

HANS ULRICH OBRIST

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BY JOHN BALDESSARI

Freeze Fair

An exhibition co-curated by the artist Olympia Scarry takes over a Swiss Alpine village.

BY MARINA CASHDAN

PORTRAIT BY GEORG GATSAS

Bollywood fans know it well: Gstaad, the idyllic ski town situated high up in the Swiss Alps—a pleasantly discreet escape for the rich and famous, but also a popular location for the Indian film industry. And where there is money and fame, there is always art. “Great collectors and people are involved in the arts there, but there’s a lack of dialogue between artists and collectors,” says the artist Olympia Scarry, granddaughter of children’s book illustrator Richard Scarry. She is the co-curator, with Neville Wakefield, of “Elevation 1049: Between Heaven and Hell,” an exhibition of site-specific outdoor works that will open in Gstaad on Jan. 27. “It’s always interesting to bring new minds and fresh ideas to the place,” adds Scarry, who spent part of her youth in the town.

For “Elevation 1049,” Scarry and Wakefield commissioned 22 Swiss artists to show pieces in the village during its popular winter season. “A lot of the artists have incorporated or played with the weather, so it’s inspired by natural forces,” Scarry says. Her own creation riffs on Swiss culture and climate; she plans to build, atop the frozen Lake Lauenensee, a gilded architectural framework made of profile poles used to indicate dimensions on construction

sites. “It will then collapse and disappear when the lake melts,” she says.

The show features work in a broad range of mediums. Christian Marclay’s contribution is a film pieced together from Bollywood movies shot in or near the town. Christoph Buchel will use a former P-26 aircraft bunker on the Gstaad Palace hill for his installation. New York-based Swiss artist Olaf Breuning will invite the public to create a participatory “action painting” by releasing toboggans full of colored pigments onto the snow-covered landscape. Urs Fischer will present two large sculptures capable of emitting tears, which will likely freeze in the cold weather.

Funded largely by Swiss patron Maja Hoffmann’s LUMA Foundation, Wakefield and Scarry gave the artists a great deal of freedom in siting their pieces—works will be installed everywhere from the town’s power station and ice rink to the controversial bunker and hard-to-reach Wispile glacier. For the artists, many of whom no longer live in Switzerland, the project is a homecoming of sorts. “It was interesting to invite artists to come back to Switzerland. I was looking at the works of [artist and healer] Emma Kunz, who said she believed that people had to eat from

the ground where they were born. I wanted to test that and question what it means to be somewhere—if it has any importance at all, especially today, when people move around so much,” Scarry says.

Location will continue to play a crucial role in what Scarry and Wakefield hope will become a series of site-specific exhibitions. “We don’t want to say it’s going to happen every X number of years,” she says. “But I’m interested in this idea that it’s a nomadic piece that we can launch in various geographic locations, working with artists from there.” So where to next? “We’ve discussed doing something in the ‘Zone of Silence’ in Mexico,” she says. “It’s kind of like a Bermuda Triangle of the desert.”



The artist Olympia Scarry in front of a former aircraft bunker in Gstaad, Switzerland.