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*Les Echos*  
Le Quotidien de l'Économie

## The rush of contemporary art in the Swiss Alps

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*Photo: Doug Aitken, Mirage. Credit: JBH*

This is the highlight of early 2019.

The Swiss summits are literally colonized by artistic activities. They are either commercial, or aesthetic or intellectual type but they invade the most chic localities.

Evidently the phenomenon is not new since the Swiss merchant of Warhol and Basquiat, Bruno Bischofberger already had a gallery in Saint Moritz and that it is in this locality that one finds the museum of the great post-impressionist artist Giovanni Segantini, whose Getty just bought a painting.

But now activities of all kinds are growing at the top. The list is vertiginous (1).

Among the most impressive ephemeral phenomena that moved contemporary art enthusiasts from all over the world into the snow of the Swiss summits, for the third time in Gstaad, from the 1st to the 3rd of February: Elevation 1049.

This is the event headed by the Swiss giga collector Maja Hoffmann with her foundation, Luma - also best known for her project in Arles in the south of France in a building designed by Frank Gehry-.

It is at the origin, with the complicity of the commissioners Neville Wakefield and Olympia Scarry of this operation which federates approximately every two years since 2014 a set of sparse performances in Gstaad (intervention of 9 artists since the French artist Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster to American choreographer Isabel Lewis).

More, this year, a spectacular operation signed by Californian Doug Aitken.

You have to want to see it: he has installed in the outskirts of the city the aptly named "Mirage": a house in mirrors. It takes the shape of the surrounding cottages and its coating makes it completely invisible from afar.

Up close this hidden treasure that we necessarily arrive on foot, looks like what could be called a panoramic kaleidoscope. Inside, the mirrors that reflect the black and white landscape seem to give lines of escape to the recomposed nature.

The artist wanted to create a changing work with time and climate. She is here for two years.

The same weekend in this alpine city, certainly considered the richest in the region-the cottages are trading up to 100 million dollars-Gagosian decided to open a gallery directly at the entrance of the small airport.

Leaving his private jet, you can directly visit the space that presents until March 17 images of the German super star of the photo, which was made more discreet recently, the German Andreas Gursky.

A specialist explains that this proliferation of commercial activities partly depends on the nature of local residents, attracted by a particularly advantageous taxation, specific to each canton. It seems likely to pay much less taxes in Gstaad or Verbier than in Geneva for example.

But the program does not stop there ...

Nearly two hours by car, on slippery serpentine roads, was held in Verbier, in the canton of Vaud - this year on the 1st and 2nd of February - meetings that have been going on since 2017: "the Verbier Art Summit".

Her creator, the Dutch Anneliek Sijbrandij is clear: "We want to be at the origin of a Davos of art". She adds that the summit refuses any commercial intrusion on the part of merchants or auction houses.

In its 2019 version, the speakers were particularly interesting, from Maria Balshaw, the boss of the Tate, to a whole series of scientists and artists concerned by the changes of societies, all led by Jochen Volz, the director of the Pinacothèque de Sao Paulo. The general purpose was to prove that art changes minds and therefore society.

There have been several touching interventions such as the researcher Naine Terena who defends the indigenous people of Mato Grosso in Brazil at a time when the new president Jair Bolsonaro wants to oust the natives of some lands to give more space to intensive crops.

Tania Bruguera, a Cuban activist and performer in delicacy with the power of her country, took the audience by her freedom and her radical vision.

She said as an introduction: "In Cuba, I had the privilege of seeing the best performer artist: Fidele Castro".

The conclusion was given by the Thai-born star artist Rikrit Tiravanija who always manages to share everything including the workload. In a very Duchampian spirit He confessed to having prepared nothing and proposed to the people who compose the public to speak each one their turn.

At the end of the afternoon in Verbier, there was talk of love, sharing, generosity, open-mindedness, as if the rest of the world, the nationalist and authoritarian temptations, racism, the misfortunes of men were finally going to end.

See you in Verbier next year to dream again.

(1) Small tour of art in the mountains:

- We can start with St. Moritz where Hauser & Wirth has just inaugurated a gallery near those of Vito Schnabel, Andrea Caratsch and Karsten Greve

- In Crans Montana, former Swiss ambassador Emmanuel Barrat now organizes regular discussions under the title "Swiss made culture". Thus, on February 9th and 10th, he leaves carte blanche at the Swiss Institute of New York directed by Simon Castet to talk about current creation in the presence of artist Valentin Carron among others.

The Tornabuoni Gallery also has a gallery in Crans Montana.

- In Engadine:

in the Canton of Graubünden and more precisely in the village of Susch, the businesswoman, Grażyna Kulczyk, inaugurated on January 2 a museum dedicated to contemporary art including a wide range of artists Marlene Dumas to Caesar.

The Alps are taken with an immoderate taste for discussions on contemporary art as at the Engadin Art talks on January 26 & 27 in Uster, in the canton of Zurich, where you could hear, among others, the German photographer in strong and disturbing images, Juergen Teller, the artist who creates with spiders and the sun, Tomas Saraceno or the ubiquitous curator at the head of the Serpentine gallery, Hans Ulrich Obrist.

- Also in Gstaad:

The Hauser & Wirth Swiss Gallery occupies the "old cottage" of the late Brigitte Bardot's former husband and collector Gunter Sachs, where you can admire by appointment, among others Calder and other Picasso.

In the same city Patricia Low has a space in the city center where she currently exposes the veteran of American Pop art, Alex Katz.