

As hiking and mountaineering become increasingly popular, the inspiring stories of alpinists and mountain guides are enhancing our knowledge and helping to find innovative ways of mitigating climate change. The inspiring voices of mountain guides and alpinists from the tropics interviewed in this book include Saúl Luciano from Peru, Marco Cruz from Ecuador, Sonia Altamirano from Bolivia and Will Gadd from Canada.

Artists

by Olivier Dangles

Ice has long been a source of fascination for humans: the magic of water turning to ice, the lure of immense polar ice caps, the grandeur of snow-covered peaks, the vertigo inspired by crevasses: ice caps are the quintessential symbol of adventure. Since time immemorial, Indigenous art has also represented glaciers, which have deep spiritual and cultural significance for communities. For the Tlingit people of Alaska, glaciers are imbued with spiritual significance, depicted in carvings, totems and ceremonial objects. Their art portrays glaciers as linked to powerful ancestral spirits and as an integral part of the natural world, influencing weather patterns and ecosystems. In the Andes, the Quechua and Aymara view glaciers as sacred entities called *apus*, or mountain spirits. Their textiles, pottery and festivals frequently feature stylised representations of glaciers, showing their reverence for the role of glaciers in providing water and fertility to the land. Himalayan communities such as the Sherpa and Ladakhi create *thangka* paintings and ritual objects that depict glacial landscapes,

incorporating intricate details and symbolic elements that reflect their belief in the interconnectedness of glaciers, deities and well-being.

Inspirational for their stunning beauty and profound symbolism, glaciers have served as powerful muses for artists of all kinds: painters, photographers, musicians, poets, cinematographers and more. The artistic representation of mountain glaciers has changed significantly over the centuries, reflecting both scientific and aesthetic developments. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, glaciers began to fascinate European artists and explorers. Artists such as John Ruskin and William Turner documented glaciers in the Alps, blending meticulous observation with Romantic ideals to capture their sublime beauty and majestic power. These works portrayed glaciers as symbols of nature's grandeur and unpredictability. Later, with the expansion of scientific exploration, artists infused their work with scientific observations. Ruskin's detailed watercolours of Alpine glaciers not only captured their beauty, but served as important records for early glaciological studies. This period saw a blending of art and science, with artists such as Frederic Church participating in expeditions to document glacial landscapes. Later still, in the early 20th century, the Canadian landscape painter Lawren Harris of the Group of Seven made stylised depictions of glaciers in the Canadian Rockies using a minimalist approach, geometric forms and bold colours, reflecting modernist influences and mystical interpretations of nature in the north.

In recent decades, the artistic focus has shifted towards environmental awareness and the impact of climate change. There are examples of artistic interpretations of mountain glaciers in the face of global warming from artists around the world. Pioneering

American eco-artists Helen and Newton Harrison depicted the effects of climate change in the Tibetan Himalayas by annotating a large-scale map of the region with poetic text to spotlight an area containing 15,000 glaciers. The French artist Noémie Goudal installed a biodegradable photographic artwork on the Rhône glacier in the Swiss Alps to illustrate the change in the landscape and the fragility of glacial ecosystems. Peruvian artist Máximo Laura, known for his vibrant tapestries, incorporates themes of Andean cosmology and the impact of climate change on the mountains, reflecting a deep connection to the Pachamama (“Mother Earth”) and a profound concern for its future. The Nigerian-British photographer Simon Norfolk has documented glacier retreat on Mount Kenya using lines of fire to mark historical extents. The fire symbolises the impact of burning fossil fuels on glacier melting. American photographer Spencer Tunick compared the fragility of human life without protection from clothing to that of the Earth without glaciers by creating a “living sculpture” of 600 naked volunteers lying on the Aletsch glacier in the Swiss Alps. The American composer, sound artist and eco-acoustician Matthew Burtner records natural sounds on Alaskan glaciers: snow, trickling streams and the cracks, pops and thundering as glaciers break apart and fall. The Nepali artist Jyoti Duwadi’s *Red Earth, Vanishing Ice* is a site-specific installation featuring a melting block of ice surrounded by wooden containers, copper cauldrons and brass vessels with water from New York and Kathmandu. A painted canvas represents nature’s regenerative powers to provide freshwater from glaciers.

From romanticised landscapes to scientifically detailed observations, from a sense of the sublime to urgent environmental commentary, the artistic representation of glaciers has continually adapted to

reflect humanity’s evolving relationship with these majestic ice forms. Through their artworks, artists capture the visual and emotional essence of glaciers, raising awareness – intentionally or not – about the fragility of these critical components of our planet’s ecosystem. As glaciers retreat, their representation in art is an indication of their enduring impact on both our environment and our collective imagination. Art not only celebrates the beauty of glaciers, but can serve as a powerful medium for environmental advocacy and cultural expression.

The voice of artists interviewed in this book include Pamela EA from Colombia, Klaus Thyman from Denmark, and Ricky Chaggar from the UK.

New life

by Olivier Dangles

Many tropical glaciers have thawed into miniature versions of their former selves. Some are today so small that they cover an area of only a few ice hockey rinks. What new ecosystems emerge when the ice is gone? Using the analogy of hockey, four rules can summarise what drives the succession of life after ice.

Rule one: there are winners and losers. In professional hockey, a game cannot end in a tie. At the end of standard time, teams will go into overtime and, if necessary, a shootout. Someone has to lose. You might think that life will be a winner in a warmer world as retreating ice exposes more land: new available terrain to be colonised, a more stable substrate, higher temperatures. Indeed, research has shown that further from a

The Voices of Glaciers

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Stories of Grief and Hope amidst shrinking Glaciers in the Tropics

Work published with the support of the Mountain Research Initiative




Éditions

Suggested citation: PALOMO I., LANA S., RABATEL A., DANGLES O. 2025 – *The voices of glaciers: stories of grief and hope amidst shrinking glaciers in the tropics*. With the collaboration of Cauvy-Fraunié S., Ceballos J. L., Adler C., Mark B., Marchant R., Morales Arnao B., Pérez Arias J. D., Aguilar Durán D. & Zimmer A. Marseille-Paris, IRD Éditions-UNESCO.

Editorial coordination: IRD/Catherine Guedj and Romain Costa

Copy editing: Elise Bradbury

Proofreading: Anne Causse

Watercolour portraits of interviewees: Mariana Vilardy

Glacier modelizations and texts about glaciers: Antoine Rabatel

Graphic design and layout: Format Tygre/Alan Guilvard

Cover photo: A Challa ceremony is held before climbing Huayana Potosi mountain, asking the Pachamama for safe passage on the climb. © Todd Antony

Editor UNESCO: Rita Marteleira

Internal review UNESCO: Anil Mishra, Patrycja Breskvar, Tales Carvalho Resende, María Rosa Cárdenas Tomažič, Nigel Thomas Crawhall, Juliette Hopkins, Emmanuelle Robert, Yiline Zhao, Hee Eun Ahn

External Review: Raúl Martín Moreno

Published in 2025 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO),
7, place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP, France,
and the French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development (IRD),
44 bd de Dunkerque, 13002 Marseille, France.

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UNESCO's paper ISBN: 978-92-3-100756-9

UNESCO's DOI: 10.54677/PZZT2044

IRD's paper ISBN : 978-2-7099-3073-4

IRD's PDF ISBN : 978-2-7099-3074-1

IRD's epub ISBN : 978-2-7099-3075-8



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