

Kunstraum Schwaz / Galerie der Stadt Schwaz

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Potosí-Principle – Archive

04.06. – 01.10.2022

curated by Alice Creischer and Andreas Siekmann
with Harun Farocki, Lois Hechenblaikner and Miguel Hilari

European capitalism is inconceivable without the exploitation of the people and natural resources of Latin America during colonial times. It is impossible to see it as a detached, isolated concept, but instead, the result of a host of historical processes.

The Bolivian mining town of Potosí marked the starting point for *The Potosí Principle*, an exhibition project curated by Alice Creischer, Max Jorge Hinderer Cruz and Andreas Siekmann. Shown at the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid and the House of World Cultures in Berlin in 2010, the exhibition travelled on to the Museo Nacional de Arte and the Museo Nacional de Etnografía y Folklore in La Paz, Bolivia in 2011.

The Cerro Rico (Rich Mountain) in Potosí was one of the most important silver mining sites in the world during the 16th-18th centuries and brought an incredible amount of wealth to Europe. In the 17th century, Potosí was seen as one of the greatest cities in the world, comparable to London or Paris.

Silver created a formidable dynamic, not only for the development of industry, banking, and the colonial trading companies with their warships and slave ships, but also for the displacement, impoverishment, and commodification of people into labour. It represents the beginning of a principle that has long been operating worldwide.

The exhibition looked at colonial baroque paintings and contemporary artists' responses to them and has become a milestone in postcolonial enquiry into the origins of modernity and the role art played in it. The current exhibition, *Potosí Principle – Archive*, presents the archive of this original project, through which the artists Alice Creischer and Andreas Siekmann seek to examine its blind spots and reconnect to the issue of where this principle of global exploitation still operates today.

The project consists of 36 booklets compiled in four volumes on the themes of: extractivism, labour, debt, inquisition, machine capitalism and decolonisation practices. *Potosí Principle – Archive* is a collection of historical and contemporary sources, interviews, essays, poems, manifestos and images.

Branding itself as a silver region, the city of Schwaz in Tyrol remains inextricably bound to its historical identity. That which once led to great wealth and drew the Fuggers to Schwaz to operate as European financial magnates is still used as the city's badge of honour.

The exhibition in Schwaz functions as a reading room, with pamphlets on the walls that can be taken down and read. Simultaneously, it is a toolbox of sorts for cognitive processes. A juxtaposition of historic works and contemporary artistic contributions, it presents processes that persist, but need to be rethought.

Alice Creischer and Andreas Siekmann were already working with the legibility of pictograms in 2010. They have redesigned and expanded this for the exhibition *Potosí Principle – Archive*.

The balcony of the Palais Enzenberg is flanked by two flags. One depicts the Potosí coin below the two pillars of Heracles, taken from the Spanish coat of arms with the banner *plus ultra* (ever onwards), as a symbol of the rise of the Spanish world empire that began with the colonisation of the Americas during the 16th century. In the centre, bulldozers spiral down towards the interior of the earth. In parallel, the flag on the other side bears the Hall coin featuring Archduke Ferdinand II. A special roller press machine developed in Hall in the 16th century revolutionised the minting process. This technology was brought to the Spanish colonies via the Spanish court under King Philip II (the cousin of Archduke Ferdinand II). The Mint Museum in Hall houses only an elaborate reconstruction whereas the Casa de la Moneda Museum in Potosí has original Hall-style minting machines preserved in its collection. This flag is also flanked by columns and banners. At the centre is a four-seater chairlift and instead of bulldozers, here it is skiers descending in a winding spiral.

The graphics depicted on the invitation card and the poster also feature in the exhibition, highlighting the issues raised in the archive and exploring the challenges facing us in our present time. Thematised in pictograms are issues like image production, authorship, self-representation, power structures, record-keeping, personal data, and intergenerational equity.

Two films, *The Silver and the Cross* by Harun Farocki and *Bocamina* by Miguel Hilari are presented in the studio of the gallery. Featuring prominently in both films is Gaspar Miguel de Berrío's painting *Descripción del Cerro Ricco e Imperial Villa de Potosí* (Description of Cerro Rico and the Imperial City of Potosí) from 1758.

The Silver and the Cross is an inventory of the painting, as well as an attempt to render the invisible visible. It is no hell exposing the atrocities of colonialism, but the neat structures of a mid-18th century industrial city. There is nothing to indicate the violence and oppression of the indigenous population. Nothing attests to the resistance, the defence and the recuperation. It is the voiceover, beyond our visual perception, that provides the necessary elements for us to register these events and presents another world to the one we think we are seeing.

Bocamina, in contrast, seems to be a kind of continuation of the painting into the present. It shows the city as it is today with the people who live there, those who work in the mines, the children who go to school in Potosí. Confronted with images from times past, the conditions and the environment appear largely unchanged. History seems to stick to this place and its inhabitants.

A silverpoint drawing on transparent paper made by Quirin Bäumlér for the original *Potosí Principle* exhibition in 2010 acts as a room divider in the large room. When entering from the west, the transparency creates a narrow corridor on one side of which we can view it up close, while on the opposite side of the room we can see a timeline of statistics drawn directly onto the wall like fine hairline cracks. A metaphor for the way the world is cracked, impermanent. Ribbons hanging from the wall convey the corresponding information. Entering the room from the northern side offers a view of the drawing in its entirety. It is an exact reproduction of the 1739 painting *Infierno* by the Master of Caquiaviri. St. Anthony is a church in Caquiaviri, in the La Paz region of Bolivia that was built around 1560 by the first Franciscan missionaries. The original painting is part of one of the few surviving stunning image ensembles known as postrimerías, which fill this entire church in Caquiaviri. Postrimerías (representations of death, Last Judgement, agony) were very common in the

area around Lake Titicaca. They are some of the earliest Christian pictorial motifs in South America.

Juxtaposed with the silverpoint drawing are 27 photographs from two series of works by Lois Hechenblaikner. We can read these as an ongoing reflection of the *Infierno* in terms of capitalist systems of exploitation of the Tyrolean alps. The focus here is on ski tourism. A documentation of the stark realities of the tourism industry over the past 25 years; an industry of idyllic landscape clichés and Tyrolean hospitality; all-round service in this supposedly 'local recreational area'; industrialisation and mass production in an endless loop; mining for new experiences, stimuli for souls long exhausted.

Alice Creischer (*1960 in Gerolstein) and **Andreas Siekmann** (*1961 in Hamm) live and work in Berlin. Jointly curated projects include *Violence is the Edge of All Things* (2002, Generali Foundation, Vienna), *ExArgentina* (2004, Museum Ludwig Cologne / 2005 Palais de Glace, Buenos Aires) and *Principio Potosí* (2010, Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin and 2011 Museo Nacional, / Museo Ethnografía, La Paz).

Current publication: ***Principio Potosí Archive***, published by Walther König, 2022, made up of four volumes divided into the themes of extractivism, labour, debt, inquisition, machine capitalism and decolonisation practices.

Lois Hechenblaikner (*1958 in Reith im Alpbachtal) lives and works in Tyrol. He came to photography as a self-taught photographer. Since the mid-1990s, the transformation of the Tyrolean landscape as a result of tourism and its consequences for people and the environment has been the central theme in his photographic, filmic and sculptural work. In 2013, Lois Hechenblaikner was listed as one of the most important photographers of the 21st century by the photographic society *Positive View Foundation* in London and his artistic works were exhibited as part of the exhibition *Landmark: The fields in Photography* at Somerset House in London.

Miguel Hilari (b. 1985 in Hamburg, Germany) lives and works in La Paz, Bolivia. He is a filmmaker whose father is Bolivian Aymara and mother is German. Born in Hamburg, he grew up in Bolivia between La Paz and Altiplano. His films deal with issues of migration, history and indigenous culture and have been showcased at several international film festivals.

Documentaries:

Cerro Saturno, 13', 2022. WP: Visions du Réel.

Bocamina, 22', 2019. WP: Short Film Festival Oberhausen.

Compañía, 60', 2019. Sesterce d'argent George Reinhart, Visions du Réel; Alanis Obomsawin Award, ImagineNATIVE, Canada; Best Feature Film Award, FIDOCs, Chile.

El corral y el viento, 55', 2014. WP: Cinéma du Réel; Multiple awards at FIDOCs, Chile; Transcinema, Peru; Márgenes, Spain and Cine de Derechos Humanos, Bolivia.

Harun Farocki (b. 1944 in Neutitschein, †2014 near Berlin) was originally from the part of Czechoslovakia that was annexed by Germany at the time. He studied at the German Film and Television Academy Berlin (West) and was a writer and editor of *Filmkritik* magazine in Munich between 1974 -1984. Farocki created over 100 film and television productions since 1966 that included children's television, documentaries, essay films and narrative films. From 1996 onwards, he also exhibited in numerous group and solo exhibitions in museums and galleries. In 2007, he participated in documenta 12 with *Deep Play*. From 2011-2014 he collaborated with Antje Ehmann on the project *Eine Einstellung zur Arbeit*. Harun Farocki died on July 30, 2014, near Berlin.