

CREATING **Arctic Sustainability Portraits**



Edited by
Timo Jokela,
Peter Berliner and
Annamari Manninen

CREATING ARCTIC **SUSTAINABILITY** **PORTRAITS**

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Timo Jokela, Peter Berliner and Annamari Manninen
Rovaniemi, 2024

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction: Creating Sustainability Portraits in the Arctic

Timo Jokela¹, Peter Berliner² and Annamari Manninen¹

¹University of Lapland, Finland, and ²Association Siunissaq, Greenland

It is summer in Bodø. The sun shines, and around midnight it sets into the ocean for a few minutes before rising again, making sunset and sunrise a continuous spectacle. The ocean looks like glass, stretching out to the horizon and beyond, mirroring the sky in the pale blue atmosphere. Everything is calm. In the late afternoon, a fresh wind blows in from the sea. We sit outside in restaurants, enjoying the sunshine until the wind arrives, playfully sending napkins fluttering down the street. Blankets appear, people move indoors and half-empty wine glasses are left on tables in the breeze. Some go home, others move on and some head to our exhibition of *New Genre Art in the Arctic*, including *Sustainability Portraits*.

The exhibition is high up in Bodø Culture House, in a long, wide hall with large windows facing the sun. It's warm here, bathed in sunlight, and there's a warmth in the portraits that gaze back at us as part of the exhibition. We see them, and they see us. That's how it feels. There is warmth in this human encounter between portraits and audience, where the boundary

between who is who blurs, much like the Arctic, where the sea and sky merge on the horizon, where heaven and earth intertwine. The portraits serve as meeting places, where we are seen as the ones who see—a double witness, a witness to witnessing. A shared gaze sees us together, both seeing and being seen.

Many in the audience said that seeing these portraits felt like coming home, being recognised, belonging, being part of a community. The portraits reach out to us and draw us into a community of shared responsibility for our landscapes, our rivers, all living things and each other in a sustainable Arctic, where heaven and earth will continue to meet in years to come, granting freedom to future generations in the eternal turn of time.

This is the essence of *Sustainability Portraits*: a collective endeavour to build community and shape our shared world. Through the lens of art, we envision and articulate a sustainable realm where we honour each other's presence, celebrate diversity, live in peaceful coexistence

and engage in stewardship for our environment. Together, we craft an Arctic where these cherished values flourish and take root.

Bell hooks (2010) once wrote that nurturing our imaginations is one of the most profound acts of resistance against oppression. Community art and aesthetic expressions not only liberate our minds but also open doors to reflection, wonder and visions that transcend environmental and social injustices, colonising narratives and inequality by opening for social resilience and sustainability.

Imagination is the key to unlocking our full human potential, allowing us to co-create our world through art. It frees our social minds and enables us to engage with the present and future, unshackling us from dominant discourses of otherness and exploitation. Through art, we craft freedom, and in a startling double loop, we create the freedom to create, to imagine, to express ourselves freely.

Art connects us to the landscape, to materiality, to each other and to time itself. In art, we find our existence; we transcend the immediate, broaden our perspectives and journey into new realms, guided by indignation, inspiration, wonder and amazement. In the journey, we show who we are. We present ourselves as the journey; the journey is a portrait of us, of who we are and where we are on the move to. It is a portrait of us, people in the Arctic, people today, people building our present and future right now, in this very moment.

The book in your hands is the culmination of an extraordinary journey—an immersive exploration of sustainability through *Sustainability Portraits*. This unique venture weaves together

art, place and social responsibility to support sustainable development in the Arctic. Collaborative efforts between the Arctic University's Arctic Sustainable Art and Design network and the Children in the Arctic thematic networks have invigorated the project, funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers' Nordic Arctic Co-operation Programme, represented by the Nordic Institute in Greenland.

This project is part of a larger, pioneering initiative known as *New Genre Arctic Art Education (AAE)* (Jokela & Hiltunen, 2024; Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2022; Jokela et al., 2024). Arctic Sustainable Art and Design network researchers, including Jokela et al. (2021), have expanded upon Suzanne Lacy's (1995) concept of 'new genre public art', which describes participatory, political and aesthetic events that resonate with the public. AAE takes this further by mobilising activism and artivism to overcome current challenges and support cultural and social strengths in the face of climate change. The strengths emerge from a diversity of cultural and social values and practices, encompassing the rights of Indigenous peoples, the rights of children and the Nordic values of equality, freedom and peaceful coexistence. AAE initiative is at the heart of these strengths as artists and art educators engage with local communities to foster a broader understanding of the Arctic through participatory and socially engaged art. In this movement, art educators play a crucial role in revitalising Arctic ecoculture, decolonising art and engaging art in promoting self-determination and building an inclusive Arctic culture of values (Jokela & Hiltunen, 2024; Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2022; Berliner & Enghoff, 2019; Berliner & de Casas, 2024). Art education plays a critical role in shaping sustainable societies in the Arctic.

Sustainable Portraits project and its framework the AAE initiative is enriched by the collaboration of disciplines from two UArctic thematic networks. Within the Arctic Sustainable Art and Design network, partners have explored how art and design education can address local eco-cultures, cultural identity, and environmental politics. The aim is to promote cultural resilience and sustainability through art-based actions, empowering communities and revitalising cultures across the circumpolar North.

Children in the Arctic thematic network focusses on the psychosocial aspects of living in the Arctic, particularly for educationally and economically disadvantaged youth. While many children and young people thrive, a considerable number face social and mental challenges, experience feelings of being marginalised and suffer from low self-esteem, depression and loneliness. Relative poverty also plays a crucial role as it encompasses income disparities and unequal access to societal benefits, demonstrating that young people have varying levels of access to citizenship and thus, unequally distributed access to civil and social rights.

Despite these current challenges, there is a vibrant culture in the Arctic, characterised by high levels of commitment and creativity. A self-determined culture is emerging, rooted in the strengths of living cultures, including competences, mutual respect, security, trust and social support. Our project, *Sustainability Portraits*, includes both the challenges and the strengths and contribute to the development of viable cultures, enhancing social resilience and sustainability at the community level through psychosocial and aesthetic community art activities for children and young people.

The *Sustainability Portraits* began as an ambitious journey, focussed on engaging children and young people in the sustainable development of the Arctic through art and aesthetic processes. The goal was clear: to foster dialogue, participation and research-based knowledge on how art and education can pave the way for a sustainable future in the North.

During workshops, partners from Finland, Sweden, Norway and Greenland came together to use art as a medium to address the shared responsibility of ensuring sustainability in the Arctic. This involved stewardship of the planet, people, prosperity and partnerships. Each workshop culminated in a vibrant community event and exhibition, showcasing the participants' works locally and at universities, as well as in joint exhibitions in Umeå, Karasjok, Bodø and Rovaniemi.

Together with young participants from partnership locations, we embarked on a mission to use art and aesthetic expressions to create environmental, social and cultural self-portraits. These sustainability portraits focussed on expressing the 'environmental me/us', the 'cultural me/us', the 'social me/us' and the 'livelihood me/us'. The central question was this: who are we in this world, and how can we contribute to shaping the present and future of the Arctic?

This shared journey encouraged participants to reflect on their place in history, their locality, family, community and environment. Each participant created a self-portrait that highlighted connections to other people, the land, the sea, living nature and ultimately, the Arctic. It was a profound exploration of identity and contributions to sustainability,

emphasising our agencies as active and responsible members of our local communities and society. The key focus is on connectedness—how young people position themselves within the larger picture and how they can impact their livelihoods and their social, cultural and environmental contexts. Through artistic expression, we forged innovative ways to engage with the material world and to create new imagery of life in the Arctic. The art project opened doors for all young people to engage in expressions that were visual, engaging, playful and full of visions of a sustainable future.

This publication is divided into three parts. The first section delves into the project's foundations. Peter Berliner and Elena de Casas draw connections between the portraits and psychosocial well-being in relation to nature in Arctic areas. Timo Jokela and Mirja Hiltunen reflect on the use of portraits, self-portraits, photography and video in art. They examine the empowering potential of photography and the ways expanded contemporary art forms can create portraits that connect to ecocultural sustainability, thus supporting the sustainability transformation in the North and Arctic regions.

The second part showcases a collection of snapshots illustrating how artists, art educators, researchers and students have crafted sustainability portraits using various methods and emphases—from drawings to photos, videos, short films, digital installations and even AI. These visual essays highlight different facets of contemporary art and the technological possibilities for creating individual, collective and community-based sustainability portraits.

Peter Berliner, Elena de Casas and Sanne Broberg describe in their visual essay the sustainability portrait workshops for young people at Sámi Centre for Contemporary Art (Sámi Daiddaguoovddas) at Karasjok. There, portraits were made of the participants and of the local river with different media to connect identities, place and ecocultural issues. In their second visual essay Berliner and de Casas introduce how Sustainability Portraits are created with teachers in Greenland.

The sustainability portraits were explored in university courses in art and craft teacher education. Sara Rylander has taken students to learn digital drawing with self-portraits to dive into identity, belonging and cultural representations. Lotta Lundstedt challenged her students to create expressions of identity with clothing, while Annamari Manninen encouraged her students to try out AI image generation to create future imagery. These student groups shared their portraits across university borders to broaden perspectives. Arctic art and art education students Md Faysal Amin, Ville Lahtinen and Inka Matilainen developed in the project a portrait photography course for young people in preparatory education in Rovaniemi to promote well-being and teach new skills with art-based activities surrounding Arctic identities.

The sustainability portraits workshops also connected younger school pupils from Norway, Sweden and Finland. Karin Stoll, Wenche Sørmo and Mette Gårdvik present workshop activities with small island school pupils, including photography and postcard making. Annamari Manninen and Sara Rylander open the process of sustainability portrait postcard workshops that connected Norwegian pupils

to their peers in Finland and Sweden. Art education students Anniina Pennanen, Virve Pietilä and Kuutti Terävä describe then how the children’s postcards were exhibited at the Arctic Congress in Bodö and the exhibition visitors were invited to make their own Arctic Greetings -postcards in an open workshop. The congress visitors also participated in the collaborative video artwork “My Arctic is...” creating another kind of collective sustainability portrait. Sade Lylykoski explains how Vikajärvi school pupils continued after the postcards the portrayal of sustainable local lifestyles by creating short films under the guidance of art education students. This publication also presents examples from another project, *On the Frontline of the Climate Crisis*, that also involves young people processing the issues of a sustainable future with art-based activities and brings the created artworks to different events. Researcher Aki Lintumäki discusses the video art project portraying participants’ important places that was presented at the Aurora Future Event. Art education students Kanerva Kivistö and Sara Teperi created a performance and media artwork of climate emotions with a group of high school students for the Arctic Spirit Conference. In the last visual essay, artist and art educator Suvi Autio gives an example of a personal art project that interlays her self-portrait into a portrait of the forest to reflect relationships with nature.

In the third part, the authors summarise the results of *Sustainability Portraits*. Throughout the process, the project was monitored, reflected upon and evaluated using art-based action research methods. The core results and learning outcomes are presented in this publication to support their implementation and integration into the curricula

of participating universities, as well as in the joint education programmes of UArctic.

We wish you inspiring moments with this publication. May this reading experience be a journey that inspires and supports the development of your own sustainability portrait, both as an individual and as an expert in your field. ●

**Timo Jokela, Peter Berliner
and Annamari Manninen**

Rovaniemi and Nuuk, October 2024

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CONCEPTUAL BASIS



Figure 1. Announcing the community event and exhibition. Photo: participants in the portrait workshop at Majoriaq, Maniitsoq, 2023. Copyright Siunissaq.

Portraits as Activism for Humanization and Sustainability

Peter Berliner and Elena de Casas

Association Siunissaq, Greenland

Siunissaq is an Association that engages in eco-cultural, community-based activities for sustainability. It combines community art and psychosocial activities to overcome social suffering and to contribute to self-determination, social justice, and creativity. We have done that in close and continuous dialogue with the local communities, especially with children, young people, professionals, and the entire local community in the towns Maniitsoq, Tasiilaq, and Nanortalik and the settlements Atammik and Kangerlussuaq. It has been a long journey that has combined psychosocial activities with aesthetic forms of expression, especially

photography, but also drawings, movement, music, sculptures, kites and balloons, and installations. We have conducted a series of workshops for young people in the local community as well as for university students and have brought the two groups together. The project works only by invitation of the local communities.

In that framework, we have through more than ten years gradually developed our understanding of what a portrait is and can be. Portraits show us a part of the world, the future, the environment, our culture, and social connections. Portraits are an

act, a performance; of the portrayed, of the portrait photographer, of the audience. It is positioning, and it is an action of creating life and art; an action that includes both the position from where we see and the object, i.e., what we see. To see, to gaze, to visualize are actions, and often, it is an action we do jointly, together, at the same time looking at the same. We share the vision.

From Drawing to Photos

The history of portraits in Siunissaq started with drawings. Two by two, the participants in the workshops for students and professionals in education, drew portraits of each other. After finished the drawing, we passed them around in the group and everyone wrote one or more words of appraisal of the portrayed person. Then we put the portraits on the wall and later everyone could bring their own portrait home. This experience evoked emotions of joy, but also of embarrassment as the two people in the team must look, even gaze, intensively at each other. Our inspiration for this activity came from reading an old text on psychotherapy in Inuit lands. Unfortunately, we have not been able to trace the text, but the inspiration lingers on. It mentioned briefly that the arrangements of chairs in psychotherapy there were side by side rather than facing each other. The text explained that as a cultural trait which saw direct and frontal eye contact as impolite and even confrontative. It was better to look at the same view in front of the two chairs and then look at each other occasionally in glimpses. The drawing of the portraits challenged this trait in a both humoristic and intimate way. People laughed heartedly in the process. It also challenged another cultural trait of not pretending to be good at task if you are not sure that you

really are good at it. Often, the participants immediately said: "I'm not good at drawing!" And then they did beautiful and expressive portraits, gratefully valued by the portrayed people. Finally, the participants told us that a cultural trait command that people should talk modestly about themselves. Sometimes, they even, with a smile and a grin, said that it is easier to talk badly about other people than to mention them with appreciation. Thus, the final writing on the portraits challenged that by just including appreciative testimonials.

Then we started by using photo portraits instead of the drawing when we did workshops for young people, sometimes adolescents 13 to 14 years of age. Good photo portraits are not easier to do than the drawings, but the time of the process is shorter, even though the young people take twenty-five photos in the process and then pick the best one. Especially in larger groups of young teenagers, the words on the portraits may occasionally disregard the rule of appreciative words. Even though Siunissaq aims to promote freedom of expression, we adhere to the golden rule that one person's freedom of expression may not limit another person's rights (and freedom). Hence, we erase these words in full public, in an open dialogue, and without ever mentioning anything about who wrote them. We also erase sexist and other ideologically impacted stigmatizations, in a joyful but still serious manner, with the full participation of the young teenagers entering adolescence with an awareness of citizenship and sexuality.

In the Siunissaq, we also did workshops on the sexual and reproductive rights. The participants made sculptures of people as bodies and drawings of the many genders and



Figures 2–3. Portraits. Photo: participants in the portrait workshop at Majoriaq, Maniitsoq, May 2023. Copyright Siunissaq.

the attributes of them. Often it started with stereotypes and ended by writing the same rights and human qualities to all the many gender identities. Both the sculptures and the drawing were a kind of portraits even though they were generalizations. They were portraits of everyone, of us all, as we could recognized ourselves in them.

During the workshops, the young participants made photos of themselves in places, i.e., in environments that invoked emotions, thoughts, and symbolic meaning. Some of the portraits were with hidden faces, by

masks or hoodies, or in shadow, in silhouette, or with a light effect that partly made the face unrecognizable. Others were with open faces, but often in an environment, a place, or with a dress or other signs that signalled connectedness to that place in the landscape or in the cityscape or to the culture. These photos portrayed connectedness, they were portraits of connections, of being in, or even belonging, to a place, a symbol, a moment.

Gradually, we developed the idea of the photos of the participants to become portraits rather than just photos. We define a portrait as a (re-)

presentation of a person, a group, a family. In the presentation the portrayed is depicted. A portrait holds a likeness of the portrayed, in physical traits, in character, or in symbolic ways. In the many centuries of painted or sculptured portraits, mainly the power elite had means to have portraits made. However, occasionally artists did portraits of poor people, as Van Gogh's "The Potato Eaters" that captured the physical appearance and conveyed the social circumstances, i.e. the hardship and the social suffering of the portrayed. The development of photographic portraits made the portraits more accessible to people. In visual art, new forms of portraits evolved, such a dadaist, cubist, and surrealist portraits, that used the visual media to present various perspectives simultaneously, including philosophical ideas and social criticism. In the history of photo portraits, the very early social portraits taken by Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson of a fisherfolk community, showed a combination of social engagement and artful portraits. Its many individual and group portraits form, as a collection, an artwork that portrays a community. A community portrait, which shows the social resilience and the human dignity of the community.

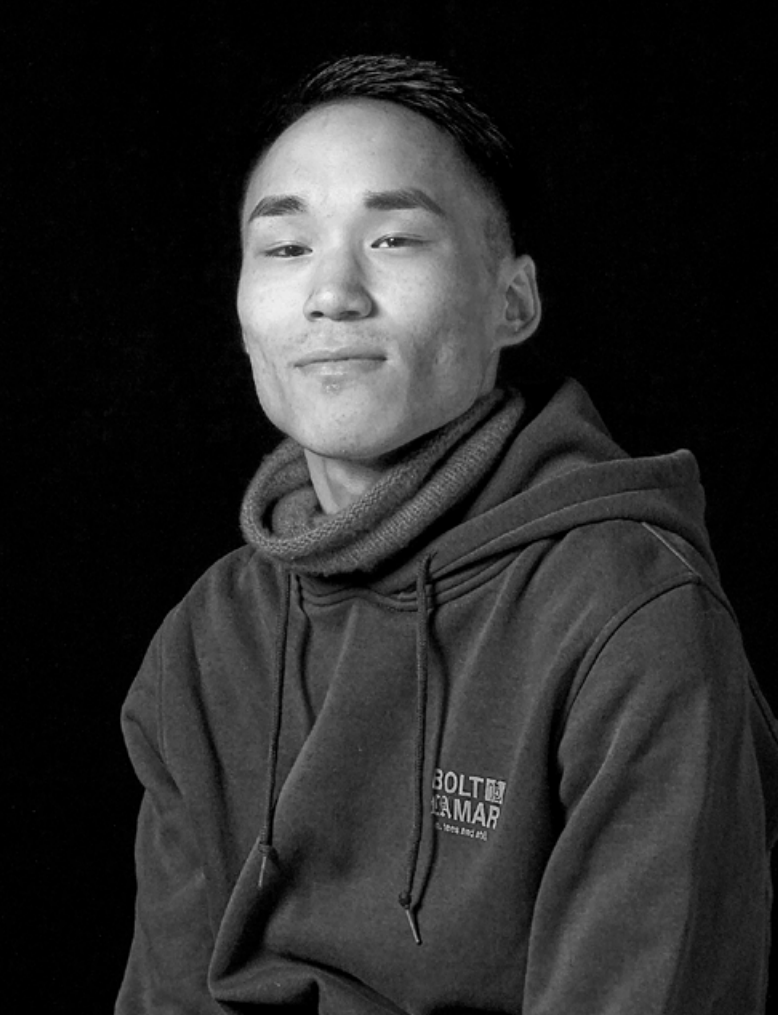
Community and Connectedness

Siunissaq developed the idea of connectiveness and community resilience portraits and in 2019, we became partners of a Nordic collaboration, funded by the Art Council Norway and the Arts Foundation Denmark, on art and community. Our contribution was workshops in the town Maniitsoq and the settlement Atammik in Greenland. The young participants in the workshops took portraits of people in the community, produced these portraits,

and made exhibitions of the portraits in the centre of the town and of the settlement as public events. The portraits were taken outside, in the streets, in a mobile photo booth with coloured backgrounds, and thus, also a series of public events. The portraits were a collaboration between the young photographers and the portrayed. Often, the portraits became social portraits, as people came to the booth with their family, friends, and colleagues. Also, the individual portraits were social as they were taken in a public event in the street, as they involved collaboration, and as they were taken to be exhibited in a community event. The portrayed and the young photographers collaborated on conveying a message, an impact on the spectator, who also included themselves on the portraits. The message is of human dignity, of attachment and caring for each other, and of engaging the spectator in a deeply felt human encounter. In various contexts around the world, the reactions of the audience include emotions of feeling attached, of feeling involved in a human meeting, and of appreciation of the portrayed people. The portraits are of humanization, of the strength of human beings to reach out to each other, to be in communication, to be together in this life, in the flow of life, and with the ability to care for each other and build a responsible and peaceful world.

Collective Expressions

The portraits are collective aesthetical expressions. they entail a process of creative collaboration and the portraits as the final product. We call it community art as it involves the community in the process of creation. We have described the community event of the exhibition where the same people were in the



Figures 4–5. Portraits. Photo: participants in the portrait workshop at Majoriaq, Maniitsoq, 2023. Copyright Siunissaq.

portraits and were looking at the portraits. It is a double gaze, a seeing and being seen at the same time.

The experience of the connectiveness, community, and social portraits made us consider how portraits can show our engagement in life and in sustainability of our shared world—in the Arctic, in the Nordic context, and globally. We named this idea: “sustainability portraits”, which can be understood as visual representation or depiction of efforts and contributions to sustainable development through engagement and initiatives.

This project cooperates with projects on sustainability portraits in Finland, Norway, and Sweden.

The sustainability portrait project started by making over five hundred portraits of people in Maniitsoq. The portraits were created in a makeshift studio at the Majoriaq school by a group of eight young people, aged 16 to 24 years old. People came to the studio, sometimes one person, but often, two or a family. It was a collaboration between the portrayed and the photographers in the same vein as in the above-mentioned social portraits. We showed

the portraits at a community event in Maniitsoq, an exhibition in Nuuk, and later at an exhibition in Bodø in Norway, at a UArctic Conference.

Just as in the reception of the social portraits, the audience, the viewers, expressed that they were emotionally touched by the dignity of the portrayed people and that they, the audience, felt very connected to them, and that they sensed that the portrayed people reached out and made a profound human contact with them. A man from northern Alaska said,

“When I look at the portraits, I really feel at home. You can see that the people in the portraits are looking at someone they know, at the young people who are taking the pictures, and at us. They are not smiling to a stranger, they are smiling to somebody, they know.

Two young women from Nunavut said when they saw the portraits, “It’s simply like being at

home in Nunavut. When we see the faces and their expressions, we can see all the suffering that these people have been through, and we can also see how they maintain their human dignity and beauty. They are like family; it feels like home. Their personalities shine through; everyone is so distinct and beautiful. It is like coming home and being welcomed by the portrayed people.”

Another viewer wrote a comment, “the portraits capture the beauty of the Inuit and connection with family.” Two people from Greenland wrote, “Great portraits, making you smile.”

Dialogues

The first author of this text had dialogues with the two visual artists, Tina Enghoff and Soren Zeuth and with the psychologist Elena de Casas, all three founding members of Siunissaq and facilitators of the aesthetic and psychosocial

Figure 6. Process – the right light. Photo: participants in the portrait workshop at Majoriaq, Maniitsoq, 2023. Copyright Siunissaq.



Figure 7. The exhibition in Bodø, May-June 2024. NB – Photo: Elena de Casas. Copyright Siunissaq.



activities and workshops of Siunissaq through more than ten years. Tina and Soeren facilitated the portraits with the young participants. All the portraits are taken by the young people.

Soeren responded to hearing the comments of the audience, “That’s what it’s all about; that people become visible to each other. They show themselves openly to someone they are comfortable with.” That may be why the audience sensed being someone, who the portrayed people felt comfortable with. The audience got positioned as a human being, someone to trust and relate to. The audience become part of the artwork as they respond to being seen as trustworthy people. It is a humanization, which – according to the dictionary – is to make kind and gentle; to position as kind and gentle; to call forward the kindness and gentleness of the audience. This humanization starts in the process of creating the portraits.

Tina says,

That is precisely the core of what we do, namely that you feel at home. You can see that the people have been through suffering, but also that they have retained their human dignity through it. I think that’s beautifully said. And it is linked to that we take the participants seriously as human beings. That is the heart of it; the keyword for us in Siunissaq. To create the portraits together is a wonderful experience for the young people, as we take the portrayed seriously, too. And the audience as it is only successful if others have as much of experience by looking at it as you have of creating it. It’s wonderful when art becomes a collaborative process.

The portraits and humanization fold into each other. The folded process also includes a profes-

sional side to photographers and community builders. Tina says,

We stand out as a highly qualified and professional team and the young people want to contribute to the team. They listen to and observe the technical aspects of the portrait-taking; where the light comes in, the glare, timing, and all those things. The participants understand that we all are professionally serious, and it makes them participate. It is craftsmanship of high quality and thus, as aesthetic expression.

Soeren follows up by saying, “in the series of black and white portraits, we stick to the aesthetic approach and so, it becomes a creative process, an aesthetic expression, yes art, as it wants to tell us something; it is a creation and not just coincidence; there is an idea, an expression in it.” Tina adds, “We chose to do five hundred portraits, not just five, as it opened for a learning process of increasing creativity. 500 portraits give a huge experience and impact.”

Portraits as humanization

Elena reflects on the reception of the portraits as humanization,

The people in the portraits made an attachment to the photographer, like saying, we trust you and we are here with our full presence. You are fully present, and I am, and through our shared presence, we create a portrait that will impact on other people. It is a shared creation, an aesthetic expression, which is a product of the “eye” of the photographer and the way, the portrayed people presented themselves. The young people had an idea before the click of the camera, a vision of what to receive from the others and how to contribute. That is making community. It is a creative expression. They wanted to tell this in the portrait. That is why, at the exhibition in

Bodø, people stopped in front of the portraits and wanted to tell us that the portraits touched them, almost as if the portraits were in direct contact with them. The viewer, the audience, told that they felt invited into a community with the portraits. They felt welcomed, like making attachments and connectedness. The audience felt included in making community.

Elena continues by saying,

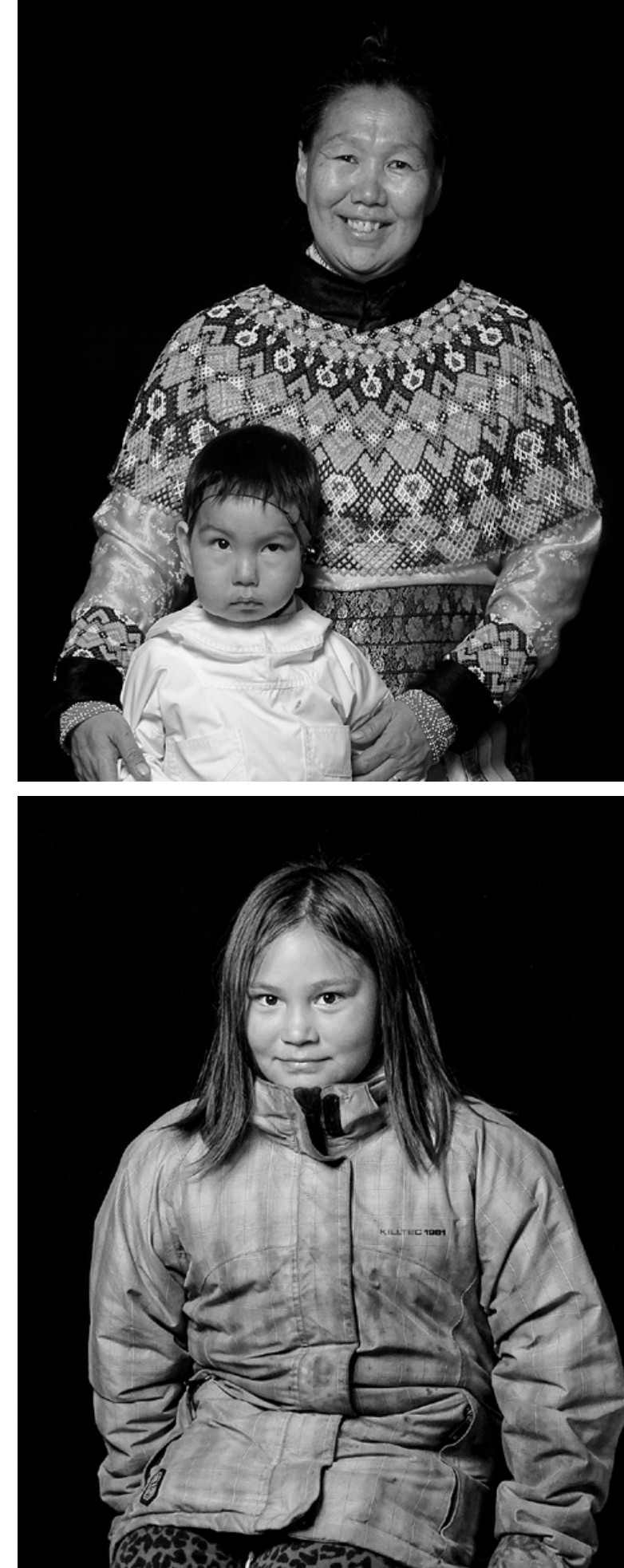
The audience shared that feeling. It was as if an invisible tread of humanity linked us together as we stood there in front of the portraits, looking into the welcoming eyes of the portrayed as we saw them there through the eyes of the young people in Maniitsoq and now also through our own eyes. The sustainability portraits are a narrative of resistance to a world that dehumanises people. They convey our efforts to build a shared meaning, between us, and give a sense of being alive to all of us. It is humanization as we see human dignity in all of us. The portraits help us to see the other and thus, to change your subjective position. We widen our identity together. It is a process of human understanding, where we can share human dignity, appreciating the human value of us all. It is a creative act, an action.

The sustainability portraits contribute to sustainability through humanization, i.e., to be kind and gentle, to connect to others with care and togetherness. ●

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Figures 8–9. Portraits. Photo: participants in the portrait workshop at Majoriaq, Maniitsoq, 2023. Copyright Siunissaq.



Sustainability Portraits: Intra-action Between Identities and Ecocultures in the Arctic

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In this chapter, we describe what Sustainability Portraits means from the perspective of art education as well as its connection to the New Genre Arctic Art Education (AAE) initiative (Jokela & Hiltunen, 2024; Jokela et al., 2024). The activities of Sustainability Portraits were initially intended to promote the goals of AAE through photography among young people in Northern and Arctic communities. However, Sustainability Portraits is not limited solely to photographs; the extensive digital arsenal of contemporary art is at its disposal, and among Indigenous peoples as well as many non-Indigenous groups in the North, handcrafted objects are seen as powerful identity symbols and ‘cultural self-portraits’. (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020a). In another way, expressing oneself through objects such as accessories and clothes is also typical of our prevailing globalised culture.

Sustainability Portraits can be viewed more broadly as a depiction of culture as well as of

the relationships of individuals and communities to their own culture and environment: the ecoculture in which they live. In this sense, Sustainability Portraits aligns with the AAE agenda, as it focuses on social engagement activities and, specifically, on depicting peoples’ lives in the Arctic amidst rapid changes. This reveals how various forms of portrait in contemporary art can promote sustainable practices in the Arctic during the age of climate crisis.

The Many Forms of Portrait in Contemporary Art

Portraiture has a long history in the visual arts. It is generally defined to be an artistic representation of a person that aims to convey the subject’s appearance, personality, mood or status. Portraits can be created using various techniques, such as painting, drawing, photography and sculpture, but they typically emphasise the likeness of the subject, often focusing on facial features. In

simplified terms, it may be said that a person’s portrait has signified value, wealth or status, but when artists have depicted the less fortunate, the portrait has carried a message of acknowledging their worth. In the Northern and Arctic regions, portraits have often been associated with ethnography: the need to depict the peoples and ethnic groups of the North (Figure 1.).

In self-portraits, by contrast, artists depict themselves, aiming to express their own perception of their identity. In addition to capturing physical appearance, self-portraits often convey the artist’s identity, emotions or thoughts, offering the viewer a window into the artist’s inner world. Artists have used self-portraits to explore themes such as self-analysis, personal growth and societal roles with very different emphases. For example, Reidar Särestöniemi, an artist working in Finnish Lapland, painted lyrical and vividly colourful animal figures, identifying to endangered nature in his self-portraits (Ilvas, 2000), while his contemporary Kalervo Palsa depicted himself as distressed, often with a noose around his neck (Aarnio, 2002). Both addressed the sentiments typical of the Arctic (Figure 2.).

Portrait photography was initially seen as a direct extension of the tradition and conventions of the visual arts, but a significant shift occurred when advancements in photographic technology democratised the medium, making portraits—including self-portraits—accessible to almost everyone (Figure 3.). With the advent of digital photography and the ubiquitous camera phone, the selfie culture emerged. In the North, this is marked by Northern landscape ‘trophies’, a kind of ‘I am here’ self-portrait in scenic places in nature (Isomursu & Jokela, 2023).



Figure 1. Juho Kyyhkynen (1875–1909) depicted the people of Lapland in his paintings around the turn of the century, portraying the Sámi in the midst of nature with ethnographic precision in the descriptions of clothing and environment. The paintings are like educational posters, which he also created featuring the Sámi people. *Kota* (1909), oil painting, 65,5 x 51,5 cm. Finnish National Gallery / Hannu Pakanen.

Portraits and self-portraits are central to the widely recognised practice of therapeutic photography (Gibson, 2018, 2023) and especially to empowering photography, an approach that seeks to elevate, inspire and enhance the self-esteem and self-respect of the subject or the viewer (Savolainen, 2009). This approach is founded on the belief that photographs allow individuals to express themselves freely, outside societal norms and expectations. This can be particularly impactful for marginalised or otherwise disadvantaged communities and

their members. When working with girls and young women, this method is often associated with body positivity. Empowering photography is seen as promoting diverse representations of bodies as well as challenging traditional beauty standards and stereotypes related to ethnicity, gender and abilities. Empowering photography also emphasises the power of storytelling. These photographs often tell compelling stories that inspire others, whether they relate to personal triumph, activism or messages of self-love and acceptance (Figures 4.,9.). With its connections to photo therapy, empowering photography is often linked to individuals and personal matters, but it can also be social or political, deriving its impact from the sense that the subject feels seen and celebrated while encouraging the viewer to reflect on their own identity, agency and empowerment (Savolainen, 2009).

Empowering photography draws from photographic therapy, which uses photographs and the process of photography as an element of therapeutic work. Photo therapy employs images to explore, express and understand emotions, thoughts and experiences. This can occur through the patient's own photos or as part of photography projects guided by therapists. The goal of photo therapy is to support self-exploration, identity building and mental well-being. Images can bring forth memories, process traumatic experiences, explore relationships or strengthen a positive self-image. Viewing and analysing photos offers a visual channel through which difficult topics can be approached safely. Photo therapy can be helpful for many groups, including children, youth, adults and the elderly, and is particularly effective for those who struggle to verbalise their emotions and experiences (Gibson,



Figure 3. Selfie at Djupvatnet, Norway. Photo: Esa Pekka Isomursu, 2019.



Figure 2. Exhibition posters in the museum shop illustrate the different ways artists use self-portraits in their art. Left: Reidar Särestöniemi's oil painting *Kielto ja kaipaus* [Prohibition and Longing], 1967. Right: Kalervo Palsa's painting *Omakuva* [Self-Portrait], 1968.

2018, 2023). Both photographic therapy and empowering photography approaches have been applied to art, art education and creative tourism with an emphasis on community alongside individual work (Jokela et. al., 2020).

Digital technology has blurred the line between traditional photography and film/video and has democratised the sharing of their results. Video portraits are videos that focus on the portrayal of a subject, usually a person, in much the same way as traditional photographic portraits. Rather than being a still image, a video portrait shows a moving subject, allowing for the expression of dynamic embodies expressions, actions and the

surrounding environment. Video portraits are often used to express personality, emotions or an atmosphere that might not be conveyed in a static photograph as well as portraying cultural and ethnical identities.

As an example the *Stories for Climate Justice program*, produced by the Alaska Native Filmmakers Intensive, showcased films by young Indigenous filmmakers who explore how they witness and respond to the impacts of climate change on their homelands and communities. Each filmmaker addresses the connection between their personal history, the issues affecting their communities, and the intergenerational ties to place as they reflect



Figure 4. Mirja Hiltunen's community portrait series *Kävelykerroksia* [Walking Layers] (2017) is created by the artist, as photo-installation, but its individual components—photographs taken during hiking—can be seen as empowering photographs. Details from the series, Photo: Minna Saastamoinen, 2017 (left). Mirja Hiltunen, 2017 (right).

on their relationship with Alaska's lands and waters (Figure 5.) (Jokela & Salganek, 2023).

Combined with the social, political and environmental aims of empowering photography, video portraits and self-portraits offer an excellent tool to convey moods, emotions, thoughts and statements, which can be enhanced by the addition of sound. This format has gained popularity in social media, documentaries and



Figure 5. By centering Indigenous voices and intergenerational knowledge shared through oral history, short films could present an alternative to dominant narratives of climate change typically shown in mainstream media. Still from *My Someday*, shortfilm (2021) by Shak'shaani Éesh / Konrad Frank.

art projects, creating more captivating and humanised depictions of individuals. Video portraits are commonly featured in contemporary visual art installations, multimedia projects and projections (Figure 6.) (Lintumäki, 2023).

In our Sustainability Portraits project, which is implemented by not only art educators but also design and crafts educators, we also ask: How can a portrait be more than just an image? Can it be tangible and object-like as well? The answer, of course, is found in sculptural portraits, which have an even longer tradition than painted portraits in Western art. However, only contemporary visual art forms, such as installations, bring a new dimension to portraits. For a long time, time-space art, performances and installations have been characterised by the combination of diverse media, such as digital audio-visual components and physical-material objects, spaces and lighting.

Importantly, New Genre Arctic Art has broken away from the traditional, dualistic Western



Figure 6. The video installation made by young people from Finland, *Minun Paikkani – Mun Baiki – My Place*, was on display on a huge outdoor screen when Finland's main broadcasting company, YLE, organized Aurora - the Future Event a summit where experts and policy makers discussed climate change. The installation, through photos, videos and text, told about the young people's favorite places, and what they would like to keep in them. Photo: Aki Lintumäki, 2022.

legacy of separating art and craft. According to Härkönen et al. (2018) and Huhmarniemi and Jokela (2020), many artists from the region have incorporated traditional craft techniques into contemporary artistic expression. These collage-like works of contemporary art, which cross the boundaries between visual art, media and craft, can be viewed as self-portraits of the artists or portraits of groups, reflecting on individual, group or cultural identities in the North and the Arctic.

Public artworks have always contributed to the identity of places and the self-images of cities. Art that combines visual arts, crafts, and landscape architecture, while connecting northern eco-cultures and identities, plays a significant role when discussing revitalization, resilience, and sustainability in rural communities in the North. This kind of artwork can be seen as a self-portrait of the community, like Timo Jokela's art project *Ounas – Our Free River*. The foundation of the piece is the villagers' relationship, intra-action, with the key element of their ecoculture—the river—through which the village's identity has been formed. The implementation of the project together with the villagers and the river can also be seen as a revitalization that enhances resilience, the ability to act in situations of change. The villagers participated in many ways in creating the artwork: sharing stories, using their skills during its construction, and celebrating the result. (Figure 7).

Sustainability Portraits in the Context of Art Education

In general discussions on sustainability, it may be observed that Sustainability Portraits are multimedia visual presentations of a kind that

highlights the actions and achievements of individuals, groups or communities in relation to sustainability. It is easy to assume that the purpose of these portraits is to showcase how people contribute to environmental and societal well-being, often with the goal of inspiring or educating others about sustainable practices. In the context of economic thinking, this brings to mind corporate and organisational promotional videos and perhaps even so-called greenwashing. In the context of Arctic arts education, however, sustainability requires closer examination.

Education for sustainable development, sustainability education and education for sustainability transition have become established educational goals. The 2030 Agenda, adopted by United Nations (UN) member states in 2015, guides educational measures to promote sustainable development (United Nations, 2015). This action plan is international and politically binding on member states globally. It encompasses 17 broad Sustainable Development Goals, each with subgoals. These goals are closely interconnected, and one cannot be achieved at the expense of another. Their realisation requires active participation from governments, decision-makers and individual citizens. The Nordic countries share a consensus on sustainability goals as reflected in, for instance, the teacher guides of the Finnish National Agency for Education (OPH), which define sustainable development as a 'continuous, globally, regionally, and locally guided societal change that aims to ensure good living conditions for present and future generations' (OPH, n.d.).

These sustainability goals demand rethinking and reforming visual arts education and



Figure 7. Timo Jokela's artwork *The Ounas – Our Free River* designed and erected with the villagers is a portrait of the river and the village. The visual elements of the art piece, old photos, gears relate to the living with the river and texts inside the 'memory box', the stories told during the process and celebrations, refers to many meaningful aspects of the local ecoculture and traditions. The artwork as sustainability portrait is a statement in support of preserving the river's cleanliness in the face of threats from mining activities. Photos: Timo Jokela, 2024.

artist training. Proposals for more culturally sustainable approaches to arts education have emerged (Härkönen, 2021), with a focus on community and justice (Garber, 2004; Hiltunen, 2009; Jokela & Hiltunen, 2023). These research themes are included in UN policies and the Sustainable Development Goals outlined by UNESCO (2017). The 2030 Agenda has also been reviewed in international assessments of the state of arts education (Wagner et al., 2021).

It is important to note that while sustainability and sustainable development are interconnected concepts, they also differ. Sustainability refers to the ability of ecosystems, organisations or societies to function in a balanced and healthy state. Ecological, economic, social and cultural sustainabilities emphasise different perspectives. While sustainability can be viewed as a principle, sustainable development is its application in the context of human development and well-being.

The concepts and the discourse on sustainability and sustainable development have been critically examined in the Arctic context (Tennberg et al., 2019). In Arctic research, sustainability is often associated with the preservation of fragile ecosystems and communities, particularly those of Indigenous peoples (Gad et al., 2019). Sustainability may be linked to preservation goals, which, in turn, could imply freezing cultural change and diversity. As a result, the goal of sustainability could imply a future vision in which people cannot continue to pursue livelihoods that depend on the use of natural resources in their native lands. The concept of sustainable development, meanwhile, faces challenges in relation to Western dualistic thinking and belief in development. In the Arctic, the exploitation of natural resources

and wind energy in the name of sustainable development—‘green energy’—has drawn strong criticism, particularly from Indigenous communities and researchers (Kårtveit, 2021).

When examining sustainability from the perspective of art education, special attention should be paid to the young people in the region. Youth living in the Northern and Arctic regions encounter specific challenges related to the rapid changes occurring in the area. They experience the impacts of climate change more directly than their southern counterparts, as their environment is changing rapidly due to global warming and the colonial exploitation of natural resources, often tied to green economic strategies (Rinne et al., 2024). Youth have also been found to suffer from environmental and climate anxiety (Pihkala, 2022), which in turn facing the need for supporting well-being and faith for the future. This requires examining AAE and Sustainability Portrait activities from the perspective of resilience. However, resilience should not be understood as passive adaptation but rather as activities supporting young people’s capacity for action and self-direction to express their opinions and feelings when managing the current changes in the region (figure 8).

Ecosocial Civilisation and Ecocultural Sustainability

Huhmarniemi and Jokela (in press) have analysed the discourse surrounding sustainability orientation in arts education and identified two approaches that are particularly relevant in the context of Arctic sustainability education. One is the widely recognised concept of ecosocial civilisation in Western countries. The second, strongly linked to AAE, is ecocultural



Figure 8. Young people perform their ‘climate portraits’, thought and emotions, to international audience at the opening of Arctic Spirit congress in Korundi Art Museum. Solastalgia performance was facilitated by art education student Kanerva Kivistö and Sara Teperi. Photo: Aki Lintumäki, 2023.

sustainability as highlighted in the University of Lapland (UoL) and Arctic Sustainable Art and Design (ASAD) Thematic Network of University of the Arctic.

According to a survey by Huhmarniemi and Jokela (in press), an ecosocial civilization is generally defined by the connection and intertwining of social and ecological issues. The goals of ecosocial education include responsibility, compassion, global citizenship, moderation in consumption, community, interspecies interaction and the ability to imagine alternative futures. The general recommendations for art education derived from theories of ecosocial civilization emphasise multi-sensory experiences, community, embodiment, creativity and the process-oriented nature of art.

According to Huhmarniemi and Jokela (in press), all these objectives are also included in ecocultural sustainability and its related education, but they manifest with slightly different emphases. The authors argue that the main difference is that ecosocial civilization emphasises an educational-philosophical and planetary perspective, which weakly guides practical action in the specific conditions of the North and Arctic, whereas art education focusing on ecocultural sustainability has been developed with strong place-specific and situational connections to the unique conditions of the North (Huhmarniemi et al., 2021).

According Huhmarniemi and Jokela (in press) and Jokela and Hiltunen (2024), ecocultural sustainability is particularly relevant in visual arts education in Northern and Arctic regions, where

communities' lives are closely and intergenerationally tied to ecosystems through livelihoods and practices such as fishing, reindeer herding, berry picking and other cultural endeavours in which humans are connected to a multi-species community and environment. This approach has links to the land-based learning trend recognised in Indigenous cultural pedagogy (Wildcat et al., 2014). However, ecoculture can be recognised in all cultures that live in close proximity to nature as in the Nordic cultures in general.

Ecocultural sustainability emerges from the continuity of culture and a simultaneous assessment of the sustainability of traditions from different perspectives. The intentional renewal of ecocultural traditions to align with current values, research and conditions aims to achieve sustainability. This ecocultural sustainability involves both the continuity and evolution of values and practices in adapting to the changing environment and society. The ecocultural aspect is closely connected to mental well-being in the North, and there is evidence that disconnection from culture, tradition and local history can lead to apathy among individuals and communities. Ecocultural connectedness supports a sense of responsibility and the meaningfulness of one's actions as required by the sustainability transition. Ecocultural thinking in art education is local and planetary at the same time and both personal nature connectiveness and cultural activism can be practiced and expressed simultaneously by means of art (Jokela et al., 2020).

Northern Ecocultures and the Four Pillars for Sustainability Portraits

When outlining the concept of Sustainability Portraits and its art-based activities, it is important to

closely examine how the four pillars—ecological, social, cultural and economic sustainability—intertwine with the lives of Northern and Arctic peoples. In Sustainability Portraits, art education is strongly connected to identities, which in turn can be approached from the perspectives of the four sustainability pillars.

First, from a Northern ecological perspective, ecocultural identity plays a significant role in shaping attitudes and behaviours towards sustainability transformation. People who understand and sense ecoculture as part of their identity often have a stronger motivation to act in ecologically friendly ways and to support sustainability initiatives. With this in mind, it is justified to link Sustainability Portrait activities to ecosystems and seasonal circles of the Northern nature. In that way, participants can create images and presentations highlighting the co-formation, intra-action, between the self, one's community and Northern ecocultures.

Second, social identity describes individuals' feeling of belonging to certain groups and communities. This relates to group dynamics, by which communities can shape sustainable practices and share common values. Communities with strong identities and social cohesion are better equipped to commit to shared sustainability goals, such as environmental protection, social justice, economic stability and, finally, sustainability transformation. This justifies designing Sustainability Portrait activities so that they are processes, with continuous connection to local communities, and are open to performative participation in many ways.

Third, cultural identity is in turn seen to reflect people's understanding of themselves and their communities as well as the values that

guide their behaviour and way of life. When sustainability is understood as individuals' and communities' ability to act, the sustainable solutions are often tied to cultural practises, values and identities. Recognising the entanglement of identity and ecoculture in sustainability efforts can enhance the acceptance of new solutions and their long-term impacts. The significance of the cultural aspect becomes increasingly emphasised when Sustainability Portraits are connected to both material; objects, clothes, building and spiritual stories and narrative and other elements important for peoples identities in the North and the Arctic.

Finally, individuals' and communities' economic identities influence how they approach sustainability. Art education is seen as an important component of sustainable transformation that aims to replace a nature-exploitative economy. Sustainability portraits created by means of con-

temporary art could play a role in demonstrating the potential of an ecoculture-based creative economy in the Arctic region (Jokela et al., 2022).

We see that sustainability portraits created by means of contemporary art have a diverse potential for achieving all four elements of sustainability. Sustainability Portraits offers a special channel for integrating sustainability objectives into the goals of education and promoting young people's well-being, both in educational institutions and directly in communities. ●

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Figure 9. The starting point for the museum pedagogical workshop was Reidar Särestöniemi's self-portraits, in which artist identifies himself with the forest, nature, and animals. In the workshop, *Be the Nature* self-portraits were created in the forest. Participant identifying herself as a guardian of the forest (left). Photo: Maria Huhmarniemi, 2020. Participant in of cut forest (right). Photo: Tanja Mäkitalo, 2020.

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IN PRACTICE



◀ **Figure 1.** *The portrait looks at us. Photo: Participant of the workshop, 2024. Copyright: Siunissaq.*

Running with the River Young Peoples' Portraits in Karasjok

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Association Siunissaq, Greenland

The learning of our shared New Genre Art Education field school in Karasjok is that we can create art together and through that, we create togetherness in between us as people, but also between us and our environment, in this case, the river. We learned that the portraits show us all as building cultural, social, environmental, and economic sustainability in a framework of equality, social justice, and freedom.

We make portraits to engage the viewer with the appearance, the personality, or the mood of the portrayed subject. This engagement is achieved through the composition, which brings forward an interpretation in the picture.

In Karasjok, the young participants in our workshop took portraits of each other in places of trees, of sculptures, of buildings, and of melting snow. The portraits became portraits of me and us in our environment. Then we printed the portraits on poster paper and sat

together at a long table in the afternoon light of Karasjok and invited everybody to write what they appreciated about the portrayed person.

We soon noticed that the young participants engage in writing appreciative comments to each other. They told us that they felt relaxed doing it even though it was a new experience both to read and listen to the appreciative words about oneself and others, and to avoid negative descriptions, derogatory teasing, and imposed feelings of inferiority and insecurity. Through that we, step by step, challenge and dissolved discourses of colonialism, violence, and neoliberal competition of positioning. It may be a long process, but it starts here and now.

In a loop of reflection, these portraits were exhibited in its context. They were exhibited at the community event at the end of the seminar, on the wall, side by side, like a long unfolding banner, a portrait of a group, a generation on the move.

In another activity, on elongated pieces of canvas, banners, we all engaged in painting our impression of water, the river, the moving downstream, the colours of water. Then we waited for the colours to dry. The next day, we all stood on the frozen river to show the long banners. We carried them on our shoulders down the slippery riverbanks. Then we unfolded them in the fading light of the afternoon and the coming of night.

It rained a grey, drizzling rain, full of life. It drenched us to the bone. The snow melted rapidly. The chilly rain embraced us, and we danced with it with our banners held high above our heads. We were shadowy figures sinking knee-deep into the melting snow, making formations and moving around as black figures in a landscape of snow.

The colours of the paintings started to dissolve and drip. It made magnificent, coloured traces on the snow. The river turned into an abstract

Figures 2. *Colours interact with the river and snow. Photos: Elena de Casas, 2024.*





Figure 3. Performance with the paintings of the river ice. Photo: Timo Jokela, 2024.

painting of blue, red, and green colours. We put the banners on plastic poles on a skidoo of the Sámi Contemporary art Centre and off they went on a speedy trip down the river. However, soaked by the rain, the banners dropped and followed the skidoo on the ground as huge

spirit of water, making stunningly trails of colours behind it in the dimming of the day light.

It was a moment of beauty, of joy, of laughter, of surprise, and of moving, being on the move. It is a portrait of us, jointly painted by the river and us. As the day passed, and we rolled the banners and started our short journey back to the Sámi Contemporary Art Centre.

In that very moment, we noticed one of the young participants crossing the river and climbing up the riverbank beside the highway bridge, up to the gas station with its bright red light of gasoline under the dark Arctic sky. Up there, he turned around and waved to us from a far distance and disappeared alongside the highway, into the coming of the night. We remember that we, in that moment, wondered if the memory of his view of a creative moment on the frozen river would stay with him onwards in life. ●

INFO

In Karasjok, in the Sámi region of Norway, the key local partners for the workshop were the Sámi Centre for Contemporary Art (Sámi Dáiddaguovddáš) and the Karasjok School. Besides the University of Lapland, the event was also supported by Umeå University in Sweden, Nord University in Norway, and the University of Greenland. External partners included the multidisciplinary arts association Piste from Rovaniemi and the artist and social psychology association Siunissaq from Greenland.

“Our workshop was a journey of shared learning in art and community, bringing together artists and students from diverse Arctic localities. It embodied Nordic values of capacity building and cooperation among various actors and institutions, in vibrant, joyful, and creative ways. This profound experience fostered lasting relationships, shared commitment, and a deep sense of belonging to a team united in working towards a sustainable present and future in the Arctic.”

- participant

“Our workshop began with appreciative portraits of people and gradually evolved into a social and environmental portrait of us all, running with the river in twilight and rain. It was a celebration of the river—a portrait of movement.”

- participant

► Figure 4. Participants' portraits on the wall at pop up exhibition. Photo: Timo Jokela, 2024.

▼ Figures 5. Self Portraits on the move. Photos: (Left) Participant of the workshop, 2024. Copyright: Siunissaq. (Right) Elena de Casas, 2024.



"It was great to feel appreciated for the teaching and learning we are doing here with the students. It is hard sometimes to see the suffering of the young people – and at times to recognize the same suffering in our own lives. We know from experience that it is hard, and here in the workshop, we feel appreciated for who we are, for our commitment, and for our care for the young people. It gives us hope and strength to continue"

- participant

"Work of helping young people to put sustainability and social support into action."

- tutor

A Sustainability Portrait of Educators for Sustainability

Peter Berliner and Elena de Casas
Association Siunissaq, Greenland

Educators are essential to promoting values of sustainability, Nordic values of social justice, a culture of peace, and equality, and Indigenous peoples' values of self-determination. Educators are core to this, not just through disseminating knowledge on these values, but also by performing them everyday in the learning. This is central to Nordic values of education, from kindergarten, where we listen to the voices of the children, to universities, where we value the academic freedom. In the workshop for educators at the Majoriaq Centre in Maniitsoq in 2023, the teachers made a sustainability portrait of themselves as a team of educators of sustainability.

The workshop was learning by doing as the participants did a sustainability portrait through psychosocial activities, including among others the "safe group", "emotional knowledge", and "letter to my teacher". The safe group is telling about an experience in life of being in a group where you feel safe and secure. After telling the story with many details, we reflect on the principles

of such a group and write them on a poster. Emotional knowledge is about formulating culturally embedded emotions and reflect on how they can provide social support. The portrait is about being appreciated. Letter to my teacher is inspired by the famous letter of gratitude, which Albert Camus, when he received the Noble Prize in Literature, wrote to his schoolteacher.

The teachers at Majoriaq developed the activities into wondrous experiences of storytelling and connectivity. It became a workshop of creativity and of unfolding our creativity, engagement, and social support.

We jointly elaborated on the "letter to my teacher" and made it a "letter to my students". The teachers wrote appreciative letters to the students at the Majoriaq Centre, in poetic and supportive words that made the resources, kindness, curiosity, and social commitment of the young students visible. In a learning loop, in the very process of writing to the students, the teachers became visible as engaged, supportive, and committed educators.

After writing these letters to the students, the teachers decided to put them on the wall at the entrance hall of the school as a mural of poetic words, welcoming and supporting the students, and transmitting a caring and supportive approach to learning. Togetherness, trust, and commitment as values of sustainability and social support beam from the words and show a committed approach to learning that opens the right to education, to art, and to knowledge for everyone in a framework of social justice and joy of living.

In poetic texts, in collages of words and drawings, and in songs, the team of teachers created a marvellous and amazing portrait of being



Figure 1. Majoriaq teacher engaged in the Sustainability Portrait workshop for the students at Majoriaq. Maniitsoq, 2023. Copyright: Siunissaq.



Figure 2. Announcing the community event and exhibition. Photo: participants in the portrait workshop at Majoriaq, Maniitsoq, 2023. Copyright: Siunissaq.

"We appreciated the recognition and mutual support during the workshop. It gave us hope and strength to continue our efforts in helping young people implement sustainability and social support in action, both in education and in community building."

- participant



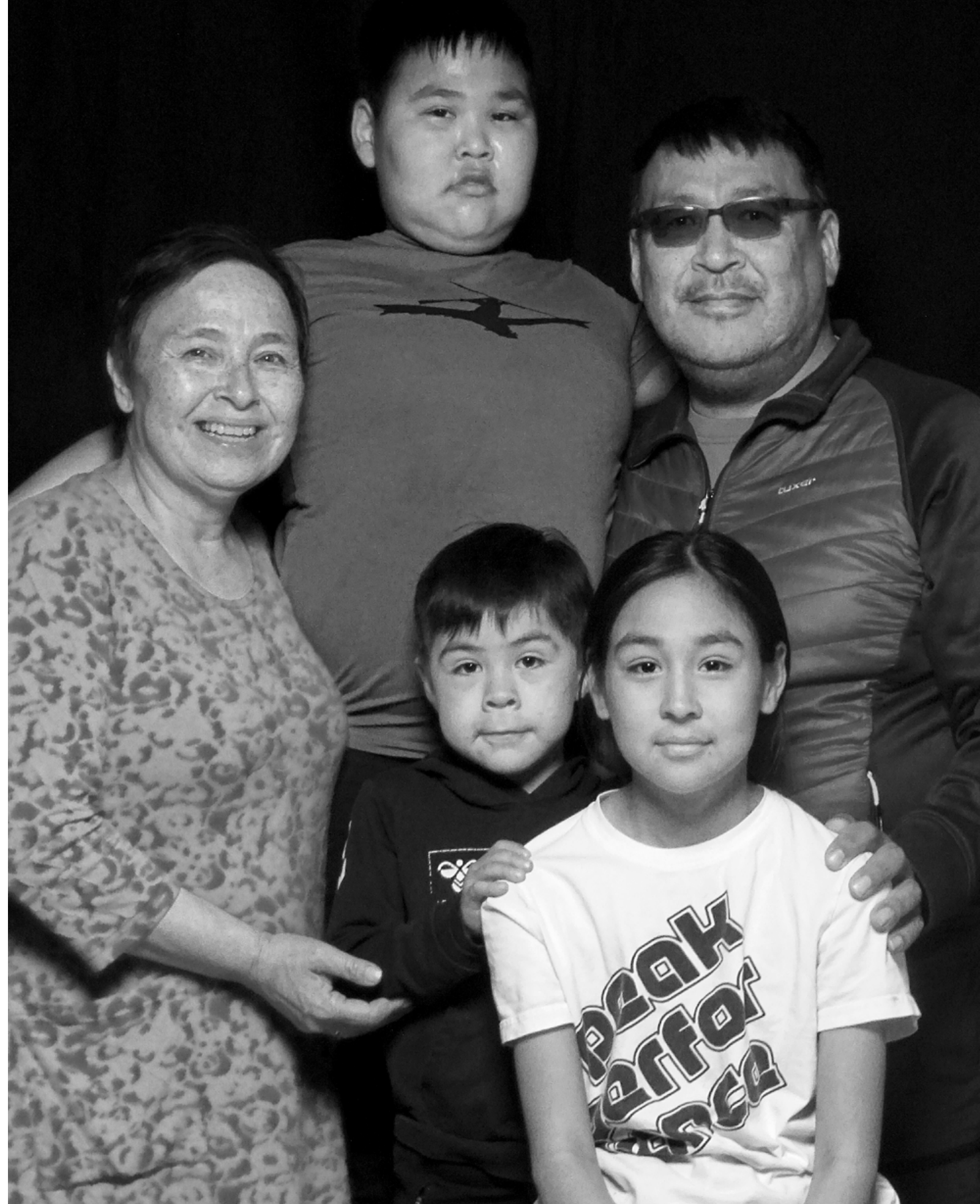
Figure 3. The Majoriaq Director engaged in the Sustainability Portrait workshop for the students at Majoriaq. Maniitsoq, 2023. Copyright: Siunissaq.

INFO

The four-day workshop participants were the six teachers at the Majoriaq Centre in Maniitsoq in Greenland and Elena de Casas and Peter Berliner, community psychologist in Association Siunissaq. Majoriaq is a second-chance educational option for the educational and social system to grant educationally marginalised young people the right to education, knowledge, and cultural activities. Siunissaq works in close collaboration with the Majoriaq Centre by Director Bitten Heilmann, Creativity Teacher Peter Josefsen, in cooperation with the Siunissaq Visual Artists Tina Enghoff and Soeren Zeuth, and in dialogue and cooperation with our Nordic partners in Finland, Sweden, and Norway.

educators for sustainability. In deeds, they proved their words in practice, as a welcoming and strong team of educators for human dignity, cultural viability, and social support. Educators for sustainability. Their experience and practices of learning can be supportive to educators for sustainability throughout the Arctic. ●

Figure 3. The portrait of the teachers with family. Taken by the young participants in the Sustainability Portraits Workshop. Maniitsoq, 2023. Copyright: Siunissaq.





◀ **Figure 1.** Assignment – “Self-Portrait as Landscape”.
Artist: Linnea Andersen, digital artwork, 2024.

“I realized that the clothes I was wearing were connected to my identity, showing that I am a student, but also revealing personal attributes”

– Ida Skoog

Exploring Sustainable Portraiture in Art Teacher Education

Sara Rylander

Umeå University, Sweden

This two-week workshop encouraged students to explore identity through digital media and portraiture. Using iPads, they created six self-portraits and analysed their work, reflecting on how identity can be expressed through art. They also analysed how past artists used symbols, clothing, and technical elements to communicate identity, power, and status. By blending personal and cultural narratives, students gained insight into their own self-expression while preparing for future inclusive, culturally sensitive classrooms.

Inspired by the Greenlandic/Danish Sustainable Portraits project (Berliner & Enghoff, 2019) and building on the insights and methodologies presented in the educational material *Who are you? Here I am!* On portraits and identity (Sjödin Landon et al., 2018), a two-week workshop was conducted where students were given various assignments. In this article, I will discuss some of these assignments.

Self-Portrait as Landscape

One exercise, *Self-Portrait as Landscape*, invited students to envision themselves as natural environments, drawing connections between their internal worlds and depicting their inner landscapes. Linnea Andersen's diverse nature beautifully captures the complexity

of the human emotional landscape. Could it perhaps symbolize an emotional intensity and personal struggles, but also the sense of movement and unpredictability that comes with navigating these emotions? Is it possible that the surfers in this imagery symbolize the human capacity to ride the waves of life's challenges, highlighting the possibility of finding strength and grace in turbulent times? Her portrait serves as a poignant reflection of personal growth, resilience, and the power of self-expression in the face of adversity.

Clothing and Apparel

In the *Sustainable Portraiture* project, students delved into these themes by reflecting on their personal and cultural identities. For example,



Figure 2. Assignment – “Clothing and Apparel”.
Artist: Ida Skoog, digital artwork, 2024.

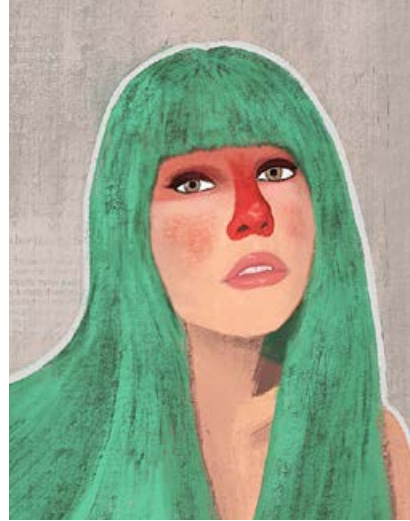


Figure 3. Assignment – “Borrowed Identity”. Artist: Stina Mäki, digital artwork, 2024.



Figure 4. Assignment – “Cultural Identity”.
Artist: Stina Mäki, digital artwork, 2024.



Figure 5. Assignment – “Cultural Identity”.
Artist: Axel Togstad, digital artwork, 2024.

one student, Ida Skoog, reflected on how her clothing in a portrait was tied to both her identity as a student and the deeper personal meanings embedded in the garment: “I realized that the clothes I was wearing were connected to my identity, showing that I am a student, but also revealing personal attributes”. (Figure 2: *Clothing and Apparel*, Ida Skoog). This reflection on clothing as a marker of identity ties into the AEA’s focus on understanding the cultural and social dimensions of self-representation.

Borrowed Identity

Stina Mäki’s *Borrowed Identity* self-portrait (Figure 3.) creatively explores how identity can be shaped through imitation and influence. By analysing an existing portrait and recreating it in her own style, Stina experimented with how identity can be “borrowed” and reinterpreted through another’s lens.

Cultural Identity

Another assignment required students to create a *Cultural Self-portrait*, reflecting on their heritage and how it influences their identity. One student, Stina Mäki, explored her Torneda-

lian roots and the historical suppression of the *Meänkieli* language: “I have kept my surname, and I am proud of it. I am proud of what I have inherited from my culture and my family, and I try to use and develop it. Forward march”.

(Figure 3: *Cultural Identity*, Stina Mäki). This assignment creates an opportunity to highlight cultural resilience and the reclamation of identity, especially for individuals from marginalized communities. The project also prompted discussions around identity and belonging. Several students expressed frustration with the challenge of creating a cultural self-portrait, particularly when they felt disconnected from a specific cultural identity. This struggle sparked meaningful discussions, which in turn fostered a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding cultural identity and representation.

For example, Axel Togstad’s self-portrait reflected a more expansive view of identity, where cultural connections are not limited to heritage or ethnicity but extend to personal passions and subcultures. Axel, who identifies strongly with the street art and graffiti scene, used his self-portrait to express this connection. His piece integrates graffiti motifs, vibrant colours, and urban ele-

ments, symbolizing his identity not through traditional cultural markers but through the creative practices and communities that shape him (Figure 5: *Cultural Identity*, Axel Togstad).

This approach opened up the conversation to a broader understanding of identity, emphasizing that cultural expression is not always tied to traditional or ancestral backgrounds. Instead, identity can also be shaped by the spaces we move in, the art we create, and the communities we belong to. It reinforced the idea that identity is fluid and multifaceted, encompassing both traditional cultural roots and contemporary, personal interests. This expanded view not only enriched the students’ understanding of their own identities but also highlighted the diverse ways in which people can connect to culture and community.

Conclusion

Throughout the project, students engaged in reflective discussions about identity, belonging, and cultural rep-

resentation. These exercises helped them not only understand their own identities but also develop the skills to foster inclusive, culturally sensitive environments in their future classrooms. By studying both personal and cultural narratives through art, students explored the multifaceted nature of self-expression. This process allowed them to experiment with different techniques, reflect on their cultural and personal backgrounds, and gain insights into how these perspectives shape their artistic choices and can be integrated into their teaching practices. ●

References:

- Berliner, P., & Enghoff, T. (2019). *Collaboration, dialogue and trust: Art and social resilience in Kalaallit Nunaat/Greenland*. Siunissaq Sjödin Landon, H., & Kateb, A. (2018). *Vem är du? Här är jag! Om porträtt och identitet*. [Who are you? Here I am! On portraits and identity]. Nationalmuseum.

“I have kept my surname, and I am proud of it. I am proud of what I have inherited from my culture and my family, and I try to use and develop it. Forward march”

– Stina Mäki

INFO

Workshop team: Sara Rylander
Institute: Department of Creative Studies, Umeå University
Participants: First-year art education students, digital art, iPads & self-portraiture
Place: Umeå University
Duration of the workshop: 2 weeks



Figure 1. Photo by Hanna-Thea Björö, 2024.



Figure 2. Photo by Astrid Stenlund, 2024.

Identity, Culture and Norms in Students' Wardrobes

Lotta Lundstedt

Umeå University, Sweden

The workshop explored self-expression through clothing, emphasizing how social interactions shape identity and personal style. Over four weeks, students examined themes such as personal and cultural identity, stereotypes, and norms. Activities included selecting garments, challenging societal norms, and fashion photography, complemented by reflective seminars. Discussions covered clothing's role as a memory carrier, cultural reinforcement, and commercialization's impact on fashion. The workshop emphasized the importance of a safe space for learning and encouraged critical reflection on the intersections of fashion, identity, and societal structures.

"I drew inspiration from music collectives and rave culture, where I've been active in groups that create inclusive, 'queer-friendly' spaces free from sexism and racism. The clothing reflects the music, designed to be 'cute', 'hard', and dance-friendly, allowing for comfort, self-expression, and freedom."

– Hanna-Thea Björö

"Underwear brands often create sexual controversy, reflecting different portrayals of men and women. Women are expected to wear stylish but uncomfortable panties, while men wear practical undergarments. Even when women wear male underwear, they are still sexualized, reflecting a persistent male gaze. Media representations differ too: women are often objectified, while men are seen as complete individuals. This week, I explored whether portraying a woman in traditionally male underwear in a masculine way could challenge these norms."

– Astrid Stenlund

The expression of self through clothing plays a vital role in shaping personal style and identity. This exploration is often facilitated through social interactions, where individuals interpret how they believe others perceive them, and these interpretations contribute to their self-concept (Yodanis, 2019). In the context of today's mass-produced fashion industry, this process can become blurry, making it challenging to navigate between stereotypes and societal norms. The workshop in question aimed to help students explore their modes of self-expression through clothing while simultaneously challenging the existing norms prevalent in both the fashion world and society at large.

This four-week workshop was structured around different thematic directions. The first week focused on expressing personal identity through clothing, encouraging participants to select garments that they felt represented their personality. In the second week, the emphasis shifted to examining wardrobes through the

lens of cultural identity, highlighting how clothing can signify group belonging, shared behaviours, language, values, and traditions. The third week tasked students with challenging stereotypes and norms or fostering dialogue through fashion photography. Students were encouraged to enhance their visual expression with makeup, accessories, lighting, and camera angles, using subsequent seminars and discussions to frame potential developments in their final week's work.

After each week's assignment, students participated in reflective seminars where they discussed their choices and experiences, including why they selected specific garments and how wearing them felt—both physically and in terms of how they wished to be perceived by others. Early discussions often centred on personal presentation, the role of clothing as a memory carrier, and how various clothing brands could reinforce one's cultural identity. As the workshop progressed and the focus shifted to challenging stereotypes and norms,

the discourse evolved to address the restrictive nature of clothing—both physically and in its role in shaping identity. Conversations also touched on the uniformity of fashion, driven by commercial forces that dictate trends and influence consumer choices, turning individuals into “living advertisements.” Other discussion topics included the sexualization of bodies through clothing, and how stereotypes related to thinness, age, or gender are perpetuated. In this context, students also explored various body positions, photographic angles, and framing techniques to amplify their expressions.

Students recognized that defying the power structures both within and beyond the fashion world requires considerable courage. The workshop highlighted that vanity should not be viewed solely in a negative light; rather, dressing up, applying makeup, and caring about one’s appearance can also be forms of self-care. In an educational setting, it is crucial to create a secure environment where students feel safe to explore their bodies, wardrobes, and identities in relation to both group affiliation and societal norms. Discussions should, therefore, aim to address structural issues at a general level to prevent feelings of personal guilt or blame. ●



▲ Figure 3. Photo by Moa-Märta Egholt, 2024.

► Figure 4. Photo by Hanna-Thea Björö, 2024.

INFO

Umeå University, Department of Creative Studies, January 2024

4 weeks photographing and styling workshop

Students - Design & Clothing A

Teacher - Lotta Lundstedt

“This week, I focused on consumption and took a photo of myself in a closet. The sunglasses represent how we see clothing before the person. I believe consumption, especially online shopping, can be a dangerous rabbit hole. I often spend hours browsing sites like Vinted and Tradera, chasing a fleeting sense of satisfaction.”

– Moa-Märta Egholt



“In a fantasy world, maybe a dream world where the suit can be worn by anyone without being interpreted one way or another”

– Hanna-Thea Björö



Figure 1. Future Self-portrait by Johannes Pekonen, 2024.

"A biomechanical device designed to prevent the amplification of minor thoughts into distressing worries. It eliminates excessive overthinking and creates a protective mental barrier for its user. The user will be transported into a bubble where everything feels natural."

– Student Johannes Pekonen about his future self-portrait (see Figure 1.)

plant was sculpted roughly with newspaper and tape. Participants were photographed in the studio with the add-on as the cyborg version of themselves in front of a green screen (see Figure 2). In the second phase of the workshop, the portraits were retouched with Adobe Express including AI tools, to more realistic outcomes and the background was

generated with words describing visions of the future (see Figure 3). The positive and hopeful views on the future were encouraged over dystopias. AI-enhanced photomanipulation made it possible to turn the paper-sculptured transplants into actual ones in the pictures. In the end, the AI tools and the future portraits were presented and discussed with the whole

Future Portraits Workshop

Annamari Manninen

University of Lapland, Finland

Photography and photomanipulation workshop for art education students, to explore the Artificial Intelligence tools as part of creating media art.

The Future Portraits workshop was part of the art education master students' media art and media education course in the spring of 2024. It was conducted in collaboration with Umeå University Sustainable Portraits Workshops. The aim was to connect this form of portrait photography and future

visions, connect hands-on creation, and studio photography with cameras, and explore new AI tools of photo manipulation.

The assignment started with a question of what kind of add-ons or enhancements one could need in the future. The tool or trans-

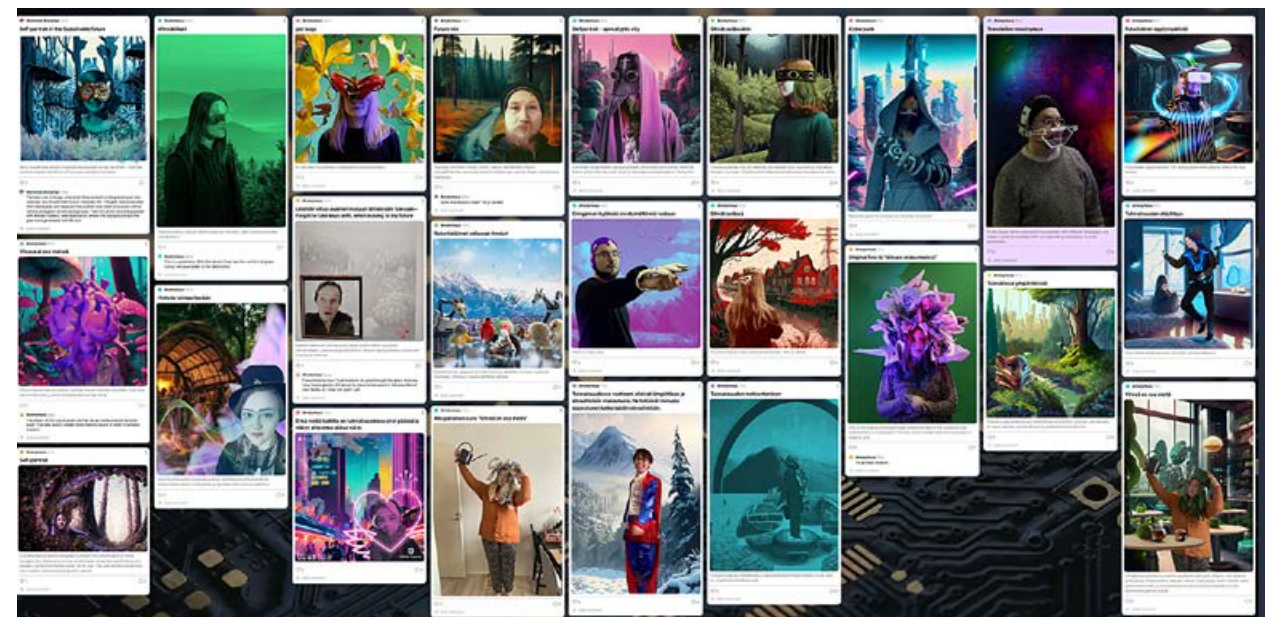


Figure 2. 1. All the portraits in Padlet, Screenshot by Annamari Manninen, 2024.

group. Adobe Express was selected as it doesn't require giving your image to the use of AI in general. Still, other AI applications were also used to generate the background images, since the amount of generated images is limited in the Adobe application.

The sustainable portraits from Umeå University students were also explored and analysed and the activity was done knowing that the future portraits were shared with them in return. The online audience made it more critical for students to look at their work, but the playful approach got everyone engaged in the activity and following it through. The final Future portraits were shared on the Padlet platform.

The material approach by improvising and ideation with making paper parts with quick forming, compressing and building with newspaper and tape made it easy and playful to approach the topic. The portrait as a classical

form in fine arts still has still its strengths as a solid form for an art activity and was here advanced from portraits of persons at the moment to imaginative portraits, as it was also used by students of Umeå University. By sharing the different portraits, the students in both universities got to see examples of the use of portraits as an art form to address different topics. With the threats and conflicts that we face today, art can take on the role of envisioning hopeful and brighter images of a sustainable future. The activity took two teaching sessions and is possible to apply to pupils or students in different school settings. The kind of transplant or tool that each student planned also mirrored their personality and brought up the discussion of the challenges, skills and needs of this time and profession that could be done with humour or more openly with the choice of the student. It helped that this was a group in their fifth year of studies, so they were familiar with one another.



Figures 2–3. Future self-portraits by Bea-Sofia Limnell, 2024.

The Future Portrait task also gave an introduction to the AI tools in image generation and manipulation and connecting self-produced ideas and images with AI-generated ones. The tools and uses of AI in the visual arts in an ongoing and quickly changing field at this moment in history that also has to be critically explored and observed in art education. ●

“A sustainable future also has to be imagined and visualised. Many of the portraits thus showed the coexistence of nature and inhabited environments.”

*– Annamari Manninen,
teacher of the workshop*

INFO

Aim of the workshop was to challenge the dystopic visualizations of the future with playful cyborg-like portraits and AI-generated places by taking art, imagination and play to explore new media tools and give a space for images of brighter and sustainable futures.

Participants of the workshop were Master-level art education students (21) from the University of Lapland. The workshop was arranged in spring 2024, with lessons of two times three hours.

Special dimension of the workshop was the Online collaboration with the Umeå University Sustainable Portraits Workshop.



Figure 1. Students played with the interaction of lights and colours. Photo: Tomi R., 2024.

The workshop, held in the Lapland Education Centre REDU in Rovaniemi on the premises of the University of Lapland, was a subproject of the Sustainability Portraits initiative. This workshop aimed to engage the participating students in exploring their identities and life in the Arctic environment through photography and discussions. The workshop focused on themes of identity, the Arctic environment, sustainability, and community. It is directly connected to the goals of promoting artistic expression and identity, ensuring youth well-being, sustainability, and understanding of the socio-cultural context of youth in the Arctic.

The preparatory education is organized for young people who have finished basic education and need more time to develop their academic and language skills to continue their studies or haven't been able to choose

"Thank you for this opportunity; this was a very nice course, and I'm happy that I was a part of it."
– participant.

a field, a study program, or a profession to apply for when graduating from secondary school. Thus, an art project around the portrait aimed to give them space to explore their identity. The project aimed to create a participatory art experience for the students and cultivate an art education that emphasizes

Light Painting and Northern Portraits

Md Faysal Amin, Ville Lahtinen and Inka Matilainen
University of Lapland, Finland

The Sustainable Portrait workshop aimed to explore Arctic identities through photography, focusing on themes of the Arctic environment and sustainability. Over six sessions, preparatory education students participated in creative exercises, discussions, and hands-on photography tasks, culminating in an exhibition. The project emphasized artistic expression and well-being, aligning with its goals of understanding and supporting the local identities of the Arctic youth.

Figure 2. Photographs were also taken outside. Photo: Ville Lahtinen, 2024.



Figure 3. In the last workshop, the participants set up a pop-up exhibition in the university's hall and gave each other positive feedback. Photo: Md Faysal Amin, 2024.



youth voices and fostering their well-being within rapidly evolving Arctic communities. Through a series of participatory activities, photography exercises, and discussions, students explored their connection to the Arctic and expressed themselves creatively. DSLR cameras, tripods, and other equipment were used for the photography exercises. Through a blend of theoretical discussions, technical demonstrations, and hands-on activities, the workshop aimed to empower participants to engage thoroughly with their surroundings while improving their artistic skills.

The workshop covered five sessions, each designed to stimulate creativity with various activities. Students participated in introductions through photo selections where they shared photos reflecting their identities and perceptions of Rovaniemi. Group discussions helped analyse chosen photos to explore common themes and interpretations of portraits. Photo puzzles and camera experiments allowed students to engage in hands-on photography exercises. Practical exercises, including camera experimentation and portrait missions,

provided opportunities for participants to apply discover skills while going deeper into the workshop's themes. Talking about Arctic objects and photo planning involved students discussing personal items and planning photos to represent themselves and the Arctic. Photo editing with Adobe Photoshop introduced basic image editing techniques to refine the photographs. The workshop culminated in preparing an exhibition where students named their artwork, wrote captions, and displayed photos for the final exhibition titled 'Pimeä maailma/ Dark world'. Finally, the feedback session allowed participants to offer opinions about their workshop experiences and thoughts.

Feedback from the participants offered valuable insights into the workshop's efficacy and areas for improvement. Students felt safe expressing themselves and learned new photography skills during the limited time. Many expressed appreciation for the opportunity to express themselves creatively and deepen their understanding of Arctic identity. Some of them highlighted their interest in photographic

lighting techniques and editing. Students found light painting to be an especially fascinating exercise. These insights will inform future iterations of the workshop, guiding refinements to the curriculum and instructional approach to better meet the needs and expectations of participants.

The workshop provides a valuable model for future art education projects. By providing participants with the tools and guidance to express themselves creatively, the workshop

not only empowered youth voices but also promoted a deeper connection to their identity and surroundings. The workshop provided a platform for students to explore their identities and connect with their Arctic environment through participatory art education where photography was performed as a medium of expression. Through enabling self-expression and throughout the process interactions, the project aligned with the AAE's vision of promoting youth well-being and artistic engagement within the Arctic context. ●

Figure 4. Students explored the possibilities of light painting. Photo: Zuhail Hassani, 2024.

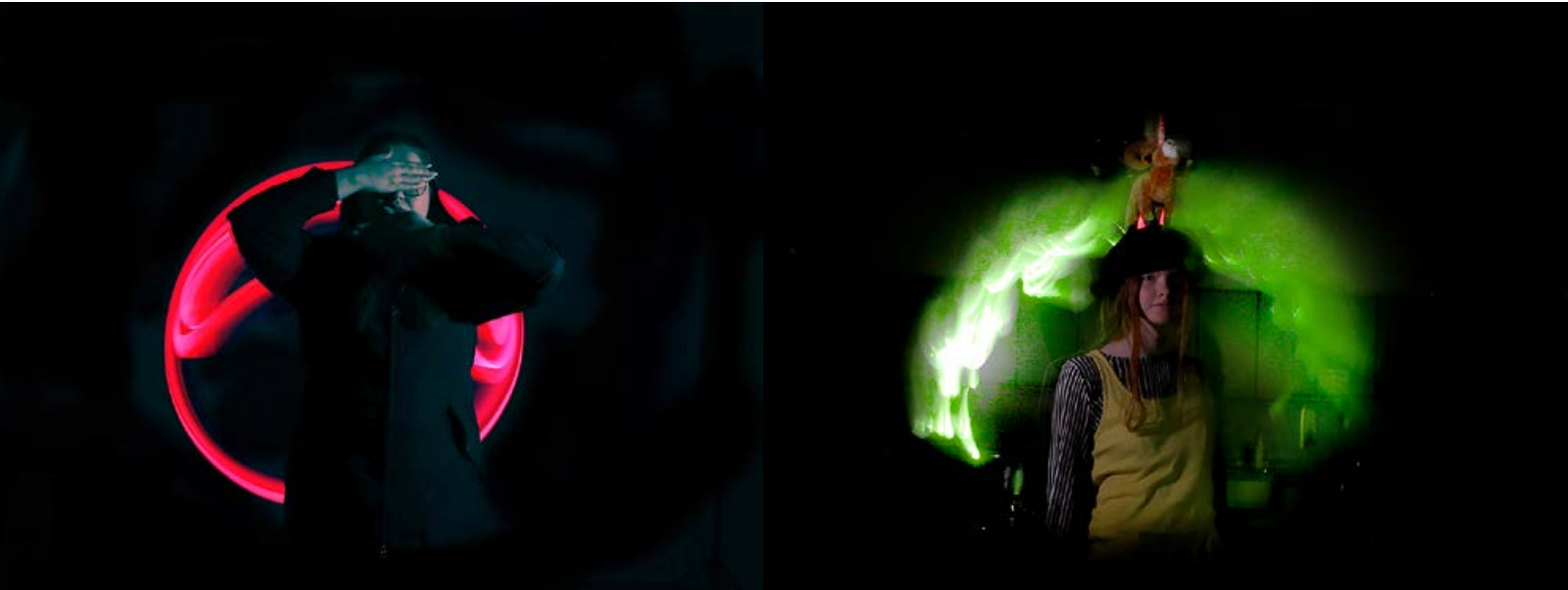


Figure 5. Participants brought objects that represent something about Rovaniemi and Arctic. Photo: H. A., 2024.



Figure 6. Kuvateksti: Figure 6: Students experimented with double-exposed photographs. Photo: H. A., 2024.

INFO

"I succeeded in daring to do things and being in the photos, too."

– participant

The Light Painting and Northern Portraits workshop, part of the Sustainability Portraits project, was held in Rovaniemi for preparatory education students from Lapland Education Centre REDU. Workshop was conducted by art education students Inka Matilainen, Ville Lahtinen, and Arctic Art and Design student Amin Md Faysal with Supervising teacher Tea Tuiskuvaara.



Figure 1. Pupils discussing their visual expressions. Photo: Mette Gårdvik, 2024.



Figure 2. I have drawn the place where I was born. Photo: Mette Gårdvik, 2024.



Figure 3. This is how I see my landscape. Photo: Mette Gårdvik, 2024.

Visual Explorations by Young Islanders in the Arctic

Karin Stoll, Wenche Sørmo and Mette Gårdvik
Nord University, Norway

To get an insider perspective on young people's thoughts about being an islander in the Arctic region, we carried out a workshop in a local school where the students were asked about their thoughts and experiences from their life on the island. The aim was to give the participants a joint experience in visual art and express their perspectives on sociocultural and eco-cultural issues. The drawings address the actual life, emotions and interactions of young islanders in the Arctic region.

“ Arctic youth face unique challenges and opportunities due to factors such as climate change, cultural preservation, economic development, and environmental sustainability. They play a crucial role in shaping the future of their communities and addressing issues related to Arctic conservation, Indigenous rights, and sustainable development” (WWF, u.d.).

The islands are located on the Helgeland coastline in Northern Norway. Visiting the island, you will be met by the fresh smell of salty seawater, white shell sand beaches and

friendly people greeting you, even if they do not know you. The landscape is characterised by high mountains, islets, skerries, beaches and old farmhouses and is a habitat for many species of sea birds. The connection between the ocean and the land has been the foundation for the coastal culture. Archaeological findings show traces of settlements more the 10,000 years back in time. For a long time, fisheries and farming were the main way of living. But today, we observe the growth of industries like fish farming, power plants and tourism. The departure of young people to the mainland

“I fish a lot. The fish is hung outside to dry”.

“We have farms here. There are lots of sheep here and wild birds. This summer I fished for halibut in the sea around the island.”

and the immigration of foreign workforce affects the local communities.

In the teaching project, the reflective use of drawing in learning processes has had a central place. Drawing is one of human's many lan-

guages. Drawing is about leaving traces and is an important process for communicating, visualizing, reflecting, explaining, describing and observing (Frisch 2011). Eisner (2003) emphasizes expressive benefits in drawing work since it allows students to explore and create meaning. Using aquarelle pencil drawings, the students were challenged to express their feelings and thoughts about living on their island and given a sense of inclusion. Through discussions about their visual expressions, the pupils interacted with and reflected on their local ecocultural and sociocultural environment.

The artworks visualise the students' strong identities, cultural pride and connectedness to their local nature and cultural heritage. ●

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"I come from Poland, and I live on an island in Norway. I like the mountains and the northern lights, the moon, the ocean, and the stars."

"I love to see oystercatchers, they are cute. We can see seagulls and eagles eating fish".

INFO

The Workshop team consisted of Karin Stoll, Wenche Sørmo and Mette Gårdvik from Nord University, Faculty of Education and Arts.

The workshop was carried out in spring 2024 as part of the New Genre Arctic Art Education project (Sustainable Portraits) and participants were 30 pupils from 1st to 7th grade from the School on the Islands of Onøy/Lurøy.

As part of the Sustainable Portraits Project, drawings were exchanged as postcard greetings with other participating schools in Sweden and Finland.



Figure 4. I have drawn our mountain, which is named Lurøyfjellet. Photo: Mette Gårdvik, 2024.



Figure 1. Postcards displayed in the exhibition at the Arctic Congress in Bodö 2024. Photo: Sara Rylander, 2024.

Greetings from the Arctic

Annamari Manninen¹ and Sara Rylander²

¹University of Lapland, Finland and ²Umeå University, Sweden

The workshops were designed to foster cross-cultural connections and environmental dialogue through artistic expression. This initiative aimed to engage young people from Arctic and near-Arctic regions—namely northern Finland, Norway, and Sweden—using art as a way to connect them with their unique environments and cultural heritage. The primary goal of this collaboration was to create a space where young people could express their perspectives on the Arctic through visual art, specifically hand-drawn postcards. These postcards served as a platform for pupils to reflect on their environment, exploring themes such as climate change, cultural traditions, and daily life in the Arctic.

In the workshops Pupils aged 7 to 12 reflected on Arctic life, culture, and climate, fostering cross-border dialogue and re-enforcing local identities. The workshops and collaboration were part of the Sustainability Portraits initiative to develop art projects in the local identities in Northern ecoculture, via children and youth well-being and collaboration. The topic was centred around the challenges and beauty of Arctic life, as well as the importance of sharing these experiences with others, and creating a collective voice across borders.

By allowing children to depict their thoughts and experiences, the project sought to promote an understanding of the shared yet diverse

“The pupils recognised the winter sports and fishing from each other’s drawings – living near a river, lake or sea, fishing is an activity that is common for all and the snow for all living in the North.”

– teacher

realities of life in the Arctic and near the Arctic. The aims of the workshops were to draw the attention to the positive and sustainable features of their surroundings and lifestyle and promote positive local identities by sharing the pictures.

In practice, the participants, pupils aged 7 to 12 years old, engaged in the process of creating postcards that they sent to the other schools in the neighbouring countries. The postcards were created using basic materials like watercolour paper, pencils, gouache and watercolour. The pupils were encouraged to think what they would like to share about their home place and life to peers in the neighbouring countries. From the start, it was clear that the images created were aimed to be sent and seen. Looking at, analysing and interpreting drawings in postcards was then the second part of the learning experience.

The idea behind this project worked well because it encouraged creative freedom while fostering collaboration. Each postcard acted as a narrative piece, allowing the participants to communicate with one another across borders. We asked the pupils to share something special from their closest surroundings. By focusing on the act of exchanging postcards, the project created a tangible connection between participants, transforming the simple

Figure 2. From the making of the postcards with stencils. Photo: Annamari Manninen, 2024.





▲► **Figures 3–4.** Postcards in the process of posting and sharing them. Photos: Annamari Manninen, 2024.

act of mailing a postcard into a meaningful gesture of sharing one's personal story.

The feedback from the participants was positive. The children enjoyed the creative process and felt empowered to share their thoughts. One of the key lesson learned from these workshops was the power of art as a tool for environmental education. It demonstrated how creative expression can break down barriers and foster understanding across different cultures. The Greetings from the Arctic collaboration suggests that similar methods could be used in other educational settings, where art-based and cross-country projects could

enhance learning, particularly in transdisciplinary contexts. The workshops highlighted how a simple activity like creating postcards could open up conversations about important topics while encouraging collaboration, creativity, and connection among young people.

The second phase of the collaboration took place at the Arctic Congress in Bodö, where the pupils' postcards were exhibited as a collective installation and the art education students held a workshop with visitors, creating postcards using pre-made stamps and colours, further enhancing cultural exchange and environmental awareness through artistic expression. ●

*How do you write
"Greetings" in Norwegian?
What about in Swedish?
– the Finnish pupils*

INFO

Workshop team:
Sara Rylander, Umeå University, Sweden
Mette Gårdvik, Nord universitet, Norway
Karin Stoll, Nord universitet, Norway
Wenche Sørmo, Nord universitet, Norway
Annamari Manninen, University of Lapland, Finland
Anniina Pennanen, University of Lapland, Finland
Virve Pietilä, University of Lapland, Finland
Kuutti Terävä, University of Lapland, Finland

Participants: Pupils aged 7-12 years
Place: Elementary schools in Sweden, Norway and Finland
Time of the workshop: Spring 2024



◀ **Figure 1.** Some of the finished postcards.
Photo: Annamari Manninen, 2024.

create the pictures, allowing the colours to be mixed for an even wider range of artistic freedom. The colours provided were red, yellow, green, blue, black and white. The card bases were the size of regular postcards and were also white. Along with rubber stamps, coloured markers were provided to decorate the cards even further, or to write their own Arctic greetings.

Exhibition visitors were also invited to participate in a collaborative video artwork. They were asked to fill in the sentence “My Arctic is...”. The chosen word about the Arctic was written on

the paper and the person was filmed with the paper in front of their face. The recorded videos were edited for a collaborative video art that was displayed in the exhibition the next day. The aim of the video and invitation to participate was to evoke thoughts and to share the meaningful aspects of the Arctic. The video as well as the postcards drew a collaborative portrait of the participants with the idea for the elements they want to sustain and share with others from the Arctic.

People who came to the workshop seemed enthusiastic about the idea and some at-

“My Arctic is...” Exhibition Workshops for Participatory Artworks

Anniina Pennanen, Virve Pietilä and Kuutti Terävä
University of Lapland, Finland

The idea in our workshop was to bring a fun and easy way for Arctic Congress attendees to take part in art experiences and have a small creative piece to show to other attendees and, at the end of the day, take home with them. The workshop aimed to not only create fun activities but also to stimulate thoughts and conversation on the topic of Arctic sustainability and lifestyle via creative outlets.

The workshop revolved around the theme of the Arctic and how people viewed it. Attendees were allowed to choose from a variety of handmade rubber stamps on wooden blocks with Arctic themes, such as reindeer, polar bears, tourists and snow, and create their own postcards however they pleased. The subjects of the rubber stamps were taken from a previous art-based collaboration project, where young people were asked to picture their Arctic. The paint was used to

Figure 2. Postcards being made at Bodø. Photo: Anniina Pennanen, 2024.



Figure 3. All the hand-made rubber stamps that were available in the workshop. Photo: Virve Pietilä, 2024.



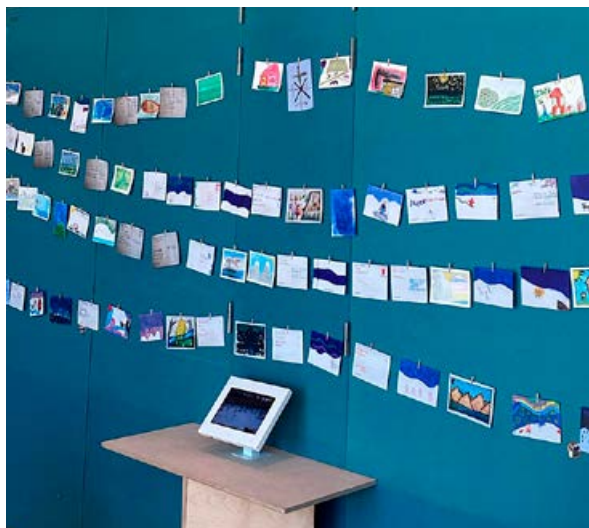


Figure 4. Installation of the postcards made by Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian pupils. Photo: Anniina Pennanen, 2024.

tendees made several individual postcards, getting increasingly creative in their ways of implementing the given method. Some people stayed and made very natural and realistic landscapes, whilst others concentrated on their favourite animals or how they wanted to represent their home. A few even got more creative, and used the rubber stamps to create pictures of completely different subjects. One person even used the stamps to make a portrait. Some people sat alone and did their postcards with high concentration for the task, left their postcards on the rack to dry and left. Others conversed either with us or other attendees, sharing their thoughts and ideas about their cards as well as the other ones that had already been completed and left for others to enjoy.

For inspiration in the workshop room, there were exhibited the postcards made by Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian children in an

"It was enriching to see how diverse the range of nature depicted in the postcards that were made with the same stamps was, and how every card was unique in its own way."

art workshop held for them previously in the project. People could also read the greetings the children wanted to share. The greetings people left themselves on the cards were varied. Some wanted to send greetings from the Expo to their family and friends, and some wanted to send greetings to the politicians who have made decisions about the future of the Arctic.

People who talked and stayed to share their opinions seemed to enjoy the workshop. The ready-made rubber stamps made the workshop easily accessible to visitors with different skills. The rubber stamps were also vague enough, so they could be made to represent many different countries' nature and cultures, without being too specific. ●

► **Figure 5.** "My Arctic is..." invited to share the keywords and participate in creating a collaborative video portrait for the exhibition. Screenshots from the video: Annamari Manninen, 2024.



INFO

Exhibition workshop and participatory video artwork by art education students

Anniina Pennanen, Virve Pietilä, and Kuutti Terävä with supervising teacher Annamari Manninen from the University of Lapland, in the Arctic Congress Bodø 2024, Norway 30.5.–1.6.2024



Figure 1. Pupils filming and sound recording on the Vikaköngäs rapids near the school. Photo: Screenshot from drone video by Ni Lin, 2024.

Sustainability in the Arctic – Ice Fishing Films from Vikajärvi Portraying the Local Lifestyle

Sade Lylykoski

University of Lapland, Finland

The aim was to plan and implement a workshop for elementary school students where they could create video art by filming, photographing, and recording audio to depict their local environment and lifestyle to share with the other participants. We worked with 3rd through 6th grade pupils at Vikajärvi school in Rovaniemi, Finland, to turn their ice fishing trip in the local lake into collaborative video artworks.

The project is part of the larger *Sustainability Portraits* initiative, where various universities and schools collaborate through subprojects. The overall goal was to expand communal and inclusive art education, as well as to increase participants' positive recognition of the local identities and sustainability in the local culture and environment. The focus of the initiative is on young people, which is why school collaborations are a crucial component of the project. All the schools

participating in the project are located in an Arctic environment, and the northern location is a common factor that unites all the participants in this project.

The preliminary theme of the workshop was the environment and sustainability, particularly in the Arctic environment. Before starting the workshop, our project group decided with the school teacher that the theme of the workshop would be water. The primary goal was for the pupils to gain a deeper understanding of their environment, video art, technical skills, and project work in general in connection to their local identities.

We examined the topic from various perspectives and presented many forms and meanings of water to the students of the Vikajärvi School from an Arctic viewpoint. Our goal was to foster discussion and encourage the pupils to develop their relationship with the Arctic environment and nature, as well as to promote

a positive sense of their living environment by asking them to present it, to 'portrait' it, in an artwork for the other project participants and the audience. Additionally, the pupils would learn how to use filming equipment and understand what project work can be like. Ultimately, our main objective was to create video art pieces in groups with the students.

After the planning phase, when we began working concretely with the pupils, our activities initially consisted mainly of advising and guiding them as they planned their own video projects. Using storyboards, we gained an overview of the types of videos the student groups wanted to create, and we could start considering potential filming locations. We decided that our main filming locations would be Vikajärvi Lake (Figures 2 and 4) and the Vikaköngäs rapids (Figure 1).

Filming took two days. We were at the lake the first day and at the rapids the second day.

Figure 2. A fish figure stamped in the snow on the lake ice by the pupils. Photo: Screenshot from drone video by Ni Lin, 2024.



Figure 3. Pupils making stop-motion animation for the underwater part of the film. Photo: Annamari Manninen, 2024.



Our group's work mainly involved advising the students on filming, recording, and using the equipment. We had cameras, GoPro cameras, various microphones, and a drone at our disposal from the university. In addition to filming the environment and recording sounds, we also had a day for creating stop motion animation at the school to add variety to our video pieces (see Figure 3), especially for depicting fish underwater as part of the stories.

As the work progressed, we encountered challenges with time management and planning. We had to reschedule a couple of times to ensure we could film everything needed, and there were moments when we realized that more detailed planning would have been beneficial in certain areas. Despite these issues, we ultimately completed the video projects. We received mostly positive feedback about the workshop. Although some pupils experienced minor frustrations along the way in the group work, overall we heard good experiences from them. The pupils enjoyed participating in the

project, which brought new elements to their school days. They were particularly excited to see the finished works. The pupils also influenced the editing by giving their comments on the first versions of the cutting. For future development, such a project should involve much more thorough planning regarding time management and contingency plans. The concept of contemporary abstract video art presented at the start seemed distant for the 9- to 12-year-olds' expression. Thus, their films followed more traditional narrative forms, which led us to add the animation in the making process to be able to execute the children's original storylines. The pupils were happy with the result, as their artwork was probably also delightful and relatable for their peer audience in the corresponding Norwegian school. The aim of Arctic art education was reached: to make the participants' voices visible through the artwork. The short films were presented in the Sustainability Portraits exhibitions at the Bodö Arctic Conference and Rovaniemi Relate North conference later in 2024. ●

"It takes time away from the regular school lessons, but I think it's worth it, since these are important experiences for the children to learn by doing. They get to work in teams and use this filming and animation equipment!"

– school teacher

'The collaboration is always welcome! The school is small and far from the city centre, so we can't get to the museum visits and so on. Without the collaboration, we couldn't do this kind of project! "

– school teacher



Figure 4. Pupils preparing to record a video under the ice with an action camera. Photo: Annamari Manninen, 2024.

INFO

Pupils from the 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th grades at Vikajärvi School (20), along with their teacher, Jussi Korpi, participated in the workshop, creating four short films in Spring 2024. The project was carried out by the University of Lapland and involved art education students Aino Jäälinoja, Aleksi Ignatius, Sade Lylykoski, Arctic art and design student Ni Lin, and university lecturer Annamari Manninen.



Art can Build a Sustainable Future in the North

Aki Lintumäki

South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences / University of Lapland, Finland

Young people's opinions on climate change attracted a lot of interest from the audience of the Aurora Future Event. Several people wanted to discuss the issue. They thought that art was a good way to take a stand on climate change. When the photos of the young people lit up the dark evening, I felt that I had done something meaningful. Art can be activism. Art can really change the world.

This art-based action research process was carried out in the Arctic and Eastern Finland in 2022. The study aimed to develop an art-based model for young people to express their thoughts on climate change and to promote their social inclusion in the future (Lintumäki 2023). Twenty-two young people participated in the art-based process. We produced a video artwork called *Minun paikkani - Mu báiki - My Place*, which presents

participants' feelings about their favourite places. The video artwork included photos, videos, and texts received from young people. It was published at the Aurora Future Event in Levi Fell, Finland on 18 November 2022. Visit Levi and the Finnish national broadcaster YLE produced Aurora. The themes of the event were equality and climate change (Figure 1).

Our team worked within the framework of the New Genre Arctic Art, which emphasizes sustainable development, northern cultural knowledge, and the integrity of art, design, and crafts to promote cultural resilience (Huuhmarniemi & Jokela 2020a).

We applied the participatory photography method in the process. The method has been widely used around the world to improve the lives of communities and individuals. Participatory photography helps the artist or researcher understand the community. It can also socially empower individuals.

We connected the idea of a place-based approach to artistic work. This helped the young people to address a broader phenomenon. They felt great love and appreciation for their favourite places. Especially young people in the Arctic saw their favorite places through the lenses of their own cultures and traditions (Figure 2 and 3). These places symbolize safety for them and losing them threatens their sense of security. Therefore, most of the young people were very concerned about climate change.

We conducted the artistic process in the autumn 2022 in Finnish and Norwegian Lapland and Eastern Finland. The process was facilitated partly live and remotely. After the data collec-

"If I can influence something through my own actions, then I definitely want to participate."

- participant

Figures 2–3. Young people wanted to talk about their cultures and traditions. Photo: Aki Lintumäki, 2022.



tion, we dramatize the video artwork. The video artwork was edited, and sound designed by videographer Inka Holck. We set up the video artwork on a four meter wide LED screen the day before the Aurora Future event started. The artwork was positioned so that all visitors attending the event could see it (Figure 4).

The audience described the video artwork as “interesting” and “touching.” It was seen as a good way for young people to take a stand on climate change. The video artwork was also seen as an excellent way to promote the inclusion of young people. Young people’s voices were heard and respected. It was clear that the young people felt the same way from the reflective interviews I conducted at the end of

the artistic process. They said they had learned new ways to express themselves (Figure 5).

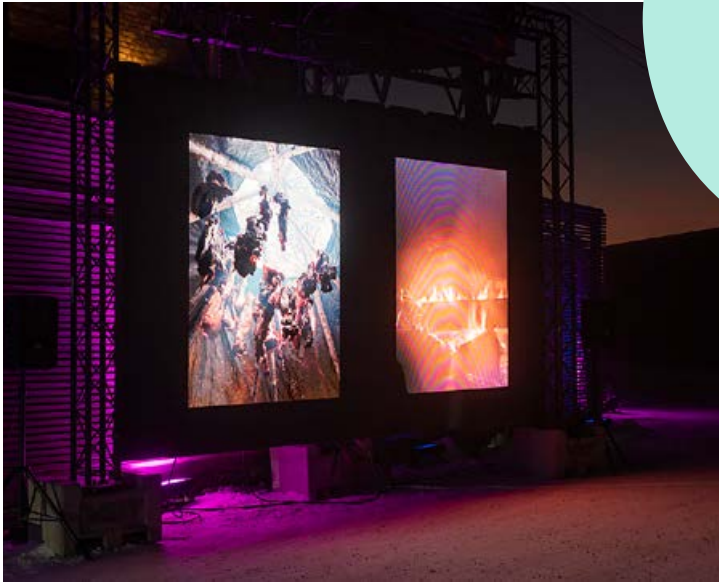
After the interviews, I concluded that such empowering arts-based processes can promote the social inclusion of young people. Art can help build a more sustainable future in the North. ●

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Figure 4. The young people's photos captured the audience's attention. Photo: Aki Lintumäki, 2022.



“It was a surprise for me that all my pictures and stories were published. I really appreciated it, and that’s why I feel I have been heard and my opinions respected.”

– participant

“It is important to be able to act, and it is important to be able to speak!”

– participant'



Figure 5. Young people felt empowered during the artistic process. Photo: Aki Lintumäki, 2022.

INFO

The University of Lapland’s doctoral researchers and artists Aki Lintumäki and Korinna Korsström facilitated the art-based process which was a starting point for the larger research project called *On the Frontline of the Climate Crisis* coordinated by the Youth Research and Development Centre Juvenia of South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences and the University of Lapland. The project started in 2022 and will continue until the end of 2025. The project is funded by the Kone Foundation, and it is carried out in Lapland, Eastern Finland, and the Tampere region.

"It is possible for young people to process and express their views on the future of climate through art-based practices – in an era of climate crisis, we need different ways to understand our reactions, feelings and thoughts connected to climate change."



Figure 1. Workshop activities – crafting the action group's outfits. Photo: Sara Teperi, 2023.



Figure 2. The knowledge group's news about Lapland's climate future at Rovaniemi Arctic Spirit. Photo: Aki Lintumäki, 2023.



Figure 3. Emotion group's videos at Rovaniemi Arctic Spirit. Photo: Aki Lintumäki, 2023.

Young People's Climate Future Performance

Kanerva Kivistö and Sara Teperi
University of Lapland, Finland

*Within the framework of our master's thesis, we planned and carried out a workshop period where a group of young people living in Rovaniemi, Finland, were able to process and express their views on the climate future through their co-artwork **Solastalgia**, for an international audience in the Arctic Spirit Congress. In this case, the concept of **young people's climate future** refers to their future prospects as well as climate change-related feelings, knowledge, and desires for sustainability action.*

As climate change reaches the Arctic and the North, our communities and ecosystems, young generations will have to face these changes and issues related to climate change throughout their lives. The idea of the workshop was for young people to process and express their views on the climate future through art-based practices. The activity is based on the participatory practices of community art through several art-based techniques and subtasks.

At the beginning of the workshop, the students had an opportunity to choose between three groups, each emphasizing a different approach: the emotion, knowledge, and action groups. The participatory practices of community art appeared as three different art-based techniques. Creative writing worked as a way to dive into one's climate emotions, media art provided an opportunity to process climate future more objectively, and performative art centred around the desire

for action. During the three-week workshop, the groups worked towards the final artwork with the help of subtasks designed for each group separately.

The subtasks of the emotion group consisted of writing a stream of thought, illustrating it, and creating a soundscape for it. The knowledge group wrote about their favourite place and brought it into a visual form as a photomontage. The action group explored the world of performance art through different exercises, including embodiment and materiality. As a result of the workshop process, the communal artwork *Solastalgia* was created. *Solastalgia* consists of the emotion group's videos, the knowledge group's photomontages and news about Lapland's climate future, and the action group's live performance around the meaning of winter.

Solastalgia was presented at the Rovaniemi Arctic Spirit opening reception in November 2023. Arctic Spirit is an international conference event that focuses on topics related to

"Solastalgia is a form of homesickness one gets when one is still at 'home'."

– Glenn Albrecht,
2005, p. 48

the Arctic areas. The aim of the workshop was to present local young people's views on the climate future through art-based practices for an audience concerned with the future of the Arctic, including policymakers and representatives of academia.

We evaluated the functionality of the workshop activity through participants' experiences of inclusion. Firstly, inclusion was fulfilled when the students experienced the subtasks as helpful while tracing their views on the climate future. One of these students noted that writing a stream of thought helped to uncover their



Figure 4. Sparkling snow – Action group's live performance. Photo: Aki Lintumäki, 2023.



Figure 5. The end of the live performance. Photo: Aki Lintumäki, 2023.

INFO

Facilitators Kanerva Kivistö and Sara Teperi, MA students, University of Lapland.

Collaboration with the *On the Frontline of the Climate Crisis* project (funded by the Kone Foundation), Aki Lintumäki, Korinna Kortsström-Magga and a local high school in Rovaniemi. The group of high school students as workshop participants and art teacher Hanna Korhonen as the third workshop facilitator. Workshop period from October to November 2023. *Solastalgia* was presented at the Arctic Spirit Congress's opening reception in November 2023.

climate emotions. Secondly, participating in the event and presenting one's art there gave some participants a feeling of influencing change. One student found it remarkable to be close to policymakers. For us, these experiences seem like successful inclusion. Our proposal for similar future activities is to focus on participatory practices of performance art instead of many art forms. ●

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Figure 6. Figure skater – Action group's live performance. Photo: Kanerva Kivistö, 2023.





Figure 1. Screenshot from video: Mauri Lähdesmäki, 2024.

My Controversial Northern Forest Relationship

Suvi Autio

University of Lapland, Finland

*My recent artwork **Angle of Approach (Northern forest relations)** is a media art piece that studies Finnish forest relations through artistic practice. With this self-portrait, I aimed to experiment in visualizing my nature, particularly my forest relationship and that of my compatriots.*

The Finnish forest relationship is controversial. On one hand, for us Finns, the forest and our close connection to nature are integral to our identity and cultural heritage. On the other hand, many of us intentionally exploit it to the detriment of biodiversity.

In a playful art process, I explored how this relation could be made visible through media arts and performance. The artwork is a contemporary self-portrait and my society being unnaturally (or naturally) awkward in the forest.

"On one hand, there's the love for nature and its calming qualities; but on the other hand, I cover myself with protective gear and spray to avoid the mosquitoes, horseflies, wasps, ticks, etc. Am I a living representation of a hypocritical Finnish nature lover?"

– Autio

The artwork consists of a video of a performance I made in a particular spot in a local forest called Ounasvaara, Rovaniemi, which is under threat of being demolished for housing tourists. The Ounasvaara forest is centrally located. It is only 1 km from the city centre and is historically important to the locals. An ongoing debate is about who it is developed for and under what regulations. This artwork also connects to a larger conversation, such as the general loss of biodiversity and exploitation of natural resources. In Finland, we have constant disputes and demonstrations over the policy of forest cutting. Much of the wood goes into paper production and further to kitchens and toilets here and abroad.

The filmed and further edited performance video was projected onto a canvas made of paper towel roll towers. In this case, paper towels represent the trees they came from and a level of vanity and luxury that end up failing



Figure 2. Screenshot from video: Mauri Lähdesmäki, 2024.

both. The second part of the performance took place as I clumsily sneaked behind the rolls of toilet paper and started tumbling the roll towers one by one. A soundscape was added to the piece in the next round of editing, which mostly consists of sounds from nature, such as birds singing and the sound of wind. The sounds were specially recorded for this piece.

The filmed performance experiments with the possible stiff and unnatural connections to the forest. On one hand, there's the love for nature and its calming qualities. But on the other hand, I cover myself with protective gear and spray to avoid the mosquitoes, horseflies, wasps, ticks, etc. Am I a living representation of a hypocritical Finnish nature lover?

The idea worked well. At first, I didn't want myself to be seen as I was pushing over the



Figure 3. Making the artwork. Photo: Mauri Lähdesmäki, 2024.

paper towel towers. But in the end, the viewer can occasionally catch glimpses of me. It turned out to be a good addition to the process, as it emphasizes that is us doing the pushing. Feedback on the artwork has so far been positive. Though some people haven't understood it at all, others have enjoyed the naïve approach to the theme.

Video based self-portraits could be used in art education. This requires more time, and it gives more tools for self-expression because we include movement and sound. ●

INFO

The video was shot with a Blackmagic Pocket Cinema Camera 6K Pro and edited with Adobe Premiere with the help of Mauri Lähdesmäki.

▼ Figures 4–5. Screenshot from video: Mauri Lähdesmäki, 2024.



CONCLUSION

Sustainability Portraits – Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Timo Jokela¹, Peter Berliner² and Annamari Manninen¹

¹University of Lapland, Finland and ²Association Siunissaq, Greenland

The Sustainability Portrait–Art, Location and Social Responsibility for Sustainable Development in the Arctic (shorthand: Sustainability Portraits) is a development project with the goal of creating a hybrid implementation model (both digital and onsite) for international seminars and workshops targeted at art educators, researchers and master’s and doctoral students in art education at four universities. The network is organised as a collaboration between the University of Lapland, Nord University, Umeå University and Siunissaq; at the beginning of the project, it is a part of the Ilisimatusarfik–University of Greenland and is now an independent research and art-and-community association. The development project is a crucial part of a broader New Genre Arctic Art Education (AAE) initiative among the partners (Jokela et al., 2024). From the outset, the goals and methods of the Sustainable Portraits collaboration have been guided by the fact that the initiative was a partnership between two thematic networks of the University of the Arctic: Arctic Sustainable Art and Design (ASAD) and Children of the

Arctic. These thematic networks join together their disciplines, interests and forces.

The project’s goal is to develop preliminary content and an approach for long-term interdisciplinary partnerships between Arctic universities and organisations in the fields of visual arts, art and design education and psychosocial work; this initiative aims to address the challenges arising from changes in the Arctic that have been driven by megatrends such as urbanisation, globalisation and the impacts of climate and environmental changes on the social and cultural lives of local communities. Our approach seeks to support knowledge sharing and collaboration by establishing a network structure that aligns with our long-term objectives: fostering connections; facilitating the exchange of knowledge, ideas and skills; and promoting practical collaboration in the communities of the North and Arctic regions.

Sustainability is central to this project. The approach is realised through dialogical and participatory methods applied in Sustainability

Portrait activities. Initially, the project implements and further develops a hybrid university course that conducts a field workshop in a selected community. These workshops serve as development pilots in which the activities are assessed and evaluated, with students from partner universities participating in facilitator roles as part of their studies.

This chapter outlines the theoretical foundation and activities of our project in a field-relevant manner. It summarises our achievements, learning and recommendations for future Sustainability Portrait activities. The project’s development spans various interactions with children, youth, teachers, communities and organisations, but impact studies will follow later. Here, we review the first two years of the Sustainability Portraits project, which was conducted from a university higher education perspective via arts-based action research (ABAR) methodologies.

ABAR combines action research principles with creative practices to address real-world issues and generate new knowledge. In our project and in the art education field more generally, ABAR is also a developmental area, with students conducting extensive study projects, master’s theses and texts within doctoral research. A key aspect of ABAR’s evolution involves agile, democratic planning and execution of exhibitions that involve diverse participants and audiences.

Our Sustainability Portraits project has undergone continuous evaluation and development from its inception through all stages of implementation—meetings, workshops, field courses, artworks, exhibitions, academic writing, visual essays and until publication layouts.

Based on dialogues, reflective discussions and collected reflective data, we have made observations and outlined directions for the future development of both Sustainability Portraits and the broader framework of the New Genre AAE initiative.

Jokela and Hiltunen (2024) conceptualised the steps for New Genre AAE activities, and their article helps in understanding the nature of Sustainability Portraits as part of it, particularly in the context of contemporary art and Arctic sociocultural situations. Berliner and de Casas (2024) highlighted the background of the Sustainability Portraits initiative and its connections to psychosocial well-being and social sustainability, especially from a Greenlandic perspective. In a sister publication, Jokela et al. (2024) shared their insights and recommendations based on the arts-based development work and action research conducted in the New Genre Art Education in the Arctic project. The proposals they presented for integrating art and research-based teaching into university curricula are also well justified from the perspective of the analysis of the Sustainability Portrait Project.

Universities and Curriculum – Art and Multidisciplinary Research

To integrate the Sustainability Portraits initiative into university art and craft teacher education, we must merge artistic practice with academic research. This is especially beneficial in the Arctic because it addresses psychosocial well-being amid rapid changes. We suggest adopting ABAR to equip staff and students with methods that blend artistic and traditional research approaches, tackling northern- and Arctic-specific issues.

The artistic expression included in ABAR is a valid form of research, offering unique insights into Arctic social and cultural dynamics. University projects should involve participants as coresearchers, fostering collaboration between students, researchers, local communities and stakeholders. These partnerships can produce knowledge that is both academically sound and socially impactful, enhancing our understanding of well-being while fostering resilience.

A participatory process that encourages collective problem solving and empowerment must be central to this effort. We can achieve this through ABAR, which prioritises transformation and change by using art as a catalyst for action-oriented research. The goal is to improve educational settings, community well-being and organisational practices by integrating research findings with artistic and art-based processes. This ensures that the outcomes not only contribute to theoretical knowledge but also address real-world needs in the Arctic, making research more impactful and grounded in lived experiences.

Reflective practice is essential here. We need to incorporate ongoing art-based reflection into research and learning, where students, educators and community members critically evaluate artistic processes, actions taken and outcomes achieved. This level of reflection enables the continuous refinement of research questions, artistic methods and project goals. Valuing diverse forms of knowledge production, such as artworks, performances or other creative outputs, enhances the understanding of research questions and provides alternative ways of engaging with psychosocial well-being issues.

Flexibility is essential. It is important to adopt context- and situation-specific methods, allowing art-based research approaches to adapt to the unique needs and challenges of Arctic research settings. This adaptive approach allows research strategies to evolve, here being shaped by interactions and insights that emerge during the project. In this manner, the research remains responsive to the changing realities of the Arctic, fostering innovation and relevance.

The recommendations for developing art-based educational models have shown effectiveness in ongoing projects. Integrating artistic practices into research has created a dynamic and creative learning environment, prompted change, generated new insights and meaningfully engaged participants. For example, the sustainable portrait model has successfully connected artmaking, research and social action, thus enhancing the relevance and impact of academic learning.

However, there are challenges. The flexible nature of study modules, such as Sustainable Portraits, can conflict with the rigid structures of standard university curricula, making students study pathways that are more complex and limiting the participation of university staff. Currently, sustainability portrait studies are available in a flexible format at the University of Lapland, being facilitated by its curriculum's inclusion of community project credits. To expand this model, we recommend exploring collaboration with the University of the Arctic to establish a common framework for integrating Sustainability Portraits across partner universities. This step would facilitate student engagement in studies addressing the specific needs of the North and Arctic, strengthening the impact of art-based research on psychosocial well-being.

By fostering collaboration between art and research, we can create an educational environment that is not only academically rigorous but also deeply connected with the lived experiences of Arctic communities, empowering students and communities to address the challenges of a rapidly changing world.

Sustainability Portraits as University Course for Art Educators

Based on our experiences and activities with Sustainability Portraits, we have outlined guidelines on how participatory contemporary art and psychosocial work should be integrated into university education to increase the capacity to support the sustainability and well-being of North and Arctic regions. We see significant potential in this integration if the following five key principles are included in the course implementation:

The first key point is strengthening cultural and personal expression through art. The Sustainability Portraits approach prepares art educators to use contemporary and participatory visual art as a platform for individuals and communities to creatively express their cultural identities, experiences and emotions. In regions where traditions are deeply connected to the ecoculture, such as North and the Arctic, art can help illustrate the impacts of social, environmental and cultural changes. Educators should be prepared to facilitate projects such as Sustainability Portraits, which provide individuals with opportunities to share their stories, reflect on their experiences and strengthen their connection to their heritage, thereby supporting psychosocial well-being.

The second is enhancing community cohesion and social resilience. During the project, diverse methods were developed for creating Sustainability Portraits based on collaboration and dialogue, either individually or as members of the community. Art educators should be equipped to design projects that bring people together to address shared challenges, such as mental health issues, social isolation or environmental concerns. Training should emphasise participatory approaches that foster dialogue, mutual support and empowerment, strengthening community cohesion and collective resilience. This requires that the course and training be conducted in a project-based interactive manner with the community, as outlined in the guidelines created in the Sustainability Portraits project.

The third is facilitating emotional processing and addressing the psychosocial dimension. Although the primary task of art educators and visual arts is not to provide therapeutic support, the training should include using art as a nonverbal tool for processing trauma, grief or stress, especially for those facing unique stress factors, such as anxiety related to climate change or cultural loss. Educators should learn to facilitate artmaking in a way that provides a safe space for emotional expression and healing, helping individuals build social support, mental health and long-term well-being.

Fourth, Sustainability Portraits should emphasise open learning processes (coformation and intra-action) over predetermined learning outcomes. Given the diverse cultural backgrounds and varying needs in the Arctic, a flexible approach to learning is essential. Education should prioritise practical experiences and local knowledge rather than content that is based solely on

conventional academic disciplines. This requires project-based learning, which allows students to immerse themselves in the subject while acquiring new skills relevant to their contexts.

Fifth, because one of the key starting points for New Genre AAE is the use of public spaces as learning environments, this could also be worth considering in Sustainable Portraits. In North and the Arctic, the land itself is an essential part of cultural identity and learning. Workshop activities and education can take place in natural settings—such as forests, riverbanks, coastal areas, tundra and mountains—where students can learn traditional ways of life and cultural practices through first-hand experiences in addition to art-based studies. Community centres, cultural festivals and other public events can also serve as dynamic learning spaces for sustainable portraits that blend traditional and contemporary art and knowledge, reinforcing a sense of place and belonging.

By incorporating these principles into art educator training programmes, universities can help future educators support the psychosocial health of northern and Arctic communities, promoting well-being, cultural continuity, renewal, resilience and support for sustainability transitions through creative collaboration. The principles of Sustainability Portraits align with the broader goals of the New Genre AAE initiative but specifically focus on psychosocial areas and social sustainability. Therefore, we will examine the role of psychosocial aspects in more detail.

The Role of Psychosocial Activities in the Sustainability Portrait Project

The Sustainability Portrait is a vivid illustration of how art, community engagement and en-

vironmental stewardship intertwine to foster sustainable development in the Arctic. One of the core concepts of this project is psychosocial activities, which play key roles in ensuring the holistic well-being and connectedness of young people to their environment, community and culture. The multifaceted psychosocial activities embedded within the project are significant in shaping socially resilient and sustainable Arctic communities.

Understanding the nature of psychosocial activities is crucial. Psychosocial activities engage individuals at both the psychological and social levels, influencing their mental health, social interactions and overall well-being. Within the context of the Sustainability Portrait Project, these activities encompass a range of creative and communal endeavours that facilitate self-expression, cultural identity and social cohesion. By participating in these activities, young people in Arctic localities can reflect on their personal and collective identities, fostering a sense of belonging and responsibility toward their community and environment.

The role of art in psychosocial activities is important. Art serves as a powerful medium for psychosocial engagement in our project. Through various artistic expressions, such as snow sculptures, winter sound recordings, handicrafts, landscape photographs and sea and animal imagery, young people can explore and articulate their connectedness to the Arctic environment. These creative endeavours are deeply embedded in the cultural and social fabric of communities, reflecting their shared histories, traditions and values.

For instance, the emphasis on clothing in Sweden highlights the importance of cultural

identity and social resilience. By using everyday materials to create art of self-expression, young people can challenge narratives of mass consumption and commercial globalisation, asserting their unique cultural landscape. Similarly, in Finland, the focus on rivers, water and local cultural traditions underscores the intimate relationship between people and their environment. These artistic activities provide a platform for young people to express their identities and envision sustainable futures.

Community engagement and social responsibility are central. Psychosocial activities within the project apply artistic expression to encompass community engagement and social responsibility. By involving young people in workshops, community events and dialogues, the project fosters a sense of collective responsibility and active participation in shaping sustainable communities. The concept of 'activism', or activist art, is central to this engagement because it empowers young people to use art as a tool for social change and environmental stewardship.

In Norway, the strong emphasis on the ocean and landscape in project activities highlights the community's role in environmental stewardship. Young people are encouraged to engage with their surroundings actively, understanding the impact of their actions on the environment and their community. This engagement nurtures a sense of responsibility and agency, empowering them to contribute to the sustainability of their localities.

The psychosocial activities within the Sustainability Portrait Project also play a vital role in enhancing cultural resilience and social support. In Greenland, for example, the project's

social focus includes cultural sustainability and, to some extent, economic sustainability. By opening access to formal education and providing income opportunities for marginalised youth, the project fostered social inclusion and resilience.

These activities create a supportive network that connects young people with their peers, families and communities. Through the collective experience of participating in the project, young people can build meaningful relationships, share knowledge and support each other in their journey toward sustainability. This network of support is crucial in fostering resilience and ensuring the well-being of young people in the Arctic.

The Sustainability Portrait emphasises the performative aspect of sustainability, highlighting the active role of individuals and communities in shaping sustainable futures. Engagement, commitment, responsibility and visions of a viable future are seen as actions involving both human and nonhuman actants. Through psychosocial activities, young people perform sustainability, embodying the principles of environmental stewardship, cultural resilience and social responsibility in their daily lives.

As the project evolves into an experience, it becomes a living testament to the power of collective action and shared visions. The activities, workshops and community events provide a formative feedback loop, allowing participants to reflect on their journey and chart their path toward sustainability. This performative aspect ensures that sustainability is not merely a theoretical concept but also a lived experience that is deeply embedded in the cultural and social fabric of the Arctic communities.

Based on the review of Sustainability Portraits, we recommend deeply integrating psychosocial activities into the project. To achieve a holistic approach to sustainable development in the Arctic, the project should prioritise psychosocial activities that incorporate artistic expression, community engagement, cultural resilience and performative sustainability. These elements will empower young people to envision and build a sustainable future. Integrating psychosocial components will not only enhance individual well-being but also strengthen the social and cultural fabric of communities, ensuring a resilient and sustainable Arctic for future generations.

Guiding Principles for Sustainability Portraits Workshop in Local Communities

Sustainability portraits, such as university courses and student training, should be implemented in well-planned hands-on field schools in local communities, where students can engage with the phenomenon and methods in real-life settings. Although tutors will naturally make the necessary preparations, in line with the principles of participatory action, students are full members of the planning and implementation teams as early as possible.

When Sustainability Portraits are designed as participatory contemporary art workshops in northern and Arctic communities, we recommend four key points to support social and cultural sustainability and well-being.

The first is the integration of contemporary art practices with local ways of life. Workshops should incorporate northern ecocultural knowledge, indigenous knowledge, cultural prac-

tices and local ecoculture by using traditional materials, techniques and themes that reflect cultural identity. Although the sustainability portrait theme is often associated with photography, video and modern digital techniques, it is essential that photographic sessions and environments connect to local ecocultures and places of personal or communal significance. Respecting cultural protocols is vital when individuals collaborate with indigenous communities. It is essential to ensure that activities are culturally appropriate and that all documentation is done with permission and used respectfully. This approach helps preserve cultural heritage, fosters cultural pride and ensures that traditional practices are passed on to younger generations, strengthening community cohesion.

The second focus is on local themes and sustainability issues. Importantly, northern and Arctic communities are not museums. Emphasis should be placed on local environmental themes and sustainability concerns, guiding participants to explore topics such as climate change and sustainable living and their relationships with these issues. Addressing these themes reinforces the connection to the local environment, raises awareness about ecological challenges and promotes sustainable practices relevant to the community and the Arctic context.

The third is the promotion of intergenerational activities. Regardless of the age group, it is important to encourage intergenerational collaboration by designing workshops that bring different generations together to work in shared spaces, hence combining the traditional knowledge of older generations with contemporary artistic perspectives. Intergen-

erational projects enhance social sustainability by strengthening relationships, reducing isolation and promoting the transfer of cultural knowledge across generations. This provides a channel for young people to be heard in their communities.

The fourth is the use of Sustainability Portraits for social dialogue and emotional well-being. Safe spaces should be created where participants can express subjective experiences, emotions and social issues through art. Sustainability portraits workshops should be understood as performative situations that allow diverse participation in a dialogue that promotes healing and supports community resilience. Although the goals of sustainability transitions are planetary, addressing them can support individual mental health by providing an outlet for self-expression and fostering dialogue on social challenges. This is particularly important in Arctic communities, where art can help address mental health issues often rooted in a legacy of colonialism and enhance emotional well-being.

Sharing Portraits for Dialogical Learning on Digital Platforms

Sustainable portraits have developed through circumpolar collaboration characterised by vast distances. In a region, it is common to work across linguistic and cultural boundaries. When participants from various fields are included, dialogue is needed to share and understand different perspectives on the location, community and subject matter of the work, fostering a sense of equal belonging. Hence, one of the development areas in the Sustainable Portraits project has been online collaboration between partners and

students. Development pilots carried out in different countries have facilitated dialogue on themes of sustainability and identity. This has been experimented with not only through shared online meetings but also by sharing digital portraits and videos in online environments.

The results encourage the belief that similar methods could be applied in other art-based and transnational, multidisciplinary contexts. The workshops have revealed how receiving, viewing and analysing others' artworks sparked discussions while promoting collaboration, creativity and a sense of connection among young people, despite the long distances between them.

The experiences demonstrate that involving Arctic universities, stakeholders and communities in interactions on digital platforms supports learning. The technology and connections needed for this interaction are already available. The time zone differences that often complicate real-time online collaboration are still manageable from Greenland to Scandinavia to Finland. Going forward, it is essential to develop ways to communicate directly with local communities to broaden participation in art-based dialogues.

Although the activities occur in specific locations and communities, creating and exhibiting artworks are important for initiating dialogue. Sharing artworks online with other groups adds a new dimension to the dialogue and allows new audiences to interact with the works. Presenting sustainable portraits for young people in other Arctic regions emphasises the goal in a unique way. It also offers an opportunity to take pride in one's culture and identity.

The digital tools needed to share videos and photos are available to everyone, and several platforms support online dialogue. Artworks provide more personal perspectives and frames to express reflections on Arctic sustainability, which may not be expressed verbally but are conveyed through images. Based on project experiences, creating artworks is seen as an essential way to provide the space for expressing emotions and diverse perspectives, conveying information in different ways and getting to know the participants behind the screens. Thus, we can encourage the use and further exploration of collaboration and online sharing of Sustainability Portraits alongside exhibitions.

An international dialogue is recommended to open a new level of sharing and learning through the Sustainability Portraits process, from creating one's own artwork to sharing and receiving those of others.

Interwoven Perspectives of Intra-action in Sustainable Portraits Learning

In Sustainable Portraits, we have designed and developed a university course for students, including an online preparatory component and a field course component in a chosen northern community. The development involved a multidisciplinary team, such as art educators, natural science teachers, social psychologists, museum staff, craftspeople and artists. Students studying diverse subjects participated as well.

During the project, we used the term 'intra-action' from Barad (2007). This concept extends the traditional idea of interaction and educa-

tional integration, suggesting that entities emerge through relationships, not pre-existing independently. In intra-action, students, teachers, materials and the environment mutually shape each other through dynamic engagement. Recognising intra-action is crucial to the formation of ecocultural knowledge in northern contexts. It should also be central in interdisciplinary academic collaboration when renewing conventional educational and operational approaches.

Adopting intra-action for sustainable portrait activity means that the learners, teachers, content and methods are intertwined, entangled and emerging from their mutual relationships. This approach shifts the focus from traditional models of knowledge transfer to viewing knowledge as arising from these entangled intra-actions. Pedagogy then emphasises the intertwining of social, cultural and material factors in education rather than the transfer of pre-existing knowledge or skills.

Intra-action also acknowledges nonhuman elements in learning, which are vital not only in northern ecocultures but also in digital environments. Cameras, devices and learning spaces actively shape how sustainable portraits are created. This is not only about representing identities but also about transforming them through intra-action with the tools. The digital platforms used with students also engage in intra-action, influencing the learning experience in real time. Therefore, a Sustainable Portrait activity requires the pedagogical consideration of these multidimensional entanglements.

In conclusion, the Sustainability Portrait Project stands as a testament to the dynamic interplay between individuals and their environments in

the pursuit of sustainable futures. The performative aspect of the project highlights the active roles played by both human and nonhuman actants, demonstrating that sustainability is not just a theoretical concept but a lived reality. Through collective action and shared visions, the participants engage in a transformative intra-active loop that deeply embeds the principles of environmental stewardship, cultural resilience and social responsibility within the fabric of Arctic communities. This ongoing dialogue and reflection foster an enduring commitment to sustainability, making it a tangible and impactful part of everyday life. ●

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This book offers glimpses into activities where creativity meets sustainability. The unique venture of *Sustainability Portraits* weaves together art, place, and social responsibility to support sustainability in the Arctic. Collaborative efforts between the University of the Arctic's Arctic Sustainable Art and Design (ASAD) and the Children in the Arctic thematic networks have invigorated the project, which centres on the region's residents, especially young people.

The book showcases the diversity of art and art education, and the variety within the *Sustainability Portraits* initiative, which simultaneously nurtures local eco-cultures, safeguards cultural continuity, strengthens social cohesion, and promotes well-being in the North and the Arctic. In this way, it supports building social resilience and sustainability in the rapidly changing Arctic region. The *Sustainability Portraits approach* is hopeful and emphasises the transformative power of art education in creating sustainable societies and communities in the North and the Arctic areas.



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