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ART/SOUTH TYROL

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Travel to the globe

By forcing its viewers out of their comfort zones in galleries, Olafur Eliasson's Alpine installation offers an immersive perspective on our relationship with the planet and its place among the stars. It's time to find new inspiration.

By *Laura Rysman*
Photography *Andrea Pugiotta*



Previous page: An icy trail of archways leads to the sculpture at an elevation of 3km

This page: (1) 'Our Glacial Perspectives' surveys the peaks (2) The artwork comprises shades of blue glass (3) Olafur Eliasson inside his creation

Perched on the tip of the Hochjochferner glacier, facing a horizon of snowy Alpine peaks at Italy's border with Austria, the newest work by Olafur Eliasson is a long way from the accessibility (and indoor heating) of a museum. Visitors are encouraged to come to this high-altitude corner of South Tyrol not only to witness the impressive, science-fiction-like globe but to observe the icy mountain landscape beyond. Danish-Icelandic artist Eliasson has long been focusing on climate change in his work and this latest sculpture is an important addition to that theme.

"I find it inspiring to create a more contemplative relationship with nature and the mountains," says Eliasson, wrapped up in plenty of warm layers as he gazes at the white peaks. The artwork, titled "Our Glacial Perspectives", sits like a fragile planet adrift in snow. It's reminiscent of an ancient astronomical tool used to measure the paths of heavenly bodies.

The far-flung work was commissioned by Talking Water Society, a water-preservation organisation. One of its founders, Bolzano-based Austrian Ui Phoenix von Kerbl, convinced South Tyrolean officials to turn this frigid patch of land into a space for a permanent and public, if remote, work of art. Crafted in galvanised steel by Pichler, a Bolzano-based manufacturer of cable cars and steel façades, the sculpture's structure – 10 tonnes of metal and glass anchored to the rock – means that visitors can step inside to study the firmament through the globe's apertures.

The rings trace the sun's path through to the year's equinoxes and solstices, and each glass pane measures 15 arc minutes of the sun's movement. "If you understand the cyclical nature of the celestial, you take away the mechanification of our relationship to the world and start to physically relate to it," says Eliasson.

Inspired by JMW Turner's 19th-century paintings of an environment "that was not



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standing still", Eliasson has long depicted the ephemeral: moving water, sunlight, melting glaciers. Over the past century, temperatures in the Alps have risen by 1.5C and permafrost now clings only to the tip of these peaks. To represent climate change, "something so abstract that it's outside our imagination," Eliasson prefers to let an encounter with the threatened glaciers speak for itself.

Getting to the work is no mean feat: visitors ride a cable car to the mountain-top Grawand lodge and then traverse a narrow 410-metre path along a frozen crest marked by nine metal archways that symbolise Earth's ice ages. At an elevation of 3km, the sculpture floats above a vertiginous drop to the valley below. The artwork is a tool to understand the landscape, not a mere installation: the visitors' experience of the freezing-cold trip, their high-altitude isolation and their ascent are all part of it.

"It's an instrument," says Eliasson. "It gets you into the mountains and gives you the opportunity to think about something abstract." His eyes pivot upwards. "Like, for instance, how blue is the sky?" — (M) olafureliasson.net

Monocle comment: After a lot of time spent cooped up, inspiration should be sought further afield. Do so and you will find places and works that will truly shift your perspective.



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