

Caring for Naturecultures Glaciers

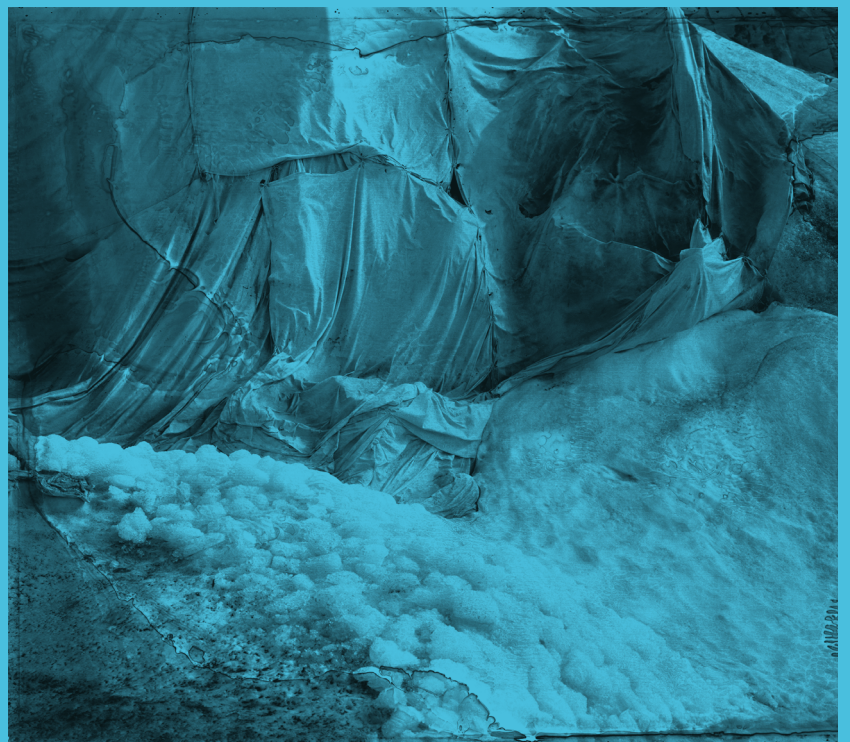
Exhibition

June 12 – July 10, 2026



Curated by
Hanna Barbara Hölling.

With works by
Pepe Molina Cruz,
Stefan Rohner,
Adam Sébire,
and Ester Vonplon.



Collegium Helveticum

The exhibition *Caring for Naturecultures: Glaciers* reconceives conservation as a practice of care spanning natural and cultural environments. Through artistic engagements with Alpine glaciers and polar icebergs, the exhibition presents ice as both conservation object and natureculture hybrid: a living archive preserving traces of planetary and human histories. Shaped by scientific inquiry, technological intervention, and climate anxiety, glaciers and icebergs emerge as sites where memory, materiality, environmental change, and human history converge.

Across the exhibition, acts of covering, cleaning, documenting, recording, and tending recur as gestures performed in the face of ecological crisis. White geotextiles draped across melting glaciers resemble bandages or shrouds—temporary membranes intended to slow disappearance. Yet they also reveal the paradoxes of contemporary conservation: attempts to preserve vanishing ice through interventions entangled with the very industrial systems implicated in planetary warming.

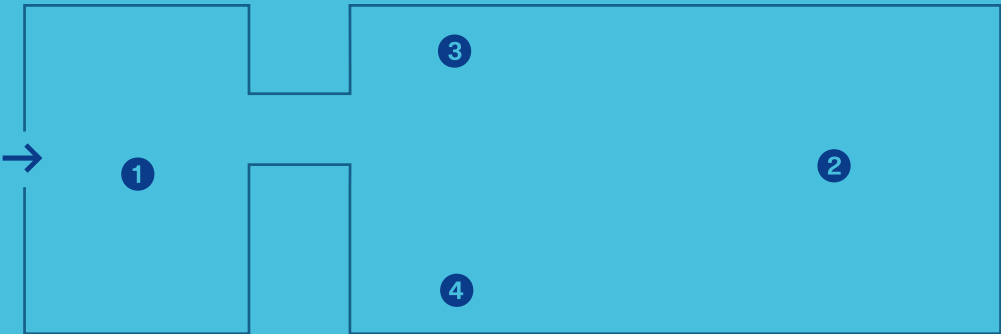
Rather than offering solutions, the exhibition dwells within these contradictions. The works move between intimacy and planetary scale, scientific observation and embodied encounter, documentation and abstraction. Glaciers and icebergs appear not merely as symbols of climate crisis, but as matter in transition, bearing traces of human intervention, labor, grief, and desire.

At its center lies a pressing question: what forms of care remain possible when permanence can no longer be promised? The works gathered here suggest that conservation today may increasingly consist not in preserving the world as it was, but in learning how to accompany, witness, and care for lifeworlds undergoing irreversible transformation.

Gallery site plan

Location: exhibition space in the basement level of the Collegium's main building.

- 1 Gletscherfahrt / Gletschermilch
Ester Vonplon, 2013–2015
- 2 Conservare
Pepe Molina Cruz, 2024
- 3 Arbeiten auf dem
Rohne-Gletscher
Stefan Rohner, 2019
- 4 Glacial Artefacts



Gallery

1 Gletscherfahrt / Gletschermilch
Ester Vonplon, 2013–2015

Photography, artistic book, video with sound, 11 mins
(in collaboration with musician Stephan Eicher)

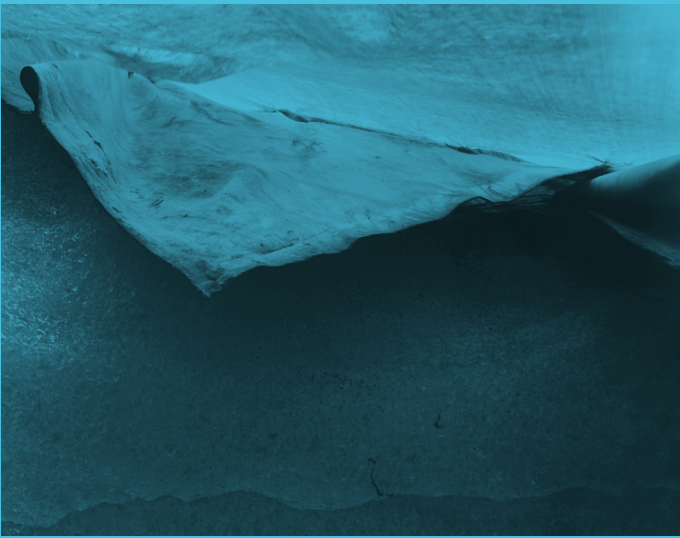
Developed over several summers spent on Alpine glaciers, *Gletscherfahrt* / *Gletschermilch* is a subtle and deeply evocative meditation on glacial retreat and human intervention. *Gletscherfahrt* invokes a journey through glacial landscapes, while *Gletschermilch*—literally “glacier milk”—refers to the pale, mineral-rich meltwater produced by glaciers. Suspended with finely ground rock particles, this luminous water lends alpine lakes their characteristic glow. It also permeates the visual atmosphere of Vonplon’s images, which unfold in a spectrum of greys that reveal an astonishing richness of textures and tonal variations.

Vonplon turns her attention to the geotextile sheets spread across glaciers in an effort to slow melting. Yet rather than documenting these interventions directly, she approaches them through fragments, surfaces, and details. The photographed objects often lose their scale and orientation, becoming landscapes in their own right. Dampness, folds, stains, tears, and dark traces left by meltwater are inscribed into the fabric, transforming the coverings into membranes that register the glacier’s ongoing transformation.

Alongside what emerges as portraits of vulnerability, Vonplon recorded the murmur of *Gletschermilch* flowing from beneath the ice. These sounds became the basis for a haunting composition by musician Stephan Eicher, extending the work beyond the visual.

The power of Vonplon’s work lies in the intimate convergence of subject and medium. Working with analogue photography, she embraces the material contingencies of image-making: light leaks, chemical traces, fractures, and surface irregularities remain visible within the final prints, echoing the textures of their subject matter. Oscillating between abstraction and documentation, the photographic image no longer merely depicts environmental change; it comes to share its condition of exposure and transformation.

This interplay between image and material extends into the accompanying artist’s book, which includes a white vinyl record featuring the soundtrack of the film created in collaboration with Stephan Eicher. Wrapped in gauze-like fabric, the publication subtly echoes the geotextile coverings of the glacier, transforming the book itself into a material continuation of the work’s meditation on preservation, care, and loss.



2 Conservare
Pepe Molina Cruz, 2024

Single-channel video, 4:48 mins,
projected on a geotextile used for glacial coverings.
Music: Paul Jebanasam; colorist: Joan Roig

Photographer and filmmaker Pepe Molina Cruz confronts us, in his large-scale single-channel video installation *Conservare*, with filmic material created in the European Alps—Italy, Switzerland, and France—in 2024. Unmercifully, the film opens with a pulsing rhythm that permeates our bodies: a heartbeat to which we instinctively relate. Simultaneously, two notions and their definitions appear on the left and right sides of the screen:

PERMANERE
diuturnum in eodem loco vel conditione manere
remaining in the same place or condition
for a long time

and

CONSERVARE
custodire et tueri ab interitu vel mutatione
protecting or preserving from destruction or change

The music gradually softens, though it continues to function as a warning. Molina Cruz slowly builds momentum: as the first images emerge, we are still metabolizing the tension between *permanere* and *conservare*. Is remaining equivalent to conserving?

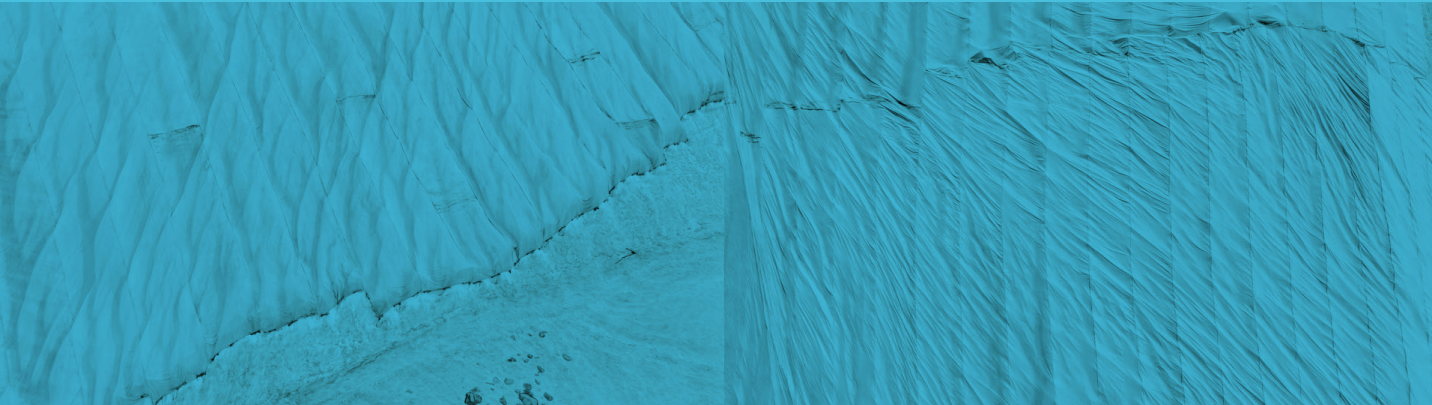
Is conserving possible only at the cost of remaining? What exactly is being conserved here, what remains, and what is lost?

The use of Latin lends the work an almost axiomatic quality, evoking the authority of inherited knowledge and seemingly self-evident truths. Yet the unfolding images reveal how unstable the relationship between permanence and conservation ultimately remains.

The film centers on glaciers covered with massive geotextiles—temporary technological membranes designed to shield ice from solar radiation and slow melting caused by rising summer temperatures. Known as forms of “white geoengineering,” these coverings are employed across Alpine regions as emergency interventions against glacial retreat. Designed to withstand snow, wind, and rain while remaining permeable to water, they function as short-term protective measures against the accelerating disappearance of glaciers.

Yet *Conservare* does not simply document a technical solution. Rather, it confronts us with a deeper paradox of contemporary conservation culture. What does it mean to preserve ice through synthetic coverings derived from the very industrial systems implicated in planetary warming? How do such gestures reshape our perception of glaciers, conservation, and nature itself? The work ultimately asks whether conservation today increasingly operates not through permanence, but through temporary acts of postponement, care, and managed loss.

Geotextile courtesy of the Glaciology Division of the Laboratory of Hydraulics, Hydrology and Glaciology at ETH Zurich.



3 Arbeiten auf dem
Rohne-Gletscher
Stefan Rohner, 2019

Video documentation, 4:07 mins

The act of caring through covering is a recurring motif throughout this exhibition. In *Arbeiten auf dem Rhone-Gletscher*, Stefan Rohner turns his attention to the labor of covering the Rhône Glacier with geotextiles intended to slow the melting of the ice.

Owing to its accessibility, its long history as a tourist destination, and its celebrated artificial ice grotto, the Rhône Glacier has accrued multiple layers of meaning. It is at once a natural formation, a tourist destination, a scientific object, a conservation object, an archive of environmental history, and a highly visible site of human intervention in the face of climatic change.

Rohner documents this process without commentary or dramatic staging, leaving viewers to confront the ambiguities and contradictions of these seemingly absurd, almost Sisyphean gestures of care. The workers carry out their task patiently and methodically, rarely acknowledging the camera. The perspective shifts



between intimate close-ups and distant panoramic views in which the scale of the intervention appears almost grotesquely small in relation to the surrounding landscape. Ropes, textiles, machinery, and technical infrastructures bear witness to the immense labor such practices require—and invite reflection on the unimaginable effort that would be necessary were glaciers to be protected on a larger scale.

There is no music and no narrative voice, only the sounds of labor: sewing machines, wind, footsteps, and movement. The starkness of these scenes is telling. Like vast shrouds or veils of regret spread across the ice, the protective coverings appear as belated responses to a crisis already underway. Resembling medical bandages placed over a wounded planet, the geotextiles embody both care and precarity: temporary acts of preservation that may slow melting locally, yet remain incapable of addressing its underlying causes. Nor are these coverings themselves neutral. As they gradually degrade, they release microplastics into the environment, introducing new ecological tensions and exposing the paradoxes inherent in contemporary efforts to preserve a rapidly changing world.

4 Glacial Artefacts

Selection of objects recovered from retreating Alpine glaciers, including mountaineering equipment, bottles, cans, cartridge cases, and fragments of attire. Mixed materials (metal, glass, plastic, textile, leather), dates unknown.

Courtesy of the Archaeological Service of Graubünden and Glaciology Division of the Laboratory of Hydraulics, Hydrology and Glaciology, ETH Zurich.

As glaciers retreat under rapidly warming climatic conditions, they release objects long held within the ice: tools, textiles, wooden implements, human and animal remains, ritual deposits, and evidence of past movement through alpine landscapes. Emerging at the intersection of archaeology, climatology, and conservation, glacial archaeology investigates these newly exposed materials and the histories they carry.

Unlike conventional archaeological sites, glacial finds appear unexpectedly and often deteriorate rapidly once exposed to air, light, moisture, and microbial activity. Their discovery therefore presents

a paradox: climate change destroys ice archives even as it makes them newly accessible. Glaciers become both preservers of memory and agents of destruction.

The objects released from the ice challenge conventional distinctions between natural and cultural heritage. Preserved through freezing and chance rather than intentional conservation, they bear witness to ancient travel routes, hunting practices, trade networks, ritual activity, and environmental transformation across centuries and millennia. Yet what constitutes an archaeological object is not always self-evident. Materials that might be dismissed as mere “civilization waste”—abandoned equipment, debris, or discarded traces of human presence—can acquire historical, cultural, and environmental significance once released from the ice.

Glacial archaeology thus does more than recover the past. It reveals glaciers themselves as active archives and “conservation objects,” shaped by climate, material transformation, and human intervention.



Curator's acknowledgements

This exhibition has been made possible through the generous support of Collegium Helveticum. My heartfelt gratitude goes to Sebastian Bonhoeffer and Mario Wimmer for enabling this project to come to fruition as part of my Senior Fellowship 2025–2026 at the Collegium.

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I owe a debt of gratitude to Thomas Reitmaier of the Archaeological Service of Graubünden for the loans provided, and to Daniel Farinotti,

Matthias Huss, Raphael Moser, and Jürg Möckli of the Laboratory of Hydraulics, Hydrology and Glaciology, ETH Zurich, for the informative conversations, loans, and invaluable support. Additionally, I would like to thank Videocompany, Jürg Abegg, and Thomas Uetzinger for their technical assistance.

Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to my home institution, the Bern Academy of the Arts (HKB), for facilitating the space for this research. Special thanks go to Marcello Rechberger for his assistance throughout the project, and to Johannes M. Hedinger, together with the Institute for Land and Environmental Art, for their invaluable consultancy during the exhibition's development.

Laboratory

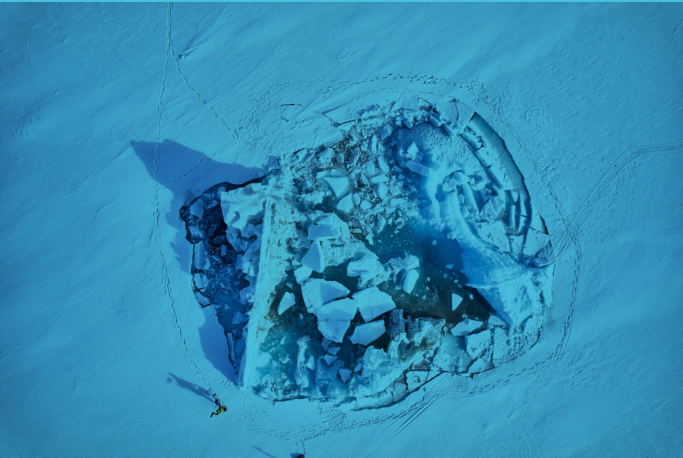
Location: exhibition space in the annex, accessible via the courtyard behind the Collegium's main building.

anthropoScene XII: iceberg care Adam Sébire, 2025

4K HDR video, single-screen version, 7:12 mins
Recording of cracking ice courtesy of Jonna Jinton.

Known to Inuit as *kassoq*, these luminous formations of translucent glacier ice originate deep within the Greenland ice sheet (*Sermersuaq*), where ice has been compressed under immense pressure over millennia before being carried outward by the flow of the Qarajaq Glacier. As anthropogenic climate change accelerates the melting of Greenland's ice masses—many of which are now thought to have passed critical tipping points—their glacial tongues will retreat inland, melting on land rather than releasing icebergs into the ocean. The drifting bergs that once carried Greenland's ice into waters may eventually cease to form.

In *anthropoScene XII: iceberg care*, disappearing icebergs are repetitively swept, polished, and cleared of snow and sediment through gestures of care that appear at once tender, misguided, awkward, and futile. The work's Sisyphean actions foreground the



contradictions of contemporary environmental stewardship: intimate acts of maintenance performed in the face of overwhelming planetary transformation.

The repetitive cleaning is not, however, a grand technological intervention. Sébire's gesture evokes forms of domestic and maintenance labor historically feminized and often rendered socially invisible. Caring for the iceberg thus acquires an additional resonance of embodied upkeep associated with cleaning and everyday care.

Icebergs form when glaciers terminate in oceans or glacial lakes and calve large masses of ice into the water. Their striking blue color results from processes occurring deep within the ice sheet, where ice becomes highly compressed and nearly free of air bubbles. This dense, ancient ice absorbs most wavelengths of light while reflecting blue. When an iceberg calves and overturns, ice that has remained buried at the glacier's base for hundreds or even thousands of years is suddenly brought into view.

In Sébire's work, moments of encounter between a human body and what was once imagined as eternal ice suggest a shared condition of finitude: both are moving, albeit at vastly different temporal scales, toward unmaking. Oscillating between care, mourning, and absurdity—and echoing contemporary attempts to preserve glaciers through protective coverings and other technological interventions—the work asks whether our relationships to the Arctic might be reimagined beyond extraction and exploitation, toward forms of attentiveness, stewardship, and coexistence with a cryospheric world in ongoing transformation.





Cover images

Front cover: *Gletscherfahrt / Gletschermilch*, Ester Vonplon, 2013–2015 (right); still from *Conservare*, Pepe Molina Cruz, 2024 (left).

Back cover: Still from *anthropoScene XII: iceberg care*, Adam Sébire, 2025 (top); still from *Arbeiten auf dem Rhone-Gletscher*, Stefan Rohner, 2019 (bottom).

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