

Press Release

Niklas Taleb

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Photographing a young child, their face stills in front of the camera, as they look into the device, held up to and obscuring the face of the artist. The child is an infant, they have no notion of the photograph as an object, but they respond to the act of documentation. Curled over themselves on top of a small tabletop all attention in the image is focused by their gaze. Around them a discarded diaper, bits of paper, and two socks that belong to someone with larger feet. Traces of movement, the objects that circle us in the home, generic family life articulated through tiny particularities. Another photograph, an older child's eyes, nose, and mouth are up close to the camera lens, joyful and curious. The face is the communicative centre of all portraiture, but it keeps the viewer out as much as it draws us in– the threshold to subjectivity. In the first image, the younger nonverbal child arrests us, while in the second the older child engages and trespasses beyond the camera's focus, almost exceeding the frame.

The photographic image disinvites its operators, process and technique become hidden inside the stillness of the pictorial. But in Niklas Taleb's photo-objects – each print with its handmade frame – tactility and gesture forge a temporary alliance between the form and content. Seen from above the irregular patchwork of European farmland abstracts and tessellates. Even in a black and white photograph, we recognise the experience of air travel; eleven thousand metres in the sky, compressed in our seats, a thousand kilometers an hour passes like nothing. Fantasies of catastrophic collision, total obliteration if the plane was to fall, a violence so alien our imagination fails to get beyond the visual, while out of the porthole window the landscape scrolls by.

A woman's face is half obscured, the back of a basketball hoop hides a game played behind it, two flies seem to be caught in conversation, children, the view from an aeroplane window: vignettes, snapshots, slices, moments from the artist's life that touch and then pull apart. Intrinsicly, Taleb leaves the signs of his handiwork on the frames and in the joins of the prints, and extrinsicly in his edited selection which disassembles and re-arranges photographic genre and type. Looking for narrative continuity, we find none, not here in this room of photographs or out there in a world full of decontextualised images. Instead, from the gap between the intimate and proximate emerges a plausible contemporary style, an impression, drape or fold, clothing shared intuition.

Alexandra Symons-Sutcliffe

Niklas Taleb (b. 1986, Germany) lives and works in Essen. Recent solo exhibitions of his work have been held at Lucas Hirsch, Düsseldorf, 2024 ; Cell Project Space, London, 2023 ; CAPC Musée d'Art Contemporain, Bordeaux, 2022 ; Edouard Montassut, Paris, 2022 ; 15 Orient, New York, 2022 ; Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn, 2021. His work has been included in group exhibitions at Kunsthalle Winterthur, Winterthur, 2024 ; CAPC Musée d'Art Contemporain, Bordeaux, 2023 ; Camera Austria, Vienna, 2023 ; Crèvecoeur, Paris, 2023 ; Stereo, Warsaw, 2023 ; Sweetwater, Berlin, 2022 ; La SIRA, Asnières-sur-Seine, 2022 ; Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn, 2021 ; Späti 71, Berlin, 2021 ; Haus der Wig, 2021. His work is featured in the collection of CAPC Musée d'Art Contemporain, Bordeaux ; Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf ; Bundeskunstsammlung, Germany.