

Art Basel

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Why artists hike – and where

From the Mojave Desert to the Swiss Alps, five artists reflect on how hiking shapes their practice

For those looking to engage with urgent voices and quiet revolutions, these are the exhibitions to visit this month

By Emily McDermott

<https://www.artbasel.com/stories/where-artists-hike>



For millennia the natural world has been a source of inspiration and subject for artists. But more than appearing in artworks, our natural environment is also often a place for reclusion, a place where artists go to regroup themselves. Andrea Zittel, Paulo Nazareth, Julius von Bismarck, Lisa Anne Auerbach, and Olaf Breuning share why they hike, run, or wander – and where.

Olaf Breuning

Lives and works: Kerhonkson, New York

Known for: addressing some of life's biggest questions through universal visual language, often with a healthy dose of humor or satire

'I hike with my friends through the Catskill Mountains, but running is more suited to me than walking. We have about 45 acres of land and there's a path from my studio that's two or three miles uphill and down, so when I'm working in the studio and my energy gets low around 3pm, I run this trail. After half an hour or so, I gain my energy back, I can think about my work again. Before I started running, I also hiked the trails. Walking or running is a repetitive physical activity that makes my brain rest and become more focused. I don't have a favorite trail where I'm like, "Wow, I have to go there to experience this or that," but this trail by my studio is important. It doesn't have a name, although I know the trees, I know the rocks. It has the mark of me walking and running over the years. When I don't go there, it gets overgrown.

'I've also hiked to specific locations to make works. For *The Edge* [2024], I hiked two hours on the trail leading to what's known as Gertrude's Nose to put a huge blow-up Earth on the edge of a rock and take a photograph. Rocks to me symbolize Earth and nature – a rock is there a hundred or a thousand or millions of years. Unlike a tree or plants, it doesn't come and go. My work talks a lot about the relationship between humans and nature, and to me, the rock is the opposite of humans. We come and go but the rock doesn't move.'