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"The Snow Show"

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The Snow Show

The art and architecture of very, very cold water

Chances are, you built snowmen when you were a kid. (Maybe you still do.) If so, you probably have an intuitive sense of the materiality of snow: Wet snow compacts better than the dry, fluffy stuff. Snow is surprisingly variable in color and texture. It's also surprisingly variable in its hardness. Structurally, snow works pretty well in compression and is lousy in tension. Pouring water over snow will either melt it or glaze it, depending on temperature and quantity. Snow is ephemeral.

Lance Fung, a New York-based independent curator, is intrigued by the material qualities of snow, just as he has long been intrigued by the nature of creative collaboration. In 2003 and 2004, he brought both interests together in the first Snow Show, held in Lapland, Finland; the most recent exhibition was held last February and March in Sestriere, Italy, in conjunction with the Winter Olympics. Pairing artists and architects, Fung deliberately explores the juxtaposition of architectural theory and fine art through a medium that encourages public participation. The Snow Show is at once intellectual exercise and sheer spectacle: It's hard to imagine anything more technically impressive and yet wonderfully goofy than an installation called *Caress Zaha with Vodka/Icefire*—in which the artist Cai Gio-Quang poured vodka over a cantilevered ice structure constructed by collaborator Zaha Hadid and set it alight, fluid fire coursing over ice—“provoking joy” in Hadid’s words.

The photographs that follow document the Snow Show installations that otherwise have no further presence. Although these

installations are far more abstract than their more familiar snow-sculpture kin at winter festivals such as Sapporo, Harbin, and Boston’s First Night, they represent ideas that are much more likely to influence the way we build. Fung notes that snow is a neutral material; neither the architects nor the artists participating in his project had previous experience with snow construction. Viewers likewise bring little experience of snow-and-ice buildings, and so these images become intriguing suggestions of new ways of making space.

Most striking are the effects of transparency, translucency, and opacity. Manipulating light and color, giving their work dual presence by night and day, the teams hint at an entire new realm of building materials that transcend the solids and voids of traditional materials such as masonry and glass. Neither solid nor void, these snow and ice constructions are something in between.

These are the qualities that make the Snow Show installations so much more provocative than similarly ephemeral seasonal structures, sandcastles. Neutral and abstract, they are also scaleless. Look at these structures and imagine walls, rooms, buildings, and cities.

—Elizabeth S. Padjen FAIA

The Snow Show has been documented in the book *The Snow Show* (Thames & Hudson, 2005), edited by Lance Fung, with essays by the participants. Additional images can be seen at www.thesnowshow.com.

Left: *Fluid Fossils*, Do-ho Suh and Morphosis, 2004



Where Are You?, Jaume Plensa and Norman Foster, 2006



Looking Glass, Kiki Smith and Lebbeus Woods, 2006

Right: *Oblong Voidspace*, Jene Highstein and Steven Holl, 2003

PHOTOS: THIS PAGE, JEFFREY DEBANY; FACING PAGE, MANNIE STENROS.







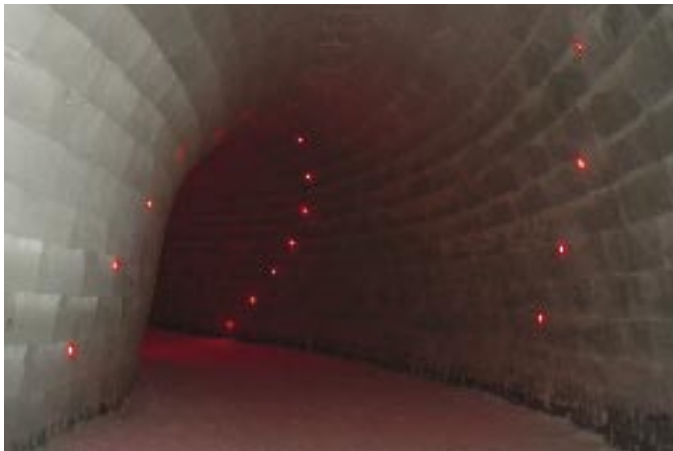
Caress Zaha with Vodka/Icefire, Cai Gio-Quang and Zaha Hadid, 2004



Coloured Ice Walls, Top Changtrakul and LOT-EK, 2004

PHOTOS: JEFFREY DEBANY

Left: *Lanterns of Ursa Minor*, Robert Barry and Hollmén-Reuter-Sandman, 2004



Iced Time Tunnel, Tatsuo Miyajima and Tadao Ando, 2004



Untitled, Paola Pivi and Cliosstraat, 2006