



AKTIONSHAUS

Clemente Ciarrocca

The Joys

24 June — 25 July 2025

AKTIONSHAUS is pleased to present *The Joys*, a new solo exhibition by Berlin-based artist Clemente Ciarrocca. *The Joys* comprises a new series of photo transfers, theoretical diagrams, prints, chemical and multimedia assemblages exposing the porosity between institutional discourse and intimacy. Drawing on excerpts from St. Augustine's *Confessions*, theories of libidinal economy and the language and tools of the military-corporate complex, Ciarrocca sheds light on how personal and official vocabularies collapse into singular, intimately logical expressions of control-desire dynamics.

For the epigraph of his 1974 book *Libidinal Economy*, Jean François Lyotard adopted a slightly reworked version of a sentence originally appearing in Stendhal's 1822 *De l'Amour*, specifically in a chapter entitled 'Des Courts'. Inscribing his "livre méchant" in the conviction that "[w]ho knows not how to hide knows not how to love," Lyotard acknowledges concealment as a crucial and generative force underlying the non-plus-ultra of relations. Somewhat similarly yet with drastically divergent consequences, what Stendhal had found in the Provençal tradition of courtly love poetry and conception of "amor de lonh" (distant love) was an exemplary form for his own theory of *crystallization*: the process by which lovers work in absence, idealizing their beloved through imagination and psychosomatic projection and eventually establishing perfect objects of desire (and sustainment). *The Joys* emerges from this complex libidinal genealogy as an attempt to expose intimacy's double role: generation and establishment. It does so by folding and unfolding as a vibrating, semantic and material field where intimate interaction and institutioning converge.

The exhibition moves through a sequence of semantic undercuts. Center stage is taken by a double series of prints installed across the corner joining the two main walls of the exhibition space. One set of prints is of still frames extracted from footage of a couple deep kissing, punctuated by moments of lip biting. After filming and selecting the stills, Ciarrocca inverted them and had them printed through a black-and-white-only HP LaserJet located in the Berlin corporate headquarters of a major German bank, which he was able to access through a personal connection. He then proceeded with photo-transferring the grayscale office prints onto industrial sanding paper, the bank's ink forming the blurred contours of the lovers' faces and mouths against the grey abrasive surface.

The installed sequence opens on the left with an initial bite, followed by a surrender into deep kissing that intensifies through multiple frames, before concluding with a reciprocal bite where the roles reverse. As the kiss progresses and intensifies toward a frame when the two profiles would become almost indistinguishable, the negative space of the interior corner suddenly occupies and replaces this central position, subtly hinting at how moments of deep intimacy are at once the location of collapse and the structural foundation to more discursive notions of identity, property, access, and control.

Simultaneously completing, intercepting and narrativizing these intimate shots is a second set of prints, composed of short sentences crossed over what looks like a sunset sky, darkening as the series progresses across the corner. The horizontal sentences are transcripts from the artist's own diary pages, originally noted with personal thoughts and altered excerpts from Hélène Cixous's *Tomb(e)*. The diary entries are crossed over with vertical, categorical statements printed on vellum sheets and composed by artist by repurposing CATIA, the global industry standard design software for aerospace and defense, as a text editor. The darkening sky is revealed to be nothing else than the software's background wireframe.

The rest of the space is pinpointed by material interventions that variously frame the environment of this structural kissing sequence, expanding on the way in which the personal and the institutional overlap in the intimate. Incorporated as both sound and text around the exhibition are fragments from St. Augustine's *Confessions* as well as BAE Systems' corporate communications transposed from collective to singular voice, exposing the uncanny resemblance between declarations of love and assertions of power. The space is filled by a noisy and seemingly endless overlay of field recordings, sex tapes, youtube and social media autoplays, music tracks abruptly cut short. Still frames from a rose bush filmed by the artist in his hometown show the coexistence in a single plant of three stages of blossoming: budding, blooming, and decay. A translucent liquid poured all over the gallery floor pools and crystallizes over the course of days, slowly flowing underneath screens functioning as framing devices for the liquid as well as for the chemical traces left by the already evaporated water. Including electrolytes, amino acids, lactic acid, urea and other chemicals dissolved in running water, the substance replicates the chemical composition of human sweat, functioning as a phantom of corporeal balancing dynamics. A material signaling at once absence and presence, fatigue and exercise. The stress of repression. The joy of release.

Working more as an alchemical incantation than a title, *The Joys* maintains a fugitive relationship to the pieces and interventions that compose it. Like the sweat refusing complete crystallization or a kiss edged by bites, the works on show variously and jointly manifest a grammar of intimacy that resists full disclosure, suggesting that institutional and personal realities share not just a vocabulary, but a fundamental investment in what remains strategically unsaid.