

GSTAAD, SWITZERLAND

BY RACHEL DONADIO

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 video work, "The Clock," which sampled clips showing timepieces from film history, Mr. Marclay knew he had found his contribution to "Elevation 1049: Between Heaven and Hell," an am-

bitious site-specific art exhibition by 25 Swiss artists that opened here this week.

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 buttercups. Over the years, film fans have followed. His work, "Bollywood Goes to Gstaad," a 17-minute montage of short clips from Bollywood films, is being shown in a video monitor in a cable car that travels halfway up the Gondelbahn glacier, with dizzying 360-degree views of the Alps below. (It is also being shown in a movie theater in Gstaad.)

With its expensive hotels, groomed ski runs, designer boutiques and celebrity sightings, Gstaad may not seem like it needs another diversion. But

the artists, including Mr. Marclay, have tried to engage with the landscape of the resort town — installing artwork 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 like 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, "Elevation 1049: Between Heaven and Hell" 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 London's Frieze art fair, and a former curatorial adviser to the Museum of Modern Art's P.S. 1; 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.

"What's happened in terms of making art accessible is that it's homogenized," he said. Their exhibition 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 through a catalog. Mr. Wakefield said he wasn't sure whether "Elevation 1049" would become an annual event, but added that the concept could easily be re-created elsewhere.

"We could do it in Death Valley," he said.

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. 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 held a small shrine to Friedrich Nietzsche, while others 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, the artist Matthias Brunner took scenes from films by the Swiss director Daniel Schmid, the epitome of the Swiss cliché in which blond maidens in milkmaid dresses sing 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 one bottle on the crowded shelf of liquor behind the bar of the Olden hotel on the main street in Gstaad. 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 3,000 meters, or about 10,000 feet, sits a pyramid-like fortification made of ice by the artist 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.)

"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 in Gstaad last weekend for a one-time performance in which the artist Claudia Comte choreographed hockey players pushing around Styrofoam sculptures, 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.

For his part, Mr. Marclay said he was pleased with the results. Since the video in the cable car is so difficult to reach, "You have to really want to do it," he said. "I love the fact that the sites that are featured in the film are the ones you're in."