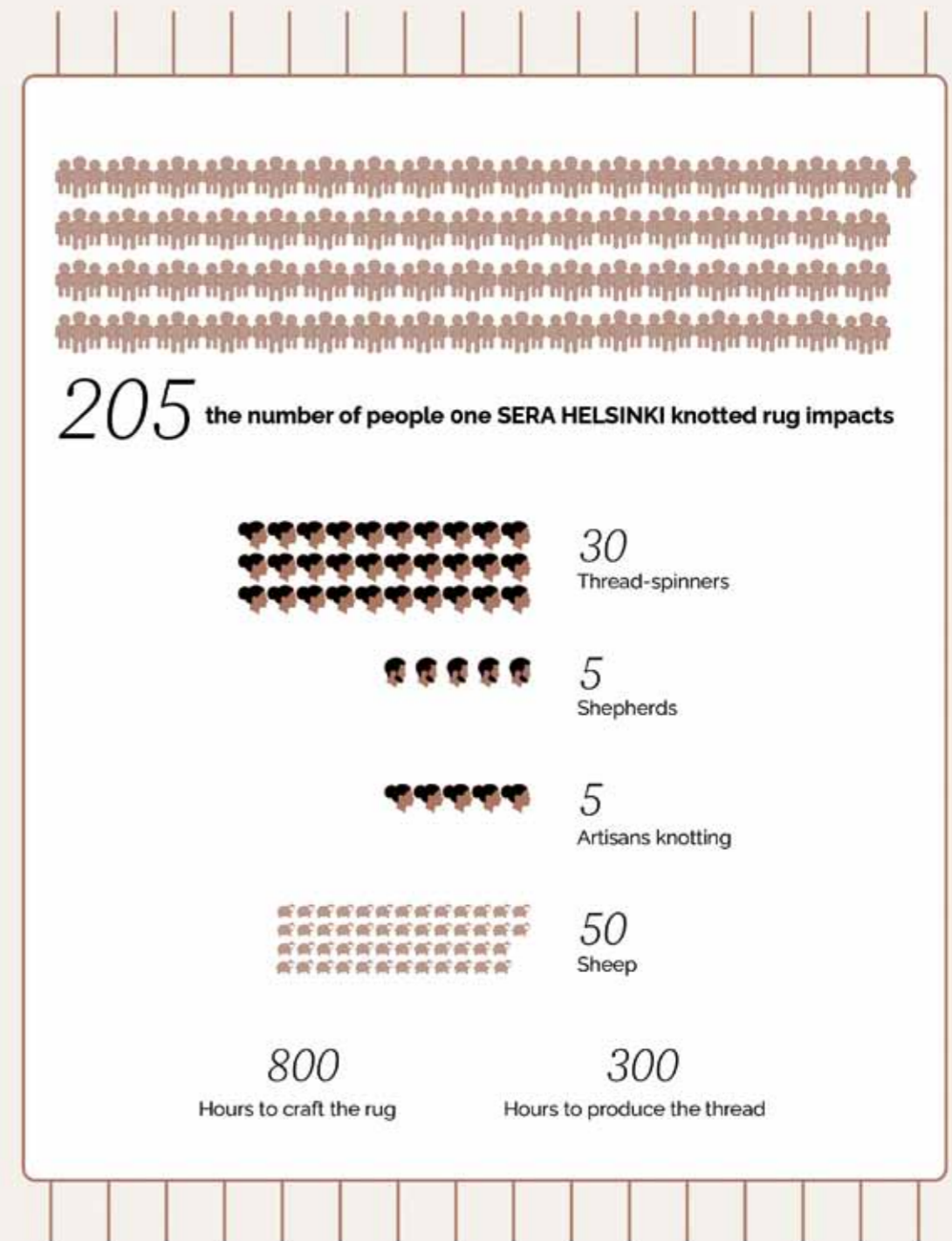


Abilis Foundation

Abilis Foundation is a non-governmental organization in Finland that operates in several developing countries. Abilis' goal is to empower people with disabilities and create job and business opportunities for them. SERA HELSINKI and Abilis started a partnership in 2016; we have created a network of Ethiopian NGOs that are part of our production and inclusion activism.

Ethiopian NGOs

We work alongside various local Ethiopian NGOs to employ and support people (especially women) with disabilities. For example, Hope For The Blind And Handicapped focuses on engaging the visually impaired in rug-making.



ON A MISSION TOWARDS REVOLUTIONARY INCLUSION

Wicked problems demand innovative solutions. We believe that truly transparent design drives change for a more inclusive and accessible society. SERA HELSINKI was born from the love for design and desire to create a better future. Our roots lie in Scandinavian design, and they are intertwined with Ethiopian craftsmanship heritage and empowerment of people.

Revolutionary inclusion and radical accessibility

Our mission is to improve inclusivity on all levels of our business. Many of our artisans don't know how to read and write and they have been excluded from the society they live in. The unfortunate fate of a person with a disability often is to be a beggar on the street. Together with organizations, we teach skills and human rights to our artisans so that they can become active and empowered members of their communities.

Design for change

Let's face it - even the most ethical product is not worth producing if it isn't desirable and durable. For us, the design is more than just a pretty surface. Good design creates fascinating and functional products that serve as a tool for creating a more inclusive future. SERA HELSINKI's ethical and empowering approach equals timeless design and traditional crafting methods. Our rugs are natural products from pure sheep wool, and our processes do not use any harmful chemicals.

Truly transparent production

The production chain of SERA HELSINKI products is fully transparent from the beginning to the end. We know the origin of our natural and organic materials. We monitor the whole production process from sheep-herding to thread-spinning and rug-weaving closely. To prove this, we provide videos and images for our customers of their very own rug's crafting process.

OUR COMMITMENTS



The United Nations developed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. Our work advances, especially goals 1, 5, and 10, as they outline the areas in which we have the largest impact.

1. No Poverty



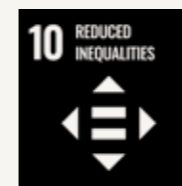
Every fifth person that lives in extreme poverty has a disability. If we want to end poverty in all its forms, we have to empower persons with disabilities. In Ethiopia, 95% of persons with disabilities live in poverty, and 85% live in the countryside. SERA HELSINKI works in Addis Ababa and in rural Ethiopia to create income and better living standards for these groups.

5. Gender Equality



In Ethiopia, 74% of women aged 15-49 are mutilated. In society, women are discriminated against, and women with disabilities are double-discriminated. SERA HELSINKI aims to create business opportunities for single mothers and women with disabilities. When a mother is empowered, it is more likely that her children will be educated and get a better future.

10. Reduce Inequalities



Only under 8 % of children with disabilities attend school in Ethiopia. Persons with disabilities are highly stigmatized in African cultures. SERA HELSINKI is committed to train and work with persons with disabilities. When persons with disabilities create beautiful rugs for export, it allows their communities and societies to see their potential and abilities.

Creating Opportunities

We began in 2016 with eight weavers, and today we employ more than 500 artisans and shepherds, most of whom are blind or disabled. Our five-year goal is to employ 200 new people with disabilities in Ethiopia. In the future, we want to expand our innovative business model to other countries and spread its positive impacts. Follow SERA HELSINKI's journey to see the progress of our work.

FUTURE DREAMS

Sera Helsinki and Abilis Foundation have started projects in the rural villages of Mahal Meda, Tsehay Sena, and Molale in Ethiopia. We have found around 300 persons with disabilities in these villages. We have started skills and business training together with Ethiopian NGOs (non-governmental organizations). The persons with disabilities have their own sheep and they have started wool spinning for Sera's rugs. We hope that the micro businesses in these villages can be successful and that the communities in the countryside will see all the potential that people with disabilities have. We hope that they will become active members of their communities and understand their rights.

Sera Helsinki and Abilis have created a new type of business model. We would love to expand this model to other countries and create a positive impact more widely.



OUR PROCESS



WOOLEN RUGS

Our woolen rugs are made according to hundreds of years old Ethiopian traditions. The rugs are completely hand made. The woolen fleece is hand shorn of the sheep, hand carded and spun into thread.

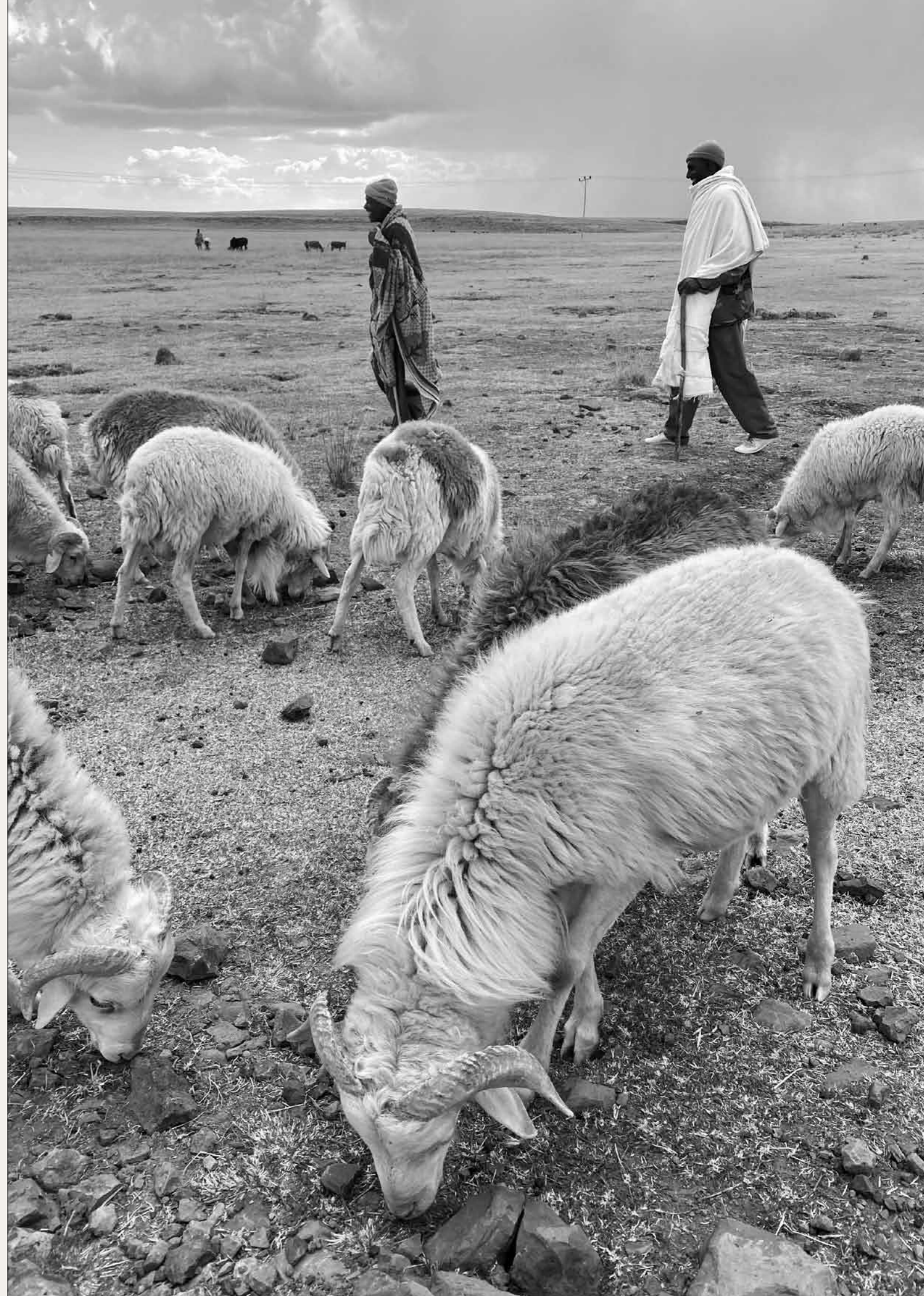
The thread is washed with boiling water and soap. It is not chemically treated, so the thread keeps its natural lanolin, which helps to remove any dirt on the carpet. We use only the beautiful colors of sheep - black, brown and natural white. Every sheep has an unique color, which makes every carpet one of a kind.



SHEPHERDING

Shepherding Devotion

The wool of the rugs originates from the highlands of Ethiopia. The climate is cool in these regions, and therefore the villages have long traditions using wool. The farmers own the sheep and treat them with the greatest respect. The sheep roam freely in nature and are looked after by disabled shepherds. Often the mothers of the families spin wool thread from their sheep.



THREAD MAKING

Handcrafting Possibilities

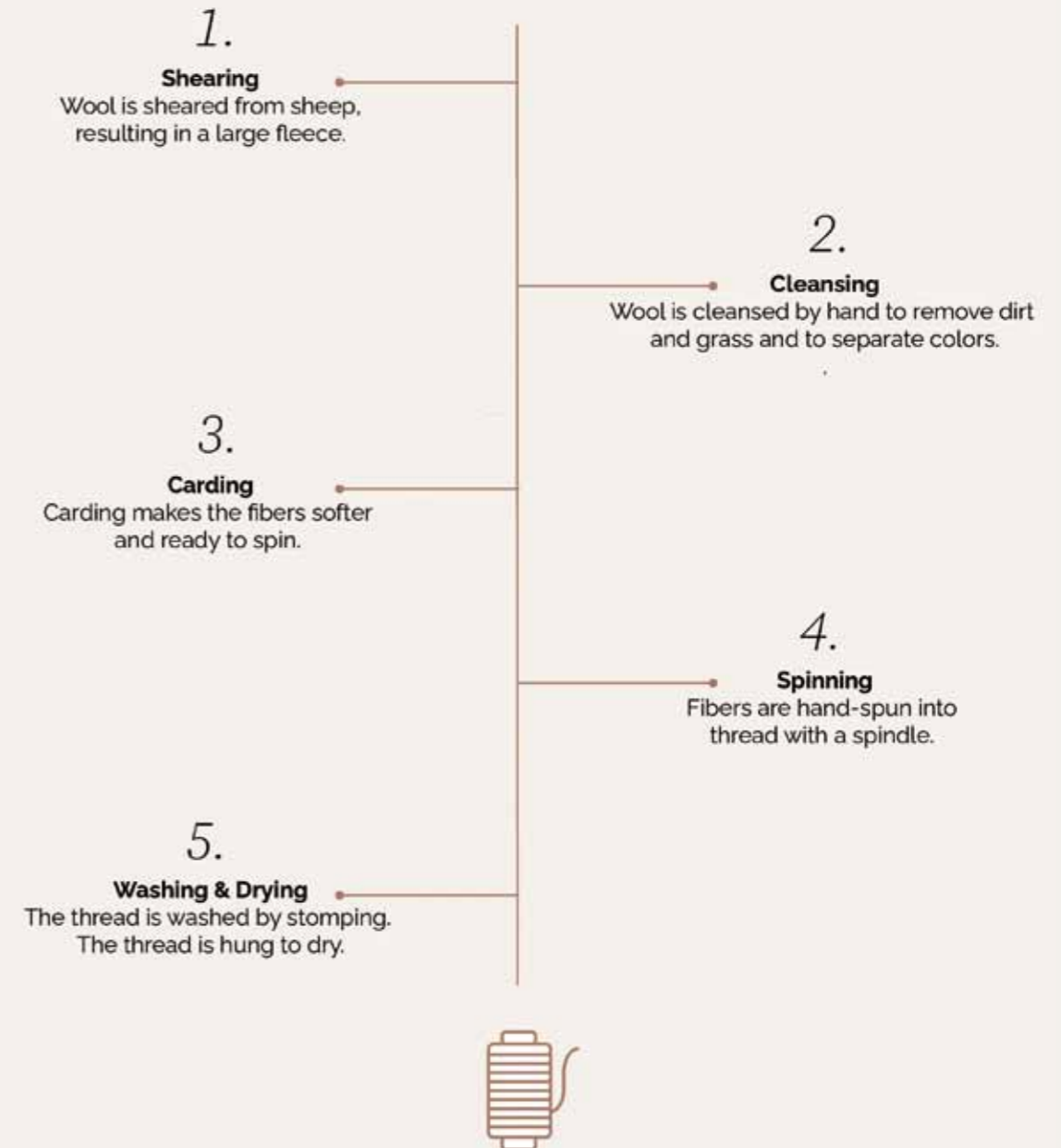
Our wool thread is entirely handmade by using ancient traditions in the highlands of Ethiopia. These villages are rural and very poor. Spinning is often a side income, making it possible to raise artisans and their families above extreme poverty.

New Perspectives For The Disabeld

Thread-spinning is excellent from a disability perspective as it can be accomplished with many injuries. Besides, a spinner can make thread from a domicile, and it does not require moving in inaccessible environments. Simultaneously, a disabled mother can combine working and watching over children while spinning. One spinner spins about 0.5 kilograms of wool yarn a day.

Enabling Income

Having a disability is strongly stigmatized in Ethiopia, often persons with disabilities hide in their homes and are excluded from their communities. We went door to door in the villages to find these persons. By 2021 we have found 300 people and now we are teaching them how to card and spin the wool thread for our rugs. Our aim is that they become active members of their communities and understand their rights.





1. Spinning by hand



3. Drying the pure and natural woolen thread



2. Washing the thread by water and soap.



4. Natural sheep colors and the colors of the thread

WEAVING AND KNOTTING RUGS

Weaving Inclusion

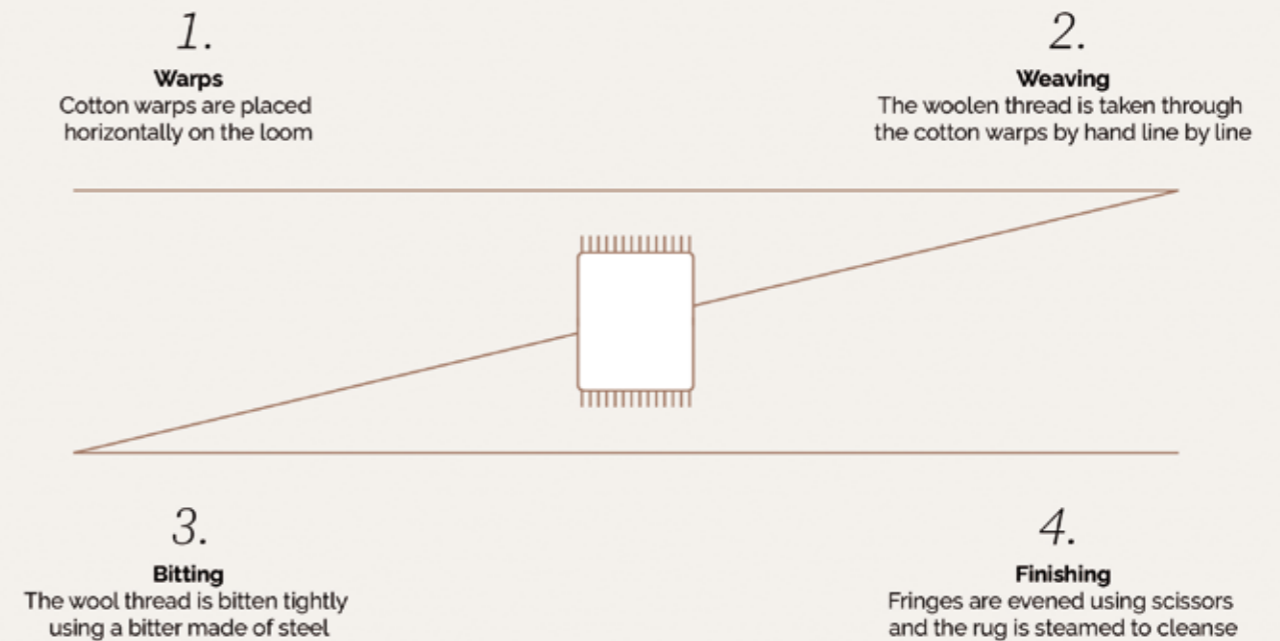
In 2016 SERA HELSINKI started with eight female weavers. We trained these women weaving techniques, how to understand geometrics and how to measure. Currently, these eight women have trained about 160 artisans in Addis Ababa. SERA HELSINKI has several workshops in the city; some operate as NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) and some private businesses. Every SERA HELSINKI rug is a result of teamwork. If one person is sighted, she can lead those that might be visually impaired.

Meaningful way to make a living

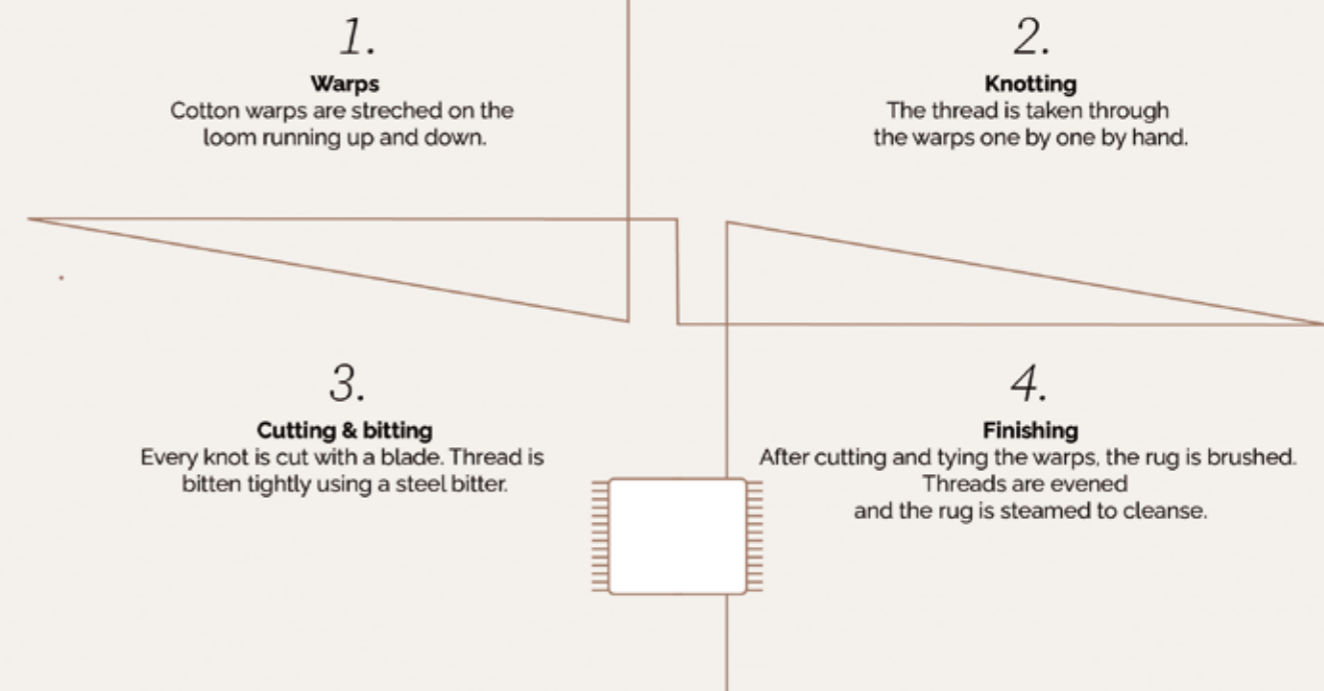
Many of our artisans can't read or write and have been excluded from the society they live in. The unfortunate fate of a person with a disability is often to be a beggar on the street. Together with organizations, we teach life skills (e.g., protection against covid19 virus) and human rights to our artisans.

SERA HELSINKI pays a higher rug price compared to the local markets. Thanks to a meaningful occupation, the disabled become active and empowered members of their communities and are no longer stigmatized people whose status depends on others.

WEAVING RUGS



KNOTTING RUGS

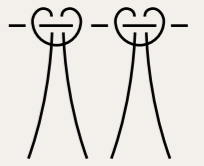


KNOTTED VS. WOVEN

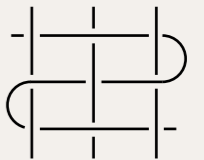
On the knotted carpets the warps are vertically on the loom. The thread is tied around two warps and cut by hand. One square meter weights around five kilograms and the knotted carpets are thick.

On the woven carpets the warps are horizontally on the loom. The looms have pedals and the woolen thread crosses the warps. One square meter weights around two kilograms and the woven carpet is thinner than the knotted carpet.

Knotted



Woven





1. Bitting by hand, the carpets are tight and dense.



3. Cutting the correct height of the knots.



2. One carpet is team work of five artisans for one month.



4. Finishing the carpet

SERA
COLLEC-
TIONS



MAKERS

Asnakech Daba – Model Master

Asnakech has been part of Sera Helsinki story since very beginning. Asnakech is a very talented weaver with a creative mind. She has become a leader of the whole carpet team. She is developing totally new techniques, which ables us to produce the Finnish designs. She is a single mother of two daughters. Now when Asnakech works for Sera Helsinki, she has multiplied her salary level and both of her daughters are going to university.



E-1027

collection *by* Samu-Jussi Koski

Human rights and minorities have always been important for Samu-Jussi Koski, so it was a joy for him to create a new rug design for Sera. As a designer you can directly influence the lives of women with disabilities in Ethiopia. This desire created a new rug called E-1027. The name reveals the source of the inspiration: a modernist Villa of female architect Eileen Grey.



E-1027

E-1027 by Samu-Jussi Koski



E-1027 - woven with knotted parts

E-1027



E-1027 by Samu-Jussi Koski



E-1027 - woven with knotted parts

E-1027

E-1027 by Samu-Jussi Koski



E-1027 - knotted with two hights

SAARISTO

collection *by* Anna Pirkola

Sera Helsinki – Designers

Saaristo (archipelago) was born from Anna Pirkola's love of the sea. Since she was a small child, Anna has enjoyed watching the sea and its constantly changing atmosphere. The movement of the ocean is always different and yet so calming. Anna wanted to bring this same feeling to the rugs, which are handmade. Every rug is unique like the waves of the sea. Creating a collection for Sera was an exciting project for Anna. "It was an honor to create a collection for a company like Sera. Their values, actions and story are something everyone should hear about. When these components are combined with high natural raw materials, handwork and high quality, it's hard to find a more inspiring project."



VIRTA

Saaristo by Anna Pirkola



Virta - knotted with two heights

LAINÉ

Saaristo by Anna Pirkola



Laine - knotted with two heights

LAINE

Saaristo by Anna Pirkola



Laine - woven with knotted parts

VALLI

Saaristo by Anna Pirkola



Valli - knotted with two heights

LUOTO

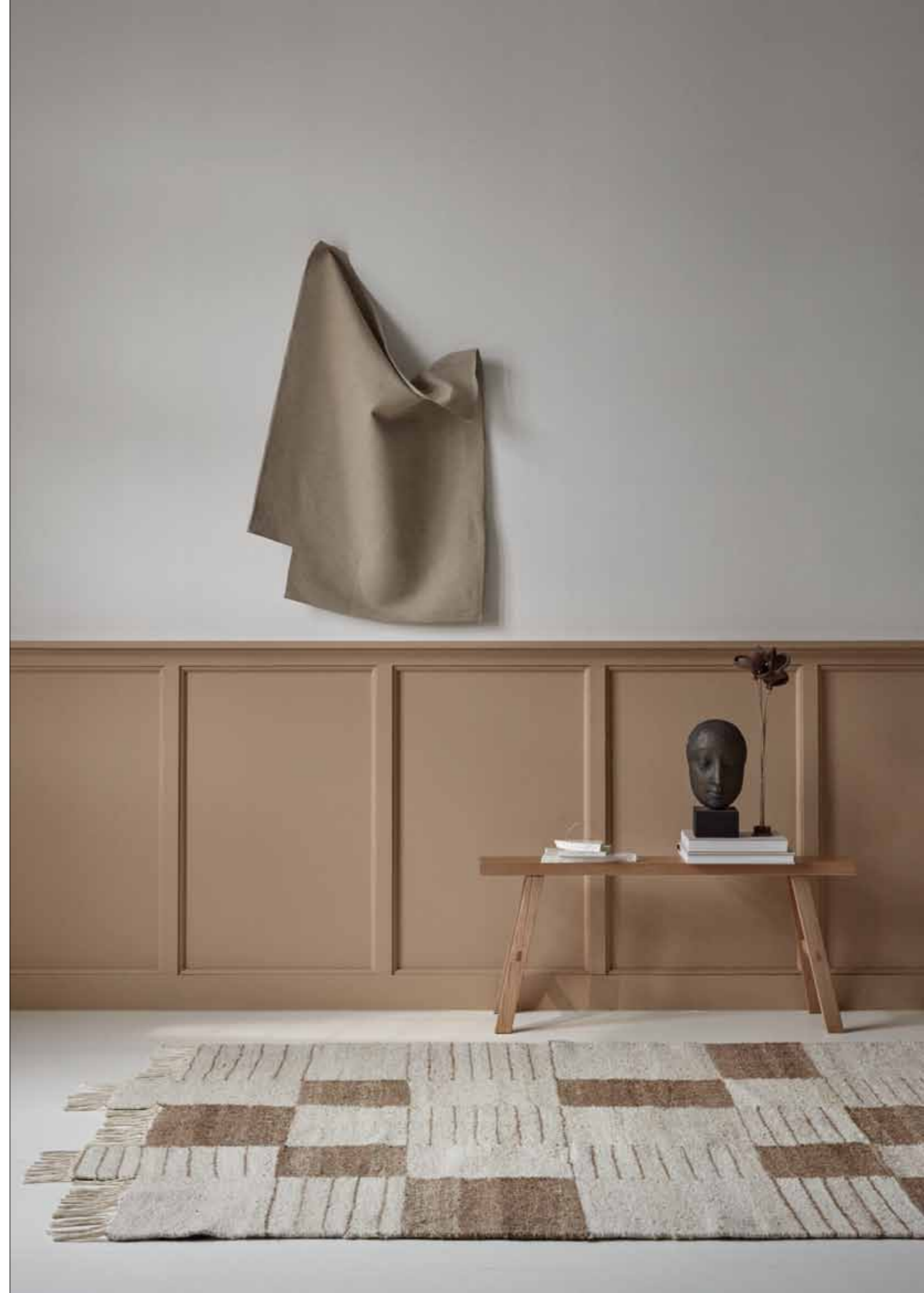
Saaristo by Anna Pirkola



Luoto - knotted with two heights

PALSTA

Saaristo by Anna Pirkola



Palsta - woven

VUORISTO

collection *by* Peeta Peltola

I was very happy when Sera proposed cooperation regarding the rug collection. It was really inspiring to be able to make a joint collection together with other talented designers. I have always admired Sera's rugs and towels, and the story behind them. I wanted to make an asymmetric pattern that breaks through the rug. I drew the pattern freehand and for the first drafts it fell into place and felt good. Sera's artisans made a version of the pattern based on my sketch that can be duplicated and I liked it right away. The colors of the rug are so neutral that the pattern allows room for play. The high knots emphasizes the pattern. I heard that the rug makers had seen the mountain range around their home in the pattern, and now I can see it too! That's how the carpet got its name.



VUORISTO

Vuoristo by Peeta Peltola



Vuoristo - knotted with two heights

VUORISTO

Vuoristo by Peeta Peltola



Vuoristo - knotted with two heights

NURJA

collection *by* Laura Seppänen

I wanted to design a carpet that takes part in its surroundings. Instead of the carpet's essence taking over the space, it rather gives it, thus becoming a part of the whole. The name "Nurja" comes from the unruly arrangement of the fringes of the rug. The geometric regularity of the rug, the differences in the height of the pile and the placement of the fringes together form a seemingly calm, yet interesting whole with details.



NURJA

Nurja by Laura Seppänen



Nurja - knotted with two heights

NURJA

Nurja by Laura Seppänen



Nurja - woven with knotted parts



ABEBA

collection *by* Mifuko

The Abeba rug designed by Mifuko was inspired by the capital of Ethiopia, whose name Addis Abeba means "new flower" in the local language. The pattern of the rug resembles the bricks of the buildings or the rhythm of the city's criss-crossing roads. The colors of the sheep's wool are beautifully vivid and the brown color is like sun-burnt earth.



ABEBA



Abeba by Mifuko

Abeba - woven



ABEBA



Abeba - woven

Abeba by Mifuko



JUURET

collection *by* Anna Suoheimo

Our first collection, Juuret (2016), is a tribute to traditions created by Anna Suoheimo. We are returning to our roots: lambswool, carding, wheel spinning, and hand weaving. We bring these traditions to you in a modern way by producing unique and minimalistic rugs. The Juuret 2016 collection got its inspiration from Finnish nature, seasons, and wilderness – places we have visited on day trips and spent happy moments.



KIDE



Juuret by Anna Suoheimo

Kide - available knotted and woven

KAARNA



Juuret by Anna Suoheimo

Kaarna - available knotted and woven

POLKU



Juuret by Anna Suoheimo

Polku - available knotted and woven

RETKI



Juuret by Anna Suoheimo

Retki - knotted

KUURA



Kuura - woven

TUOHI



Tuohi - knotted

AAVA

Juuret by Anna Suoheimo



SERA RUGS



Aava - available knotted and woven

PRODUCT LIST

E-1027



Material:

100 % lamb wool

natural colors

Colors:

white - brown - black ●●●

white - brown ●●

white - black ●●

Technique:

knotted ㉞

woven + knotted ㉞ ㉞

Size:

200 cm x 300 cm

170 cm x 240 cm

Available in custom sizes

Virta



Material: 100 % lamb wool natural colors
Colors: white - brown - black ● ● ●
Technique: knotted 𐄂𐄂
Size: 200 cm x 300 cm 170 cm x 240 cm Available in custom sizes

Valli



Material: 100 % lamb wool natural colors
Colors: white - grey ● ● white - brown ● ● white ●
Technique: knotted 𐄂𐄂
Size: 170 cm x 240 cm Available in custom sizes

Laine



Material: 100 % lamb wool natural colors
Colors: white - brown ● ● white - black ● ● white ●
Technique: knotted 𐄂𐄂 woven + knotted 𐄂𐄂
Size: 200 cm x 300 cm 170 cm x 240 cm Available in custom sizes

Luoto



Material: 100 % lamb wool natural colors
Colors: white - brown ● ●
Technique: knotted 𐄂𐄂
Size: 170 cm x 240 cm Available in custom sizes

Palsta



Material:

100 % lamb wool

natural colors

Colors:

white - black ●●

white - brown ●●

Technique:

woven 𐀀

Size:

200 cm x 300 cm

170 cm x 240 cm

Available in custom size

Nurja



Material:

100 % lamb wool

natural colors

Colors:

white - black ●●

white - brown ●●

white ●

Technique:

woven + knotted 𐀀 𐀁

Size:

180 cm x 300 cm

150 cm x 240 cm

Available in custom sizes

Vuoristo



Material:

100 % lamb wool

natural colors

Colors:

white - black ●●

white - brown ●●

white ●

Technique:

knotted 𐀁

woven + knotted 𐀀 𐀁

Size:

200 cm x 300 cm

170 cm x 240 cm

Available in custom sizes

Abeba



Material:

100 % lamb wool

natural colors

Colors:

white - black ●●

white - brown ●●

Technique:

woven 𐀀

Size:

100 cm x 200 cm

Available in custom sizes

Kaarna



Material:

100 % lamb wool natural colors

Colors:

white - black ●●

Technique:

knotted 𐄂𐄂 woven 𐄂𐄂

Size:

200 cm x 310 cm 170 cm x 260 cm 100 cm x 210 cm

Available in custom sizes

Kuura



Material:

100 % lamb wool natural colors

Colors:

white - black ●●

Technique:

woven 𐄂𐄂

Size:

200 cm x 300 cm 200 cm x 250 cm 100 cm x 200 cm

Available in custom sizes

Kide



Material:

100 % lamb wool natural colors

Colors:

white - black ●●

Technique:

knotted 𐄂𐄂 woven 𐄂𐄂

Size:

200 cm x 300 cm 170 cm x 240 cm 100 cm x 200 cm

Available in custom sizes

Polku



Material:

100 % lamb wool natural colors

Colors:

white - black ●● white - grey ●●

Technique:

knotted 𐄂𐄂 woven 𐄂𐄂

Size:

200 cm x 300 cm 170 cm x 240 cm 100 cm x 200 cm

Available in custom sizes

Retki



Material:

100 % lamb wool natural colors

Colors:

white – black ●●

Technique:

knotted ʘʘ woven 罎

Size:

200 cm x 300 cm 170 cm x 240 cm 100 cm x 200 cm

Available in custom sizes

Tuohi



Material:

100 % lamb wool natural colors

Colors:

white – black ●●

Technique:

knotted ʘʘ

Size:

200 cm x 300 cm 170 cm x 240 cm 100 cm x 200 cm

Available in custom sizes

Aava



Material:

100 % lamb wool natural colors

Colors:

white – black ●●

Technique:

knotted ʘʘ woven 罎

Size:

200 cm x 300 cm 170 cm x 240 cm 100 cm x 200 cm

Available in custom sizes

SERA *COTTON* *TOWELS*

Artisans hand spin the natural fibers, pot dye the thread in small batches and weave the towels on traditional handlooms. Hand made thread makes the towels extremely soft and absorbing. The dyes are all AZO free and REACH certified. All Sera Helsinki towels have WFTO Fair Trade mark.



Sera Towels



Sizes: Beach towels 100 x 180 cm

Material: 100 % cotton

Colors: white, grey, black ●●●

Technique: woven

Sertificate: WFTO, Fair trade

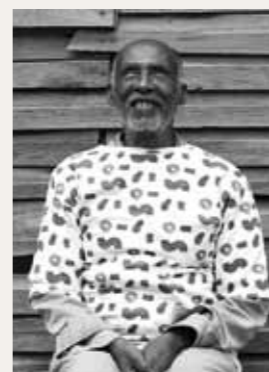
Hand towels 50 x 80 cm





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