

# Our impressions of the 76<sup>th</sup> Sapporo Snow Festival

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Coming to Sapporo, we did not know what to expect. A few months before, we would have never thought that such an opportunity would occur in our lives.

In September, we received an email from the Polish Institute in Tokyo, that contained information about an open call. The Institute was looking for a project of a snow sculpture, that would represent Poland during the 76<sup>th</sup> Sapporo Snow Sculpture Contest.

The only rule to take part in the open call was to have had experience in sculpting in snow, which we did not have at that time. We decided, however, that it would not stop us, as visiting Japan had been our dream for a long time. We submitted our project anyways, with a link to our portfolios, that contained other forms of subtractive sculpting - for example wood and marble. The project titled "2026 – the Year of Andrzej Wajda" depicted one of the greatest polish film directors, looking through a lens of an old camera. The project referred to the year 2026 being dedicated to Wajda, as it is his 100th birth, and 10th death anniversary. We decided that the topic is very suitable, as we also knew about Wajda's connection to Japan. It turned out, that it was indeed, as we won the contest and could realize the sculpture in the target material – snow.

As we came out of the train station in Sapporo, we immediately noticed the amount of snow, the icy streets and snowdrifts. As we found out, Sapporo had not experienced that kind of snowfall in years. It was truly beautiful, and we really enjoyed it - without the snow sculpting experience, however, we did not know what that would mean during our work time.

We found out very quickly, that the weather conditions were quite nice – it was cold, but not as cold as it could have been, and we only had one day of a positive temperature. It was, however, enough to make our sculpture melt in places we did not want it to melt and then create icy textures when it dropped below zero.

The hardest parts were the evenings - especially the last one - when the temperatures were the lowest, with snowfall and blowing wind. The last evening, although it seemed the hardest, was not that bad at all for us, for we had our heat packs from Mr. Ogata, whom we once again want to thank greatly!

For each of the five days of the contest, we had visits from Mr. Ogata Yoshihide, who would not only bring us presents such as the mentioned heat packs and more, but also take photos of all of us and write us letters. The letters contained very kind words, information about the Hokkaido-Poland Cultural Association, the history of the Polish – Japanese relations and mentions about important local landmarks. The visits meant so much to us, as it was really beautiful to not only meet an unexpected supporter, but also a person as kind as Mr. Ogata.

We also had a chance to meet Mr. Atsushi Ando, who made a great impression on us, with an interesting conversation. He was also very kind to us, for what we also want to thank very much!

We got to meet so many nice, interesting people during our stay - from Japan, and all around the world. The other teams were very nice and outgoing, many of whom we became friends with. They also taught us a lot of snow sculpting and shared their tools with us. With the friendships and experience gathered during the festival, we are now sure we would really love to return next year!