

Malerier malt av barn på Murmansk Kunstskole for Barn med tema Russiske Folkeeventyr

SOGNDAL KULTURHUS
TIRSDAG 30 MAI ÅPNES KL. 10 00

'Russian' folk tales and children's art

Visiting Murmansk 1999/2000

On New Year's Eve 1999, Yeltsin abruptly quit and named Putin acting president. I remember this well, because I was visiting Murmansk College of Art for Children together with my Russian wife Natasha. We were sitting with the teachers around a table at the college which was bedecked with all kinds of delicacies. Everyone was in a festive mood. The television was also switched on. A news flash announced that Putin was now president, without explaining how he could suddenly become president without an election. The news certainly put a damper on the new year celebrations. At the time, I knew very little about Russian politics. However, I could see from the downturned mouths and bleak faces of the teachers that this was something that was not welcomed, although, as is the Russian fashion, no one said anything. The whole thing seemed to signify something portentous.

Is the folktale or fairy tale 'national property'

I have written elsewhere that there is no such thing as a national folktale. Nations, in their nation-building, 'annex' culture, in the same way they attempt to annex the land of their neighbours. I often write here 'Russian folktale'; of course, there is no such thing as a Russian folk tale. The "Three Brothers" folktale is considered by Russians to be a Russian folktale, whereas, Ukrainians consider it to be a Ukrainian folktale. Without being an expert in folklore, it is perhaps more correct to say it is a Slavic folktale. On the other hand, "Prince Ivan and the Firebird" has a lot in common with the Norwegian folktale, "Gullfuglen" (literal translation: the Bird of Gold). Similarly, when I first met my wife Natasha, I asked her if she could make me some Russian soup, borscht, as I imagined, like many other people, that it is Russian. However, it is perhaps more correct to say it is a soup popular in the Slavic countries, although Ukraine is frequently cited as its place of origin.

Another irony here is so-called 'cultural exchange' between nations; cultures tend to spread across national borders. In this context, there is no such thing as "Englishness", although ideologically driven right-wing politicians demand that everyone in England should be 'English' as defined by them.

The annexation of culture for nationalist purposes

But to return to the point I was strenuously trying to make - there is no such thing as national folklore. However, I will contradict myself here. Of course, some folk tales are inspired by nationalist ideas. In our context, I can mention one of the texts included here, "The Dead Princess and the Seven Nights", by the Russian national poet Pushkin. Pushkin has clearly 'annexed' the tale claiming it as 'national property'. Although, Pushkin's poem may have its origin in so-called national Russian folklore, it greatly resembles the "Little Snow White" tale from the Grimm's Fairy Tales. In other words, poems and stories belonging to wider non-national cultures have been annexed and adapted for nationalist purposes. Further, the words of the stories are adapted, such as the use of tsarevna instead of princess; many of the Russian folk tales were illustrated by well-known Russian artists such as Bilibin who created a Russian background for the tales. One might even go as far as to say this was also a socialization process for the children being told these tales, as they would associate the tales with so-called Russian national culture.

Imperial knights

The knights in Pushkin's story are clearly 'imperial' warriors. They are also 'lusty':

"Dinner time, The yard resounded, Horses stamped and men dismounted. Thick-moustached and ruddy-skinned, Seven lusty Knights walked in." Of course, there is an unintended irony here. They are not only 'lusty', but lustful, every one of them wishing to ravage the virgin and housemaid, the *tsarevna*, who they surprisingly find ensconced in their house.

The eldest knight suggests that the girl should join in an orgy with him and his brothers. Of course, I am basing my brief analysis here on Peter Tempest's English translation, so I do not know what the original Russian is; but to "desire (her) favours", although archaic, clearly means they wish to have sexual intercourse with her. This seems a rather improper way to talk to a princess; this is the way men of old my talk to their housemaid; but the tsarevna is also their maid:

And the Eldest Knight addressed her:
"As you know, you are our sister.
But all seven of us here
Are in love with you, my dear,
And we all desire your favours."

But he has second thoughts and says:

"But that must not be, God save us! Find some way to give us peace! Be a wife to one at least, To the rest remain a sister!"

Imperial ambitions - subduing Turks, Arabs and other 'lesser' races

At another point in the poem, Pushkin remarks on the colonial ambitions of the Russian nation. Without going into a deeper analysis here, Great Britain is mainly composed of two islands, so British imperialism has mainly consisted of exploiting lands 'across the seas'. On the other hand, Russia dominates, at least geographically, Eurasia, which is the largest continental area on Earth, comprising all of Europe and Asia. Thus, Russian imperialism has involved subjugating neighbouring lands, some of which have cultures distinct from the Russian culture.

This is obliquely referred to in Pushkin's poem:

Days flew by — the Princess living
All the time without misgiving
In the forest, never bored
With the Seven Knights abroad.
Darkness would the earth still cover
When at dawn the seven brothers
Would ride out to try their luck
With a long-bow, shooting duck,
Or to ply their sword in battle
And a Saracen unsaddle,
Headlong at a Tartar go,
Chop his head off at a blow,
Or give chase to a Circassian,
From the forest send him dashing.

With the risk of making gross generalizations, such ideas as "unsaddling Saracens" (Arabs), cutting the heads off Tartars (Turks), and chasing Circassians is something which is held in high esteem by Russians. In other words, Russians have an inbred racism regarding their neighbouring countries; as mentioned, this is a generalization, which I do not intend to investigate further here.

The imperial ambitions of Russia in 2022 and Ivan the Terrible (Putin)

In 2022, the seven knights of Pushkin's poem have metamorphosed into a marauding mass of hundreds of thousands of Russian men murdering and raping the people of their neighbouring country, and attempting to steal their land and extend their empire. At least this was the plan. But things don't always go according to plan. 'Ivan the Terrible' (Putin) is not so much 'terrible' in the sense of gruesome acts committed, although this is also the case, but 'terrible' as the whole invasion seems to be one big cock-up.

Cultural exchange?

In other words, Russia, as of 2022, has not only annexed the culture of their neighbours, but also their land (Ukraine); at the same time, the Putin regime has put an end to any kind of cultural exchange. Thus, Norway has always been open to cooperation with Russia in many areas. But it is difficult to see how this can continue in the future. As of 2022, Norway is sending weaponry to Ukraine to kill Russians. ¹ Russia has targeted the civilian population in Ukraine by using missiles to destroy Ukrainian infrastructure, such as water and electricity; while also restricting the export of Ukrainian grain to the poorer countries of the world. In other words, Putin's regime has a plan to starve the world. ² It seems the Russians have similar plans for their Baltic neighbours. That is, to destroy infrastructure. Several Russian spies and terrorists have recently been arrested in Norway; mainly involving the use of drones aimed at destroying the infrastructure.³

The British schoolboy comics of the twentieth century portrayed Scandinavians as gullible, simple, naïve and good-hearted. In other words, 'blue-eyed'. As noted elsewhere, I am British, but have lived in Norway for almost 50 years. I have always been surprised at the gullibility of Norwegians regarding the Russians. This is a kind of Trojan horse idea; they naïvely invite Russians to be a part of cooperation between the two countries.

But now it seems they have finally 'woken up'. However, the present head of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg, the former Norwegian prime minister seems to have gone 'over the top'. In other words, his "NATO must prepare for 'long haul' in Ukraine" seems to be the language of a wife who has been betrayed by her husband and now seeks revenge. In other words, it hardly seems to be directed at some kind of solution. Sometimes nations can reach compromise solutions, although not perfect; such as the independence of Ireland in 1919, and the formation of Northern Ireland in 1921.

¹ https://www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/norge-har-donert-artilleriskyts-til-ukraina/id2917760/

² https://unherd.com/2022/05/putins-plan-to-starve-the-world/

 $^{^3\,\}underline{https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2022/10/russian-dual-citizenship-detained-flying-drone-$

 $[\]underline{svalbard\#:} \sim \underline{text} = Russian \% 20 \underline{citizens \% 20 are \% 20 not \% 20 \underline{allowed \% 20 to \% 20 \underline{fly \% 20 drones \% 20 in \% 20 Nor \underline{wegian, miles \% 20 sea \% 20 \underline{territory \% 20 from \% 20 \underline{land}.}$

⁴ https://www.politico.eu/article/nato-jens-stoltenberg-russia-conflict-in-ukraine-alliance-brussels/

But to sum up after this long digression, the idea of cultural interchange as encouraged by my books and exhibition seems today to have become a thing of the past. However, I will describe below 'happier days'.

My visit to Murmansk

As mentioned above, I visited Murmansk in Russia together with my wife Natasha. We were visiting her family, more specifically her sister Masha, and her mother Tatiana. Our son, Alan, was just a little baby at the time. I took the opportunity to visit the Murmansk College of Art for Children. My wife and her mother did not like this idea, as the planned visit was on New Year's Eve 1999/2000. I remember Natasha saying it was important to welcome in the new year with one's nearest and dearest; however, being British, I did not hold to such ideas. I had become 'obsessed' with Russian folk tales for some unexplainable reason, and, inspired by my 'footballing friend' Knut Skau,⁵ wanted to make a book like he had done of Russian folktales; but I wanted to make it in English, not Norwegian.⁶ I have since that time published several books on Russian and Norwegian folktales, historical accounts, poems, and so on, in both Norwegian and English, which are posted on a website for stories.⁷

The Scottish 'Ivan the Terrible' playing football in Finnmark

As an aside, I was perhaps the skinniest football player in history that tried to emulate Norman Hunter of Leeds. Knut comically called me 'Ivan the Terrible', as I managed to 'take down' many of the other players twice my body weight in five-a-side soccer games at Finnmark University College. I was like an amateur 'Nobby Stiles' who was perhaps the most important player in the 1966 World Cup, as he managed to 'neutralize' the magnificent Eusebio of Portugal. In fact, to

 $^{^5}$ Knut played for the Norwegian soccer club Odd. $\underline{\text{https://statistikk.odd.no/spillere/028fc00a-9264-4f2a-b61f-fa843e1a2f81}}$

⁶ "Ivan tsarevitsj og den grå ulven og andre russiske folkeeventyr" https://www.bokkilden.no/skjoennlitteratur-for-barn-og-ungdom-tradisjonelle-historier/ivan-tsarevitsj-og-den-graa-ulven-og-andre-russiske-folkeeventyr-knut-skau/produkt.do?produktId=123194

⁷ https://artstraveling.wordpress.com

stretch a point, Stiles was also a 'skinny boy' at 68 kilos, whereas his athletically strong opponent Eusebio weighed in at 76 kilos. When Knut called me 'Ivan (Ian) the Terrible', I'm not sure if he meant 'terrible' in the sense of a soccer player arbitrarily hacking and chopping down opposing players, or 'terrible' in the sense of a 'feeble' soccer player. Knut is a good-humoured chap, so I choose to believe he meant the former meaning of a 'hacker'. Putin is nearing the end of his life; I imagine he wants to be remembered as 'Putin the Terrible' (gruesome), but it is more likely he will be remembered as 'Putin the Terrible' (incapable and impotent).

Murmansk Art College for Children

The college were kind enough to let me have many paintings that the children had painted based on Russian folk tales.

The exhibition at Sogndal Culture House

I also thought it would be a good idea to arrange an exhibition of the children's art and invite children in the local area of Sogndal, and the general public. The exhibition of about 40 children's paintings was held in Sogndal Culture House from May to June in 2000. As mentioned, the paintings were based on Russian folk tales, such as "Prince Ivan, the Firebird and the Grey Wolf", and "The Dead Princess and the Seven Knights." Local school children visited the exhibition, such as the children from Trudvang School. The general public were also invited. In fact, a tourist from Holland bought one of the paintings!

Email to the Consulate in Murmansk

I wrote an email to the consulate in Murmansk asking them if the paintings and exhibition might be of interest to them regarding the idea of cultural exchange between Russia and Norway.

Brief summary in English of the article in Sogndal Newspaper, 31st May 2000

This week an exhibition of children's art was held in Sogndal Culture House. The exhibition was comprised of 40 paintings, which were painted by the students of Murmansk Art College for Children. Local

schools and kindergartens, as well as the general public, were invited to attend. With Russian classical music playing in the background, children could enjoy looking at the paintings. Afterwards, the children were treated to 'champagne pop'. The theme of the paintings is Russian folk tales. The paintings were kindly provided by Murmansk Art College for Children. On a recent visit to Murmansk, they were handed over to Ian Harkness who is assistant professor at Sogn og Fjordane University College. He was accompanied on the trip by his wife, Natalie Harkness, who teaches English at Sogndal Upper Secondary School. A dramatization of one of the folktales, "Masha and the Bear", was also given.

Reply from Jon Elvedal Fredriksen, Consul, Murmansk

The consulate in Murmansk replied to my email. Jon Elvedal Fredriksen thanked me for posters of the paintings I had sent to him. He replied that an exhibition would be given in Murmansk in the children's library. the exhibition would be opened by the general consul, Robert Kvile, the sixteenth of May 2001. He wrote that the exhibition would be held in the library, and that it was expected that a large number of children would visit the exhibition, because at this time there was a large summer camp in Murmansk. In addition, there was a plan to have activities in connection with the exhibition, such as drawing lessons, and so on. Moreover, later, another exhibition would be held in the small salon of the Murmansk Museum. This exhibition would also include paintings painted by the Norwegian children who were inspired by the Russian paintings in the Sogndal exhibition.

I should have pointed out before, that I used a local business in Sogndal, specializing in the production of maps, to produce large scale productions of the children's paintings, which I sent to the consulate in Murmansk.

Trudvangen School

Marit Ellingsen, the class teacher of class 3B at Trudvangen School, sent me an email about one year after the exhibition, on the 14 May 2001. She

told me that her class had visited the exhibition in the previous year. She also told me that she had prepared her pupils for the exhibition by first borrowing some books about Russian folktales from the library. After the exhibition, the children had been encouraged to paint paintings based on the folktales and inspired by the paintings in the exhibition. She expressed that she and her class were honoured by the fact that their paintings had been exhibited in Russia. She also sent me a class list of the pupils. Some of the pupils signed their paintings, which correspond with the list.

In conclusion:

The children that painted the paintings around the year 2000 were aged between 6 and 16 years old, roughly speaking. Twenty years later, they are now between the ages of 26 and 36. One wonders whether some of these budding artists have already met their demise; that is, Putin's plan to murder his own brothers through forced conscription. I don't intend to investigate this here; but it seems fairly certain that people in Russia know of other family and friends that have been negatively affected by the invasion of their neighbouring Slavic brother.

Barnas Kunstutstilling

Det skal holdes kunstutstilling i Kulturhuset, Sogndal fra 22 mai til 5 juni.

Barn fra *Murmansk Kunstskole for Barn* i Russland har malt bildene som skal stilles ut i Kulturhuset, Sogndal. De 40 bilder som skal stilles ut har forskjellige russiske folkeeventyr som tema. Mange av maleriene er malt etter eventyr skrevet av den berømte russiske forfatter Pushkin, for eksempel, 'Tsar Saltan' og 'Eventyret om den Døde Prinsessen og de Syv Riddere'.

Ian Harkness, som er høgskolelektor i engelsk på Høgskulen, har skrevet om både norske og russiske folkeeventyr, og laget to samlinger med disse. Han skal bruke de utstilte maleriene som illustrasjoner i en ny bok med russiske eventyr skrevet på engelsk. Inntekt fra eventuell salg av denne, og av barnemaleriene på utstillingen, vil gå til innkjøp av malermateriell for barna i *Murmansk Kunstskolen for Barn*, Russland.

Utstillingen skal 'åpnes' mandag 29 mai med vin og ost (og brus for barna). Barn er selvfølgelig velkommen til utstillingen. Det skal også vises videofilm med kjente folkeeventyr for barna, for eksempel, Snøhvit, Askepott, Sleeping Beauty og andre. Nøyaktig program vil bli gitt senere.

Det skal også bli gitt seminar og forelesning samme dag som 'åpningen'. Forelesningen skal handler om likheter mellom folkeeventyr i forskjellige land, og hvordan folkeeventyr kan brukes i undervisning på tvers av fag grensene. Nøyaktig program vil bli gitt senere.



Fossvegen 6, Postboks 133, 6851 Sogndal TIf. 57 67 6307 Fax 57 67 63 01 email: jap.harkness@aos.hisf.no

Ian Harkness Stølen 115 6856 Sogndal

Norsk Konsulat Murmansk

Vår ref.

Dykkar ref.

Dato

IH

2 januar 2001

Vedr.: Russiske barnemalerier

Jeg sender med disse malerier som kan være av interesse for Konsulatet. Jeg har samlet barnemalerier (basert på folkeeventyr) fra kunstskolene for barn i Murmansk. Disse har blitt brukt til forskjellige formål:

Bok: Russiske folkeeventyr utgitt på norsk med illustrasjoner /malerier malt av barn ved kunstskolene for barn i både Nikkel og Murmansk (samarbeid norsk forlag: Knut Skau og oversatt av norsk utvekslingsstudent)

Utstilling: I Sogndal Kulturhus (se avis reportasje). Norske barn produserte også sine egne malerier etter å ha besøkt utstillingen (se vedlegg).

Homepage på Internet (Under konstruksjon).

Det finnes også en kunstkatalog. Katalog finnes på CD-rom disk (med 40 malerier basert på russiske folkeeventyr).

Det er mye mer jeg kunne ha skrevet her. Men jeg venter heller å se om dette kan være noe dere kunne eventuelt bruke i norsk/russisk felles kulturarbeid.

Det er også interessant at russiske og norske folkeeventyr har mange fellestrekk, for eksempel sammenligner 'Prins Ivan og Gullfuglen', med Asbjørnsen og Moes 'Gullfuglen'. Askeladden ligner også på det russiske 'Jemelya'.

Hilsen.

Ian Harkness

Høgskule Lektor

From:

"Kgl. norsk Generalkonsulat i Murmansk" <gknormmk@online.ru>

To:

<ian.harkness@aos.hisf.no>

Subject:

russiske barnemalerier

Date sent:

Thu, 1 Feb 2001 14:01:20 +0300

Generalkonsulatet registrerer med glede ditt positive initiativ for fremme av russisk barnekultur i Norge, og er av den oppfatning at samlingen av tegninger, sammen med de norske barnetegningene, kan brukes i utstilingsøyemed også i Murmansk.

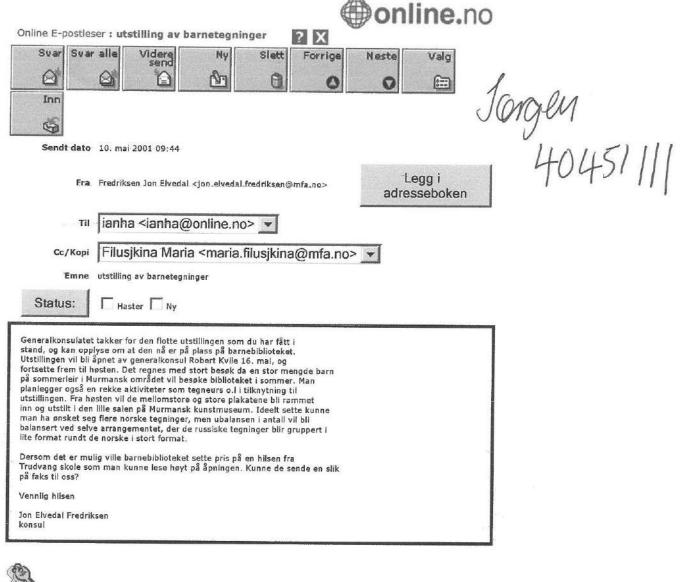
Generalkonsulatet har vært i kontakt med Murmansk fylkes barnebibliotek (som er et stort og velutstyrt barnekulturhus) om saken, og man har fra bibliotektets side foreslått å eventuelt åpne en utstilling i tilknytning til 17. mai. Barnebibliotektet er aktive i Barentssamarbeidet, og har flere litterære og bibliotekfaglige prosjekter rettet både mot Norge og Sverige. Da generalkonsulatet i mai 2000 arrangerte norsk kultufestival i Murmansk (som ble toppet med Den Norske Operas oppsening av "Tosca") var biblioteket en aktiv støttespiller i organiseringen av festivalen.

Dersom et prosjekt av nevnte type er av interesse, ser en frem i mot tilbakemelding slik at kontakt kan opprettes direkte med biblioteket. Det ville også være av interesse å se på CD-rom versjonen av utstillingen.

visekonsul Jon Elvedal Fredriksen godkjent av generalkonsul Robert Kvile

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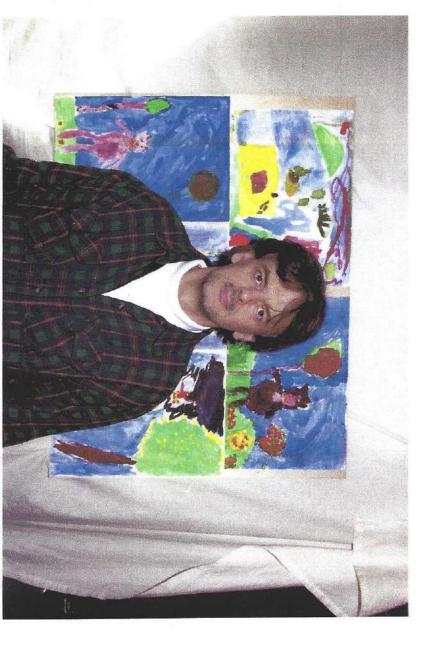
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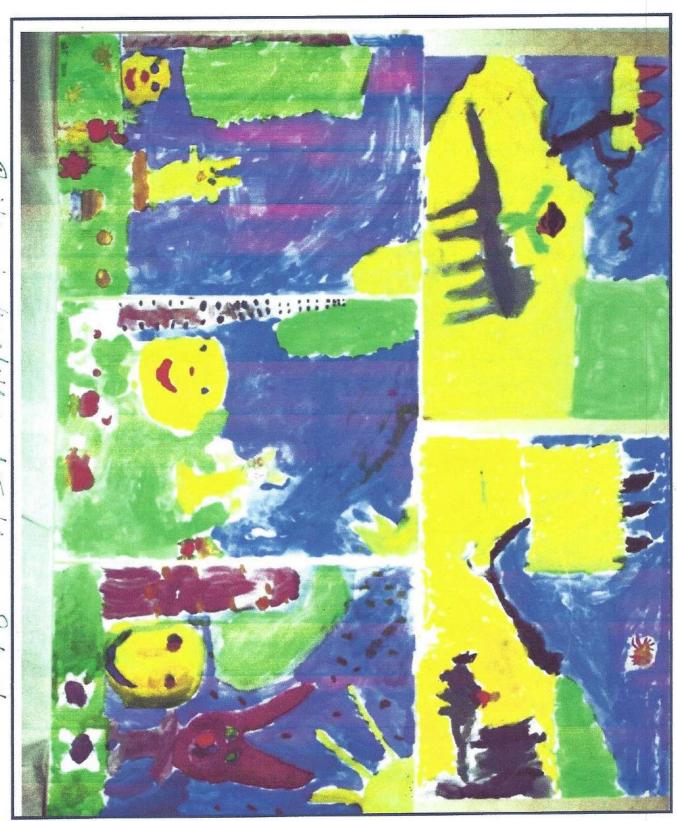


Trykk her for å aktivere sikker (kryptert) kommunikasjon.

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Printing by the children of Trudvangen Schoot.

For ca. eit år sidan kom ei utstilling av barneteikningar frå kunstskulen i Murmansk til kulturhuset her i Sogndal. Det var illustrasjonar til russiske eventyr. Vi gjekk på biblioteket og fann ein del av desse eventyra omsette til norsk. Vi las fleire av dei før vi besøkte utstillinga, slik at borna kunne kjenna att eventyra i teikningane.

Etter å ha studert teikningane, fekk kvar elev velje seg ein teikning som dei tok skisse av. Tilbake på skulen måla dei bileta med vassfargar. Ian Harkness var til stades i kulturhuset då vi var der. Han ville gjerne låna teikningane til borna og fotografera dei av.

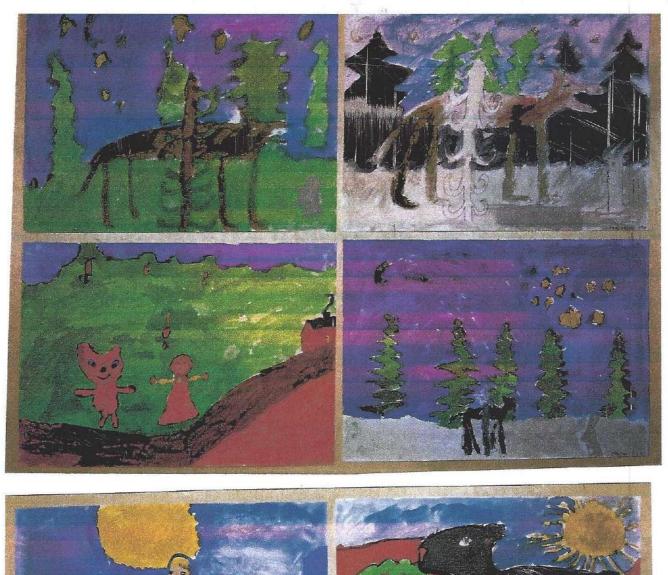
Stor var forundringa då han kom att med teikningane og sa at dei skulle vera med på ei utstilling i Murmansk!

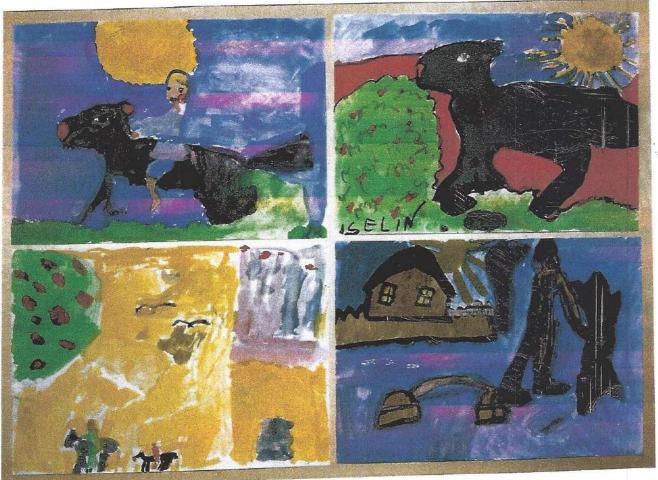
Det er ei stor ære for oss å få vera med, og vi ønskjer dykk lukke til med utstillinga.

Helsing frå klasse 3b ved Trudvang skule

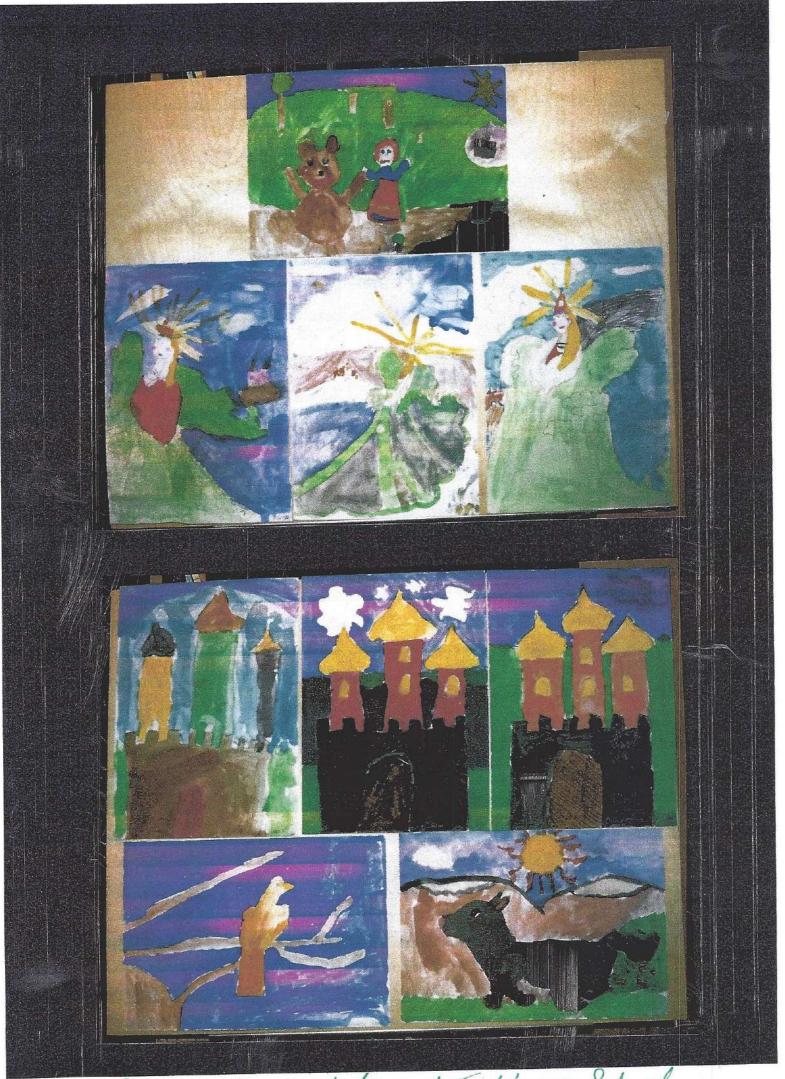
Manit Ellingsen

klassestyrar





Paintings by the children of Trudvangen School.



Paintings by the children of Trud Vangan School.

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U.B. Jeg skannet denne og bruhte den i utstillingen mai/juni 2000.