

CULTURAL HERITAGE KALEVALA; RAIJA UOSIKKINEN AND HER ILLUSTRATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Throughout history, illustration has been a visual language and communication tool in different countries and cultures of the world. The illustration technique has played an important role in the transmission of literary texts, heroic stories, and mythological transmissions.

This article discusses the contribution of artist Raija Uosikkinen as a designer and illustrator for Arabia, one of the most well-known ceramic factories in Finland, for nearly 40 years. In addition, the article touches upon the 24 limited edition plate designs produced annually for Finland's national epic, Kalevala, from 1976 to 1999. In addition, the article examines the artist's original illustration style and screen printing technique in creating designs based on poetic stories of both real and prehistoric gods, goddesses and heroes. The article highlights the quality of plate illustrations in this series, which combine folkloric elements with a contemporary interpretation of poetic text, as documenting cultural heritage through an epic. Based on this information, the article describes the designs from 1976 and 1999, featuring Uosikkinen illustrations on the front and a part of the Kalevala epic in Finnish, Swedish and English on the back.

Keywords: Raija Uosikkinen, Illustration, Heritage, Kalevala.

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KÜLTÜREL MİRAS KALEVALA; RAIJA UOSIKKINEN VE İLLÜSTRASYONLARI

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ÖZET

İllüstrasyon, tarih boyunca dünyanın farklı ülkelerinde ve kültürlerinde bir görsel anlatım dili ve iletişim aracı olmuştur. Tarihte edebi metinler, kahramanlık öyküleri ve mitolojiye dayalı aktarımlarda illüstrasyon tekniği önemli bir rol oynamıştır.

Bu makalede sanatçı Raija Uosikkinen'in tasarımcı ve illüstratör olarak Finlandiya'nın en tanınmış seramik fabrikalarından biri olan Arabia için yaklaşık 40 yıl boyunca yaptığı katkıdan bahsedilmiştir. Ayrıca Finlandiya'nın ulusal destanı Kalevala için 1976'dan 1999'a kadar her yıl sınırlı sayıda üretilen 24 adet tabak tasarımına değinilmiştir. Sanatçının gerçek tarihin yanı sıra tarih öncesi tanrılar, tanrıçalar ve kahramanlarla ilgili şiirsel hikayeleri özgün illüstrasyon anlatımıyla ve serigraf baskı tekniği kullanarak meydana getirdiği tasarımlar incelenmiştir. Bu seride bulunan ve folklorik öğelerin şiirsel metin ile birleştirilmiş çağdaş yorumları olan tabak illüstrasyonlarının, kültürel mirasın bir destan üzerinden belgelenmesine ışık tutan niteliği vurgulanmıştır. Bu bilgilerin ışığı altında 1976 ve 1999 tarihli ve ön yüzünde Uosikkinen illüstrasyonlarının, arka yüzeyinde Fince, İsveççe ve İngilizce olarak Kalevala destanının bir parçasının yer aldığı tasarımlar açıklanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Raija Uosikkinen, İllüstrasyon, Miras, Kalevala.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The word illustration, which is the name given to visual creations in a text, comes from the Latin root 'lustrare' and it means to make something understood. Its real purpose is to explain an idea more effectively and clearly (Demir, 2021: 126). "According to the fifth edition (1964) of The Concise Oxford English Dictionary, the verb illustrate is defined as 'Make clear, explain; make clear by examples; elucidate ... by drawings; ornament (book, newspaper, etc.) with designs' (Goldman and Cooke, 2012: 28)". Illustrations, such as a map or diagram, give information about a subject. They are used to increase the focus of a message, to help a product sell, to create a story, and to make comments and explanations about the material it represents (Gikony, 1991: 14). Illustrations are a communication tool and have been a visual language in different countries and cultures from the past to the present. From history until today, illustrations have been used in narratives based on mythology, heroic stories, and literature.

According to Wigan, illustrations help convey content visually, using creative and different ways to solve problems, entertain, comment, inform, inspire, explain, educate, persuade, surprise, fascinate, and tell stories. They are popular, have a strong expression and are art form that is in constant development. As a conventional media with its long rich history, is a tool for communication and comment, it is a vital, dynamic, and contemporary expression that can create stunning images and messages. It is a hybrid branch in complementary disciplines in graphic design (Wigan, 2012: 9). Besides illustrations literally mean explanatory pictures. While some of the thoughts or events are applied as they are, some of them are influenced by interpretations (Tepecik, 2002: 79). Accordingly, artists are separated from each other in terms of style and technique when they are turning

an idea, image, or text into an illustration. An illustration can be classified according to the area where it is used, or the technique used to create it. As a result, illustrations are seen in many other areas as well as in graphic design. Ceramic art is one of these areas and we encounter many ceramic artists, both ancient and modern, who have used illustration techniques.

The Arabia factory was set up near Helsinki, Finland, in 1873 by the Swedish company Rörstran. The ceramics and porcelain markets in Finland at that time were dominated by the Arabia Company, which as a result of extensions and technical improvements had one of the most modern factories to be found anywhere in Europe (Hellman, 2004: 19). It is one of the leading names through its knowledge, creative design, and brand management in design history. Some of their most famous designers are Kaj Franck, Liisa Hallamaa, Oiva Toikka, Francesca, Richard Lindh, and Raija Uosikkinen ([http 1](http://1)).

Finnish ceramics have never been produced in isolation. From around 1890, the interchanges of personalities and cultural influences have been as varied and influential as in any other country. This makes tracing their course by means of a few key pots and potters a challenging and salutary experience. The artist-makers are as fascinating as the works themselves. Understanding the human costs, the sacrifices of comfort, company, and country, has proved to be as rewarding a means of appreciating the ceramic works as understanding the technical and aesthetic achievements (Hellman, 2004: 9).

2. RAIJA UOSIKKINEN AND HER ILLUSTRATIONS

2.1. "Woman is Man in Finland"

Alfred William Finch, seen by many as the father of Finnish ceramics, supposedly said: "Woman is Man in Finland". In actual fact, most ceramic artists in Finland are women (Hellman, 2004: 7).

One of these artists Raija Uosikkinen (b. 1923 in Hollola, d. 2004 in Helsinki) studied at the Central School of Art and Design for porcelain painters from 1944 to 1947. She then worked as a decorator and designer for Arabia between 1947 and 1986. In the late 1940s, Franck started working on a new ceramic series called Kilta, launched to great success in 1953, and then illustrated with Uosikkinen's perhaps most well-known illustration 'Emilia' in 1957. The Emilia series consisted of characters in different milieus and the series would be produced up until 1966. Uosikkinen illustrated other series as well in the style of Emilia but under different names and with other motives. The decorative Emilia series had a great response in the factory and was very well received by the customers. Other recognized illustrations are Pomona (1964- 1971), stylized fruits on Ulla Procopé's jars, and the Ali pattern (1965- 1970) inspired by Islamic ornaments. She drew inspiration for her designs from her extensive travels with more than 50 trips to East Asia and the Americas, documenting other cultures' illustration styles with her camera (Huokuna, 2012: 37).

Uosikkinen is one of the important artists who had technical product knowledge and a talent for creative and characteristic design and decoration. For this reason, she improved the decorative production approach after she joined the Arabia art department. She also contributed to Arabia's product variety by designing functional and original tableware. According to Raija Uosikkinen, "a decorative designer had to create something new and to constantly look for new influences from which ideas can be born. These influences were usually found in nature, professional literature, museums, the folk art of different cultures, and the study of new conditions and environments. The influences matured gradually. When the first idea was taking shape, the second was often already emerging" (Lehikoinen, 2001: 24).

In this way, the artist created an individual narrative language to turn her feelings and ideas into different expressions on ceramic forms and surfaces. She then combined this plain, symbolic style with the plastic features of ceramic and decoration techniques. Her design and illustration identities merged and became prominent in Arabia. At a time when this company started to produce large-scale collections and souvenirs in the 1970s, she designed 24 plates that were produced in limited editions every year from 1976 to 1999 for the Finnish national epic Kalevala.

2.2. Kalevala: The Epic Poem of Finland

The Kalevala is an epic compiled by Elias Lönnrot in the 19th century, based on oral Finnish mythology, and it is one of the most important literary works in Finnish. At the same time, the text of the mythological and historical events that constitute the basis of the epic of Kalevala consists of Runo (Lönnrot, 1965: XX). *"It starts with the creation of the world. Ilmatar, the virgin spirit of the air, floats on the surface of the ocean. A bird lays an egg on her knee and the world is created from parts of the egg. The main character of The Kalevala is Väinämöinen, born as a fully grown man after Ilmatar's thirty-year-long pregnancy. Other male heroes of The Kalevala are Ilmarinen, Lemminkäinen, Joukahainen, and Kullervo. The most important female characters are Louhi, who forces Ilmarinen to forge the Sampo, Aino, Kyllikki, Marjatta, and Lemminkäinen's nameless mother (Bradunas, 1986: 64-65)"*.

The reason why this epic is so important is explained by Bradunas "For Finland, the publication of songs sung by the ordinary folk in the hinterlands of their country served as a major stimulus to the building and fostering of a distinct national identity. Until then, the Finnish language and identity were held in rather low esteem. Finland's educated, the urban elite, had accepted, for the most part, the language, culture,

and traditions of the governing Swedes. Through Lönnrot's Kalevala, the intelligentsia began to awaken to the richness of Finnish heritage (Leppälähti, 2015: 112)."

2.3. Transforming Natural Heritage into Art

Uosikkinen transferred real history with supernatural legendary events in the epic as well as poetic stories about prehistoric gods, goddesses, and heroes onto the plates using the silk-screen printing decoration technique with her original illustration style. She created marvelous rustic images on these decorative plates using brown, gold beige, black, white, and cobalt blue glazing. The back of each plate has part of the Kalevala epic in Finnish, Swedish, and English as well as the Arabia Finland logo, Raija Uosikkinen's signature, and the year and place of production.

On the front and back of the 24 plates, from the 1976 to 1998 period, we can see that the poems were taken from certain parts of the stories in the epic, and the perfectly designed sketches were turned into amazing illustrations through ceramic surfaces' instrumentality (Picture 1). It is interesting that the design expression did not change over the years. In the Karelia region, which is considered the first settlement and homeland known for the epic of the Finns, Finnish culture was recited from generation to generation with the 'Runo' sung by folk poets (Özbay, 1999: 171). Uosikkinen introduced her national culture to the different folks and nations using the Finnish national identity on plate surfaces which are important objects of everyday life.

The first plate in the series designed by Uosikkinen in 1976 is "Vainamoinen's Sowing" (Picture 2). On the front part of the plate,



Picture 1. Raija, 24 plate series covering the period from 1976 to 1998, Finland.



Picture 2. Raija, "Vainamoinen's Sowing", 20x20 cm, 1976, Finland.

which is also in the writer's own collection, is the main character of the Kalevala epic, called Vainamoinen. "Vainamoinen is both a wise character and a bard singing songs with his magical kantele throughout the epic (Abdurrezzak, 2014: 19)". He is seen planting corn seeds into the land as depicted in the poem. Also, there are birds perched on the birch tree and ethnic Finnish-style flowers in the illustration. In the epic, it is narrated that "Vainamoinen wants some land cleared of trees to plant seeds, but only the birch tree is not cut so that birds can come and rest on it and as a result the tree becomes holy (Abdurrezzak, 2014: 291-292)". There flows a river full of fish next to Vainamoinen. This is interpreted as "water is a womb that contains the whole potential and also the seeds of the universe because one of the factors that activate nature is water and it gives life wherever it is (Abdurrezzak, 2014: 340)". These verses below are on the back of the plate that is 20x20 cm in size;

Another part of the writer's collection, and the last plate of the series, is "the song of

Vainamoinen" dated 1999 (Picture 3). On the front of the plate is Vainamoinen, the main character of the Kalevala epic, singing with his magical kantele. There is a bear, a deer, a lynx, birds, a pigeon, an owl, a partridge, and fish swimming in the river while listening to Vainamoinen sitting on a rock. In the Kalevala epic, "for Finnish people, reindeer, bears, swans, and pike fish are sacred. At the same time, there is information about land and water animals, such as trout, salmon, reindeer, oxen, finches, black snakes, carp, bears, wolves, rabbits, swans, crows, seagulls, owls, cuckoos, codfish, bees, squirrels, and martens. There are especially a lot of animals which live in water. Such animals have geographical habitats, especially in Northern Europe (Abdurrezzak, 2014: 114)". Bird nests were in this sacred birch tree and on the tree there is an owl, which is the symbol of evil, and a cuckoo, the symbol of good. In the illustration, there are also ethnic Finnish flowers and tulip figures. Below are the verses that are on the back of the 20x20 cm plate;



Picture 3. Raija, "The song of Vainamoinen", 20x20 cm, 1999, Finland.

"NOW I SCOOP THE SEEDS TO SCATTER,
AS FROM THE CREATOR'S FINGER,
FROM THE HAND OF HIM ALMIGHTY,
THAT THE COUNTRY MAY BE FERTILE
AND THE CORN MAY GROW AND FLOURISH."

"ALL THE WILD BEASTS OF THE FOREST
UPRIGHT ON THEIR CLAWS WERE RESTING
TO THE KANTELE TO LISTEN,
AND THEY WONDERED AT THEIR PLEASURE,
ALL THE BIRDS IN AIR THEN FLYING,
PERCHED UPON THE NEIGHBORING BRANCHES,
ALL THE FISH THAT SWAM THE WATERS,
TO THE MARGIN HASTENED QUICKLY."
XLIV:293-300

CONCLUSION

When artists are using illustrations, their stories create pictures and new worlds, and they make an art form combining imagination with creativity and mastery. At the same time, an artist uses illustrations that she/he turns into symbols and are characterized by originality formed during the individual creative process. With the contributions of these illustrations which are creatively and aesthetically attractive, many epics finds place in our present life. These illustrations also enrich social and cultural areas, heroic stories or literary works, religious beliefs, myths, and legends. During his long career, Raija Uosikkinen had time to design so many decorations, that it is hard to give an exact number. Moreover, the amount is amazing when it comes to decorations that haven't progressed to the production stage. It can only be said with certainty that the trace of work is visible in almost all Finnish homes. At this point "the fact that almost every family in Finland uses Arabia products for several generations in succession provides a bond between generations and cultures in the history of families. It is an indication that it has an important place in its formation (Hakan Verdu Martinez, 2018: 89)". Historical-geographical Finnish folklore is based on the Finnish folk epic Kalevala. A lot of information about prehistoric Finnish sacred values and rituals and their view of the world is given through the main character of Kalevala, Vainamoinen. This is important because rituals have a unifying role for the Finnish nation. The illustrations of the Kalevala epic on ceramic surfaces are important in terms of graphic design and aesthetic values and they contain cultural heritage. As a result, the illustrations that Raija Uosikkinen prepared for the Finnish epic Kalevala are a contemporary interpretation of folkloric factors combined with poetic text. It is a marvelous document that narrates cultural

heritage through an epic from history. It also attracts the attention of collectors because of its above-mentioned unique features.

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Internet Resources

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Visual Resources

Picture 1. *Raija, 24 plate series covering the period from 1976 to 1998, Finland. <https://www.replacements.com/collectibles-arabia-of-finland-kalevala-annual-plate-ainos-fate-boxed/p/598911> (Date of access: 12.10.2021).*

Picture 2. *Raija, "Vainamoinen's Sowing", 20x20 cm, 1976, Finland. Salur's collection.*

Picture 3. *Raija, "The song of Vainamoinen", 20x20 cm, 1999, Finland. Salur's collection.*