

Feelings transformed into jewels: Toikka does it again

Professor **Oiva Toikka's** glass birds are true masterpieces of the glassblower's art. Only the most expert craftsmen are capable of turning Toikka's visions into reality. But what is the seemingly unending source of inspiration that Toikka calls on to create these ever-more amazing glass jewels 35 years after the first one saw the light of day?



Cucunor

Russet Grebe

Ursula & Valdemar

Blue Stint

When asked what he was thinking about when he designed the latest additions to the Iittala Birds by Toikka collection, the conversation quickly loses direction because, as he puts it, "oh, that was so long ago now that I can't really remember", before continuing:

"Well, I certainly wasn't thinking of any particular techniques or anything. Everything starts from a feeling, a particular atmosphere that I try and capture in glass."

He continues by explaining how relaxing it is to work at the Nuutajärvi glassworks, as he knows the glassblowers so well. He feels very much at home at Nuutajärvi, as he moved there over 40 years ago in 1963, when he was appointed the glassworks' full-time designer and started working alongside **Kaj Franck**. He shared a studio with Franck for years, and despite their different personalities the two got on very well together.

Cucunor – rhymes in colour

Toikka has named his 2008 bird, Cucunor. His choice of name could give us a pointer to understanding Toikka's work on a wider level, as it appears in the title of an extended fantasy poem penned by the well-known post-war Finnish poet **Lauri Viita**, in 1949, known as *'Kukunor ja Kalahari'* (*Kukunor and Kalahari*). The poem tells the story of two child sprites that spend the winter in a professor's empty summer cottage, where they discover the wonders of the professor's library. Viita's poem belongs very much in the fantasy tradition and is full of invented words, plays on words, and free association. It is also full of wonderful rhymes and so playful at times that it has been described as nonsense poetry. At the same time, it is full of different layers of meanings and describes the power of the imagination and love in our journey through life.

Oiva Toikka's birds can be seen as a similar celebration of artistic expression, this time in glass. The colours in Toikka's Cucunor have a pastel feel to them, and the glass almost feels like a watercolour. All of Toikka's birds are very independent creations and inhabit their own worlds, and just like Viita's sprites, Toikka's Cucunor embodies the poet's words very aptly: "Seldom does anyone have the chance to live a story like this."

Pigeon, Willow Curlew, and Russet Grebe – truth and fantasy

Toikka's birds share a surprising lot in common with birds from the real world. His *Pulu (Pigeon)* is instantly recognisable as a cousin of a real-life pigeon. Like the latter, the feathers on Toikka's *Pigeon* reflect the colours of the rainbow back at you when the light hits them, awakening memories of the doves of the storytelling age. The blunt forms of his glass pigeon also make it a very down-to-earth creation. Realism and imagination join hands here.

Toikka's new *Luikuri (Willow Curlew)* and *Kriikku (Russet Grebe)* also resemble the real-life birds of similar names, but are still something different. Which features has he taken from nature and which are pure fantasy? Or does it matter?

The *Willow Curlew* in his hundreds of colours seems very taken with his own importance, and makes a perfect choice for this year's limited edition. Only 2,000 will be produced by Nuutajärvi's craftsmen.

Ursula and Valdemar

The fun birds of the year are without doubt *Ursula* and *Valdemar*. *Ursula*, a distinguished lady in green, and *Valdemar*, resplendent in white, make a great couple, and are sold only as a couple. They are sure to bring a smile to the faces of anyone who buys them and for years afterwards.

Toikka's birds have a reputation for awakening a wide range of different associations and feelings in different people, which is probably one of the reasons people are very attached to their birds for years and often add to their collection. Their attraction comes from a combination of factors – their colours, their size, their wings, the length of their beaks, the fan of their tails, and that something that you cannot put your finger on and which makes every bird special for everyone in their own way. They are like jewels, hatched in the glassblower's furnace.

Product information, new birds:

Cucunor, Annual Bird 2008	185 x 105 mm
Cucunor, Annual Egg 2008	95 x 120 mm
Pigeon	310 x 165 mm
Willow Curlew	435 x 205 mm, numbered 1-2000
Russet Grebe	300 x 155 mm
Ursula & Valdemar	115/130 x 85 mm
Blue Stint	120 x 80 mm, available only 15th Jan – 31st Dec, 2008

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