

Press release, 13 October 2017

Kirsti Rantanen's Monumental Textile Sculptures on Show at Design Museum 14 October 2016 – 5 March 2017

Kirsti Rantanen is one of Finland's leading textile artists of the late 20th century. This exhibition at Design Museum presents her life's work beginning in the 1950s and including her less-known industrial textile designs and pattern design for craft-based industries. The main role is given to Kirsti Rantanen's artistic oeuvre from the 1970s onwards. Her work is slow art – meditative and created gradually and in silence. The exhibition features a sculpture garden allowing visitors to contemplate the mindscapes of this textile artist.

A trailblazer of textile art

Kirsti Rantanen's career reflects the changes in textile art that began in Finland in the 1970s, and in which she was an important initiator. Woven ryijys (ryas) and tapestries were matched by textile works that took command of their space and whose form and variety of materials were as important as their technique.

Before the Second World War, textile art was in the forefront of the applied arts in Finland, and in the post-war years it thrived by reforming the solid ryijy tradition. Nonetheless, this sector was still regarded as inferior to visual art and sculpture, which had been largely male-dominated areas until the 1950s. Textile crafts and textile art, instead, have traditionally been a female domain in Finland. Kirsti Rantanen pointed to the lack of appreciation of this field in many of her socially engaged works of the early 1970s. Around the same time, she became involved with fibre arts, which had already been renewing expression in textiles in the United States and Europe for approximately two decades.

Rantanen has also been an important teacher for a whole generation of textile artists. The exhibition addresses her significance as a teacher and an artist with material compiled from interviews with her colleagues and former students.

Slow art

The ensembles of works on show in the sculpture garden of the central lobby and the main exhibition rooms are based on Kirsti Rantanen's solo exhibitions at the Amos Anderson Art Museum (1987) in Helsinki, Kulturhuset (1989) in Stockholm and the Barbican Centre (1992) in London. The exhibition also presents a large selection of sketches and models made by Rantanen for her works.

Kirsti Rantanen's works are marked by a strong narrative approach. They tell stories. Her summer cottage and later home at Hanhilampi in Porvoo have a distinct presence in her art. Between 1984 and 1993, she made all her monumental works in her studio at Hanhilampi. Rantanen's work is slow art, meditative, created in the midst of nature at a slow pace. The sculpture garden of the exhibition creates a space for contemplating the mindscapes of this textile artist.

"I return to ancient, primitive methods in a completely instinctive way. The starting points of my technique can be traced back to the Stone Age. I am like a Stone Age woman when I weave. The primitive nature of the technique transports one far back in time. The massive fabric grows layer by layer in my hands." Kirsti Rantanen, 1987

Kirsti Rantanen briefly

Kirsti Rantanen (née Widing) was born in 1930 in Honkaniemi in the Rural Parish of Viipuri. In 1944, after the war ended for Finland, the Widing family moved to Hämeenlinna. Rantanen graduated from the Institute of Industrial Arts in Helsinki in 1952. She married Esko Rantanen, MSc (Eng.), Licentiate in Business Administration, in 1953, and their daughters Silja and Riikka were born in 1955 and 1959. In the 1950s and 1960s, she participated actively and successfully in textile design competitions held by the Friends of Finnish Handicraft and the Neovius and Helmi Vuorelma companies, among others. In 1959, Kirsti Rantanen began her teaching career, first as an instructor and from 1973 as lecturer in printed fabric design at the University of Art and Design Helsinki. In the 1950s and 1960s, Rantanen worked in industrial design first as a designer of printed fabrics for the Finlayson-Forssa company and later on a freelance basis for the Someron kutomon weaving mill. In the summer of 1971, she travelled to Lausanne in Switzerland. Her piece *Kadonnut idylli* (Lost Idyll) had been selected for the Lausanne textile biennial, a highly regarded showing of contemporary textile art. Kirsti Rantanen was awarded a five-year artist professorship in 1983. Her best-known public work of art is the two-part *Sävelkudos* from 1993, in the foyer of the National Opera of Finland.

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Design Museum is a national specialist museum of Finnish design. The museum researches, collects, acquires and documents design, and displays it in Finland and in touring exhibitions abroad.

Street address:

Korkeavuorenkatu 23, 00130 Helsinki www.designmuseum.fi

Opening hours:

Summer season, 1 June – 31 August Mon. – Sun. 11 a.m. – 6 p.m. Winter season, 1 September–31 May
Tuesdays 11 a.m.–8 p.m. Wed.–Sun. 11 a.m.–6 p.m. Mondays closed

Entrance:

Adults €10, pensioners €8, students €5, visitors under 16 free of charge. Free entrance with the Museum Card (initial cost €59) Joint ticket to the Museum of Finnish Architecture and Design Museum €12.