

Heritage NordicMuseum

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NORDIC HERITAGE MUSEUM ANNOUNCES NEW EXHIBITION: VESSELS OF THE HEART

**Exhibition: Vessels of the Heart: Fairbanks at Arabia / Cushing and Salmenhaara at Alfred
March 4 – May 22, 2011
Nordic Heritage Museum, Seattle**

Seattle—The Nordic Heritage Museum is pleased to announce a new exhibition: **Vessels of the Heart: Fairbanks at Arabia / Cushing and Salmenhaara at Alfred** which opens Friday, March 4 and runs through Sunday, May 22, 2011.

Vessels of the Heart reveals a rich dialogue between artists in Finland and the United States in the second half of the twentieth century. At the center of the story is Washington ceramicist Richard Fairbanks, who spent an influential Fulbright year at the Arabia ceramics factory in Finland in 1959–1960, witnessing a golden age of Scandinavian design. In his introduction to the book *Richard Fairbanks, American Potter*, art critic Matthew Kangas writes “Once his body of work is closely examined, it becomes clear that Richard Fairbanks is among the most important, if not the most important, potter in the history of the Pacific Northwest.”

Fairbanks (1929 – 1989), a native of Yakima, Washington, first studied ceramics at the University of Washington in the early 1950’s. His rural background was the foundation for a connection to early American farm pottery and a dedication to functional pottery that would endure throughout his career, and which set him apart from other Pacific Northwest ceramicists at the time. In 1959, Fairbanks was awarded a Fulbright grant to study at the Institute for Applied Arts in Helsinki and work as a guest artist at the Arabia ceramics manufacturing firm. The factory, founded in 1873, was known for simple, functionalist designs—many inspired by natural materials and by Finnish folk art.

Fairbanks thrived in this atmosphere, meeting colleagues such as Kyllikki Salmenhaara (1915 – 1981). Salmenhaara had studied at New York’s Alfred University during her own education abroad. She shared Fairbanks’ regard for American folk pottery, and the two artists forged a friendship that continued until Salmenhaara’s death. “Ceramics are not only to be looked at. They should be

touched and felt," according to Salmenhaara. In the 1960s, because of an accident, Salmenhaara could no longer work with the potter's wheel and she began a new career in teaching. As a teacher, Salmenhaara underlined the knowledge of material and command of technique as the basis of all creative work. She wrote the first textbook in ceramics written in the Finnish language.

During her tenure at Alfred University, Salmenhaara was an influence on Val Cushing (1931–), who was a ceramics graduate student when they first met in 1956. When the Finnish potter returned years later as a guest professor, Cushing was then teaching in Alfred's graduate ceramic department. Professor Cushing remains productive in his studio, exhibiting and lecturing widely as a highly recognized leader in his field. "I aspire to make pottery that is both beautiful and useful," Cushing has said. "I place as much emphasis as I can on the sensuous qualities of a pot. I do this mainly by the use of color, form and surface textures that are as stimulating to see as to touch."

Together, works by Fairbanks, Salmenhaara, and Cushing call to mind conversations about form, function, aesthetics, and technique between artists in Scandinavia and North America.



Image: Kyllikki Salmenhaara vase, 1959-1960. Photo by Richard Fairbanks.

For general information, visit www.nordicmuseum.org or phone (206) 789-5707

Museum hours: Tues-Sat 10 am to 4 pm; Sun 12 noon to 4 pm; Mon closed

Admission: \$6 general; \$5 seniors & college students; \$4 children over 5 years;

FREE for children under 5 and Museum members

The Museum is located at 3014 NW 67th Street, Seattle, WA 9811

About the Nordic Heritage Museum

With over 55,000 visitors annually, the Nordic Heritage Museum is a cultural treasure in the Pacific Northwest. It is the only museum in the United States that represents the cultural heritage of all five Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The Museum's mission is to share Nordic culture with people of all ages and backgrounds by exhibiting art and objects, preserving collections, providing educational and cultural experiences and serving as a community gathering place. The Nordic Heritage Museum presents a wide range of vibrant programs including contemporary art exhibitions, outstanding concerts, lectures and films and a variety of special events throughout the year.