

## **Testimonial Erasmus 06/06/2016 – 09/16/2016**

### **Finsterwolde, summer semester 2016**

#### Preparations

Preparing the stay abroad was very entertaining. The only thing that took a while, about 2 weeks, was to find cheap accommodation, as this usually thinly populated part of Holland was busy because of the summer holidays at the time I was there. I also had to buy my own private accident insurance and research it and think about which insurance option really made sense. It also took some time. Basically, I already knew what I would need to work and to document my efforts in the weaving workshop because I had already been there for a week, which was really very relaxing. The boss on site was also able to lend me a bike so I didn't need to bring one with me and was very mobile.

My supervising professor supported me well and encouraged me to pursue this specialist knowledge in a hand-weaving mill. In between, I discussed my results with him via email.

#### Accommodation

I was very lucky because after a long search online for an affordable room, I called the weaver and she gave me a tip. So I was able to find a room in the village of Finsterwolde (near Winschoten), with an acquaintance of hers. It was only a ten-minute walk and maybe a three-minute bike ride from my accommodation to the weaving mill, which was really great.

After moving in to the room in the place of my boss's friend, I initially felt like I was being observed. In the second month I was somehow able to free myself from that feeling and worked on my own project in the workshop in the evenings and just spend very little time at my room. Next time, I would try not to stay with the boss's acquaintances. But every other accommodation just wasn't affordable.

The room ended up costing me €600 a month, which was really horrible, but there was just nothing that could be done about that. If I had stayed longer I would definitely have been able to rent an entire apartment cheaper, but as I was in a rush during peak tourist season – there was simply no chance.

Finsterwolde is really very rural and apart from exploring the dirt roads by bike, there were simply no distractions apart from work. But I took two short weekend trips to Gronigen that I would not want to miss.

#### Groceries

Luckily there was at least a shop in the small village and so food was easy to come by. We always ate lunch together in the workshop. What was really great was the fact that the weaver had her own chickens, so I was able to enjoy “happy”, organically raised eggs and didn't have to buy any from the discount store.

#### Workshop life

The hours were very exemplary, every day work started at 9 a.m., there was a lunch break from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. and the evening ended at 7 p.m. at the latest. I could only stay longer if I wanted to continue working on my own projects, which I was generously allowed to do. So from the second week onwards I got my own key for the workshop and was able to move around very freely.

The weaving workshop is rather small, there is only one permanent employee who comes 1-2 days a week. There are some hand-weaving activities that are better done with two or even three people, such as untangling the warp. The three of us always did this activity together and the weeks were planned around that. So I was able to find out: What can you do on your own and what do you need help for? In principle, the workshop is always open to buyers or visitors on weekdays. In the area we know that there is always tea at 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. and so I gradually got to know the whole village.

Day by day I was allowed to take on more tasks and in the end I was able to plan and carry out weaving projects independently. Ms. XXX taught me everything from the beginning, which was really a very helpful for me. She taught me everything from materials science to writing weaving plans to executing them. She taught me how to analyse and categorise cloth. I learned plain and twill weaves and was allowed to weave practice pieces on 4 different looms. Due to the small size of the company, I was of course involved in everything:

- from the design to the sale
- exhibition preparation
- archiving of ethnic collections
- documentation
- course preparation
- translation of the instructions for weaving with cards
- trade fair preparation (unfortunately there was no trade fair while I was there)
- making test pieces for historical garments

It was really great to gain such a comprehensive impression of this craft in such a short time. But it also showed how difficult it is to make a living from such a small business. I learned a lot, it probably paved the way for me to enter the fashion world because I can now write weaving plans, which is highly sought after by employers in the industry. It was also good to be able to take on more responsibility from day to day. XXX has been teaching for a long time, but I was probably her first intern in this sense and apparently also the first who was allowed to realise their own project with her.

Next, I would like to do an internship at a larger company with a stronger focus on design. I would love to go to a fashion house in Paris or London to get to know the fashion world from the inside and find out where there could be a place for me as an accessories designer.

Special event outside of work

In the second month, I found out that there are different activities taking place in the village community centre on certain days of the week. So I started learning archery every Wednesday

evening, which was really enriching and, in addition to cycling every day, was a great sporting activity that I would like to continue!

## Conclusion

Without the financial support from Erasmus it would not have been possible for me to do this internship.

The opportunity to work independently has given me a lot of confidence in my creative abilities. That I could work on my own project, flying carpet artefacts, enabled me to complete my final collection. For me, working under the guidance of the weaver XXX was very good because she lived in Oman, Libya and Venezuela for many years and learned all the ethnic weaving techniques. Her CV and her skills prompted me to do an internship with her. She could have had a studio in another country, then I would have gone there if that would have been possible. For me the intellectual context was very important. It wasn't my intention to just learn a craft, I wanted to delve into the cultural technique of weaving and that only worked because Ms. XXX took me in and, in addition to introducing me to the craft, also made her extensive library available to me.



Weaving with a small table loom



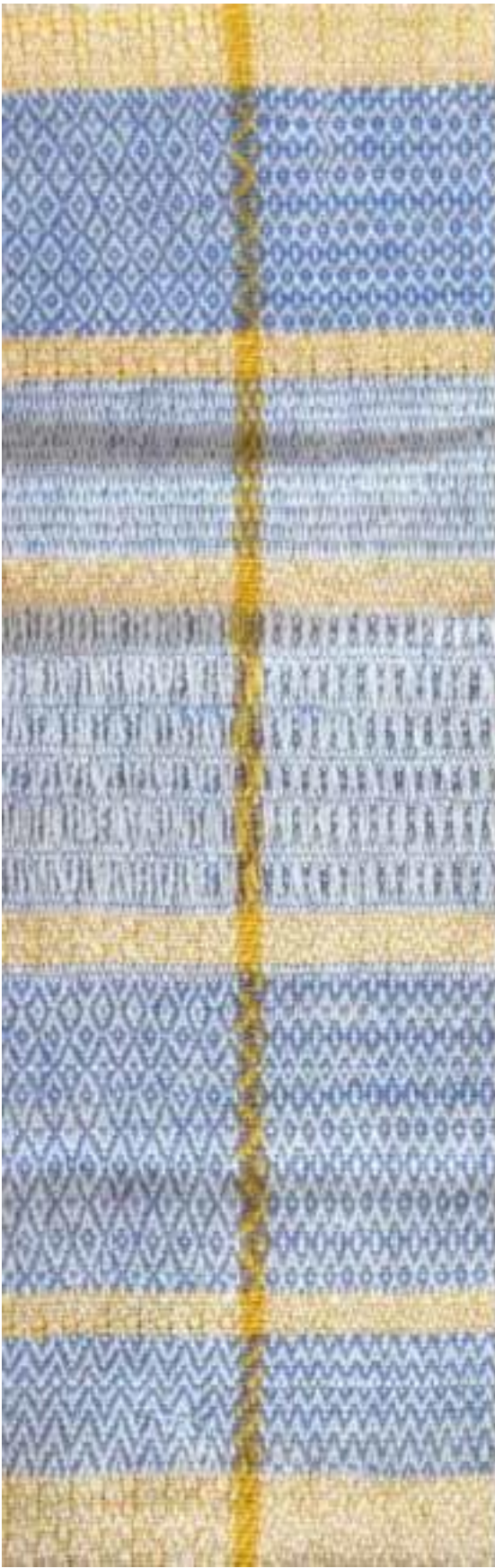
simple plain linen weave



Practice piece in twill weave on an American 4-shaft loom



Irish Raanu weaving, here a carpet for a customer



Twill weave, different patterns in one cloth



Here is my own project, linen weave, 5 meters long and 1,20 meters wide, created on an old, large 8 Schaft loom