

DIARY

# SUCH GREAT HEIGHTS

February 13, 2019 • Gstaad, Switzerland • Nicolas Trembley at Elevation 1049



Doug Aitken, *Mirage Gstaad*, 2019. Photo: Stefan Altenburger.

**I HAD TWO RIDE OPTIONS** to the third iteration of “Elevation 1049” (the number refers to the ski resort’s altitude), produced by Luma Foundation, with the involvement of Maja Hoffmann, and again curated by local artist Olympia Scarry and Neville Wakefield: driving with artist Sylvie Fleury in her new Tesla (the brand is popular in the Alps, and it’s easy to find charging stations) or flying with Hans Ulrich Obrist in an Airbus helicopter (also very popular, with many local landing areas). But an unexpected snowstorm forced me to take a regular train from the Geneva airport to Montreux, and then catch the panoramic GoldenPass, which stops at every village on the way to Gstaad.

I arrived just in time to attend the Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster concert, *Exotourisme*, at the GreenGo, the iconic disco club that still exhales the presence of past clients including Liz Taylor and Michael Jackson. That night, DGF was dressed as Rachael, the iconic replicant from *Blade Runner*, and sang texts written by Paul B. Preciado over the synthetic music of Julian Perez. With a distorted vocoder, DGF claimed that we are crossing an “involution” (sort of a revolution in regression), an era of telluric forces similar to the movement of tectonic plates. “Is it like the Gilets Jaunes?” someone asked.

The audience was warned: Times are changing. But maybe not that night, because we had to shuttle to the neighboring village of Saanen, where collector Ulla Dreyfus-Best and dealer Dominique Lévy were hosting a dinner with Hoffman, a regular *de la station de ski*. At Chlösterli chalet, the club owned by the billionaire Pastor family of Monaco, salmon toasts were served and a collective energy seemed to be brewing. Contemporary art performances challenging political or social issues, staged in an über-privileged, almost out-of-reality village in pristine nature, were already generating many different feelings—and the main event hadn’t even begun. The crowd was teeming with excitement, curious and hungry for more of *everything*. I was seated next to Kristen Joy Watts of Instagram, who caught everybody’s attention. “How can we have more followers?” “Can I be certified?”

Arriving late the next day for the performance programming, I unfortunately missed Naama Tsabar singing (*Barricades*), Nina Beier’s critique of commodity aesthetics dealing (*Automobile*), Zhana Ivanova on human behavior (*Borrowed Splendour*), and Marie Karlberg on commodity aesthetics. Karlberg’s performance, *The Artist Will Be in Attendance*, at Chalet Mittelgässli, addressed the expectations and challenges of young artists’ marketability and careers. She wore a big puffy coat by Moncler, the event’s fashion sponsor.



**Performance by Isabel Lewis, *Poolside Pastoral*.** Photo: Nicolas Trembley.

In the pool room on the old Gunter Sachs property, Isabel Lewis and her team of nude dancers were moving like eels on the floor or walking like dislocated puppets among the public. Then they all jumped in the pool, where they recited poems from their phones, while songs from the *Pulp Fiction* soundtrack played in the background. “So excessive and inspiring,” said the woman behind me, drinking a raw berry juice from a tiny glass with her long polished nails.

Le Vieux Chalet is also the site of Hauser & Wirth’s Gstaad gallery, where they’re presenting original children’s book illustrations by Olympia Scarry’s late grandfather, Richard Scarry. Some of us jumped in horse drawn sleighs to the Lauenen church to listen to *Improvisation on Five Sequences*, by the electronic music pioneer Suzanne Ciani, who started a site-specific “concert” by sampling crisp ski sounds. Above her were the words *Christus spricht: Ich bin der Weg* (Christ speaks: I’m the way). We didn’t follow Him, but we all found our way by walking to lunch at hotel Wildhorn, where friends of the Swiss Institute—Fabienne and Charles Abrecht, among others—were offering low-alkaline viande des Grisons, soup, and cheese. From there we all hopped into shuttles to the Saanen airport to attend a participative performance by Liz Magic Laser, Hanna Novak, and Cori Kresge, who asked us to drink a



small vitamin mixture, put on an eye mask, and relax. We were all revitalized for a visit to Tarmak 22, a hybrid space founded by Agnelli heiress Tatiana de Pahlen and currently rented by Larry Gagosian, offering a solo show by Andreas Gursky (small-format works are available, for easy storage in the jet).

At sunset, we walked to Doug Aitken's outdoor site-specific sculpture, *Mirage Gstaad*. It's the Land art snow iteration of Aitken's mirror house first built for Desert X near Joshua Tree, and will stay up for two years. In either the desert or the mountains, the house reflects the surrounding landscape and, according to your point of view, disappears. The main departure from the US version was that this one sports black lines to prevent birds from flying into it. Swiss people care about nature.



**Performance by Marianne Vitale.**

Hot red wine was served, so it was aperitif time. Christie's hosted a cocktail hour in bar Bellevue, before we caught the cable car to the top of Eggli Mountain, where Marianne Vitale was firing up (literally) one of her "Burned Bridges" wood sculptures. At night, Pahlen and the



magazine *L'Officiel* were hosting a memorable after party at Château de Rougemont, Pahlen's private residence. It was snowing, and people danced and drank and drank and danced in the medieval courtyard, illuminated by candles.

After the merrymaking, there was an early breakfast talk with Aitken in the Alpina cinema. The hotel owner's son Nachson Mimran hired the Cayre Art Group to develop the extensive art collection for its public areas, including a Pierre Huyghe aquarium in the lobby and a Wade Guyton work in the restaurant, next to a Jana Euler piece. Adviser Jacob King was explaining the why and the what to the staff, who replied that clients missed the old Bosco Sodi paintings and that they should put them back in place of the Nicole Eisenman.

While having a bratwurst in an outdoor kiosk, I ran into Art Basel director Marc Spiegler, who had just returned from snowboarding, and then Almine and Bernard Ruiz-Picasso, who had just come back from Fondation Beyeler in Basel, where the institution was opening "The Young Picasso: Blue and Rose Periods." From the Engadin Art Talks to the new Muzeum Susch, the art fair Nomad in St Moritz, and the Verbier Art Summit, "Elevation" was definitely a high point of this alpine art season. After such heights, I was honestly quite sad to come back down to reality.

— Nicolas Trembley



Michèle Lamy.



**Designer Yolanda Zobel.**





Artist Isabel Lewis.



Performance by Suzanne Ciani.



**Collector Tatiana de Pahlen at Tarmak 22.**





Artist Doug Aitken’s dealers with advisor Ana Sokoloff.



Collector Alex Hank.



**Doug Aitken and collector Maja Hoffmann.**





Doug Aitken, *Mirage Gstaad*.



**Art advisor Jacob King and artist Marie Karlberg.**



Elevation 1049 co-curator Olympia Scarry.





Artist Cecilia Bengolea and Elevation 1049 co-curator Neville Wakefield.



**Musician Suzanne Ciani.**



Artist Liz Magic Laser.





Artist Marianne Vitale, collector Staffan Ahrenberg, and Art Basel global director Marc Spiegler.



Hans Ulrich Obrist.



Party at Château de Rougemont.

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