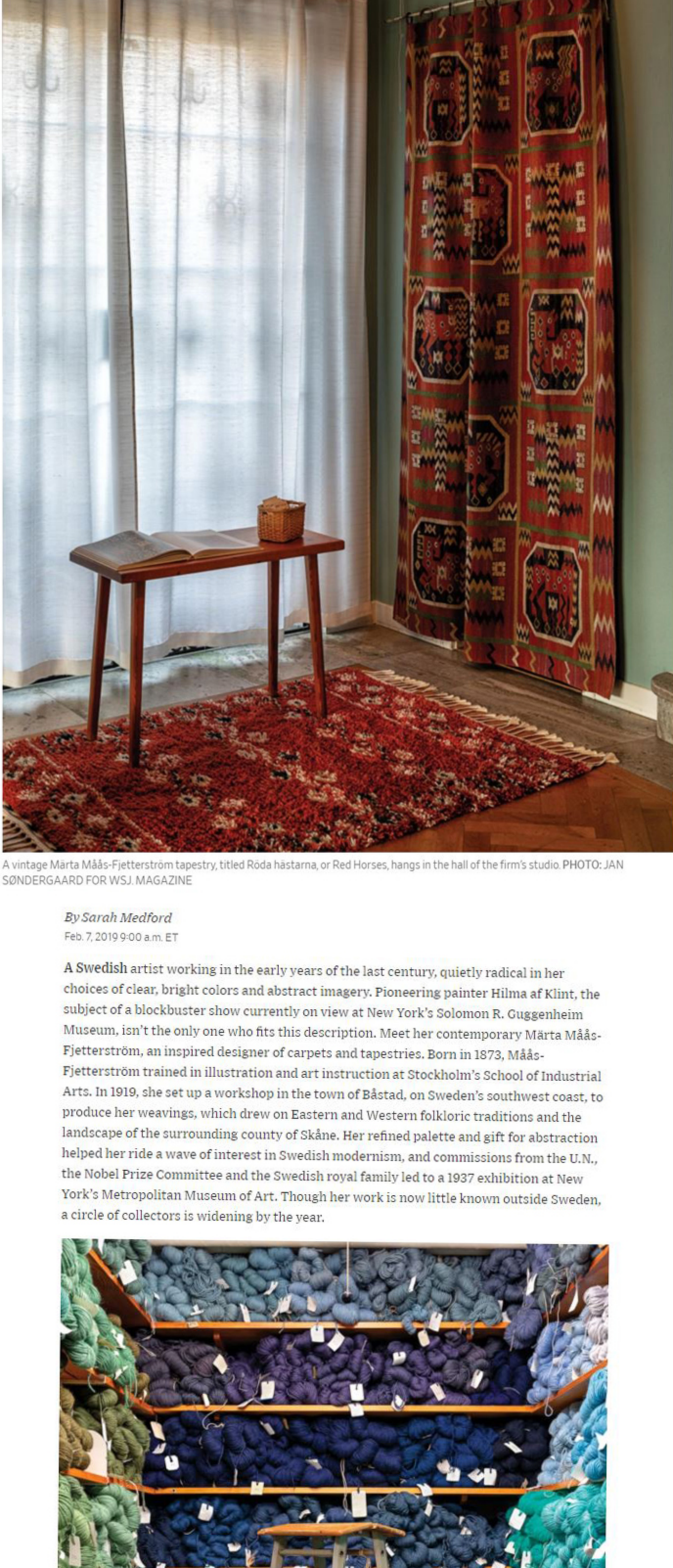


WSJ.MAGAZINE | ART & DESIGN

The Enduring Appeal of Märta Måås-Fjetterström's Modernist Swedish Rugs

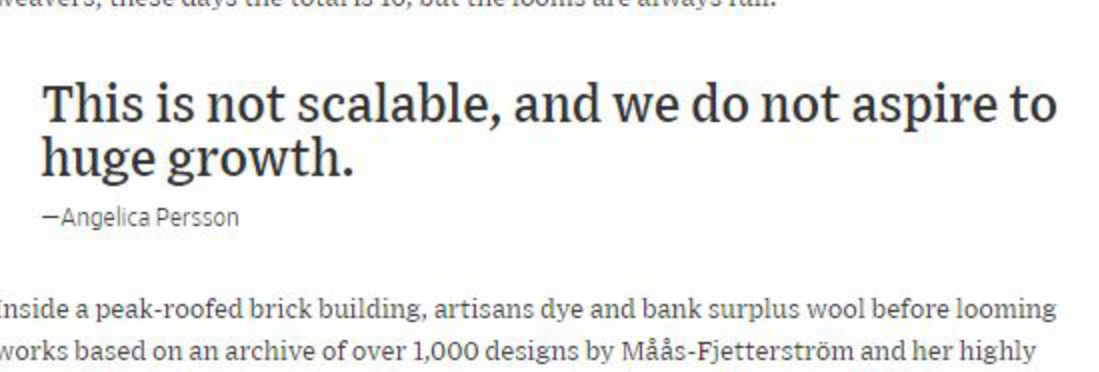
At 100, the Swedish rug firm still produces covetable designs



A vintage Märta Måås-Fjetterström tapestry, titled Rida hastarna, or Red Horses, hangs in the hall of the firm's studio. PHOTO: JAN SÖNDERGAARD FOR WSJ MAGAZINE

By Sarah Medford
Feb. 7, 2019 9:00 a.m. ET

A Swedish artist working in the early years of the last century, quietly radical in her choices of clear, bright colors and abstract imagery. Pioneering painter Hilma af Klint, the subject of a blockbuster show currently on view at New York's Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, isn't the only one who fits this description. Meet her contemporary Märta Måås-Fjetterström, an inspired designer of carpets and tapestries. Born in 1873, Måås-Fjetterström trained in illustration and art instruction at Stockholm's School of Industrial Arts. In 1919, she set up a workshop in the town of Båstad, on Sweden's southwest coast, to produce her weavings, which drew on Eastern and Western folkloric traditions and the landscape of the surrounding county of Skåne. Her refined palette and gift for abstraction helped her ride a wave of interest in Swedish modernism, and commissions from the U.N., the Nobel Prize Committee and the Swedish royal family led to a 1937 exhibition at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. Though her work is now little known outside Sweden, a circle of collectors is widening by the year.



More than eight tons of yarn is stored in the basement. PHOTO: JAN SÖNDERGAARD FOR WSJ MAGAZINE

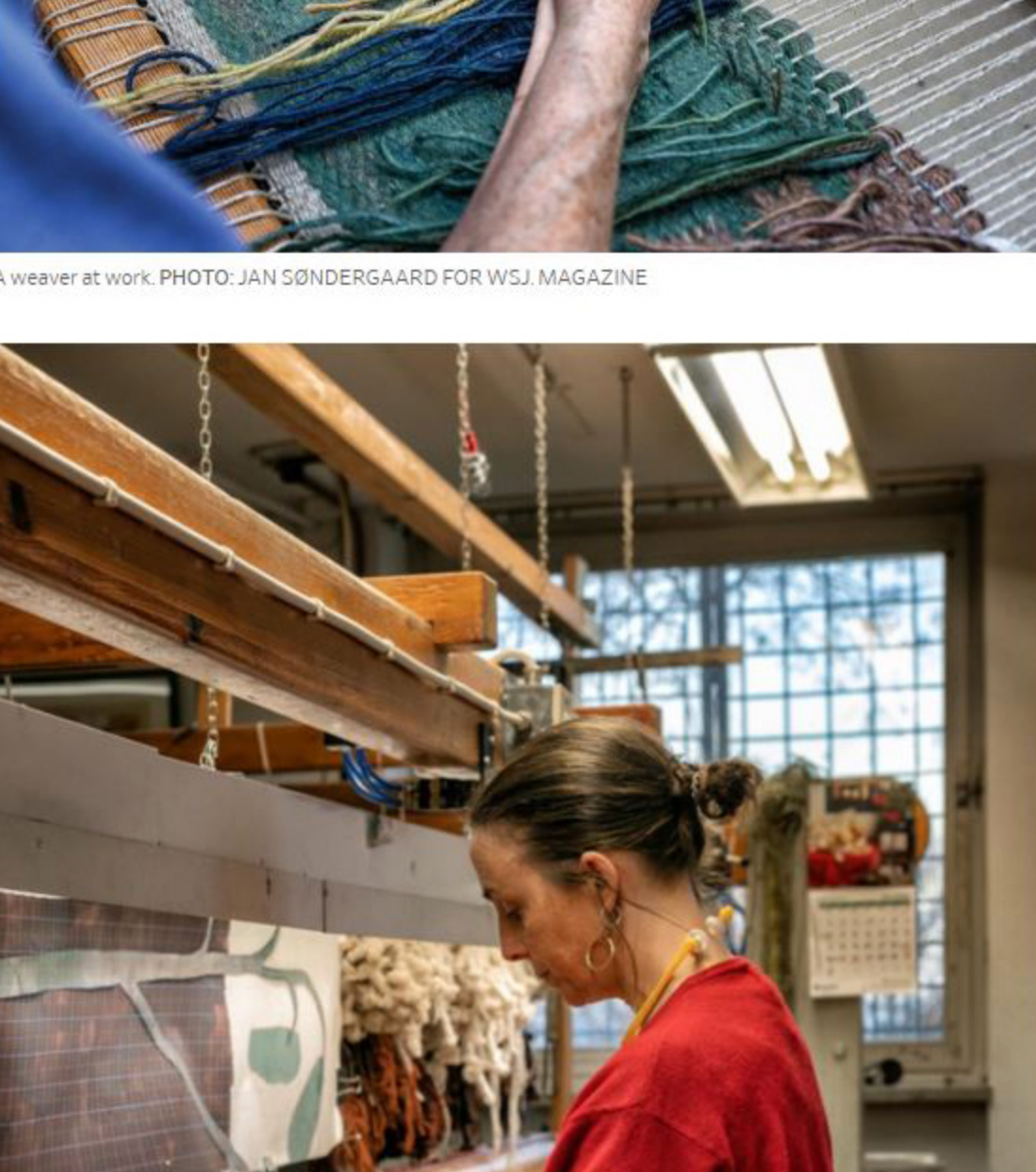
According to the studio's current managing director, Angelica Persson, Måås-Fjetterström pushed the limits of traditional weaving techniques to achieve naturalistic effects. Flatweaves, tapestry weaves and piles were all turned out from European long-fiber wool, synthetically dyed so that each color recipe could be duplicated exactly. Pieces were signed either "MMF," if produced during Måås-Fjetterström's lifetime, or "AB MMF," for those made after her death in 1941. At its height in the '50s and '60s, the workshop employed 62 weavers; these days the total is 16, but the looms are always full.

This is not scalable, and we do not aspire to huge growth.

—Angelica Persson

Inside a peak-roofed brick building, artisans dye and bank surplus wool before looming works based on an archive of over 1,000 designs by Måås-Fjetterström and her highly accomplished disciples. Like Barbro Nilsson and Marianne Richter. In addition to newly woven pieces, the studio sells vintage work and contemporary creations by artists such as Olafur Eliasson and Mamma Andersson, who have been invited to collaborate. At auction, pristine early examples have sold for as much as \$215,000, while later works in so-so condition have gone for as little as \$5,000. (Thanks to current labor and material costs, a new piece based on an archival design can sometimes cost twice as much as an original.) In the 30-plus years that New York rug dealer Joe Hakimian of FJ Hakimian has been selling vintage Måås-Fjetterström pieces, he's seen prices jump at least tenfold. Prices may rise again when a show marking the studio's 100th anniversary opens this fall at Stockholm's Royal Palace.

Though it's far from a cottage industry, the Märta Måås-Fjetterström studio still moves at a pace determined by fingers on a handloom. "This is not scalable, and we do not aspire to huge growth," Persson says. "The best-quality pieces, created with natural materials and a minimal impact on the environment, are our small contribution towards a sustainable future." mmf.se



The workshop building in Båstad, Sweden. PHOTO: JAN SÖNDERGAARD FOR WSJ MAGAZINE



A weaver at work. PHOTO: JAN SÖNDERGAARD FOR WSJ MAGAZINE

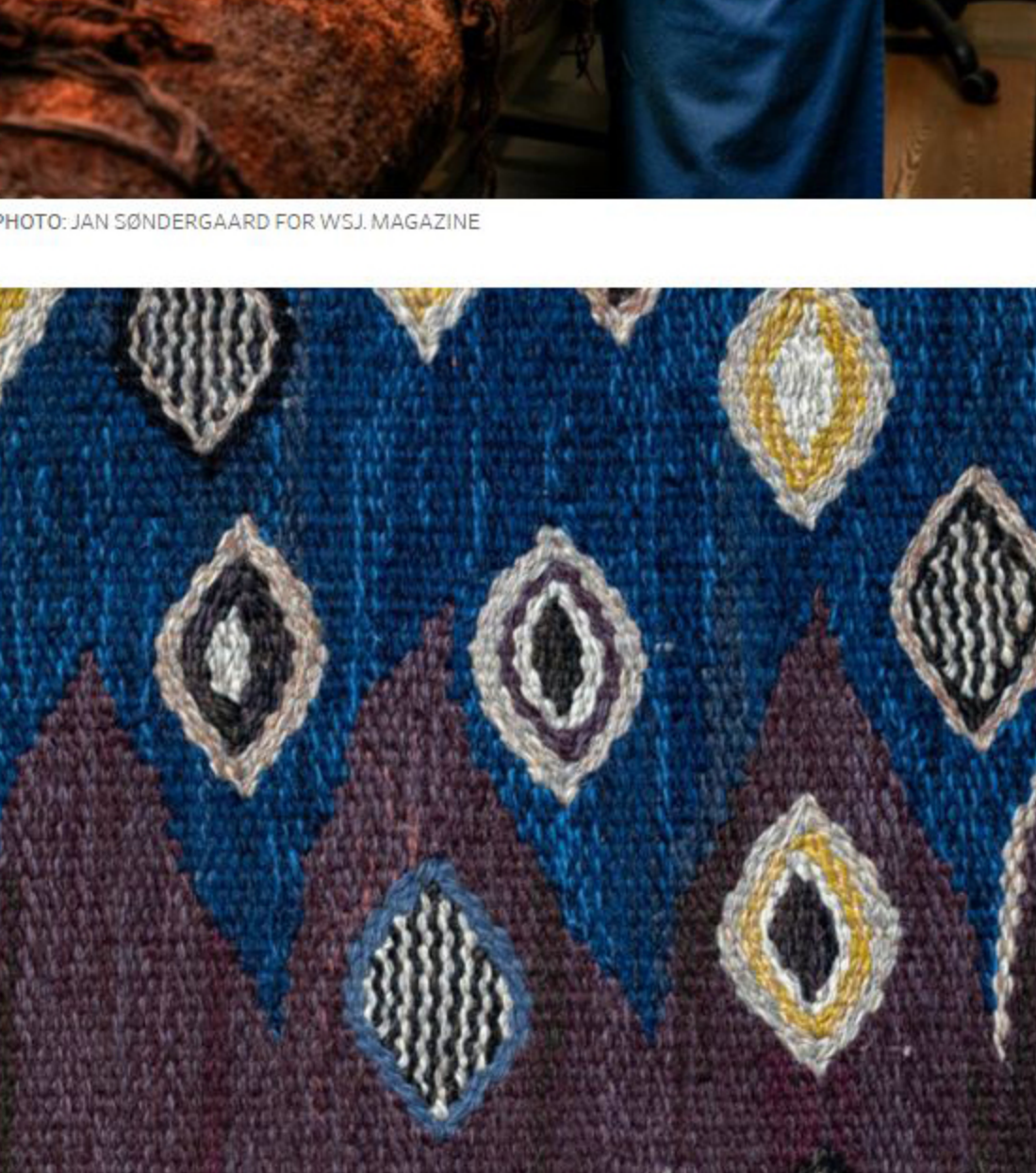


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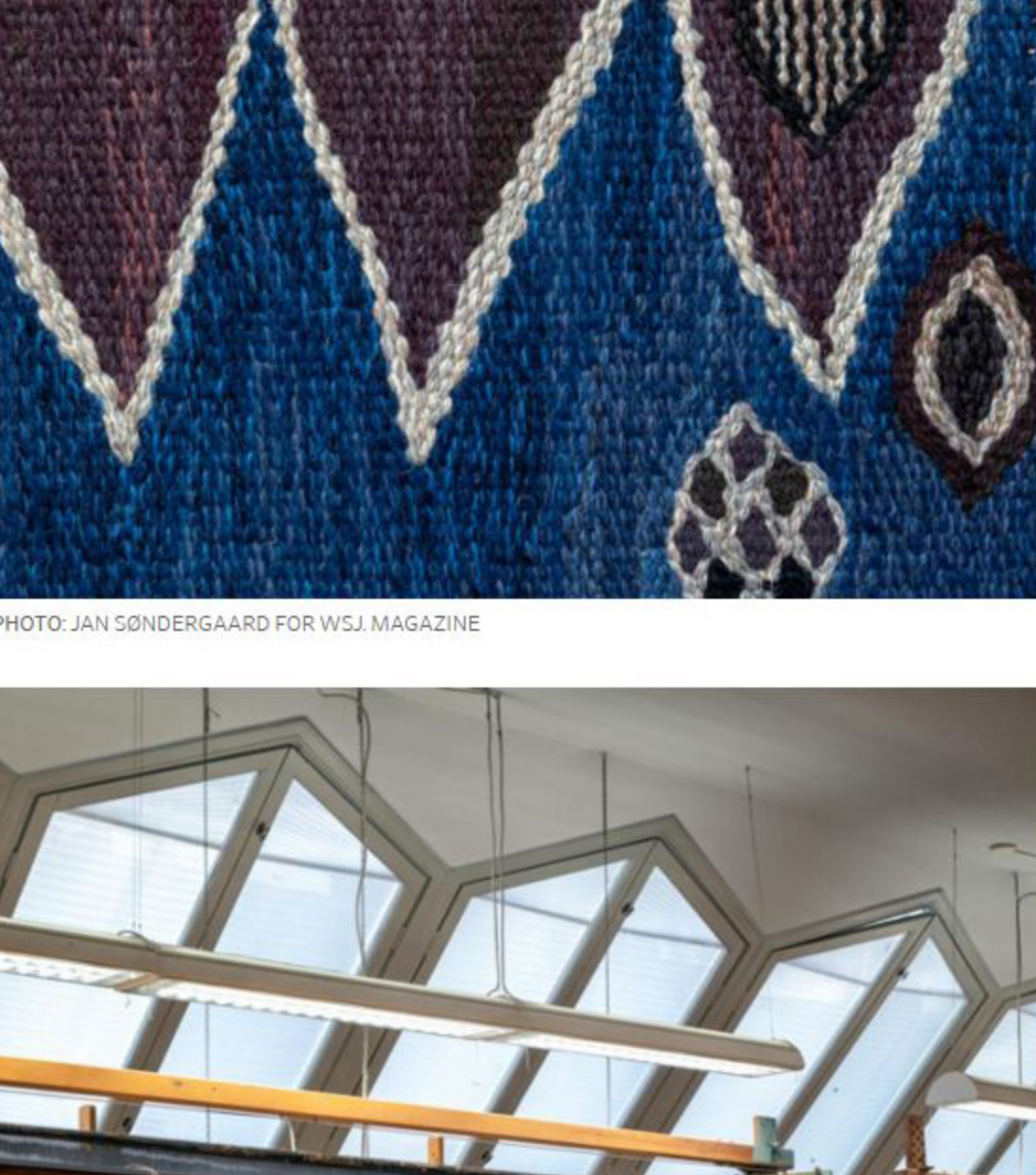
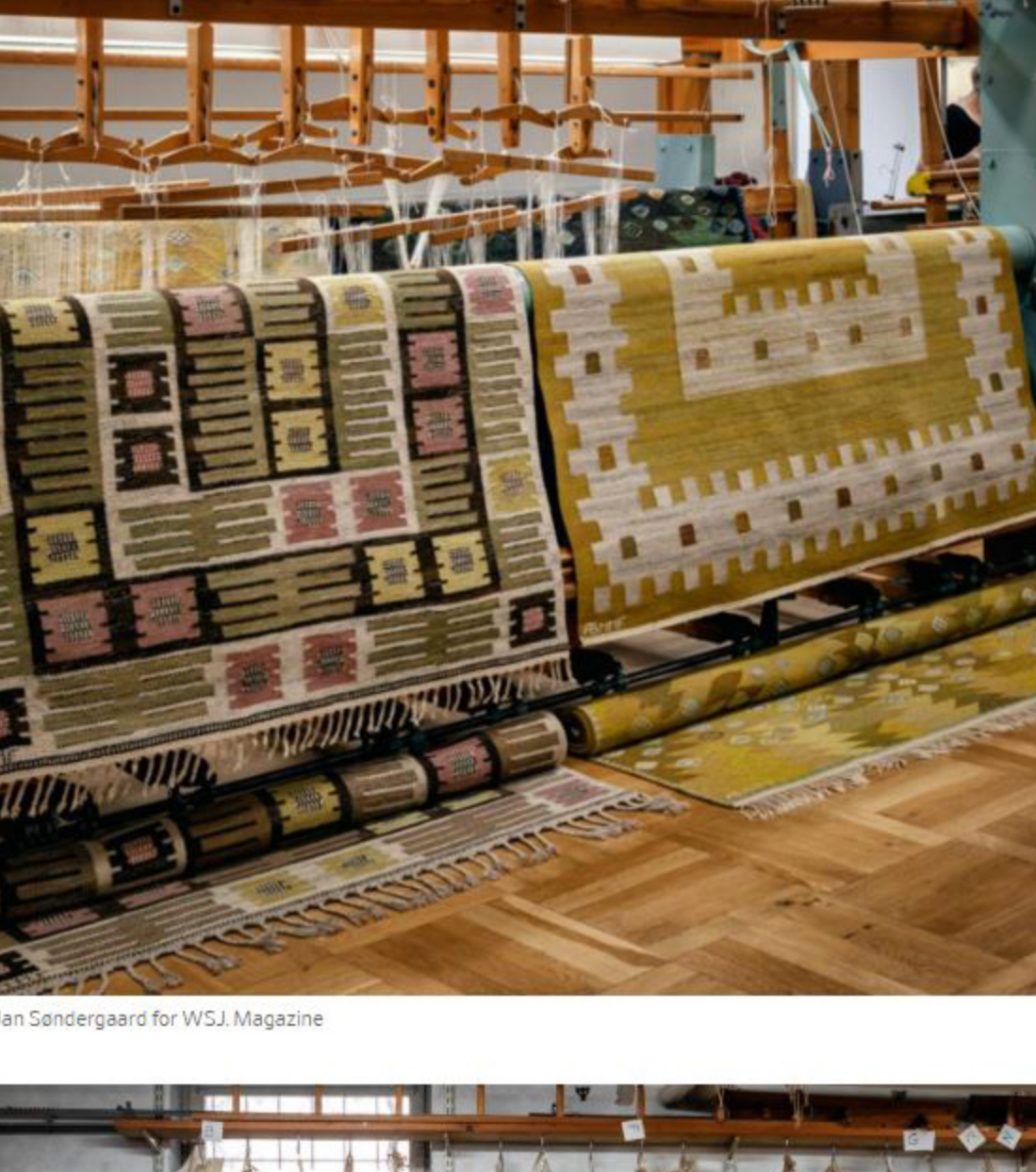


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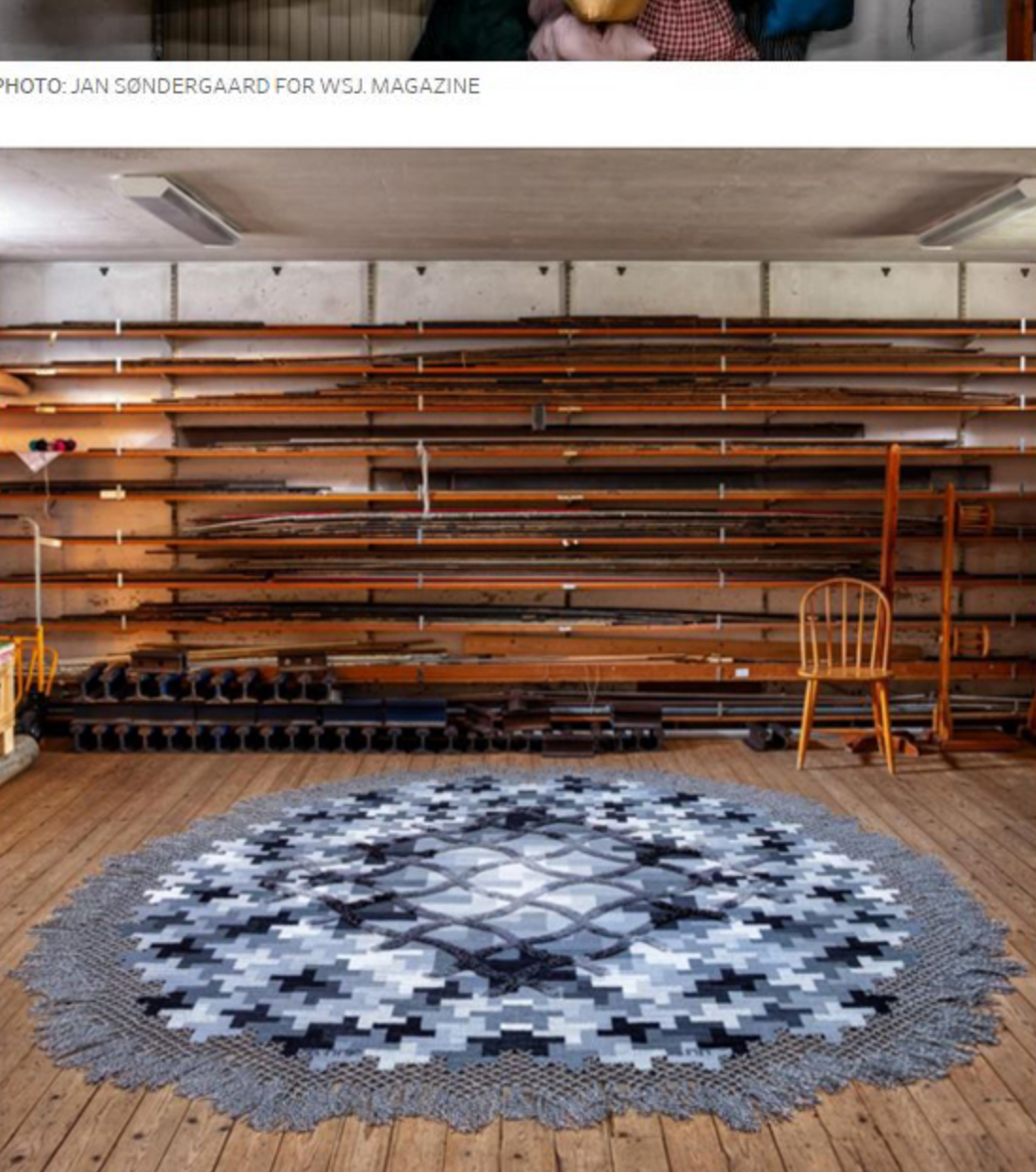


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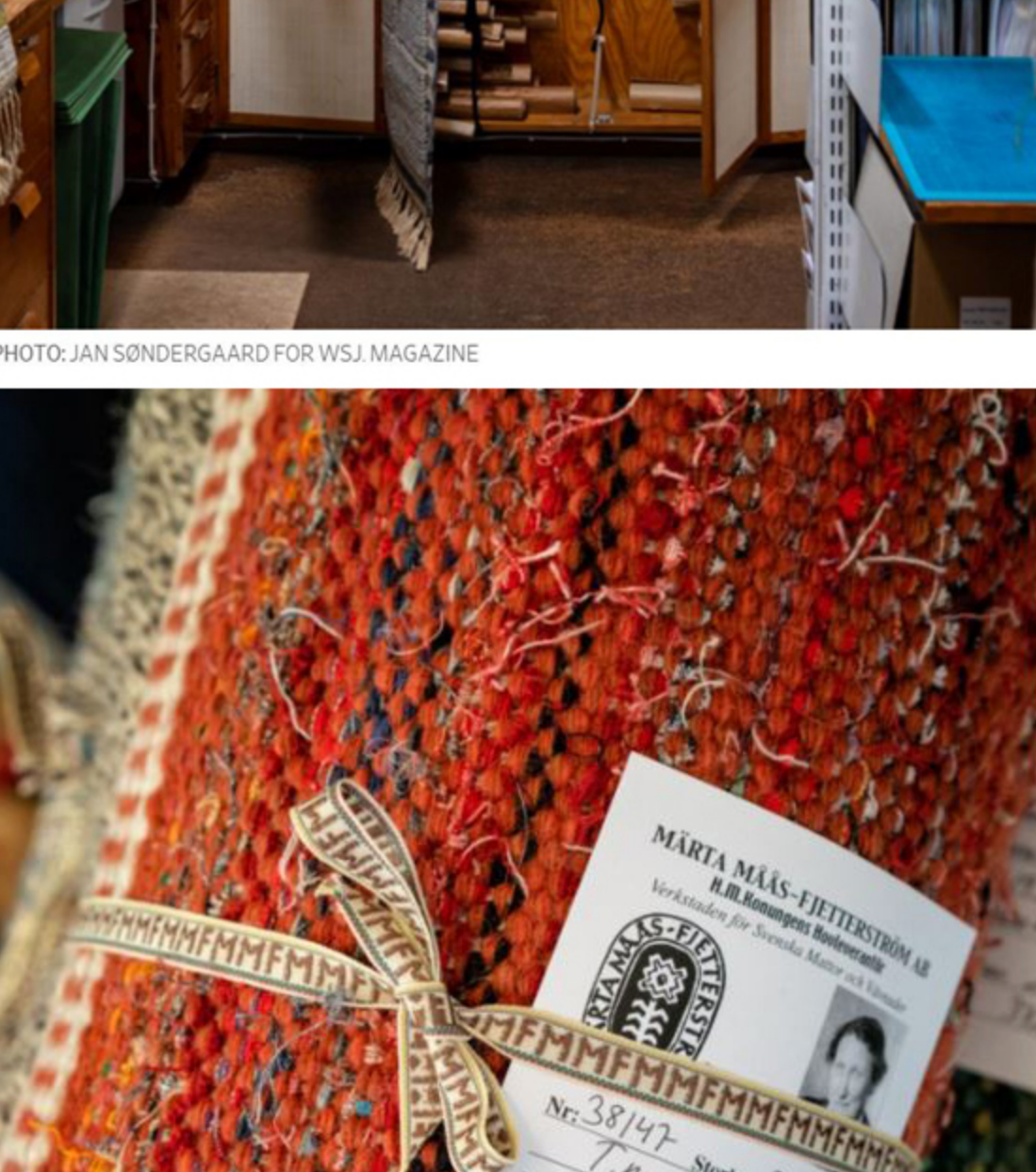


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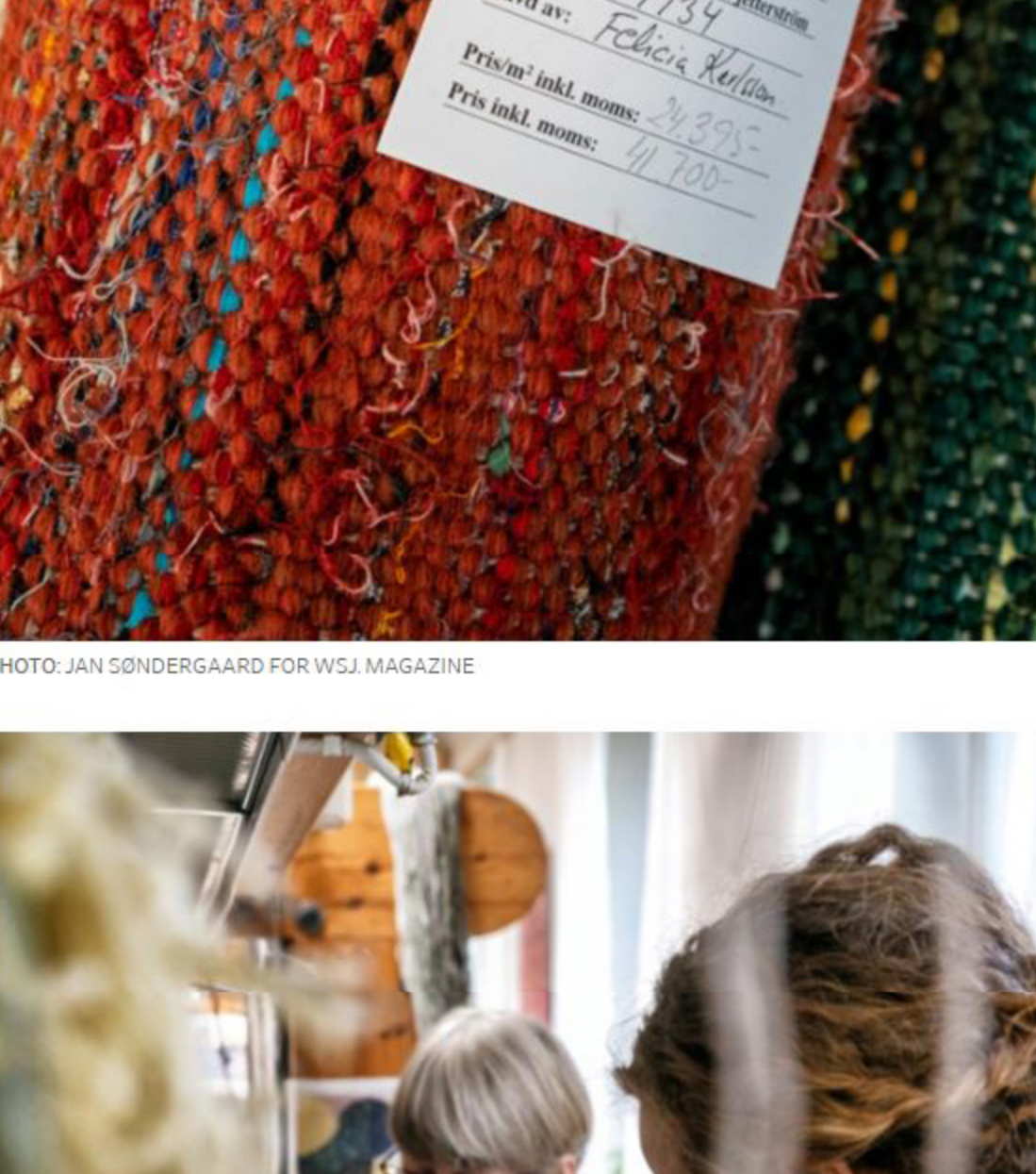


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Read the original article
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