

Shielin-bough:
**A Shelter for
Learning
Together**

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PHOTO: GINA MALL

“ Students thrive when engaged in experiential learning with high-quality materials. ”



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Shielin-bough is a collaborative, inter-institutional project between The Glasgow School of Art (GSA) and the University of Lapland, supported financially by the Scottish Government’s Arctic Connections Fund and the Finnish Institute in the UK and Ireland.

Within the project, we have developed learning, teaching, and research outputs focused on shelter, food, and storytelling in Scottish and Finnish culture. This thematic scope has allowed for the examination of Arctic and near-Arctic ecocultures in the spirit and values of UArctic: bridging the past and present, traditional knowledge and contemporary practices. Shielin-bough is a good example of the approach of the UArctic Thematic Network on Arctic Sustainable Art and Design to bringing sustainability-focused research, art, and education into practice across northern and Arctic regions.

The project has culminated in a live build at the GSA Highlands and Islands campus. The building is directly inspired by the cultures of the shieling and *laavu*, and an important element of the live build is that it was student-led from the outset. The structure was created in collaboration, based on sharing participants’ skills and diverse intercultural experiences. Our project was also interdisciplinary, with students joining from a range of educational programmes at various levels in fine art, art education, design innovation, and architecture in Finland and Scotland.

Due to the project’s deep focus on the relation between people and place, students have been concerned to ensure that the building is as sustainable as possible. We used untreated wood which was locally sourced from Logie Timber, grown within a 60-mile radius of the sawmill. The brief

suggested that the *laavu* should sit lightly in its surroundings, and the decision not to use concrete footings or dug foundations necessitated an innovative response. The resulting foundation feet were designed by staff at the Mackintosh School of Architecture and made in collaboration with Logie Timber using large Douglas fir logs. The students also explored the innovative use of traditional materials such as wooden shingles and thatch made from heather, sustainably sourced from the Cairngorms.

Learning through doing and the development of material literacies via practical handling has been crucial in the project. By engaging the students in live learning, we have been able to respond to contemporary estrangement from tacit, embodied knowledge, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

It was apparent throughout the project that regardless of discipline, students thrive when engaged in experiential learning with high-quality materials. For the students of architecture and fine art, handling materials at scale was especially important in coming to understand the realities of the construction. For students more used to working on screens in a design studio, the opportunity to learn new skills with materials was transformative. For teachers and students of art and education, the opportunity to work across flattened hierarchies in a genuinely engaged way was liberating and generative in terms of learning *with* and *together*.

The full impact of the project remains to be evaluated, but as project leaders, we are certain that its legacy will resonate for considerable time to come.

Further information:
www.shielinbough.co.uk