

► **Figures 1–3.** *Water and Elements* installation, photocollage, shoe laces. Umeå, Sweden, Photos: Mirja Hiltunen, 2023.

Random Encounters with Locals and a Glacial Stream in Greenland

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After participating in an enriching AAE seminar in Nuuk, Greenland, we were wondering how to approach the place and its people through art and how to transfer the experiences into art education. My artistic works usually deal with equality and interaction between generations as well as between humans and non-human nature. The focus is often on physicality, embodied meaning-making, and encounters with the environment and people. Based on this, two artworks emerged that explored the characteristics of AAE.

I walked along the streets in the city centre of Nuuk with my camera and talked to people I met. I asked if they would like to participate in my tiny art project, where the purpose is simply to chat while I take a photo of our feet – our shoes. I took a series of photos of random encounters. My way of working as an artist and art educator can be characterized as community art. The focus of my work is often physicality – meeting the environment and people. I met elderly people, families, school children, and workers at their work.

As a researcher and artist, I have participated in numerous congresses, exhibitions, and projects

dealing with the art and culture of the Arctic region over decades. Instead of parting ways, I've ended up thinking about what unites us. Do I represent the original? Am I an outsider? How do we shut our fellow travellers in or out of the community? Do we care about diversity in culture and nature? Do we view diversity as wealth or a threat?

I named my artwork *Water and Elements*, since 70% of human tissue is water, consisting of oxygen and hydrogen. Carbon, on the other hand, is a key ingredient in all molecules of living things. Friendly people, legs, hydrogen, and coal. We also have nitrogen, phosphorus,



and calcium in significant quantities. On the other hand, the scarce elements in the body can be important for vital functions. We are one with our environment when we breathe or take a sip of water. In society, art is often seen on the margins. However, art has an important meaning. I see New Genre Arctic Art education and Arctic art as an opportunity to act as a vital element in building a hopeful, sustainable future.

On another encounter in Greenland – in Nuuk in May 2023, and the most physical memories from this trip – was a sip of crystal-clear, vel-

vety-soft, sensory-pleasing water that is millions of years old, captured directly from a glacial stream. The experience connects me to the eternal cycle of water in the earth’s ecosystem. I wondered how the momentary nature of human time compares to that. Continental ice has been here for about 2.6 million years. We humans have upset the balance of the earth in the blink of an eye. Glaciers are melting at an unprecedented rate. While creating the *Water* installation out of photos, glass, water, and video at the Galleria Valo in Rovaniemi, I wondered if art could at least remind us that we are part of an ecosystem that we must take care of. •



Figure 4. Under the glacier. Photo: Mirja Hiltunen, 2023.

INFO

Mirja Hiltunen collected material for two artworks during the AAE seminar and workshop in Nuuk (2023). The installation *Water and Elements* (photocollage, shoelaces) was presented in Umeå, Sweden at the Relate North Symposium, Beyond Borders in November 2023. The other installation, *Water* (8 photos, video, crystal glass, water), was displayed at Gallery Valo in Rovaniemi, Finland in 2024.

Figures 5–6. Water installation by Mirja Hiltunen, Gallery Valo, Rovaniemi 2024. Photos: Mirja Hiltunen, 2024.

“Even though we didn’t often share a common language, taking pictures of our feet surprised and amused them. They were happy to participate and stop for a moment to talk to a stranger.”

– artist

