

**FACE TO FACE**  
**The Helinä Rautavaara Museum**  
**Collection Exhibition**





# Face to Face - The Helinä Rautavaara Museum Collection Exhibition

**"I always needed to be part of the group, to belong. To me that was absolutely necessary. That sets me apart from other researchers. I don't study, I live their lives."**

**Helinä Rautavaara (1928–1998)**, travelled first in Europe, then further afield into more distant cultures. Her desire was to see, experience and to understand. Curiosity and the wish to let her passionate interest take the lead link her to other earlier female explorers. They too travelled light and alone to see the world. Rautavaara taped, photographed and wrote. From her travels she brought home artefacts, little by little building a collection worthy of a museum. Armed with these artefacts, the stories behind them, and the international Sunday Salons she held at her home in Ruusulankatu in Helsinki, she fought the greyness of the post-war years.

The artefacts that Helinä Rautavaara brought home from her travels have now become part of the ever-changing heritage of Finland. The Helinä Rautavaara Collection Exhibition continues to live and grow with new stories and interpretations.

**"True peace can only be reached in people's hearts. In the history of humanity, the communities that have managed to understand others and their emotions deeply are those that have experienced profound peace. Lack of comprehension causes fear, prejudice and can lead to conflict." (Alioune Diop, Senegalese write and editor, 1966. Helinä Rautavaara's private library).**



# HELINÄ RAUTAVAARA

**Researcher, experiencer, journalist, teacher, collector**

**I travelled to learn and to show respect. I think it showed in my earlier writing that I may have had a somewhat ambivalent attitude, but when I got in there, into Ceylon [now Sri Lanka], then the tone changed completely. I was of course a child of the 50s, but I soon developed a wider, clearer focus.'**


**Helinä Rautavaara, recollection, 1997.**

**Helinä Rautavaara** (1928–1998) was born into an academic family in Helsinki. She attended the Helsingin suomalaisen yhteiskoulu school and took piano lessons. Rautavaara read psychology and pedagogy at the University of Helsinki and attended drawing classes at the University Drawing School. She also took a course in journalism with the University's Ylioppilaslehti magazine. In 1954 she embarked on her first trip outside Europe when she travelled to North Africa. Rautavaara had already been married, divorced, and undergone difficult surgery.

On her second long-distance journey she went to India by way of the Middle East. Rautavaara wrote about her travels for Seura magazine under the heading 'Thumbelina's Travels' (Peukaloliisan matkakertomuksia in Finnish). In 1958 she received a two-year scholarship to the

United States. After completing her studies in the US, she went on a long bicycle tour of Central and South America. She travelled about as a researcher and journalist, taping, photographing and writing about her experiences. Six years later, she returned to Finland.

During her travels, Rautavaara got to know people, joined in with the life of communities and strove to learn about and understand them. In 1966 she took part in a festival of African culture (Premier festival des Arts Nègres) in Senegal and a Unesco conference in Benin. Soon afterwards she continued her studies at the University of São Paulo in Brazil. However, a severe worsening of her eyesight meant that she could not finish the work on her thesis.



In the 1970s and 80s Helinä Rautavaara travelled in Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal. In the 1990s she made several shorter trips to places she knew from her earlier travels. Her last trip was made five years before her death. She ran away from the hospital to spend a week in Morocco and returned with Berber wedding jewellery and carpets.

Little by little, Helinä Rautavaara became a collector. Her way of travelling and her finances did not allow for any large purchases before the 1980s. It was not until she inherited from her parents that she was able to systematically expand her collection. The Rautavaara Collection comprises some 3,000 objects, tens of thousands of photographs, hundreds of hours of sound recordings and dozens of hours of cinematographic film.



# A LIFE CROSSING BOUNDARIES

## Heart in Somalia, rooted in Finland

**"People have their own preconceived ideas of what I can be. I have to fit into the idea of what it is like to be an African, a refugee, an immigrant or a Muslim. From experience I know that all these definitions and their negative connotations are found in the word Somali. If you are Somali, you are assumed to be marginalized and subjugated, a thief, a rapist, a burden, you are thought to be exploiting the social services system and to be an Islamist pirate.**

**In 1988**, Civil war broke out in Somalia and by 1991 had caused the collapse of the State. Today, more than one million Somalis live elsewhere, including in Ethiopia, Kenya, the countries of the Arabian Peninsula, the United Kingdom, North America and the Nordic countries.

Somalis residing outside their home country make up the community of Somalian people living in the Somali diaspora. Adapting to what is new around them and preserving their own culture are important elements of their life in the diaspora. They are aware of their roots and keep in touch with their country of origin, but they are also building new

lives. Family members are often a network of relatives dispersed around the world.

The first Somalis arrived in Finland through the Soviet Union in 1990. Today, there are more than 20,000 people in Finland whose first language is Somali. Half of them are citizens of Somalia while the other half are Finnish citizens. Those who flee from war can take only what they absolutely need, which is why this part of the exhibition is lacking in objects. Photographs tell the story of Somalia, of the first Somalis to come to Finland and of the young people who have grown up in Finland.

**But I am proud to be Somali, despite all the unwarranted definitions people put on me. I do not accept the hypocrisy of people telling me that I am "a good Somali". They want to see me as a victim who has bravely turned my back on my own group in order to be something else. Sorry guys, but I am Somali – and a lot of other things besides."**

**Warda Ahmed, teacher and activist, 2016.**

## Photos

1. Hamar weyne, “Old city”, Mogadishu 1984. *Photo: Pirkko Tantt*

2. Afar irdoor, “Four doors”, Mogadishu 1984. *Photo: Pirkko Tantt*

3. “Camel market”, Baidoa 1985.  
*Photo: Pirkko Tantt*

4. “Refugee camp”, Mogadishu 1984.  
*Photo: Pirkko Tantt*

5. “Celebration at the stadium”, Mogadishu 1984. *Photo: Pirkko Tantt*

6. “Demonstration”, Helsinki 1991.  
*Photo: Nur Nasib*

7. “Funerals”, Helsinki 1991.  
*Photo: Nur Nasib*

8. “Football game”, Helsinki 1992.  
*Photo: Nur Nasib*

9. “Cutting hay”, Espoo 2013.  
*Photo: Nina-Maria Oförsagd*

10. “Wedding”, Espoo 2013.  
*Photo: Nina-Maria Oförsagd*

Video: “Mogadishu then and now - photos and poems from the city”.

Length: 15 minutes.

Production: Helinä Rautavaara Museum

Funding: Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland



# PROTECTION AND ECONOMIC SECURITY


## The significance of jewellery in the Islamic world

**'Ahead of us we had the famous journey across the desert of nearly a thousand kilometres. The barrenness of the environment was so palpable that you would start and think you had seen a ghost when, occasionally, a herd of goats or camels with their herders appeared in this unfathomably rocky landscape. The driver said these people can live for months on goat's milk alone, even going without bread.' Helinä Rautavaara, 'Thumbelina's Travels', Seura magazine, 1956.**

**The Middle East** is home to some of humanity's oldest civilizations, with a history stretching back more than 7,000 years. The great rivers and the water systems built around them formed the basis of the agriculture that developed in the region. The desert was home to nomadic cattle herders. Growing trade evolved between the towns and cities that were already growing up 5,000 years ago and, little by little, trade routes came to connect the Middle East with Asia, Africa and Europe. The great monotheistic religions of the world – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – were all born in the Middle East. The first known writing system, astronomy and mathematics also began there.

Jewellery and amulets have had a special place in the Middle and Near East and are still given as wedding gifts to the bride. Today, gold is the most popular metal, but earlier it was silver. Jewellery has been about more than personal adornment. It was an insurance and a property that a woman could take with her and trade for money in a time of need. Many stories tell of jewellery that has united families. People have also believed that jewellery possesses protective or lucky powers. For instance, among the Berber in North Africa, a blue gemstone was thought to protect its bearer, while a red stone brought good luck.





Beads too were popular in North Africa. Women crushed seeds with cloves and added water spiced with saffron and fragrant herbs, such as masterwort (*Peucedanum ostruthium*). After forming the mixture into round or pyramid-shaped beads, they pierced a hole in each one, then threaded them on to a string.

In 2016, Denmark established a law that stated that property can be seized from asylum seekers if it is worth more than EUR 1,300. Jewellery, with the exception of wedding rings, is also in the purview of the law. However, not a single item of jewellery has been seized.



# DURGA PUJA - RETURN OF THE GODDESS

## Diaspora festivities

**'That's the beauty of it, that even though people's lives all around are modern, these ceremonies survive.' Helinä Rautavaara, interview, 1997.**

**The Durga Puja Festival** celebrates the victory of the goddess Durga over the devious, shape-shifting buffalo demon Mahishasura. The feast is an expression of the victory of good over evil, but it is also a harvest festival celebrating the goddess of all living things. Durga Puja is one of the biggest annual religious festivities in India. It is particularly celebrated in the state of Bengal in eastern India. During the festival, statues and images of the goddess Durga are venerated in many ways – families visit temples and children receive gifts.

In India old statues of gods and their altars are often dunked in water after use. The Bengal community in the Helsinki area used a festive altar in Finland from 2007–2012. When they got a new one, they donated their old altar to the Helinä Rautavaara Museum.

In 2019 nearly 16 million Indian nationals were living outside their native country. They are the largest known diaspora in the world. The IT boom of the twenty-first century sped up the arrival of Indian experts in Finland. At the end of 2018 there were some 6,000 Indian citizens living in Finland, many of them in Espoo.

Durga Puja is also a symbol of homecoming. According to tradition, the goddess Durga lives in the Himalaya mountains with her husband Shiva. During Durga Puja she is thought to visit her childhood home with her daughters Lakshmi and Saraswati and her sons Kartikeya and Ganesha.

## **Durga Puja**

The Durga Puja celebration organised by the members of Bengali community in the capital area.

Please have a look!



# INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE AMAZON

**Survival stories from conflicts over natural resources**

**'On the Amazon river I caught malaria. I got it in a canoe like this, it was night and pitch black. It was a sort of ague. I was in really bad shape and said that I have to get ashore.' Helinä Rautavaara, interview, 1997.**

**It is said that the Amazon river** was named for Yagua men. When the first Europeans saw men with long hair, dressed in skirts of palm fronds, they thought they were strong women and named the river the Amazon, after the warrior women of Greek mythology.

To the Yagua people, who live in an area bordering Peru and Colombia, the palm tree is an important plant. They use it to keep in touch with their forefathers and the spirit world. The Yagua grow palms near their dwellings and use them to make blowpipes, flutes, jewellery and clothes. Jewellery and clothes made of palm leaves are thought to protect their wearers against evil. Blowpipes made of palm trees are still an important part of the Yagua way of life. They are used to catch monkeys and birds. Each man usually has his own blowpipe, which is not

generally lent or borrowed. The dead are buried with their blowpipes.

Helinä Rautavaara travelled in the Amazon area of Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Brazil during 1961–1964 and in 1971. In the 2000s, the Shuar, the Pilagá, the Hixkaryana, the Yagua and other indigenous peoples of the Amazon region have risen up to defend their rights to the natural resources, the land, their language and culture. The results of the trials have been promising. For instance, ancestral lands of the Hixkaryana have been returned to them and they have established new villages on their ancient lands. However, the time of politicians who exploit indigenous peoples is not yet over.



## Photos

1–2. The Pilagá are an indigenous people living in the Chaco Plains between Argentina and Paraguay.

*Photographs: 1962, Helinä Rautavaara  
Museum Image Collection*

3–4. The Shuar live in the Amazonian rainforest in Ecuador and Peru. The man's face is traditionally painted using a pigment that comes from the *Genipa americana* tree, a species that is significant to the indigenous peoples of the area. Tradition has it that the *Genipa americana* tree was originally a beautiful girl called Huituc. When Huituc grew up she and her sister Manduru became trees, spreading beauty and a pleasant scent. In

order to become similarly attractive, local women sing a song dedicated to the tree spirit.

*Photographs: 1962, Helinä Rautavaara  
Museum Image Collection*

5. A traditional Shuar dwelling is made of palm leaves and built on stilts to keep out dangerous animals. For the same reason, sleeping in the rainforest is usually done in hammocks.

*Photograph: 1961, Helinä Rautavaara  
Museum Image Collection*



# BRAZILIAN CAPOEIRA

## From slave revolt to national sport

**'The capoeira begins with an introductory hymn, the dancers sitting on their haunches at the feet of those who play the music. When the choir joins in, the dancers bless themselves and begin the dance or duel. The movements are only training for actual battle.'** Helinä Rautavaara, notes, 1972.

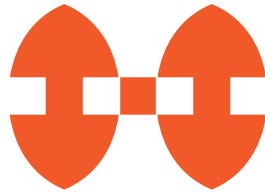
**Brazilian capoeira** is a form of martial art in which dance-like movements are performed together with music and song. Combat takes place within a ring, or roda, of capoeirista, as practitioners of capoeira are called. The fight is accompanied by the bateria, which usually consists of eight people playing instruments and singing. The instruments are the berimbau, a musical bow, the vaqueta stick, the caxixi shaker, the bandeira drum and agogô bell.

The roots of capoeira are found in south-west Africa. It crossed the Atlantic with the Bantu slaves brought into Brazil by Portuguese colonisers during the sixteenth century. A similar tradition still exists in present-day Angola. There are many theories about the origin of the word 'capoeira'. For instance, ka'a e pûer or ko'pwera in the language of the Tupi people of Brazil denotes plants growing

in the past tense. This is understood to be a reference to the shrubland in which escaped slaves often hid. In the nineteenth century, former slaves used capoeira for self-defence and set up settlements called quilombo from which they opposed the Brazilian authorities. The violent sport was associated with criminal behaviour and was banned by law in 1889. In 1932 the Mestre Bimba, a master capoeirista, convinced the Brazilian authorities that capoeira was important and founded the first school that taught the capoeira regional style in Salvador, Bahia.

The history of capoeira has been recorded in stories, songs and poetry, and in written sources which have survived. The state of Bahia in north-eastern Brazil is known as the cradle of capoeira as a sport.

In 1972 capoeira was made the official national sport of Brazil, and in 2014 UNESCO granted it a special protected status as an intangible cultural heritage. The sport reached Finland in the late 1980s. Helinä Rautavaara had become acquainted with capoeira during her first trip to Brazil in the 1960s.



# RELIGIOUS ART IN AFRICA

## Ancestors and nature spirits beside you in life

**'I'm interested in rituals, dances and music. I record sound, I make movies, I don't seek individual objects, they're not what I'm studying. They are all part of a whole.' Helinä Rautavaara, interview, 1997.**

**There has long been** considerable give and take between Africa and Europe in trade, religion, ideas and art. When Europeans began collecting African objects, they focused their attention on sculptures that resembled Western art. Textiles and ceramics were mostly ignored, as were the paintings on people's skin, the walls of houses and on rocks. Collectors also neglected to document the names of the artists.

As in Western art, there is great diversity in African art in terms of its shape, technique and meaning. Regardless of where it is created, art can have political or ideological aims, it can be entertaining or contribute to religious expression. Often, art combines more than one of those meanings. Characteristic of African art is its combination of several elements together with performance. Music, dance, clothing, body emphasis, sculptures and masks are all interconnected and individ-

ual objects derive meaning from being part of a larger whole. A common misconception has been that the importance of pre-colonial African art resided only in its use or function. But, in addition to its use, it has always had an aesthetic value in and of itself.

Most of the objects in the display case represent West African religious art. The objects are connected to universal life questions and needs, such as being a member of a community, social order and power, growing up, gender, the birth of children, making a living, safety and death. In many parts of West Africa, ancestors and nature spirits are believed to remain present throughout the various stages of life. Many of the objects displayed have to do with the connection between human beings and the spiritual world. When we consider the use of Christian crucifixes and icons, it seems they too can be seen as belonging to a



similar group of objects.

The objects have been grouped according to a theme within each display case. The themes are based on the meaning and uses of the objects. However, many objects often have several concurrent meanings and could be used in a variety of situations. The division used here is only one of several possibilities.

Helinä Rautavaara collected her first West African objects in Benin in 1966. Most of the objects on display were acquired in the 1990s through personal contacts directly in Africa or at auctions in Europe.



# SUFISM IN SENEGAL

## On Amadou Bamba's peaceful road

**'I am a Muslim and a creature of God and a servant of the Prophet Muhammad Saw.' Sheik Amadou Bamba.**

**Suwer stained-glass art** depicts Senegal's colonial history and the life of its people. Many themes common to both Islam and Christianity, such as Noah's Ark, are also depicted in the stained-glass works.

Some 90 per cent of the population of Senegal are Muslim. Arab traders introduced Islam to Senegal in the eleventh century. By the late nineteenth century, Sheik (teacher) Amadou Bamba (1850–1927) had founded the Mouride, a Sufi brotherhood. About one third of the inhabitants of Senegal are members of the brotherhood, which emphasises the peaceful co-existence of Islam and Christianity. Sheik Amadou Bamba is a popular figure depicted in Senegalese stained-glass art. He is always shown with his face partly covered by a scarf.

The aim of Sufi religiosity is to become a friend of God (wali Allah), to find the way back to the original home of the soul and reach a connection with God. A Sufi always strives to be working on their spiritual side. In the end, everything that a mystic is, their circulation, their breathing and their words are offered in praise of God and they live in a constant state of prayer.

The name of the Suwer stained-glass paintings comes from the French *sous verre* (under glass). Suwers are painted on a pane of glass in reverse order. First the contours and surface details are painted, such as faces and eyes with eyelashes, after which colours are added one layer at a time. Large areas such as the sea or the sky are painted last.

## Photos

1. The Mosque of Touba. In 1888, Amadou Bamba founded the holy city of Touba, which with its mosque became the most important place of pilgrimage in Mouridism.

*Photograph: Matlaboul Fawzeyni Touba Helsinki*

2. Darou Mousty, a Mouride religious village some 28 kilometres from Touba.

*Photograph: Helinä Rautavaara Image Collection*

3. Magal Kazu Rajab, Helsinki, 2019. A party celebrates the birth of Serigne Fallou, second son of Sheik Amadou Bamba. The party also marks Isra Wal Miraj, the evening when Allah gave Muhammad Saw the five daily prayers.

*Photograph: Matlaboul Fawzeyni Touba Helsinki*



# THE BAYE FALL BROTHERHOOD

## From Senegal to Finland

**'The blue beauty of the mosaics in the mosques of Iran and the grandeur of Moghul architecture deepened my respect for Islam, which had never faded over the years, and then it came to fruition in Senegal in the brotherhood of Baye Fall, which was founded by Sheik Amadou Bamba among the Sufi Mouride.' Helinä Rautavaara, recollection, 1997.**

**The Baye Fall brotherhood** was named after Sheik Ibrahima Fall (1855–1930). Ibrahima Fall was the most well-known follower of Sheik Amadou Bamba. He emphasised the importance of work and a complete dedication to one's teacher. Ibrahima Fall's dedication to Bamba was achieved through constant work. Work was an important expression of prayer and the life of the faith. Ibrahima Fall did not follow the traditional Islamic prayer rhythm and he was said to have worked so diligently that he did not have time to fast, wash his hair, nor to think about what clothes he wore. Wearing their hair in long dreadlocks and clothes sewn together from patches of fabric became a characteristic of Ibrahima Fall and his followers. They also typically wore amulets or n`dombos [OR n`dombos] around

their neck, a kuur club hanging from their belt and the begging bowl këll.

Helinä Rautavaara first travelled to Senegal in 1966. From 1984 onwards she visited the country regularly. On her final trip in 1991 she made a pilgrimage to the holy sites of the Baye Fall.

This section of the exhibition has been realised in cooperation with the Mouride association Matlaboul Fawzeyni Touba Helsinki. Some 250 people belong to the Senegalese community in Finland and about one fifth of them are members of the Baye Fall brotherhood. People who knew Helinä Rautavaara are part of that community.

## Photos

1. Helinä Rautavaara by a mural of Sheik Amadou Bamba. Daroy Mousty, Sedina Ousmane Noreyni House exterior. Mid-1980s.

*Photograph: Helinä Rautavaara Museum Image Collection*

2. The Serigne Sangué group. Dakar, 1980s.

*Photograph: Helinä Rautavaara Museum Image Collection*

3. Serigne Amadou Bamba's family collage, held by Khadim Goeye. Medina, mid-1980s.

*Photograph: Helinä Rautavaara Museum Image Collection*

4. Rautavaara and a Baye Fall group inside Sedina Ousmane Noreyni House. Daroy Mousty, mid-1980s.

*Photograph: Helinä Rautavaara Museum Image Collection*

5. MBacke Fall, Karim Samba Mbaye and Koursi Wou. During Thiant, zikr (prayer to God). Daroy Mousty, mid-1980s.

*Photograph: Helinä Rautavaara Museum Image Collection*