

Brief Report on the “Permafrost Project Days” at the Wilhelmsburg School (text by Angela Dietz)

Day One

On the upper storey of the school building, there is long black bin bag lying in the hallway outside the art rooms. Tomas Engel, an external artist, Ali and Ahmet start working on the bin bag. Along the hallway wall, the baseboard has been adorned with blue-and-turquoise waves made of paper, which Nelly is drying with a blow dryer. This afternoon marks the first of two project days on permafrost at the Wilhelmsburg School.

A glimpse into the art rooms reveals a buzzing atmosphere. A small book, an animated film and a miniature installation with countless water drops, all on the topic of permafrost, will be produced by early summer. The students are sitting around the tables, drawing or painting with watercolours. There are quiet conversations going on here and there, with the occasional loud shout across the classroom. Some of the students are standing together, discussing questions concerning the dramaturgy for the animated film.

Everywhere you look, there are shapes made of paper, cardboard or polystyrene lying about, hanging from the ceiling and leaning against the walls, including miniature stage sets. The room is aglow in shades of white, blue and turquoise; images and models meant to represent landscapes covered with ice and snow. They are joined by grey and black, images of the soil and underground worlds left behind after the ice has melted; some are documentary-style, others more artistic.

And in the middle of it all we see Gundi Wiemer, the art teacher who has coordinated the participating students from classes 5, 6, 8, 9 and 10 for years. She never seems to miss a thing: no sooner has she finished discussing a technical problem in the sequence of scenes for the animated film than she has to defuse a quarrel before it can get out of hand, only to assign new tasks to the students just a few minutes later.

Snezhana is painting polystyrene blocks and accidentally gets her finger in the sky-blue paint. 'It feels nice!' she cheerfully proclaims to her classmates. Meanwhile, fellow student Emine is busy hanging up colourful collage drops on the hallway wall.

'We're making a cartoon,' explains Ecem. 'When you show the photos one after the other fast enough, it works just like an old flip-book.' A team working with illustrator Maria Luisa Witte, another external artist, has just finished shooting a test run.



Students of the Stadtteilschule Wilhelmsburg during the „Permafrost Project Days“ in school year 2015/16 (Photo: Angela Dietz)

Panning the camera through the bin-bag tunnel didn't quite produce the desired effect. The idea is to evoke the perspective of travelling through a subterranean tunnel, up toward the light, until you make your way back to the 'real' world. Well, tomorrow is another day.

Day Two

At a discussion of the status quo in the afternoon, Gundi Wiemer counters the kids' input with precise, insightful comments of her own. Lack of imagination is no excuse. They keep coming back to dramaturgical problems with the animated film.

On a large sheet of paper, some of the students are moving small paper cut-outs back and forth – an old trick for planning the film scenes. Getting the dramaturgical development and the sequence of images just right is no mean feat. Undaunted, Ecem simply tries out something new. Until a moment ago, there were sheets of white paper with pale blue, vertical watercolour waves hanging on the chalkboard; now Elif has taken them down and brought them to table, using a marker to add very thin, black contour lines – the wind. 'Are you going to finish that sometime today?' asks Wiemer. 'Yes,' replies Elif, nodding confidently. Meanwhile, Tom and Cihad are busy sketching the black holes that the permafrost leaves behind once the ice has melted.

At the end of the day, everything that is packable has been packed up; the floors have been swept. Gundi Wiemer, Ecem, Tomas Engel and Maria Luisa Witte are all looking over an image sequence in the camera display and are pleased with what's been achieved so far. Their heads are brimming full of ideas, and each of them has a smile on their face.