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# A Case Study of Contemporary Textile Art in Loewe Craft Prize

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# **Keywords**

# **Abstract**

Loewe Craft Prize, textile, Continuation of Tradition, Experiments with Materials, Pictorial Character

Loewe Craft Prize is currently the most influential craft contest. During the contest, contemporary craftworks, as art with excellent aesthetic value, are selected as finalists but there are no enough studies on them as subjects. This study aimed to investigate contemporary textile pieces found in the fashion brand Loewe's Craft Prize, a Loewe Foundation Craft Prize and elucidate their expressive characteristics. The methodology of the study was a qualitative study that derives the expressive characteristics of the works within the scope of the study through case analysis along with theoretical reviews. The selection of research subjects was based on 22 works of textile pieces among the works selected as finalists for the last six years since the first year of the prize in 2016. The analysis of textile pieces showed first, the emphasis on traditional expression, second, the development of new expressive techniques for the pictorial character revealed in flat pieces. The material, and third, the expressive characteristics of contemporary textile art shown in the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize, derived based on such results were, first, the confirmation of the unique capabilities of craft through the inheritance of tradition, second, the rediscovery of textile properties through material experimentation, and third, the possibility of expanding the field of textile due to the pictorial character.

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### I. Introduction

## 1. Background and the Aims of the Study

Craft refers to a valuable genre of art that is completed through the unique manual labor of artisans based on tradition. With the development of industry, there are many manufactured goods that are easily produced at low prices, and these products are quickly consumed and easily discarded. Thus, the differentiated product strategy of luxury brands is to develop valuable products based on craftsmanship that are produced by the brand's know-how accumulated over a long period of time, along with original design, rather than materials easily produced through industry or mass manufacturing methods. Craftsmanship based on the unique skills of artisans is recognized as an important value for product differentiation for luxury brands. Hence, each brand is developing various heritage products based on their own unique skills, which are represented as their artistic identity highlighted by each luxury fashion brand.

To express such identity, brands expose the handcrafted production methods of the workshops that they operate and collaborate with through visual materials on social media, and highlight their heritage by developing workshop collections and exhibiting products from the collections. They are also making various attempts to collaborate with artistic genres to express their own artistic values, even if they do not directly utilize craft techniques. For instance, they sponsor artists through art competitions to enhance their identity and artistic value, or uphold tradition and support artists via protecting and nurturing artisans. In doing so, they strive to reinforce their luxury image. Through this, they intend to establish the image of a brand with an artistic identity and instill the perception of a brand that creates products based on such art.

The fashion brand Loewe, which began as a cooperative of leather artisans in Madrid in 1846, also cites craft as its identity, and they organized the world's first international competition for contemporary craft, supporting handcraft-based artists of exceptional talent

and vision. In pervious studies on art-related activities of luxury brands, Kim(2019) studied and elucidated the characteristics of the luxury brand's marketing collaboration with the art and culture community through the analysis of the convergence of arts and culture of fashion brand Marni, and Kim (2023) studied the case of artisan education in luxury fashion as a social responsibility activity, and investigated the cases of Chanel, LVMH, Hermès, Kering Group, and Brunello Cucinelli. While there are case studies on various brands in the literature, there is a lack of studies on the works of the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize. As the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize is considered to have a tremendous impact on the art world despite being a competition organized by a fashion brand, it is considered that a study on the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize would provide valuable data for the field, particularly if the case of the submitted works was analyzed in depth by area. Furthermore, it can be used as data for profound analysis of the artistic activities pursued by the brand.

Therefore, this study takes on textile based on the material used in fashion, among the various fields awarded in the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize as the scope of the research and aims to identify its expressive characteristics. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze the textile cases among the previous winners of the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize and to elucidate their expressive characteristics. The significance of this study is to examine the implications and possibilities of contemporary textile pieces as a contemporary craft along with the artistic values that luxury brands seek to uphold, and to reveal the characteristics of artistic activities pursued by fashion brands.

# 2. Methods and Scope

In this study, the contemporary textile cases shown in the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize, and their characteristics were analyzed. For this, the research method included a theoretical review through literature and a qualitative study through case analysis of the craft prize. First, in order to understand the reason that the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize were able to be positioned as a research subject that allows identification of the landscape of contemporary craft, the theoretical background was established by conducting a literature review on the fashion house Loewe Foundation and the establishment of the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize based on their beliefs through academic journals, books, internet resources, and newspaper articles. Then, selected research cases were analyzed and their characteristics identified. The selection criteria for the study were 22 textile pieces from the finalists of the six competitions of the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize, starting with the first competition in 2016.

## II. Theoretical Background

## 1. Contemporary Craft and Textile Art

A study by Chung(2007) shows that while the boundaries established in different periods were different, there has been always dichotomy such as physical and mental, academic and technical, and pure and functional, which led to exclusion of the history of craft from art history. However, in the art world since the late 20th century, when the integration of different media has become more prominent, the discussion of the boundaries between traditional fine art and craft has no longer produced meaningful discourse. Consequently, contemporary craft has experienced substantial growth as a medium for artistic expression since the mid-20th century based on the pluralism and deconstruction sentiments of postmodernism following World War II (Han, 2019). Contemporary craft is defined as 'the practice or ability to create items by hand (including partially mechanical processes) in pursuit of functionality and decorativeness based on techniques, technologies, materials, and patterns reflecting cultural elements' (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism[MCST] : Korea Craft and Design Foundation, 2021), which can be interpreted as an inclusive term that encompasses both artistic and industrial crafts. Although the discourse on craft is still active, craft as a sculpture is already being introduced to the public through platforms such as exhibitions, and its value is recognized in the art world. Meanwhile, textile has been acknowledged under the name of textile craft in the past. Standard Korean Dictionary define it as 'any creative activity or work that uses textile as a material' and in English, it is notaed as 'textile art' and 'fiber art' (Textile Art, n.d.). In other words, modern notation for textile crafts is relatively flexible, which can be easily observed in academic disciplines. In this paper, the term 'textile' is used as the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize, which is the subject of this study, uses it to refer to the corresponding field. Textile as art has served practical and aesthetic functions in our everyday lives for a long time and has shared the trajectory with the progress of human civilization (Park, 2020). According to Cho(2021), in this era where contemporary art is being de-bordered with various materials emerging and new things constantly in demand, textile as art holds great promise as a sculptural art that can be expressed through fusing artistry, craft, and design characteristics together.

# 2. Loewe Foundation Craft Prize

1) Establishment and Operation of the Foundation by the Fashion House Loewe

Loewe is an international fashion brand that began in Spain in 1846 as a cooperative of leather craftsmen (Loewe, n.d.). Initially operated as a workshop, Loewe was later developed into a full-fledged business by German Enrique Roessberg Loewe (Figure 1). In 1905, Loewe was selected as a supplier to the Spanish royal family and became a favorite of royalty and the wealthy, and is now recognized as a Spain's leading luxury brand. In 1910, Loewe opened its first store in Barcelona and grew to open many more throughout Spain. In 1963, the company expanded internationally, opening its first overseas branch in London, and in the 1970s and 1980s, it entered Asia, including cities such as Tokyo and Hong Kong (History of Loewe, 2022). In 1987, Loewe forged a partnership with the LVMH Group to facilitate

international expansion, Subsequently, the company was acquired by LVMH in 1996, when it celebrated its 150th anniversary. Under LVMH's ownership, the brand experienced a revival by hiring renowned designers, including Narciso Rodriquez as artistic director in 1997, who revolutionized the brand and was recognized with a designer award from an American fashion organization (Park, 2023). Then, in 2013, Jonathan Anderson, who was appointed creative director, reshaped the brand's identity, making Loewe a cultural brand with a global impact through its women's and men's collections. The Loewe Foundation was established in 1988 by Enrique Loewe Lynch, the man on the right in Figure 2, with the goal of preserving the legacy of poetry, dance, photography, arts and crafts. Currently overseen by his daughter, Sheila Loewe, as shown on the left in Figure 2, the foundation actively supports diverse cultural and artistic areas, encompassing poetry, dance, photography, and crafts. For these contributions to the arts, the Loewe Foundation was awarded the Gold Medal for Merit in the Fine Arts in 2002, the highest honor bestowed by the Spanish government (Loewe Foundation, n.d.).

# 2) Loewe's Values and the Craft Prize In 2016, Jonathan Anderson (Figure 3), who has served as the creative director of Loewe since 2013, created the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize, the world's first

**Figure 1.** *Enrique Roessberg Loewe* (fashiongear fibre2fashion.com)

international award for contemporary craft. He states, "Craft is the essence of Loewe, It is where our modernity breathes, and our relationship with craft will continue" (Commitment for Craft of Loewe, n.d.). As such, Loewe sees craft as a fundamental part of their identity and what drives their brand, making the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize a tangible manifestation of their values. At the suggestion of Jonathan Anderson, the Foundation has been honoring and supporting artists with exceptional talent and vision in the development of contemporary craft each year through this competition. On the dedicated site for entering the Loewe craft prize, the competition guidelines are published, as well as information of the judging process. The competition is an annual international competition that accepts submissions in any field and is open to professional craftspeople over the age of 18. Submissions made via the designated website undergo assessment by a panel of professionals, which includes the director of London's Victoria and Albert Museum, the head of architecture and visual merchandising at Loewe, and the secretary general of the Korea Craft and Design Foundation. This panel is responsible for selection of 30 finalists. Then, the winner is selected from the finalists by a jury composed of different members from the expert panel. The jury is also composed of prominent figures in the art world, such as the director of the Louvre Museum in Paris, the curator



**Figure 2.** Sheila Loewe and Enrique Loewe Lynch (www.loewe.com)

of art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the director of the Tokyo Folk Crafts Museum, and Jonathan Anderson, and the composition of the expert panel and jury varies from year to year. The winner, selected through a rigorous process, receives a trophy (Figure 4) and a cash prize of 50,000 euros, and the Foundation organizes a month-long exhibition of approximately 30 finalists selected each year. The winner is announced during an opening ceremony on the first day of the exhibition, and the country and location of the exhibition changes each year (Loewe Craft Prize, n.d.). In 2022, the fifth exhibition was hosted by the Seoul Museum of Craft Art (Figure 5), achieving great success, with more than 1,000 visitors per day and long queues forming to enter. These works, selected through a rigorous process by the world's leading fashion house, attract the attention of the art world and show the current state of contemporary craft. It also provides a platform for lesser-known craft artists to grow in line with the founder's goals, and sets the stage for the maturation of craft as a genre of contemporary art.

# III. Case Analysis of Textile Art in the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize

Contemporary textile has a multidimensional meaning and is steadily growing as a sector of contemporary craft and even contemporary art. The Loewe Foundation Craft

Prize is open to submissions from any discipline, and the finalists are drawn from a wide range of areas, including ceramics, glass, metal, wood, textile and lacquer. Textile piece has also been making its presence known with consistent wins each year, with the top prize in 2021 and 2022, thereby creating a notable impression in the art world. These shortlisted and winning textile pieces are presented to the public each year in the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize exhibition, solidifying their position within the realm of contemporary craft and art. Their proportion of the overall representation is as follows. The proportion of textile among the shortlisted works announced each year in the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize is shown in Table 1, and the total number of shortlisted works announced in the textile category for the six competitions is 22 out of 175. Based on the textile artworks that have been presented each year, this chapter will provide a case analysis of their characteristics.

# 1. Emphasizing Traditional Techniques

The case analysis shows that among the finalists, many crafts are based on the traditional values of traditional textile crafts by utilizing traditional techniques. Figure 6 shows a work woven from a unique material called horsehair, using a 500-year-old hat-making technique. This work was highly praised for revitalizing a tradition



Figure 3. Jonathan Anderson

(www.loewe.com)



Figure 4. Trophy for the Loewe Craft
Prize Winner
(www.loewe.com)



Figure 5. View of the 2022 Loewe Craft
Prize Exhibition
(www.loewe.com)

Year of Award	Total Number of Finalists	Number of Textile Arts in Finalist	Percentage of Textile Art in Finalists	Winner of Year or Not
Craft Prize 2017	26	5	19.2%	Χ
Craft Prize 2018	30	4	13.3%	Χ
Craft Prize 2019	29	2	6.8%	Χ
Craft Prize 2021	30	2	6.6%	0
Craft Prize 2022	30	4	13.3%	0
Craft Prize 2023	30	6	16.3%	X

Table 1. Analysis of the Number and Percentage of Textile Arts of the Loewe Craft Prize Finalists

<sup>\*</sup>The Award was Canceled in 2020 due to COVID-19



**Figure 6.** A Time of Sincerity (www.loewe.com)



**Figure 7.** *Matriarchal Womb* (www.loewe.com)



**Figure 8.** *Selva Blanca* (www.loewe.com)

in a modern way and selected as the final winner in 2022 competition. Works that utilize these traditional techniques have an important aesthetic value in terms of preserving tradition. Figure 7, a 2023 finalist, utilized one of the most popular traditional techniques in textiles: knitting. By using a rope made of cotton as the main material and mixing various traditional knitting techniques, the work emphasizes the texture of the fiber and expresses the theme. Due to the thickness of the rope, various knitting techniques are noticeable on the surface of the work. By employing the single-line knitting technique, the artist analogizes the unity and bonding of families and communities that are connected to each other without being divided into hierarchies within the community. Crafts based on this tradition are

characterized by a focus on the intrinsic texture of the fibers to bring out the characteristics of the material and by the use of traditional handmade techniques. Figure 8 shows a complex mix of traditional techniques with hand embroidery on a woven fabric in a tapestry. By mixing and matching two traditional techniques, the artist was able to create a unique expression. Through the case analysis, it could be seen that traditional techniques such as tapestry, hand embroidery, quilting, and weaving were often utilized. This can be seen as characteristics of craft as an art genre based on traditional manual labor, setting it apart from other modern art forms. In addition, the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize values these traditional craft techniques, giving higher marks to craft works that stick to the

basics than those with techniques reinterpreted in a modern way.

# 2. Developing New Expressive Techniques for New Materials

The classification of craft by material is commonplace today, evident in the classification of craft collections used by craft departments in universities and museums. While the areas of contemporary craft are typically defined by material, the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize allows entrants to choose their own area when submitting their work. Examining the winning entries shows that they have developed expressive techniques for new materials using fusion or convergence of materials and techniques, which is one of the characteristics of contemporary craft. Among them, some of the works submitted in the textile category stood out for their fusion of materials and techniques to the extent that they could not be considered works in such a category, and others showed a whole new way of expression of material, which cold not be recognized as a textile material until the description of the work was read. The 2022 shortlisted work, Strada (Figures 9-10) by French art duo Aware, gives the impression of metalwork due to its shiny surface, and it is difficult to see the use of textile materials intuitively. One of the members, Jérôme Pereira, has a background in sculpture and physics, while Sylvia Eustache has a background in textile. They carved ash wood elaborately, and wrapped silk threads around it, bonding the two with heated iron. Subsequently, they visually depicted the geological structure of the Earth through coloring, with a crucial phase in their creative process involving the application of ink to silk threads. They chose textile as their competition area, which defines the identity of their work. Liam Leed's Chair11 (Figures 11-12), a 2023 nominee, falls into the category of furniture, as the title suggests. However, due to the fiber material of wool that covers their surfaces and the techniques used to create them, it is easy to intuitively think of them in the category of textile. He shaped the chair out of poplar plywood and completed the sculpture through needle-felting of a dense layer of wool onto its surface. The work in Figure 13, which received a special mention in 2018, used fabric recycled from waste tires as its primary material, and used clothespins as a secondary material to create a realistic depiction of cracks as it was layered and stacked. This can be regarded as an innovative approach to textile expression, employing fabric but integrating the artist's unique techniques. Similarly to the past, contemporary craft works can be universally categorized by material. However, what distinguishes contemporary textile pieces is that artists are utilizing their own new techniques with textile materials and using them in ways that have never been attempted before. Despite being crafted from composite materials, the texture and technique of textile, which forms the surface shaping the final work, convey the sense of



**Figure 9.** *Strada* (www.theroom.loewe.com)



**Figure 10.** *Strada Detail* (www.theroom.loewe.com)



**Figure 11.** *Chair11* (www.theroom.loewe.com)



**Figure 12.** *Chair11 Detail* (www.theroom.loewe.com)



Figure 13. Croissance XL(XL Growth) (www.loewe.com)

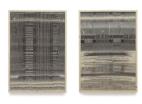








Figure 14, A Little Space to Live Figure 15, Lehrata-Khet (www.theroom.loewe.com)

(www.theroom.loewe.com)

Figure 16, NeoFolk (www.theroom.loewe.com)

Figure 17, Khadi Frays (www.theroom.loewe.com)

theme. In addition, this method is meaningful in that it has the characteristics of contemporary art, which is an original expression method of the artist beyond traditional crafts.

# 3. Pictorial Character

Among the works submitted in various fields at the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize, there are many works that have been recognized for their excellent figurative characters in the form of three-dimensions. However, within the textile field, many works leave an impression two-dimensional paintings rather than three-dimensional sculpture works. Most of them were made based on the fabrication method of weaving using flexible fiber strands as formative element called lines, which is traditional craft technique that create surface by intersection of certain ratio of warp and weft. In fact, of the nine flat works, all but three (one embroidered, one quilted, and one sewn) were woven-based. These woven works, which created an intersecting plane of lines, were able to achieve a structurally intersecting plane through the technique alone, without the need for any additional materials. Two works that notably exhibit this characteristic are Afsaneh Modiramani's A Little Space to Live (Figure 14) and Maina Devi's Lehrata-Khet (Figure 15). Both artworks established a solid surface at the convergence of weft and warp, eliciting a feeling reminiscent of abstract painting. In addition, Heidi Friesen's 'Neofolk(Figure 16)' utilized the structural nature of weaving, where the warp existed only as a line when the weft was not woven into the warp, and the warp existed only as a surface when the two were tightly interwoven, to create a sculptural sense of contrast

between line and surface. Sophie Rowley presented 'Khadi Frays(Figure 17)'. in which she deconstructed a ready—made textile into its weft and warp threads and then geometrically constructed surfaces from the loose threads, using the fact that textiles are woven with weft and warp. As such, in textile field, most of the flat works created using the structural characteristics of weaving techniques showed pictorial character, and rather than explaining the formative characteristics as a three–dimensional work, it was possible to explain the formative characteristics with flat paintings.

# IV. Characteristics of Contemporary Textile Expression Revealed in the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize

# 1. Identifying the Unique Capabilities of Craft through the Continuation of Tradition

The most important value upheld in the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize is tradition. This is also connected to the heritage pursued by the fashion brand Loewe. The value of craft in contemporary art, unlike other painting genres, is inheritance of tradition, and the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize emphasizes this aspect, valuing craft works that utilize the most basic and traditional techniques and selecting many of these works for the final shortlist. This shows that the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize has identified the tradition of textile art as an important value.

# 2. Rediscovering Textile Properties through Experiments with Materials

Contemporary craft artists utilize the properties of materials themselves but develop their own unique techniques to express them in new ways, and the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize saw a number of works in this vein. This shows that the characteristics of contemporary art, which include the artist's own sculptural language and the high value of convergence of genres without boundaries, are also present in the craft genre. The

selection of the Crafts Prize shows that it is important for contemporary textile craft artists not only to inherit traditional techniques, but also to experiment with new materials to create their own unique sculptural language. In addition, the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize has selected a number of these works as finalists, indicating that the rediscovery of textile properties is an important value in textile art.

# 3. The Possibility of Expanding the Field of Art due to the Pictorial Character

There is a traditional fabrication method called weaving within textile crafts. This is a method in which lines can be crossed to make a surface, and as in the case discussed above, various pictorial expressions are possible depending on the application method. Of course, other craft field can implement weaving techniques using linear elements in other craft fields, but the textile field has confirmed that the original flexibility of fiber acts as a great advantage and is suitable for building its shape on a plane, so it can be expressed in various ways. In other words, textiles, which have been recognized for their formative excellence in the form of planes, will be able to develop their distinctive characteristics in the form of planes in modern crafts where three-dimensional crafts are popular, and there are possibility that textiles could act as an intersection with contemporary art called painting.

## V. Conclusion

The fashion brand Loewe not only expresses its identity but also contributes to the field of craft by sponsoring highly talented artists every year through a competition. In doing so, the competition has become one of the most renowned and prestigious craft competitions in the world, promoting not only the creation of craft as an art form but also providing a broader audience with the opportunity to recognize craft as a contemporary art form. This study examined cases of contemporary textile art in this competition organized by the fashion brand

Loewe, the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize, to identify their expressive characteristics, and the results of the study are as follows. The case analysis of the works selected as finalists showed that, first, traditional values are prioritized by emphasizing traditional techniques. Second, there were many works that showed artists' original new techniques by utilizing the material properties of textiles and combining them with other materials through development of new expressive techniques for innovative materials. Third, It can be seen that there are many flat works that highlight the characteristics of painting based on weaving technique. The expressive characteristics of contemporary textile art in the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize, derived from the analysis of these cases, can be outlined as follows. Firstly, the uniqueness of craft through the inheritance of traditional techniques is highlighted. After all, craft possesses a tradition distinct from other contemporary artistic practices, and the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize prioritizes this aspect. Secondly, the rediscovery of textile properties through experiments with materials highlighted. By understanding the intrinsic properties of textiles and expressing them in a new way, the work of rediscovering the value of textiles as a material for expressing sculptural language is highly valued and appreciated. Finally, It is a confirmation of the pictorial character of a works implemented in a flat surface. The flexibility of fiber is characterized by interpreting the technique of weaving in various ways, and the pictorial character that flat works can have were utilized. Through this, it was found that the discriminative value of pictorial formability accomplished by the traditional craft technique of weaving and this can expand the textile field. Through this study, it could be seen that textile art serves not only as a medium for conveying the artist's diverse perspectives through textile as a material but also as a contemporary art form that employs traditional materials and techniques to present a new vision distinct from other crafts. Although this study has confined its scope to textile art to characterize and analyze its features, the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize serves as a valuable asset for contemporary craft.

Therefore, it is necessary to broaden the scope to encompass all fields for further research.

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