

Theta

Kelsey Isaacs

Baby Mozart's Kiss

September 9 - October 24, 2026

Before Mozart's first contact with the piano, before he penned his first ink-splattered composition, he was a tiny little baby. His talent was abstract, an unopened precious gift. Two centuries later, the promise of that potential was converted to product: *Baby Mozart*, one installment in a wildly successful series of educational videos premised on the notion that exposure to classical music might accelerate infant intelligence. The science has since been debunked. The fantasy persists.

Kelsey Isaacs's second solo exhibition at Theta presents two distinct series of paintings alongside a video installation, extending her practice of using staged sets and cameras as a genesis for composing pictures. Isaacs draws freely from the history of painting in constructing these scenes, dicing conventions from illusionistic Renaissance heavens and the staged landscapes of Watteau, and remodeling them with the contemporary ephemera of her sets. Four expansive paintings depict scenes animated by feathers, bubbles, spotlights, polyethylene and a passing dog. Three others send a baby crawling across a jerry-rigged sky, fumbling toward an LED party light like a twenty-first-century putto. Throughout, a bizarre plastic baroque assembles a verisimilar stage of fleeting fascination.

Isaacs's latest compositions use installations to expand hyperreal marginalia at cinematic scale. Access to a disused movie soundstage enabled a massive scaling up and a shift to landscape. Its seamless cyclorama dissolves any fixed horizon between floor and wall, while targeted light, shadow and reflection stretch and compress the space that remains. This endeavor is brought to architectural proportions in *Music is Love*, a diptych consuming the gallery wall that feels almost enterable. In *The Glade*, it is neither night nor day. Light radiates continuously from the left, catching the thin films of passing bubbles and resolving into prismatic flecks that seem to pop as they reach the frame's edge, revealing glimmers of aluminum panel beneath. The source of this illumination stands in the back, casting shadows from feathers dangling and resting in the middleground. The artist's poodle (Waggy) dashes across the foreground, a photobomb and context clue.

For the *Cloud Editor* series, Isaacs took pictures of the sky from the roof atop her studio, printed them large scale, and tiled them across the floor beneath a camera positioned several feet overhead. The resulting patchwork scrambles floor and sky, a foreshortened bird's-eye construction by way of ceiling painting traditions. A baby crawls among the prints, tripods and an LED party light, alternately grounded and floating. Like a cupid, it occupies a strange interval between the earthly and divine, drawn towards ineffably constructed notions of bliss.

Around the gallery, miniature pearlescent media players are tucked in corners and perched on exposed pipes. Each plays a soundless, single-shot video made with an endoscope camera, darting in and out of the feathers, plastics, and other materials staged for the paintings as its built-in ring light flashes back against their surfaces. These micro-spectacles lose the long view. The camera noses around at close

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range, catching color, glare and texture in quick succession, where months of painting have otherwise gone toward holding a fraction of a second still.

Across these modes of looking, Isaacs recycles images through an exacting chain of translations: sets become photographs, photos become digital compositions and stencils, their materials reappear in videos, and momentary arrangements are reconstructed in alternately precise and gestural oil. Her high-definition realism carries the technical ambitions of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century painting into a media landscape where images are endlessly reproduced, refined and recirculated. Lights, tech, seams, strings and substrate of panels remain visible throughout; perfection here takes pride in its process. Mozart's gift, after all, did not unwrap itself. His father Leopold diligently cultivated his son's extraordinary ability, presenting the five-year-old before courts across Europe and turning precocity into legend. Babies, stages and empty canvases all share the peculiar luxury of having not yet become anything in particular. What follows is a matter of production.

Kelsey Isaacs (b. 1994, Los Angeles) lives and works in New York City. Solo exhibitions and fair presentations include: Art Basel Miami Beach, with Theta (2025); Clima, Milan; Frieze London, with Clima (both 2024); Theta, New York (2023); and Chapter NY, New York (2022). Recent group exhibitions include: LOMEX, New York (2026); Theta, New York; Bortolami, New York; Paulina Caspari, Munich; Schiefe Zaehne, Berlin (all 2025); Zodiac Pictures, Los Angeles (2024); Tara Downs, New York; Soft Opening, London (both 2023); Venus Over Manhattan, New York (2022); and King's Leap, New York (2021).