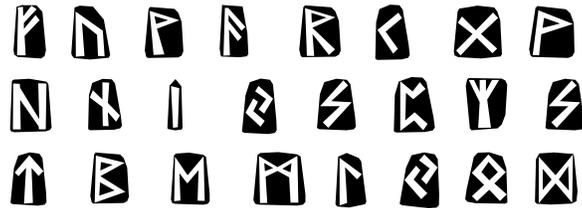


# Nordic 5 Arts

Denmark – Finland – Iceland – Norway – Sweden

[Nordic5Arts.com](http://Nordic5Arts.com)



## A Mixed-Media Exhibition by Nordic 5 Arts

### Old Norse definition of the word “rune”

1. Mystery, secret knowledge, learning
2. Secret or whispered conversation
3. Sign used in magic
4. Rune, runic character
5. letter

Founded in 1993, Nordic 5 Arts is an organization comprised of professional artists in the San Francisco Bay Area of Nordic/Scandinavian descent. We have collaborated on many group exhibitions over the past twenty years, showing our work in galleries, educational institutions, corporate and public exhibition spaces and in a museum.

During the past year, we have worked on a new group exhibition, “*Runes Revealed*”, based on ancient Norse runes, a distinctive form of writing that is no longer in use. The runic alphabet was

the script of the Old Norse and the Vikings before the introduction of the Latin alphabet in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It was not only a simple representation of sounds, but each rune was imbued with symbolism, mystery and an association with specific gods in Norse mythology. The mystique of the runes of our ancestors appealed to our artistic sense.

For inspiration, we chose one or several runes, either by picking out a random rune from a bag of “divination runes”, or by choosing a specific rune that spoke to us. Based on our choice, we created works in a variety of mediums, including painting, prints, sculpture, textile and photography. Our works are contemporary and personal artistic interpretations. Each piece will be accompanied by the meaning of the rune(s) and a description of the work.

## **RUNIC ALPHABET**

Runes have been found dating back to c. 200 AD. Comprised of 24 characters, the first six of which represent the sounds f-u-th-a-r-k, it is a simple script with a combination of vertical and angled lines that could easily be carved with a knife on a piece of wood. The most common Runic alphabet is now referred to as *Elder Futhark* and was the written language of the Old Norse and Vikings whose jewelry, weapons and utensils were embellished with runic inscriptions of the owners' name, words of wisdom or the name of a Norse god.

The runic alphabet was divided into three families named after the Norse gods Freyr, Hagel and Tyr, each family consisting of eight runes. The runes were believed to possess magical powers when used to guide a person's actions or predict future events. There are references in the Viking sagas to runes being used as a divination tool, a practice that has continued to this day.

Large runestones, tall upright stones with longer inscriptions covering an entire flat surface, began to appear in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. They were erected by the Vikings as memorials in honor of an important person or loved one, or to commemorate an important event that occurred in the area. Although many of the runestones are well preserved, the inscriptions, often written in poetic form and with no spaces between the words, can be extremely difficult to decipher and interpret.

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Definition of “Rune”: *Norwegian Runes and Runic Inscriptions* by Terje Spurkland

## REFERENCES

Page, R.I. *Runes* (from the "Reading the Past" series) University of California Press/British Museum, 1988.

Blum, Ralph. *The Book of Runes. A Handbook for the Use of an Ancient Oracle: The Viking Runes.* Oracle Books, St. Martin's Press, New York City, 1987.

Spurkland, Terje. *Norwegian Runes and Runic Inscriptions.* The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2005.

### **RUNES** *Definition by Wikipedia.org*

"**Runes** are the letters in a set of related alphabets known as **runic alphabets**, which were used to write various Germanic languages before the adoption of the Latin alphabet and for specialized purposes thereafter. The Scandinavian variants are also known as **futhark** or **fupark** (derived from their first six letters of the alphabet: F, U, Þ, A, R, and K). The earliest runic inscriptions date from around AD 150. These characters were generally replaced by the Latin alphabet when the cultures that had used runes underwent Christianization, by approximately AD 700 in central Europe and AD 1100 in Northern Europe. However, the use of runes persisted for specialized purposes in Northern Europe. Until the early 20th century, runes were used in rural Sweden for decorative purposes in the province of Dalarna and on Runic calendars."

[http://lore-and-saga.co.uk/html/the\\_simple\\_truth\\_about\\_runes.html](http://lore-and-saga.co.uk/html/the_simple_truth_about_runes.html)

**Runes** were a simple script designed for the simplest of tools and materials. At a time when virtually everyone carried a knife the only other thing you needed was a piece of wood. Each rune is carved with a combination of vertical and angled strokes, never horizontal. The reason for this comes from their origin being scratched on wood. If you take a stick and shave along its length to make a flat surface with a knife, you reveal a pattern of lines or grain running up the stick. By carving your runes across and at an angle to the stick none of the lines you cut can be confused with the grain of the stick.

### **DIVINATION** *Definition by Merriam Webster*

**1:** the art or practice that seeks to foresee or foretell future events or discover hidden knowledge usually by the interpretation of omens or by the aid of supernatural powers

**2:** unusual insight: intuitive perception

### **SAGA** *sagadb.org*

**saga** n : a narrative telling the adventures of a hero or a family; originally, a story of the families that settled Iceland and their descendants.

The Icelandic sagas are prose histories describing events that took place amongst the Norse and Celtic inhabitants of Iceland during the period of the Icelandic Commonwealth in the 10th and 11th centuries AD. They were most likely written in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries AD, perhaps originating in an oral tradition of storytelling. While their facticity and authorship is for the most part unknown, they are a widely recognized gem of world literature thanks to their sparse, succinct prose style and balanced storytelling. The sagas focus largely on history, especially genealogical and family history, and reflect the

struggles and conflicts that arose amongst the second and third generations of Norse settlers in medieval Iceland, which was in this time a remote, decentralised society with a rich legal tradition but no organized executive power.

### VIKINGS [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vikings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vikings)

The **Vikings** (from Old Norse *víkingr*) were seafaring north Germanic people who raided, traded, explored, and settled in wide areas of Europe, Asia, and the North Atlantic islands from the late 8th to the mid-11th centuries.<sup>[1]</sup> The Vikings employed wooden longships with wide, shallow-draft hulls, allowing navigation in rough seas or in shallow river waters. The ships could be landed on beaches, and their light weight enabled them to be carried over portages. These versatile ships allowed the Vikings to travel as far east as Constantinople and the Volga River in Russia, as far west as Iceland, Greenland, and Newfoundland, and as far south as Nekor. This period of Viking expansion, known as the Viking Age, constitutes an important element of the medieval history of Scandinavia, Great Britain, Ireland, Russia, and the rest of Europe.

### ELDER FUTHARK (fuþark) <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/runic.htm#elder>

Elder Futhark is thought to be the oldest version of the Runic alphabet, and was used in the parts of Europe which were home to Germanic peoples, including Scandinavia. Other versions probably developed from it. The names of the letters are shown in Common Germanic, the reconstructed ancestor of all Germanic languages.

							
f	u	þ	a	r	k	g	w
fehu	ūruz	þurisaz	ansuz	raipō	kaunaz	gebō	wunjō
wealth	aurochs	giant	god	riding	ulcer	gift	joy
							
h	n	i	j	ī	p	z	s
hagalaz	naupiz	isa	jera	eihwaz	perþ	algiz	sōwulō
hail	need/hardship	ice	year/harvest	yew tree	luck	sedge (?)	sun
							
t	b	e	m	l	ng	d	o
teiwaz	berkana	ehwaz	mannaz	laguz	inguz	ḍagaz	ōþila
the god Tyr	birch twig	horse	man	water	the god Ing	day	inherited land

### Notes

The letter k is also called **kēnaz** (torch) or **kanō** (skiff). The meaning of the letter name **perþ** is unknown.