



Art + Architecture

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White Wedding

A unique event in Finnish Lapland, planned for the winter of 2004, seeks to marry the disciplines of art and architecture in the form of works in ice and snow. **Abigail Grater** explains the motivations of the 'Snow Show' and reviews two of the featured structures previewing this year.

With the conceptualisation of architecture, and increasing dominance in the art world of installations and abstract sculptures that tackle spatial issues, the gap between architecture and art is narrowing. But is it possible for artists and architects to work together on an equal footing? And, faced with unfamiliar materials and environments, do these two types of creative mind remain distinct, or can the disciplinary boundaries fall away altogether?

An extraordinary event unfolding in Finnish Lapland sets out to tackle these questions in what promises to be an unforgettable display of structures in ice and snow. The 'Snow Show' will present 30 large-scale works created by carefully selected artist-architect pairings from around the world, taking a fresh view of the cross-disciplinary collaborative process by forcing participants to work in entirely foreign, and utterly ephemeral, materials. The list of participants incorporates representatives from 27 countries across five continents, and includes names such as Tadao Ando, Future Systems, Zaha Hadid, Greg Lynn, Anish Kapoor, Sol Lewitt, Yoko Ono and Rachel Whiteread. Unlike most previous snow and ice buildings, which have tended towards the kitsch, these works are being created with serious cultural investigation in mind – although not without an equal sense of magic.

New York-based independent curator Lance Fung first conceived the idea for the 'Snow Show' some two years ago. Seeking to encourage cultural development in an area hit by recession, he initially planned simply to invite young local artists to produce site-specific works for Kemi SnowCastle – one of the region's key tourist attractions for the past eight years. From

these humble beginnings the idea quickly grew into a project with an international focus that examines connections between art and architecture at the same time as fostering links with the local community and attracting an entirely new kind of visitor to Lapland.

Alongside the creation of the structures themselves will be an international student design competition; a series of seminars, lectures and workshops; and a touring exhibition being launched at the Venice Biennale in June 2003 with multimedia presentations of the structures and documentation of the collaborative processes by which they have been conceived. Although the 'Snow Show' itself will not take place until March 2004, two structures have been prepared in advance this year, to test the process and to whet the appetite of potential visitors.

A stone's throw from the Arctic Circle, the city of Rovaniemi, redeveloped by Alvar Aalto after its destruction in 1944, is to be the location for half of the works. This year it hosts *Oblong Voidspace*, created by the all-American team of Steven Holl and Jene Highstein. Describing the development of the piece, Highstein recounts how as a sculptor his priority was to focus on form-finding, whilst architect Holl was keen to devise an overall concept and to address practicalities concerning access and materials. The two came together by using the vessel as a conceptual form on which to base their work. The resulting piece is a nine-metre-high all-ice structure with an almost cubic

Opposite
Asymptote Architects and Osmo Rauhala,
Absolute Zero: A Light House of Temporality, Kemi, Finnish Lapland.



exterior that encloses a cylindrical space – a negative vessel form – accessed by an interior stairway. Highstein explains: 'In a sense it is the absence of a sculpture, the outside being more architectural and the inside being more experiential. Like a ceremonial space, the interior focuses attention on the convergence of body and mind.'

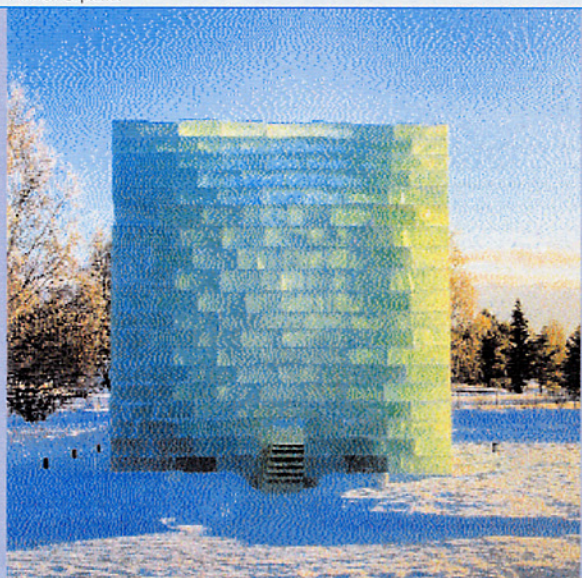
The work does indeed provoke an attitude of contemplation – not only through its serene form and strange acoustic qualities, but also through the surprisingly varied nature of the ice blocks from which it is constructed. Cut from the frozen surface of the nearby Salmijärvi lake, the blocks have a crystalline and almost otherworldly green tinge to them, and the random patterning of veins and bubbles within them varies their transparency to create an ever-changing spectacle of light, shade and colour.

Throughout the design process the eventual deterioration of the building material has intrigued Holl. With no initial briefing into the fundamental characteristics of ice and snow or the building methods that might be used, the 'Snow Show' participants have experienced a steep learning curve as a gradual dialogue with the specialist builders has overthrown many of their assumptions about the materials. Holl and Highstein had envisaged water running off their structure as it melted, and intended to install channels and pools into which to direct this, but abandoned these plans when they learnt that the ice would simply evaporate. Holl maintains a hope that the south wall of the piece, which overlooks the now frozen river outside Rovaniemi, will deteriorate more quickly than the rest, to reveal a view towards the city.

Kemi, a small papermaking town on the northernmost point of Finland's Baltic coast where the other half of the works will be located, provides the site for *Absolute Zero: A Light House of Temporality*, the creation of Lise-Anne Couture and Hani Rashid of New York-based firm Asymptote Architecture, and Finnish artist Osmo Rauhala. Another well-chosen collaboration, the three have become firm friends and found common areas of creative inspiration, all sharing a fascination

Below left
Computer-generated rendering of Osmo Rauhala's video installation in *Absolute Zero: A Light House of Temporality*.

Below right
Steven Holl and Jene Highstein, *Oblong Voidspace*, Rovaniemi, Finnish Lapland.



with states of flux and the concept of the fine line between order and disorder.

After initial brainstorming meetings, artist and architects decided to develop their ideas separately before bringing them to bear on a collaborative object. Staying in New York at the time, Rauhala's first instinct was to seek out snow or ice nearby for inspiration. He set off to the open-air ice rink in Central Park, where he found a perfect representation of the order/disorder paradox in what he describes as an 'urban flock of birds' – people of all ages, sizes and races peacefully skating in the same near-circular path, lost in their own worlds yet effectively participating in a common performance. A video of this scene forms the basis for the work: projected through a revolving glass door, it plays constantly on one section of the inner surface of each of Asymptote's fluid snow forms, whilst a second 'ghost' image is deflected to circulate around the space and escapes briefly into the outside world along the entrance wall, as if the subjects were skating out of the structure.

These two preview structures, together with progress reports from other participants, offer ample evidence that next year's show will be wide ranging in form and challenging in concept. In some cases the roles of the artists and architects are clearly defined, whilst in others they blend seamlessly. Some partnerships seek to discover and express the inherent qualities of the unfamiliar materials they are working with, whilst others attempt to make snow and ice act in ways that are alien to their natural state. It is rare for anything to appeal on so many different levels – to the intellect and to the aesthetic eye, as well as to the sense of novelty and to childlike wonder. This is definitely a site to be seen. 4

Further information on the Snow Show is available at www.thesnowshow.net