



45 Rue de Lausanne, 1950 Sion, Switzerland  
[www.lemme.site](http://www.lemme.site)

Willimann/Arai - Walking with the Rhone  
22 July - 9 September 2023

The project *Walking with the Rhone* by the artist duo Willimann/Arai consists of presentations at two exhibition venues and nine days of walking between Sion and the Rhone Glacier: It starts on 22 July 2023 with farewell drinks at the base station of the project, Lemme, in Sion and the opening of the exhibition in the concrete cube. Then Nina Willimann & Mayumi Arai, accompanied by interested fellow hikers, will walk in five days through the Rhone valley to Ernen, where a public discussion with the priest Vitus Nwosu will take place, before tackling three more stages to the Rhone Glacier.

The artists are walking the Rhine-Rhone pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela in the opposite direction, from Sion upstream to the source of the Rhone, the Rhone Glacier. The idea of an artistic pilgrimage arose from the two artists' interest in pilgrimage traditions and their variations. While in Japan trees, mountains or landscapes have always been sites of pilgrimage, Christianity established a dualism between nature and people over centuries. The walk by Willimann/Arai highlights the Rhone as an element of "nature". The river is the companion and reference point of the hike and the centre of the associated artistic research: the collection of river-related stories in which the Rhone acts as a subject.

Storytelling, like pilgrimage, is an ancient cultural technique for making sense of the world. Stories shape the collective perception of our world. In view of the looming climate catastrophe, visible in the melting of the Rhone glacier, Willimann/Arai are looking for stories that break up the dominant, western, modern narrative of man's mastery over nature. In doing so, they draw on the one hand on the myths of the Valais region, on traces of a pre-modern understanding of the world in which people saw themselves as part of a living nature that must be taken into account. On the other hand, they collect personal stories (true and invented) and experiences connected to the Rhone from fellow hikers and people they meet on the road. The aim is to juxtapose the dominant narrative with many different, alternative narratives and to let the Rhone speak for itself.

The Lemme exhibition space is both the starting point and base station of the walk and the visual archive of the project. Here Mayumi Arai and Nina Willimann show selected visual material from their research on the Rhone, the Rhone glacier and Japanese and European pilgrimage. The special structure of the exhibition space is used to create relationships between the different themes.

Willimann/Arai record the collected stories through mappings and pass them on orally to fellow hikers. They send the daily drawings by post to Ernen, where they are displayed in a shop window as part of the exhibition *Zur frohen Aussicht*. Mapping is a method of documentation used regularly by the duo. This medium allows them to condense linear narratives into simultaneous images and to let different stories stand side by side equally. The drawings have no claim to objective representation and leave room for the viewers' interpretations. In this way, they consciously seek a contrast to scientific cartography.

Willimann/Arai

Mayumi Arai, born in New York in 1988 and raised in Tokyo, and Nina Willimann (\*1982), who grew up in the countryside of central Switzerland, met in Hong Kong in 2015. They have been working together since then. In their research- and process-based works, Willimann/Arai refer to a specific context or place and examine its local and global interconnections. They often work with the inhabitants of this place or with experts from science and other fields. In their research, Willimann/Arai are interested in phenomena and subjects that question or overcome modern divisions such as nature-culture, east-west and the self-foreign. In doing so, they develop multi-perspective narratives and make speculative references.

<https://willimannarai.net>

Curator: Josiane Imhasly

Supported by Erna and Curt Burgauer Foundation

*Translated with DeepL*