

The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
April 1992

KAJ FRANCK: DESIGNER

April 16 - October 12, 1992

The first retrospective in the United States of the work of Finnish glass and ceramic designer Kaj Franck (1911-1989) is on view at The Museum of Modern Art from April 16 through October 12, 1992. Organized by Christopher Mount, curatorial assistant, Department of Architecture and Design, **KAJ FRANCK: DESIGNER** consists of approximately 200 pieces of one-of-a-kind and mass-produced ceramic, glass, and plastic tableware designed between the late 1940s and 1980s.

The exhibition is made possible by grants from the Finnish Ministry of Education, Hackman Arabia Oy Ab, Hackman Iittala Oy Ab, the Finnish Cultural Foundation, the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Dorrit Pacius, the Museum of Applied Arts, Helsinki; and The Helsinki University of Industrial Arts. Transportation assistance has been provided by Finnair.

Often called the "conscience of Finnish design," Franck sought to create what he called the "optimal object," one that reflected the ideal relationship between man and the mass-produced commodity. His products remain among the most successful in the history of modern design, because they synthesize both utility and aesthetics with the utmost refinement and continue to look as contemporary today as they did when first introduced.

Franck's postwar designs for such companies as Arabia, Iittala, and Nuutajarvi ranged from the highly functional to the purely decorative. His production pieces were some of the most popular and influential of the period:

-more-

versatile and durable, these inexpensive designs focused on the needs of the consumer. Like many modernists, Franck utilized elementary geometric shapes to achieve a universality and purity of form. As Mr. Mount notes in his essay for the brochure accompanying the exhibition, "Franck's definition of beauty, 'necessary, functional, justified, and right,' corresponds to his belief that a certain truth is embodied in an object that simply and elegantly fulfills its purpose." Franck's *Kilta* series, manufactured between 1950 and 1975, could be used in a multitude of combinations and was the first full set of interchangeable oven-to-table ware to be manufactured. It was also the first tableware to be sold by the individual piece, thus allowing postwar consumers to purchase it as they could afford it.

Franck served as artistic director at Nuutajarvi glass between 1951 and 1976, during which time design became a major export industry in Finland. While at Nuutajarvi, Franck designed both mass-production tableware, which was influenced by the style of scientific labware, and many of his unique "art" glass pieces. In 1960 he began to teach at the Institute of Industrial Arts in Helsinki, where he remained for the following three decades. Among his many honors, Franck was awarded the Gold Medal (1951), the *diplôme d'honneur* (1954), and the grand prix (1957) in the Triennials of Milan, as well as the Lunning Prize (1955) and the *Compasso d'oro* (1957). In addition, his work appeared in the GOOD DESIGN exhibitions at The Museum of Modern Art during the 1950s.

* * *

No. 27

For further information or photographic materials, contact Helen Bennett, press representative, Department of Public Information, 212-708-9756.