

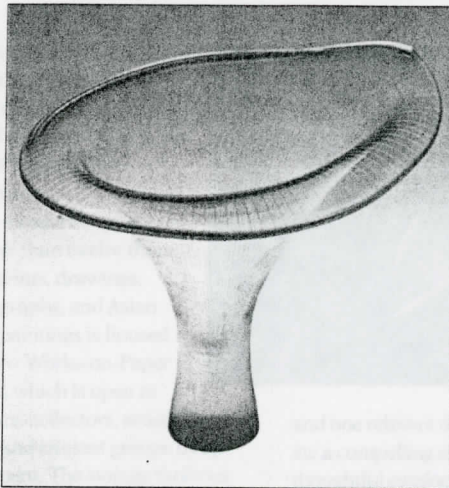
Current and coming

By Allison Eckardt Ledes

Finnish modern design

Two exhibitions taking place in New York City call attention to the pivotal role of Finnish architects and designers in revolutionizing design earlier in this century. The first, on view at the Museum of Modern Art through May 19, is entitled *Alvar Aalto: Between Humanism and Materialism*. The second, *Finnish Modern Design: Utopian Ideals and Everyday Realities, 1930–1997*, may be seen at the Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts through June 28. Both shows are part of a city-wide cultural celebration of the eightieth anniversary of Finland's independence.

Aalto's long and prolific career had a marked influence on architecture and industrial design around the world. His innovative buildings in Europe and the United States included museums, libraries, churches, factories, apartment buildings, private houses, and municipal buildings. The exhibition at the



vernacular tradition in architecture.

In the 1930s Aalto achieved international recognition largely through the furniture he designed, which was exhibited around the world. By the middle of the decade, with Maire and Harry Gullichsen, he founded Artek, a manufactory to produce his furniture designs. Concurrently he became

Museum of Modern Art includes approximately 175 sketches and drawings, 15 models, archival photographs, and examples of his furniture, glass, and bentwood sculptures. Video tours of several of his most important buildings are part of the installation, along with reconstructions of architectural elements. The latter include a wall made of wedge-shaped bricks from the House of Culture in Helsinki, a kiosk from the 1929 Turku 700th Anniversary Exhibition, and several wooden and tiled columns from his buildings. These elements are indicative of the innovative ways in which Aalto used traditional building materials.

In common with other modernists of his generation, Aalto designed his buildings to harmonize with their natural sites. He believed that technology did not have to be dehumanizing but could be utilized to elevate cultural values. Aalto was profoundly influenced by the Renaissance architecture of Italy, which he encountered when he traveled there in 1924. However, he was a strong advocate for the creation of a Finnish national style that would pay homage to the distinctive aspects of the country's ver-

interested in designing glass.

Aalto taught at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge during the 1940s. Following World War II he was a major force in reconstructing damaged and leveled buildings in Finland. His career flourished in the 1950s and 1960s, and he received a number of commissions outside Finland. Today his legacy lives on not only in his buildings, but also through the numerous objects he designed, some of which are still in production.

Bard's exhibition focuses on the six decades in which modernism became a catalyst for Finnish designers, who, in turn, influenced their counterparts around the world. Some 130 works include ceramics, furniture, glass, prints, lighting, metalwork and jewelry, commercial design, fashion designs, and textiles. In the early years of this century Finland's vernacular craft traditions were blended with progressive theories of design then in vogue on the Continent and in Sweden. The latter emphasized spare, natural forms related directly to the objects' function. While today many of these early designers of ceramics, glass, furniture, and textiles

are not well known in the United States, the influence of their products on comparable objects made in other countries has nonetheless been considerable.

One of the most influential figures was Arttu Brummer (1892–1951), an interior architect, glass designer, critic, and most important, a teacher of design at the Central School of Arts and Crafts in Helsinki starting in 1919. Between 1944 and his death in 1951 he was the artistic director of the school, shaping the careers

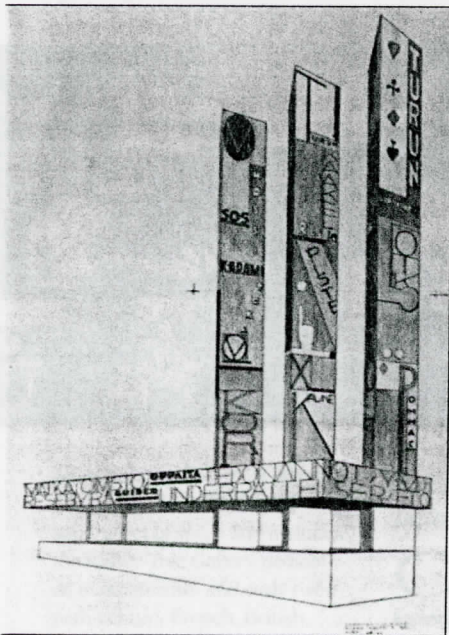
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Design for a kiosk (now destroyed) at the Turku 700th Anniversary Exhibition and Trade Fair held in Turku, Finland, by Alvar Aalto (1898–1976) and Erik Bryggman (1891–1955), 1929. India ink and color pencil on paper, 19 11/16 by 14 9/16 inches. Alvar Aalto Foundation, Helsinki, on view at the Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

Chanterelle, vase designed by Tapio Wirkkala (1915–1985) and made by Iittala, 1946. Mold-blown and cut glass, height 5 7/8 inches. Iittala Glass Museum, Iittala, Finland, on view at the Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, New York City; photograph by MuseoKuva, Helsinki.

Bowl designed by Friedl Holzer-Kjellberg (1905–1943) and manufactured by Arabia, Helsinki, 1943. Porcelain, height 5 7/8 inches. Arabia Museum, Helsinki, on view at the Bard Graduate Center; MuseoKuva photograph.



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of many of the artists and designers represented by works in this exhibition.

The arts and crafts style came to Finland in the first years of the twentieth century, where it was espoused by Brummer, who emphasized the artistic and highly individual side of design by insisting that designers and craftsmen were neither different from nor less talented than artists.

The catalogue of the Aalto exhibition is published by the Museum of Modern Art (telephone 212-708-9700) and distributed by Harry N. Abrams. Bard's exhibition catalogue (telephone 212-501-3023) is co-published with Yale University Press.

A California museum expands

The Santa Barbara Museum of Art, founded in 1941, has recently reopened after two years of renovations and additions. The permanent collections have been reinstalled, and many paintings have been conserved or

(many of them tied to loan exhibitions) are offered by appointment. The architect of the Peck Wing is John Pitman of Edwards and Pitman.

The museum's collection of more than twelve thousand prints, drawings, photographs, and Asian scroll paintings is housed in a new Works-on-Paper Center, which is open to scholars, collectors, artists, docents, and student groups by appointment. The storage facilities in the center maintain the most advanced preservation standards. A gallery devoted to works on paper enables the museum to rotate its permanent collection and mount loan exhibitions.

A new cafe and a greatly enlarged museum store have also been provided. Self-guided audio tours are available for the first time.

Two special exhibitions and affiliated programs have been organized to celebrate the museum's reopening. For information telephone 805-963-4364.



and one relevant drawing to create a compelling show and thoughtful catalogue. The exhibition in question, *Titian and Rubens: Power, Politics, and Style*, will be on view at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston through April 26. The two works by Titian are *Europa* (in the Gardner Museum) and *Portrait of Francesco Maria della Rovere, Duke of Urbino* (in the Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence). The two by Rubens are *Rape of Europa* (in the Museo del Prado, Madrid) and *Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel* (in the Gardner Museum).

As the fine exhibition catalogue explains, the commissioning and subsequent ownership of the paintings overlap in fascinating ways. As the stories unfold, the paramount importance of nobility and power in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe becomes evident. Both Titian and Rubens traveled in the very highest circles. Titian's patron, Francesco Maria I della Rovere, for example, was related by birth and marriage to Pope Julius II and members of the ruling house of Aragon. Pietro Aretino commented on his friend Titian's portrait of Francesco Maria I in a letter dated November 7, 1537, in which he noted that the artist had captured "every wrinkle, hair, every mark, and he painted the colors not to depict the boldness of the flesh but the virility of the soul." Titian's *Europa* was part of a projected series of six works painted for Philip II of Spain.

Rubens was born one year after Titian died, and at the time of his own death in 1640, his inventory listed eight paintings and two sketches by Titian along with thirty-three copies Rubens had made. Through his role as a diplomat his travels took him to the courts of Europe and England, where art and politics always intersected. David Freedberg's catalogue essay



chronicling Rubens's comings and goings between the Low Countries, Italy, Spain, England, and France is as full of intrigues as a James Bond movie. His entry into royal palaces provided Rubens with the opportunity to study and copy some of Titian's most remarkable paintings. Rubens befriended the English nobleman Thomas Howard, second earl of Arundel, an insatiable art collector who commissioned a portrait. Rubens once again looked back to Titian's penetrating likeness of the duke of Urbino. In composition and psychological depth Rubens accomplished precisely what Aretino had noted a generation earlier:

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Rendering of the expanded Santa Barbara Museum of Art in California. Photograph by courtesy of Edwards and Pitman.

Europa, by Titian (c. 1488–1576), 1559–1562. Oil on canvas, 70 3/8 by 79 3/4 inches. Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

Rape of Europa, by Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), 1628–1629. Oil on canvas, 71 5/16 by 78 3/4 inches. Museo del Prado, Madrid.

Art imitating art and beyond

One great painter's fascination with the work of a legendary predecessor is a provocative subject for an exhibition, especially when the painters are, respectively, Peter Paul Rubens and Titian. One need only juxtapose two pairs of similar paintings

reframed. The new Peck Wing adds some eleven thousand square feet of space and includes the Ridley-Tree Gallery, dedicated to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century French, British, and American paintings and sculpture; the Emmons Gallery, devoted to the work of California artists; and the Children's Gallery, where educational programs

