Re-imagining the Past
A dream of a new home for School of Business

Video, Look 1 and 2

Dekorativ Vorbilder
– Augmented Reality Animation

Rauma–Hannu–Measuring drawing: facade to the courtyard, 2013

Lecturer’s trousers and other merry tunes

Student Work Collections

Sextant

A Steam Powered Airship

Rut Bryk’s Student Works

Quality Education Already in the year 1900

On Returning

Engineer’s Tools

Decade Resistance Box

Professor Gustaf Komppa (1867–1949)

Ilmari Tapiovaara (1914–99)
Aalto University Archives provide a treasure box into the history of Aalto University and its founding universities. During the past two years moving both Arabia and Töölö campuses to Otaniemi have caused a huge moving project of archives and art collections for the Archives and many valuable additions have been made to the collections. At the same time Aalto University Archives have digitized nearly 300,000 works within the last ten years. The aim is to give better access to this national treasure and hopefully these past collections will be both useful and most of all, inspirational for the whole society.

This exhibition highlights carefully selected items from the Aalto University Archives. We invited professors, professors emeriti and current Aalto students & staff to choose their own favorites from the collection. There are stories from a small cardamom paper box symbolizing the fundraising for Töölö building, a touching example how a piece of artwork has brought comfort in time of illness, to a fictive story on artefacts from the physics laboratory museum collection. The aim of the exhibition is to open the collections and the possibilities on how to work with them.

The Aalto University Archives is an archive open to all researchers. The key task of the Archives Services is the preservation of Aalto University’s documented heritage and the promotion of research based on it. The Aalto University Archives include the collections from Aalto University, the Helsinki School of Economics (HSE), the University of Art and Design Helsinki (TaiK) and the Helsinki University of Technology (TKK) and their predecessors, as well as numerous private archives closely linked to Aalto University and its remits.

Learn more about the Aalto University Archives’ collections on the VRC + Archives pages.
Now, while I am writing this text, I have a few weeks left until my own graduation day. Looking at the outfits that the students created back in 1990 for the ‘Councours International des jeunes créateurs de mode’—competition in France makes me reflect upon the past and the future. The fashion show, just as seen in the video, is still today a relevant way of showing the creations. Maybe today’s models just walk a little different and with a more severe attitude. If this was taken in 2019, you could see the crowd snapping photos with their phones. Here the audience is just present and observing. The looks by the Finnish students are in today’s perspective still quite contemporary. And what reveals their true age might be the accessories and styling. The competition is held in Paris—the capital of art and fashion—which is still today as exciting for a fashion student as it was then, almost 30 years ago. It is the go-to place: a multifaceted city full of fashion opportunities. And today, when Finland is a member of the European Union, Paris is even closer. And this is how I would like to keep it.

Look 1 and 2
I chose to showcase these two dresses from 1990 because I think both share some similarities with today’s Aalto fashion aesthetics. The assignment for the students were to design a casual look for an artist attending an opening for a sports competition in spring 1991. The fashion design student Sirpa Ryynänen’s ‘L’eau et la Roche’—dress is made from a patchwork material combining different silk qualities. The textiles are all hand-dyed in different shades of beige and gray. The materials are then decorated with stitches or pleats in various ways. What I find particularly interesting is how the ensemble is combining elegance with a sophisticated amount of wittiness. Having a bit of humor in the design work is also something that I see in my fellow students at Aalto in 2019, and I think that is what makes us exceptionally desirable.
In the early 1900’s, professors at the University of Art and Design Helsinki would occasionally travel out of the country to acquire unique and exotic textbooks for their classes. The Dekorativ Vorbilder is one such book. Printed in 1894, the illustration and ornamental design book was published in Berlin, at one of the oldest family-run publishers of books concerning architecture, art, and design in Germany. The book includes dozens of pages of hand-drawn illustrations, vastly ranging in content and style.

Due to conservation practices, this book is stored in the basement of the Aalto Archives and is not easily accessible to students. Driven by the desire to illuminate the intricate illustrations, I have created an Augmented Reality animation that facilitates the rediscovery of the pages of the Dekorativ Vorbilder.

A single page from the Dekorativ Vorbilder can be seen on display. Adjacent to the page is an iPad, which visitors are prompted to pick up so they can study the page through the front camera lens on the device. The page acts as trigger for an augmented reality animation. The video showcases multiple pages from the Dekorativ Vorbilder, cinematically animated to reflect the mediums and intricate content found in the original artifact. The pages of the once hidden book are dynamically reinterpreted to engage a new generation of students and visitors.

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Professors of Helsinki University of Technology had different ways of unwinding after a hard day’s work at the university. Henrik Probus Ossian Solitander, aka H.P.O. Solitander, who was a professor of hydraulic engineering in 1938–1958 and had a notable career in the modernisation of Finland’s ports and canal networks, was a prolific composer.

Music had always played an important role in Solitander’s life. For example, in his calendar in 1945 there are markings of departmental committee and lyrics and handwritten notes to short tunes next to each other.

Solitander composed and wrote lyrics to couplets (comic songs), light plays, songs and short pieces of music for piano under pseudonym Nikodemus or Nuotti-Nikodemus. He composed humorous pieces of music including lyhyt luritus lehmistä–keskitetty kurssi ka- jataloudesta (short song about cows–intense course on livestock industry), kutiava köksä (ticklish cook) and lehtorin housut (lecturer’s trousers).

His compositions were also performed live. Musical play Hei Heiparallaa Helsinki! (Hey Hello Helsinki!) which Solitander had composed to Agapetus’s lyrics, was performed by revue theatre Punainen Mylly all over Finland.

When I started as an archivist for the University of Art and Design in 2008 I was just amazed by the vast amount of student works in the collection, some of the oldest dating back to late 19th century. Boxes after boxes full of beautiful exquisite drawings, carefully crafted dresses and textiles, ceramics, photographs of student exhibitions and excursions, reports and an extensive thesis collection.

Besides the records of university administration, professors, teachers and several associations and societies linked closely to our predecessors, the student works and thesis collection depict a rich image of the history of the education of art and design, business and technology in Finland. These collections are an essential part of the archives’ collections, not just additions to it. You cannot really form a good and concise picture of Aalto University and its predecessors just by going through the records, you also have to see what our remarkable students have done.

Going through our collections you will find names of many famous Aalto University alumni but also hidden gems from already forgotten professionals. Besides the official student records many family researchers also find drawings and other works made by their past relatives.

“Lumikkoja” is a student work by Juuli Suits, an Estonian national, who studied ceramics & textile design in Central School for Arts and Craft in 1907–1910.
Professor Gustaf Komppa was the first Professor of chemistry at the new University, Institute of Technology, established in 1908. Professor Komppa held this position until his retirement in 1937 but he continued some of his activities until his death in 1949.

Professor Gustaf Komppa was a highly recognised scientist and became famous for his research on synthetic organic chemistry e.g. the total synthesis of camphor in the early 1900's and later among others on the complete synthesis of α-pinene.

Professor Komppa was also a chemical engineer and wanted to see practical applications of his research. He was interested in the utilization of domestic natural resources such as wood and peat. He was granted a patent for converting peat into liquid fuel and in the 1930's he started to develop his method towards industrial scale.

The Finnish textbook of Chemical Technology from the 1940's describes Komppa's process under the title Artificial petrol and other liquid fuels obtained simultaneously (in Finnish Keinotekoinen ben- tiini ja muut samalla saatavat nestemäiset polttoaineet). Unfortunately, during the World War II the university laboratories with research equipment were completely destroyed and the development work has to be interrupted.

Furniture designer and interior architect Ilmari Tapiovaara was one of the most illustrious professionals coming from the Central School of Arts and Crafts during the 1930s. Here we can see his poster for the annual masquerade of the school, held on the 16th March 1935, when Tapiovaara was in his second year of studies. The tradition of art-school masquerades are long and probably the ones held by Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris are among the most legendary ones.

Tapiovaara had a great start for his career in the late 1930s but the Finnish Winter War 1939-40 and then the WWII 1941-44 signified a break and it was only from the late 1940s onwards that Tapiovaara could again embark his profession fully. He became one of the key actors in the rapid rise of Finnish design in the 1950s into not only national, but also international success. His active career spanned five decades. Several of his most important designs are again in production, such as chairs Domus and Mademoiselle.
Engineer’s Tools

Historically, each profession has always had its own iconic set of tools. For engineers, many implements had remained unchanged from their initial designs’ decades, or even, centuries ago, until the digital revolution led to profound changes in the tools and technology used.

The slide rule is perhaps the best example of these traditional implements which were representative of the profession; engineers were known for having a 30 cm slide rule on their desk, and a smaller one inside their breast pocket for daily “field calculations”.

The slide rule was invented in 1622 and widely used for over three hundred years due to its ingeniously simple operational principle. Logarithms are utilized in multiplication and division, while square roots, sine values etc. are found from comparison scales. The modern calculator emerged in the early 1980s, revolutionizing calculus and replacing the slide rule, once an iconic emblem of engineering. The knowledge of how to use the slide rule was soon forgotten.

Another important instrument was the drawing board. Architects had a horizontal “white board” but engineers had an almost vertical board, fitted with a drafting machine. Computer Aided Design (CAD) replaced this quickly in the early 1990s. CAD brought unparalleled speed and ease to the actual drawing work which had previously been arduously but beautifully done with rulers, compasses and draftsman’s sets. CAD provided the designer with completely new opportunities, as we all know.

While original, mechanical instruments were being replaced by digital ones, engineers also embraced an entirely new tool, the smart phone. This opened up more space for creativity and efficiency. All these developments allowed more time for the engineer’s creative activities.

Decade Resistance Box

Decade boxes are test instruments which use a series of resistors, capacitors, or inductors to simulate very specific political ideas. They can be quickly and easily substituted into a community and replace any standard idea component. Their ability to be configured to nearly any resistance, capacitance, or inductance makes decade boxes a convenient way to find the optimum idea for community operation. Highly useful for laboratory, education, or design work; decade boxes are also ideal for verifying the accuracy of test equipment prior to use as well as troubleshooting in the field or on the factory floor.

Decade Boxes (DB) are passive devices that consist of switches and, depending upon the type of box, a series of resistors, capacitors, or inductors to simulate very specific political ideas. They can be quickly and easily substituted into a community and replace any standard idea component. Their ability to be configured to nearly any resistance, capacitance, or inductance makes decade boxes a convenient way to find the optimum idea for community operation. Highly useful for laboratory, education, or design work; decade boxes are also ideal for verifying the accuracy of test equipment prior to use as well as troubleshooting in the field or on the factory floor.

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1. Slide Rule is the European term, it is known as a Slide Stick in the US.
2. Ikiteekkari, elected living legend tech. student.
I was compiling the 80th anniversary story of the Department of Textile Art and went through student works and annual reports from various decades. In an annual report from the 1930s, there was an incredibly touching linocut print that may have been designed for an EX LIBRIS. A young girl sitting in a chair, lost in her thoughts, as if waiting for something to happen amidst the silence. I recognized it as a student work by Rut Bryk from the style and the initials on the right RB. At the time, I had been unwell and stayed at home hoping that all would be better. The days at home felt long, time would not pass, and it was quiet indoors. Rut Bryk’s girl became a comforting, understanding friend. I had copied the work from the annual report, and the copy still remains inside my calendar for that year.

Systematic technical education in Finland started on the 15th of January 1849, when Helsinki Technical School started its operations. This school was then changed into Polytechnic School in 1872 and further to Polytechnic Institute in 1879, and finally to University of Technology in 1908. Many teachers in basic engineering fields during the early years came from abroad with the Central European (usually German) tradition of engineering education. Gradually, when the knowledge in the country developed, the teachers were recruited among national experts.

In the late 19th and early 20th century many teachers made wide study tours in Central Europe to get knowledge of the latest trends in their field. This was especially important for the development of the laboratories and for the design of new buildings for the School. The Polytechnic School got its first own building in 1877 to Hietalahti square.

Through good teachers and capable students, the work at the Polytechnic Institute at that time was up to date with international development. This was acknowledged in the year 1900 in the Paris World Exhibition, where the Polytechnic Institute got first price in the field of “Teaching and education”, subarea “Industrial and economic education”.

The Central School of Arts and Crafts, the predecessor of the University of Art and Design, participated in the Paris World Exhibition in 1900, too, and won a silver medal in its field. Thus, two of the three universities behind Aalto were known for their good quality of education already more than 100 years ago.
When browsing the archives for the exhibition, I kept coming back to the old instruments. Partly because they are interesting items in themselves, but mostly due to their various kinds of inherent distance from where we are now. Some of them are double the age of our Otaniemi campus: my grandparents’ grandparents could have used this very sextant in their studies. All the Aalto faculties have also travelled quite some geographical distance during that time, not to mention the unrelenting march of progress that’s led to distinctly different tools being used in teaching presently.

On the other hand, a few of the “ancient” tools in the archive’s collection are indistinguishable from ones in use today, and some of the lessons learnt and experiments conducted in our lectures are decades or centuries older still. Which bits of today’s leading edge will be relevant in a hundred years’ time, I wonder?

Museum collection of the Department of Surveying, University of Technology

Rasmus Ruohola
Student, Bioinformation Technology

Tapio Yli-Viikari
Professor Emeritus, Ceramic Art

Kyllikki Salmenhaara (1915–1981) made large clay “wrappings” in 1976. She had experimented with handmade paper and mixing fibres in clay when working in the New York State Ceramic College at Alfred University. Using fibres in clay added to the strength of raw clay and made it possible to work lighter and larger.

Salmenhaara called her wrappings “letters (to those who know ceramics)”. To read the letters is to see how her hands treated the clay: markings of the cloth supporting the thin slab surface uncleansed, and just finishing edges. You may notice the elegance in directness of the shape and eloquence in execution of the material.

Kyllikki Salmenhaara is an alumna of our University, graduated in 1943. She spent a period in Denmark with Nathalie Krebs’s Saxbo ceramic studio before joining the Arabia factory as an artist. During her years at Arabia Kyllikki Salmenhaara participated in numerous international exhibitions and was awarded prizes (particularly at the Milan Triennale). She received the Pro Finlandia medal in 1961. Important to her career was the Fulbright Scholarship 1956 that led her first time to the Alfred University. She also made tableware design for the Iron Mountain Pottery in Tennessee, USA.

Kyllikki Salmenhaara is remembered as a reformer of the ceramics education in Finland. Her leading idea was in combining research of clays and glazes in design using local materials and focusing in small-scale studio production.
I see creativity as a process where familiar parts are combined to build a new, more ingenious entity. For me, this image visualizes creativity in a similarly, sympathetic, perhaps even amusing way, now that we know how the airplane has been developed to date.

However, the graphic black smoke puffing out of the steam engine also makes me think about the massive burden air traffic has on the environment. That is why this innocent sketch reminds me, not only of the pure joy of discovery and creation, but also of the great responsibility of the materialization of any design.

Using material resources is inevitable in the field of architecture. Fortunately, being environmentally responsible is not necessarily mutually exclusive with high-flying ideas, unlike this imaginative aircraft from the Industrial Age. In any case it takes a whole lot of courage to present something new because the impact of an idea can be quite unpredictable; it might even take flight.

Elina Järvelä
Student, Architecture

Curator
Ksenia Kaverina

The Aalto Archives can also be used for different workshop. One such example is a workshop On Returning: Workshop for Post-Digital Archives 10–14.12.2018, where a group of researchers approached the digital archives and other collections at Aalto University to produce a collective visual footprint. The outcomes later appeared in the form of a publication and were made available in the Visual Resources Centre (VRC). The workshop was curated by Ksenia Kaverina and produced with support of Arts & Creative Practices Initiative (Sharing and Co-Creating Transdisciplinary Artworks) in Aalto University. All the image materials in the publication and on the blog belong to Aalto University Archives and hold Creative Commons license or Copyright.
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- Stories from the
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