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The Fire Fox Snow Sculpture



1. The Fire Fox Snow Sculpture.

Photo: Mariana Docekalova and Katerina Spanhelova

When we came to Finland one of the biggest wishes were to try an ice or snow sculpture. As we've heard from girls from last year, such an experience is really worth it. And it could be our first and last time in our life we could try such sculpting.

First meeting about Ice sculpture – Fire fox was 14th of February. We met Maria Huhmarniemi from department of Art education and she introduced us to the Fire fox project. Why Fire fox? There is a Finnish Sami legend about a Fire fox that creates the polar lights with her tail while running across the sky. There are still some

more Sami stories connected to the Fire fox and polar lights. One of the most important motives of this project was to find relationship between Finnish and Sami people, because it is still not easy. The communication is opening through the Sami / Finnish school in Utsjoki, the furthestmost Lapland's pure Sami town. This happening was already taking place last year and for a big success and interest of local people of every age it repeated this year with a financial support of EU. The theme for this year was light and dark / day and night.

The project had four parts: build big snow sculpture of fire fox, work on snow and ice sculpture with children, prepare shadow theater with children and work with old local people on textile project. Our team under leadership of Maria contented of ten exchange student participants of University of Lapland. Our plan was to build big fox in two days so that we have time to try to work on our own ice sculpture.

We were asked to find some more stories of Sami mythology about Sun and Moon so that we have common themes for working on our ice sculptures with kids when we finish the fox. The other part of our group was asked to make some models of a fox,

according to which we can work afterwards. Maria also showed us pictures from last year event, so that we could imagine, how our work might look like.

There were similar actions happening already and they were not merely educationally based. Snow sculpting as a domain of Northern part of Finland and its usually great celebration of otherwise gloomy winter. The real boom of such sculpting in Finland started in 90s and there is still a great interest in such happenings. For example last year there was a big Snow show in Rovaniemi with participation of artists and architects from all around the world. Such events are very interesting for media, and for regions or cities where it takes place it's very important and helpful to be seen.



2. Planning meeting.

Photo: Mariana and Katerina

At the second meeting after one week, we gathered around the models and we decided, which is most likely looking as a fox. Our group couldn't find any Sami stories in English about Sun and Moon, so Maria gave us some interesting copies she found. Our trip started on Sunday 27th of February early morning we get on the bus to Utsjoki with one stop in Ivalo. The landscape was changing, we could see some wild reindeers in forests and a wonderful sunset at the end of the journey. We were accommodated in "Jesus' house", as we called it later. Right away we went to see schoolyards, meet another working groups consisting also of Finnish students and headmaster of local school and Minna Saastamoinen who is an art teacher and artist. We spent a really long time outside around the school choosing the right place for our sculpture, and it got quite cold. We wanted to place the fox in front of the main entrance to school, but there were other opinions that wanted to squeeze our huge idea into a small space. Luckily, we won. But when we were choosing the place we were thinking only in an esthetical way and not in terms of right conditions that could be hence affecting the life of our sculpture (such as wind, sunshine, enough of manipulation space in front of school for cars etc.)

That evening back "home" we were planning proportion sizes of the snow boxes, how we will make the fox high, wide, long, i.e. how the boxes should be built. We picked up a model made by Diederik, Belgium guy (second from left), of a kind of Cubistic shape. Finally we decided to make body boxes app. 2.4m wide, 3.5m high, 4.8m long and tail app. 8m long. These proportions were to going to make us some troubles...

Monday. Sun rising and nice chilly feeling on our cheeks when we left worm house. No wonder, working conditions were in -26°C . We thought that those who had really winter shoes were in advantage, but it was not finally so. We were all cold.

We started with bringing material and tools, for boxes and started to put them together. We used beams for fasten pieces of desks. These bigger molds we put together and made cube. We had to nail it and reinforce it with laths. Then we started to fill the box with snow with help of a tractor. Usually is normal to fill snow in 20cm layers and better is to leave snow harden overnight. Other part of work was to make the snow inside firm. We always must get into the box and step on the snow and then jump out again when new snow was coming. When first cube was

ready, there was built another half size cube on a top of it and filled it with snow. It was quite exiting to put down the desks and to uncover the snow cube. Then we built the third box only with three desks, right next to the first cube and so used one side of that cube. We supported and tighten this on by beams and by belt around the whole thing. We filled it up by snow, opened it again and that was our work for Monday.



3. The result of the first day.

Photo: Heidi Koljonen.

During the day after lunch we were invited to opening Fire Fox ceremony at school. Every participant or group introduced themselves, pupils played a part from

Kalevala story. All tried to speak in Finnish and then Sami language.

In the evening Mirja took us to a close kaami cottage. Inside we made fire and spend there nice and interesting evening. Owner came to open the place for us and he put the light on and told us about fireplace and how the locals used this cottage and how they use the fireplace in a traditional way. It was our first time that we were sitting on the reindeer furs, it's really warm. Because otherwise it was still very cold inside, because the warmth of fire did not spread, the stones of the fireplace were cold even when we left.



4. Drawing with a coal.

Photo: Heidi Koljonen.

Tuesday. We started to work around nine o'clock and we felt very tired. Our group divided into two parts. One part started to draw fire fox on a snow with a coal and discussed it and following group continued building boxes for tail.



5. Building the tail.

Photo: Heidi Koljonen

The tail was supposed to have shape of a stage, so that a shadow theater could take part on it. We were on first group and it was one of the hardest part of work. Finding and fitting propositions of the image of sketches onto those huge 3D cubes was pretty tough. We were nervous about every piece of snow we took off at the beginning, so we were scared of correctness of the lines. Every participant of our group was finding the best working tool for himself: shovels, saws, chopping knives, chisels files, etc. We worked slowly this day. A part of the group climbed on to fox head and built ears. Our

small group then divided so that some worked on head, some on ears and others on legs. To work on higher level we used ladder. It was also very important to shovel the fallen snow away, so that it did not accumulate on the ground and statue was reachable easily.



6. Mariana and Katerina getting to sculpt.
Photo: Mirja Hiltunen



7. Claire using a shovel.
Photo: Heidi Koljonen

At the end of the day, we were not quite satisfied with our result of work as it

reminded us of a huge squirrel with "karhu" head. We were not nervous yet, there were still two days to come. But we could already see that there was something wrong with the proportions of the fox, specially the front side. And ears were in a wrong direction and nose was strange. Our hand muscles were really tired that evening. What about tomorrow?

At the evening we attended virtual lecture from Rovaniemi University made by Timo Jokela about snow sculpture. He showed us pictures from different snow and ice show events from around the world and some of his very interesting works from Norway and Finland. There is an interesting thing about his work, which is similar to our project and that is that he cooperates with local people.

During Wednesday we continued working on the fox and tried to get it her to a better shape. The snow was different this day and so was the work - the snow was acting almost like an ice, it was more fragile and bigger pieces were braking off the body and we couldn't influence it very much. But as you can see, the result was still not satisfying, yet we started to be nervous. It looked like a Koons' Puppy: round big head on a big body without a neck. And some

participants already started to polish this as a final shape!



8. Katerina sculpting.

Photo: Heidi Koljonen

After dinner we came back to schoolyard and some of us tried to work with ice. Maria showed us different tools and how to use them on ice sculpture. It was different kind of work, easier. We could use chain saw, small chisels, iron and gas flame. The work with ice is totally different from the snow and one has to think individually now and in a different way: the result looks different thanks to transparency of material. Later on we attended lecture about stars and fire fox

star. But we were not lucky about the clear sky, so we had lecture inside.

Thursday. We imprinted the last image with chisels files of fox and we decided to return to original idea about shape. Maria took chainsaw and cut off big pieces and we left the edges after the saw so it had more angular and not round shape. We were all working on the body this day, the tail was finished. There were some interesting details as the bends of the tail were connected with ice cubes. Kids already loved the tail and drove guys nuts when they were sliding on it.



9. Polishing the surface.

Photo: Mirja Hiltunen

We were introduced to some different tools that day that were used for "polishing" the surface of the fox. We also undercut one ear and turned in a direction of a head. We

worked quite fast and we finished the fox. It did not look like we planned, but we could say that we were satisfied with the result.

During the days we were working on the fox, the other student's group were working with children to build their snow cubes for snow sculpture and ice sculpture and they were preparing shadow theater with them. One of the girls was working at the pensioner house with textiles. Their motive this year was the sun and when they first saw it, each person created her/his own ribbon sun with the date.



10. Fire Fox and sculptures by children.

Photo: Mirja Hiltunen

In the evening started big Fire Fox festival, for which we were building the snow fox. We think we were successful as we saw the reaction of coming people. It was a big event in the region, whole town come to see the show. There were a lot of children running

around. It started with speeches, then they announced the result of snow sculpture competition. The sculptures were around the schoolyard, gathered in groups or individually. Visitors could walk around freely and see them. Following program was the color shadow theater with story line that the students invented. The peak of the evening was fire works show and concert of local Sami family music group. They played traditional Sami music in a modern rhythm. That last special evening the Fire fox said good bye to us with a huge polar light. On the way back we stopped in Inari to see the Siida museum. And this visit opened more our minds about Sami people, the culture and history. We met few Sami people in Utsjoki while working on the snow Fox, there were local men helping us in a technical manner, some school girls were helping boys on the tail, one snow sculpture was created by two Sami participants, there were a lot of people coming by on their way around the school and sometimes they interviewed us. They were interested where we came from, if we experienced such kind of snow work before and asked how we liked Lapland. Once pupils during their English language class also interviewed us. One thing that Sami people still use up to nowadays are some parts of their traditional

clothes. We really liked their reindeer shoes and reindeer hats with those feltz ribbons of Sami flag's colors. Otherwise we did not have much opportunity to meet the locals; honestly, we were much occupied with work and tired.



11. The tail in use.

Photo: Mirja Hiltunen



12. The shadow puppet play.

Photo: Mirja Hiltunen

Anyway, for both sides was this event great experience, we learned things that we can use in the future in our art (education)

projects, we experienced how to work in team and how to change ideas into reality. Unfortunately, we finally did not work with children, but it was because we had to finish our mission first, it would be even difficult - it was our first experience with snow sculpture and we had to try everything before we teach someone else. And the sculpture was too huge for kids as well. We also think that ten people working on a fox was the very highest number, that eight would be sufficient, especially at last days. But there can be a challenge of opinions even in three people.

We would like to thank you very much for giving us the possibility to come to Utsjoki and try to experience the snow sculpture, meet the real Sami people and participate on this special Fire fox event.

The participant of the Fire Fox Snow Sculpting workshop:

Mariana Docekalova, Katerina Spanhelova, Claire Grandferry, Fiona Campbell, Laura Simms, Agnes Borbely, Syoen Diederik, Tom Van Overloop, Geert Schoenmakers, Blair Ciemiecki.