

The New York Times

February 1, 2014

Artists Go to Town on a Picturesque Swiss Village

By RACHEL DONADIO

GSTAAD, Switzerland — In the summer of 2012, the London-based artist Christian Marclay was scouting locations around this postcard-perfect, ski-resort town in the Swiss Alps, looking for inspiration.

"We went on the top of this glacier, and I kept noticing all these Indian tourists, and I asked, 'What are they doing here?'" Mr. Marclay, 59, recalled. "Apparently they were coming to see where their favorite stars had been filming these Bollywood films."

Best known for his mesmerizing 24-hour-long video work, "The Clock," which sampled clips showing timepieces from film history, Mr. Marclay knew he had found the idea behind his contribution to "Elevation 1049: Between Heaven and Hell," an ambitious site-specific art exhibition by 25 Swiss artists that opened here on Monday.

For decades, Indian directors had come to Switzerland to film towns like Gstaad as the backdrop to elaborate dream sequences in which the movies' romantic leads, fantasizing of escape from the close quarters of India, frolic in snow or on Alpine hills filled with buttermilk, performing song-and-dance numbers. And over the years, film fans have followed.

Mr. Marclay's "Elevation" work, "Bollywood Goes to Gstaad," is a 17-minute montage of short clips from Bollywood films that is being shown on a video monitor in a cable car that travels halfway up the Gondolbahn glacier. With dizzying 360-degree views of the Alps below. (It is also being shown in a

A treasure hunt of a show, with work in cable cars and a sleigh.

movie theater in downtown Gstaad.) The film clips are from the 1980s and 1990s, and feature Bollywood superstars including Shah Rukh Khan.

With its expensive hotels, groomed ski runs, designer boutiques and celebrity sightings, Gstaad may not seem as if it needs another diversion. But the artists, including Mr. Marclay, have tried to engage with the landscape of the resort town — installing art that embraces not only Gstaad's peaks, but also issues like climate change and the 1 percent (in a town full of the 1 percent).

The exhibition is something of a treasure hunt, requiring travel by car, cable car and, in one case, horse-drawn sleigh, in Gstaad and its surrounding villages. On view until March 8, the show gets the first part of its name from Gstaad's elevation in meters. (It's about 3,400 feet.) The second part of the name — "Between Heaven and Hell" — refers rather enigmatically to the different elevations of each artwork.

The project is the brainchild of Neville Wakefield, a former curator of Frieze Projects, part of the Frieze art fair in London and a curatorial adviser to the MoMA PS1; and Olympia Scarry, an artist and the granddaughter of the illustrator Richard Scarry, who lived in Gstaad. Mr. Wakefield and Ms. Scarry, a couple, said they had been inspired by the earthworks art of the 1970s.

But the show, which is their first artistic collaboration, is also a response to their frustration with seeing so much art "set in these jewel box architectural spaces, which are essentially market spaces, and you really can't tell whether you are in Singapore, Shanghai, Berlin, London or whatever," Mr. Wakefield said, adding, "What's happened in terms of making art accessible is that it's homogenized."

"Their exhibition, he said, is meant to be an antidote to the 'art-fair, urban, white-cube gallery experience.'"

"It is difficult to get to," Mr. Wakefield added, "but because of that, it also demands a different kind of attention. You discover the art through the place and the place through the art." The project can also be explored online at elevation1049.org through a catalog.

Ms. Scarry, who grew up in the United States, Italy and Switzerland, chose a favorite spot by a lake for her installation, a series of poles planted in the ground on the hill reachable only by horse-drawn sleigh. (Her grandfather immortalized the city as Busytown in his children's books from the 1960s.)



PHOTOGRAPH BY SIBBERT HUBER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



Above, Sylvie Fleury's "Space Cannon and Sheets," showing Gstaad; left, a still from Christian Marclay's "Bollywood Goes to Gstaad," with clips from films shot in the village.

She said she had wanted the artists "to be inspired by the elements" of the pristine landscape, but also "to question whether it's important to be coming from a certain place, or coming back and being inspired."

In the village of Lauenen, Thomas Hirschhorn created one of the show's most complex works, an encampment of igloos and brightly colored snowmen holding signs in German. One igloo held a small shrine to Friedrich Nietzsche while other igloos took on questions about nuclear disaster, corruption and

inequality. Other works tackle the contradictions of Switzerland and try to upend the picturesque. In the village of Saanen, Matthias Brunner took scenes from films by the Swiss director Daniel Schmid epitomizing a Swiss cliché — blond maidens in milkmaid dresses in Alpine landscapes — and projected them onto the walls of more than 10 rooms inside a cavernous bunker carved into a mountain for use as a fallout shelter.

Another artist, Pipilotti Rist, projected a video onto a bottle on the crowded

shelf of liquor behind the bar of the Hotel Olden, on the main street here. After traveling in the cable car halfway up the glacier to view Mr. Marclay's work, visitors can take another cable car to the top, where, at nearly three kilometers, about 9,842 feet, sits a pyramidlike fortification made of ice by Olivier Mosset, the highest work in the show. (A second ice fortification by Mr. Mosset sits slowly melting in a parking garage at the show's lowest elevation.)

For a project in a small town, "Elevation 1049" has a high-powered advisory board that includes Hans Ulrich Obrist, a co-director of the Serpentine Gallery in London, and Beatrix Ruf, the director of the Kunsthalle Zurich. The show is funded in significant part by the Luma Foundation, whose founder, Maja Hoffmann, is a Swiss art collector and philanthropist. As she stood by the skating rink here last Saturday for a onetime performance in which the artist Claudia Comte choreographed hockey players pushing around Styrofoam sculptures in a living board game, Ms. Hoffmann said she liked that "Elevation 1049" championed Swiss artists. "They are very proud of their mountains, all of them, even if they don't say it," she said.