

Eeli Aalto

# Behind his Pictures



The 85-year-old visual artist tells vividly, along with many pictures, about his life and work.



When Giorgio Morandi was asked why he does not do abstract art, he answered that nothing is as abstract as reality.

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I thank Taina and Markus Aalto for your contribution  
to making this book.

# *To Airí*



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In our time, with everything disappearing from sight faster and faster, we are talking about sustainable development. We would like some of the best sides of our lives to survive us, but are there any? The most vigorous development takes place in rearmament, war, with a belief that it will bring peace to the world. What if it did? Would we know how to live in a time of lasting peace? I am telling about myself, about the way I see life. Does it have any purpose other than gathering earthly wealth? I think it does.



We spent our summers at Kesvalahti in Ladoga Karelia. My father, formerly a tailor, was working as a taxi driver in Vyborg. He brought us to spend some time with mother's relatives on holidays. I am posing here in front of my father's car at the age of three.

On some occasions, he left us at Sortavala, where we went aboard S/S Venus to get to Kesvalahti. I would have liked to fish with a rod. A branch or something was put in my hand, and after a while, they asked me with a sly grin if I had had any fish. I said I would have if I had the right gadgets. I really liked to tell stories to my country cousins. I guess I lied a little when I praised how great the life in the town was. I told them about the port, the boats and the neon lights that were shining on the roofs of high buildings when it was dark. I felt I was a city boy from Vyborg. I did not like it in the country, the town seemed more interesting to me.



Eeli in Kesvalahti 1934.



Steamboat Venus.



Hilda and Pekka Aalto 1923

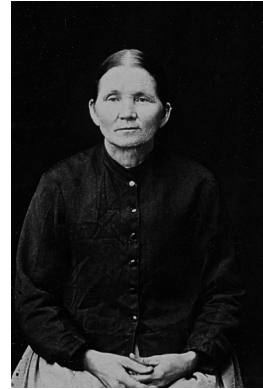


From left: Pekka, Gunnar, Sulo and Hilda with Eeli

My father Pekka Aalto was born at Kurkijoki in 1894. He had passed off the events of 1918 by defecting to Russia for four years. He would have been forced to join the red ones, but he did not want to wage a war on either side. Before the civil war broke out, he had reserved a one-way ticket to America, but he did not manage to set out before the unrest began. Dad went all the way to Siberia, making a living by means of peddling. He had already trained himself as a tailor in Finland when he was a young man. Pekka had a good sense of humour and knew how to get along. He was never without money, no matter what the times were like. Everyone liked him. As a young man, he had played the accordion with two rows. I remember him having hummed J. Alfred Tanner's songs with a twinkle in his eye.

My mother was born at Lumivaara in 1901. She was the youngest in a flock of 12 girls in the family of Anna and Matti Kaartinen. They also had three sons.

My mother's mother Anna Vilhelmiina Kaartinen (née Ristolainen, born at Valkeala in 1866 and died at Kesvalahti in 1918) was a member of a religious sect known by the name of Uukuniemi Pietists and belonged to the close circle of Helena Konttinen, a renowned preacher. It is actually mentioned in the historical records of the parish of Lumivaara that my grandmother exuded deep tranquillity and balance. My mother had inherited similar qualities. But the war and the escape from Karelia had been difficult things to endure even for her. She grew to adulthood in this house called Särkkä. She only attended a circulating school. They were a couple of opposites, my father and mother, but I never heard them quarrel between themselves. I still remember the walk through the thick woods from the docks to the Kaartinen house. I've never seen such woods anywhere after that. Behind the house there was an apple garden.



Anna Vilhelmiina Kaartinen.



Kaartinens' house called 'Särkkä' in Lumivaara.



Gunnar, Eeli and Sulo in about 1934.



Eeli (left) in Vyborg 1935.

My brother Gunnar, on the left, played the violin under the direction of Boris Sirpo. Heimo Haitto, a wonder child of the violin, was active in Vyborg. He became an idol especially for my parents who idealised culture. My mother dreamt of me becoming a violin artist as well. I hated the idea. My idol was Puputti, the goalkeeper of a Vyborg team called the Wolves. I wanted to be like him when I grew up.

I tended to be trampled underfoot by the big boys in the heat of life, but I got along well with the girls in our yard. They needed me in their games that could end up being quite tricky for me.

At Easter they organised a major spectacle, a real drama. I was put inside a chick made out of a cardboard box. I was supposed to cackle, but I could not be heard at all. I also had to play the part of a baby in a pram. It included breastfeeding which I did not like at all.

We were brought up in an enlightened manner, though, considering our parents' basic starting points. My father was tough without ever needing to use physical discipline. Our way of dressing received attention to harmful lengths.

Siberia had taught dad to cope in all conditions. We never had a shortage of anything even at war-time. My eldest brother Sulo went to vocational school. He was interested in soccer, later in boxing. Gunnar was quick-witted at school and played the violin. Mom hoped that I would become at least a priest. My interests were, however, in drawing. I was good at it even before school.

My father was sporty. His clothes and cars always represented the best brands: Buick, Chrysler, Studebaker or the 1938 model of Pontiac which we were using to flee from Vyborg when the Winter War broke out.



Sulo, Gunnar, Eeli, Hilda and Pekka in Korkeasaari zoo 1937.



Father's cars were highest quality.



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The book "Behind his Pictures" describes vividly, along with many pictures, what all the 85-year-old visual artist has done. He has done everything in the field of visual art; first he studied, then he taught, wrote, painted, sculpted, made TV films, books, founded a Nordic cultural magazine, wrote in a newspaper, and blogged in the web. Rich and high-quality artwork makes the book easy to read. It includes the growth of a Vyborish boy with his pictures from a 3-year-old child to a 85-year-old, vibrant old man. Aalto has touched and influenced an astonishing number of lives, and he has accomplished much. He is a true Renaissance man.



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