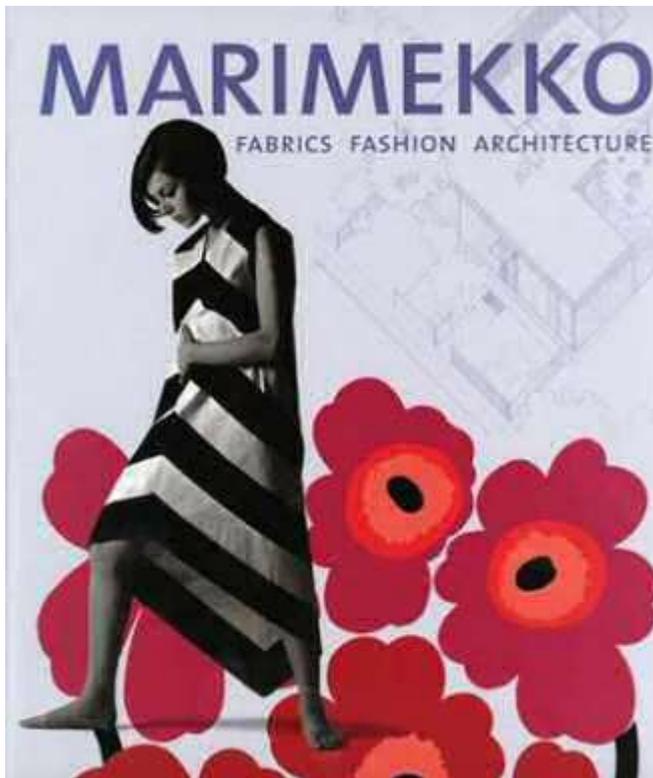


# 20<sup>th</sup> century Finnish Design for the Decorative Arts

Background Notes

*Dr Robin Jones - 18 June 2014*



*Marimekko design*

**WAHG**

Winchester Art History Group

[www.wahg.org.uk](http://www.wahg.org.uk)



**This lecture will discuss a range of industrial design products from Finland produced between 1930 and 1975.**

## **Structure of lecture**

Finnish design for the decorative arts including:

- Furniture
- Ceramics,
- Glass,
- Textiles,
- Jewellery

## **Context to Scandinavian design**

### **Finland**

Finland only became an independent nation after 1917, having been under the shadow of both Sweden and Russia for the previous 150 years.

The two dominant twentieth century Finnish industrial manufacturers of pottery and glass were **Arabia**, Helsinki (est. 1873) and **Iittala** (est. 1881).

## Furniture

### **ALVAR AALTO (1898 - 1976)**

The architect Alvar Aalto is **one of the most important 20th century furniture designers.**

Like a number of his Scandinavian contemporaries, Aalto developed a range of furniture which **took advantage of developments in moulded plywood.**

**Paimio chair** has become an icon of modernist design.

**ARTEK furniture design.**

## Ceramics

### **ARABIA - CERAMICS**

**In the post war era** that Arabia's achievement became **celebrated on an international scale.** In **1945 Kaj Franck** was hired as the firm's **chief designer** followed by **Ulla Procope.**

Franck's ***Kilta* dinnerware** of 1952 typifies the highly successful modern designs which Franck introduced.

### **Art Products from Arabia Studio**

#### **RUT BRYK (b. 1916)**

Swedish born ceramicist and graphic and textile designer who lived all her life in Finland. Married to designer Tapio Wirkkala

#### **BIRGER KAIPIAINEN (1915-88)**

Finnish ceramicist. 1937-54 was a designer at Arabia.

## Finnish Glass

### IITTALA GLASS

**The Iittala company** produced useful wares and cut glass objects from its earliest days.

The architect **Alvar Aalto** won 1936 competition with his '**Savoy vase**' (named after a restaurant in Helsinki).

**Tapio Wirkkala** chief designer. He created works which were abstract and sculptural but had their basis in natural forms.

He began his career in 1946 with a design that was to become synonymous with Scandinavian art glass: the famous **Kantarelli vase**.

The other designer of major international significance who has worked at Iittala for his entire career is **Timo Sarpaneva**.

In the mid 1950s he designed a mid range glass series culminating in 1956 with the so-called *i-range*.

### NUUTAJARVI-NOTSJO - GLASS

Another **major industrial producer of glassware** in Finland was Nuutajarvi-Notsjo, founded in 1793.

From 1950 to 1976, **Kaj Franck** became design and art director of the firm.

From **1963, Oiva Toikka (b. 1931)** became artistic director of the firm. His work during this period is characterised by a exuberance and a Pop-inspired aesthetic.

## Textiles

### **MARIMEKKO - TEXTILES**

In addition to the production of high quality glass and ceramics, Finland also made a **major contribution in post war textile design**.

Marimekko emerged from the textile company, Printex in 1951.

The **basis of the product range was printed fabrics and women's clothes** – strong colours and bold graphic patterns predominate.

The creative staff in the new company, including **Maija Isola** and **Vuokko Eskolin-Nurmesniemi**, was given a free hand to **respond to trends in contemporary art** as well as current social phenomena.

## Finnish Metal ware

### **PAAVO TYNELL (1890-1973)**

A pioneer in the field of Finnish metal lighting fixtures.

### **BERTEL GARDBERG**

**Enamel ware – Finel, Arabia-Wartsila, Nurmesniemi enamel**

### **TAPIO WIRKKALA FURNITURE**

The Finnish designer best known for his glassware, Tapio Wirkkala also designed a series of low tables/coffee tables for the furniture manufacturer Asko Oy during the mid-1950s.

### **ILMARI TAPIOVAARA**

### **ANTTI NURMESNIEMI**

## **YRJO KUKKAPURO (b. 1933)**

**One of Finland's leading designers of furniture.** Studied at the University of Art and Design, Helsinki and graduated in 1958.

Became professor of design at the University of Art and Design, Helsinki where he experimented with post-modernism in the form his '**Experiment' chairs of 1983 for Avarte.**

## **EERO AARNIO (b 1932)**

**Aarnio was one of several designers to bring international recognition to Finnish design in the 1960s.**

**Started as traditionalist** in terms of materials used – first furniture of wood and wicker but began experimenting in **early 1960s with fibreglass** and plastic.

## **Finnish Precious metal and bronze Jewellery of the 1960s and 1970s**

### **BJORN WECKSTROM (b. 1935)**

**Finnish metalworker and jeweller.** Studied at Goldsmiths School in Helsinki graduating in 1956. He continued his studies in America, Mexico.

### **Pentti Sarpaneva (1925-78)**

Brother of Timo Sarpaneva; used bronze and referenced traditional styles of jewellery.

### **Jorma Laine (1930-2002)**

Trained as goldsmith. Designed for Kultateollisuus and Turun Hopea.

## **Suggested Further Reading:**

Jukka Savolainen and Aila Svenskberg (eds.). 2012. *Builders of the Future: Finnish Design, 1945-67*. Helsinki: Design Museum.

Marianne Aav and Nina Strizler-Levine (eds.). 1998. *Finnish Modern Design: utopian ideals and everyday realities, 1930-1997*. New Haven and London: Bard Graduate Centre for Studies in the Decorative Arts.

Anne Stenros (ed.). 1999. *Visions of Modern Finnish Design*. Keuruu: Octava Books.

Marianne Aav (ed.). 2011. *Kaj Franck: Universal Forms*. Helsinki: Design Museum.

Marianne Aav (ed.). 2010. *Oiva Toika: moments of ingenuity*. Helsinki: Design Museum.

Kevin Davies. 2002. 'a geographical notion turned into an artistic reality': Promoting Finland and selling Finnish design in post-war Britain, c. 1953-1965', *Journal of Design History*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 101-116.



**Aalto vase by littala**