

The creator of our most beloved lantern hasn't seen a replacement since 1984.

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Now Ann Wolff wants to be paid for her 50th anniversary design classic, the Snowball, to establish an award to promote other female artists.

IN ARTIST Ann Wolff's garden, a few kilometers from the Visby ring wall, stands a modest carpentry building. The interior is light and airy and full of Wolff's work. A cast statue of a black jackdaw next to a glass block where the bird has left its imprint, as if frozen in the blue glass. Charcoal drawings resembling cephalopods with red embroidered cross-stitches. Bronze sculptures of the artist's own lower legs and feet, which she photographed in close-up for large posters.

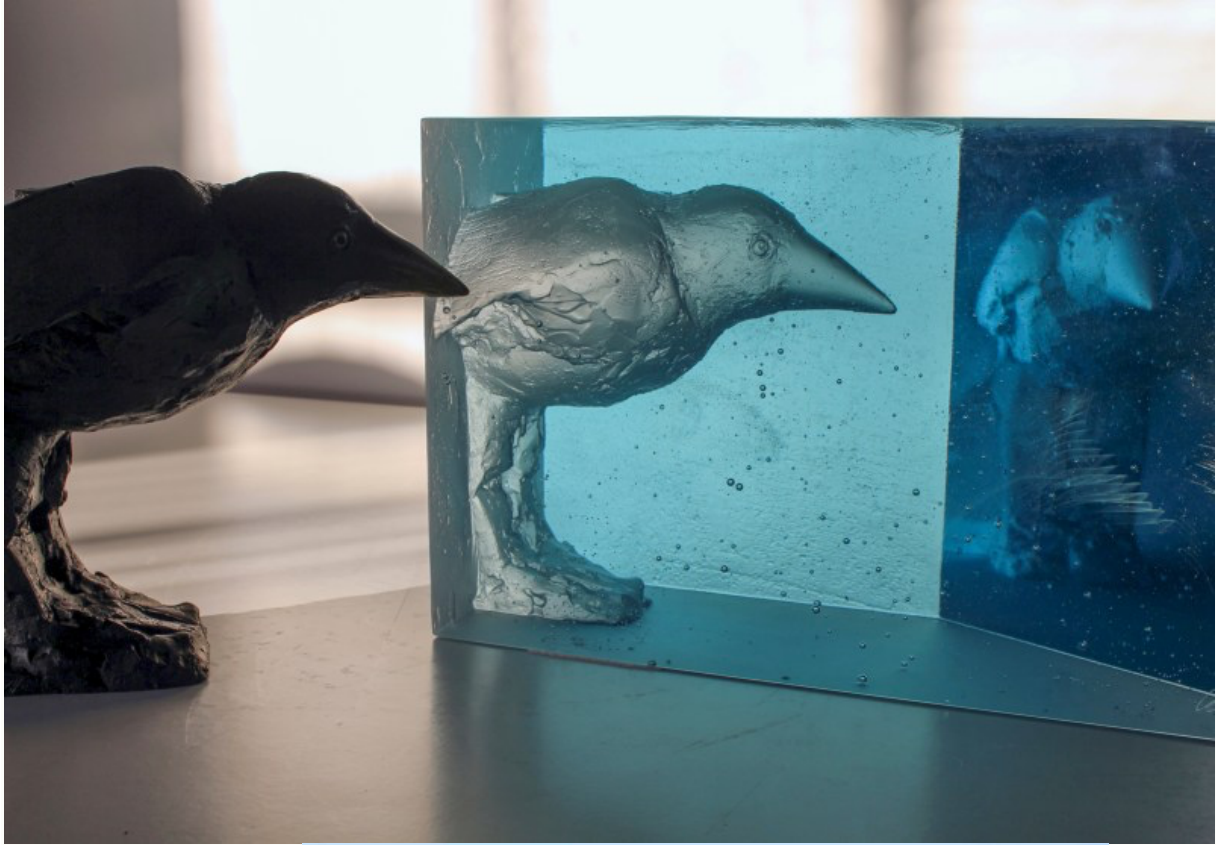


PHOTO: ANN WOLFF
PHOTO: ANN WOLFF

Ann Wolff pulls up her trouser leg to show the original.

- I couldn't see all these amazing structures on my legs until I made a cast of them. Do you see how beautiful they are? They look like mountains, or like I'm an old tree. It actually gave me a different view of aging, it's almost like a comfort - I belong to the landscape, I'm part of the universe.

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At 86, she has had some thoughts on the subject. She apologizes for her poor hearing and vision - "hell for a visual artist". Ann's husband Dirk Bimberg comes in from the garden, wearing head-to-toe jeans and a cap on his head. She introduces him as her 'fourteen assistants'.

- Twelve, Dirk laughs back as he picks up some packaging.

ANN WOLFF

BIRTH: 1937 in Lübeck

LIVES: A house in Visby and a summer house with a studio in Kyllaj on Gotland.

CAREER: Worked in the 1960s and 1970s at the glassworks in Småland. Then ran his own cabin and built his own art career. Is represented in museums around the world, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Hokkaido Museum of Modern Art in Sapporo. Won numerous awards, including Pro Europa for spreading the studio glass movement in Europe.

CURRENT: Her Snowball lantern is 50 years old.



Many of the works were shown in her first major Swedish solo exhibition at Waldemarsudde in 2022. Dagens Nyheter's reviewer Lotta Jonsson noted that it was strange that Wolff had never before been exhibited at this level in Sweden, when she had achieved great success abroad. Jonsson attempted an explanation: "Maybe it's because we here at home have found it difficult to capture her in one genre." Ann Wolff herself has another:

- It's that damn Snowball.

The damn Snowball is one of Sweden's most beloved utility objects and one of the glassworks Kosta Boda's biggest international sales successes ever. The sparkling lantern has sold more than 15 million copies, according to Kosta Boda's website, and is celebrating 50 years this year. For almost as many years, its creator Ann Wolff has tried to distance herself from it.

- It took away something that I had taken very seriously - art. I never got a gallery in Sweden, because they weren't interested in what I was doing, my art was never taken seriously after Snöbollen.



Recently, however, she has taken a different approach after reading an article in the magazine Konstnären about the new copyright law. Since

the turn of the year, authors may be entitled to retroactive compensation for works that have become best sellers. Ann immediately contacted the author of the article, Katarina Renman Claesson, federal lawyer at the Swedish Artists' Association (KRO), and a lawyer. She smiles broadly:

- Then I started the snowball fight.

THE ROAD TO THE GLASS KINGDOM was a winding one. She was born in Lübeck in 1937 as Anneliese Shaefer, the second child of two teachers, Bruno and Lore. A few years later, Bruno was drafted, and the little family spent many nights in the basement of the apartment building as the air raid siren sounded. Dad Bruno was hit by shrapnel in the lung and then went into hiding to avoid being called up again. The women in the apartment building worked together to keep the children clothed and fed.

Ann remembers the war, but most of all she remembers how strange everything was when it ended and her father came home. As a soldier and former leader of the Hitler Youth, he was not highly regarded by employers and had to return to his father's profession as a tailor. Together, the family cut open the seams of old uniforms and dyed the fabric so Bruno could make new, durable jackets to sell or trade for food. Together with Ann's older brother Dieter, he also made Casper dolls and put on plays for the neighborhood children. Ann wanted to join in, but was not allowed. She felt neither seen nor heard at home. The only person she got along with was her little sister Heike. When she announced as a teenager that she wanted to study medicine, her parents told her no - they couldn't afford two courses because Dieter was going to be an architect.

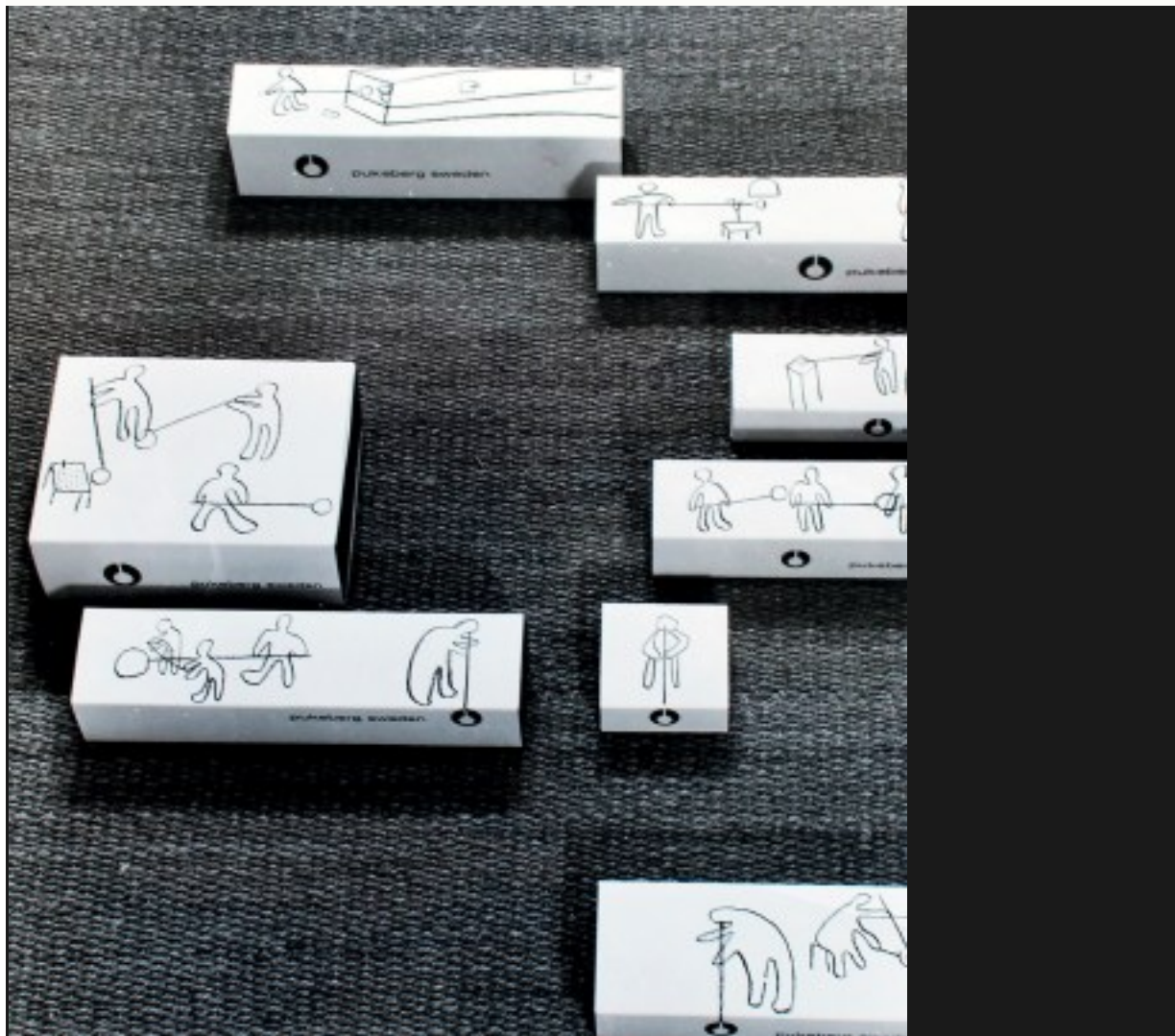
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Ann packed her bags and went to a fashion school in Hamburg and apprenticed to become a window dresser. After graduating, she took a job as an au pair in Sweden and then moved back to Hamburg, where she lived in a commune and did odd jobs.

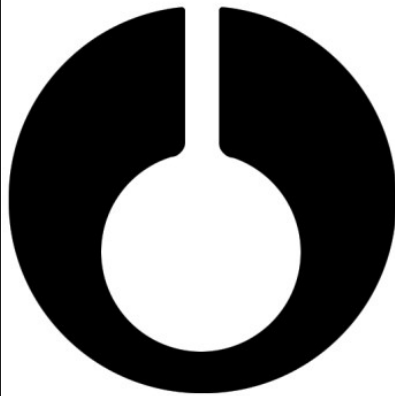
At the age of 19, she applied to the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm to study graphic design. Out of 104 accepted students, 8 were women, and Ann was one of them. The school instilled in its students the Bauhaus ethos, which was banned during the Nazi era - functionality and simplicity were the watchwords.

Both students and teachers lived at the school and constantly discussed the role of design and design in society. During her first year, Ann met a Swede, Göran Wärff, who was doing an exchange year in Ulm. They kept in touch, and a few years later he invited her to join him in Småland where he had started working at the Pukeberg glassworks. Ann, who already knew she liked Sweden, moved in with Göran, who soon became her husband.

ANN DESIGNED PUKEBERG'S logo and did packaging design. After the birth of their first child, she stayed at home, designing wooden toys and children's books. Together with Göran, she also started working with glass, without having an employment contract herself. After four years at Pukeberg, the couple was recruited to Kosta, again with Ann on Göran's contract.



Pukeberg's packaging design. PHOTO: AWFG



The Pukeberg logo.



Children's toys. PHOTO: AWFG

She spent her time etching and designing new techniques. Ann and Göran Wärff pushed Kosta in a new direction, away from clear and smooth fine glass to more rustic expressions. Their pressing technique, which also kept the price down, created more cloudy and misshapen plates and glasses. Despite initial resistance from colleagues, together they made a big name for themselves in the world of glass and won

great prizes. The fact that she was still something of an appendage to her husband began to grate on Ann.

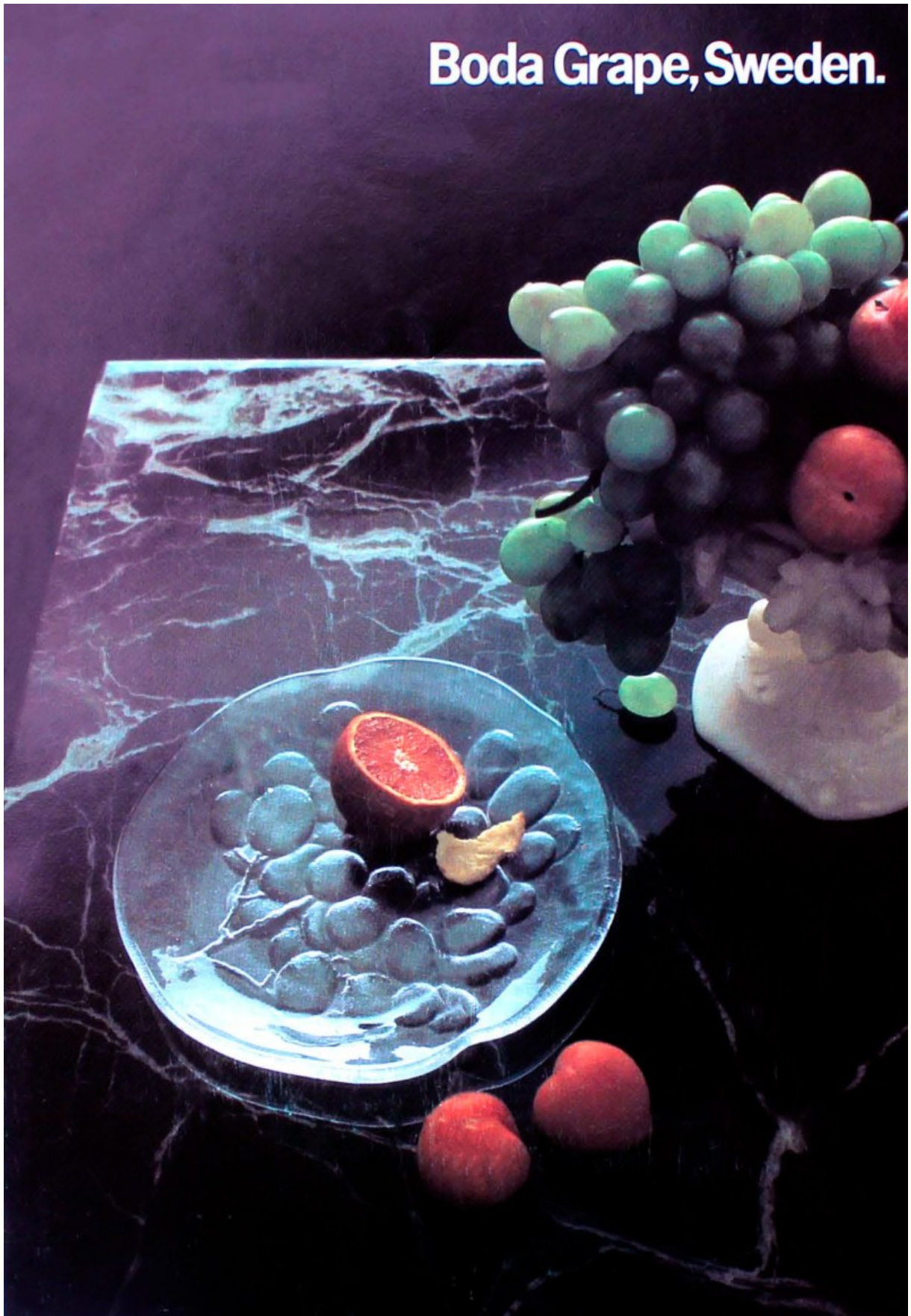


At Kosta. Ann Wolff, then surnamed Wårff, on the right. PHOTO: AWFG

- It was sometimes awful. I remember once when our mill owner Erik Rosén brought customers into our room when I was working: Here we have Göran Wårff's studio and his wife is sitting here painting small patterns. I wrote him a letter afterwards asking if he really meant what he said. So I was usually pissed off there.

In 1971 Ann and Göran divorced, and Ann finally got her own contract at Kosta. When her work was signed with only her name, it became clear that she was more than just someone's wife. Just one year later, one of her first bestsellers, the Druva plate series, was published. Interested in finding new textures on glass, Ann continued to experiment, including blowing glass into snowdrifts to see how the material reacted.

Boda Grape, Sweden.



The Druva range of plates PHOTO: AWFG

- It became a bit lumpy and a bit bubbly, with lots of blisters in it. So I wanted to exaggerate this and made a clay model that I pushed the raw stone into so that it became a snowy structure. It became some kind of lantern, and I thought: Okay, a lantern. A snowball.

She created a plaster model that was used to form an iron mold to cast the lantern. Twenty or so examples were shown to Kosta's sales team to test it on the market.

- And just like that! They could start selling it immediately.

Kosta was already in crisis, and Snöbollen became one of the products that kept the mill afloat. A carousel with 15-20 iron molds was installed, where Snöbollen could be efficiently produced. Ann's reputation rose considerably at the company, but she herself was hesitant.

- I found it strange that it was so terribly popular. As an artist, you almost think there must be something ... strange.

However, one positive consequence was that for the first time she earned a substantial amount of money from her work. For ten years she received a two percent commission, which gave her more freedom than before. She continued to develop her art and was recognized by the American studio glass movement. In the 1960s, teachers in US art schools had become interested in glass as a material, a tradition that was not really present in the country. They invented a small, inexpensive furnace that made it possible to melt glass in small huts, and then traveled to places like Murano, Italy, and the Glass Kingdom in Småland, Sweden, for inspiration. On one of these trips, Ann was invited to the United States, and in 1977 she went for the first time to the Pilchuck School outside Seattle, where they held courses and trainings.



PHOTO:
PRIVATE



Workshop "Goddesses". PHOTO: PRIVATE

- The students were really a bunch of hippies, with denim jackets embroidered with the fact that they were glassblowers. I had an absolutely fantastic time there.

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Ann was inspired - glass didn't just have to be utilitarian, it could be art. The following year, she resigned from Kosta, and with the help of the royalties from Snöbollen, she opened her own hut with master glassblower Wilke Adolfsson and her new husband, engineer Dirk Bimberg.



Ann Wärff and the "Dalom" glassware for Kosta Boda. PHOTO: AWFEG

DURING THE 1980S Ann WON German, Swiss and Czechoslovakian prizes. She had solo exhibitions in Kyoto, New York, Washington, Frankfurt and Annecy. In Sweden? Here she was commissioned by the Knivsta medical center and exhibited at Galleri Belle in Västerås.

- I could go to any gallery in Sweden and they'd just say: 'Oh, are you a glass artist?' Here it was just seen as servicing the mills, or working for tourists in some small hut.

She herself began to move away from the material - in the mid-1980s, she dropped the surname on which she had built her glass career and took her Nazi-hating grandmother's maiden name Wolff, as a tribute. In 1989, she gave a lecture at Konstfack in Stockholm in which she complained that as a glass artist she was not welcomed in the art world, and that consumers and producers only demanded "artistry instead of art". She officially renounced the label of glass artist.

Ann Wolff broke away from her family, friends and work and moved to Cologne. Inspired by a dance company, she drew expressive female bodies in charcoal. She painted watercolors and sculpted. In 1993, she was appointed professor of material-related design at the Hochschule für bildende Künste in Hamburg, where she taught for five years.

Together with her husband Dirk, she learned to cast sculptures and approached glass again, but now as heavy, multi-dimensional creations. It was a new beginning and she moved to Gotland, where she continued to create. She was represented at prestigious institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and the Hokkaido Museum of Modern Art in Sapporo, but it was not until 2022 that she had a proper solo exhibition in Sweden.



PHOTO:
PRIVATE



Ann with her daughter Pauline, 1971. PHOTO: PRIVATE

At Waldemarsudde, she chose to exhibit only works in different materials created after 1989, because "after breaking with ingrained

habits, she gained more self-confidence". Nevertheless, the museum was keen to sell the Snowball in its museum shop during the exhibition.

- And I said: Don't do it, it's completely uninteresting. But in the end I gave in.

At the opening, people came up mainly to talk about the Snowball. But Ann took their politeness more as an insult.

- I thought it was terrible that it overshadowed everything else I had done, almost.



In their studio in Kyllaj, Ann and Dirk have installed a large oven, where they can cast sculptures weighing up to 50 kilograms. However, most of the work in recent years has been cast by a man in the Czech Republic. "We have worked together so much that he is almost family."

THEN that issue of *Konstnären* dropped through the letterbox. Lawyer Katarina Renman Claesson wrote that authors could be entitled to compensation if the work became an unexpected bestseller if the "agreed compensation is disproportionately low in relation to the acquirer's income". Ann, who since 1984 has received nothing at all for at least 15 million lanterns sold, considered herself to be in that group.

Ann Wolff was not really interested in money for herself, but she has a foundation, the Ann Wolff Foundation Gotland, which could award an annual prize to young female artists. Given that Snöbollen was also celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, she thought it would be an excellent opportunity to announce the first winner during the summer. She wanted it to be big, on par with the Polar Prize, so she needed a proper launch pad. Something Orrefors Kosta Boda could provide - a one-off payment for all the royalties she had lost over 40 years.

Together with the foundation, she hired a lawyer. Orrefors Kosta Boda is now part of the New Wave Group, with around 40 companies, such as the sportswear company Craft, the workwear manufacturer Jobman and the shoe company Sköna Marie. According to the 2022 annual report, the group had a turnover of almost SEK 9 billion.

In the spring, Ann's lawyer communicated with the company's lawyer, who agreed to a price and was willing to negotiate both a lump sum and future compensation. However, the company had one demand: the snowball had to be made in more colors.

- I don't want that," says Ann Wolff. A snowball is not red or yellow or green. It never is.

To move forward, she thought she could contact the group's charismatic CEO, billionaire Torsten Jansson, who since New Wave's takeover of the glassworks lives in the old mansion in Kosta.

- I thought he seemed like a good person," says Ann. 'He had expressed that he had a great interest in art and culture.

She was referred to her daughter Isabella Jansson, who is Orrefors Kosta Boda's product manager, and CEO Ulf Kinneson. They traveled to Visby to continue the talks, and Ann describes the meeting as pleasant, but when she later heard their proposal, she froze. 400 000 SEK in a lump sum and 4 percent royalty on further sales. She was thinking more along the lines of 10 million, which would still be considerably less than if she had been awarded royalties for all the royalty-free years.

- *No peanuts*, she says. I will never settle for that.



From the exhibition at Waldermarsudde.

PHOTO: ANN WOLFF

Katarina Renman Claesson, a lawyer at the National Organization of ARTISTS, IS behind Ann in the process, as a sounding board and support for a member. For the association, it is also interesting to follow what happens when the stricter requirements for compensation to authors are put into practice, since the matter has never been tried.

- 'The rules are based on EU regulations,' says Renman Claesson. 'Simply because it has been seen that authors have poor conditions and remuneration. And generally speaking, I must say that designers in particular have almost incomprehensibly bad conditions. Their ability to negotiate their terms and conditions is particularly difficult as they risk the company turning to another designer if they get into trouble.

Nowadays, all communication between the parties takes place via the legal representatives. Orrefors Kosta Boda states that fifty years ago Ann Wolff signed an agreement to receive royalties for ten years and that in the early 2000s she signed a further agreement in which she refrained from making royalty claims in respect of earlier products. Ann says that it is nevertheless beyond doubt that what the company

has earned from the Snowball is not commensurate with what she has received.

- We have an open dialog with Ann and have great respect for her work in Kosta Boda - and in general, says Filip Trulsson, sales manager at Orrefors Kosta Boda.

On one of the walls of Ann Wolff's kitchen hangs a large painting from her time in Cologne. The charcoal drawing shows a woman stabbing an expressionless, solid figure in the chest.

- "We hung it just a few days ago," laughs Ann. 'Actually, it was supposed to go with a donation to a museum in Munich, but I felt I needed to hang it here for a while. It shows the impossibility of the situation. That guy doesn't want to care.



"For the last five years I have been embroidering my work. I started thinking about traditional female creativity: embroidery, crochet,

needlepoint... I simply wanted to honor the women of previous generations by incorporating the thread into my work."

There is no Snowball on the table, but she pulls out a three-pack of lanterns and opens the box.

- "I've actually embraced it a bit in the last year," she says. 'I realized that what's fascinating about it is the encounter between the warm candle flame and the cold snow. It's yin and yang.

She looks at the shiny surface.

- It's a bit strange that it started and ended with this one. It's quite interesting. Now I see that it can contribute to giving new generations of women the opportunity to work creatively. I'm not mad at the Snowball anymore.

It's unclear at the time of writing whether there will ever be a prize, but Ann Wolff hopes that just by taking up the fight, she can inspire designers and artists.

Even though it's autumn, it's warm enough to sit outside by the studio's sun wall. Dirk has made beetroot soup and cut up walnut bread. He says to his wife:

- I really don't know how you manage to do this. You're 86 years old.

Ann Wolff tightens up.

- It's something that has encouraged me actually. It's not just whining here. But now I feel that we are fighting for something that is good.