



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 *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 acknowledged 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 series of prints framing the corner that joins the two main walls of the exhibition space. Part of the prints are still frames extracted from footage of a couple's deep kissing, intervalled by lip biting. After filming and selecting the stills, Ciarrocca inverted them and had them scanned and printed through an HP LaserJet office printer located in the Berlin corporate quarters of a major German banking institution he was able to access through an intimate connection. He then proceeded to manually transfer the prints onto industrial sanding paper, the bank's grayscale ink composing the blurred contours of the lovers' faces and mouths on the grey abrasives. 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, the negative space of an interior corner suddenly occupies the step of highest intensity, suggesting that moments of deep intimacy are simultaneously the structural foundation to more discursive notions of property, access and control.

At once intercepting and narrativizing these intimate shots is a second set of prints, composed of sentences overlaying and crossing over what looks like a sunset sky darkening as the series progresses over 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 drilling, categorizing statements printed on transparent vellum sheets and drawn by repurposing CATIA (the 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 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. A noisy and seemingly endless overlay of field recordings, sex tapes, youtube and social media autoplays, music tracks abruptly cut short fills the space. Prints from a rose bush photographed by the artist in his hometown show the coexistence in a single plant of the tree stages of blossoming: budding, blooming, and decay. Synthetic human sweat spread across 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 is 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 evocation and 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, all the works on show both variously and jointly manifest a grammar of intimacy that resists full disclosure, suggesting that institutional and personal languages share not just vocabulary but a fundamental investment in what remains strategically unsaid.

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Gottlieb-Dunkel-Strasse 44, 8th Floor Ost, 12099 Berlin

www.aktionshaus.berlin | aktionshaus@posteo.de | [aktionshaus_](#)