

Alice Creischer
The Establishment of Matters of Fact

Exhibition at Heidelberger Kunstverein
Hauptstraße 97, 69117 Heidelberg, Germany
Hours: Tuesday–Sunday 11am–6pm

Opening: Saturday, June 11 at 4 p.m.
Duration: June 12 to September 11, 2022

“You poor take courage. You rich take care. The earth was made a common treasury. For everyone to share!” (from “The World Turned Upside Down”, British anti-establishment ballad from the 1640s; first published as a pamphlet)

With this exhibition, Heidelberger Kunstverein refers to its urban context: Heidelberg, the city of sciences, housing the oldest university of Germany. The establishment of matters of facts was the guiding principle of the early empirical sciences. They introduced a new power to the world: the power of facts. Experimental research was supposed to deliver truths on its own accord, unaffected by belief systems and free from dominant interests. In short, pure facts.

The artist Alice Creischer, born in 1960, has deliberately mistranslated this motto of the 17th century into *Das Etablissement der Tatsachen*. That title may sound disreputable, yet, not without reason. Creischer’s detailed installation shows that the normative power of the factual is a regime in its own right, formed by economic and political interests.

At the centre of Creischer’s installation is the free reconstruction of a vacuum pump that scientist Robert Boyle, a founding member of the Royal Society, used in the 1660s to prove the existence of the absence of air from a space. His claim led to an argument with the political theorist Thomas Hobbes: Whilst Boyle intended to arrive at truth through technical tools and the help of neutral observers, Hobbes insisted that scientific insight had to submit to the power of the absolute ruler, the Leviathan. He feared that if the existence of a vacuum could be proven solely through experiments without considering the laws of pure reason and political philosophy, this space would be exempt from government control and might even provoke a political vacuum, i.e., anarchy and civil war.

Boyle went to tremendous lengths to make his vacuum pump leakproof until it could suffocate lab mice. Far from creating anarchy, he, instead, invented death in the laboratory to demonstrate physical facts.

Using the family trees, scientific classifications, and genetic codes of countless generations of lab mice, Creischer unfolds her expansive installation. She connects Boyle’s experiments with present-day political events to denounce the illusion of knowledge existing separated from power. The artist guides the spectator through a dense parcours of images, collages, objects and encoded poems. In addition, the exhibition features a theatre script, written in four acts and accompanied by a detailed and challenging to decipher source appendix. Encryption and the deliberate withholding

of information are the defining characteristics of the exhibition's semantics. Here, too, to understand is to appropriate. Knowledge is not something we just find. What can be known and what cannot is subject to conditions—for the one who speaks and the one who listens. No fact is innocent; neither is the knowledge of it, nor its critique.

About the artist

Alice Creischer (b. 1960) lives and works in Berlin and has, since the 1990s, been considered an influential figure in the theoretical and political discourse of the German art scene. For a long time, she was a regular contributor to the art magazines *Texte zur Kunst* and *springerin*. Exhibitions include: *Arbeit, Arbeit, nichts als Arbeit* (Galerie Wedding, Berlin, 2019); *Circular Flow—Zur globalen Ökonomie der Ungleichheit* (Kunstmuseum Basel, 2019); *The School of Kyiv* (Kyiv Biennial, 2015); *Social Fabric* (Institute of International Visual Arts, London, 2012); *Apparatus for the Osmotic Compensation of the Pressure of Wealth During the Contemplation of Poverty* (MACBA, Barcelona, 2008); *documenta 12* (Kassel, 2007); *The Greatest Happiness Principle Party* (Secession, Wien, 2001). As a curator, she has worked on important exhibitions around the critique of neoliberalism and colonialism, i. e. *Die Gewalt ist der Rand aller Dinge* (2002); *ExArgentina* (2004); *Das Potosí-Prinzip* (2010 / 2011).