

HUNDRED+ HEROINES₊

Hundred Heroines

PRESS RELEASE

March 2026

Colour Me Modern: Claire Aho and the New Woman



Exhibition Dates:

7 March – 31 May 2026

Locations:

Hundred Heroines

Photo Museum

Thur to Sat 11:00 - 16:00

Unit 19 Nailsworth Mills

Avening Road, Nailsworth,

Stroud, Gloucestershire, GL6 0BS

The Art Garden

Mon - Sun 24 hours

Mortimer Gardens, 17 Fountain

Street, Nailsworth, Stroud,

Gloucestershire, GL6 0NP

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Press Material & Images:

[Press/Hundred Heroines](#)

Captions (left to right):

Claire Aho, *Valio's Penguins*, 1950 © JB, courtesy of Aho & Soldan Photo and Film Foundation ; and Claire Aho, *Marimekko Parasol. Model Carita Järvinen*, c.1965 © JB, courtesy of Aho & Soldan Photo and Film Foundation.

***Colour Me Modern: Claire Aho and the New Woman*, celebrates the vibrant photography of the pioneering Finnish artist, Claire Aho (1925-2015) who brought wit, colour and cinematic flair to postwar image-making across her work in fashion, advertising and editorial. Presented by Hundred Heroines, the UK's only museum dedicated to women in photography, this free exhibition, split over two sites, highlights how Aho, known as 'the Grand Old Lady of Finnish Photography,' helped shape a new visual language for Finland, presenting confident, contemporary women and transforming everyday scenes into carefully staged moments of style.**

Working at a time when colour photography was still fighting for critical recognition, Aho embraced it fully, producing images that captured the optimism and style of postwar Finland through her keen eye for composition, innovative use of colour techniques and surprisingly modern aesthetic. She understood colour as contemporary language.

Del Barrett, curator and Founder of Hundred Heroines, says of *Colour Me Modern: Claire Aho and the New Woman*, "There is so much bad news around at the moment, we wanted to show something cheerful. In the same way that Claire used colour and a modern style to project confidence and optimism about the future we hope this exhibition leaves visitors feeling uplifted, energised and more hopeful about what lies ahead."

Aho learned her trade from her father, Heikki Aho, who was a photographer and filmmaker himself. Following in his footsteps, she began her career as a documentary filmmaker but eventually started her own studio in the 1950s, which was a formative period in Finnish design. Her foray into colour photography followed her father's remarks about the poor quality of colour photographs in Finland; his views inspired her to develop techniques which produced beautifully saturated images.

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Aho's artistically arranged, witty photographs reflected the liveliness of Helsinki's cultural scene, capturing the imaginations of viewers and creating a demand for her work among leading commercial publications and brands. In her native Finland, she became one of the most prominent photographers of her time. Her hometown for much of her life, Helsinki features frequently in her work; in 1957 she produced *Helsinki, Itämeren tytär* (Daughter of the Baltic Sea), the first colour photobook post World War II to document the lives of the city folk. These images have also been displayed at an exhibition shown in New York, Geneva, Nairobi and Helsinki, organised by the United Nations to celebrate the centenary of Finnish independence in 2017.

Aho was the only woman to film the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki. As wartime restrictions eased, photographic materials became more available, meaning she was able to work with colour. Her films and photographs did justice to the flags of the world, including Finland's newly official blue-and-white cross. The Olympic games acted not only as a celebration of Finland, but of the end of war and a brighter future. Aho captured that celebration in all its colours, establishing her career as a commercial photographer.

It was this work at the 1952 Helsinki Olympics that led to her being hired as a photojournalist by Pathé News, New York - as the only woman among 400 men to report from Finland. Alongside documentary and fashion photography, Aho worked as a filmmaker, producing the film *Suomi - värien maa* (Finland - the Country of Colours) in 1951 as well as *Laulu meren kaupungista* (The Song of the City of the Sea) in 1950 with her father to mark the 400th anniversary of the establishment of Helsinki.

Aho's work in advertising reflected and played a key part in the excitement and commercial success that was felt with new cutting edge products appearing on the market in 1950s Finland following the gloom of the war and immediate post war years. With the end of wartime rationing there was every reason to promote brands of food and drink, such as Fazer, Jaffa and Paulig. Aho brought her sense of fun into these images: in an advert for Fazer confectionery, she used invisible thread to levitate the sweets. Ornamental penguins stand in the midst of glacier-like cakes at a Valio ice-cream parlour.

She worked with many female models, particularly in fashion shoots for magazines such as *Eeva* and *Me Naiset* ('We Women'), as well as the Cotton Rhapsody Catalogue she created together with set and costume designer, artist Anneli Qveflander and glass artist, designer Timo Sarpaneva in her studio in 1958. In addition to photographic materials, the availability of fabric increased. This meant that many Finnish artists were employed to design patterns that had previously been imported. In this regard, Aho's commercial photographs can be viewed as celebrations of authentic Finnish fashion.



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In the 1970s Aho moved to Sweden, where she lived and worked until her death. Her broad body of work has been exhibited around the world, including at The Photographers' Gallery, London; United Nations; Liljevalchs Art Hall, Stockholm; Photo London; and Paris Photo. In December 2015 she was awarded posthumously the prestigious order of the Knight of the White Rose of Finland in recognition of her work. The Claire Aho Award for Women Photographers was created in Aho's memory by the World Food Photography Awards sponsored by Tenderstem® Bimi® Broccolini, the greatest global celebration of food photography. This Award aims to inspire and encourage women photographers and has received over 3,000 entries from nearly 50 countries since its inception in 2021.

From fashion editorials and advertising campaigns to portraits and documentary studies, Aho's work reflects a society in transition. Her photographs move between the commercial and the everyday realities of women's lives, revealing how identity was being reshaped in the 1950s and 60s. *Colour Me Modern* situates Aho within a broader international story of women photographers who shaped visual culture yet were often overlooked in its telling, something Hundred Heroines is committed to in its ongoing work promoting women in photography.

For further information, images and interview requests please contact Sam Trenerry:

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About Hundred Heroines

Hundred Heroines (HH) is the only UK charity dedicated to advancing public awareness of women in photography. Leading women photographers (the 'Heroines') challenge how we see the world, push artistic and social boundaries and highlight issues of inequality. We provide an accessible, varied programme of creative, social and educational activities as well as opportunities, which are particularly empowering for young women.

hundredheroines.org | [Facebook](#) | [X \(formerly known as Twitter\)](#) | [Instagram](#)

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Press Images



Claire Aho, Surprise! Pirkko Mannola, Miss Finland 1958
© JB, courtesy of Aho & Soldan Photo and Film Foundation



Claire Aho, Marimekko Parasol. Model Carita Järvinen, c.1965
© JB, courtesy of Aho & Soldan Photo and Film Foundation



Claire Aho, Penguins, 1950s
© JB, courtesy of Aho & Soldan Photo and Film Foundation



Claire Aho, Fazer's Finlandia Sweets, 1952
© JB, courtesy of Aho & Soldan Photo and Film Foundation

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Claire Aho, Cotton Rhapsody. Model Elina Salo, 1958 © JB, courtesy of Aho & Soldan Photo and Film Foundation



Claire Aho, Model Carita Järvinen, 1959 © JB, courtesy of Aho & Soldan Photo and Film Foundation



Claire Aho, The Pension Reform, 1961 © JB, courtesy of Aho & Soldan Photo and Film Foundation



Photo of Claire Aho in Stockholm 2010 © Petri Mulari