

# ONOMA - THE COOPERATIVE OF ARTISANS, DESIGNERS AND ARTISTS IN FISKARS

*By Camilla Moberg*



## BACKGROUND

When the Fiskars Company moved its factory to nearby Billnäs, another part of Raseborg, industrial activity declined in the ironworks village. Jobs were lost and people moved out of the community. Old industrial facilities remained unused and houses stood empty. Designers, artists and artisans began to move into the community with a unique interaction of available workspace and housing.

In 1994 the first joint exhibition was held of work by artists, designers and artisans at Fiskars village, numbering some twenty at the time. It was given the simple title "the First exhibition". Its core idea was to combine design and the visual arts, and to consider them alongside each other. The exhibition was received in highly positive terms by the public and the press.

## A COOPERATIVE IS BORN

The number of designers, artists and artisans at Fiskars grew fast, as did the exhibition work. It became necessary to find a permanent form for the movement. In 1996, the cooperative of artisans, designers and artists in Fiskars was founded as an umbrella organisation for the purpose of organising exhibitions, events and training and to sell products made and designed by its members. In addition to participating in the joint organisation, the members engage independently in their own occupations. The cooperative had 30 founding members. To be accepted as a member of the Cooperative you have to live or work in the village and be a professional in craft, design or visual arts.

## THE AIM OF THE COOPERATIVE

The Cooperative creates circumstances that make it possible to live outside town: the first Executive Director defined one of the fundamentals of the Cooperative 1996. The aim has from the beginning been to promote the members business – in the field of craft, design and arts. The main activity is to organise exhibitions and to sell and market products made and designed by its members. The Cooperative offers a common marketing and retail channel.

## EXHIBITIONS

Beginning in 1994, summer exhibitions have been arranged annually at the copper smithy with the schedule later expanded to events throughout the year. The organisers of the summer exhibitions have maintained a high standard, which may be one of the main reasons why they have been noted as events of national importance. The content and the focus in the exhibition vary every year.

Invitations to exhibit in different parts of the world reflect growing interest in Fiskars Design village and the activities of the community. Exhibitions have been sent to Sweden, Japan and Mexico, among other countries. There has been interest not only in skilled creative designers, artists and artisans but also in the Fiskars phenomenon as a whole.

The aims of the exhibitions are a) to show the members diverse expertise b) present high level and professional know-how in the field of design, craft and arts c) create a wider network in Finland and abroad aiming to develop and to further raise the level of the exhibitions and other activities d) to present current subjects and new points of view.

## ONOMA SHOP

The cooperative had its own sales outlet at its first exhibition in 1994. As activities came under way the outlet evolved to become ONOMA SHOP. ON OMA means IS OWN. The shop is



*Exhibition, Copper Smithy, Fiskars*





*Onoma shop*

the designers & artists own shop. Onoma is today used as a name for the whole Cooperative.

Today Onoma maintains a shop in the Clock-tower building in the heart of the village. For sale there is a wide collection of its members' serial objects and pieces of art. Developing the shop demands continuous and intensive attention. The shop charges 35 % of the selling price. The aim is to display a diverse collection.

### ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

Since 2006 there has been an Artist in Residence in Fiskars. The aim of the residence is to promote the exchange of information within the field of Design, craft and art, on an international level. It offers both the guesting artist as well as the members an opportunity to network, to participate in creative cooperation projects and in advanced research work. Fiskars Village Artists in Residence is open to professionals from all creative businesses, nationalities and ages. This includes working craftspeople, designers, visual artists, architects, industrial designers,

performing artists, composers, musicians, curators, producers, journalists, writers and researchers. Over 100 artists from all continents apply annually to use the guest studios in Fiskars.

### TOGETHERNESS & COLLECTIVITY

In the beginning the whole activity was based on co-operation and all members participated actively in the work: the exhibitions were organised with talkoo work\*, the shop was kept open during the weekends by members. The meetings and occasions were attended by all the members. This phenomenon would not have been possible without commitment, team spirit and a lot of talkoo work. And the same attitude is demanded even today, even though the organisation has developed significantly.

The member benefits most of the Cooperative by being active in common issues. The members have several opportunities to affect the Onoma affairs by bringing suggestions, brainstorming

improvements, presenting wishes, giving feedback and so on. At this moment the member has no actual obligations, but active members are conditions of existence for the Cooperative.

### SITUATION TODAY AND FUTURE

The cooperative had some 30 founding members. The number has now grown to 116, representing over 20 different professions as artisans, interior architects, industrial designers, visual artists, cabinetmakers, ceramists, goldsmiths, glassblowers, graphic designers, textile artists.

The growth of the Cooperative demands changes in the organisation as well. The active members have not increased in proportion and people get tired of talkoo work and of the fact that always the same members are active.

Over the years the exhibition period was lengthened, the exhibitions arranged in summer was increased to two and off season exhibitions were arranged. This demanded a lot of effort as well as money. Onoma was depending on the Fiskars company sponsorship even though the exhibitions were also funded by the Finnish state as well as private funds.

2013 the critical economic situation forced “the board” to put a lot of thought on the future of the Onoma Cooperative and on the organisation. The board decided to separate the shop, exhibition and Artist Residency to independent activities. As a result Onoma hired a person to be in charge of the exhibitions, and another person to develop the shop.

International activities and a desire to exhibit outside Fiskars village is today considered important. The challenge concerning that the shop has been unprofitability – the first task for the new shop keeper was to examine what kind of activities create a more sustainable future for the Onoma shop.

In the near future a remarkable challenge will be to emphasize on the LOCALLY MADE message to the visitors of the village and other clients. The collectivity of the members, strengthening the talkoo spirit and collaboration with both Fiskars Company and the Raseborg municipality, are considered as important tasks in the variable ironworks and developing Finland.

*\* Talkoo work means people getting together to get a task done, without getting paid.*



*Exhibition, Granary*