

**FINNISH MODERNISM IN DESIGN
UTOPIAN IDEALS AND EVERYDAY REALITIES, 1930-1997**

Organized in collaboration with the Museum of Art and Design, Helsinki (formerly the Museum of Applied Arts), the exhibition at the Bard Graduate Center will be the first comprehensive examination of Finnish modern design in the United States. It will feature approximately 130 works including ceramics, fashion design, furniture, glass, graphics, lighting, metalwork and jewelry, product design, and textiles.

Scheduled to open at the Bard Graduate Center on February 26 and continue through June 28, 1998, the exhibition examines the outstanding design achievements of Finland by focusing on the central and decisive role played by modernism in the development of Finnish design over the past six decades. Unlike past studies in which Finnish design has been considered together with that of the other Scandinavian countries, the Bard Graduate Center's exhibition will bring into relief the particular artistic and cultural qualities that distinguish Finnish design from that of its Nordic as well as its European neighbors.

Conceptually the exhibition will be divided in two parts. The first part, entitled Assimilation, Integration, and Synthesis, will encompass the years 1930 to 1960 and will consider the principal designers, manufacturers, issues, and ideas that have contributed to the development of Finnish modern design. During the 1930s a unique synthesis of indigenous vernacular craft traditions with progressive design influences from the Continent and in Sweden began to develop into a distinctly Finnish brand of modernism. While adhering to many of the formal design tenets promoted by the modern movement - notably the exploitation of industrial production, simplicity of form, reduction of surface ornamentation, and adherence to geometric form - Finnish modernism in design offered a less dogmatic, more humane interpretation of progressive design. Rather than serving merely as a rhetorical slogan, the notion of good economical design was realized through the development of new

products, and in more subtle qualities such as the attention given to the shaping of a cup to fit most comfortably in the hand. This approach resulted in the creation of objects unsurpassed in their integrity, aesthetic, and quality of production.

The tenets of modernism were realized in Finland through the magnificent everyday objects for the home produced by factories such as the ceramics firm Arabia, the glass factories of Iittala, Karhula, and Nuutajarvi, and the textile and clothing manufacturer Marimekko. By collaborating with the finest architects and designers, among them Alvar Aalto (1898-1976), Tapio Wirkkala (1915-1985), Kaj Franck (1911-1989), and Timo Sarpaneva (1926-), the Finnish applied arts industries helped shape progressive taste for more than thirty years. They also helped support women designers including Gunnel Nyman (1909-1948) and Saara Hopea (1925-1985).

The second part of the exhibition, entitled Upheaval and Continuity, encompasses the period from the end of the 1960s through today. It will show that despite strong reactions against modernism in design beginning in the late 1960s, the cultural and aesthetic aspects of modernism continue to dominate in Finnish design today. In the highly politicized climate of the late 1960s, Finnish designers came under attack and Finnish design experienced a dramatic downturn in productivity that was further exacerbated by the energy crisis of the 1970s. The past fifteen years have been marked by a slow renewal; it is now possible to detect a resurgence of noteworthy innovative Finnish design. Among the designers who have been selected to represent this turbulent period in Finnish design history are Yrjö Kukkapuro (1933-), Antti Nurmesniemi (1927-), Stefan Lindfors, and Hannu Kähönen.

The selection of objects in the exhibition will be displayed against the backdrop of an elaborate photographic and graphic presentation intended to portray the inextricable link between Finnish modern design and the broader socioeconomic, political, and cultural landscape of the nation. It will consider the emergence of Finnish modernism in relation to the newly achieved independence from Russia in 1917, the intensification of nationalistic sentiments on the part of artists and the population at

large, and the economic exigencies faced by Finland in the post-World War II period. With the conclusion of World War II, Finland deliberately exploited the applied arts industries as a primary tool for financing war reparations and for invigorating its economy. The unprecedented attention given to the applied arts that resulted from a political and economic expediency contributed to the creation of a Finnish modern design idiom that was quickly recognized internationally. The photographic display will also highlight the architectural context for the formation of a distinctly Finnish design aesthetic. In addition to that of Alvar Aalto, the work of the architects Yrjö Lindegren (1900-1952), Aarne Ervi (1910-1977), Viljo Revell (1910-1964), and Aulis Blomstedt (1906-1979) will be represented in this display.

Loans to the exhibition have been assembled from leading public and private collections in Finland and the United States including the Museum of Art and Design, Helsinki (formerly the Museum of Applied Arts), the Iittala Museum, the Alvar Aalto Museum, the Finnish Glass Museum at Riihimäki, and the Newark Museum.

The exhibition curators are Marianne Aav, curator, Design Museum, Helsinki, and Nina Stritzler-Levine, director of exhibitions, the Bard Graduate Center.

In conjunction with the exhibition, a variety of public programs will be organized including lectures, family days, and an open house for seniors.

Finnish Modern Design: Utopian Ideals and Everyday Realities, 1930-1997 has been funded in part by a generous grant provided by Hackman Tabletop, Inc. (Iittala, Arabia, Rörstrand).

For further information, please telephone 212/501-3072 or 501-3074, or fax 501-3079