

Iris Helkama
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Dogs, bottles and life itself
Markku Salo's glass art is rich in humour

Running Dog, glass art by Markku Salo at the Galleria Johan S. in Helsinki in December 1996.

Humour is a difficult genre, particularly in design or arts and crafts. Markku Salo is one of the few to practice it successfully.

December 1996 the Finnish public was shown new works by Markku Salo. These large, cast and cut pieces were arranged with apparent whimsy into a spatial configuration on the floor and wall and around the corner of the space.

- For me nothing exists beyond the space. Space alone shapes the works, says Salo.

The assistance of a professional glass cutter and polisher inspired Salo to use cutting as an effect. Markku Salo, one of the artists at the Nuutajärvi glassworks, is known for his large glass sculptures employing steel structures and intended for public spaces, and also for his amusing bottles blown into steel netting. His last public commission was a gigantic glass and steel construction hanging from the ceiling of the Malmi House in northern Helsinki and inspired by the wind-sock of the nearby airport.

The dog theme was continued then the Running Dog series was created, ultimately lending its name to the exhibition. The bottles, laid horizontally, have been given fur, legs and tails made of steel netting. By changing the positions of these features, Salo created a series illustrating the human features and ridiculous traits of dogs – and man – while literally expressing the decorative theme of the running dog. Clear, coloured and filigreed glass as well as sand-blasting techniques were employed in different ways to characterize the bottle-dog creatures. Of these, some practical use could be found for a seated animal figure which Salo calls Liquor Dog. This piece is also the response and humorous comment by a glass artist of the 1990s to the traditional masterpiece of past glassblowers, the dog-shaped spirits dog bottle.

The three cast canine mummies refer to Salo's experiences on his recent trip to Egypt, where he was greatly impressed by the mummified animals in the Cairo Museum, with their archaic forms and the geometrical patterns of their shrouds. Like many other works, the titles of Dog Buried I-III or Vita Brevis Canis Longa play words.