

How true, and yet I mistook it!



Francisca
Khamis
Giacoman,

Juan
Larraín
González,

Lanna
Leite,

Alicia Luz
Rodríguez,

Craig
Stewart,



curated by
Cosima
zu Knyphausen

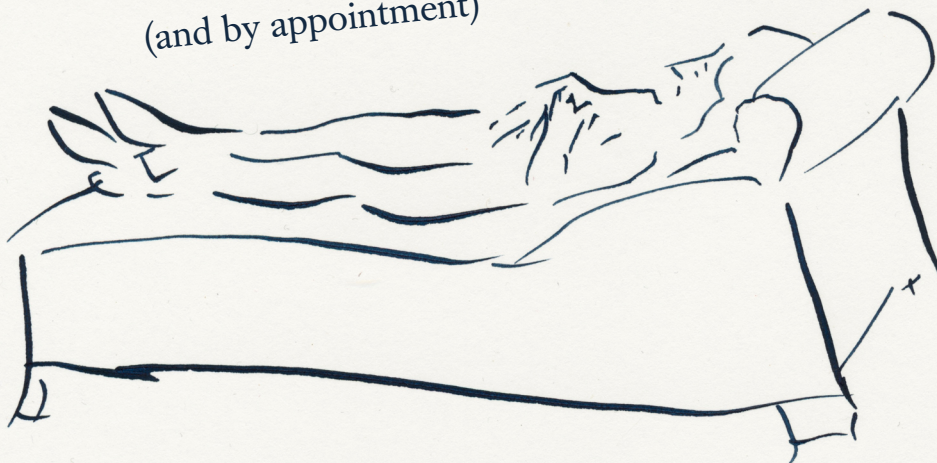
opening:

25.04.24, 5–9pm

exhibition: 26.04.–08.06.

Friday & Saturday 3–6pm

(and by appointment)



BPA// Raum
Sophienstraße 21
Sophie-Gips-Höfe
10178 Berlin

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red passageway)

How true, and yet I mistook it!

In my worn out copy of *The Aleph*, malformed by the humidity of an accident and the passing of the years, right on that page where, once upon a time, a small insect was stamped (and mummified), there is a part of Borges' story *The Immortal* that similarly left a great impression on me. In it, the narrator, who has already unknowingly (by mistake?) drunk from the river that "purifies men from death" enters a palace in the coveted city of the immortals, only to discover, horrified, how the architecture, of chaotic and incoherent forms, seems to obey a "complex senselessness". The staircases instill a "singular fatigue" because of their irregularities, and the doors and corridors lead nowhere.

I had crossed a labyrinth, but the crisp City of Immortals frightened and repulsed me. A labyrinth is a house carved to confuse men; its architecture, prodigal in symmetries, is subordinated to that end. In the palace I imperfectly explored, the architecture lacked an end.

In this exercise of imagination, immortality is not the eternal reverberation of a fixed identity, as we usually think of deities, or as we venerate our idols. On the contrary: those who do not die are beings described as Trog-lodytes who seem to not have to know language, because they have already forgotten it, in the dense oblivion of having already been everything. Stripped of any sense of urgency, they live self-absorbed in the inertia of thought and alienated from the physical world. Even from pity: when one of their peers falls into a deep quarry, he is scorched by thirst, but it takes seventy years before someone throws him a rope. The character's self equally dissolves in his biography of potential, infinite as the permutations of the universe.

Homer composed the Odyssey; postulated an infinite term, with infinite circumstances and changes, the impossible is not to compose, even once, the Odyssey.

Certainly, it is the notion of an end that makes us preciously pathetic, elegiac and ceremonial. And it is in relation to our life long challenge of resourcefulness, attached to some kind of meaning, that a notion of error emerges. As artists, we create our own methods, rules and techniques as ways, not only to navigate this, but to make our relationship to mistakes our profession.

But what is an error?

A mistake that may or may not have legal consequences

Something precise (as to how it differs from the norm)

That which mistakes something false for something true.

An involuntary movement

Something that happens randomly, by chance

Not letting go

A Freudian slip

An oversight caused by the tiredness and fatigue (the fatigue being caused by regular and standardized stairs)

Relying too much on one's own expertise

Something fixable

Something irreparable

According to Gonzalo Rojas' poem *Mortal*, which coincidentally was the last tweet of Felipe Camiroaga (one of Chile's most popular television presenter, actor and falcon breeder) before dying in a plane crash:

A mistake would be not to love each other.¹

If the opposite of an error is assertiveness, success, it is worth noting that not all mistakes, or what we perceive as wrong, happens accidentally. As I learned in a conversation with Alicia, it was Borges who translated, nine

years after its publication, the novel *Orlando: A Biography* by Virginia Woolf, a fictional biography that spans over 300 years and tells the story of Orlando, who during this time ages only thirty-six years, lives multiple lives as a poet, nobleman and diplomat, and changes gender from a man to a woman. For several decades, this was the only and undisputed Spanish version. And yet, in it, Borges (mis)took something a bit beyond small 'poetic licences': his translation makes incisive, biased modifications, omissions of complete sentences and changes of pronouns that substantially alter and skew the author's voice, as well as the brilliantly transgressive, satirical and queer quality of this text, one that has opened so many real doors to our collective imagination.

But without extending this introduction any further (time is precious!):

How true, and yet I mistook it! brings together works that deal with error, repetition and memory.

For this exhibition at BPA Raum, I invited five fellow artists with whom I have shared in collaborations, friendship and dialogue, and who have in common, in their mortal biographies, a non-linear career in the arts.

The title takes a phrase from Anne Carson's poem *Essay on what I think about most*, in which Greek lyric by the hungry spartan poet Alcmán, containing an error of arithmetic, is analyzed to reflect on the idea of metaphor as what allows the mind to "experience itself", and error being what lies in the core of creativity and poetry.

At first it looks odd, contradictory or wrong, / then it makes sense. / And at this moment, according to Aristotle, / the mind turns to itself and says: / "How true, and yet I mistook it!" / From the true mistakes of metaphor a lesson can be learned.

¹

Del aire soy, del aire, como todo mortal, / del gran vuelo terrible y estoy aquí de paso a las estrellas, / pero vuelvo a decirte que los hombres estamos ya tan cerca los unos de los otros / que sería un error, si el estallido mismo es un error, / que sería un error el que no nos amáramos.

I am of the air, of the air, like any mortal, / from the great, terrible flight, and I am here only passing through to the stars, / but I must say again that we humans are already so close to each other / that it would be a mistake, if the explosion itself is a mistake, / it would be a mistake not to love each other.



text by
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zu Knyphausen



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Francisca Khamis Giamcoman works with a set of discarded, ‘blundered’ embroideries from her grandfather’s textile company, a vehicle for the family’s economic development in Chile after migrating from Palestine in the end of the 40’s. The small family business produced several motifs of ornamental embroideries that were sold in batches. Today, the ones with mistakes (thus the ‘unsellable ones’) are only ones remaining as documentation. They had been meticulously collected, counted, catalogued by motif and labeled as ‘the bad ones’, with the purpose to repaired (sometimes painstakingly) in some future. Each of these embroideries has failed to reproduce their prototype in a particular, unique way. The original *Los Malos (Pato con pañuelo)* (Duck with scarf); *(Flores I)* (Flowers I) and the eye-less *(Payaso I)* (Clown I) are from ca. 1990. For a new series of embroideries, Francisca singles them out as new archetypes, enlarging and further enhancing the errors they come with, sometimes adding the annotations scabbled in the bag they were stored in.

In *Stadt, Land, Fluss* (2024), a recent oil painting by **Juan Larraín González**, the night is a treatment of multiple glazes harbouring exquisite pictorial details virtually impossible to capture with the casual phone snapshot. In an almost allegorical motif, we see three spring chickens in a forest-like landscape, possibly lost to the sight of their mother. The title refers to a popular game in Germany known as “city, country, river”, which consists of filling in these and other categories in the shortest time possible, each round with words that begin with the same letter. According to the rules, scores can be severely penalized when some of the terms are incorrect, or have been invented. But analog to the constructions of geography and language, the boundaries of these rules can become subject of interpretation, if not of fundamental disagreement. The corner of a sheet of paper with a finished game, lying on the grass, is catching fire.

In *pequenos y grandes altares* (small and grand altars), a short film by **Lanna Leite** from 2019, a young woman far from home calls her grandmother to read her a poem she wrote. Unrelated film material from New York and Berlin, and footage from the grandmother’s hands accompany the phone call that gives a candid glimpse into a family story marked by hardship. The poem’s ending question (*I wonder is it cinema / if I film the nothingness?*) has been orienting in Lanna Leite’s search of ways of telling the imageless memories of her family in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, as well as in her more recent interest in listening and sound.

house shoes (2024), displayed in this exhibition, is a brief, silent film with the feet of Lanna’s grandmother as protagonists, of something so fleeting and domestic as the act of taking off (and putting on again) the house shoes. When the fitting seems to present difficulties, we see a helping hand (or: *A hand that wants to help*) coming in and out the frame, in hesitation whether to intervene and ‘direct’ the scene, or leave things as they are. This ‘stepping in’ with the hand into the ‘footage’, initially seen as a mistake and a reason to discard the shot for the other film, is in itself a beautiful and felt moment of cinematic mise-en-scène.

For **Alicia Luz Rodríguez**, a photocopier, so ubiquitous in beaurocratic spaces, multiplying the number of Mahnungen and standarized formatted bad news, can also be the infrastructure of a one-person-run copyshop or the foundational stone of an independent publishing house: *Lesbianas Concentradas* (Focused Lesbians). In the work *La Fotocopiadora* (2024), a newly acquired second hand printer is centered as a catalyst of visual translations, actions in the public space and entrepreneurial fantasies. Projected within the installation is a 10-minute-long video: *Orlando* (2024). With some shots that have the pace of a moving postcard, it presents recognizable as well as generic Berlin sceneries that the artist calmly pastes up with a previously photocopied knife (an exe’s present), and a quote from Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*, found in an old notebook: *Nothing thicker than a knife’s blade separates happiness and melancholy*. This sentence does not stand alone; as if on one side of a blade, graffitis and tags against police repression, calls for ceasefire and other anonymous messages from the city to itself serve as backdrop. (Get a quote for your project at alicia.info.copyshop@gmail.com !)

Craig Stewart’s drawings are the result of a long-durational process of detailed and repetitive mark-making. In the amphitheatrically shaped *Indifference Curve* (2022), made with ink on paper, subtle moments of translucency shimmer through a deep condensation of lines equivalent to a dense volume of time and attention. If to be read as a diagram, as the title suggest, its single unites would originate in (or measure, or reverberate, or ruminate on) the contours of its empty center: negative spikes resembling a circular saw blade, or a sunrise. The irreversible and immediate consequences of the cut of a blade stand in opposition of Craig’s slow methodology, which includes ongoing confrontations with stages of solitude and boredom. And while his execution of precise, free hand drawn lines seem reluctant to display something that can be perceived as a flaw, they could certainly embody a proper failure of capitalist, high efficiency ideals of fast production. With this and other drawings, an outcome cannot be truly anticipated before going through the procedure. Some have had to be confined, after months of work, to the shadows of a drawer. But others leave us with a work that can be contemplatively looked at and (re)discovered for equally long, slow periods of time, leaving us all but indifferent.

Cosima zu Knyphausen’s painting *Selbst als Kunstvermittlung* (‘Self as Art Mediation’), from 2022, is a self portrait of the artist (and faithfully yours in this text) personifying the bridge between art and the viewer. In something between the vignettes of a comic and the stages of via crucis, a monologuing character moves through several rooms with a group of people, invested in repeating a well-known oration about the displayed works as if it was said for the very first time (possibly hoping for some tip.) The work draws on the experience of many years in a side job giving tours in a private contemporary art collection not far from here. (Thank you for your attention!)

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Craig Stewart, *Indifference Curve*, 2022, Ink on paper, 70 x 100 cm



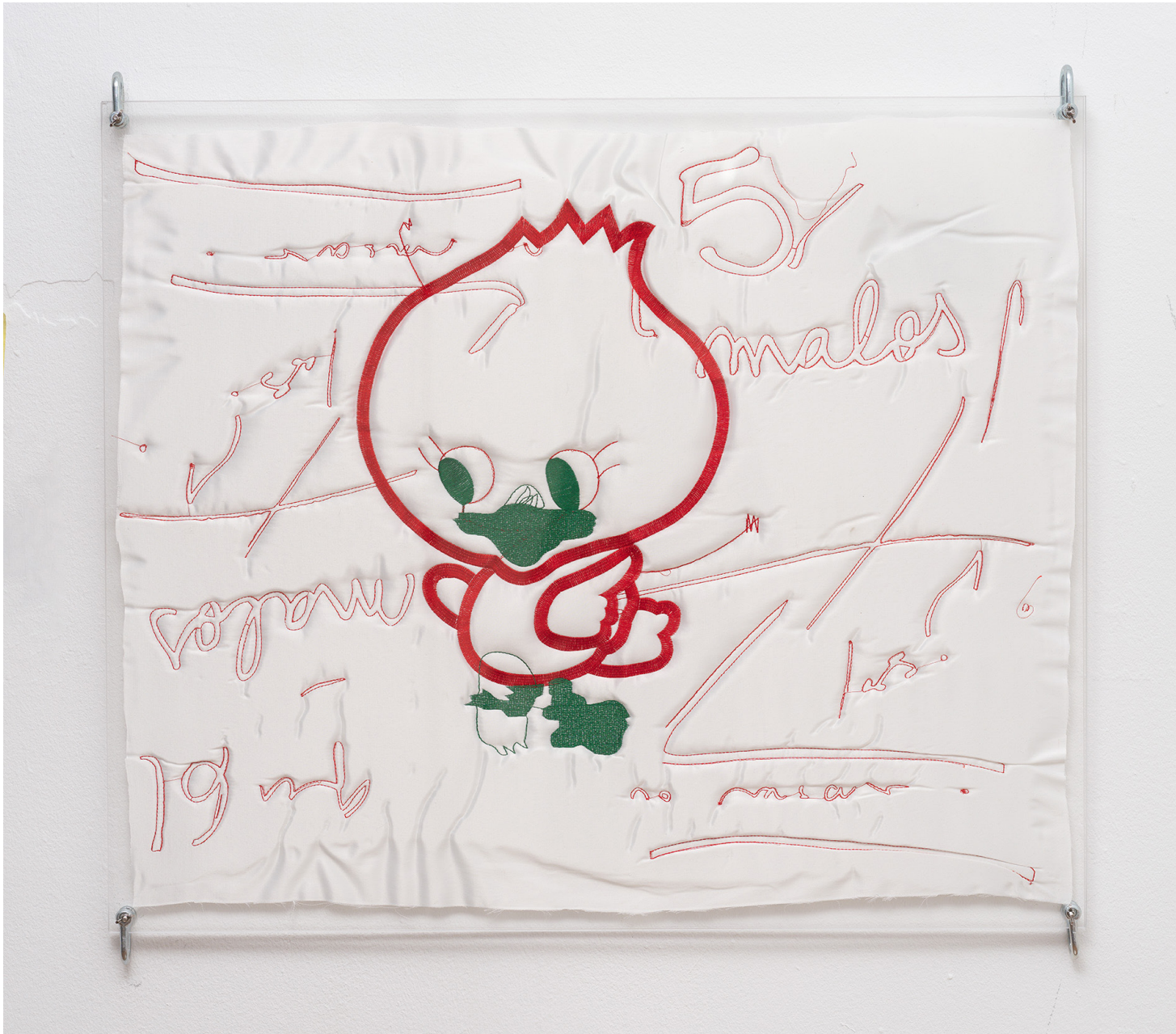
Francisca Khamis Giacomani, *Los Malos (Flores I, Original)*, ca. 1990-2023, Found embroidery, acrylic, 10 x 15 cm



Francisca Khamis Giacomani, *Los Malos (Rosas inconclusas)*, 2024, Embroidery, acrylic, steel shackle, 50 x 65 cm



Francisca Khamis Giacomán, *Los Malos (Pato con pañuelo, Original)*, ca. 1990-2023, Found embroidery, acrylic, 10 x 15 cm



Francisca Khamis Giacomani, *Pato y Anotaciones*, 2024, Embroidery, acrylic, steel schackle, 85 x 70 cm



Cosima zu Knyphausen, *Selbst als Kunstvermittlung*, 2022,
Ink and fabric on canvas, 100 x 70 cm



Juan Larraín González, *Stadt Land Fluss*, 2024, oil on linen, 80 x 100 cm



Installation view, *How true, and yet I mistook it!*, BPA Raum, Berlin, 2024



Lanna Leite, *house shoes*, 2024, 16mm, digitalized, 0:49 min



Installation view, *How true, and yet I mistook it!*, BPA Raum, Berlin, 2024



Alicia Luz Rodríguez, *La Fotocopiadora*, 2024, copy station, various sizes



Alicia Luz Rodríguez, *Orlando*, 2024, video, 10:02 min



Installation view, *How true, and yet I mistook it!*, BPA Raum, Berlin, 2024



Francisca Khamis Giacomani, *Los Malos (Payaso I, Original)*, ca. 1990-2023, Found embroidery, acrylic, 10 x 15 cm

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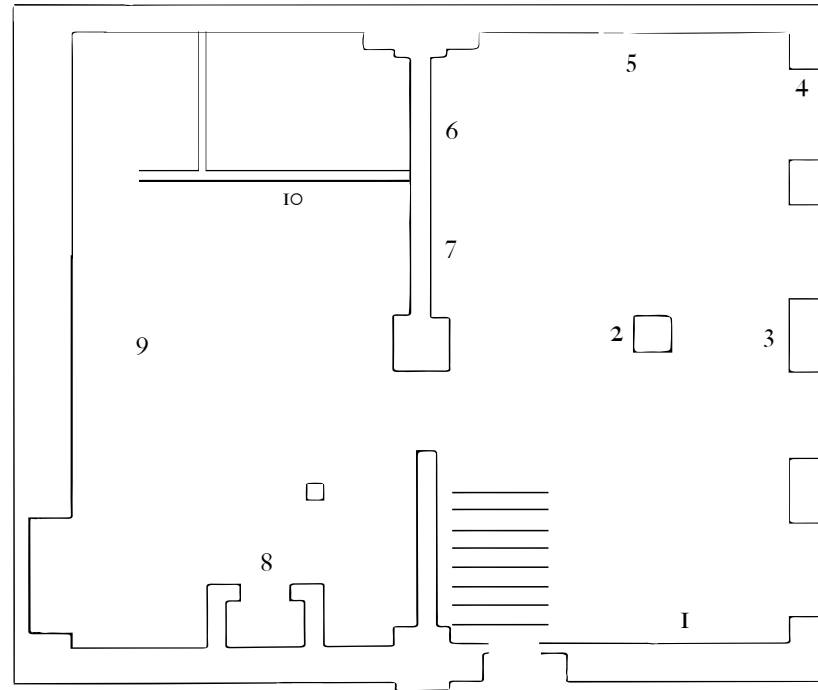
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3. Francisca Khamis Giacoman, *Los Malos (Flores I, Original)*, ca. 1990-2023, Found embroidery, acrylic, magnets, 10 x 15 cm
4. Francisca Khamis Giacoman, *Los Malos (Pato con pañuelo, Original)*, ca. 1990-2023, Found embroidery, acrylic, 10 x 10 cm
5. Juan Larraín González, *Stadt, Land, Fluss*, 2024, Oil on linen, 80 x 100 cm
6. Francisca Khamis Giacoman, *Pato y Anotaciones*, 2024, Embroidery, acrylic, steel shackle, 85 x 70 cm
7. Cosima zu Knyphausen, *Selbst als Kunstvermittlung*, 2022, Fabric and ink on canvas, 100 x 70 cm
8. Lanna Leite, *house shoes*, 2024, 16mm, digitalized, 0:49 min
9. Alicia Luz Rodríguez, *Orlando*, 2024, Video, 10:02 min
Alicia Luz Rodríguez, *La Fotocopiadora*, 2024, Copy/printer station, various sizes
10. Francisca Khamis Giacoman, *Los Malos (Payaso I, Original)*, ca. 1990-2023, Found embroidery, acrylic, 10 x 15 cm

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