Conscience of glass

- Makers of artistic and artisan glass in Finland: realities, vocation and relationship with the industrial past

Ella Varvio
Master’s Thesis
Applied Art and Design
Department of Design
School of Art, Design and Architecture
Aalto University
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ABSTRACT

Conscience of glass - Makers of artistic and artisan glass in Finland: realities, vocation and relationship with the industrial past, is an exploration of the scene of Finnish glassmaking today. In my thesis I am making an insight into the trade that I am graduating into. I summarize the developments of Finnish glassmaking to present day and introduce the realities and mindset of independent glassmakers; craftsmen, designers and artist working outside the industry.

During the recent decades Finnish glassmaking has gone through major changes. Today Iittala is the only prominent industrial manufacturer of glass in Finland, when in the history there were competing factories. The industry has declined, but otherwise glassmaking might be more versatile than it used to be. There has been a rise in glass education and emergence of minor scale glass studios. The report on present day operators of glassmaking includes Iittala as a factory and as a global brand, educational institutes and small studios. The sections covering history, education and present day manufacturers are based on literary sources, websites, inquiries via email and interviews.

To fully comprehend the realities for glass designers, artists and craftsmen, I have conducted interviews with 14 glassmakers. The interviewees are all glassmakers working mainly in Finland and they identify themselves as designers, artists or glassblowers. The interviews provided information on practicalities in running a glass studio, thoughts and ideas on income, exhibiting glass and also on the future of Finnish glassmaking. The present day glassmakers appear to be versatile and devoted to their job. In addition small studios are making glassmaking visible and offer the possibility to realize alternative design and art to those of the industrial manufacturers.
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. Personal perspective

The objective of this study is to form up an overall look of the Finnish glassmaking today. The initial reason to do this was that I view myself as a becoming glassmaker. The grounding of this research lies in is my previous experience of design, art, and craft in glass. My educational background for it is in the Bachelor program of Ceramic and Glass Design in Aalto University. Through my studies I gained basic knowledge of glassmaking, but it wasn’t an obvious choice of specialization for me as I identified myself more as a drafter and designer than actual maker.

A turning point for me became in fall 2011, when I attended a week-long workshop in co-operation between Aalto University and Linnaeus University in southern Sweden in the area that is also known as Kingdom of Crystal for its long traditions in glass manufacturing. Despite the short duration of the workshop I made important realizations, some related to technical and artistic aspects, but the most significant was the perception of glassmaking as a peculiar combination of art, craft, industry, tradition and commercialism. The industry had bound together specialists from craft, commerce, technology and design, but this concept was already waning away.

Within two years from the workshop one of the most prestigious brands from this area, Orrefors, had moved all of its manufacturing outside Sweden. As a result Orrefors and Åfors factories were being closed down. (New Wave Group AB 2012.) Meanwhile factory of Kosta on the same area and owned by the same company New Wave Group AB, has been preserved as a tourist attraction and production place for more artistic products for KostaBoda brand (Orrefors KostaBoda AB, 2014).

After the workshop in Sweden I began to work on the techniques and ideas that I adopted there. For my bachelor’s thesis in 2012 I explored Swedish graal glassblowing
technique and pondered about designer’s and maker’s role in production, as the demanding pieces required co-operation with professional glassblower. Eventually glass had become an irreplaceable medium for me, both for its visual capacities and for the excitement and craft traditions of the making itself. Therefore I was eager to learn about glassmaking traditions in Finland and on this ground I applied for an internship in Nuutajärvi glass factory. Owned by Fiskars Group and a producer for Iittala brand, the factory manufactured small art series and Birds by Oiva Toikka, in other words products that needed craft skills and a wide palette of glass colours. In past Nuutajärvi played a significant role in Finnish glass manufacturing and renowned designers such as Gunnell Nyman, Kaj Franck, Saara Hopea and Heikki Orvola had worked there. Therefore my internship at the factory in summer 2013 turned out to be a bit of a swan song. Within a year Nuutajärvi factory closed down, and all its functions were rearranged to Iittala glass factory, which is now the only significant industrial producer of glass in Finland.

Meanwhile my own production had drifted to very artistic glass. Together with fellow student Sini Majuri I have been creating contemporary glass art by combining comic art illustrations to traditional glass art. One of the main objectives of our project “Comic art in glass” has been to bring glass art visible to a new audience and present the works on unconventional arenas. This year some of my glass artworks are being exhibited both in Finland and abroad. I am mentioning this to point out that I am already trying to play in the field of glass art and design, but I am not including my own practices to this study.

Initially I have done this research for my personal motifs and morals, as I have made an exploration of the field that I am graduating into. On general level I have gathered data that could be beneficial for the scene of glassmaking and to bring present day glassmakers into light.
1.2. Topic, framing and questions

In consequence it appeared relevant to make an insight of Finnish glassmaking, especially artistic glass. It is obvious that the scene has undergone various transitions. The art of making glass used to exist solely within factory walls, but there has been a relatively recent rise of new minor scale operators, such as artists and artisans working in studios run by associations, co-operatives, educational institutes or even companies. In this study I am revealing the current state of Finnish glassmaking. Who are the operators in designing, manufacturing, exhibiting and educating art glass? What are the requirements, conditions and values that sustain art glass production in Finland?

I view making of glass as a cultural tradition that has involved designers, artists, glassblowers, engravers and other specialists during its history. Therefore this study specifies glassmaking as design and art that is made in traditional glassblowing techniques and requires a hot glass studio for implementation. In other words I exclude things as window glass, stained glass, glass beads, laboratory glass or container glass production from this study, though it is worth mentioning that utility glass such as bottles and jars used to be an important backbone of the industry (Koivisto 2010, 19).

The purpose of this study is not to define, what is art or design, or ponder about its qualities, instead it is looking at the people, who are making glass. In Finland industry and small-scale entrepreneurs are facing the same challenges: manufacturing glass requires equipment, skillful labor force, high energy consumption, imported raw materials, and the ability to market and sell the products. Keeping this in mind, I assume that there must be values or a vocation that upholds glass producing in Finland. I venture myself to unravel some of the values that backbone glassmakers.

To present the road that has led to the current state of Finnish glassmaking, I have outlined the history and recent changes in design and production. To understand the present I need to be able to compare it to the past. The phases that have occurred in
glassmaking are usually reflections from global phenomena, for instance the economic boom in 1950s and the international studio glass movement 1960s onwards.

The method to gather information on contemporary glassmaking was to conduct qualitative, semi-structured interviews. Previous to this study I had already been in touch with wide spectrum of operators in the field. Their point of view can not be found in literary sources. The biggest group of interviewees I have nicknamed as indie glassmakers, which refers to artists, designers and craftsmen working outside the big company. From them I have asked about the realities of glassmaking, but to view the future prospects of glassmaking I have also inquired glassmakers’ ideas about improvements and solutions to challenges they are facing.

Furthermore I have outlined the development of glass education. Education of glass outside factories is relatively recent activity and it introduces new makers into the business. Basically I am summarizing, where glass artists, designers or craftsman are emerging from.

To fully report on Finnish glassmaking the current state of Iittala has to be opened up. In Iittala’s case it is important to understand that it is a global brand, not solely a factory unit. I have reviewed Iittala according to news reports, press releases and interviews. Though there was a temptation to interview several representatives from the company, I have focused on the persons who can give me insight on brand’s philosophy and manufacturing process.

Although I am not writing about my own art, I am including my opinions and observations into the study. In traditional structure personal reflecting is removed to the final chapters, but I consider it fluent to give anecdotes and comments to open up the scene for those not familiar to glassmaking. To keep the personal opinions and less objective material in frames, I have divided them into chapters under the title viewpoint. These parts of the text are less formal and more narrative.
1.3. Previous study

A recent Master’s Thesis from ARTS, A dialogue with glass, by Anna van der Lei and Kristos Mavrostomos, touch upon the changes in Finnish glassmaking. Their study includes interviews of glassmakers and they record the atmosphere of Nuutajärvi village in the time of its turmoil. Whereas my research is about the realities and vocation of manufacturing glass in Finland, van der Lei and Mavrostomos had more artistic approach. Their work concentrated on viewing glassmaking as something totally different than traditional product design, as a performance, which is an inspiring approach. (Van der Lei & Mavrostomos; 2014.)

Publications of the Finnish Glass Museum are a key source of reference to my study, especially Finnish Glass Lives -bulletins that are published every fifth year to report on Finnish glass art and manufacturing. The most recent Finnish Glass Lives 7 was being published in February 2015 alongside with an assembling exhibition at the museum. The bulletin has current information on factories, workshops and artists. While it offers valuable recording of recent developments in the scene of Finnish glass, it does not comment on what it is like to be a glass craftsman or glass designer in 2015. (Vertainen, 2015.)

The section about the history of Finnish glass is mainly based on literature by the Finnish Glass Museum, especially texts by Kaisa Koivisto and Uta Lauren. For analyses of 1940s and 1950s design ethics, Harri Kalha’s doctoral thesis from 1997 was a substantial source (Kalha, 1997). In the section about the history, I have not brought new data on the table, instead I have aimed to form myself an understanding of the previous phases of glass industry and -art. I also reckon that giving background knowledge of the trade gives a better insight to the findings and conclusions that I have made by interviewing contemporary glass artists and craftsmen.
Viewpoint 1

I might be naïve, when I say that the production side matters to me.

I guess every design student that I know has gone through ideological and artistic crises, and I am no exception. For me one the biggest dilemma is the invisibility of production. The factory units have been eloping to places far and hidden. For a consumer it’s impossible to say which kind of environmental and occupational safety neglects might be concealed in manufacturing. But when it comes to design a product, the burden feels unbearable. As a future designer will I be able to have good conscience of the things I design?

Making of glass has held the fort Finnish manufacturing for surprisingly long. It is the recent decades that have narrowed the industry to its slimmest. And to me, personally, Finnish glassmaking has held the fort of justified product design. When it comes to energy consumption and chemicals, glass is not innocent, but instead it has the human factor. Glassmaking has demanded handcraft and skills of many. Even in the advertising of glass art and design the role of handcraft, art, and co-operation has been emphasized. Maybe I have added some poetical and unrealistic values to glass crafting, but I still can not resist the charm of glowing furnaces, skills and tricks of craftsmen and –women, not to mention the visual characteristics of this translucent and transparent material.

So far my own artistic career has been guided by thrills that I get from glassmaking. In 2011 I saw team of glassblowers form a stemmed wine glass in Kosta factory, Sweden. What an experience to realize that the highly expensive wine glasses in the factory outlet were really formed by a human breath! In Nuutajärvi I admired the palette of pot furnaces with different glass colours. In Iittala I was carried away by the enchanting inferno of steam and hot glass. I am a fan girl of the industrial glassmaking, yet it is vanishing away. They do not form wineglasses at Kosta anymore and they don’t use the colour furnaces at Nuutajärvi. So what is there left and where to turn next?
It is a matter of conscience for me, as it is a matter of future prospects. I want to know where glass designs could be implemented, if not in a factory, what is it like in smaller workshops? Although I do keep up with my fan girl attitude towards Iittala, it has been far from rosy in some recent cases. I’m not the only Finn shaken by the Finnwatches report in 2013 that proved Finnish brands Marimekko and Iittala using a subcontractor in Thailand with severe neglects in occupational health and safety and workers rights. (Finnwatch 2013) Though Iittala replied quickly to the scrutiny and even according to Finnwatches report Iittala is producing most of its glassware still in Finland, the case left a suspicion about production’s sincerity.

I guess this all comes to the fact, that I myself have been spelled by the myths of Finnish design history. I have aspired to become like Kaj Franck, Tapio Wirkkala, Timo Sarpaneva, Gunnel Nyman or Saara Hopea. I have this image of an artistically talented designer who works in close co-operation with workers at the factory. Can I highlight this even more: the designer used to be present at the factory and had comprehension of the manufacturing process. And it must have been justified for designers to feel themselves significant as their designs might have been the provider of livelihood for the people they were working with.

So why does this not exist anymore? And why can I not become Kaj Franck when I grow up? I do somehow understand that the role is not on offer, and the world around has changed so much. Still I have to scour the history of Finnish glass industry to catch the elements that led to the extinction of design heroes.
2 HISTORY OF FINNISH GLASS

Firstly how to determine Finnish glass? Although modern day markets use the term Finnish Design despite the origin of the product itself, it seems vague to approach the matter by the nationality of designer. Instead I am recapping the history of glass manufacturing within the geographical entity of Finland. Over the time glassmaking has been heavily influenced by external knowhow, politics, economy and fashion.

The Finnish glass design and industry thrived after the Second World War. Now all the famous factories, except one, have gone out of business (Koivisto and Lauren 2013, 301-310.) When did the downhill for industry begin? And in which state did designers step into the world of glass manufacturing? How did glass become a medium for art and even a medium for nation’s self-esteem? And when did the small scale studios appear on the scene?

2.1. Early years

The glass production in Finland started relatively late compared to other European countries. The first recorded glass factory functioned in 1681-85 in Uusikaupunki, but the first boom of setting up a glass factory came in late 18th century. For example Nuutajärvi glass factory was founded in 1793. As a part of Swedish Kingdom, the art of glassmaking passed through Sweden, usually by glassblowers, who originated from central Europe. (Matsuikainen 1994, 23-32, Lauren 2013, 30-31.)

Finnish glassware was largely exported to mainland Sweden, but after the Finnish War in early 19th century, the markets opened to Russian Empire. At this time there were around 20 glass workshops in Finland producing tableware, jars, bottles and window glass. (Lauren 2013, 31.)
2.2. Design emerges in the industry

The design of the glass factories used to be anonymous, products were created by craftsmen at the factories, or more commonly designs were copied from central European models (Koivisto 2001, 25).

The demand for design and applied arts rises in the late 19th century due to industrialization, and in Finland, also due to the rise of nationalistic ideas. Finland as a part of Russian Empire had an urge to define itself by fine and applied arts. In 1871 the Craft school, predecessor to Aalto University School of Art, Design and Architecture, is founded. In turn of the 19th and 20th century Finnish design embraces the style of romantic nationalism which in fact is an adaptation from Art Nouveau. The glass industry reacts slowly in the swift of styles, but in 1905 Nuutajärvi glass factory is the first to organize a design competition for glass. (Lauren 2013, 9-10, 28-33; Korvenmaa 2009, 15-69.)

Still in 1910s and 1920s produced glass models were rarely designed by known artists. One thing that drove a change in this was the success of Swedish glass factory Orrefors. Orrefors pioneered in involving artists in the product development. Factory’s artists Simon Gate and Edward Hald were working closely with craftsmen and were therefore forerunners even for the whole trade of designers. (Lauren 2013, 34-35.)

In general 1920s was hard times for the glass industry. The impacts of the First World War and Finnish Civil War were still present and the prohibition law (1919-1932) came heavy on the bottle and drinking glass manufacturing. Glass factories tried to replace the loss in sale by producing crystal glass to “European taste”. Intimidated by the rivalry of Swedish Orrefors, Riihimäki glass factory launched a competition in 1928 for new tableware. The outcomes of the competition were presented in the World Expo in Barcelona 1929, which turned out to be the first international appearance by Finnish glass industry with designed items. (Lauren 2013, 35-39.)
In 1930s design competitions by glass industry became an established practice. Through competitions glass factories sought for either novelty products or showpieces for international exhibitions such as World Expos and Milan triennials. Many of the noted Finnish designers came to prominence through the competitions and following international displays. For example Gunnel Nyman, Aino Aalto and Alvar Aalto created many of their design classics as proposals for glass factories’ competitions. The famous Aalto -vase, that I myself have become slightly allergic to, was originally a proposal for Karhula-Iittala’s design competition in 1936. (Lauren 2013, 43-66.)

Ideologically glass design in 1930s had two different leanings. As international exhibitions were seen as a mean to promote nations industry and development, they usually presented glass as sumptuous showpieces that required a lot of handcraft and were expensive to produce. Meanwhile many members of the new trade of designers felt strongly for the ideas of modernism and functionalism. Leaning to the ideologies hatched in Europe (Gregor Paulsson, Le Corbusier, Bauhaus, Deutscher Werkbund) there was a quest to create beautiful, affordable and machine-made everyday items, not only exclusive artworks. Eventually factories engaged artists also in tableware and utility glass design. (Lauren 2013, 45-64, 79-81.)

Although several classics of Finnish modernistic design were produced before the Second World War and design competitions had engaged artists and glass industry together, only few designers were on the regular pay lists of the glass factories (Lauren 2013, 45-77). The very first designers to have a job in glass industry were Göran Hongell and Erkki Vesanto in 1930s, and they were no star designers of their day, but more like impersonal industrial designers (Koivisto 2013, 188-189).

According to Koivisto’s estimate before 1965 there had been less than twenty full-basis glass designers. (Koivisto 2001, 14). This makes you think that being a glass designer was quite marginal even in the heydays.
2.3. The Golden Era of Finnish Design

Glass art and design has almost a mythical status for promoting Finnish industry and design internationally, especially during the post-war era in 1940s and 1950s. Art historian Harri Kalha refers these decades as a Golden Era of Finnish Design in his study and other sources usually refer 1950s as the triumph for Finnish designers on international arenas. (Kalha 1997, 33, 276; Koivisto 2001, 9.)

In the fact the Second World War made almost a total stop to Finnish glass design, factories were producing solely utility glass such as bottles and pharmaceutical glass (Lauren 2013, 77). Support to Finnish design scene came from applied art exhibitions organized by other Nordic countries. For example "Ny finsk konstindustri" -exhibition was presented in Stockholm during one of the harshest war years in 1941. (Lauren 2013, 74-78.)

The reconstruction after war raised the demand for reasonable quality products, and they were designed and manufactured by the same individuals that had been active before the war. The industry continued the fruitful co-operation with artists that was introduced by the competitions in 1930s. (Lauren 2013, 117-118.)

In matter of fact, wartime’s after effects might have accelerated designer’s involvement with glass industry. Kaisa Koivisto observes the role of designer being part of the rationalization of industrial production. Simultaneously as engineers and technicians were employed to factories, also the first designers were hired, and after the war it became current to make production more efficient. (Koivisto 2013, 187-190.)

Koivisto points the year 1946 remarkable for nominations of famous-to-be designers in Finnish glass industry. After Iittala’s design competition the same year, Tapio Wirkkala and Kaj Franck are being hired to the factory. Meantime Nuutajärvi glass factory begins co-operation with Gunnel Nyman and Riihimäki glass factory employs Helena Tynell to design tableware glass. Although the initial intention of hiring designers aimed to
create new models for serial production, the uneasy times justified artistic glass in unseen scale. In late 1940s Finland was struggling with war reparations and obligations to Soviet Union. The actual fear of becoming a communistic state might have been one reason for Finnish industry to push elaborate design to exhibitions around the world to proof otherwise. (Koivisto 2013, 187-190.)

1950s can be seen as the heyday for international success of Finnish Design. The success came from arenas such as Milan Triennials and World Expos and other international exhibitions. The success in terms of design prices at the venues aroused not only global interest, but also rising demand of Finnish glass at the home markets. (Lauren 2013, 122-141, 162.) The fame of Finnish design in 1950s can be seen as a well constructed creation of a national image. One of the aims of taking part in international design exhibitions was to build up image for a small and relatively unknown country. The cultural independence of Finland was emphasized, because Finland desired to be perceived as part of the western bloc. Exhibition projects were justified in terms of art, commerce and foreign policy. (Kalha 1997, 149-150.)

Until 1960s it was a common practice for major glassworks to present their artistic glass at the trade fairs, most notable being the World Fairs and Milan Triennials. Therefore the role of art glass was to bring prestige to the factories and in the matter of fact countries were competing at the fairs in a somewhat nationalistic spirit. (Klein 1984, 245-248.) According to Klein Scandinavian glass design dominated the markets in 1950-60s by volume and technique. This applied to Sweden in particular, but Finnish glass played in same arenas too. Finnish glass designers such as Tapio Wirkkala, Timo Sarpaneva, Kaj Franck, Oiva Toikka, Helena Tynell and Nanny Still were well noted abroad. (Klein 1984, 248-253.)

1960s can be seen as the harvest season for the fame of Finnish design in 1950s. Industry’s competitiveness had reached a substantive level and glass products were selling well both in homeland and on foreign markets. For example Nuutajärvi was
focusing on colourful, quality pressed glass, but also a lot of artistic glass was being made alongside with the mechanized production. In 1960s Finnish markets were cautiously opening up, but glass industry managed to restrain import and factories made mutual agreements to control competition. For a present day viewer this seems a bit curious or even illegal, but for example Iittala stopped producing pressed glass in 1960s to give this branch away to Riihimäki’s and Karhula’s factories. (Koivisto 2013, 223-233.)

2.4. Meanwhile studio glass starts to emerge

Due to the rise of new ideals art glass started to move away from the industry. The Studio Glass Movement was originally an American phenomenon, which eventually spread globally. Initially it had been launched as an attempt to create compact glass furnace suitable for independent artistic use. Soon after the first successful glass melting outside industrial environments, universities in Northern America started glass programs. The idea of working on one’s own with such rare medium as glass really took off in 1960s and 1970s. Klein sees this as a part of the spirit of the times, as studio glass concentrated on artistic work and experimentation with the material. Probably it did strike a chord among hippies, as glass was now introduced as a means for self-expression, and what is more as art outside the commercial world. (Klein 1989, 6-11, 18-22.)

Though Studio Glass Movement cautiously arrived in Finland in 1970s, much of the artistic glass was still made in premises of the factories. If all of the renowned Finnish glassware brands produced artworks for fairs and exhibitions, Nuutajärvi factory was probably the one to offer most artistic freedom to its designers. Already in 1952 Kaj Franck, the artistic director of Nuutajärvi and Arabia, pushed the idea through that art pieces should be made alongside with mass production. Probably he saw Arabia’s art department as a fine example of art’s and industry’s interplay. Until 1980s Nuutajärvi offered its designers the option to produce unique art pieces, similar freedom did not appear to same extent at other Finnish factories. (Koivisto 2013, 213-214.)
In 1971, actually by Kaj Franck’s invitation, one of the figures of American Studio Glass Movement, Marvin Lipofsky, came to Finland to give glassblowing demonstration and lectures. After that some students of University of Art and Design Helsinki got inspired of the possibilities of making glass art. Heikki Kallio was one of the pioneering characters in Finland to run a glass studio on his own. (Koivisto 2003, 143-145.)

Still there was no boom of setting up artistic glass studios. Some smaller workshops do appear in 1970s and 1980s, in many cases found by former factory glassblowers. In a way it is very unlikely that these workshops intentionally followed Studio Glass Movement’s principles. (Kosonen 1999, 223.) And it was not until recent decades that artist and craftsmen graduating from educational institutes set up studios (Koivisto 2013, 274).

2.5. Troubles occur for the industry

Eventually, in 1970s Finnish markets increasingly opened up for import. The import of cheaper glassware put Finnish products in unfavorable competition. Factories replied to the changes in various ways. Riihimäki glass factory ended all of their handcraft production by 1976. Iittala focused on the efficiency of the production as did Nuutajärvi too. The increasing competition gradually reduced the amount of different designs in production. (Koivisto 2013, 264-267.)

In 1988 the two great rivals Nuutajärvi and Iittala were merged together. The 1990s recession in Finland escalated the attempts to make production even more efficient. Both the number of different designs in production and the amount of workers were reduced. From 1995 onwards all products from Nuutajärvi and Iittala were marketed under the i-label. In 2003 Iittala was made a global trademark. The ownership of Iittala changed for couple of times until Fiskars Group bought it in 2007. (Koivisto 2013, 268-272.) According to Kaisa Koivisto Kerttu Nurminen was the last designer who had a
Most notable glass factories of Finland
(Koivisto and Lauren 2013, 301-310)

Kumela 1937-1985
Riihimäki 1910-1990
Nuutajärvi 1793-2014
Humppila 1952-2008
Iittala 1881-
permanent work in Finnish glass industry. After 2007 all the product designs for Iittala has been done on freelance -bases (Koivisto 2010, 20-21.)

Although my research concentrates on art glass, it is worth mentioning that in 2009 all production of window and bottle glass came to an end in Finland. For the industry these necessity products had been economically important sectors. (Koivisto 2010, 19.)

So we come close to the present day. It is likely that for some time functions at old Nuutajärvi factory were reduced and moved to Iittala factory, but the final blow for Nuutajärvi unit came in 2013 as Fiskars announced to centralize glass manufacturing in Iittala (Fiskars Group Oyj, 2013.) This act was probably a rational decision to secure glass manufacturing in Finland, but also as the vanishing point for 220 years of industrial tradition in Nuutajärvi.

This leaves Iittala as the one left standing of Finnish glass industry. At least it seems to be the only prominent one, but to be precise Muurla is listed in Finnish Glass Lives 7 as functioning factory (Kekäläinen 2015, 140.) According to Muurla’s website they produce glass by centrifugal casting, and handcraft items and prototypes at their factory in Finland, when some of the glassware is produced elsewhere in Europe (Muurla Design Marketing, 2015.) Without seeing the place, it is hard to estimate the credibility and scale of their manufacturing. For my inquiries about factory’s functions their representative gave scarce answers. Based on my discussions with designers and notices of their website, Muurla can not be reckoned as very ambitious in design wise.

Eventually the industry had reached the situation, where there are no more glass factories functioning on protected home markets and competing with one and another with novelty products. This has led to the extinction of full-time glass designers. In the matter of fact the profession of a glass designer occurred only from 1930s to 2000s. The narrowing down of the industry has consequently reduced also the number of glass craftsmen working in the trade.

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2.6. Ideologies of glass?

What I myself find most intriguing about the past, are the ideologies behind objects. Obvious reason for producing altogether anything is economical profit, but I believe there is much more to it. Many of the famous designs link to the ideologies of their time. For example Aino Aalto’s or later on Kaj Franck’s rational tableware glass can be linked to the ideas of functionalism and equality. (Koivisto 2001, 48; Lauren 2013, 48-51.)

Alongside with the rational products there has always been a demand for eye-catching pieces. Manufacturing highly expensive artworks has been justified by international exhibitions and presenting the capability of the maker, the factory and even the nation. From late 19th century to 1960s, and even in some extent to the present day too, Finnish glass industry has been fueled by nationalistic ideas. Although many of the styles and techniques of Finnish glass have been adopted from abroad, there has been the strong agenda to present something truly Finnish by presenting glass design.

Promoting design after the World War II had also a political agenda. There was a serious concern that Finland might have been seen as a country trapped behind the Iron Curtain. Therefore by presenting cutting-edge design and vigorous, competitive industry, Finland could claim that it was part of the western economy. In this sense it was also beneficial to link Finland more closely to Scandinavia. The term of Scandinavian design was emphasized strongly during the cold war. (Lauren 2013, 154-162; Kalha 1997, 112-116, 264.) In consequence the values linked to Finnish design in past might have a nationalistic and conservative tone. I fear that this applies especially with glass, as it is the design classics that are stuck on everyone’s retina and on the window displays of the stores.

Yet it would be all black and white to claim glass design to have been fully economy driven and nationalistic. It is more like a frame set by the society, business and advertising. In many cases designers themselves must have felt the social conscience
of their work. It is obvious that many of Golden Era designers were aware of the concepts and ideals of modernism. They knew Gregor Paulsson’s ideas of rational and honest design, affordable to many, which were presented in his book Vackrare vardagsvara, More Beautiful Everyday Things (Koivisto 2001, 28). Aino and Alvar Aalto were personally acquaintances of Paulsson and other figures setting the ideologies of functionalistic design (Lauren 2013, 46-47). Besides the good intentions of design there could have been a very personal commitment to work. For instance Päivi Jantunen’s book on Kaj Franck conveys a picture of the designer being a part of a community formed up by the factory and its employees (Jantunen, 2011).

Handcraft can be seen as one of glass’ essential values. It might be an echo that dates back to Arts and Crafts Movement or it goes even further back in time. Craftsmen felt strong professional pride after years of practicing. Many of the designers who entered into factories appreciated the workmanship and became spokesman for craft and more artistic products. Arttu Brummer, designer and long time teacher at the Craft school (later to become ARTS) was known for advocating artistic craft (Kalha 1997, 198-205). Kaj Franck had many attempts to revive craft tradition at Nuutajärvi. Altogether craft had a symbolic significance for the whole industry. (Koivisto 2001, 224-225.)

For the home markets glass industry represented not only international fame, but values of workmanship and reconstruction (Koivisto 2001, 9). Glassblowing can be very manual and laborious work and this seems to have been emphasized in advertisement of glass factories. Koivisto sees that the highlighting of co-operation between artists and glassblowers as part of the spirit of reconstruction. (Koivisto 2013, 233-237.)

As a remark many of the classic glass artworks and designs associate to the nature. Glass has clear reminiscent of water and ice, so nature has been and still is an obvious source of inspiration. Wirkkala, Nyman, Sarpaneva and Franck are all good examples of using organic shapes and titling their works with names related to nature. Yet Kalha questions in his study whether connotations to nature originated from artist’s
inspiration or were added afterwards to give the character of Finnish nature to the designs. (Kalha 1997, 202-212.)

But when it comes to the present, can glass items be sold by being something “truly Finnish” or by emphasizing world famous designs from decades ago? Both Koivisto and Kalha acknowledge that the fixed image of glass design from 1950s can form up a burden for present day makers (Kalha 1997, 15; Koivisto 2001, 10).

Whereas industrial environment emphasized co-operation and teamwork for economical profit, the Studio Glass Movement introduced different ideals. It aimed to transform glass to a suitable medium for independent artists. Therefore it determined glassmaking more as self-expression in solitude. (Klein 1989, 10-11). For example Heikki Kallio’s main reason for contemplating an affordable glass furnace for educational use in 1970s was to give an option to industrial mass production (Koivisto 2003, 145.)

The values that might have been part of the industrial production or 1970s ideology does not necessarily translate into the work of present day glassmakers. By interviewing contemporary designers, artists and craftsman I might be able to dig up some of the ideologies that support the trade of glassmaking in 2015.
It was at Ambiente Fair in Frankfurt am Main that I talked to a representative of a Czech crystal manufacturer. For those who are not so enlightened about glass trivia, crystal contains lead to enhance glass’ optical properties. I think everyone remembers the sparkling nature of those grandmother’s crystal vases or crystal chandeliers. Well those flickers are due to the lead and skillfully crafted cutting and polishing that bring out crystal glass’ amazing refraction.

But at Ambiente Fair, said to be biggest fair for tableware, interior design and kitchen items, at the exhibition stand of this Czech manufacturer, I was puzzled. By the optical qualities I could note that the heavy vases were really lead crystal. Instead of having elaborate cuttings, the items were just pressed in a mold. What’s the sense of producing stuff with such a harmful chemical without anyhow exploiting the visual benefits it has? I couldn’t help asking the factory’s representative, how come that they are using lead crystal but no cuttings to bring out material’s quality? The answer was polite but perplexing: “Our factory has long traditions of making lead crystal, but we can not afford to pay the engravers and cutters anymore. We need to find new ways to keep on going.”

So we come to the dilemma of hours that has been around since the industrialization. The more you can reduce the hours from production, the more efficient and profitable the business is. The less working hours, the less workers, even the better. I guess it is the luxury nature of glass, and especially crystal, that has kept silly things such as cut crystal living. Actually Finland also produced cut crystal in the gone-by days, but it more or less came along with the rise of product design that items were simplified. Yet the value of hours weren’t as high as it is today, as a curiosity Koivisto mentions that Helena Tynell’s Lintupuu, 1948 for Riihimäki glass factory, took 24 hours to engrave. (Koivisto 2001, 226-227.)
Yes, the world does change, and so does the rate for the value of human hours. Here in western world it’s comparatively high and in sweatshops of India, China or other recently industrialized countries it’s very low. You can go to your nearest Ikea, see the cute tumblers and vases that are advertised to be mouth blown glass. Then check the price and you’ll note it’s few euros. I does not need much brains to reason that the value of hours has been inadequate. This is not the place to go deep in the question about consumers’, retailer’s or manufacturer’s responsibility, but what I’m trying to bring out are the two most used options when producing glass in big volumes: strip off the hand-craft and human hours, or exploit human hours less valuable.

The dilemma of hours might be the hurdle of Finnish glassmaking, but it might also be its potential. It has become more and more relevant to be able to tell the story behind objects, and open up the value of hours. I wish that Finnish glass could compete on the global markets by quality, design, new concepts and innovations, honesty, story and good conscience.
3 FURNACES GLOWING TODAY

3.1. Education

Glassmaking used to be a craft practiced merely in factories and therefore the trade had a secretive nature. In a way it was industry’s task and responsibility to pass through the know-how. This exclusiveness of the craft did not crumble until 1970s (Koivisto 2003, 141-145) and by the present day it is more common to learn glassmaking in school than in a factory. In this chapter I am outlining the development of education and its current standing. This is because the increase of glass education has had significant outcomes, such as the rise of minor scale studios, the changed attitudes and more open way of doing.

3.1.1. Via factory

Let’s begin with the old way of becoming a glassblower: entering into a factory. According to Iittala’s factory director Per-Henrik Hagberg’s estimation only some of Iittala’s glassblowers have gained glass education outside the factory. Instead there is a form of internal education, and even qualifications for a journeyman (kisälli) and for a master glassblower (mestari). To reach even the journeyman’s title glassblowers must have worked in trade for several years. (Hagberg 2015.)

This tradition of factory’s internal education is a relic from the past. In factories glassblowers form up a working group. Master is the one in charge of the team and the most challenging procedures are made by him (hardly ever by her). The new comers in the factory traditionally started their career from donkey jobs such as handling the molds and carrying the pieces to annealing. Slowly step by step one could proceed to a glassblower, and finally as a master. (Metsänkylä, Suutari 1992, 27-28, 118-124.)

Based on my own experience at Nuutajärvi factory, this hierarchy still existed. If I
compare it to the report on Nuutajärvi by National Board of Antiquites in 1991-1992, the scope and versatility of production at Nuutajärvi had naturally declined, but the working teams were still functioning. Whereas the team’s original purpose might have been to make a refined wine glasses, in 2013 they were almost solely making Birds by Toikka. Nevertheless the glassblowers had a division of roles, one makes the first bubble, second one forms the body, third one shapes the head, and so on. The procedure varies depending on the item in production.

One might claim that the modern day industry, with only few designs in production, is not giving enough challenge and variety for a glassblower to become truly skillful.

**3.1.2. Glassblowing in vocational schools**

In a report for the Finnish Glass Museum in 2003 it becomes obvious, how recent phenomenon glass education is. Nuutajärvi Glass School started glassblowing courses in 1993 and Ikaalinen College of Craft and Design in 1999 (Siikamäki2 2003, 1-12). Today these two are also the vocational schools in Finland to offer training for glassblower’s profession (Nuutajärvi Glass Village 2015; Sastamalan koulutuskuntayhtymä 2015).

Ikaalinen College of Craft and Design, IKATA, used to have an outpost in Kihniö were glass artisans were taught. In 2014 this education unit was moved to Ikaalinen, where they take in 12 students for glassblowing studies every second year (Yli-Knuuttila 2015).

Vocational training at Nuutajärvi Glass School started in 1993, currently it has degree studies and also adult education. The degree study for glass artisan aims to give students the professional acquirements for glass blowers profession. (Sara Hulkkonen, teacher, 5.3.2015 by email.) In the past year the school has been facing challenges as it had been dependent on Nuutajärvi factory. This spring there was even a threat of closure, but on 24.3.2015 Tavastia Education Consortium decided to continue the education in Nuutajärvi at least for a year (Yle 2015).
Both IKATA and Nuutajärvi are vocational schools, their emphasis is on hands-on-studies and craft skills:

"Here in Nuutajärvi we consider important that students will learn the techniques and by repeating them. We would gladly do co-operation with art and design students in other institutes. It benefits both and promotes workmanship."
Sara Hulkkonen)

After Per-Henrik Hagberg’s interview I had the impression that journeyman’s and master’s qualifications are only possible for factory employees, but gladly Sara Hulkkonen put it right for me. Nuutajärvi School can also arrange the examination for these titles. In theory anyone working in the trade, as a freelancer or entrepreneur, can gain these qualifications. It feels rewarding to hear this and as Hulkkonen puts it: nowadays the job is not only in factories. (Hulkkonen 2015.)

3.1.3. Aalto ARTS

Aalto University, School of Art, Design and Architecture (ARTS), former University of Art and Design Helsinki and former Craft School, has the longest history of educating glass designers and artists in Finland. Although almost all of the renowned designers of Golden Era Finnish design studied in the school, they had barely any introduction to glass in their degree. For example Timo Sarpaneva was trained as graphic designer, Gunnel Nyman and Kaj Franck as furniture designers, Oiva Toikka as ceramic artist. It was not until 1970s that first glass courses took place and first small glass furnaces were built for student use. (Koivisto 2013, 187-188; Koivisto 2003, 141-145.)

The alignment of glass studies in ARTS and its predecessors has varied during the time. What I relate to is Koivisto’s note that it has not been ever decided whether ARTS educates designers or artists working with glass (Koivisto 2003, 141-146). In any case there is nowadays a fully equipped hot glass studio at Arabia campus, and in theory it is
possible to do Bachelor, Master and even Doctoral degree studies related to glass.

Though it appears that 1990s was the peak for glass education in ARTS and there is a decline from that. ARTS used to have active exchange programs with the world top glass schools and multidisciplinary research projects on glass chemistry. (Siikamäki 2003, 152-157; Yli-Viikari 1999, 224; Yli-Viikari 2015.) According to Siikamäki ARTS had several research projects and even a paid laboratory engineer for glass. (Siikamäki 2003, 152-157). Now the focus of the Department of Design has shifted from material-based studies to more theoretical, conceptual and universal curriculums (Yli-Viikari 2015).

Furthermore the School of ARTS has undergone a degree reform in 2014. The aims of the reformation were to create more topical degrees that would enable the students to graduate faster and get employed easily. One notable thing is that the new degrees include compulsory minor studies. This inevitably makes studies more multidisciplinary than they used to be. (Aalto University 2014.) The actual outcomes of the reform are that the word ‘glass’ disappeared from degree titles. I fear that the new design students do not have enough time in their curriculum immerse themselves in glass crafting. When I myself see the reform as a negative thing when it comes to glassmaking, I have better to ask teaching personnel’s opinion. According to lecturer and studio master Kazushi Nakada ARTS is educating designers who are able to design in glass. On Nakada’s opinion the degree reform enables more and more students to get involved with glass. An architect or fashion designer or anyone can become inspired by glass. Nakada sees that it might enrich the field of glass from now onwards.

3.1.4. Glass design in Universities of Applied Sciences

Now we go back into the sudden rise of glass education in 1990s. When glassblowing studies started in Nuutajärvi, they were originally arranged by Wetterhoff institute, which is nowadays part of Häme University of Applied Sciences (HAMK), and from 1994
Where to get glass education in 2015?

Aalto ARTS

Nuutajärvi Glass School

IKATA

Iittala factory

Wetterhoff (HAMK) *

LAMK *

Metropolia *

*) Do not have a hot glass studio
it has been possible to do Bachelor Degree studies on glass design there. 1995 glass and ceramic design was also offered in Kuopio University of Applied Sciences. According to Siikamäki Lahti Institute of Design and Fine Arts also offered glass courses starting from 1994. (Siikamäki 2003, 1-12.)

Today Wetterhoff still offers ceramic and glass design study program, whereas Universities of Applied Sciences, Lahti (LAMK) and Metropolia offer glass design courses to some extent. None of these institutes have a proper hot glass studio, instead they work in co-operation with small glass studios or vocational schools. Kuopio University of Applied Sciences has ended the study program for ceramic and glass design. (Via email: Kosonen 2015; Rautiainen 2015; Känkäinen 2015; Mokkila-Karttunen 2015.)

3.2. Studios

For some time in Finland small glass studios have been set up by former factory glassblowers. Just to mention some of them: Pekka Paunila working in Riihimäki, already retired Jaakko Liikanen also in Riihimäki, brothers from Nuutajärvi Tarmo and Reima Maaronen in Fiskars and Humppila, and Kari Alakoski that I’ve also interviewed for this study (Winter 2014, 64,70,86).

What is curious point of view about glassblowers’ hot shops, is Markku Kosonen’s comment in his writing about studio glass from 1999: “---small studios can’t afford to pay for designers---” (Kosonen 1999, 223). I have not ever thought it in that way, of course glassblowers running a studio on their own can not afford to hire a designer! Nowadays the case is more that designer’s commission prototypes, artworks, and even small series from glassblowers and the money flows from designer to craftsman, not the other way around.

Today it is quite obvious that the rise of education has brought new blood into the trade,
meanwhile the traditional industry has been shrinking. It is an impossible equation between the number of graduating glassmakers and available jobs, and it has led to the emergence of some small scale hot shops and businesses.

When it comes to these younger ways of managing a glass studio, working together seems to be the solution. For example there are studios of Hytti ry in Suomenlinna (found in 1996) and Lasikomppania in Nuutajärvi (found in 2003) that are run by associations. Then there is Lasismo in Riihimäki (found in 2010), co-operative formed by young designers and glassblowers. Glassmakers working in these kind of studios usually have been educated in glass schools, which were mentioned in previous chapter.

It is interesting to think, whether newcomers in the trade have a different approach to their work, then those who have experienced day-job in a factory. I will look closer to the realities and customs of the small studios in interviews made with contemporary craftsmen, designers and artists.

### 3.3. Iittala - the factory and the brand

This chapter is based on material found on Fiskars Group’s website, press releases and according to interviews with two of company’s representatives. To get a view of design’s and art’s role in product development, I contacted Concept Design Manager for Iittala brand, Irina Viippola. For information about manufacturing and the tradition of glassmaking I contacted Iittala’s Factory Director, Per-Henrik Hagberg. I was fortunate to arrange a meeting with both of them at Fiskars offices on 15.12.2014. The information on design process and on Iittala factory as a manufacturing unit is based on the interviews.

Iittala is a lifestyle brand owned by Fiskars Group. Nowadays the brand is not bound to a certain material, like it used to. Under the international brand of Iittala, and under
the famous i-label, they are retailing cookware, tableware and home interior products. After the 2003 brand reform within the company, products from old regional brands such as Arabia, Rörstrand and Hackman were selected to be marketed as Iittala on international arenas. (Viippola 2014.) It can be seen as a bit of a cherry-picking from old design classics. It is also noteworthy that Iittala has nearly 30 outlets and stores in Finland, around 15 stores abroad, plus a globally spread network of retailers (Iittala 2015).

For an average consumer it is not necessarily certain that many prestigious brands are not any more independent companies but part of larger enterprises. All of these old tableware brands: Arabia, Iittala, Rörstrand and Royal Copenhagen are owned by Fiskars (Fiskars Group Oyj, 2014). A very recent adding to brands held by Fiskars came this spring as Fiskars bought WWRD group which includes luxury home and tableware brands such as Waterford, Wedgwood and Royal Doulton (Fiskars Group Oyj, 2015.) For me this sets up the question, whether the brand of Iittala will push to the markets of luxury brands in future.

However, according to Fiskars’ website Iittala is one the key international brands, whereas for instance Arabia exists only as a local brand. Still it seems that the brand of Iittala relies heavily on the Finnish design history. Although Iittala is being officially characterized as “Leading Scandinavian design brand for interior and dining”, Iittala’s marketing material still emphasizes its roots in Finnish design and glassmaking. (Fiskars Group Oyj 2014.) This can be for instance seen in the video “The Shape that Moves”, which is available in Iittala’s youtube channel and also linked to Fiskars’ website (Iittala 2014). It appears that Iittala’s history and actual factory of Iittala are essential cornerstones for the brand, and Viippola confirms this:

“It is important for the brand that there is a story to tell. Iittala differs from many other brands by having own manufacturing and we can present the people who are making the products. We can show that we are doing something better than anyone
else. If that would disappear, the story wouldn’t be creditable.” (Irina Viippola)

Design process for new Iittala products has several stages. The common route for a new product begins from concept design, which means developing product concepts based on consumer research and trend analyses. According to Irina Viippola, Concept Design Manager for Iittala, Arabia and Rörstrand, they aim to predict what people might value in the future. They also must do their predictions well ahead, because Iittala’s product development is relatively long. In late 2014 concept designers’ mind is set to 2017. The actual product designer comes along later in the process. The designer creates a proposal for the product according to the design brief given to him/her. (Viippola 2014.)

The actual factory of Iittala, located in a town called Iittala near Tampere, is still playing a major role in manufacturing. According to Hagberg, everything that is possible, is produced in Iittala. But there are certain functions Iittala glass factory does not have, for example producing heath resistant borosilicate glass. At the time of the interview factory was employing 200 workers and approximately 65 glassblowers. (Hagberg 2014.)

As I visited the factory in November 2014 glassblowers were working intensively in two shifts, making handcrafted Birds by Toikka and mold-blown design classics.

Asking about the role of artistic glass in Iittala I was given two kind of answers. Both Viippola and Hagberg recognize how art projects are crucial for new innovations, and how new projects also challenge and sustain glassblowers’ skills. They do acknowledge that the art glass’ value is in keeping the heritage alive.

When I ask about the status of unique art pieces compared to what it was in the heydays of Finnish Design, Viippola explains the realities:

“There is not the same status (for art) as in past. --- We are a listed company and we need to make economically rational decisions. Producing art does not aim to bring profit. There must be a business logic. The world has changed, a country does not
anymore present itself through making and manufacturing. The Finnish origin of the products is most important to Finns, not necessarily to French or Germans. Nowadays we are not building a Finland-brand by unique artworks. But it is truly important to maintain the tradition, as it will disappear without upkeep. If we wouldn’t manufacture art glass, it makes no sense to think that in future years it could be started again from a scratch. This is what we value, also in the house, and it is essential for the brand too.” (Irina Viippola)

Though Iittala is playing according to harsh economical realities, it is reassuring to hear that at least Viippola is conscious of the historical context of the factory. It also gives a good prediction for Iittala factory that its value in glassmaking traditions is recognized, and that it plays a vital role in global trademark’s brand. When continuing the talk on art glass, Oiva Toikka’s glass birds are being mentioned. Birds by Toikka is a collectable art product and a long-lasting series, and Iittala aims to create a novelty for this same category. Birds though are no high art, as they are produced in series and they are affordable to the many. Once in a while Iittala has launched Artworks -series, latest by Klaus Haapaniemi and Nathalie Lahdenmäki. Occasionally Iittala also organizes workshops for invited designers at the glass factory. (Hagberg 2014; Viippola 2014.)

However art’s role in business that is concentrating in interior design and tableware, does not have clear channels to art buyers. At the moment Iittala has not gateways to such markets. Both Viippola and Hagberg appear to be optimistic about art and craft production staying within Iittala brand, as there is a freshly appointed product manager for art series, Raija Siikamäki. (Hagberg 2014; Viippola 2014.)
Viewpoint 3:

I kind of fancy Iittala factory.

One might claim that it’s one vast hall in middle of nowhere, but to me it’s the reminiscent of glorious industrial past. The factory is still very much puffing along, as I noted whilst visiting the factory in summer 2013 and fall 2014. Visitors are usually allowed to follow glassblowing from a loft, but during my internship and with a student group I was allowed to tour around more extensively. There are several functions within the factory hall; melting of the glass, glassblowing, mechanical glass pressing, grinding, packing, mold making to some extent, and nowadays also mixing of the raw materials for glass base. Of course it’s hard to say how quickly things do change, but still I’m admiring the factory for keeping up the flag of glass industry.

On my tour in Iittala in 2013 I was lucky to be guided by a young engineer and I noticed many details at the factory. I noted the curious combination of mechanized mass production and handcraft. There are some traces of the old craft culture and I couldn’t help gasping my breath, when seeing skillful engraving made for a baptism font and an authentic wood workshop hidden in an old brick building (I do get kicks out of these kinds of things!). Meanwhile automated production lines were pressing familiar items such as Kartio -drinking glass and Mariskooli. The heat and the steam near furnaces and pressing machines was more like from some old-world steampunk reality. Yet everything at the factory was of understandable scale. One can comprehend what glass producing demands. To my eyes Iittala factory seems to be a well-functioning production unit, and therefore it feels like a shame, that it such a hidden gem. Although Iittala has been lifting up factory in its marketing material, the fascination of the making itself is still somewhat under a curtain.

After immersing into the history of Finnish glass industry, it is more apparent that today Iittala factory is a melting pot of two different industrial traditions, the one of
Nuutajärvi’s and the one of Iittala’s. As Iittala handed over manufacturing coloured glass in 1970s, meanwhile that Nuutajärvi continued to specialize in colours, one can conclude that the colour palette of Iittala is largely Nuutajärvi’s heritage. Likewise many of Iittala’s important products originate from Nuutajärvi. For instance Kastehelmi -set by Oiva Toikka or Kartio by Kaj Franck were originally designed for Nuutajärvi. Yet it remains to be seen, if Nuutajärvi’s legacy of playful art and strong presence of designers will ever revive in Iittala. From historical point of view, it’s curious how Iittala managed to evolve from an offspring of Nuutajärvi (Iittala was founded in 1881 by former Nuutajärvi employee) to a global brand and trademark that outnumbered the others.

Later in fall 2014 I took the chance to join in a student group excursion to Iittala. Looking again from the loft at the glassblowers working below me, I was surprised by the amount of glassblowers shuffling around with their tasks. I was delighted to see familiar faces among the glassblowers, guys and a girl that I knew from Nuutajärvi. Our guide explained how glassblowers work in two shifts. With this information I counted that there must be over 60 glassblowers working there, and I was glad that presumably many of Nuutajärvi workers were among them. I continued to gaze at the choreography of glassblowing below me, and once again I noted how curious trace of handcraft it is in the world of mass production. Then I paid attention to the items in production, without revealing them, I can say that all the designs originated from 1930s to 1970s, except for Birds by Toikka. So, is Iittala virtually a factory of Finnish nostalgia?
4 THE GLASSMAKERS

4.1. Interviews

All in all I interviewed 14 glassmakers, some of which identify themselves more as designers and artist, some as craftsman. I aimed to reach persons who are working actively in the field and who have different roles (entrepreneur, designer, artist, glassblower). The age range of the interviewees is from 27 to 84 and they are working in different locations (Nuutajärvi, Riihimäki, Helsinki). The interviews were conducted between 13.11.2014 – 25.2.2015. One interview took approximately 40 minutes, but in some cases I did supplementing interviews with the same person.

Basically the interviews went through in a conversation like manner. I had prepared the questions forehand, but the choice of words varied, partly because of the different vocabulary that interviewees prefer. People who are producing glass items that I myself would place in the same category, might consider themselves as artist, sculptors, designers or craftsmen. I mainly refer to them as glassmakers, and I asked them the following questions:

What is profession / What are your professional roles?
How did you enter the world of glassmaking? / What is your educational background?
What kind of production you have at the moment? / Name a recent project?
What are the necessities for your work?
What has kept you making glass? / Why glass is an important medium for you?
What is your relationship with the history of Finnish glass design?
Where do you present your work?
Do you operate internationally?
How does livelihood of a glassmaker consist?
How do you see the future of glassmaking in Finland?
What would improve conditions for your work?
### Glassmakers’ interviews

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Place of the interview</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13.11.2014</td>
<td>Sini Majuri</td>
<td>Glass artist, MA-student</td>
<td>Arabia campus, Helsinki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.11.2014</td>
<td>Riikka Latva-Somppi</td>
<td>Glass artist, lecturer</td>
<td>Arabia campus, Helsinki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.11.2014</td>
<td>Kirsti Taiviola</td>
<td>Glass artist, lecturer</td>
<td>Arabia campus, Helsinki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.12 &amp; 12.2014</td>
<td>Kazushi Nakada</td>
<td>Glass artist, lecturer</td>
<td>Arabia campus, Helsinki</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.1.2015</td>
<td>Kari Alakoski</td>
<td>Glassblower, glass artist</td>
<td>Mafka&amp;Alakoski, Riihimäki</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.1.2015</td>
<td>Marja Hepo-aho</td>
<td>Glassblower, glass artist</td>
<td>Mafka&amp;Alakoski, Riihimäki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.1.2015</td>
<td>Anna Schroderus</td>
<td>Designer, glassblower</td>
<td>Hytti ry, Helsinki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2.2015</td>
<td>Helmi Remes</td>
<td>Designer, glassblower</td>
<td>Lasismi, Riihimäki</td>
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<td>9.2.2015</td>
<td>Kaappo Lähdesmäki</td>
<td>Glassblower, artist</td>
<td>Lasismi, Riihimäki</td>
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<td>24.2.2015</td>
<td>Alma Jantunen</td>
<td>Glassblower, artist</td>
<td>Nuutajärvi</td>
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<tr>
<td>24.2.2015</td>
<td>Markku Salo</td>
<td>Designer, artist</td>
<td>Nuutajärvi</td>
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<tr>
<td>24.2.2015</td>
<td>Janne Rahunen</td>
<td>Glassblower</td>
<td>Nuutajärvi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.2.2015</td>
<td>Oiva Toikka</td>
<td>Designer, artist</td>
<td>Helsinki</td>
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4.2. Glassmakers and their vocation

To introduce the glassmakers, I will begin with their thoughts on vocation to the trade. In the first interviews that I contemplated, I asked explicitly about values and ideologies from artist’s working with glass. This never concluded to fluent answers. Therefore I proceeded by asking about things that inspire in glass and what has kept the craftsmen and artists using the medium. In this manner I got more vivid conversation on the matter. I gathered data on glassmakers’ vocation to do their job, but the topic also drifted away from precisely defined ideologies. Therefore I do not claim that I have fully exposed the values of glassmaking, but I am proud to present the fragments I managed to excavate.

Fellow student and the partner in many of my glass projects, **Sini Majuri**, acted as a guinea pig for my question frame. Therefore she was a bit puzzled by the question about values, but she quickly replied that she feels that like any other artists, she is expressing herself with the medium. She also shares the same agendas as I in our joint project “Comic art in glass”: uplifting glass art to a new audience and presenting it in unexpected venues such as Comic Art Fairs.

**Riikka Latva-Somppi**, artist and teacher at ARTS, realizes much of her glass art at Hytti ry’s studio in Suomenlinna. She recalls that she ended up as glass artist because she had been interested in artistic work and wanted to effect how Finnish glass art was seen. Her artistic work is mainly influenced by personal expression. When I led the conversation to values, she mentions that she wishes long life cycle for her artworks and products.

Besides Latva-Somppi the other one to mention about environmental issues is her colleague, designer **Anna Schoredus**. She also works in Hytti ry’s studio in Suomenlinna, and she has fascination of the making process of glass. When she is asked to describe her own products, she replies quickly:
“Beautiful everyday objects are the justification for my carbon footprint!”
(Anna Schroderus)

This is a delightful answer as it is a link to the history of Scandinavian design, and partly a quote from Gregor Paulsson.

Glass artist and lecturer in ARTS, Kirsti Taiviola, that I admire for her researcher’s attitude when working with glass, reasons that she is working with the material because of its unique qualities:

“One of the reasons why I have chosen to work with glass, is that it is a rare instrument which enables you to work with light too. They go hand in hand: light and glass.” (Kirsti Taiviola)

Kazushi Nakada, artist and also lecturer in ARTS, is viewing glass art from a very global point. He has studied in Tokyo Glass Art Institute, Japan, and Royal College of Arts, England, and he is very aware of the glassmaking scene all over the world. When I inquire why he got interested in glass, he points out materials potential both for art and design:

“Later on I went to Royal College of Arts for Master Degree. In between I worked in Denmark as an assistant for glass artist --- It was interesting to see the material without subject profile. In Europe glass is related to tableware design, but glass can be just glass. We can produce anything out of it, within material’s capability. That was one reason, other one was that at that time glass was introducing so many materials and techniques (glue, optical coating, processing technologies).”
(Kazushi Nakada)
Artist **Renata Jakowleff** explains her initiatives for artistic work:

> "I’m intrigued by the corporeality when handling hot glass. I usually get ideas for my artworks by thinking how glass acts and thinking about the experience of the making. In my latest projects the behavior of hot glass is the starting point. Previously I have pondered about the liquid nature of glass, and always noted how the outcome is always very organic. Artworks reminiscent the living world, cells and organs. I have examined this and tried to emphasize it—"

(Renata Jakowleff)

Accordingly glassmakers who are producing fine art and concentrate on self-expression, have more artistic ambitions and influences. Intentionally, or unintentionally, they are realizing the ideals of Studio Glass Movement. They are independent artists, who happen to use glass and they are able to do that away from the industry.

Meanwhile persons that characterize themselves as glassblowers often mention constant learning and the challenging nature of the craft as their motif for working with glass. **Marja Hepo-aho** is a young glassblower and entrepreneur working in Riihimäki, for her glass holds its shimmer because of its challenging nature:

> "Glass is not static but constantly moving, it can hold its interesting and shimmering nature. Glass opens up with time, the more I make, more interesting it gets. From makers point of view it has the possibility for constant learning."

(Marja Hepo-aho)

Hepo-aho’s works often in duo with master glassblower and former Iittala employee **Kari Alakoski**, who shares the passion in learning still more on the material:

> "Glass is interesting and rare material. There are not that many who can work with it, I would estimate that there are around 100 people in Finland who can call themselves..."
glassblowers. The trade is rare and challenging. You have always something to learn, and you’ll never become perfect. If time, energy and money would stretch, there would be a whole lot of opportunities with glass.”
(Kari Alakoski)

Hepo-aho and Alakoski share also the craftsmen pride in presenting quality items, with visible handmade nature. They also mention the positive feature with small-scale studios, they can be very open about their manufacturing process. The workshop in Riihimäki is open to public. Likewise is the neighboring Lasismi’s studio and hotshops in Nuutajärvi and Suomenlinna. The idea of openness and shared knowledge seems to be a virtue for many of the indie glassmakers.

Designer and glassblower **Helmi Remes** is a member in Lasismi. She explains how visual capacities of glass are superior to any other material:

“If I compare ceramics and glass, glass is a very pure material. I get chills when I see glass. The refraction and colours are so pure and fresh, that one can play with those. I have always said, on the level of vision, that glass is pure and ceramics are dirty. Glass kind of startled me, I got more kicks out of it. And of course when I got to try glassblowing, I got totally carried away.” (Helmi Remes)

Another Lasismi member, glassblower **Kaappo Lähdesmäki** upholds the workmanship-nature of his profession:

“I guess there’s nothing poetical about it. I have set myself to this trade, so I’ll go along with it too. It has given me a lot, or just enough, to get me going.” (Kaappo Lähdesmäki)

Reading between lines in Remes’ and Lähdesmäki’s duo-interview it comes evident that the ideology of the co-operative is much based on the team spirit and joint ambitions.
Glassmakers value their work because they ...

... are fascinated by visual capacities of glass.

... enjoy physical work.

... appreciate teamwork.

... concentrate on artistic self-expression.

... are "researchers" of the material.

... want to improve their skills.
Glassblower and artist Alma Jantunen, who works in her and Johannes Rantasalo’s company Lasisirkus in Nuutajärvi, enjoys challenges and teamwork:

“I am intrigued about the challenging nature of glass, and all the different possibilities. The most rewarding things come from observing the whole cycle from melting glass to the finishing touches. Handling the process in whole is interesting. In addition comes the social side, I love teamwork. These things I value over seeing glass as a superior material or seeing myself as an artist.” (Alma Jantunen)

Designer Markku Salo told me a lot about his career from industrial designer to entrepreneur and artist. During the phases of his career he has had the urge to push himself towards more artistic freedom. But this is what he replied when asking about the significance of glass in his work:

“Glass is the material with ever so many possibilities. It has huge potential with its transparency and all the colours, there’s infinite amount of combinations if you add it to all the possible old and new techniques. That’s what has kept me working with the material, and of course the fact that over the 30 past years there have been glass furnaces within 500 meters from my front door. I have had good workspaces here in Nuutajärvi.” (Markku Salo)

Meanwhile Janne Rahunen is a recently graduated glassblower working in Nuutajärvi:

“During my studies I got really carried away by glassblowing. I am driven by the interest in glass and making myself livelihood out of it. After leaving my previous job I was looking for real physical work. And that’s what I found in glassblowing. It is very challenging and physical. I am inspired by working with huge masses of glass. It requires full concentration, I can’t distract with anything, and I find that meditative.” (Janne Rahunen)
Teamwork is essential for many glassmakers, especially for those who identify themselves more as craftsmen than artists. Another part of glassblowers’ vocation to their trade is the athlete kind of attitude, they want to enhance their skills and make a better performance time after time.

You can find plenty of literary sources on Oiva Toikka’s thoughts and ideas, but if I view his work according to the interview, I would pick out two points: teamwork and craft. The base of Toikka’s art and design has been teamwork with skillful glassblowers, engravers, technicians, chemists, mold makers, etc. He values the specialists and he also wants to push them to use their knowhow. I can not prevent myself of asking how glassblowers could find variable work to improve their skills:

“In factory it depends on what is selected in production. I have always designed strongly hand-crafted works. The rattle of mechanized production does make precise and beautiful items, but they are a bit cold and without nuances. I find it desirable that craft making would live on. But handcrafted items cost a lot and the common people are not prepared to pay. That is the problem.” (Oiva Toikka)

The old ideologies of glass appear to exist today: workmanship, co-operation, art, value of craft, beautiful everyday objects are all mentioned. The idea of openness might be a newcomer to the value palette formed by industry and artistic movements. No one explicitly talks about presenting something truly Finnish by presenting glass art, which was the case in 1950s. Nevertheless, the small studios are producing authentic craft made in Finland, and it is apparent that they are culturally valuable. Small studios have located themselves to old sites of glass manufacturing in Riihimäki and Nuutajärvi. They are keeping the old milieu alive and they bring glassmaking visible to public. Most importantly small studios offer the alternative for industrial products, they enable contemporary art and innovative design to be made of glass.
4.3. Different paths of knowhow

The interviewees have different backgrounds for glassmaking. I have interviewed seven artist and designers, who have been schooled either in Aalto University School of Art, Design and Architecture (ARTS), or in its predecessor University of Art and Design Helsinki (UIAH / TAIK). As their major they have studied either Ceramic and Glass Design or Industrial Design. Though the newer generation of artists has been able to experiment glassmaking at the campus, many of them have also gained additional education abroad. For example Renata Jakowleff acknowledges much of her glassblowing skills to the study exchange that she did in Bornholm, Denmark. In same way Anna Schroderus mentions her exchange to Sheridan College, Canada and Orrefors Glass School, Sweden. Similarly Kirsti Taiviola has done an exchange in Danmark Design Skole and Riikka Latva-Somppi also in Sheridan College, and they all infer that exchange studies were crucial for gaining more craft skills.

“I was encouraged to apply for Orrefors Glass School’s spring courses, it used to be a co-operation between Taik and Konstfack at the time. The education was effective, glassblowing 4 hours per day and the rest of the day for grinding work. I gained a lot of necessary routine there. I also did an exchange year in Sheridan College, in Canada. The schooling there followed the ideals of American Studio Glass Movement. So students implemented all of their work by themselves, either independently or under instruction.” (Anna Schoredus)

Also glassblower and designer Marja Hepo-aho praises Orrefors Glass School as a good completion to her earlier studies at Nuutajärvi Glass School. By glancing through the artists profiles in latest Suomen Lasi Elää - Finnish Glass Lives 7 -bulletin, one can note that additional education from abroad is very common especially among young. The National School of Glass in Orrefors and Sheridan College in Toronto are often cited institutes in the profiles. (Kekäläinen 2015, 146-174.)
In this way one might argue that the art of glassmaking in Finland is based much on international sources, especially in terms of graduates from ARTS / TAIK. There are still craftsman and artists whose knowhow is based on the industrial tradition. For example glassblower and glass artist Kari Alakoski recalls that he came to Iittala factory as a summer worker at age of 14, and has been since working with glass, first as a part time summer worker, later as a factory’s glassblower and as a teacher at Nuutajärvi Glass School and now as an entrepreneur.

Among my interviewees, designers Oiva Toikka and Markku Salo represent kind of historical relics as they have both entered the world of glassmaking by being recruited to Nuutajärvi glass factory as full time designers, Toikka in 1963 and Markku Salo in 1983. Before 2000s when Iittala ended all the contracts for full-time product designers, Toikka and Salo played the role of the in-house designer, who could be involved in the whole design process.

Many of the interviewees that identify themselves foremost as glassblowers have studied in Nuutajärvi Glass School. For many additional training by job or education is a lifeblood to sustain the skills. Kaappo Lahdesmäki talks aptly about the different paths that the tacit knowledge travels in Finland, or globally. He has himself worked in Iittala’s factories in Humppila and Nuutajärvi. Now that those factories do not exist anymore, he reasons that a lot of the “lost” knowhow must have traveled to Iittala factory.

4.4. Realities

Nearly all of the interviewed glassmakers require a hot glass studio to realize their work. 9 of these 14 share the costs of a studio via association, co-operative or business. The others commission their work from glassblowers or use other arrangements to rent a studio occasionally. Among the 14, even 12 are able to blow glass themselves. This might be a bit twisted result, because only two of my interviewees come from the traditional
role of industrial designer (Markku Salo, Oiva Toikka). Then among the 12 who can do
glassblowing themselves, almost all use their skills to implement their artworks. Usually
glassmaking is teamwork, and even for artists able to craft glass it is not unheard to
subcontract pieces, if needed. For example Kirsti Taiviola, who realizes many of her
artworks herself, contracts professional glassblower for product prototypes, and likewise
Renata Jakowleff, artist most capable to craft glass, used to hire Nuutajärvi factory for
certain projects.

The fact that a glass furnace is always a money hole, has forced glassmakers to create
solutions to divide the costs. I have interviewed glassblowers, designers and artists
who are working in a co-operative (Lasismi) or in a studio owned by an association
(Hytti ry, Lasikomppania). In associations and co-operatives the expenses are divided,
and the members are usually charged according to the time and material they use at
the studio. For example co-operative Lasismi was founded in 2010 by comrades from
Nuutajärvi. The co-operative runs a glass studio in the old building of Riihimäki glass
factory. Currently there are 7 members using the studio and the co-operative is not only
a workshop, but more like a brand promoting young glassmakers. Meanwhile the glass
studio of Hytti ry is owned by an association with four members. The studio functions
in Suomenlinna and it is the only hot glass studio in Helsinki besides the one at Aalto
University. The rent is divided in four, but electricity is divided according to the use of
the furnace. All the new investments are ideally covered by grants.

Also Lasikomppania, formally known as Nuutajärven Lasitaitajat ry, is glass studio run
by an association. Lasikomppania is one of the most noteworthy studios when it comes
to contemporary glass art and design in Finland. The association has 12 members, many
of whom are renowned glass artists and designers. The studio is located in Nuutajärvi
and therefore it can be seen as a torchbearer for glassmaking traditions in the village.
Equally costs are divided according to the use of the studio. (Lasikomppania 2015;
Jantunen 2015.)
As I am considering, where to realize my own designs in the future, I inquired about renting of these studios. Primarily these studios do not want to rent their workshop to outsiders, but they all see it possible to take a new member in.

However there are entrepreneurs running glass studios on their own or with one or two associates, such as Kari Alakoski and Marja Hepo-aho are doing from early 2015 onwards. Finnish Glass Lives -bulletin cites that there are over 30 small functioning glass studios in Finland, but I would estimate that around 10 of those have a proper hot glass studio and the rest are making glass engraving, glass beads and items out of recycled glass or fused glass (Matiskainen 2015, 4 and Suomen Lasi Elää 7 2015, 139-148).

Running a glass studio creates costs that form up from the rent of the premises, from equipment and materials and from electricity and gas. With glass furnace energy costs are the ones, you can not prevent as melted glass requires the temperature of around 1100C and furnace can not be cooled down too often, maybe only once a year. So the costs are running even though the furnace would not be in use. This creates a huge pressure for income, in other words a pressure to sell, or in cases of professional glassblowers pressure to get contracts from designers and artists. Therefore when asking about requirements and challenges of work, glassmakers mention the importance of customers, clients, retailers, grants, commissioned works and marketing.

“The lifeline for the trade is that there’s enough work. There are continuously running costs from keeping the glass hot. It means that you have to work all the time. We need clients. It’s also very important to have teamwork and to network. If I was ever to move somewhere else (from Nuutajärvi), it would be hard to imagine as I can’t see myself working in a vacuum. I need people around.” (Alma Jantunen)

All in all the answers shift from practical to more conceptual when I inquired about necessities for glassmaking. Besides the obvious glass studio and the necessity to sell,
these were things were mentioned: own study or home-office, computer with necessary programs, persistent attitude to work, teamwork, working community, networking, subcontractors, such as carpenter and photographer, storage space, tools, equipment, sturdy table, good health and support from the family. One of the most occurring challenges among the answers is marketing. Independent artists and small-scale entrepreneurs feel that they do not have enough resources for marketing. Glassmakers who in some way or another share responsibility over a glass furnace and studio equipment feel that they are so tied to the hands-on work they are not able to put time in marketing.

4.5. How to show your work?

Let’s then have a look at the possible stumbling block of independent glassmakers: marketing. The different channels mentioned to market one’s art or products were: website, social media, galleries, good gallerist, craft boutiques, craft shops run by co-operatives or associations, retailers, fairs, group- and solo exhibitions, public art projects, own showroom or shop, contacts with designers and design students, recreation events at the glass studio, and also having studio open for visitors.

The majority of the interviewed glassmakers present on their websites. Some are very active in social media, the co-operative Lasismi is a good example in this. Helmi Remes explains that the co-operative has gained an extensive group of followers in social media, which is neat when there is time to advertise an exhibition or event:

“When I’m having my exhibition at the Finnish Glass Museum this summer, I’m going to use invitations via email and social media. I wouldn’t pay for advertisement. Lasismi has gained good exposure and a vast group of fans, so why not exploit that.” (Helmi Remes)

I guess it is part of the challenge of marketing, how to keep up with clients and audience
Ways to present glass art and design:

Social Media
Retailers
Design Fairs
Co-op Boutique
Art Gallery
At the Studio
WWW-Site
for your work. Social media might be one solution, but there are more traditional ways. For example Markku Salo’s own gallery in Nuutajärvi has only a few open days a year, but Salo’s former customers and acquaintance are being invited beforehand by mail or email. All in all marketing and keeping up with your clientele demands an effort. Those of the glass artists, who can share the workload of marketing with someone else, business partner, spouse or fellow artists, are the lucky ones.

“One of the lifelines in this business is that people get to know you. It is a problem, that I'm not able to hire anyone for that. There’s a need for a person that could promote sales… Although we have in many cases sensed that we are ourselves our best marketers” (Marja Hepo-aho)

This is something I see in common with the glassmakers. Artisans and artist are so focused on their actual work, designing and realizing their pieces, that there is limited time and energy left for the marketing.

Many of the artists recall that an opportunity tend to spawn another, this means that, when you present your work somewhere, more and more people get interested, another gallerist or possible client notices your work. When you get to the point that you have well established yourself as glass designer or glass artist, exhibitions and projects might be even catered for you. I dare to say that someone like Oiva Toikka does not have to be running around and banging the drum about himself anymore.

Of course exhibitions are the most prevalent way of showing glass art and design. The exhibition premises though vary, from art galleries to museums, from studio premises to public spaces. Based on the interviews, and according to my own knowledge, there are no art galleries specified in glass art in Finland. There are some gallery-shop-combinations that artist run by themselves, but when it comes to high art galleries in big cities, there is no gallery that has a focus on glass art. But galleries do occasionally present glass art exhibitions, Galerie Forsblom’s exhibitions with Oiva Toikka being probably the most
noted. No doubt that breaking into the world of high art with glass is a bit of a challenge, and then good contacts with gallerists are crucial. In interviews artists Renata Jakowleff and Oiva Toikka remark the liaison with a gallerist, both in positive tone. Principally art galleries are important for those glassmakers who identify themselves as artists and desire to operate on the fine arts scene.

When it comes to gallery-shop-combinations for glass art, I think one of the best examples is in Nuutajärvi. NuGo, The Nuutajärvi Glass Gallery Co-op, presents art from ten glass artists working in Nuutajärvi. Similarly there are gallery-shop combinations for Lasismi’s, Alakoski’s and Hepoaho’s or Hytti ry’s products and art close to the place of origin. For example Hytti ry runs a summer shop in Suomenlinna, which goes well with the tourist season too.

In case of many of the interviewees, their studio is essentially part of their marketing, image and a proof of products origin and genuine. Small studios are open to visitors, and glassblowers eagerly tell about their work and show some glassblowing tricks, if not too busy on their work. I also back up the notion that it is much easier to reason the prices higher than Ikea’s by showing how much work there goes to realize an item.

More design focused persons might seek presence in different sort of venues. Fairs are being mentioned, but the ones in Finland are belittled. According to some of the glassmakers fairs tend to take more time and effort than they give profit. Instead international design fairs are seen as interesting opportunities. Designer Kirsti Taiviola sees Design Fairs as important gateways to present glass design, especially Milan Furniture Fair.

When it comes to exhibiting contemporary art glass, The Finnish Glass Museum and The Design Museum are reputably mentioned. Mostly comments about the actions of Finnish Glass Museum are optimistic, as it is seen that the museum does vital job in presenting and promoting Finnish glass. Surprisingly I found few dissenting opinions
that claim that the Finnish Glass Museum might be too formal arena and that it might make glass artists “lazy”. In conversations many artists mention the recent Ceramics and Space -exhibition in Design Museum, which presented cutting-edge Finnish ceramic art (Designmuseo 2014). One of interviewees argues that glass artists would not join forces to organize similar overview of contemporary glass art.

When talking about large assembling exhibitions, I must mention the Suomen Lasi Elää - Finnish Glass Lives 7 -exhibition at the Finnish Glass Museum. Held during spring 2015 the exhibition presented Finnish glass art from last 5 years. The display was a patchwork of colours and styles, and I must give praise to its versatility, as it presented works from older maestros and upcoming young craftsmen and artists. All of my interviewees were present at the exhibition. When I asked about future state of Finnish glass art, many referred to the exhibition, and I agree that it is a great thing to have these assembling shows.

Otherwise joint exhibitions tend to have been formed up by the fellowships within glass scene; Nuutajärvi’s artist have joint summer exhibitions, Lasismi’s artist naturally present themselves together and so on. What is missing is an ambitious juried exhibition of contemporary glass art in an established arena of art or design, and preferably in the capital.

When it comes to international presence of Finnish contemporary glass art and design, many glassmakers have had exhibitions abroad. Artists consider international exhibitions important, but challenging to conduct well. Some of the glassmakers even feel that they are too bound to their studio to have ambitions for taking part in international appearances.

“Everything revolves here in Finland and mainly in Helsinki. I have been lazy when it comes to international exhibitions or running in conferences. My time goes to the maintenance of this studio.” (Anna Schroderus)
4.6. Artist’s or artisan’s income

The case of income for the glassmakers is that they are juggling with many roles to earn their livelihood. The different sources of income mentioned in the interviews were: sales of products and art, commissioned artworks, teaching, freelancer based product design, curating, grants, public space art work commissions, glassblowing for designers, recreation events, unemployment benefit and jobs not related to glass.

Everyone mentions sales of artworks or products as a source of income. Yet it seems not to be enough to bring bread and butter to the table. One of artists estimates that the sales cover only expenses, but they do not form enough for a salary. For many artists, craftsmen, and entrepreneurs there is no other choice than try to sell as much as possible. The high production costs of glass bring the pressure to sell to a whole new level.

“Everything that I produce has to be sold, otherwise I’m on the minus side. I’m an associate in arts & crafts boutiques and besides that I have my products on sale via retailers and on sale accounts.”

(Anna Schroderus)

The professional role for a glassblower is to realize work for others and they get paid of that. Five of the interviewees identify themselves foremost as glassblowers, and that is mainly where their income comes from. Alma Jantunen, who runs a business with another glassblower Johannes Rantasalo, reasons her income:

“You must consider it so that there’s a business that you’re working for. And the idea of the business is to blow glass, so the income must be based on that. Then the working day must have a price tag, which covers up the expenses, keeps the business running and gives you salary. During the working day we either realize our own design, or then we are working as glassblowers for other designers.---At the moment half of our
turnover comes from our own production and half from glassblower’s job (for others)."
(Alma Jantunen)

On this ground it is easy to reason that glassblowers are dependable on designers and artists. Based on the interviews, especially glassblowers need commissions. Even though it must be hard to establish oneself as a glassblower and to gain enough contacts, they still have a clear professional role to employ. If viewing co-operative Lasismi’s members, it is the most professional glassblower, who has enough jobs.

“I’m getting my income from Lasismi, I can’t say that I’m unemployed or doing any other jobs. I’ll manage with the salary. When I’m always here (at the studio), I don’t need much. Hopefully I’ll someday reach the average person’s salary rate... And I’ve always been skinny as this.”
(Kaappo Lähdesmäki)

Many of the glass studios are looking for additional income in recreation events. For example they arrange short courses in glassblowing or beads making, or arrange a dinner and glass blowing demonstration for visitor groups. Glassmakers tend to think that this kind of services might increase in the future, besides they are good advertisement for the glass studios.

When it comes to glassmakers who identify themselves as artists, the options for income are following: sales of artworks, grants and specialist jobs such as teaching. At time of the interviews three of the artists had a grant for artistic work, which means that their daily income is covered by grant. Besides working grants for a year or half a year, more commonly artists cover projects and necessary purchases such as equipment by smaller grants.

Teaching job is the basis of income at least for Kazushi Nakada and Kirsti Taiviola, both lecturers in ARTS. There are also other forms of specialist jobs. For example Riikka
Latva-Somppi mentions curating as one of her professional roles. Nakada mentions that he has taken part in product development of new materials related to glass. Riikka Latva-Somppi and Markku Salo mention public art projects as interesting commissions, Latva-Somppi has been involved in art collaboration in Arabianranta and Markku Salo is constructing artwork in hospital building.

For designer’s income I can not give fulfilling answers. Oiva Toikka and Markku Salo are the only ones among the interviewees who have been practicing freelance-designer’s profession in glass industry. They both used to be fulltime glass designers. Nowadays they are still designing glass but either on freelance basis for Iittala or they are producing glass for their own name. Markku Salo has set up his own business and studio, and Oiva Toikka has had private exhibitions in Galerie Forsblom. Toikka and Salo appear to be extremely versatile in their work, as it ranges from industrial design to unique art pieces and installations. Kirsti Taiviola and Helmi Remes are also designing items like lamps, jewellery and tableware for their own name, or in Helmi Remes case to be marketed under Lasismi label.

However it is noteworthy to point out how much glassmakers’ roles have changed. Designer, artist or craftsman working outside the industry is the one to invest money in prototyping, producing and marketing. Not to mention networking and forming up contacts to subcontractors, galleries and retailers. It is unlikely that glassmakers are paid for all the hours they spent working. It is also an alarming equation that glassblowers need designers and artists for their income, but will there be artists successful enough to keep the small studios running?
4.7. Relation to the industrial past

Four out of the fourteen have been employed by the Finnish glass industry. These four are probably the ones who relate closest to the industrial tradition, as their know-how is based on that.

“I enjoyed being in the factory, there were two working teams and tight community. If the factory would not have been closed, I wouldn’t have been in a hurry to leave. Perhaps I would still be there. But that’s how the life goes, and I have no regrets. Thinking about it afterwards I understand that the factory was crucial for my learning. My working became confident.” (Kaappo Lähdesmäki)

In terms of the other ten, it is hard to build up unanimous approach when it comes to the past. In the previous chapters about education and know-how it appeared that glassmakers’ skills are increasingly international. In term of teachers, some had strong links to the industry, such as glassblower masters Unto Suominen who used to teach in ARTST and Kari Alakoski who taught in Nuutajärvi Glass School. It is more than likely that these individuals have passed through habits and customs from the factories.

For artists it might be even incentive to realize works completely different from factories’ production. Though by rebelling against design classics they are forming up a relationship with the past. Yet it appears hard for the artists to put this in words. One artist refuses to comment anything on her relation to history of Finnish glassmaking. Maybe it is reasonable for an artist to see it as an outdated discussion. Another says that she wishes to change the appearance of Finnish glass, which is likely to refer to the fixed image created by 1950s design.

Small hot shop and independent artists can not compete with Iittala, or Ikea, or such on the sector of glass produced in big volumes. Instead glassmakers are operating in the field of craft, unique art and designed small series. Therefore the independent
glassmakers might feel that they are totally separate from the industrial culture, at least its current standing. Glassmakers in Riihimäki and Nuutajärvi are equally capable as glassblowers in Iittala. There is information available from schools or from retired glassmakers, and they have enough resources to produce what they do: versatile artworks and small series.

“I have enough background in the industry to remark that the factory is no more the only place to do these things. In Finland people are making high quality glass outside factories. Nowadays glassmakers in studios are equally skillful to factory glassblowers.” (Kari Alakoski)

"Of course it would be fun, if Iittala announces to put up three more factories. But it won’t happen! I’ve said this before, but the business has fallen behind long time ago. That’s why there’s still the possibility to make it in small-scale. It is such an interesting approach to be working with such an old-worldly, yet living relic.” (Kaappo Lähdesmäki)

Some of the interviewees have a longing for some sort of co-operation with the industry, in other words with Iittala factory. Still they seem to be incapable of determining what that would be. Renata Jakowleff used to rent Nuutajärvi factory for realizing artworks made from casted colour glass. This is something small studios are not able to do, they can not melt big quantities of coloured glass. Kari Alakoski also remarks that when it comes to scale, Iittala is the only place to implement something huge. Besides that Iittala, or Ikea, has the incomparable vantage to small studios when it comes to marketing and retailing.

4.8. Question about designer’s and maker’s role

Although it is hard to get a proper viewpoint with the sampling of 14 glassmakers, I want to raise up the question about designer’s and maker’s separate roles, as it is part
of glassmaking’s industrial past. By tradition the designer was the mastermind and glassblowers were the makers, but among my interviewees it is more common that the artist is also the maker. From this I can draw lines that go back to the increase of glass education and the ideals of Studio Glass Movement.

Yet there are glassmakers who prefer the old way of working. Although I wanted to limit my research to glass art made in Finland, I have to acknowledge that some of the recent and noted glass exhibitions show glass made in some of the world’s hotspots for glassblowing. Both of these shows are examples of the industrial tradition: the artist is not the implementer of the artworks. In turn of the year renowned glass designer Oiva Toikka held an exhibition at Galerie Forsblom, Helsinki and nearly all of the artworks were made in Murano, Italy (Galerie Forsblom 2014). A younger example of the same practice, artist involving with skillful glassblowers, is Laura Laine. In early 2015 the graphic artist and illustrator presented fresh and elaborate glass in Design Museum, Helsinki. Artworks were created in Netherlands and one can see that they are done by professional craftsmen. (Designmuseo 2015.)

I personally find teamwork important. It is nice to have partners in crime. And when it comes to handicraft, it is only natural that someone handles glass better than me. Now that I had the exhibition in Helsinki, because of it I was in Murano in Venice. There was this glass master, a real virtuoso Pino Signoretto. We played well together and probably we will be working together in the future --- It is most fascinating to see how glassblowers solve things.” (Oiva Toikka)

When I asked Oiva Toikka about the co-operation with glassblowers in different locations (Italy, Sweden, United States), he has a very straightforward answer:

“Having a new team to work with is inspiring. With different team and different makers the glass gains a different character. And I find it important that the character of the makers is visible in the finished glass piece. I think it’s a bit silly that the talk is
always about the glass artist, glassblowers should be mentioned too, and engravers in some cases.” (Oiva Toikka)

Glass designer Helmi Remes shares the ideal of uplifting the whole team behind the artwork.

“When I’m having solo exhibitions, I still want to name every glassblower involved. I want to emphasize that the art is a result of teamwork, and that it presents Finnish workmanship.” (Helmi Remes)

Also Iittala has recently brought makers into spotlight, also as means to promote workmanship at the factory. This can be seen for example in an advertisement video on Ruutu-vase designed by Bouroullec brothers filmed mainly at Iittala factory (Iittala 2014).

It brings an exciting flavour to glass art to think that the actual artwork is formed up by several hands. Still the mastermind, the artist, should be somehow visible from the result. I have sometimes wondered how much influences flow from designers to glassblower, and vice versa. It also brings quite a challenge to designer’s work to communicate with craftsmen. This is also the case with industrial design, and it is likely for designers to feel that their position has worsened thanks to short term freelance jobs. In factories designers do not get to know the workers, and teamwork suffers from that.

“The product development process used to be run by a team and designer was part of that team. As a full-time employee I was able discuss with the manufacturing side about the process. With the present day system with freelance designers the guys at the factory see only the drawings and say far too easily that something is impossible. Then the compromises that should have been done by the artist are done by others... “ (Markku Salo)
4.9. Open vs. closed

Initially it is the education and more artistic approach to glass, introduced by Studio Glass Movement that has turned glassmaking from secret alchemy to free art. Therefore it is only natural for younger generation of glassmakers to take the idea of openness for granted. In fact openness can be an advertisement for small studios.

“Compared to a big enterprise our manufacturing is completely transparent. Anyone can come here, have a look and ask questions. Openness and recreation events are lifelines for us. We can offer personal attendance and adapt to our customers’ needs. We are both very open to tell about our work. I believe that in long term it will bring profit.” (Marja Hepo-aho)

I aspire to see some co-operation between contemporary glassmakers, Iittala definitely included. Yet there is a dilemma to overcome before that happens. The biggest difference between indie glassmakers and Iittala is the attitude to open information. Whereas younger generation of glassmakers have been used to the openness of know-how, the industry is still playing according to its secretive tradition. Partly it is well justified, because innovations are factories’ competitive advantages. Partly it might be exaggeration as many of the glassblowing techniques are nowadays open information. Iittala’s factory director explains his approach to the matter of hiring Iittala for artistic projects:

“In principle it is possible to make the arrangements for an artist to hire Iittala during weekends. The price tag is though very high for the artist, and for us. We need to protect our product development and novelty products. Those should be somehow put aside during that. Artists rarely complete their pieces on one visit, there’s always the cold work.--- If something happens, it’s all on our account.--- There’s too much challenges, therefore I’ve been cautious. We simply need to protect our novelty products.” (Per-Henrik Hagberg)
I think the question about openness is the biggest confrontation when it comes to co-operation with glassmakers. This confrontation is possible on every level, between glassblowers, between designers and glassblowers, between artists and between industry and small-scale operators. Small studios are accustomed to keeping doors open and testing all possible techniques and forms in their production. They might not even realize when they are coming close to the border of copying. To promote co-operation there is a demand for guidelines and mutual respect.

4.10. Improvements and ideas

Of course when inquiring about improvements to glassmakers’ situation, people mention practicalities. There is always a demand for better tools, or well arranged working spaces. Markku Salo’s concerns in Nuutajärvi have both practical and profound aspects:

“When the industrial culture vanished here alongside with the factory, the foundation for Nuutajärvi’s glass culture was established. --- We want to preserve the milieu as good as possible, buildings in condition for us and for the visitors. --- When it comes to working spaces here (in old buildings of Nuutajärvi factory), they should be re-organized. We have plans for a bigger shop. There’s the vast Iittala outlet, but to have an equal showroom for small producers would allow new makers to bring their work on sale. In addition the working spaces should be renovated and re-organized too.”

(Markku Salo)

Salo is referring to Nuutajärven lasikylän kulttuurisäätiö, Nuutajärvi’s glass culture foundation according to my translation. The foundation aims to support the glassmaking traditions in the village. Yet the foundation is very recently launched and still gathering funds. (Salo 2015; Nuutajärven lasikulttuurisäätiö 2015.)

Marja Hepo-aho wishes that glassmakers would be able to hire assistance, by doing so they would pass on the know-how and commit young people. It would also ease the
pressure, when there are more people to share the responsibility of the studio. Kazushi Nakada sees also the possibility that new blood will come to the scene of glassmaking. He thinks that after the degree reform in ARTS more and more designers will be considering using glass as a medium.

It is the younger glassmakers, who see a demand for improvements in education. Hepoaho wishes she had gained at least some introduction to entrepreneurship in her studies. Also Sini Majuri reckons that designer students should form up contacts for co-operation already during their studies. Glassblower Janne Rahunen joins the choir by talking about designers and glassblowers co-operation.

“It’s quite different to start realizing your work if you have already experience of co-operation during your studies. I see it crucial. Why there’s no co-operation between Aalto University and Nuutajärvi Glass School?” (Janne Rahunen)

It is not only the world of education that would benefit from co-operation. Some of the glassmakers feel that there are certain in-groups within the scene. There is the group working in Nuutajärvi, the other in Riihimäki and then artists working in Helsinki. Some of the glassmakers fear that on such a small markets the rivalry will run over team spirit. Still some interviewees are optimistic and call for future co-operation, for example in term of joint exhibitions. Kirsti Taiviola mentions that she has had discussions to form up an interest group for glassmaking within Ornamo, Finnish Association of Designers.

Naturally there are concerns about the income. Many wish to have more commissions. Helmi Remes calls for grants especially for young artists launching their career. Artist Riikka Latva-Somppi has arguments about artist’s income, she promotes improvements like tax deduction from art purchases, artist’s pension and exhibition compensation for artists.
“I'm an educated specialist, I have the right to get salary from my job.”
(Riikka Latva-Somppi)

Marja Hepo-aho seems to be bursting with ideas. She invokes for a website that would assemble the whole trade together. The site would gather artists, craftsmen, factories, schools, shops, museums and events all under one address. This might be one solution to the problem of marketing, and it would make info about glass available. On Finnish Glass Museum’s initiative there is a similar project starting, but at the moment the website is still under construction (Finnishglass.fi 2015). Hepo-aho also calls for more experimental and open approach among the industry. She refers to Ajeto Glassworks in Czech as a good example. She says that Ajeto has very different objectives than Finnish glassworks, the factory concentrates on colourful, artistic glass and offers designers and glassblowers facilities plus freedom to create.

Also Alma Jantunen sees that the solutions for Finnish glassmaking can searched from abroad: “You should go there where glassmaking is vibrant and base on that why it’s not the same here.” Then she continues to talk about the issue of minor scale glass enterprises:

“I yearn to see medium-sized enterprises, companies of four to ten people. It should have already happened after twenty years of glass education. A bit bigger businesses would have individuals also for selling and marketing. --- It’s a bit poor to have only Iittala capable to recruit designers.” (Alma Jantunen)

Indie glassmakers working in small studios have also advantages. As a positive remark they are skillful, versatile, flexible and quick in their product development. Many of them are ambitious, innovative and eager to find new ways to work. An evidence of young Finnish glassmakers’ capability is the success in European Glass Experience, juried exhibition on contemporary European glass art (Finnish Glass Museum 2014).
To conclude, I will end the chapter with Kirsti Taiviola’s positive remarks:

“I don’t feel that glassmaking is under threat in Finland, even more artists and designers are using glass in their work. People are curious to experiment different materials and techniques. People and things tend to move faster. There are a lot of small enterprises occurring in Finland, even in the design business. And they are more agile in their acts. --- Samuji just opened a store, where the fashion brand has extended itself to home décor such as ceramic and glass. These kind of operators are future customers for glass studios.” (Kirsti Taiviola)
I agree that my sampling of 14 glassmakers does not form up the whole picture. Designers were under-presented, and designers such as Anu Penttinen, Harri Koskinen or Katariina Nuutinen would have been an important adding to the list. Especially Harri Koskinen’s role in Iittala is a bit of an enigma for me. I have understood that he’s the one closest to old world’s design hero’s position at the factory, but I can not be sure if that’s just image creation.

Anyway, I feel that I’ve done my best with the time and resources I had. 14 interviewees is not bad toll, plus adding the representatives of Iittala and all the inquiries made via emails. My pursuit was to interview glassmaker’s in different roles and locations. I felt it was crucial to include glassmakers not only in capital, but also in Nuutajärvi and Riihimäki. For a student without a car, this meant journeys by train, bus or lifts from some polite glassmakers, and an awful lot of walking too. It’s a curious thing how modern day craftsmen and artists end up to the old industrial sites. I guess it enforces the feeling that they’re working with tradition and keeping the milieu alive.

All in all, I’m deeply grateful of the interviews I did. They strengthened my relationship to actors on the field and helped me to form up understanding of the trade I’m graduating into. Although many of the interviews reflected and even strengthened my already existing fears and hopes, I gained a lot of new information. Not all of the info was directly linked to my study, but I made positive remarks that might concern my future as a glass designer. For instance the small workshops are capable of producing good quality prototypes, artworks and small series. The workshops I visited have all the necessary know-how and equipments to do that.

The personal contacts to glassmakers were extremely rewarding. Altogether glassmakers
tend to be the most likeable and welcoming people. As a fan girl of the glass industry my research period culminated to the interview of glass art’s grand old man Oiva Toikka. I couldn’t help myself from being slightly nervous as I visited his home and was suddenly in an apartment filled with large ceramic and glass sculptures. Now I finally had the chance to meet up with the artist, whose work I had come to know during my internship in Nuutajärvi! I can tell you that Oiva Toikka is awful lot of more than those glass birds.

Anyway I tried to follow my question frame as I had done with other glassmakers, but Toikka kept on interrupting me by offering lemonade. Finally that I had come to the end of my question list, he asked me:

“What do you think of the drinking glass?”
To my shame I only then notice the tumbler I’ve been holding and drinking lemonade from. I fear that the question is a bit of a trial for me.

“It’s very beautiful, though the diameter might be a bit too big for my hand.”
“Well, you seem to have smallish hands. But don’t you agree that the surface pattern gives you a good grip?”
I agree, and suddenly I realize that the designer tries to give tips to a younger designer.

Probably the best thing for me is to keep on listening, keep on learning and keep on with the conversation with other glassmakers.
5 FUTURE PROSPECTS

5.1. Conclusions

To conclude the developments of Finnish glass industry from design student’s perspective, it is a much narrower and harsher environment that it used to be. There were a handful of glass manufacturers with ambitions in design and art, and the after war period turned out to be a golden era for art glass. Glass played an essential role in promoting Finnish design and industry abroad. The relationship between industry and designers was tight, especially in Nuutajärvi. Gradually glass factories were beaten by global competition, until Iittala factory was the one left standing.

The values and ideologies of glass art can be traced to its industrial nest: workmanship, co-operation, promoting economy and Finland via art. The designers have brought along their own ideas of modernism or artistic freedom. It is not until 1970s that glassmaking started to break free from its industrial roots. Studio Glass Movement introduced glass as a medium for independent artistic purposes.

However it is the very recent decades when glassmaking really pulls away from the industry. Simultaneously with the decline of the factories, glass education increased. The education finally released glassmaking under secrets-of-the-trade tradition. Due to former factory glassblowers and newcomers from glass schools, small studios have joined the scene of Finnish glassmaking. Therefore the current operators in glass craft, design and art are the small workshops, educational institutes, and factories of Iittala and Muurula. It is major change from the history; the industry might have faded from the days of its glory, but glassmaking itself seems to be more versatile than ever.

Even if industry does not employ full-time glass designers and artists, glassblowers are still needed. Iittala factory is the biggest employer of glassblowers in Finland. In addition Iittala is the last reminiscent of the industry that was used to promote Finnish
design. Therefore Iittala has huge responsibility over maintaining and renewing the tradition. Yet the factory is merely a piece in a puzzle, as it is a manufacturing unit under Iittala brand, and under Fiskars Group. Nevertheless Fiskars has a reason to keep Iittala factory going, as the factory is essential for the brand of Iittala. Iittala, the brand and the factory, produces glass artworks occasionally, but its foothold is in serial production.

Meanwhile artists, designers and craftsmen working outside the industry are active in producing and presenting small series and one-off art pieces. However they are working in challenging circumstances, dealing with high manufacturing costs, small markets, inadequate income and the lack of marketing. For the cost reasons, and also for the teamwork, glassmakers usually work in shared studios. The sale of products and artworks is rarely sufficient for a livelihood. Usually glassmakers have many professional roles to form up a living. The fact that glassblowers in small studios are dependable on artists, designers and entrepreneurs commissioning works is a bit of an alarming pattern. Are there enough ambitious designers or entrepreneurs to keep small studios going?

When it comes to glassmakers’ vocation and ideologies, persons who identify themselves as artists have artistic ambitions and influences. For them glass is a medium of self-expression. Meanwhile craftsmen have the tendency to rely on their workmanship and athlete attitude. The more you master the craft, the more interesting it gets. Glassmakers themselves do not explicitly express the cultural value of small studios, but it is undeniable that workshops enliven old industrial sites and offer possibility to produce alternative design and art. Besides small studios are very open, and it creates visibility for the craft of glassmaking.

The responsibility over educating glassmaking is spread to vocational schools in Nuutajärvi and Ikaalinen, to applied sciences universities, Aalto University and Iittala factory. Contemporary glassmakers’ know-how is increasingly international, as
students have the possibility to do exchange studies and internships abroad. Yet many contemporary glassmakers are in way or another working with the industrial tradition.

According to the interviews I can detect two future trends among the indie glassmakers. The first is to push to the fine arts markets and buyers. The production costs are so high, that it makes more sense to produce unique high-end pieces. In the global world it is hard to justify for a customer the price of a mouth blown, handcrafted drinking glass. Second opportunity is in recreational events. Many glass studios offer events, where people can try glassblowing, beads making or have a dinner at the studio. This is an emerging practice, but it might expand. As glass studios tend to locate in historical sites, in Suomenlinna, Nuutajärvi and Riihimäki, the studios have the possibility to benefit if they are considered as tourist attractions.

5.2. Proposal for acts

If you think of the major changes that have happened, there has not been enough public debate on the future of Finnish glassmaking. What I am missing, is the discussion on alternative ways of succeeding in glass design without the support of big manufacturers. Meanwhile in Swedish FORM Magazine I have noticed articles on independent glassmakers who are filling the vacuum left by dead glass manufacturing giants (Cirelli 2013; Lekberg 2013; Madestrand 2013).

The modern glassmakers embrace co-operation and teamwork and it is crucial for the future of the trade. What I call upon are joint exhibitions and projects without regional barriers. Operators in Nuutajärvi, Riihimäki, Helsinki and places in between are facing the same challenges, but they rarely gather to create something together. I aspire to see an ambitious joint exhibition for contemporary Finnish glass in the capital region and abroad. The word ambitious in this context means that the exhibition pieces should be selected according to the venue and audience. If glass is wished to be seen as contemporary art, then the exhibition pieces should be juried according to that.
As the industry no longer bares the full responsibility over manufacturing, exhibiting and educating glassmaking, the importance of small studios and independent glassmakers should be recognized on regional and national level and by cultural institutes. As well as glassmakers are renewing and preserving cultural heritage, they are also maintaining industrial milieus. Buildings of old Nuutajärvi or Riihimäki factory would be dead silent without functioning glass studios.

The scene of glass education would also benefit from tighter co-operation. If separate roles of glassblower and designer still exist, why do not they co-operate already during their studies. I call for ambition also in the education. There were research projects on glass chemistry in ARTS in 1990s, why in Aalto University that should be the upmost multidisciplinary institute, similar projects no longer exist? Glass has potential to be considered as a material for contemporary art, luxury objects, totally new products and a material suitable for gross disciplinary research projects. Could this potential be realized in education?

The entrepreneurship- and copyright issues should be taught when preparing a glassmaker student into the real world. To promote co-operation there is a need for code of conduct. What are the rules in craftsmen and designer co-operation, how to form up a common language and how to avoid copyright violation? The awareness of common ground rules could open new possibilities for co-operation, even between indie glassmakers and Iittala.

Despite the protective attitude of Iittala on its products and knowhow, Iittala should reconsider its relationship to artists and designers. Close liaison between artists and the industry led to the success of Finnish glass factories in 1950s and 1960s. I reckon that Iittala would benefit from a tighter relationship to glass designers. An artist or a designer allowed to be present at the factory and allowed to take part in the whole process, is a key to both innovations and rational production.
5.3. Further study

When looking at the scene of Finnish glassmaking, there were distinct topics for further research. One was the theme of education, tacit knowledge and traveling craft traditions. The skills of glassmaking have moved from factory to another, from maker to maker and nowadays from teacher to students. Presumably education preserves the craft, but because of the major changes in the trade, there is also know-how getting lost. In Finland there are plenty of people who used to do their day job in glass industry, their knowledge could be important for the younger generation of glassmakers.

Now that I have gained more comprehension, I notice clearly the limitations of the research. I did not include a professional glass engraver, or a glass chemist, or a mold maker in the study. They can be rightfully called as glassmakers too. There have been glass specialists that have worked in total obscurity, while designers and sometimes glassblowers have been uplifted to the public eye. I also regard it as a deficiency that I did not manage to interview Harri Koskinen, Anu Penttinen, Mari Isopahkala or Katariina Nuutinen. This was due to the limitations in timetable, but for a further study on the same topic, I would include more glassmakers that are identified as designers.

Income and marketing are hot topics for the whole scene of Finnish art and design. It would be topical to have projects or further research that might offer a helping hand for new entrepreneurs working in the field. I see it is a task for someone with proficiency and comprehension in marketing and retailing.

As Finnish glass industry in its peak was an example of art’s and industry’s interplay, what are the contemporary examples of this? On global scale, where does the industry have symbiosis with artists and designers? Are there companies where full-time designers are allowed to produce art, as was the practice in Nuutajärvi? I suspect that in fashion industry there are similar examples to be found. It would be topical to survey contemporary cases of companies with tight relationship between industry and art.
Viewpoint 5:

Where to turn next?

Whilst running up and down the staircases in Arabia campus, whilst conducting this study and putting up two exhibitions, the time has passed. I’m closer to the graduation than ever! It is a relatively good reason to be panicked about as this research confirmed my fears on the demanding nature of a career in glassmaking.

Yet I am optimistic, or at least venturous enough to keep on going. It’s been a grazy year for me and my workmate Sini Majuri. Our glass art has drawn unexpected attention. This spring I have had my first international exhibitions and there are more coming up. People seem to buy our concept and are curious about our artworks. I didn’t expect to get traveling grants or website articles on “Comic art in glass”. To be honest, writing my thesis had to be postponed because of these exhibition projects. I have felt like I’m driving a car with no brakes.

I guess there’s an urge to find new ways for glass art, even on global scale. This year I’ve visited some glass art places, such as the island of Murano in Venice and Sheridan College near Toronto. Next I am traveling to Leerdam, a glassmaking site in Netherlands. The situation of glassmaking seems to be the same in the whole western world. Traditional brands are not able to produce interesting art; craft skills and artistic production can be found in schools and small hot shops. Yet it’s hard to push glass into the scene of fine art or to justify the high prices for handcrafted utility products.

If I intend to continue on this road, I am going to face the challenges of a glassmaker. Where am I going to get my livelihood from? Is glassmaking just going to be a side-job for me? Am I adventurous enough to try my wings as an artist or an entrepreneur? If I choose to work in Finland, how to arrange the manufacturing, how to establish yourself, how to deal with marketing and sales? Should I stay in Helsinki, or go to studios in Nuutajärvi
or Riihimäki? Or is it my chance to travel around, is it possible to break through with glass art somewhere else?

A lot of questions in the air. Therefore this study had an additional purpose: I wanted to test myself, whether I am capable for research tasks. The ability to write works well in the field of art too. More importantly it might give me a gateway to jobs more suitable for a naïve designer. I fear that I am no future designer for mass production. I bare too much conscience of my acts. If it doesn’t work for me in the field of art either, I can turn to the role of observer, writer and researcher. That’s my master plan, but for now I am in this moving car without brakes.
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Illustrations:
Ella Varvio
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Markku Salo
www.markkusalo.com

Anna Schroderus
www.annaschroderus.fi

Kirsti Taiviola
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