

Press Release 21.8.2023

## Architect Elissa Aalto exhibition opens Lahti Architecture Week

An exhibition about the life's work of architect Elissa Aalto will open at Galleria Nuovo, Lahti, at 18:00 on 22.8.2023.

The *Architect Elissa Aalto* exhibition launches the city's *Architecture Week*, which puts the spotlight on architectural sites in Lahti's city centre and the top-rank designers behind them. The Week celebrates 150 years since the birth of **Eliei Saarinen**, 125 since Alvar Aalto's birth, and **Elissa Aalto's** centenary (in 2022).

The exhibition shows the life's work of this talented, tenacious designer, who is still relatively unknown to the general public. It sheds light on her public and private role in the everyday life of Alvar Aalto's architect's office and alongside her famous architect husband. The exhibition is open 23.8–1.10.2023.

Lahti City Architect **Johanna Palomäki** is happy that the exhibition is at Galleria Nuovo, right next to the church. *"The exhibition also interestingly reveals the background to the design of the Church of the Cross. The Church can rightly be considered to be Elissa Aalto's work, since she brought it to completion after Alvar Aalto's death,"* Palomäki says. The exhibition is part of Lahti's architectural policy programme. *"The architectural policy promotes high-quality newbuilds, fosters the built heritage, and increases awareness of its value,"* she says.

Elissa Aalto (née Elsa Kaisa Mäkinieni in Kemi in 1922) graduated as an architect in 1949. In that same year, she got to work in Alvar Aalto's architect's office, which had several large-scale public construction projects and architectural competitions underway both in Finland and abroad. As her responsibilities expanded, Elissa Aalto was put in charge of a number of major construction projects. Alvar Aalto took a liking to his bright, vivacious colleague, and their courtship led to marriage in 1952.

Over the years, Elissa Aalto developed into a skilled interpreter and mediator of Alvar Aalto's ideas, a role that was accentuated when maintaining contacts during construction projects. She worked alongside Aalto and then carried on his work for 45 years in all. She ran the office from 1976 to 1994, following his death, resolutely bringing several unfinished construction projects to completion. She took charge of finishing Lahti's Church of the Cross (1969–79), which had long been on the drawing board, and the Church of Santa Maria Assunta (1966–80) in Riola, Italy. From the 1920s to 70s, Alvar Aalto's architect's office designed a total of seven built churches, four in Finland, two in Germany, and one in Italy.

It was with Elissa Aalto's backing that the architectural firm's drawing, photograph and document collections were transferred to the ownership of the Alvar Aalto Foundation, thus keeping it all in one place – making it one of the world's rare drawing collections to be preserved intact. *"The numerous projects brought to completion and the series of carefully renovated valuable buildings are permanent monuments to Elissa Aalto's life's work. She played a major role in the discussion about his architectural heritage and the preservation of his buildings, and was a co-founder of the Alvar Aalto Foundation in 1968,"* says Alvar Aalto Foundation CEO **Tommi Lindh**.

During Lahti Architecture Week, the public can enjoy lectures and guided tours of various sites. To accompany the exhibition, architect **Sofia Singler**, PhD, will give a lecture at the Church of the Cross in Lahti at 18–19.30 on Wednesday 6.9.2023. Her theme is *Puista, papeista ja pyhydestä: Näkökulmia Alvar ja Elissa Aallon kirkkoarkkitehtuuriin (Trees, priests and holiness: Perspectives on Alvar and Elissa Aalto's church architecture)*. More about the Architecture Week [here](#).

Besides the exhibition, the Alvar Aalto Foundation has produced an [Elissa Aalto product range](#) and the first [book about Elissa Aalto](#). The exhibition has previously been shown in four Alvar Aalto cities: Rovaniemi, Alajärvi, Tammisaari and Oulu.

*This year marks the 125th anniversary of the birth of Alvar Aalto (1898–1976). The pioneers of modern design, architects Alvar, Aino and Elissa Aalto, had exceptionally rich and varied careers in Finland and abroad. In this anniversary year, the Alvar Aalto Foundation – along with its partners in collaboration – is putting the spotlight on the story of Alvar Aalto’s architect’s office (1923–1994) and on the ideas behind its work, ideas that are still relevant today. The exhibition, produced by the Alvar Aalto Foundation, is part of the Alvar Aalto 125 anniversary year programme.*

### **Touring exhibition: Architect Elissa Aalto**

23.8–1.10.2023 Galleria Nuovo

Open Wed–Fri 14–17 and Sat 12–15 and Sun 14–17

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