



Leverage from
the EU
2014–2020



GLASS

Main story: Born from tears

Only the lucky few have seen them. They fly around in spectres in the colours of the rainbow when the light passes through glass. They are here at lightning speed, and then they are gone. They are fragile and as thin as glass, and just as transparent.

The story goes that they are created as the tears of the glass-blowers drop into pieces of broken glass. The tears are shed when you are so close to a perfect piece and the lose it, and it shatters or loses its unique shape. Or of tears of joy when the item turns out perfect, just like the glass-blower's soul predicted.

Glass fairies only live for a moment as they are all born with glass disease, but they are born again as a glassblower can blow a small glass heart for them, a tiny bubble of life to sustain them.

Are the glassblowers the only ones who can see the glass fairies? No, others can too if... Let's find out.

Fiskars Finland/Iittala glassworks

Glass-blowing

You can see the glass furnace glow from the open factory door. I open the door and the heat invites me in. A group of glass-blowers stand before me and I stop to watch them work.

I suddenly realise that an elderly gentleman wearing a hat is standing next to me, sneering and swinging his cane. Where did he come from? I am spellbound by the glassblowers' work. The molten glass on the tip of the blowpipe magically turns into vases, birds, drinking glasses... The glassblowers move like they are dancing; it is like a carefully planned choreography.

The man suggests that I try glass-blowing myself. Surprised, I follow him to the glass furnace, and soon I realise I am inflating a piece of molten glass in a wooden mould. Smoke is rising from the mould and I can smell the wood burning. The master glassblower pulls a vase out of the mould, removes it from the blowpipe and carries it to the cooling chamber.

I find the idea of a self-created, unique object appealing.

I turn around to thank the man, but all I can see is a door closing in the back of the room and a swing of a cane. His identity remains a mystery.

Finnish Glass Museum: Tapio Wirkkala takes the stage

One morning, an unknown man enters the glassblowing studio. He takes off his green corduroy jacket and places it on a sooty coat hook in the studio, rolling up his sleeves.

“Come closer, to the light, and I'll tell you what I've thought we'll do first.”



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The man spread sheet boards in front of the men. They featured charcoal sketches of oval plates. To the other group, he gave a sketch of a vase that looked like a large mushroom. It was called 'Chanterelle' as well.

"You look at that while I tell the Kivelä boys about the other one. And by the way, can we forget about the titles? My name is Tapio."

That is how the team got a new member: a designer.

Tapio became a familiar sight at the factory. He kept cool and listened to the glassblowers' opinions. He was interested in every object and each glassblower.

Väinö had even bought some objects that Tapio had designed, for example the Tapio glasses that he had in the glass case. The bubble in the foot of the goblet catches Väinö's eye. There it is, the bubble, the home of the fairy.

Väinö shakes his head. An old man like him, coming up with such things.

Fiskars Finland/Design Museum Iittala

Night of the fairies in Iittala

Darkness had already fallen at the museum when the museum technician closed the doors of the Iittala Design Museum. In the dark, tiny lights began to appear in some of the glass objects in the collection, like stars blinking in them. Tiny glass fairies were waking up in their bubble homes.

The floor of the museum soon filled with dancing fairies who were careful not to stumble on the wooden floor. Everyone knew that tripping could be dangerous, because fairies who fell in between the floorboards turned into tiny pieces of glass.

That night, the fairies danced wilder than ever. But, suddenly, the dancing stopped. They heard the sound of glass shattering. Everyone was looking around: who had been hurt? The fairies were relieved to realise that only one small glass object had fallen on the floor. As the dawn began to break, the fairies crawled back into their homes.

When the museum technician returned to work, he swept the floor in amazement. This was not the first time he found pieces of glass on the floor in the morning.

The main story continues...

Glass comes in many forms, and so do glass fairies. Even if someone can see them in a certain object, someone else might not.

The fairies do not care, they are used to the fact that what is beautiful to someone is not necessarily beautiful to everyone else.

And fairies do not occupy all glass objects, either.

Glass fairies are only born when the glassblower sees the beauty of their creation, sees what they were trying to achieve. It is in that moment when miracles happen.



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Sometimes the fairies like to play. They slide down sunrays, having fun in the stripes of the spectre. They playfully scare each other on the convex surfaces of the glass objects so that they look gigantic or change colours by diving into multicoloured glass.

Glass fairies live among people as long as someone sees the beauty of the object. That is how long the fairy will have a home; without a home, she has to return to Fairy Land. She will return to us when someone blows a new glass object and sees its beauty.

The glass fairy is as fragile and durable as glass, so easy to break and just as eternal. Everything depends on how it is treated.