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June 2005

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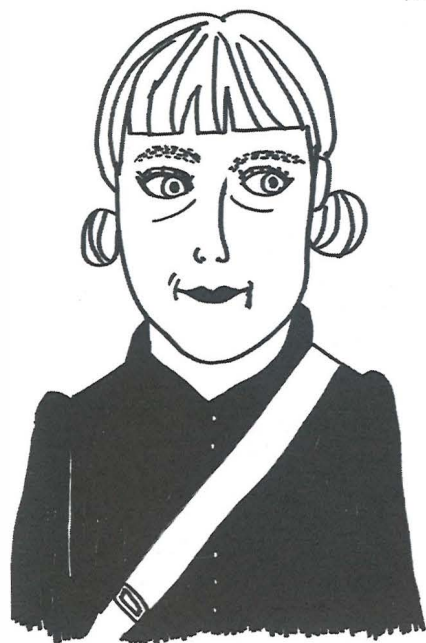
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ERIKA KOVANEN



TUOMAS KIVINEN

TOMMI MÄKYNE

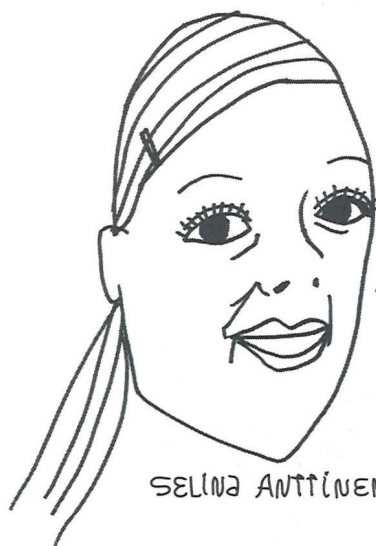


MALIN BLOMQVIST

MARI TAKA

I'M SORRY,  
EXCUSE ME

By Katherine E. Nelson



SELMA ANTTINEN

JOHAN OLIN

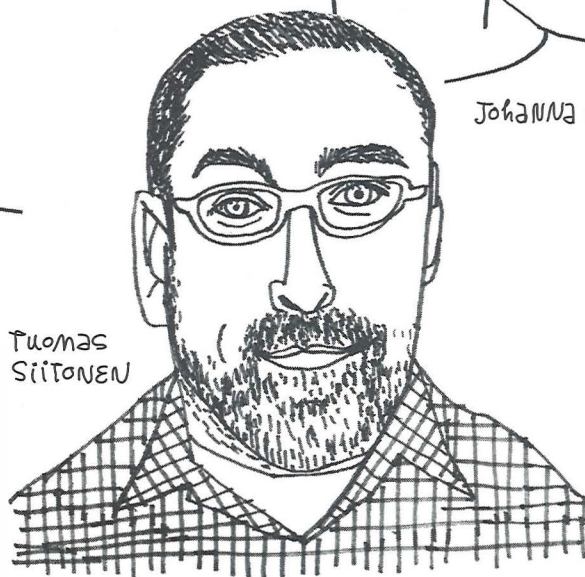
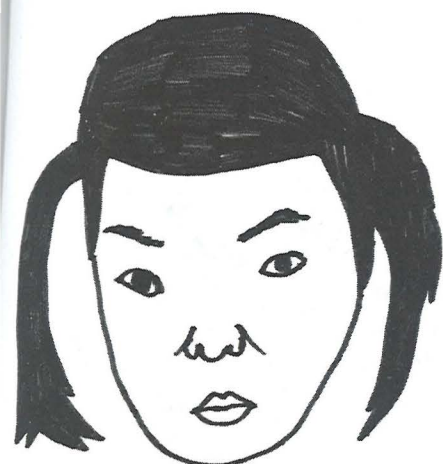
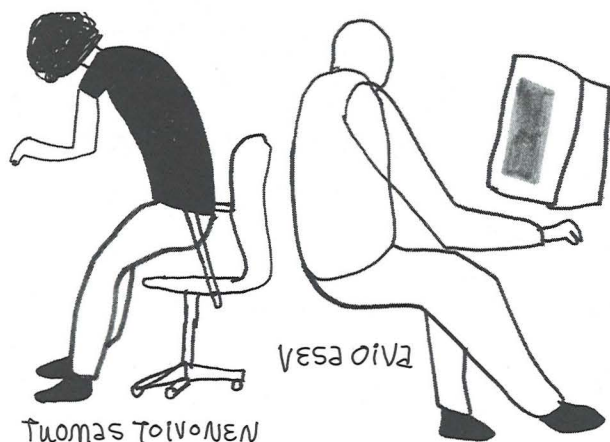


Helsinki-based design collaborative Anteeksi has produced a witty body of work. Its 14 members also work independently. For instance, in January 2004, designer and illustrator Nene Tsuboi used the side of the building where the group works (opposite page, bottom) to exhibit her colorful flags printed with various objects, including a money tree, a sun, and a nene bird.

**A chair sports a rumpled three-piece wool suit.** A white cloak is adorned with well-loved stuffed animals. A furry muff doubles as a whoopee cushion. The work of Finnish design group Anteeksi, showcased this May at ICFF in New York, celebrates the awkward, the overlooked, and even the downright kooky. The collective's 14 members do most of their work independently—occasionally collaborating with another member to bring particular expertise to a project. But when the group does unite under the Anteeksi moniker, its imaginative undertakings take full flight—blurring disciplinary boundaries and offering up wildly unfettered ideas that serve only to inspire fresh thinking about design. “A lot of people have been dubbing our stuff antidesign and antifashion,” says architect and musician Tuomas Toivonen of the group’s scrappy creative antics. “But I don’t think it is ‘anti’ anything really. We just have an acute need to do these things.”

Though today Anteeksi serves as a creative cauldron of ideas for its members, in the beginning its objectives were more modest. The group, whose ages range from 27 to 35, first joined forces about three years ago to share rent in a large industrial building in Kallio, an old working-class neighborhood of Helsinki. Moving into the space was the design agency Com-pa-ny, the architecture firm M41LH2, and a clutch of freelancers, ultimately comprising a group of 14. Though each member retained their own identity and client base, new projects evolved organically from the shared office arrangement. Hosting performances and events such as a fashion show on the office fire escape and an off-off-off-site Salone Internazionale del Mobile event soon





## Fourteen young Finnish designers apologize—possibly for the fact that they're having so much fun.

earned the collective a reputation for artful mischief making. The name Anteeksi—which loosely translated means “I’m sorry” or “Excuse me” in Finnish—served as a fitting tagline for the outfit’s good-natured iconoclasm.

A key to the group’s success lies in its easy cross-disciplinary approach, which inspires members to reach beyond their various specialties. They hail from a wide range of design backgrounds—Jussi Kalliopuska, Vesa Oiva, Tuomas Toivonen, Tommi Mäkyne, Johanna Hyrkäs, Tuomas Kivinen, Selina Anttinen, and Tuomas Siitonen are architects; Siitonen and Erika Kovanen are graphic designers; Malin Blomqvist is a landscape architect; Nene Tsuboi is a designer and illustrator; Johan Olin and Aamu Song are designers; and Mari Talka is a fashion designer—and projects often push them into unfamiliar territory. “There needs to be a leap or a jump for the design process to be exciting for everybody,” Toivonen says. Projects are loosely coordinated, and though designers often chat and share ideas, they accomplish the majority of their work on their own.

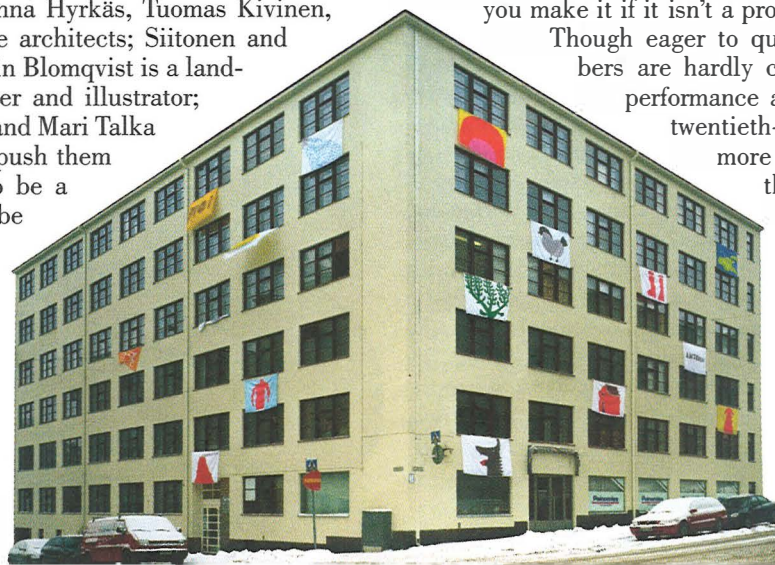
While Anteeksi designers have varied expertise, they share a thirst for reinvention. With childlike glee they put found objects to new purpose, such as the empty

cans employed in the Beer Chair, by Jussi Kalliopuska. Off-the-shelf items are also merrily misused, such as the numerous mittens sewn onto the Pocket Jacket, by Johan Olin. Because the group creates its designs by hand for one-off performances and installations, each item is one of a kind. “People try to buy the stuff, but it’s not for sale because there’s only one,” Toivonen says. “Then they get kind of confused. They’ll say, ‘Why did you make it if it isn’t a product?’”

Though eager to question the status quo, Anteeksi members are hardly cynics. Their work gives nods to Dada, performance art, Memphis, and other anticommercial twentieth-century movements, but their pieces are more exercises in free creative expression than examples of any particular ideology.

Anteeksi members view their flexibility and freedom as vital to sustaining their own enthusiasm for their chosen professions. “Our working process is not well planned or organized, but it isn’t random either,” Toivonen says. “Our designs may be funny, but they aren’t a joke because we take this very seriously.”

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Tram Corridor, Helsinki Club

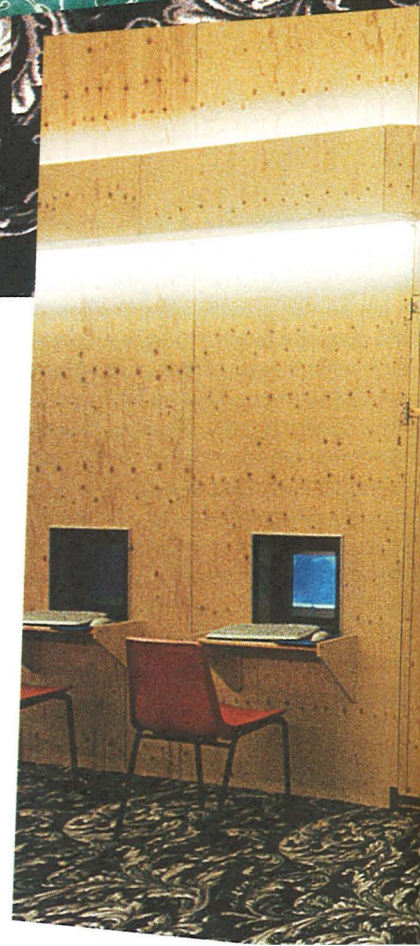
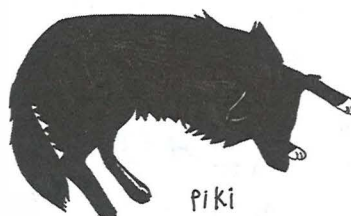


# ✌ ARCHITECTURE ✌

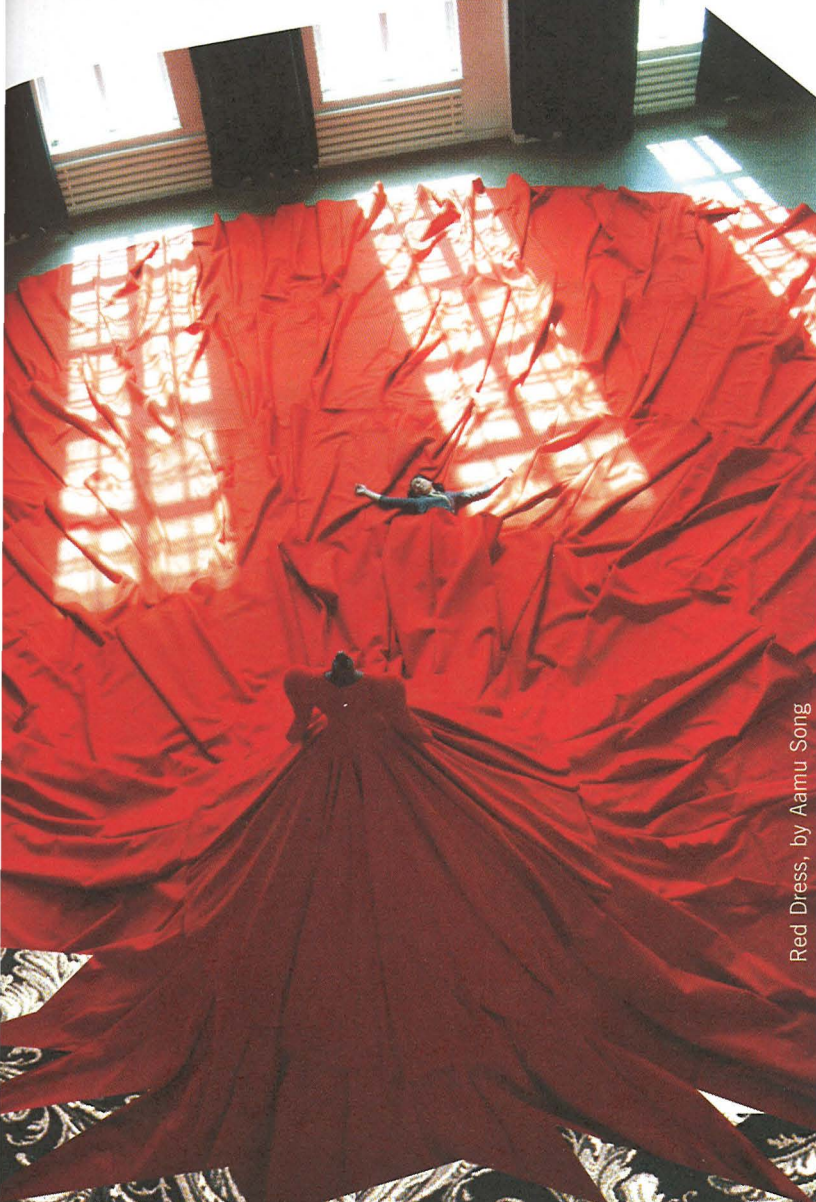
## HELSINKI CLUB

Anteeksi's design rarely addresses the needs of a client. An exception is the exuberant interior the group created for the Helsinki Club, a former courthouse cum gambling hot spot that needed refurbishing. Begun in 2002, the project was Anteeksi's first official commission, and some members had little experience in interior design at the time. To lend the place a unique feel, Anteeksi developed what Tuomas Toivonen calls an "urban plan" for the club's layout that guided four teams of designers in tackling approximately ten separate rooms. Wide-open aesthetic parameters resulted in a playful juxtaposition of jewel-colored spaces, each with its own distinct personality. For example, dramatic baroque

patterned carpeting sweeps across the central lounge from floor to ceiling while bright red carpets, fabrics, and walls set the dance area aglow. Tropical hues, quirky details, and similar elemental shapes, such as blocky stools and low-slung benches, loosely unite distinct spaces. Anteeksi's propensity for repurposing found objects also pervades the interior—the same vivid orange seats found on Helsinki city trams line a long corridor awash in striped orange carpeting, and the casino glitters with five-cent coins embedded in the resin flooring. "We received a very official reply from the national treasury that it was okay to use the coins as long as we didn't destroy them," Toivonen says.







Red Dress, by Aamu Song

## THE RED DRESS AAMU SONG

“Anteeksi is like a girl and boy who are dating, rather than a married couple. We don’t ask too much of one another,” says South Korean designer Aamu Song, who has been living in Finland since 1998. Like all Anteeksi designers, Song wears a variety of professional hats, running the design agency Com-pa-ny with the graphic designer Johan Olin in addition to her work with Anteeksi. She also develops personal projects, including one called the Red Dress, a striking performance piece that melds music, architecture, and fashion. In an effort bridge the distance between performer and viewer, Song developed a 10-foot-high dress with a flowing skirt 65 feet in diameter that carves out a three-dimensional performance space. Comprised of laminated layers of wool, felt, foam, and

velour—held together by six miles of thread—the folds of the dress become a large blanket that provides “pocket” seats for 238 viewers. During the performance, the bodice of the dress rotates so the singer becomes visible to all members of the audience. Song hand-made the dress with the help of a technical designer, Tuomo Järvi-mäki, and a professional dress-maker, Sari Manner, during a production process that took four months. After about five years in development, the Red Dress will have its debut at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, on the north Zealand coast of Denmark, on August 14, 2005.



The Helsinki Club carpet is a traditional pattern that Anteeksi had the Danish company Ege enlarge to twice its usual size.



## KONTUPISTE COMMUNITY CENTER M41LH2

Anteeksi’s spunky design approach carries over into all of its members’ professional practices. In 2002 the architecture firm M41LH2—comprised of group members Johanna Hyrkäs, Tommi Mäkynen, Tuomas Siitonen, and Tuomas Toivonen—created a community center for the down-at-the-heels Helsinki neighborhood of Kontula. The new center serves as a home base for a variety of area outreach programs sponsored by the European Union. The floor plan features an open central lounge and area for computer use, lectures, and music performances rimmed by five project spaces that

house various community programs. Although the layout is strictly functional, the interior design isn’t overly serious. The design team created a lighthearted feeling by juxtaposing a variety of disparate materials, including an industrial carpet with a baroque pattern adapted from Versailles and a low-tech plywood construction for the interior offices. “These materials shouldn’t really work together, but they do,” Toivonen says. A photo-mural of a tropical sunset adds another humorous touch. “We wanted to get rid of that terrible sterile smell of public space,” he adds.



Lacking funds to attend Milan's Salone Internazionale del Mobile, Anteeksi sent an invitation (inset top) to their own "booth" in a city-owned vitrine in Helsinki.



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The collaborative's work often blurs the boundaries between disciplines. Clockwise from right: a house-shaped shirt, a chair upholstered with foam and pins, and a suit-covered chair.



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## FURNITURE SHOWS

"If an object is displayed in a cool, impersonal way, it doesn't communicate. Performance is a way for us to attach a personality to our designs," Tuomas Toivonen says of Anteeksi's creative approach. Performance also offers a forum for the group's antiestablishment jests. A recent furniture installation gave a mischievous nod to Milan's Salone Internazionale del Mobile. Lacking money to attend the industry's foremost design event, the collective faked its participation. Invitations to the Anteeksi furniture launch, timed to coincide with the fair, featured the Salone's logo and graphics while the fine print listed directions to a location in Helsinki. Joining in the high jinks, Milan-bound friends and colleagues distributed the invitations at the Italian fair. "We saved a ton on airfare," Toivonen says. The collective staged its furniture exhibition, which showcased about 20 new designs, in a large vacant vitrine owned by the city of Helsinki's parking-ticket office. The entire group contributed handmade pieces, ranging from a pin-covered chair made from foam that simulated folds of upholstery, by Aamu Song, to a glowing blue rug knitted from a snaking string of off-the-shelf lighting, by Johanna Hyrkäs.



FASHION SHOWS

↑ FAASHION ↓

In crafting their clothing design, the members of Anteeksi share a love of contrasts. The materials range from the oldfangled—Selina Anttinen made vintage men's ties into a skirt and shawl—to the futuristic—Tuomas Toivonen's Mute Hood is devised from soundproofing panels. "I was really amazed at how widely the group understood the concept of fashion," says Mari Talka, the group's only trained fashion designer, who makes garments for international sports brands. "A garment could be a sock with a rubber sole or a pile scarf with animal features—a farting scarf!" To date Anteeksi members have produced two fashion shows, each featuring a collection of approximately 30 items, which highlighted their interest in handicraft as well as their penchant for performance. During the first show, in May 2003, the runway wound directly through the lofty Anteeksi office. Itching to one-up themselves, the designers hosted a second show a year later that wrapped the runway around the office's exterior along a six-story fire escape. "At first I had slight reservations about doing a fashion show with everybody. The lack of respect for the discipline was a bit frightening to a commercial and technical designer like myself," Talka says. "But after I realized the positive mood in doing this together and I saw some results, all of my doubts were gone."

Erika Kovanen in her stuffed-animal coat



Pocket Jackets by Johan Olin



Anteeksi used a fire escape (far right) in their building as a catwalk for their last fashion show. The group's designers (shown here) modeled their own creations.

