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# GSTAAD LIFE

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## Elevation 1049 Olympia Scarry & Neville Wakefield

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Haus mit Raketen, 1981 by Roman Signer. Photo by Emil Grubenmann, Courtesy of Hauser & Wirth, © Roman Signer

# Bringing The Art Of Snow And Stone To Life

An Interview with the Curators of Elevation 1049

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PHOTOS BY: TOM HALLER

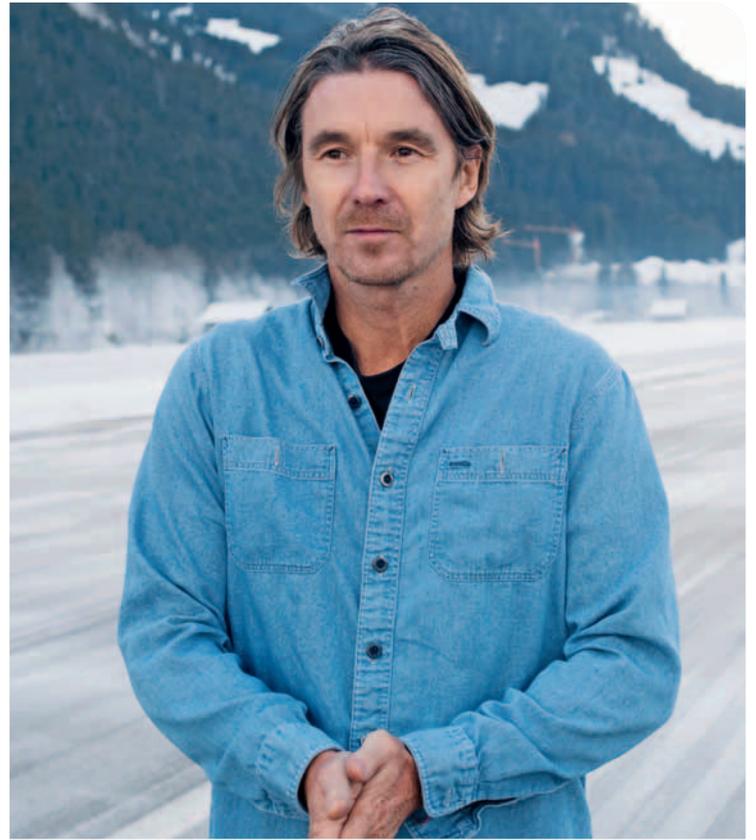
The natural beauty of the Saanenland in winter is the inspiration of the exciting exhibition Elevation 1049. The brainchild of Olympia Scarry and Neville Wakefield, Elevation

1049 features the work of Swiss artists, set against their beautiful native Alpine landscape and created in materials inspired by nature – including snow and stone. Curated by Neville and Olympia and produced by the LUMA& Foundation, Elevation 1049 is the first in a series of site-specific exhibitions.

GSTAADLIFE sat down with the couple to discuss the exhibition and their lives as artists.

Note: Elevation 1049 will be on view from January 27<sup>th</sup> through March 8th, 2014 and will be free and open to the public.  
[www.elevation1049.org](http://www.elevation1049.org)

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**GSTAADLIFE:** Olympia, you're described as a Swiss artist but have spent most of your life living elsewhere. Tell us about your upbringing and what it feels like to come home to Switzerland, and to Gstaad in particular.

**Olympia Scarry:** I feel that I've led a nomadic existence thus far. My parents, I could say, were in constant search of beauty, which led us to travel and then settle temporarily. We moved like nomads from one landscape to another – in constant migration between the Adriatic and Atlantic coasts. In turn, over the course of my life, I never developed deep roots in any one mainland. I therefore chose a neutral place to call home, a place in which I never really lived. I think this influenced my interest in gathering a focused vision of artists from one land of origin. I'm excited about inviting a new wave of interesting minds to the region.

**GL:** You come from a long line of artists, starting with grandfather and famed children's book illustrator Richard Scarry. Why did you choose to pursue a career as an artist? Are there any similar qualities that can be found in the work of the three Scarry generations?

**OS:** I think art is very much about telling stories; stories about the world we live in, and about experiences we variously survive, in turn leaving a marking or record of a spe-

cific time and place. My grandfather did so by recording through his drawings and writings the goings-on around him in children's books such as *Busy Busy Town* and *What Do People do All Day?* and diaries from other regions. In the same way, my father continues to do so today through the books he authors, as well as with his own paintings and diaries from other lands such as *Diario Veneziano* and *Diario Toscano*. I do something similar with sculpture and installation, though the biographical content comes as much through psychology and material as through observation.

**GL:** Neville, is this the first time you've worked with Olympia? How exactly did the two of you meet?

**Neville Wakefield:** We've never collaborated in this way before though I have gone against the grain of impartiality and included Olympia's work in a couple of shows, testament perhaps to a longstanding belief that there is no interest without conflict of interest. One such show, titled 'Involuntary' was about the idea that most of our interactions with the world are governed by restraint and decorum - the subject of a great deal of art - while those that fall outside the borders of control tend to get neglected.

Olympia's response was to create a self-por-

trait, filmed in glacial slow motion, of her own yawn. The fact that she so clearly found it all a bore was instantly endearing. It confirmed everything that I'd felt before, when we met in Venice in 2009 where she had an installation. There, I was instantly attracted to both her and the work and I ended up having long conversations about both.

**GL:** How does Gstaad compare to your hometown, Neville?

**NW:** I grew up in a very small community of less than two thousand people on a secluded offshore island. In some ways it's probably a bit like Gstaad in that everyone knows everyone else's business. And even though the English could certainly learn a thing or two from the Swiss in terms of discretion, it was, and still is, a very private place governed as much by the elements as by the people who live there.

**GL:** The role of curator is a curious one, often misunderstood. What does your job involve and what motivates you?

**NW:** My background is in philosophy and writing and the kind of curating that I'm interested in draws on both. It's a delicate

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balance because while you hope the end result will articulate a position – in this instance the matrix of relationships between artwork, art, artists and place – the last thing you want as a curator is to be using art to illustrate a thesis. For me, it's more about creating a platform from which artists can launch their own vision. There's an underlying structure and thought but it's the artists who create the narrative that ultimately describes the show. Curating, for me is writing with other means – it's meant to lead you to unexpected places and results. It should be unpredictable, otherwise it's just decoration.

**GL: How did the idea for Elevation 1049 come about?**

**NW:** We wanted to do a show in Gstaad that could in some ways celebrate the history and natural beauty of the place without imposing too much upon it. Michaela and Simon de Pury introduced us to Tracey and Maurice A. Amon and Maja Hoffmann in Venice in 2011. A number of people with close ties both to Gstaad and contemporary art – Dominique Levy, and Almine and Bernard Ruiz Picasso, later joined by Theresa Sackler and Camilla Al-Fayed, formed an Honorary Board. But the project couldn't have happened without the support of the LUMA& Foundation's team, which has produced the show; not to mention the relentless energy and enthusiasm of Maja herself, the Advisory Board, patron, friends and many local partners such as Gstaad-Saenenland Tourism and the Municipality of Saanen.

**GL: Why Gstaad as the location for Elevation 1049?**

**NW:** There were many reasons why Gstaad, all of which start with Olympia's very close family ties. As the third generation Scarry to live here, she wanted to bring some of the energy of her interests to Gstaad in the same way that her grandparents did in the sixties when the village became the backdrop for the eccentric escapades of the children's stories we all grew up on. But it's also an iconic place with a rich social history, an abundance of natural beauty and a few secrets of its own. Those things are inspiration for artists and the natural nutrient for art.

**GL: What is your vision of Elevation 1049, and why the subtitle 'Between Heaven and Hell'?**

**NW:** Having become an international currency, it has become increasingly hard to tell whether the art you are looking at is in New York, London, Berlin, Dubai or Shanghai. The idea behind Elevation1049 was to create a type of installation that spoke to the specifics of place – a show that functioned as an antidote to the white-walled hegemony of art-fair circuit. Nearly all of the works in the show grew out of a particular context and are situated outside in nature. Some will melt, others will disappear but they all, in one way or another, speak to mankind's relationship to terrain – to the ground beneath our feet and the sky above. What we see below and above us is the Heaven and Hell of the subtitle. In his most famous song, Roger Waters of Pink Floyd - who spend time in Gstaad - wrote the lyrics, "So you think you can tell Heaven from hell, blue skies from pain". The song was "Wish you were Here".

**GL: Tell us about the artists who will be showcasing work at the exhibition. Are they the "Who's Who" of contemporary Swiss work or up-and-coming young artists?**

**NW:** When you invite artists to participate in a show you don't necessarily know who is going to be inspired. What's amazing about this project was that almost without exception all the artists we approached agreed to participate. As a result we ended up with an incredibly strong representation of artists, many of whom have really played a key role in shaping Swiss art of the last few decades. But, alongside the veterans there are also many younger and emerging artists like Beni Hegglin (here collaborating with Tina Braegger) who at the age of 25 is the youngest and just beginning to show his work.

**GL: Olympia, can you tell us about your installation?**

**OS:** I will be presenting a minimal installation of a home that will never be built, that eventually will collapse and disappear. It's equally a dream home that never comes to fruition and the dream of a home. It exists as a skeleton to be fleshed out in the mind. Constructed on unstable ground, I invite the earth to rebel against it and with it all the mindless damage that construction imposes on the world. The title – All that is Solid Melts into Air – to me suggests that all mankind's endeavors are forever in conflict with nature. And so we are left always on the outside looking in.

Gstaad is an iconic place with a rich social history, an abundance of natural beauty and a few secrets of its own.

NEVILLE WAKEFIELD

**GL: What can Elevation 1049 bring to Gstaad, a village known mostly for its glitz and glamour?**

**NW:** Gstaad may be known mostly for its glitz and glamour but perhaps interestingly, that aspect was not what most of the artists were drawn to. Christian Marclay, for instance, chose to look at how the Saanenland has been seen through the lens of another culture – in this instance Bollywood films. Other artists such as Thomas Hirschhorn or Claudia Comte have chosen to create works with snow and ice as it is used in everyday ways around farms and on the ice rink. What we hope Elevation 1049 brings to Gstaad is another perception that perhaps goes beyond the stereotype – one in which glitz and glamour can be seen as just one surface facet of a much richer and more varied totality.

**GL: Do you have any estimate of the number of visitors expected to attend?**

**NW:** We don't have an estimate for the number of visitors expected to attend though with an exhibition that is intentionally de-centered and in a place that is not easy to access there's a certain threshold of commitment that people have to pass in order to see it. That said, it's been very important to us that the show is free to the public and that it is as accessible for local people as it is for art-world globetrotters and their attendant Sherpas. And for those who would rather let their fingers do the walking there's always the website: [www.elevation1049.org](http://www.elevation1049.org)

**GL: Olympia, will you pass on a love on the Saanenland to future generations of the Scarry family?**

**OS:** I do hope so!