

Exhibition Text

Jenny Michel - Cracks in my Mind

Galerie Georg Nothelfer, Corneliusstraße 3, 10787 Berlin-Tiergarten

September 11 - November 1, 2025

The Nothelfer Gallery is pleased to present the first solo exhibition by Jenny Michel (*1975). Parallel to the solo show, her works will be on display at the art festival HALLEN #6 - Wilhelm Hallen (September 6 - 14) as part of BERLIN ART WEEK.

Jenny Michel's art combines a wide variety of materials and forms of expression. Sculptural objects, drawings and collages come together to form a multifaceted overall picture. It is striking that Michel's works vary greatly in size, appear ramified and often small-scale - and at the same time are characterised by great fragility. At times they appear incidental or lost, sometimes like the remains of an experimental arrangement aimed at capturing aspects of reality more precisely.

But it is precisely these seemingly incidental characteristics that give her art its subtle effect. On closer inspection, it becomes clear that it is only in the awareness of one's own limitations that the opportunity for reflection arises.

Only a fraction of people are interested in how the things they encounter every day work. As long as they function properly, it does not seem necessary in our fast-paced, performance-oriented society to question how certain things come about. Usually, only what appears necessary for immediate use is perceived. More than 100 years ago, British art critic Roger Fry (1866-1934) observed that humans, with *admirable economy*, orient themselves solely by the *labels* of the things around them, without seeking deeper information.

This learned *labelling* of the world is more relevant than ever: on numerous social media platforms, hashtags condense the vastness of the world into simple keywords, uniformed trends dictate what should be stylish for a short period of time, and complex problems become a noise without any relevant content in endless strings of headlines. Thematic differentiation is often called for, but rarely achieved in the face of our current disputes.

Art has a difficult position in such a structure, as it must increasingly demonstrate a clear offering in order to be accepted: participation, identification and engagement only seem possible if the artwork in question is comprehensible and actively reflects the ideas of its viewers. However, such a work is not to be found in Jenny Michel's art.

Her works shatter the omnipotence of our expectations, ideas and attempts at classification. In a media diversity, she combines objects, photographs, sculptural structures, drawings and texts into works that take over the exhibition space in a new and emphatic way. These include, for example, the small-format works from the *Hidden Encyclopedia* series, which has been in existence since 2020; the large-format wall installation *Exit* (2018-2020), which bundles utopian ideas about humanity and transforms them into a confrontational space for reflection; and the work that gives the exhibition its title, *Cracks in my Mind - Nature is Data* (2024/25). Through the combination of its diverse elements,

the latter refers to an artistic understanding that characterises Michel's entire oeuvre - and which deliberately opposes conventional viewing habits. Even today, the pictorial longing that already preoccupied artists such as Caspar David Friedrich in their statements still echoes:

The eye and the imagination are generally more attracted to the distant and vague than to what is close and clear before them.

This desire gave rise to a hierarchy that, despite individual forms of expression, produced stereotypical results. Countless images trained their viewers to perceive the world as something distant, overlooking what was right in front of them.

Jenny Michel's works do not focus on the distance, but on overlooked spaces, thereby creating a perception of the world that operates beyond hierarchical structures: Traces of civilisation - in the form of individual words or socially coded symbols such as arrows or units of measurement, which can be found in numerous works in the *Hidden Encyclopedia* - stand alongside seemingly insignificant scraps of paper that give no indication of their former use. While the *Hidden Encyclopedia* series is concerned, among other things, with questioning the claim to absoluteness of the natural sciences, the collages, in their recurring confrontation of contrasting elements, bring one aspect in particular to the fore: the immediate.

Throughout the artist's oeuvre, we repeatedly see how the impending loss of concrete contexts gives rise to direct access to new perspectives and insights. Michel's series *Utopian Scrabble*, created from the cut-out remnants of the work *Exit*, presents horizontal and vertical structures reminiscent of architectural construction plans or - due to the title - of a utopian parlour game. But more important than the association is the insight that the series points to a central problem: the world is more complex than we can comprehend. *Utopian Scrabble* is dedicated to this often overlooked principle. Each individual fragment of information - such as the word 'escape' in *Utopian Scrabble #8* (2024) - corresponds to a local instance that can only be understood and classified in the context of the complex totality that surrounds it.

Current debates, such as those on migration or climate protection, are increasingly dominated by interest-driven alliances. This primarily influences how individual pieces of information are classified: they no longer appear as part of a larger whole that needs to be considered, but are mistakenly understood as isolated truths. A multi-perspective exchange, as visualised in the *Utopian Scrabble* series, is completely lost in the process.

Jenny Michel's works aim for immediate expression: they shorten the path from intuition to the visualisation of the artwork by placing everyday materials - things that may be considered meaningless - in a newly conceived context. Her works are non-conformist reflections that are not held back by conventional boundaries of representation that exclude the possible: the works show what is, what was and what could be. In doing so, they do not seek to convert or present definitive solutions; rather, they encourage viewers to keep their minds active and to become aware of their shared world with the addition of art.

Written by Dr. Alexander Leinemann

Education and exhibitions (selection)

Born 1975 in Worms/Germany

1998-2003 Study Visual Communication/ Free Graphics, Kunsthochschule Kassel

2000-2005 Study fine arts at the Kunsthochschule Kassel; graduated under Prof. Bjørn Melhus

2008 EHF- Scholarship, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

2010 HAP-Grieshaber-Price

2013 Artist in Residence, Hanse-Wissenschaftskolleg, Delmenhorst

2015 "Trash Thought Chronicles", Art Association Ludwigshafen a. Rh.

2017 "Fallen Gardens", Project space, Museum Wiesbaden

2018 Nomination Marianne-Werefkin-Preis

2020 "Doors, Windows and Cells", Art museum Reutlingen

2022 "leaves of eden versus fleurs du mal", Galerie Pankow, Berlin

2023 NEUSTARTplus Scholarship, Stiftung Kunstfonds

2024 "Soft Ruins", Museum Villa Zanders, Bergisch Gladbach