



ITE Art in Finland – 20-year jubilee

We would like to invite everyone to explore Finnish contemporary folk art, *ITE art*, and to take part in the jubilee year's many festive events!

When the Association for Rural Culture and Education and its partners began surveying Finnish contemporary folk art in the late 1990s, the genre was virtually unknown in Finland, as was the general concept of contemporary folk art.

The consequences can be compared to opening Pandora's box – in a good way. Hundreds of original creators and wonderful worlds of imagination were discovered on the walls of Finnish homes and especially in the vast expanses of remote countryside yards. Until then, their creations had been mainly ignored or sneered at.

The phenomenon was named ITE art, ITE being an acronym of the Finnish words *itse tehty elämä*, 'self-made life'. It refers to the fact that most of these artists are self-taught and use their art to shape their entire lives; they construct their own stories through their works. In 2000, the first ITE exhibitions were held and the first book on the subject was published. They gained tremendous popularity and attention, and ITE art coverage was huge in the media. And now it's time to mark ITE art's 20-year jubilee.

The dynamic duo of ITE art surveys – the Association for Rural Culture and Education's former Director of Cultural Affairs, **Liisa Heikkilä-Palo**, and Coordinator of Cultural Affairs, **Raija Kallioinen** – paved the way for later ITE art explorers and discoverers. Finnish ITE art has been mapped province by province through EU-funded projects, and soon the whole country will have been covered. Currently surveys are being carried out in **Satakunta** and **Häme**, and we'd like to hear about more ITE artists! The operations are now run by Director of Cultural Affairs, **Helka Ketonen**.

Finnish ITE art promoters also started networking overseas with major European outsider art experts, museums and galleries at a very early stage. Finnish ITE art arouses interest with its unpolished and imaginative techniques and large, often crowded, rural yards, which are seldom seen in the more densely populated Central Europe.

Other key people in the process have been photographer **Veli Granö**, whose photos have been admired in many exhibitions, and the late multidisciplinary artist **Erkki Pirtola**, whose hand-held videos of ITE artists and ITE art environments depicted the subjects as they were and became seminal to the image of Finnish ITE art in other countries.



The jubilee year exhibition, *Kohtalona luovuus* ('Destined for creativity'), will tour three art museums in Finland: the ITE Museum in Kokkola, the Oulu Museum of Art, and the Hämeenlinna Art Museum. The exhibitions are produced by the museums, and curated by Liisa Heikkilä-Palo, **Elina Vuorimies** and **Minna Haveri**. At the exhibition, ITE art meets selected works by contemporary artists.

The jubilee year also celebrates the first ITE Artist of the Year, **Paula Huhtanen**, who promotes "joyism" in her art, which spreads the idea of trust and optimism that erupts in her brilliantly colourful paintings and collages. Her paintings are characterised by abundance, power and joy.

One of the key techniques in Finnish ITE art is wood sculpting, and understandably so given that Finland is one of the world's most wood-rich countries and the material is easy to come by. Many Finnish people who live in the countryside are skilful users of the chainsaw, and there are hundreds of master chainsaw sculptors. The most popular subject is the bear, which is considered the king of nature in Finland. Chainsaw sculptors will demonstrate their skills at the Bear Festival in Ilomantsi, the easternmost municipality of Finland, from 13–15 August. The theme of the festival's sculpture competition this year is *Freestyle*. Chainsaw artist **Juha Käkelä** will add something fantastic to the jubilee year calendar: he will sculpt a bear every day of the year – a total of 365 bears!

There are numerous ITE art environments in Finland, located in courtyards and in public places. There will be an ITE picnic on Saturday, 25 July, where ITE art enthusiasts from all over the country can visit these environments. Everybody is welcome as long as they respect the environments. The ITE art website www.itenet.fi offers tips on the best-known ITE art environments, and the website is also the source of a lot of other information on the subject.

ITE art is also featured on the **Arjen Luovuus** idea cards. The cards, in Finnish, provide ideas for using creativity in everyday life. The cards can be downloaded free from www.arjenluovuus.fi.

Maahenki publishing house, which is owned by the Association for Rural Culture and Education, has published numerous books about Finnish ITE art.

The Association also has an extensive Collection of ITE art, which is maintained by the ITE Museum in Kokkola on the west coast of Finland. Both the Association and the ITE Museum provide guidance and advice on all issues related to ITE art.



Contact us!

Association for Rural Culture and Education

Helka Ketonen, Director, Cultural Affairs, helka.ketonen@msl.fi

Raija Kallioinen, Coordinator, Cultural Affairs, raija.kallioinen@msl.fi

ITE Collection

Elina Vuorimies, Curator in ITE Museum, elina.vuorimies@kokkola.fi