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10 Must-See Museum Shows in 2014

Olympia Scarry and Neville Wakefield: Art in the Alps

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WHO'S AFRAID OF ENTROPY?

ELEVATION 1049 MIGHT MELT, BUT THAT'S THE POINT

BY SCOTT INDRISEK

PHOTOGRAPH BY KRISTINE LARSEN
THIS WINTER THE RESORT VILLAGE OF GSTAAD, SWITZERLAND, BECOMES AN UNLIKELY SPOT ON THE ART WORLD MAP, THANKS TO NEVILLE WAKEFIELD AND OLYMPIA SCARRY'S NEWEST CURATORIAL PROJECT.

Wakefield, who has curated for Moma 91, Prizm Projects, Nike, and Playboy, among others, and Scarry, a successful artist focused on sculpture, have not collaborated on such an undertaking before. Taking a cue from Gumming, scavenger hunt-style expositions like Documenta in Kassel, Germany, or the Contour Biennale in Mechelen, Belgium, Elevation 1049, named for Gstaad's height in meters above sea level, will see the installation of commissioned works by 22 Swiss artists—in garages, on frozen lakes, and in cable cars traversing up to the village's adjacent glacier. (The project's emphasis on cold and its material properties also recalls the 2004 "Snow Show," curated by Lance Fung in Indianapolis.) For me, Gstaad carried all the clichés and baggage of the jet set—but when you go there, it does still seem like a village," Wakefield says. "It's Samsung of real shit." Scarry who has the most direct connection to the town: Her grandfather, beloved children's book author Richard Scarry, lived there for years, and Olympia spent the final two years of high school in the snowy hamlet. Wakefield, who was born on the Isle of Scilly in the U.K., brings a secondary point of view to the Swiss-centric project, which is fitting, considering the odd-in-between space in which he sees Gstaad operating. "It's really a global village, both extremely local and extremely international," he says. "As much of Switzerland exists outside the country as in it." That's reflected in the impressive roster of artists involved with Elevation 1049: some, like Valentin Carron and Sylvie Fleury, still reside in Switzerland, while others are based in Iceland, China, Arizona, and Paris.

Some of these artists plan to focus on unconventional locations, or on Gstaad's unique history. Peter Fischli is restoring a 1983 work he made with the late David Weiss, titled in a village garage. "It's an installation with an air of the hobbist gone wrong," Wakefield says. "You can't tell what's being made, what's real, and what's fake. There's something that looks like a motor, but there's also a polyurethane crocodile." Christian Marclay's contribution plays on Gstaad's unlikely status as the go-to backdrop for Bollywood films and will string together clips from that pantheon. Christoph Büchel has expressed his fascination with the architecture of a trailer park located a very short distance from the village center, a ramshackle assortment of permanent dwellings that has its own view of the Gstaad Palace. Ugo Rondinone is placing colored rocks in streams; Claudia Comte is making a painting that will be installed beneath the surface of the local hockey rink. Many of the proposed works will speak to the climate, topography, and natural conditions of Gstaad from January 27 through March 8.

"The weather, which is obviously unreliable, will be the biggest challenge," Wakefield admits, noting the temerity of a proposed ice and snow sculpture by Thomas Hirschhorn. Ofcoma is coming to create an interactive piece that involves winter sport: "It started from a conversation about skiers and first tracks and how they're effectively a drawing made on the slopes," Wakefield says. "It developed into an idea that is much more democratic and participatory, where you basically produce an action painting using these pigment laden sleds." Scarry's own contribution to Elevation 1049 is a sculpture that she plans to site on top of a fairly remote lake. Her piece will be a facsimile of the poles used to mark the boundaries of construction sites in Switzerland—in her condition, the poles will be gilded by local craftsmen, and the whole structure will slowly slip into the lake as the ice on its surface melts. That's the plan, provided winter temperatures play along.

"My original interest in the art world came through Robert Smithson and land art, the idea of non-sites," Wakefield says. "A lot of the pieces work with the weather, and that's the point—they'll melt, or decompose, or deteriorate," adds Scarry. "That's what's interesting," Wakefield explains. "It's art as process rather than end product. We've seen enough product. Putting a bit of entropy in the mix is not going to be bad."
Documentation of Roman Signer's Haus mit Raketen (house with Rockets), 1961, in Götzen, Switzerland. "This work was created in large part as a response to the local architecture and the natural snow background," according to Waelkens. Signer's piece for Derivation 1049 is 'also temporary, using the natural forces that will drive a large structure on and down the mountain," says Waelkens.

omnisci Stills from Christian Marclay's work In progress for Derivation 1049 complete the issue, and the next will soon start in Gedas.