

Oiva Toikka at Galerie Forsblom

Dramas captured in glass

Opera figures and musical terms are very prominent in the names of **Oiva Toikka's** latest works on show in Helsinki, including *Tristan und Isolde*, *Aida*, *Nabucco*, and *Paso doble*. The new pieces are brimming with imaginative details and stunning colour combinations. At first glance, they seem like an amazing firework display, showcasing all the skills of Nuutajärvi's glassblowers. Look deeper, and you will find drama and multiple layers of meaning.



Paso doble



Hebrew Slave Choir



Computer



Birch in the Rain

Oiva Toikka has always steered clear of isms and other trends, preferring to tread his own path. In his monograph on Toikka entitled *Glass and Design*, **Jack Dawson** writes:

"There's always been an edge to Toikka's art. The youngest superstar of the Finnish glass world since the 1960s has never tried to fit himself into the aesthetic programme of older designers, nor has he felt any need to follow it. Toikka always appears happier on the outside, challenging current tastes."

Toikka's decision to stay on the outside of the art world has given him the opportunity to experiment in glass in ways that few artists have been able to anywhere. The glassblowers at Nuutajärvi have had to stretch themselves to the limit to turn Toikka's wildest ideas and craziest visions into reality.

A joke or something more serious?

Toikka has named his latest exhibition "... and so on", underlining the fact that his output is very much a work in progress, full of new stories to be told and new meanings to be pondered. In *Paso doble*, a sturdy bull confronts an elegant dancer; the shapes, colours, and dimensions of the glass set up an immediate sense of tension and expectancy about who is going to take the next step. In *Nabucco – Hebrew Slave Choir* in contrast, Toikka juxtaposes the sympathetic owl figures that make up the 'choir' with Verdi's opera and its associations with people struggling for their freedom.

History, a childhood spent in Karelia, and his travels around the world have always been important sources of inspiration for Toikka. The subtle allusion in *Apsis* points to medieval ecclesiastical architecture, while the massive *Computer* points to how computers are continuing to change the meaning of knowledge. But with Toikka you never know whether he is joking or being serious – after all, he loves drama and opera!

Toikka's close relationship with nature is beautifully reflected in *Bouquet*, a series of pieces – including *Early Morning*, *Birch in the Rain*, *Lightening*, and *Hay Cloud* – that highlight how closely Toikka observes the natural world.

The story continues

Oiva Toikka originally studied ceramics and began his career at the Arabia Art Department in 1956 as an assistant to **Michael Schilkin**. In 1960, he took a job as an art teacher in Sodankylä in northern Finland. He

was recruited to Nuutajärvi by **Saara Hopea** and **Kaj Franck** in 1963, and has developed his unique glass art there for decades. His most well-known functional designs include *Kastelhelmi* (1964), *Flora* (1966), *Fauna* (1970), and *Pioni* (1975).

Toikka returned to the heart of the Nuutajärvi glassworks this summer to experiment with his latest ideas, chat with the glassblowers and polishers there about what he was striving for, compose his pieces, and review how successful they were. His partnership with the glassblowers – **Arto Lahtinen**, **Timo Niekka**, **Rauno Saarinen**, **Kirsi Anttila**, **Mirella Eskola**, **Juha Valkonen**, and **Mitsuru Sato** again proved a very fruitful one. **Seppo Luoto**, **Teppo Lehtinen**, and **Aki Anttila** also played a key part in polishing and finishing the pieces.

Glass has provided Oiva Toikka with a very personal expressive language, and a medium that he is continually trying to master. What is it about glass that fascinates him?

“It’s the heat of the kilns, the speed at which you have to work, and the fact that glass has its own will – you never know how it’s going to behave or how you’re going to be able to put your mark on it.

“And then there’s the glassblowers themselves. It’s like watching a ballet, it’s got its very own choreography.

I’ve been lucky to work with people who’ve always been ready to experiment and try and turn even the craziest of my notions into reality. An environment like this is perfect for getting your creative juices flowing!”

The opening of Oiva Toikka’s exhibition was held on Thursday, August 28 at Galerie Forsblom in the presence of the artist.

Original illustrations from Toikka’s recently published book of nonsense poetry ‘Aasinsilta ja niin edelleen...’ (Preambles and so on...) are on show at Studio Forsblom to coincide with the main exhibition.

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