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Keynote: Approach to Northern Ceramics: Arabia – Pentik

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ABSTRACT

In Finland, even more than in other Scandinavian countries, ceramic art has been dependent on support from industry and from governmental policies. Throughout the different phases of ceramics industry development in Finland, I see there are three key factors at the heart of change: People, Public Policy and Business Logic. International influence, financial and educational enablers and artists networks all shape this history and also influence our future. I will give you an overview of the main phases of Finnish industrial ceramic design, which is built upon the history of Swedish Rörstrand and Arabia Porcelain Factory and their business logic. As society changes, public policy has a big role in enabling and supporting new initiatives, as well as accelerating change. For ceramics industry, public policy is important both in financial support for investments and in ceramic art education.

The Finnish ceramics industry spans over more than 150 years. At the end of the 19th Century, important societal and regulatory changes opened up possibilities for establishing new companies and thus created the grounds for a design industry in Finland, an autonomous Grand Duchy of Russia. The industry started its bloom with foreign investors and a more centralized family enterprise structure. 1902 A.W. Finch launched the modern ceramic art in Finland.

The next phase of development saw new needs due to the end of the First World War, the political will to integrate people in a post-war context and a growing need to cater products to the needs of people moving to cities. C-G. Herlitz and Kurt Ekholm founded the Art Department at Arabia Porcelain factory in 1932. The end of the Second World War sparked a new interest in everyday tableware. The Design Department was created and Kaj Franck took the lead in designing for export markets.

As of the sixties, regional and structural policy saw public investments push for the creation of local enterprises throughout Finland. Kyllikki Salmenhaara took responsibility of the ceramic art education in Finland emphasizing the know-how of limited production. A good example of success stories of



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the increased public support for regional industry development, is that of Pentik, created by Topi and Anu Pentikäinen in Posio. Their first contact to international studio pottery was through Risto Paatero and American Kent Herschleb. Anja and Peter Winqvist, from the Arabia Factory, further developed the then craft-oriented Pentik studio, creating a more industrial approach. Suku Park was invited to begin Novus studio for exclusive porcelain products. Suku Park also developed international artist network for Pentik and laid the foundations for Reijo Lantto to open the Arctic Ceramic Centre.

After the delocalization of Arabia's industrial ceramics production at the beginning of the 21st Century, Posio is the only still standing production site for domestic ceramic design in Finland. Today, the legacy of Arabia can be seen in the vitality of the Arabia Art Department Society. The key success factors for the future of ceramic art in Finland can be seen as investing in the professional education and know-how, strengthening the position of ceramic art in the art context and increasing international networking in the form of residencies, workshops and exhibitions. Karin Widnäs Museum KWUM in Fiskars Village is a good example of people investing in know-how to support new creation.

We need to remember, that the future of ceramics is built by people (investors, industry owners, creators, artists, designers and educators). Public policy supports the development (regional development and education policy), while business logic foresees and responds to the changes in the markets (production, globalization, optimization). In the current context, successful design industry needs education policy. Artists and designers need to become increasingly open up to a truly global perspective. Each era creates new possibilities that we will turn into success through cooperation and sharing of new ideas and practices.