

SPECIAL THEME:  
CULTURAL FINLAND



LEFT: The Ateneum Art Museum hosts a major centenary exhibition presenting Jansson's impressive career. Tove Jansson: Early Moomins (painting) Tampere Art Museum ©Moomin Characters™. TOP RIGHT: Tove Jansson: Alice in Wonderland (illustration) Tampere Art Museum. Photo: Finnish National Gallery/Jenni Nurminen. BELOW: Tove Jansson: Family (painting) Private collection. Photo: Finnish National Gallery/Hannu Aaltonen ©Tove Jansson Estate.

## Finnish creative Centenarians are having a ball

The Moomins are the creations of the multitalented Finnish artist Tove Jansson (1914-2001), one of the best-known Finnish artists in the world. This year sees Tove Jansson's 100th birthday, as well as another big anniversary, being celebrated with seminars, concerts, happenings, and children's events.

By Taina Värri

The major centenary exhibition, simply named *Tove Jansson*, opened in the Ateneum Art Museum in Helsinki in March, and in September it will move from Helsinki to Japan, where the Moomins have long been a huge success. As if that was not enough, a hand-drawn animated feature film, *Moomins on the Riviera*, will premiere in the autumn of 2014.

Coincidentally, Finland also celebrates 100 years of Finnish animation this year. The first animated short films by Eric Vasström were shown in theatres before the main feature films the same year Tove Jansson was born. The first animated feature film, *Seven brothers*, by Riitta Nelmämarkka in 1979 was based on the classic story of Aleksis Kivi (1834-1872), the Finnish author who wrote the first significant novel in the Finnish language.

Special events will be held throughout the country. The gaming industry is growing fast and new talents are very much in demand, so there will be a special emphasis on developing education. Rovio with its Angry Birds is a remarkable employer for animation artists, Niko the reindeer is an international movie star charming his way all around the world, and pre-school animation series DibiDogs has attracted more than 50 million viewers already.

### Moomin philosophy

The Moomin stories are hugely popular among children, but there is a message on a deeper level of the Moomin philosophy about freedom, friends and open-mindedness, which touches grown-ups as well.

The sympathetic Moomins are well-known all over the world, not least from the Japanese animated films made for children in the 1980s and 1990s. The new 80-minute-long movie is a French-Finnish-venture, the story and visuals based on the original cartoon by Tove Jansson in 1955. At the Riviera, the Moomins get a taste of bright lights, adventure and glamour, which, combined with the length of the film, will make it alluring to adults too.

Those already familiar with Jansson's way of life and philosophy are not surprised: the early Moomins were actually quite liberal in their ways. The first volume of her cartoons was *The Moomins and the Great Flood* in 1945, and in the 1950s Jansson signed a contract with the largest evening paper at the time, *The Evening News* in London. Soon, people in more than 20 other countries were familiar with the quirky residents of the Moominvalley.

Tove Jansson was raised in a family of artists, and the Moomin family is said to have developed from these experiences. Her brother, Lars Jansson, played a big part in drawing the cartoons. Sometimes he did all the drawing, when his sister was swamped with other passions and duties.

### Full life, love and art

Tove Jansson lived in her beloved painting studio in the centre of Helsinki, but also spent as much time as possible at Klovharu, a modest cottage on a tiny islet in the Gulf of Finland. She also travelled the world with her life partner, Tuulikki Pietilä, or 'Tooti' (1917-2009), and some endearing moments were captured on their 8-millimetre films, as the artist, full of joy, jumped around. Fortunately, these films were saved and later published in DVD format.

But the Moomin cartoons and animations were only one side of Tove Jansson's persona. Already as a young art student, she was a gifted painter. She also created illustrations, graphic prints and public works from murals to mosaics. Her writing career started in 1968 with the auto-

biographical novel *Sculptor's Daughter* and went on for decades, and the grown-up novelist wrote perceptive stories about people and their complicated relationships.

Ateneum's exhibition covers all the periods in Jansson's productive career, including her Surrealist paintings of the



TOP: Tove Jansson, the ambassador of fun, freedom and open-mindedness (b/w photo) ©Moomin Characters™. MIDDLE: Tove Jansson in her studio. Photo: Per Olov Jansson ©Moomin Characters™. BOTTOM: The Moomins will party hard on the Riviera this autumn. Moomins on the Riviera (movie) ©Handle Productions Oy & Pictak Cie ©Moomin Characters™.

1930s, Modernist art of the 1950s, and more abstract works in the 1960s and '70s, as well as her satirical anti-war illustrations for the magazine *Garm*, her monumental paintings for public spaces, and, of course, her enormously popular and internationally renowned Moomin characters and stories.

#### Books:

*Tove Jansson: Life, Art, Work* – biography by Boel Westin, Jan 2014 (Sort of Books)

*Tove Jansson, Labora et amare* – biography by Tuula Karjalainen, 2014 (Penguin)

#### Major centenary exhibition:

Ateneum Art Museum: Tove Jansson, 14 Mar – 7 Sep, ateneum.fi

#### Hand-drawn animated film:

*Moomins on the Riviera 2014*, Handle Productions Oy, moominsontheriviera.com

#### Cartoon Digital:

A top-level seminar about the latest developments in digital animation and entertainment for connected screens, 5-6 May, Helsinki, [www.cartoon-media.eu/cartoon-masters/cartoon-digital](http://www.cartoon-media.eu/cartoon-masters/cartoon-digital)

#### For more information, please visit:

[tove100.com](http://tove100.com) and [100vuotta.finnanimation.fi](http://100vuotta.finnanimation.fi)