

Educative Ice Sculpture

Report on Ice Sculpture Workshop in Lainio Snow Village from 20th to 23rd of January 2005



1. Ice orange slice.

Photo: Timo Jokela

Before coming to Lapland, I always considered winter as the worst season of the year. Perhaps this feeling is due to the fact that I live in a city that is not well organized to make you realize the positive sides of winter. What is sure however, is that winter art helped me to reconcile with the cold and

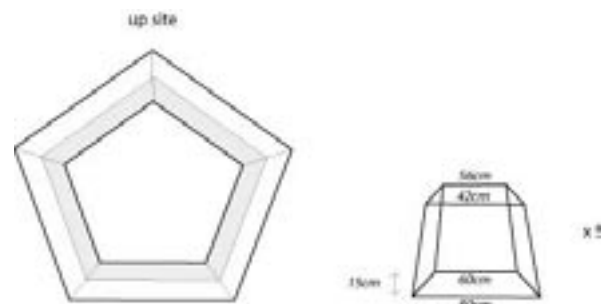
the materials it brings at hand, i.e. snow and ice. This work is thus the report of my experience with the Snow and ice Sculpture Workshop that took place in Lainio Snow village (Ylläs, Finland) from the 20th to 23rd of January 2005.

For people who have never experienced winter before, it is difficult to have a clear idea of what this phenomenon is all about. On the other hand, winter art can help those people (and even those who are already initiated) to grasp how the cold season is seen and understood in a given culture (Jokela *in* Huhmarniemi, Jokela & Vuorjoki, 2003a: 9). In fact, this is a way to express your feelings about this time of the year. In our case, this was the starting point of our ice sculpture project. Often, in environmental art, it is the surroundings that inspire the artwork. In other words, you find the site where the artistic production will take place and then, you nourish yourself from this very place to find ideas (Hiltunen *in* Huhmarniemi et al., 2003a: 45). It was very different this time since we found the theme of our sculpture without having been exposed to the actual site of construction in Lainio Snow Village. Of course, there were some photographs presented, but the main ideas came from our deep feelings about

winter. We wanted to use the opposite characteristics of winter as the underlying inspiration. For example, winter is usually depicted as cold, dark and dead (Ylimartimo *in* Huhmarniemi et al., 2003a: 21). So, we wanted to play on those features and present their antagonism, i.e. warm, light and alive. We thus thought of a cocktail glass.

Perhaps, the latter brings together the idea of beach and therefore of sun and party. The outline was there, but then we needed to find out how to accomplish it. This was a little bit more difficult. At first, we built a scale model out of play dough of a cocktail glass that was close to what the latter is in reality, that is to say, with round and organic shapes. At that point, we had not thought yet about the feasibility of this project, but only of the elements that would be part of the artwork. We wanted to have ice cubes, an orange slice, cherries and a small cocktail umbrella. Then, at that precise moment, we understood all the importance of a scale model. Actually, when making a scale model, you become aware of the effects of the removing of the material and of the techniques that must be used to do so and assemble the different parts of the construction (Huhmarniemi, Jokela & Vuorjoki, 2003b: 33). Of course, when ice is gone, you

cannot put it back except if you use water and/or snow, and this will show in the final work.



2. Second scale model in progress.

Photo: Romain Camenen

A second model was therefore created so that we could become aware of the construction process. Also, this time, we

took into account the interplay of light and shadows that would hopefully give color and relief to our ice sculpture (Lillberg, in Huhmarniemi et al., 2003a: 41). This was best achieved using more geometrical shapes with sharp angles.



3. Transparency of the work.

Photo: Romain Camenen

Another way to color the ice was to play with transparency and opacity. As a matter of fact, it is possible to polish the ice with water, gas flame or iron (Huhmarniemi et al., 2003b: 51). In our case, we used an iron to make the ice crystal clear for the ice glass and put slush on the ice cubes so that they had a matt finish. Then, we had to decide whether we wanted to have the seams to be obviously or not. In effect, those latter can be part of the design because they accentuate the different shapes and give rhythm to a sculpture (Huhmarniemi et al., 2003b: 49).

We wanted to keep the transparency of the glass as much as possible, so we tried to assemble the different parts of the glass pouring only water in the gaps separating the pieces.

It held together, but because ice sculptures can be used (by children especially, who could climb on them), we had to take this fact into account in the building of the artwork to ensure an optimal safety (Huhmarniemi *in* Huhmarniemi et al., 2003a: 91). Therefore, gaps were filled with a mixture of snow and water in order to solidify the structure. But let us discuss in more details the actual construction of the sculpture.

When sculpting ice, you become aware of the necessity to work with partners. Working as a group, you can create artworks that are quite big (Huhmarniemi *in* Huhmarniemi et al., 2003a: 93). This would not be possible when working alone as snow and ice are both very heavy and you have to lift the blocks with help. This is a whole sensory activity since you become conscious of the properties of the material (Jokela *in* Huhmarniemi et al., 2003a: 53).

Transparency is usually also another characteristic feature of ice, but it is also

useful to know that ice must be taken from natural waters to have this property (Huhmarniemi et al., 2003b: 45). So, the ice blocks we worked with were taken from the river with heavy duty equipment. Because of the impurities that naturally collect on top of the ice blocks, there was a layer of yellowish and opaque ice that we had to get rid of (Huhmarniemi et al., 2003b: 47).



4. Tomi from the Snowvillage helped to cut the ice and used the biggest saw.

Photo: Romain Camenen

Since we wanted very flat surfaces for the cocktail glass, we used a chain saw to remove the crappy layer of ice. In fact, we used this tool quite a lot to cut out the different shapes needed for our work. But it is, of course, also possible to carve small details with a woodcarving chisel whose handle is bent at a seven degree handle (Huhmarniemi et al., 2003b: 51). Our work

was more sketchy and geometrical because of the use of big tools, but that was the aesthetic we were looking for.

We wanted to keep a certain roughness to our work to open up the imagination of the viewer. It is interesting to note that there are basically two general criteria and categories of sculptures in winter art events and these are the decorativeness & technical skills, and the formalistic language of shape, which our sculpture was mostly part of (Jokela *in* Huhmarniemi et al., 2003a: 51). There are so many possibilities offered to the sculptor that he must make some choices. Those latter make the complexity of snow and ice sculpture very interesting.

The workshop that took place in Lainio Snow Village was very enriching since Finnish and exchange students had to participate in the project, thus presenting very different styles of sculpture. Of course, in international winter art events, it is possible to learn about diverse sculpture schools and cultural differences in that matter (Lillberg *in* Huhmarniemi et al., 2003a: 43). It is interesting to notice that the groups were intuitively formed according to the language spoken. This fact emphasizes the collaborative side of ice sculpture since it

is easier to communicate in an effective way in our mother tongue. The sculpting process is therefore facilitated.



5. Successful collaboration in French-speaking group.

Photo: Timo Jokela

It is also worth saying that the artist needs to be able and at ease to work in a public space. In effect, because of that, a close relationship is established between the sculptors and the viewer who witnesses the creative process (Lillberg *in* huhmarniemi et al., 2003a: 41). This was the case in Lainio Snow Village where tourists were visiting the snow and ice installations while we were working. This

probably helped the visitors to grasp a little understanding of how the sculptures are made and their curiosity rewarded and encouraged us.

It is difficult to think of a better way that people can get in touch with their environment than by working with it as a material. Doing so, you get conscious of your surroundings and of the emotions it brings to you (Huhmarniemi et al., 2003b: 11). Personally, I got conscious of the flexibility of the material, but also of a certain relaxation or even trance state that you fall in when working with ice, even if it is a very exhausting labor. The workshop permitted me to make peace with winter. Furthermore, because ice is a smooth and hard substance that evokes diverse feelings linked to its season, it makes you aware both of the characteristics of winter and of its antagonism, summer (Ylimartimo *in* Huhmarniemi et al., 2003a: 23). Winter art, as environmental art must also be contextual and take into account the site it is built on and the community that will have to share its daily life with it (Jokela *in* Huhmarniemi et al., 2003a: 51). In our case, this fact lost most of its meaning since the sculptures were meant to be installed in an ice art gallery.



6. The work in the gallery space.

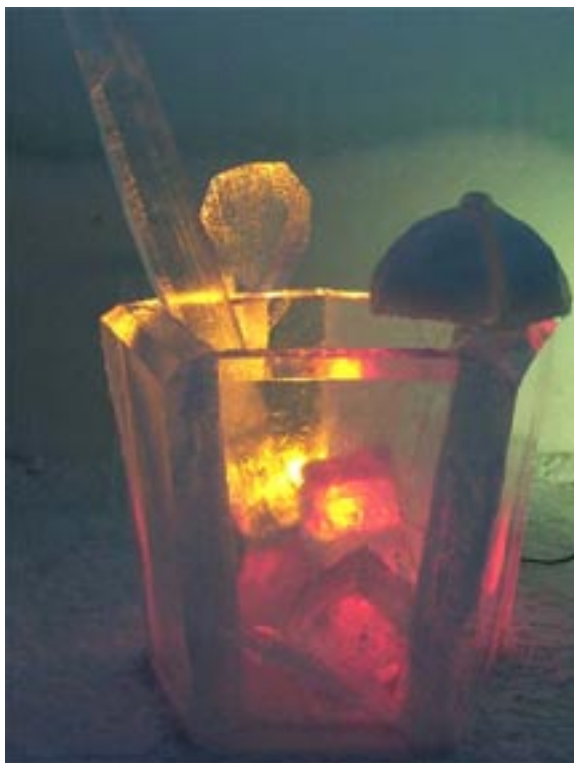
Photo: Timo Jokela

Usually, in the latter space, many different things can cohabit without major problems as long as there exists at least one link between the artworks displayed. As Timo Jokela discussed in his article *Environmental Art in Winter* (2003a), one of the possible effects of winter art would be to ease the recognition of values attached to their own environment and community (55). As a matter of fact, because I come from a place that has a winter similar to Lapland's (Québec), it is easy for me to agree to the fact that "the environmental art approach makes winter, snow and ice a permanent part

of the winter city mentality and increases the enjoyment of residents of cities and towns" (Jokela *in* Huhmarniemi et al., 2003a: 55). This is indeed a thing of importance to consider since most of the people are concentrated in the cities. As a future art educator. It is doubly more important because winter art is a very powerful tool to inculcate positive winter values to pupils.

Winter art can usually serve many purposes. For the project in Lainio Snow Village, the main goal was to get acquainted with snow and ice sculpture and get used with the skills to achieve it. But in other contexts, as in elementary schools, those goals can go from enhancing the school yard to integrate different subjects or simply to organize a field trip (Huhmarniemi *in* Huhmarniemi et al., 2003a: 89). Snow and Ice sculpture brings together many different aspects and needs different skills. But above all, as I already stated previously, it is a collaborative activity. Stating this, if one is able to get people interested in winter art, it is a great opportunity to reinforce solidarity between individuals and groups, and even to encourage the development of communities (Lehtiniemi *in* Huhmarniemi et al., 2003a: 85). The workshop fell right on time to integrate some of the new exchange students

to the old crew, and even to Finnish community. It permitted to get people actively participating in the creation and formation of their community. And if we have a look at a deeper effect, snow and ice sculpting projects facilitate the elaboration of active citizenship and can create social impacts (Huhmarniemi *in* Huhmarniemi et al., 2003a: 95). In fact, one feels that he/she has a role to play in its community and feels involved toward it. For us, we had promised to make ice sculptures to be place in the ice art gallery before we leave and we had to respect the expectations we had created.



7. Finished Sculpture with lighting.

Photo: Caroline Beauregard

Snow and Ice Sculpture might be something that people think of as difficult and accessible only to snow and ice artists. I thought so, before participating in the workshop. Now, I understand that it is indeed difficult work, but that it is not impossible to achieve and the results, of course, are extremely rewarding. Our team struggled a little bit with certain aspects of the construction, but at the end, we were very pleased with the results. Finally, it is worth saying that snow and ice sculpture is an activity with multiple advantages in terms of education. It could either serve to bring people together or to reduce the gap that might exist between one community and its environment, and these are just examples. If those educational aspects would be more valued in the school and societal systems, maybe winter would not be seen as a negative thing. Let us hope that a majority of educators will value snow and ice sculpture to its just value in the future.

Litterature:

Huhmarniemi, M., Jokela, T., & Vuorjoki, S. (Eds.). (2003a). *Winter Art. Statements on Winter Culture, Winter Art and Snow Construction*. Rovaniemi: Lapin yliopiston taiteiden tiedekunnan julkaisu D 6.

Huhmarniemi, M., Jokela, T., & Vuorjoki, S. (Eds.). (2003b). *Winter Skills. A Guidebook for Snow and IceSculpting*. Rovaniemi: Lapin yliopiston taiteiden tiedekunnan julkaisu D 7.