EN

Eva de Souza
tecidos que curam
21.08.–03.10.2026

Eva de Souza's artistic and activist practice combines textile works with a long-standing engagement with social justice, anti-racism and feminism. Through embroidery and sewing she interweaves personal stories with social events, media images with names and political slogans, creating visual worlds and objects that give voice to resistance and protest. Her new abstract textile works foreground acts of self-empowerment and the concept of healing.

For the three exhibition spaces at Stadtgalerie, the artist has developed a narrative installation comprising existing and new work. The exhibition title, which translates from Portuguese as 'healing fabrics' or 'fabrics that heal', is intentionally ambiguous, referring both to social structures (the 'social fabric') and the materiality of textiles, whose transformative potential plays a central role in her practice. Organised around the themes of protest, self-healing and contemplation, the exhibition invites visitors to explore multiple aspects of her work and to engage with a space of remembrance, exchange and care.

With *tecidos que curam*, Stadtgalerie Bern presents Eva de Souza's first institutional solo exhibition. The Brazilian Swiss artist lives and works in Salvador, Brazil, and Bern.

Room 1

Trigger warning: The text describes racist police violence.

The first exhibition space is dedicated to protest against human rights violations, in particular racist violence toward Black people.

In the large-scale embroidery *Zamambaia*, a Black woman lies on the ground, surrounded by a group of police officers. Whether she is being helped or trying to protect herself from the police remains open to interpretation. Through this ambiguity, Eva de Souza reflects on how structural violence is experienced, observed and remembered in everyday life.

The title *Zamambaia* is Portuguese for 'fern'. This primeval plant, which frames the scene, symbolises resilience and regeneration: It continues to grow, adapt and thrive even under adverse conditions. Nature is therefore presented as a force of renewal, in contrast to experiences of violence and discrimination. The rooster also depicted here alludes to the spiritual dimension of Eva de Souza's practice. She describes it as a symbol for the connection to ancestors and their protective presence, which is deeply rooted in Afro-Brazilian culture.

The smaller textile works *Vidas Desperdiçadas 1* and *Vidas Desperdiçadas 2* ('wasted lives') from 2021 respond to cases of racist police violence in Brazil. On kitchen towels, Eva de Souza has embroidered names, biographical details, silhouettes of bodies and crosses, as well as the crossed-out word *absolvidos* ('acquitted'). *Vidas Desperdiçadas 2* commemorates the murder of Cláudia Ferreira da Silva, a 38-year-old Brazilian mother of four who was shot by police officers in Rio de Janeiro in 2014. On the way to the hospital, she fell from the trunk of a police car and was dragged along the road for around 300 metres. Video footage of the incident circulated in the media and sparked nationwide protests. Nevertheless, the six military police officers charged in connection with her death were acquitted. *Vidas Desperdiçadas 1* commemorates young Black people wrongfully imprisoned in Brazilian jails or killed by police violence.

The *Manifesto Jacket* (2022) is embroidered with political slogans such as 'Black Lives Matter', along with the names of other Black people killed by police violence in various parts of the world. Among them is Roger Nzoy Wilhelm, who was shot by a police officer in Morges, Switzerland, in 2021. By relating deaths in Brazil, Germany and Switzerland to one another, Eva de Souza demonstrates that racist and state-perpetrated violence are not isolated incidents but rather a form of structural violence that is continues to be shaped by colonial power relations.

The jacket is not only a textile manifesto for social justice but also a garment through which remembrance and resistance are manifested in the public sphere. Eva de Souza thus articulates an artistic approach inspired by protest movements, to keep the memory of people killed or injured by state violence. She tells their stories to counter oblivion and invisibility and through them connects with people to initiate conversations around shared experiences, fears and emotional distress.

Room 2

The second exhibition space focuses on aspects of participation, ritual and healing.

Starting from the premise that structural racism cannot be addressed on an individual level, for several years Eva de Souza has been developing participatory workshops for people with various experiences of discrimination. These collective encounters and the shared act of embroidery facilitate the exchange of experiences and perspectives, as well as the opportunity to raise personal concerns and ideas. Here, textile practices and oral tradition come together as a way of exchanging knowledge in solidarity and mutual empowerment.

One example is the ongoing participative piece *Cartografia Afetiva* (2023/26–) ('affective cartography'). The embroidered words and symbols bear witness to a multiplicity of voices, expressing wishes, hopes and thoughts. Visitors to the exhibition are invited to embroider their own messages and add them to this ongoing textile work of art, which will continue to grow for the duration of the exhibition at Stadtgalerie. Fabric, thread and sewing needles are provided – the Stadtgalerie team is happy to assist you!

The two works facing each other, *A Mulher no Saco* (2023) and *O Manto* (2020), are part of a series depicting sleeping figures. Eva de Souza considers sleep as a strategy of resistance, a means of evading the pressure to conform to capitalist expectations of productivity and exploitability. She portrays two people resting in public space. In *O Manto* an oscillating line suggests a heartbeat, or perhaps the stock market price. The letters can be interpreted as a reference to a precarious residency status.

Material itself also plays an important role in Eva de Souza's textile practice. She frequently works with textiles found in second-hand shops, often originating in domestic contexts such as the kitchen or needlework. The grey cloth on which the scenes of *O Manto* and *Zamambaia* in the first space are embroidered is a recycled fabric, of a type often used by homeless people in Brazil as a sturdy blanket for protection against the cold. The fabric itself is thus already imbued with its own social history, with associations to the depicted scene on the street and the unyielding materiality of the asphalt. Much like *Manifesto Jacket*, the artist conceived *O Manto* as a cloak. Worn on the body, it provides protection and strengthens the wearer's agency in relation to the world. The translucent sheet of *A Mulher no Saco*, by contrast, points to the vulnerability and social invisibility of unhoused people.

O Batismo (2025) ('the baptism') is a textile self-portrait of Eva de Souza. As a priestess in a white gown and adorned with flowers, she performs a baptismal ritual. In the water, bodies and boats float towards a golden horizon. Behind them are cows, snow-capped mountains and the figure of an alpine herdsman. The work explores the histories of colonialism and migration, as well as religious promises of salvation. Eva de Souza draws parallels with the hopes held by many migrants of finding prosperity and security in another place. The spiritual ritual could be understood as an attempt to break free of ideas shaped by colonialism. The priestess represented here draws her strength from within herself and from her connection with nature, water and plants.

On the opposite wall, amulets, plant fibres, items of clothing and panels suspended from the ceiling combine to form a vibrant tapestry. Eva de Souza made the amulets from seed pods, used textiles and medicine packages. Through this act of repurposing, these everyday materials acquire a symbolic meaning: the objects evoke sexual organs, body extensions or pieces of jewellery. Originally created as protective companions for people in her community, they develop their own physical presence in conjunction with the other elements of the installation. The palm leaves from Bahia hanging between the fabrics mark a transition. Traditionally, they are hung in doorways, to cleanse those entering of negative thoughts and inspire new beginnings. Visitors to the exhibition are also invited to walk through the installation, to engage with the objects and their own perceptions. Body awareness, purification, traditional knowledge and artistic creation intertwine to form another source of self-healing.

Room 3

Eva de Souza devotes the final space in the exhibition to themes of time and contemplation.

By turning to abstraction, she claims an artistic freedom that in the Western art canon was long regarded as a supposedly universal and autonomous expression of modernism, while Black artists were often confined to questions of origin, identity and political representation. Eva de Souza resists this expectation and reframes abstraction as artistic self-determination.

For this large-scale installation, Eva de Souza attached sheets of fabric to rusty surfaces over an extended period, watering them and allowing them to oxidise. Traces of rust are inscribed in the

textiles like a map of time. Some of the light, pale fabrics are freely suspended in space and react to drafts of air and movement. Following the figurative and narrative work in the preceding parts of the exhibition, this space foregrounds the immediate experience of material, light, movement and time. The focus shifts from protest against external violence to a form of reflective agency.

Text: Eva-Maria Knüsel

EVENTS

Stitching Together
Sat, 29 August, 3–6 pm

Workshop with Eva de Souza

Embroidery is an important part of Eva de Souza's artistic practice and serves as a form of quiet protest, remembrance, and processing. In this workshop, she invites participants to embroider their own message onto fabric and incorporate it into an ongoing textile work. The piece will grow throughout the entire duration of the exhibition. Through stitching together, an empowering space emerges in which participants can engage deeply with a creative practice, contribute their individual concerns and experiences, and exchange ideas with one another.

Talk on Textile Art and Activism
Sat, 12 September, 5 pm

Eva de Souza will be in conversation with artists Latefa Wiersch and Lynne Gbodjrou Kouassi about textile-based artistic practices as forms of resistance and activism. The conversation will be moderated by Eva-Maria Knüsel.

Guided Tour with Sign Language Interpretation
~~Thu, 17 September, 6 pm~~
postponed to Thu, 24 September, 6 pm

Eva-Maria Knüsel, director of the Stadtgalerie, will lead a guided tour through the exhibition *tecidos que curam*. Sign language interpreter Janet Fiebelkorn will provide simultaneous interpretation in sign language. All Deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing visitors are warmly welcome!

More information: www.stadtgalerie.ch

TEAM

Director and Curator: Eva-Maria Knüsel
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

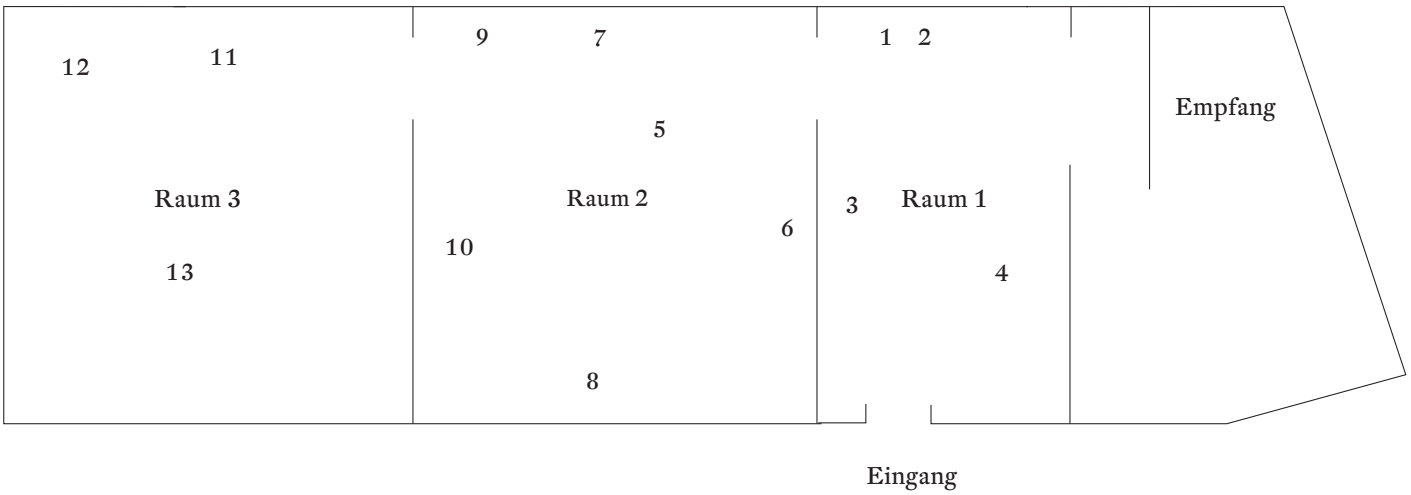
Eva de Souza would like to thank:
Mathias Schmid; Gundeldingerfeld, Basel; Verein Rheingeworfen Basel, Jeroen Dierssen; Das Dazwischen Bern, Nikkol Rot and Marion Hermann; Reitschule Bern, Mitchu; Eneias Trochsler, Andrea Zellhuber, Evelyn Zea Schuler, Carolina Brandini, Alba Christina Darabi, Binta Kopp, Cédric Eisenring, Emma Kouassi, Verena Dietze, Camila Benavides, Gabriel Reis, Vera Ryser

The Stadtgalerie is generously supported by:

Kultur Stadt Bern
SWISSLOS Kultur Kanton Bern

Werkliste

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Raum 1

1
Vidas Desperdiçadas 1
2021

2
Vidas Desperdiçadas 2
2021

3
Manifesto Jacket
2022

4
Zamambaia
2022
Leihgabe der Kunst-
sammlung Kanton Bern

Raum 2

5
Cartografia Afetiva
2023/26–

6
O Batismo
2025

7
A Mulher no Saco
2023

8
O Manto
2025

9
Herz
2026

10
Textile Installation
2026

Raum 3

11
Magen
2026

12
Lunge
2026

13
Textile Installation
2026