

Dear LUTSF

Thank you for your support over the past 18 months on this project. As I mentioned this is a sort of temporary report written in June. ... is now out of hospital and .... It is my intention to write more in the new year. Meanwhile I hope this works for now.

Best wishes

Gaby Agis

The North – Hidden Behind the Darkness  
Gaby Agis June 2012

My project, *The North – Hidden Behind the Darkness*, involved travelling to Utsjoki, Finland, Iqaluit, Canada, and Kirkenes, Norway. This project was funded in part by the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund (LUTSF), the Rebecca Skelton Fund, the Arts Council of Finland, and the Arts Council of Wales, and was hosted by Ulla Pirttijarvi-Lansm (a Sami musician) in Finland, by Qaggiavuut (Society for a Nunavut Performing Arts Center) in Canada, and by Pikene Pa Broen (Girls on a Bridge) in Norway. While researching *The North – Hidden Behind the Darkness*, I was joined by two Finnish dance artists, Eeva Maria-Mukta based in Wales and Titta Court based in Finland. Their creativity, friendship and enthusiasm was essential to this project.

Over the course of a year (from May 2011 to March 2012) I researched the use of imagery in the performance and traditional arts of the Inuit and Sami peoples. I found similarities and great differences between these two cultures, particularly in the way landscape has shaped their psyches. Spending time in these communities I was able to participate in everyday life, sometimes struggling at minus forty degrees Celsius. The artists I met were generous, enthusiastic and curious and their willingness to exchange ideas and practice was a delight to me.

#### Utsjoki- Lapland- Northern Finland

In Utsjoki we met with Ulla daily, spending time yoriking (Sami traditional singing), either in the studio or outdoors within the landscape. The importance of the natural world within the yoriking revealed itself to be essential to the Sami culture. Many nights were spent around the campfire in daylight (almost twenty-four hour light in late-May) eating traditional foods that always included delicious reindeer meat and hearing long unfolding folk stories in which the natural world featured largely.



*Gaby Agis, Ulla Pirttjarvii and Ellen Ravna*



*Utsjoki landscape*

## Iqaluit-Nunavut- Canada

In contrast to Utsjoki, where despite its high latitude and relative remoteness the presence of Europe could still be felt, Iqaluit felt entirely cut off from the rest of the world. Here, on this island, the sea was frozen for hundreds of miles in every direction and life was dominated by the weather. The only way in and out of the community was by plane and often blizzards grounded travel for days at a time. Our hosts provided an enriching experience where we met many local artists including throat singers, protest singers, mask dancers, musicians and film makers. We were able to exchange our practices freely with the local Inuit artists. This gave me an insight into the way they view their world, which I feel has affected me and will in time inform my own practice. Unexpectedly we spent three days in the local middle school teaching twelve and thirteen year olds Skinner Releasing Technique. Their enthusiasm, playfulness, and pure joy were an inspiration, a welcome tonic to the alcohol and drug abuse rife within the community.



*Gaby Agis teaching at the middle school in Iqaluit*



*Iqaluit landscape*

## Kirkenes- Lapland- Norway

Our final destination for our project was Kirkenes, a small town in the northernmost reaches of Norway near the border with Russia. Coinciding with our stay was a major dog sled race in which one hundred and sixty five teams raced over five days around the region. The energy, sounds and excitement of this event provided us with a vivid source of imagery. Here we were joined once more by the yorling singer Ulla and we started to incorporate the images collected on our journeys. These consisted of photographs, videos, drawings, writings, dances and songs. On the last day we gave an informal sharing with this material in the local museum which was greeted by much curiosity and enthusiasm.



*Kirkenes lanscape*



*Dog sled racing teams in the town square*

I feel incredibly privileged and grateful to have had this opportunity to travel to these remote northern communities. The influence of this year is still in the process of making itself understood. I'm sure that my teaching, dancing, and choreographic work will be profoundly enriched by these experiences and I'd like to thank the LUTSF for all its support.



*Eeva-Maria Mutka in the studio in Kirkenes*