

Solo Yolo

Niklas Taleb

Opens Friday 23rd June 2023, 6-9pm

24th June - 13th August

Solo Yolo, Essen-based artist Niklas Taleb's first UK solo exhibition, explores material relations and emotional transitions of the everyday – being (or having a) solo, coming-of-age, settling down, individuating, communing and assimilating, considered through and as photographic forms & formulas.

The half-melancholic, half-facetious twist on the exuberant millennial You Only Live Once mindset of the early social media era (#yolo), a lived mantra of trust fund babies, and a coping strategy for those priced out of the previous generation's stability, *Solo Yolo* suggests reality hitting home as the dust of the pandemic years settles.

Niklas Taleb's photographs extend from the inside out. The exact site of this interior is rigorously non-specific, an opening that encloses, conceals. Picking up spots and smudges of everyday life, the camera works from within it; from within the quite literal messiness of a child-rearing home, the almost inevitable circumstance of early parenthood, and from the messy, prescriptive nature of middle-class relations – familial, convivial, professional and incidental.

Standardised, grid-like, modular, wooden toy building blocks first appeared in Fröbel's gift #3 in the 1850s, marking a shift towards a child-centric education model in 'the West'. Le Corbusier adored Fröbel's gifts, made to nurture the child's sense of form, structure, and proportion through imaginative play. And thus, he came up with 'Unité d'Habitation', standardised homes he coined 'the machines for living in'.

Hands on the back of his neck, a family friend smiles wearily on the living room sofa (*Alex*, 2023). Stocks only go up, building blocks point up (*In the city*, 2023), and you only live once. In the exhibition's single decisive moment, the infant's nail valiantly meets the file in the mother's ambivalent grip, soft yet firm (*Untitled*, 2023). Boy at risk (*Boy at Risk I*, 2021) has got about a 5% chance of success. Regret flickers across the poker face, did he really go all-in with a 9 of hearts and 2 of clubs?

Making use of the much-theorised family photography and snapshot genres, Taleb's photographs abstain from reflecting on their obligatory core concerns – narrative construction, class dynamics, identity performance and ideological reproduction. As *Solo Yolo* works through the codes (of lived experience, and of photography), assimilation into existing cultural and social life is the state of affairs. Its flow is for the photographs to fragment and unpick.

Refusing to tell stories or counter-stories, reproduce lives or set memories, *Solo Yolo* gradually extends to nearer and farther proximities between people. The photographs attune to moments of idle time. The poker player has not slept for hours, the dad on parental leave watching TV waits with him. The child's asleep, and so we wait too. In supposed unproductive time of very real alertness (the player can't quit the bluff, the child is about to wake up), Niklas Taleb stages general forms for particular affects. As these forms become formations, a strange clarity saunters in aimlessly.

Curator Adomas Narkevičius

Niklas Taleb (b. 1986, Munich) studied at the Folkwang University of the Arts in Essen, where he lives and works. He was founder and co-curator of the exhibition space Belle Air in Essen (2014–17) and is cofounder of the artist group New Bretagne. Taleb was awarded the Peter Mertes Scholarship of the Bonner Kunstverein in 2020. His first solo exhibition, Dream again of better Generationenvertrag, was held at Lucas Hirsch, Düsseldorf, in 2020. His recent solo and duo exhibitions include CAPC Musée d'Art Contemporain de Bordeaux (with Phung-Tien Phan) (2022); Edouard Montassut, Paris (2022); and 15 Orient, New York (2022). His work was further shown at Bonner Kunstverein (2021); Peach, Rotterdam (2021); Haus der Wig, Berlin (2021); Kunstverein Hamburger Bahnhof, Hamburg (2020); Neuer Essener Kunstverein (2020); Kunsthalle Düsseldorf (2020); and Vleeshal Center for Contemporary Art, Middelburg (2019).

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