

CAMPLE—LINE

**AMALIA PICA
KEEPSAKE
04.10 – 14.12.25**





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Amalia Pica: Keepsake
—Alejandra Aguado

For anyone living in Argentina before newspapers were mainly consumed digitally – when they were left on your doorstep or spread and shared on a breakfast table – the sight of a nineteenth century painting in which the front page of the liberal periodical *La Nación* features so prominently alongside a bouquet of wild flowers would easily take them back to that time and place. To anyone else, the newssheet might just provide a background for the lilacs and daisies it wrapped and held together and which might even be, given their symbolic meanings, the relevant carriers of the picture's message. For Amalia Pica, the painting's attraction would lay, on one hand, on the fact that it bridges two places and traditions: Argentina, where she was born, and the UK where she has lived since 2008 and where this painting was found. And, on the other, on the capacity with which it signals to two forms of communication: print journalism and the secret language of flowers, which became particularly prominent in the Victorian era, when the painting was made.

Adrift in a city where it could only tell one part of its story, the painting needed someone to identify its parts and to read into them with curiosity and empathy. That was Amalia. Spotted and purchased by the artist's partner Rafael Ortega in a car boot sale in Dalston in east London, the painting signed by Andrea G. (a female name in Spanish) and dated 1891, quickly came forth as the image of her own transit. But it also portrayed a series of nostalgic and domestic details as well as signs that underpin aspects of her wider practice. For someone like Amalia who is always alert to coded languages and interested in portraying how we communicate, its elements offered her the possibility of thinking that it might try to say more than what it seemed to show. It not only depicts *La Nación*, one of Argentina's earliest papers (a nod from home), but two other elements remain strangely clear within the otherwise loosely painted page: the paper's date, which references the anniversary of Argentina's day of independence, 9th of July, and the word 'Telegram', even if it

appears to be missing a letter, which was the title of the paper's section dedicated to news coming from the other side of the Atlantic. The details of the painting's message remain unclear, but if we choose to believe this simple image holds a secret form of expression – is it a love letter tied to the joy of new beginnings? – they might be hidden in the selection of flowers.

If a large part of Amalia Pica's work deals with the bureaucracy of language – particularly the exchange of information we enact with (and within) public bodies, academic institutions or corporations, there is another area of her practice that explores more organic means of communication, nurtured away from those formal spheres. These belong to the realms of motherhood, friendship and tend to evoke intimacy, cooperation and community building. They sometimes even recall clandestine ways of communication or more primal and private forms of expression that link us to our roots. Nothing more relevant, then, than an image that makes us dream of intimate messages hidden in the image of a bouquet of flowers unceremoniously laid on a table, to introduce us to this world.

Almost all of the works in this exhibition, which spring from these interests and experiences, represent the emotional language of bonds. Amalia Pica's series of *Keepsakes*, for example, which she has been producing for the last year, arise from a collection of doodles drawn by her son, which are carefully reproduced using embroidery. The spontaneity and urgency of children's drawings have been replaced by a refined and precise technique which creates a more monumental version of the sketches, presumably longer lasting. They represent a sort of treasuring, as their collective title 'keepsake' suggests and they seem to celebrate pre-school mark-making as a kind of authentic abstraction, which can only be reproduced in adulthood by a slow and laborious copying, their gestural quality lost. Executed after painstakingly long hours – 73 or 174, as Amalia's records show – the *Keepsakes* can be read as both a declaration of love and a statement on traditional education as a process of conformity where expression can be forced to adapt to more standard forms and signs of character or individualism subdued.

A former primary school art teacher, Amalia's works always retain a didactic quality. Her *Keepsakes* seem to decode the language of



Unknown title, Andrea G, 1891

scribbles; they decipher them in order to learn how to make them again, almost in the way you could practice calligraphy. They also bring the world of domestic life to the fore through the use of household fabrics and the reference to embroidery, traditionally perceived as a task performed by women. This way, the domains where we spend our formative period – home and school – take centre stage, as well as the methods we first use to create images, which are at their core. The academic language of art only appears in Amalia's bronze sculpture, *Another One's Treasure*, 2025, which nevertheless recreates a clumsy volume made out of cardboard and plastic packages – a collection of left-overs surrounding us at home; but also stuff populating, and shaping our world, that we keep as precious.

Amalia is part of a lineage of artists whose work's power and criticality rely in the way they use the tools and habits of domestic life, a great example of which was Argentine artist Eugenia Crenovich. Better known as Yente, Crenovich was born in Buenos Aires in 1905 and is claimed to have been the first woman artist in



Still from *One hundred and thirty-four years of smoke*, 2025

Argentina to adhere to abstraction. Nevertheless, her work moved fearlessly between abstraction and figuration, poking fun at those artists who felt the need to subject their practices to a manifesto. Unclassifiable, she made the most of the freedom that being a woman could grant her at the time, and skillfully wielded the armature of tools granted by domestic life to shake the reductive idea that art could only have one point of departure – the serious debates taking place in the artistic arena – or of arrival. In the 1950s, she produced textile works that represented both geometric and gestural abstraction in what was traditionally conceived of as a decorative medium. Formally exquisite, these embroidered works resulted from a conceptual strategy and at the same time expressed a sense of playfulness, a joy in making, and the will for art to trigger an ambiguous chain of associations. These are qualities we can also find in Amalia's works, which are interested in revealing alternative ways of building and guarding language; hidden realms of creativity.

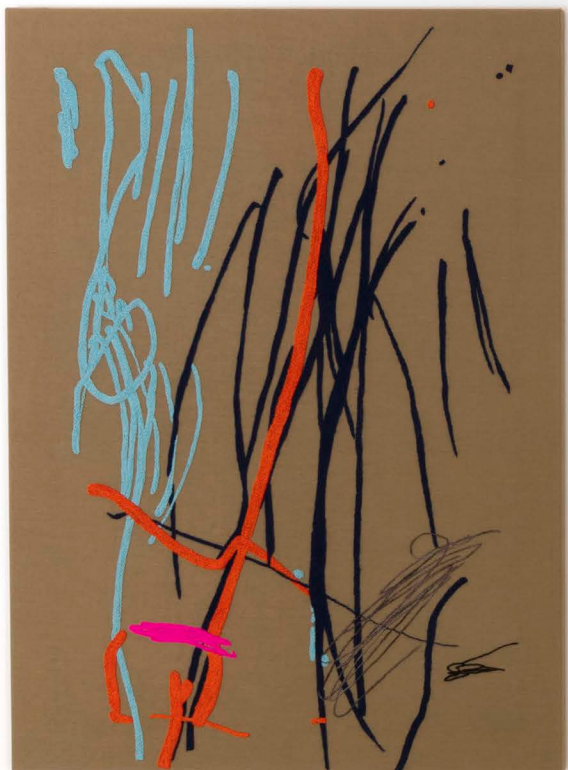
But let us go back to Andrea G.'s painting. The daisies appearing at its centre, illuminating the bouquet, are also echoed elsewhere in the exhibition. They are present in the form of a vast string of daisy chains, dried and fragile, that has been made by local school children, members of the local community and the team at Cample Line. This collaborative element, rather than diluting a sense of

authorship, encourages a wider, more profound feeling of ownership. A frequent summer activity shared between children, including Amalia's own son, the making of daisy chains might feel universal but is in actual fact quite culturally specific. The chains installed at Cample carry the linear, methodical and rhythmic quality of language, created bit by bit by all the contributors to construct something larger and as yet unknown. If coding is a language of intimacy under the public eye, these chains, insofar as they hold the memory of shared experience, can be powerful message carriers.

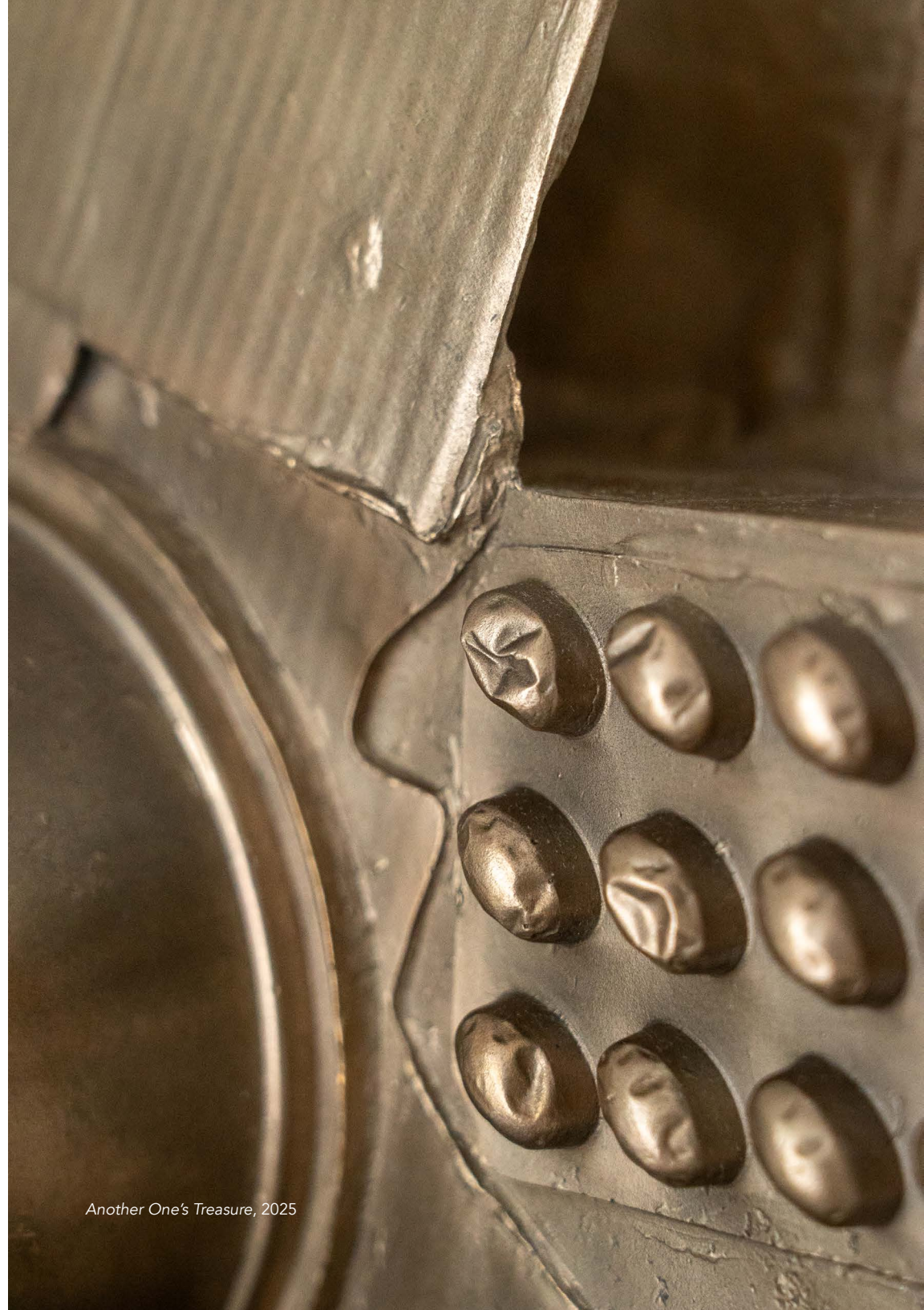
I have sometimes got the impression that Amalia's work functions as a slow game of Chinese whispers. It does not use words but instead figures, forms and actions that represent communication and are passed on through her practice from one time or site to another. They come before her and she passes them on, slightly transformed, to the viewer, who might recognise them and even use them, amused by their transformation into play. I still remember my first encounter with her work, back in 2005, when she was finishing her residency at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam. One of her works involved transforming the Academy's large bicycle parking lot into a field of flickering coloured light, as she had repurposed an array of flashing bike lights for the occasion so that they could signal a celebration and illuminate the way. Inside the building was a video made of found footage showing a multitude of people on the deck of a cruise ship just prior to departing for the other side of the ocean, waving white handkerchiefs to their loved ones on a never-ending loop, already sending signs from afar.

A language combining fact and folklore, sentiment and truth is something which persists throughout Amalia's practice. These pieces have stayed with me, always murmuring something about our endless abilities to communicate and connect, to shorten distances and to leave traces which are destined to be picked up by someone other, creating a long conversation through time and space. Just as it happened for Amalia with the mysterious found painting, these signs can get us beyond the paralysing effect of not understanding, to rejoice in the fact that language has various ways, that we have the power to create and decipher them and that we can subvert the more formal and obvious channels of communication as we hide meaning even in the most minute of our actions.









Another One's Treasure, 2025



List of works

1. **Keepsake #7**
2024
Cotton and wool on linen, 73 hours
130 x 95 x 2.5 cm
2. **Keepsake #10**
2024
Cotton and wool on linen
40 x 30.2 x 3.6 cm
3. **Keepsake #11**
2024
Cotton and wool on linen
40 x 30.2 x 3.6 cm
4. **Keepsake #15**
2025
Cotton and wool on linen, 122 hours
135 x 135 cm
5. **Keepsake #9**
2024
Cotton and wool on linen, 81.5 hours
157 x 120 cm
6. **Keepsake #12**
2024
Cotton and wool on linen
40 x 30.2 x 3.6 cm
7. **One hundred and thirty-four years of smoke, 2025**
Amalia Pica/Rafael Ortega
Two channel video installation
Dimensions variable
8. **Another One's Treasure**
2025
Bronze
40 x 30 x 17 cm
9. **unknown title, 1891**
Andrea G
Oil on canvas
40.5 x 30 cm
10. **Communal Daisy Chain, 2025**
Pressed daisies, flour paste
and cotton thread
Daisy chains made by pupils from
Wallace Hall Academy, Thornhill,
Penpont Primary School, visitors to
Cample Line and the Cample Line team

Dimensions are given H x W x D



Amalia Pica was born in 1978 in Neuquén, Argentina and currently lives and works in London. She received a BA from the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes P.P. in Buenos Aires in 2003 and attended graduate school at the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten in Amsterdam.

Pica has had solo exhibitions at Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York (2024); Museo Jumex, Mexico City (2023); Fondazione Memmo, Rome (2022); Brighton CCA (2022); Museum Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich (2020); Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, Seville, Spain (2019); The New Art Gallery, Walsall, UK (2019); Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, Perth, Australia (2018); The Power Plant, Toronto (2017); NC Arte, Bogotá, Colombia (2017); Kunstverein Freiburg, Freiburg, Germany (2016); Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands (2014); List Visual Arts Center, MIT, Cambridge, Massachusetts (2013); Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City (2013); Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (2013); Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Neuquén, Argentina (2013); Kunsthalle St. Gallen, St. Gallen, Switzerland (2012); Chisenhale Gallery, London (2012); Malmö Konsthall, Malmö, Sweden (2010); among many others.

Her work was included in the Gwangju Biennial, South Korea (2016); *The Ungovernables*: New Museum Triennial, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (2015); and *ILLUMInations*, curated by Bice Curiger, 54th Venice Biennale (2011). Public commissions include University of North Carolina, North Carolina; *Semaphores*, King's Cross, London; and *Sipping colors*, De Pijp Station, Amsterdam. She received the Zürich Art Prize (2020); Paul Hamlyn Foundation Award (2011) amongst other awards. She has had residencies at the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, Boulder, Colorado (2017); Headlands Center for the Arts, Sausalito, California (2012); Uqbar Foundation at Casa Vecina, Mexico City (2011); Markus Lennikus, Baurmarkt 9, Vienna (2010); and BijlmerAIR, Centrum Beeldende Kunst Zuidoost, Stedelijk Museum Bureau, Amsterdam (2007).



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Keepsake
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