

MOMENTS
in
The Building of a Nation



By three Masters of Photography

AHO & SOLDAN
CLAIRE AHO

UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUILDING, DELEGATE´S ENTRANCE
UNITED NATIONS PLAZA, NEW YORK, U.S.A.



Permanent Mission of Finland to the United Nations, New York in co-operation with A & S Photo and Film Foundation, Helsinki presents the photo exhibition 'MOMENTS in The Building of a Nation' in celebration of Finland's 100th year as an independent nation.

The exhibition, which is open 13-24 February 2017, is an international touring exhibition.

Photo: JB, 2017

Suomi
Finland
100



PERMANENT MISSION OF FINLAND
TO THE UNITED NATIONS



CONSULATE GENERAL OF FINLAND
NEW YORK

AHO & SOLDAN

THREE MASTERS OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Heikki Aho (1895-1961) and Björn Soldan (1902-1953) were pioneers of Finnish photography and film. In 1924 they established their legendary company AHO & SOLDAN which became the dynamo of the cinematic arts.

Aho & Soldan produced well over 400 documentary films, whilst creating a visual image of Finland to the World.

Their entire production opened up new perspectives on Finnish concepts of beauty, the history of everyday life and the industrialization processes in society. They were two of the most influential constructors of the modern image of Finland.

Heikki Aho's daughter CLAIRE AHO (1925-2015) – "The Grand Old Lady of Finnish Photography" - joined Aho & Soldan in the late 1940's as a documentary filmmaker, for example filming the 1952 Helsinki Summer Olympics.

Having also opened her own commercial studio she became a pioneer of Finnish colour photography and was especially active in the 1950's and 1960's.

Brightly coloured, formally inventive and full of wit, her photographs capture a distinctive era in Finland's history while maintaining contemporary vitality and relevance.

The exhibition MOMENTS at the United Nations Headquarters is a sample of their prolific and versatile production and a celebration of their life's work spanning half a century.



Heikki Aho



Björn Soldan



Claire Aho
Ph: Jonatan Rieder Lundqvist

TESTIMONY TO THE VALUES WE SHARE

Welfare state isn't something that just happened. Neither is it something that merely exists. It was – and is – the result of hard labor, vision and continuous nurturing.

In these pictures you can see a flash of the history of a nation. Something that has been captured, standing still against time and change. You see smiling faces, clean nature, women and men at work. You see the first signs of globalization: the US-made car against the backdrop of the Arctic Sea. You see children, gazing into the future. You see design, industry, luxury and poverty. It's a story - a story of a nation.

However it's just that, a story. These pictures offer a narrow view to what we choose to remember. They are documentation, but also art. Not meant only to capture the motion of the subject but to capture the emotion of the photographer, and to transfer those emotions into the viewer, you and me. In building a nation, let's not forget art. Let's not forget individuality or the two freedoms: Freedom of expression and freedom of speech.

In one of the pictures you can see representatives of over 20 professions from a nurse to a ballet dancer, from a woodcutter to a banker. Freedom to choose your own part, your own story, freedom for every child, despite of gender, wealth or any other factor, for education and equal opportunity to start, to try. And trust that the community, the country, is on your side even if you won't succeed. The story of Finland is the story of equality, education and support of those in the weakest position.

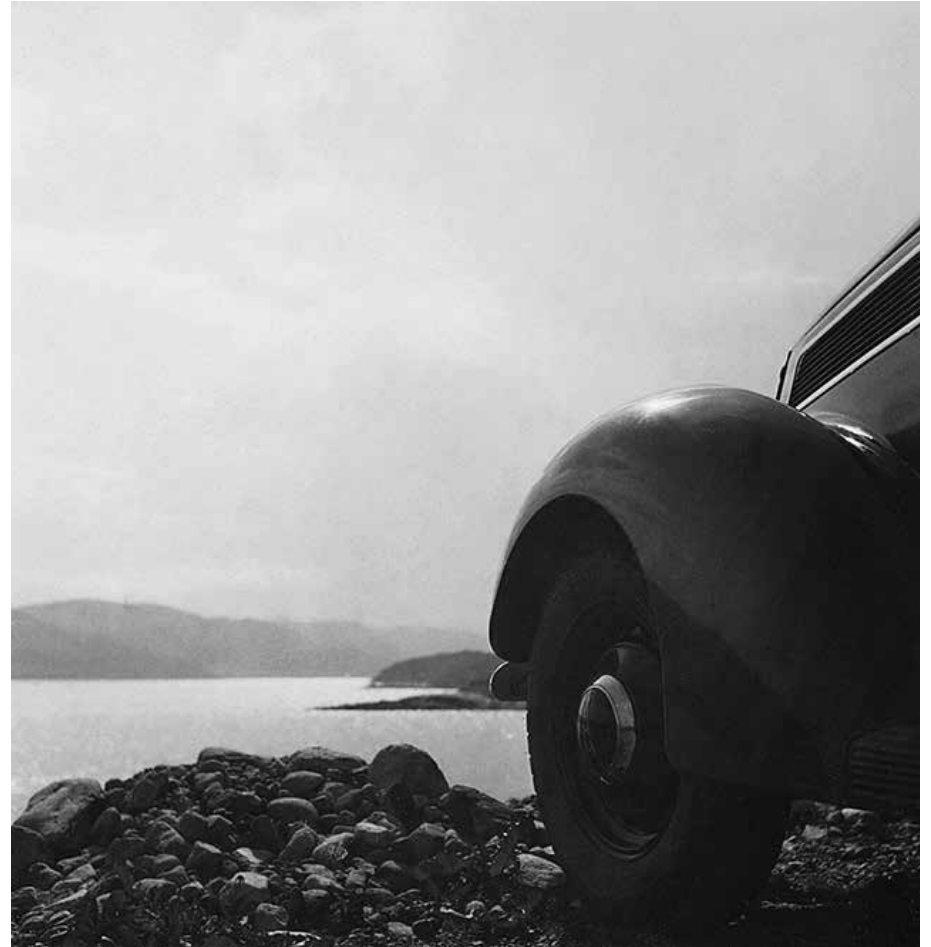
Finland is by no means a perfect, "Finished" country. As does every nation, also we have things to develop, things to improve. We have committed ourselves to the Sustainable Development goals, to become greener, more equal, fairer country. To become better.

This exhibition, 'MOMENTS in The Building of a Nation – Finland 100 years 2017', is now here at the United Nations, just behind the General Assembly Hall where all member states come to discuss and debate which direction our world should go. But what this exhibition reminds us of, is that it is equally important to remember where we have been. If a poor, northern nation can push itself up and become a successful welfare nation in just 100 years. And to do so by following the values we share with the United Nations, values of equality, education, human rights and human dignity, then those must be some really good values.

While displaying the path of Finland to become a welfare state, this exhibition is also a strong testimony to the Agenda 2030.

Kai Sauer, Ambassador
Permanent Mission of Finland to the United Nations

AHO & SOLDAN



By The Arctic Sea, 1937

Heikki Aho and Björn Soldan belonged to the new world of photographers who were exalted by the progressive critic Raoul af Hellström in the journal *Tulenkantajat* ("Torchbearers"):

"The modern photographer reinvents the world, opens our eyes to see amazing things whose beauty we would otherwise have missed. His significance as an interpreter of our time continues to grow..."



Claire Aho heading for Villinki outside Helsinki, early 1930's









Building a Modern Nation - A Glance on Finland and 100 Years of Independence

In 2017 one Northern European nation, Finland, is celebrating its 100-year anniversary as an independent republic. However, the development into a nation and a state of its own had already begun earlier than in 1917. The territory that constitutes Finland today had been an integrated part of the Swedish kingdom since the Middle Ages. During the Napoleonic Wars in the early 19th century, it was joined to the Russian empire as a separate Grand Duchy with its own administration. Finland would thus continue along the same path as the other Nordic countries. It maintained its Lutheran faith and Swedish laws, and when the First World War broke out in 1914, Finns considered themselves as a nation of their own.

The political culture of Finland was thus prepared for national sovereignty. But in order to gain full independency it needed economic resources and geopolitical stability as well. Thanks to its (favorable) natural resources (large forests, water power, efficient education), swiftly improving infrastructures (trade fleet, railway, urban innovations) and large markets in both Russia and Central Europe, Finland experienced a stronger growth than the more developed nations in Europe since the 1890s. This paved the way for a modernization of both the countryside and the urban areas, with capital Helsinki in the forefront.

All these structures were heavily shaken by the Russian revolution in 1917. The Finnish parliament declared the country independent on the 6th of December, but the chaos was unavoidable and threw the country into a short but tragic civil war. It ended in the victory of the contra-revolutionaries in May of 1918, and one year later the country got a republican constitution, which defined Finland as a parliamentary democracy.

The system of government remains to the present day. One reason for this continuity has been the institutional stability of the society. It has been stable enough to resist both left- and right-radical threats against democracy in the domestic politics. Another necessary condition for this trust in Finnish democracy has been a steady economic growth. As long as the standard of living has increased and since a socially equalizing welfare state was created, the citizens have had faith in their politicians and the democratic order. The third necessary factor for the survival of the Finnish democracy has been its geopolitical balancing between the West and the East, the North and the South. This has continued after Finland joined the European Union in 1995.

The exhibition that you are to see tells this same story, seen from the perspective of ordinary citizens who have taken part in the building of the nation and state of Finland. Thanks to the skillful photographers Aho, Soldan and Aho, the spectator gets a close and honest look at how the everyday life of both young and old, rich and poor, urban and rural Finns, took shape during these formative years for Finnish independency, democracy and welfare state.

Dr Henrik Meinander,
Professor of History, University of Helsinki

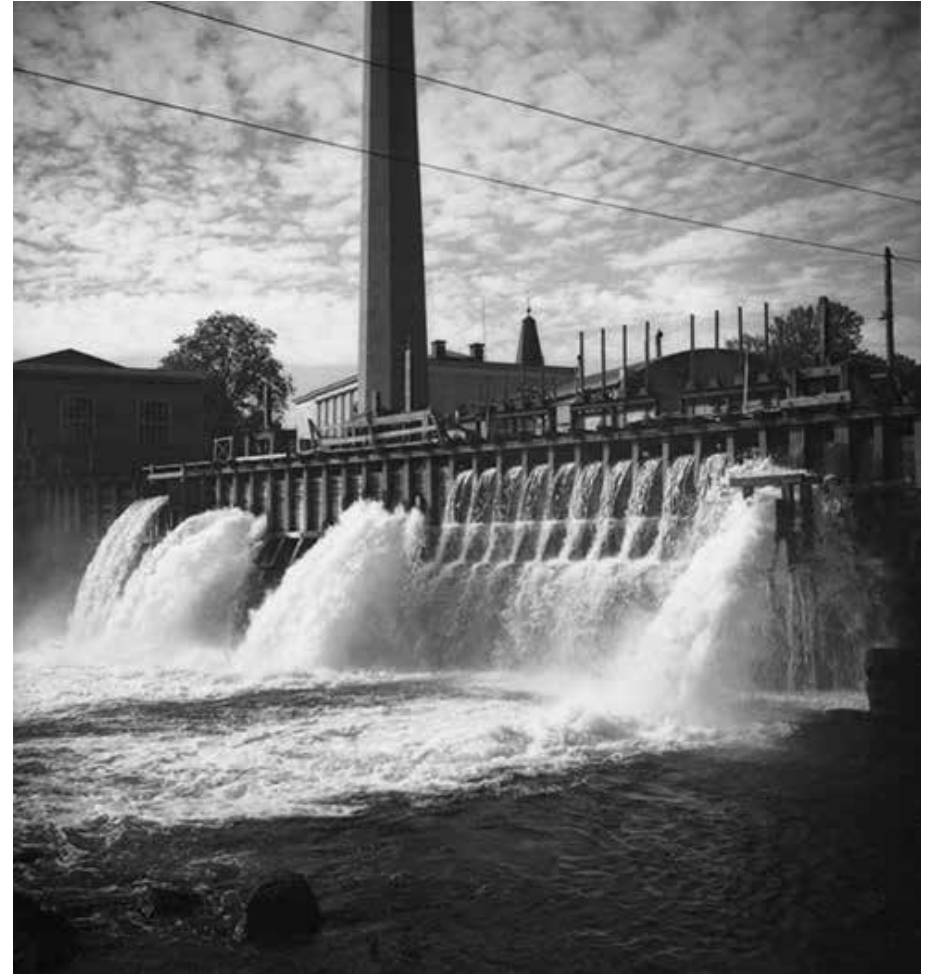




Exhibited in Alvar Aalto's Finnish Pavilion at the World's Fair, New York, 1939-40



Aurajoki, Turku



Tampere



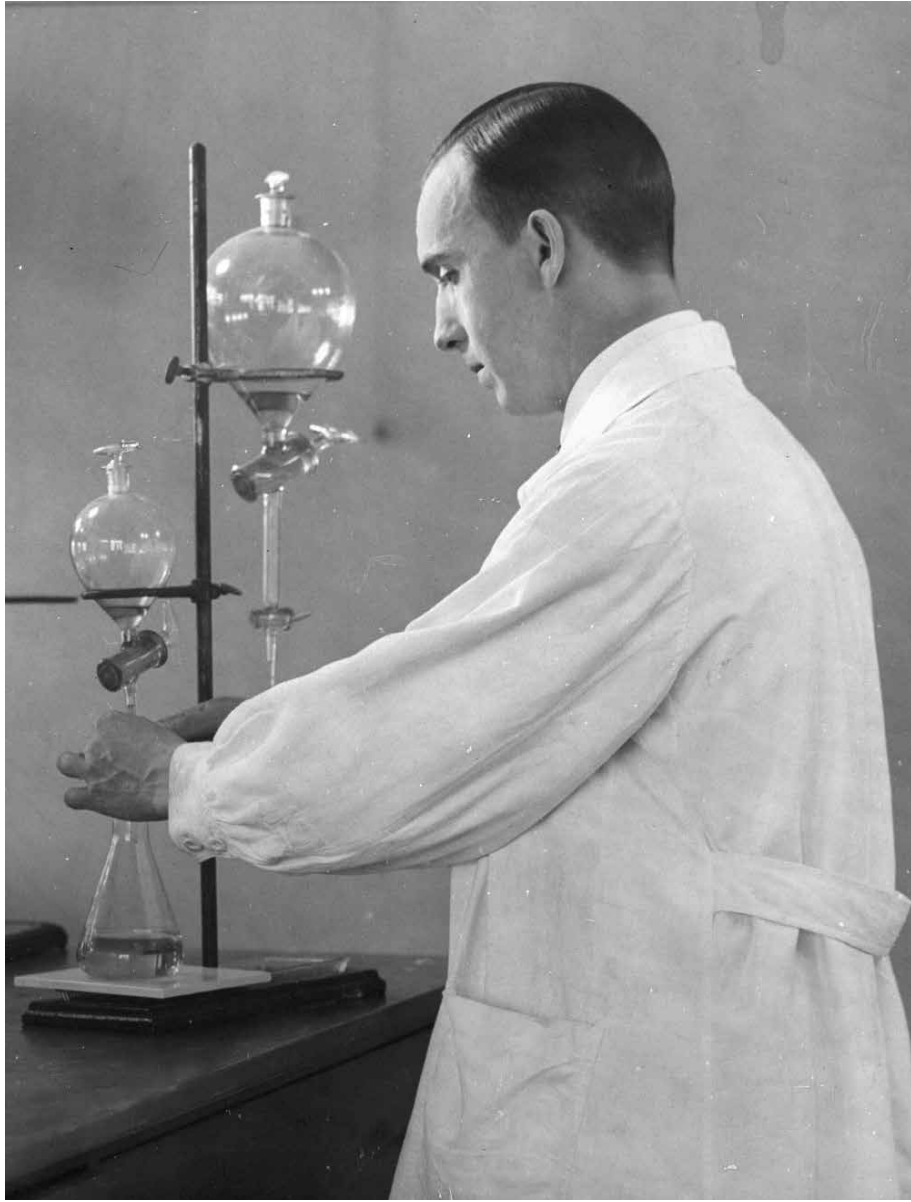
Exhibited in Alvar Aalto's Finnish Pavilion at the World's Fair, New York, 1939-40





Showeling Pyrites







Jean Sibelius at Home

As the Master Composer disliked being photographed, Jean Sibelius was rarely caught on camera. In 1927 and 1945 Aho & Soldan was allowed to shoot a documentary featuring him and his family at their beloved home Ainola.



The Masters. Heikki Aho and his father Juhani Aho, the National Author of his time. Helsinki, 1910's.

Finns and the Story of Finland

Is there a secret which should be revealed when a country becomes one of the best in the world in 100 years, having first been a poor agricultural nation without any capital built up for decades and centuries? Well, not really. The story of Finland can easily be told because it is not secret. It is indeed a story of a country which after 100 years of unbroken democracy, is among the wealthiest in the world, providing a high welfare for its citizens. In international rankings, Finland regularly scores among the top 5 or 10. For example, the best country to be a mother or student in, a low level of corruption, top competitiveness and creativity, best functioning society, and many more.

The story can be told because there is indeed nothing secret. But still, when trying to define Finland there is often a feeling that the country has something unique, which cannot be fully represented by words. Thus it is necessary to visualize coming closer to the basic organizing principles of the Finnish society, and the mentality of its citizens.

You can tell many stories about Finland; About its Beautiful nature, numerous lakes, reindeers, Santa Claus, technology, education, industry, design, musicians, sportsmen, architects, wars, welfare, languages, equality. Every foreigner who knows something about Finland, has his or/her own perception.

There are great stories but behind all these, if you take a closer look, there is a hidden driver. It is the engine which puts Finns running and which has made it possible to build a society of which they could not even dream about one hundred years ago.

Well, actually somebody did dream about it. Finland had a national philosopher, Mr. J.V. Snellman, who in the 19th century decided that the power of small countries lies in their civilization. By this he meant that since small countries do not have military, monetary, or natural resources, they must rely on their brains. Only in this way can they survive and prosper. In practice: get an education, respect common values, work hard, think individually, and never give up.

This recipe was adopted as a building block of the Finnish society and turned out to be a success. It fell on fertile ground.

Finns love problem solving and challenges, the more challenging, the better. If something is broken, it has to be fixed as soon as possible. Even better if it can simultaneously be improved. And if not, you design a new one until it IS good. It is also helpful if someone says that solving the problem is impossible. Here you can see a Finn get inspired, because they can rely on their skills, knowhow and "SISU", an attitude of never giving up.

This mentality combined with over one hundred years of continuous investments in education as Dr. Snellman prescribed, has made Finland what it is: The country of solutions. Finns love to solve problems because they have the education, the attitude and the individuality to do so.

This might sound too good to be true. Well, if this was true, Finland would be a perfect country. It is not. There is none in the world. Finns could never say that their country is perfect. Why? Because they love problems. There is always something, that needs to be done better, needs to be corrected and developed.

But if you had to all of a sudden design a country from scratch, one can suppose it would come pretty close to something like Finland. High income, general welfare network from birth to grave, equal opportunities for everybody, general trust, happiness and high quality of life, – and beautiful nature, of course.

Close relation to nature has made Finns to think about sustainability long before it hit the international agenda. Most of the Finnish products, services and ability are exported all over the world. Sustainability is part of them. Finns love nature and it is natural for them to create solutions for a better future. Finns are proud of it, and as they live surrounded by nature, they do their utmost to solve nature threatening problems like global warming, as well.

The mentality of the nation, the production of pragmatic, functioning, sustainable solutions lies so deep in the Finnish mindset that sometimes they themselves are blind to it.

But if you look at these pictures you can see the concentrated effort put by citizens into their work by yourself, the skills honed and enjoyably used in daily tasks, the proudness of results, the knowledge that every day like this means the building of a better nation for our families and our kids.

The future is made now, with my own hands and brain.

This is the secret behind the success of Finland, and it is indeed no secret. In these unique pictures everybody can see how a nation builds a better future for itself – and others.

Timo Heino
Ambassador of Finland to Cyprus,
former head of public diplomacy at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.





Porters, Turku



Graduates, Helsinki



Yteri



Blind

PHOTO EXHIBITIONS & FILM SCREENINGS

Aho & Soldan´s and Claire Aho´s photographs have during 1920 – 2009 been displayed at numerous exhibitions in Finland and around the world. Samples of recent exhibitions 2010-2017 can be found below. Films are screened at film festivals around the World such as ICA – Institute of Contemporary Arts in London and DocPoint Film Festival in Helsinki.

2010 – 2017

United Nations Headquarters, General Assembly Building, Delegate´s Entrance, New York – AHO & SOLDAN, CLAIRE AHO, 'MOMENTS – in The Building of a Nation'. Touring exhibition.

The Presidential Palace, Helsinki – AHO & SOLDAN, CLAIRE AHO, 'SELECTION'.

Embassy of Finland, Beijing

Helsinki Airport, Vantaa – AHO & SOLDAN, CLAIRE AHO, 'SIBELIUS & Images of Finland'.

Akateeminen kirjakauppa (Academic Bookstore), Helsinki – AHO & SOLDAN, CLAIRE AHO, 'SIBELIUS & Images of Finland'.

Lincoln Center, New York – AHO & SOLDAN, 'Jean Sibelius at Home'.

Mobilia, Kangasala – AHO & SOLDAN, 'Automobiles and Helsinki'.

Kansallismuseo (National Museum), Helsinki - AHO & SOLDAN, 'Automobiles and Helsinki'.

Centre Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne Paris – AHO & SOLDAN, 'The Light of the North'.

The Photographers´ Gallery, London – CLAIRE AHO, 'Studio Works'
ICA – Institute of Contemporary Arts, London – AHO & SOLDAN, 'JUHA', 'Finland Calling', 'Tempo', 'Outokumpu Copper Mine', 'The Director on Summer Holidays' and 5 other films, CLAIRE AHO, 'Claire and the Film Camera', 'Ballad of the Maritime City', 'Finland – the Country of Colours', 'Muistojen kisakesä', 'Leirikirje', 'Jean Sibelius at Home' and others, PETER VON BAGH, 'SPLINTERS – A Century of an Artistic Family'.

Designmuseo (Design Museum), Helsinki – Group exhibition, 'The Builders of the Future', CLAIRE AHO.

The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, Helsinki – AHO & SOLDAN, 'Life and People in Finland'.

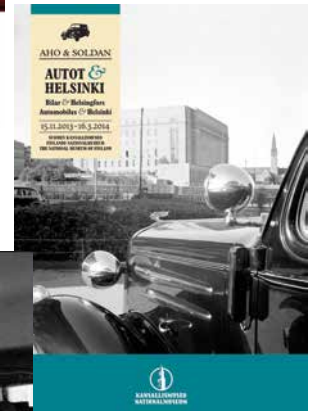
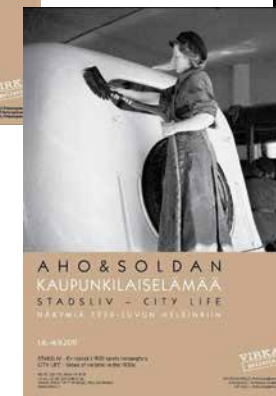
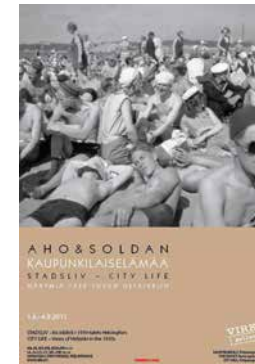
Ateneum (National Gallery), Helsinki – AHO & SOLDAN, 'Finland Calling'.

Taidehalli (Kunsthalle), Helsinki – CLAIRE AHO, 'The Age of Elegance'.

Helsinki City Hall´s Virka Gallery, Helsinki – AHO & SOLDAN, 'City Life'.

Helsinki City Hall´s Virka Gallery, Helsinki – CLAIRE AHO 'Helsinki 1968'.

Designmuseo (Design Museum), Helsinki - Group exhibition, 'Modern[ism]', AHO & SOLDAN, 'Nordic Modernism'





Central Railway Station, Helsinki, 1937



The new Post Office building, Helsinki, 1930's





Aleksanterinkatu, Helsinki, 1937

FILMS

AHO & SOLDAN was founded in 1924 to give a visual image of Finland. It became the largest producer of documentary films in the 1930's in Finland and made well over 400 films over the years.

Aho & Soldan, founded by engineer Heikki Aho and photographer Björn Soldan, brought a brilliant business idea to the Finnish market: fast exposure panchromatic film, a souvenir from the Zeiss factories in Germany. "Ostwald's Colour Theory", named so after Heikki Aho's teacher, professor Wilhelm Ostwald, as a guarantee of international quality standards, was another German invention they introduced in Finland.

Aho & Soldan began with short cultural films and moved on to optical experiments in nature films. At the turn of the decade, the company was ready for feature-length documentaries. Two years of work culminated with three films, the most impressive of which was Suomen puu- ja paperiteollisuus ("Finnish wood and paper industry"). Global distribution and praising newspaper articles proved the allure of the brothers' work. The epic documentary Suomen maatalous ("Finnish agriculture") was followed by the fiery Raudanjälöstusta Suomessa ("Iron processing in Finland").

Aho & Soldan was undisputedly the leading producer of industrial films in the 1930s, and the cinematic shaper of the rise out of the Great Depression. Finnish film producer and director T.J.Särkkä summed up the importance of the company:

"The aesthetic values of the films lay in the romanticism of machines".

In the future, documentaries would show the triumphs of a modernizing nation, focusing on developing industries and trade – and not lacking in commercial appeal.

The study of Soviet films and the legacy of Walter Ruttmann, a pioneer of avant-garde cinema, shaped the cinematic style of the brothers. Artistic development was first seen onscreen in 1933, in an experimental montage in Tempo. The company reached its full stylistic potential in different versions of the Foreign Ministry's film Suomi kutsuu ("Finland invites"), released between 1932 and 1940.

Encouraged by a law entitling them to tax reductions, the company produced short films which shaped the entire notion of genre in Finnish documentary cinema. Their travel films combined landscapes and cultural values in a way appealing to the public. The fields and forests of the homeland, as well as ethnology, which was

going through a renaissance, continued to interest filmmakers. Eino Mäkinen, the grand old man of ethnological film, made his reputation at Aho & Soldan. The scope of films was further expanded by commissioned pieces and organizational films.

"Documentaries would show the triumphs of a modernizing nation"

After the war, Aho & Soldan's filming activities slowed down, but were not entirely discontinued. Björn Soldan moved to London, continued to photograph, e.g. for his planned book "100 Photographs from England" and worked for the BBC as the "Finnish voice". Heikki Aho was supported by his daughter Claire. Her input was significant during the early stages of colour cinema when few cinematographers had knowledge of the new technique.

Sample films by AHO & SOLDAN can be viewed here:

<http://ahosoldan.com/filmselokuvat.html>

Adapted from text by Ilkka Kippola, Researcher at the National Audiovisual Archive and Jari Sedergren, Doctor of Political Science, Researcher at the National Audiovisual Archive.





Poster by Venny Soldan-Brofeldt

MAGAZINE COVERS - AHO & SOLDAN



CLAIRE AHO

CLAIRE AHO

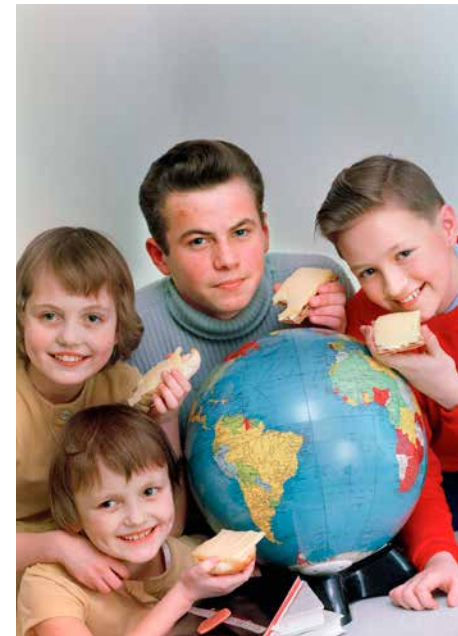
Claire Aho was one of the most popular fashion and advertising photographers in Finland in the 1950's and 1960's. Many periodicals commissioned cover photos from her. Aho's photographs were famous for their vibrant colours and humour. She had a knack for capturing the natural sensitivity of her subjects.

A pioneer of Finnish colour photography, Claire Aho came from a cultured family: she was the grandchild of the author Juhani Aho and the painter Venny Soldan-Brofeldt.

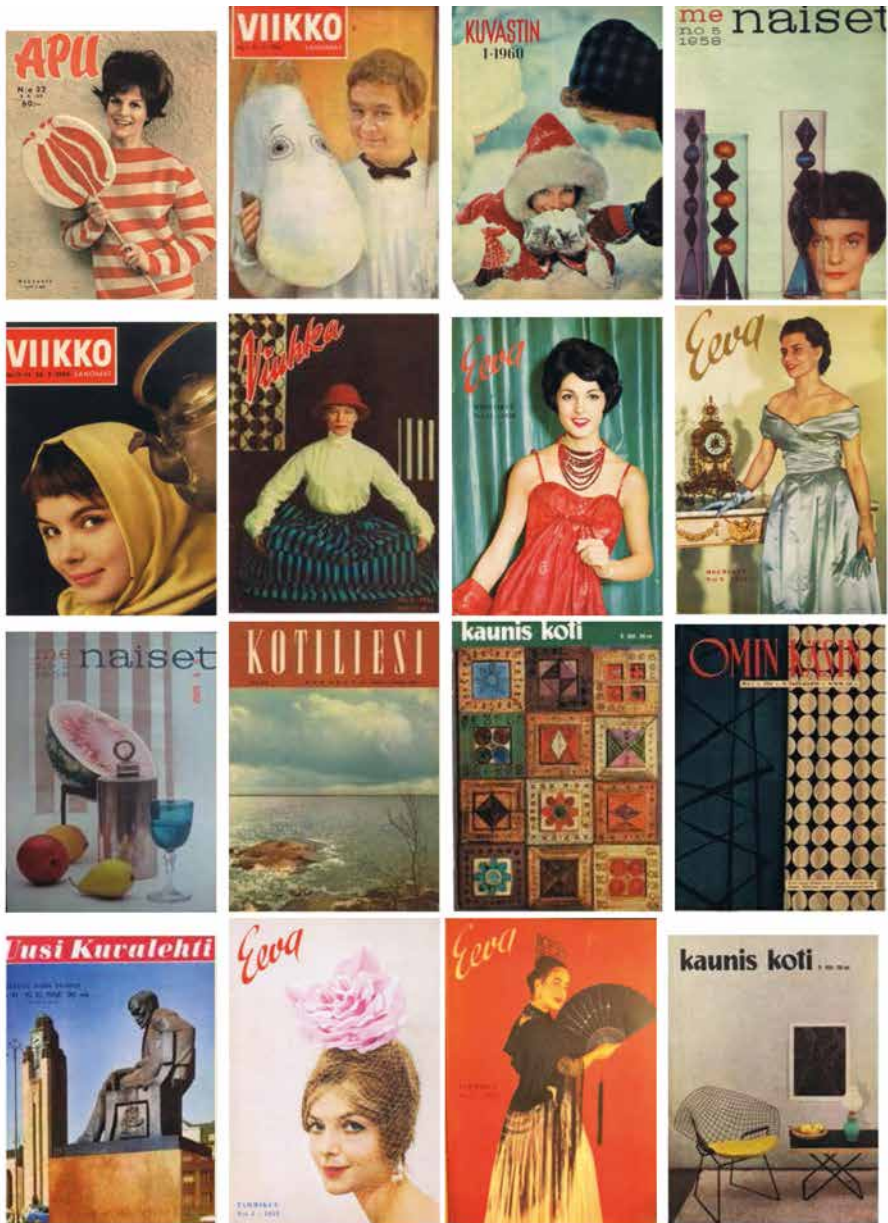
"I took my fathers' Rollei and it said CLICK – and there the picture was, and since then I have taken pictures"

Studio Works

Claire Aho's prolific output spans advertising, editorial, reportage and fashion photography. These 5 photographs centres on Aho's studio work in the 1950s and 1960s. It was in this space that she developed her relationship with her subjects, in particular her eye for combining form, colour and pattern.



MAGAZINE COVERS - CLAIRE AHO



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"The elements of movement and color are part of what make her work iconic"

"All elements of her photographs point to a modern aesthetic that is ahead of its time: from the use of colour, pattern and form, to the way in which she arranged her subjects and objects in these stylised shots"

"Her prolific, quality output across a broad range of industries created a demand for her services among leading commercial brands and publications, making her one of the most prominent photographers of the period"

"She is particularly admired for her work with pattern, form and colour and the dialogue she creates between them in her images"

"--- the composition of the various scenarios is extremely inventive"

"The focal dynamism and balance of the composition, taken with the intensity of the colour, grabs the attention of the viewer"

"--- Aho employs ingenious methods for displaying complex, patterned materials with extra geometrical complexity"

"Her colour work was at the forefront of Finnish photography, and often used humour to bring her scenes to life..."

"The photos are from the 1950s to the 1970s and show a mastery of the sparse use of colour and design that we have come to associate with Scandinavia"

"Her inspired layering of fabrics and backdrops and her talent for bringing out a model's personality are still being emulated today"

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'Cotton Rhapsody', PMK's catalogue 1958. Model, Elina Salo.



Carita Järvinen, 1950's



The Woman Behind the Glass - Clary von Platen, 1950's



THE FRIDGE

The year of the Helsinki Summer Olympics 1952, was the first time Coca Cola was sold in bottles in Finland.

Electrical fridges spread throughout the 1950's, but they were still an expensive purchase. The fridge was the proudness of the home and a mark of a high standard of living.



The children, the bear and the fridge

I hoped to create an image which, on one hand would be filled with colours and humour and thus catch the eyes of the beholder, on the other hand give a familiar and comfortable feeling, but also draw attention to the details. I wanted the viewers to get an immediate connection with the image.

Colours are all over and need no explanation. The little thirsty bear on the floor is a warm and comforting friend of any child. The whole setting, I hope, breathes a joyful familiarity - as in any home anywhere.

At the same time it is obvious that everything is set up (just look at the studio floor) and that the white fridge, the silent main character of the image, holds the promise of ever more well tasting treats at any time. As long as one has one.

Perhaps, the fridge thus became as familiar in some new homes as the situation in the image.

This is my comment some 60 years after the shot!

- Claire Aho



CLAIRE AHO & HEIKKI AHO

Helsinki in 1950's colours

The decade of innocence in Helsinki comes alive in Claire and Heikki Aho's charming, previously unseen colour photographs.

"It seemed important to immortalize people, street life, traffic and a lot else on the streets of Helsinki. There were many beautiful things to see – especially if you knew how to look. On the streets the spirits of the era was vivid, and my father Heikki and I immortalized it".



CLAIRE AHO

Helsinki 1968

In 1968 photographer Claire Aho participated in a Nordic photography exhibition in Kiel, Germany with her images of Helsinki. The photographs relate the story of Helsinki about 50 years ago and offer a nostalgic journey through time.



CLAIRE AHO , South harbour, Ehrenströmintie, Helsinki, 1968

The Pension Reform of 1961



To this commercial for pension insurance, the whole palette of Finnish society has been gathered. The commercial concerns the Pension Reform of 1961, which can be said to be the foundation of the modern pension system. In essence, Claire Aho was asked to create a picture of the new law. Here it is!

The image also shows one of many MOMENTS in The Building of a Nation, a moment in time some 44 years after the beginning of Finland's independence.

The Knight of the White Rose of Finland

The President of the Republic of Finland, Sauli Niinistö, as the Grand Master of the Orders of the White Rose of Finland and of the Lion of Finland, has awarded the order of the Knight of the White Rose of Finland to the photographer Claire Brofeldt (CLAIRE AHO) on the 6th December 2015.



Photo: Heikki Saukkomaa, Lehtikuva, 2012



Claire Aho at the Independence Day celebration, 6 December 2012

A & S Photo and Film Foundation sr

The Foundation has as its aim to foster and make Finnish historical photography and film known, especially regarding Heikki Aho´s, Björn Soldan´s, Claire Aho´s and the film production company Aho & Soldan´s production.

The Foundation is working with, and actively seeking, partners in Finland and Internationally, in order to develop its operations.

The A & S Photo and Film Foundation sr wishes to thank

Professor Heikki A. Reenpää

in Helsinki for his engagement over several decades in the promotion of Finnish literature and photography and especially for his active support and participation in making the photo and film production of Aho & Soldan and Claire Aho known to the generations of today.

A & S PHOTO AND FILM FOUNDATION sr

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