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ART | BY HARRIET LLOYD-SMITH | 3 FEB 2019


Engadin Art Talks: creative luminaries unravel grace and gravity in the digital age



Speakers from a range of creative disciplines descended on the Swiss village of Zuoz for this year's Engadin Art Talks

Leading creatives retreated to the Romanesque alcove of Zuoz over the last weekend of January for the 2019 edition of Engadin Art Talks (EAT). A distinguished panel debated topics within the spheres of art, design, science, film and literature, injecting a dose of culture into the time-honoured tradition of après-ski.

Zurich-based collector and publisher Cristina Bechtler founded EAT in 2010 after being inspired by Die Gläserne Kette ('The Crystal Chain'). Helmed by architect Bruno Taut, this early 20th-century artist collective exchanged radical, utopian ideas through 'letter chains'. In a similar vein, the Engadin forum operates as a catalyst for concepts, forging a space where disciplines overlap. 'There is an inspiring potential – it feels like fusing separated minds and ideas in fresh air once a year,' explained EAT founding member Bice Curiger.

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In the picturesque corridors of Alpine resorts, art institutions are in abundance. At least 30 international galleries and museums now populate the stretch between St Moritz and the municipality of Sent. Nestled in the middle is Zuoz: a ski locale, bucolic Eden, and collector's paradise, accessible from Zurich – by virtue of Swiss efficiency – via a scenic three-hour trip on the Glacier Express. The region, too, harbours a surprisingly dense artistic heritage.

Art dealer Bruno Bischofberger – who acquainted Europe with American pop art – first opened a glitzy St Moritz gallery in 1963. The dramatic landscape, distinctive quality of light and sedate pace of life have long been appealing traits for a cultural clan with former residents including Friedrich Nietzsche (he first conceived the idea for *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* on the shores of Lake Silvaplana), and ballet dancer Vaslav Nijinsky. Region regulars include Gerhard Richter, Julian Schnabel, Richard Long and Sent native Not Vital who acquired a sprawling 12th-century Lower Engadin castle, which the artist plans to convert into an exhibition space.

Against an enchanting snow-capped vista, EAT guests were treated to a prestigious line-up of speakers and captivating performances led by Daniel Baumann, Kunsthalle Zurich director; Bice Curiger, Fondation Vincent van Gogh Arles artistic director; Hans Ulrich Obrist, Serpentine Gallery artistic director; and Philip Ursprung, professor for Art and Architectural History at the ETH Zurich. This year's theme of 'Grace and Gravity' saw the union of two contradictory forces and how both are defined in the digital age: the disciplined laws of physics versus the

anarchic, fluid impulses of the mind. ‘We are witnessing a particular moment now. As cultural protagonists, we are always already confronted with this duality in our perception of the world,’ says Curiger.



Artist and dancer Cecilia Bengolea delivers her seminar at Engadin Art Talks 2019

Artist Thomas Hirschhorn paid homage to EAT's theme by way of philosopher Simone Weil in his discussion. Elizabeth Diller, meanwhile, deconstructed the use of physical grace and gravity in her architectural practice and photographer Juergen Teller addressed discrepancies between the pretention of luxury and the vital facts

of life. Other speakers at the 2019 event included German artist Lena Henke, choreographer Cecilia Bengolea (who staged a mesmerising dance performance), and recent Wallpaper* Guest Editor Tomás Saraceno, whose talk, 'Floating in an ocean of air', dissected how grace and gravity can collide in aerosolar journeys, foreseeing the possibilities of an Earth in a 'post-fossil fuel' era.

'The fact that you have to invest a couple of hours, even days, to come up to the mountains for this gathering already creates a symbolic detachment from the normalcy of our metropolitan digi-life,' Curiger said, 'sitting in a room and listening to what extraordinarily engaged personalities have to tell us about our culture and its constant changes might initiate a manifesto-character.' ✱

INFORMATION

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