

Press release

Ladji Diaby „No one has ever called their child hunger“
Kunstverein Nürnberg — Albrecht Dürer Gesellschaft
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In his solo exhibition “No One Has Ever Called Their Child Hunger”, Ladji Diaby draws on a trove of his own and found photographs and artifacts—and their stories and attributes—to develop intimate mythologies. Embarking on a quest in which questions of class and race are pivotal, Diaby seeks and creates internal connections between images and objects from his immediate surroundings. As part of this, Diaby has developed photo transfer processes in which he transposes motifs onto a variety of image and material backgrounds, sometimes reworking them gesturally. Diaby thus integrates photographs, memes, gaming, video, and film stills of hidden obsessions and (fallen) idols into his very own personal cosmos. The result is an expansive fan fiction, where Diaby fights existing determinism and reveals a particular sensitivity for aspects of everyday life and subcultures. The domestic environment—the place where all these disparate images circulate—is in turn portrayed through photography or rendered visible by means of modified interiors. This conveys a sense of familial intimacy, rituals, and beliefs, but also a uniquely “photographic view” of the surroundings, in which the distinction between a bed made of mahogany wood and a mock-mahogany bed not only explores the relationship between the object and its representation, but also the cultural context of its discussion. The exhibition “No One Has Ever Called Their Child Hunger” is realized with the support of the artist Cleopatra Mendes Gonçalves and accompanied by a text written by the curator and researcher Cynthia Igbokwe.

Ladji Diaby (b. 2000 in Saint-Denis/Paris, FR) lives and works in Paris. Following group exhibitions at Crèvecœur, Paris (2024); Forde, Geneva; FRAC Corsica, Corsica; Sammlung Braunschweig, Cologne (all 2023); and the Centre Pompidou (2022), “No One Has Ever Called Their Child Hunger” is the artist’s first solo exhibition. Another solo exhibition will be held at Schiefe Zähne, Berlin, in 2025.

Curator: Nele Kaczmarek
Curatorial Assistance: Leonora Prugger

“No One Has Ever Called Their Child Hunger” is generously supported by the Alexander Tutsek-Stiftung, the Institut français/Bureau des arts plastiques, and the Department of Culture of the City of Nuremberg.

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No one has ever called their child hunger

“No One Has Ever Called Their Child Hunger”. This proverb, shared by a friend after watching Ladj Diaby walk the streets of Dakar, holds a powerful sentiment. A few words, carefully chosen, can convey profound meanings far beyond their apparent simplicity, taking root in our minds like seeds that grow over time into something far greater. Like a proverb, art has the power to evoke one’s own life story in the mind of any viewer. In the case of Ladj’s artistic process, the gathering of everyday objects he finds on the street builds a kind of personal mythology—one that captures the wisdom of a soul passed down through generations.

There is a humility in this kind of work, a reminder that he is not making the rules, but allowing the materials themselves to show him how to use them. They teach him that it is only by accepting limitations that he can find the freedom to experiment and realize the limitless possibilities of what could be. It is within these constraints that radical thought and imagination are born. This approach is not simply about making something out of nothing; it’s about the sensibility of seeing beauty in objects in the moment of encounter. An exploration of what speaks to him in a language beyond words.

Ladj’s prints and sculptural work share something in common with the process of sampling in his music production. By isolating and recombining elements, whether sonic or material, he weaves in pop cultural histories, engaging not only with their aesthetics but also with their impact on our everyday lives. It’s a fascinating process: hearing a fleeting sound, taking a piece of it, looping it, allowing it to take on a life of its own—a new beginning and end, a new feeling that moves you even before you can articulate why. Call it a J Dilla-type magic or a happy accident. Ladj’s assembly of objects and imagery captures those unexpected moments, creating a serendipitous effect where the journey to the final piece is as mysterious as the work itself. Sampling, as both technique and stylistic choice, forms a bridge between the past and the present—a continuous exchange of cultural memory, identity, sounds, and images. This work connects on a deeper level because it is rooted in people’s everyday existence and activities, in images that remind us of drawing on bathroom tiles or sitting on our mother’s bed frame at night.

If magic is found in the encounter with an object, then a personal utopia is found in this exhibition. However, this utopia critiques the notion of “art for art’s sake” and instead celebrates the struggles and triumphs of those who came before us. Being a “people’s artist” teaches us how to persevere and remain dignified in “the industry” or “the art world.” Ladj encourages us to imagine new forms of world-building, forms in which the collected materials embody political, literary, musical, and personal influences, creating a new system of meaning that reflects the complexity and diversity of everyday life. We encounter a vivid visual lexicon that allows us to talk about Mike Tyson, Karl Marx, Shinji Ikari, Fredo Santana, and Louis Farrakhan all in the same breath. His drawings and sculptures not only invite us to fill in the gaps, but also propose a remaking of historical images and stereotypes; they subvert context, skin tone, or hair color in the name of self-respect and creating new expressions of pride.

We can learn much from anime about our imaginative and transformative potential, and dedication. Something like the feeling when you realize that your favorite green, blue, or purple anime character somehow feels Black. Or the excitement felt when a protagonist awakens their power system in the training arc and learns to manipulate their own life energy (aura) to defeat an opponent. Or the magic of hearing Susumu Hirasawa’s “Guts” for the first time while watching the anime series “Berserk” (1997) and experiencing that shock of beauty in response to those moving images.

The diverse influences embedded in Ladj’s practice are a testament to his breaking out of the “white cube”—to the constant struggle to liberate himself while operating within oppressive structures, pushing the boundaries of what is considered acceptable art, and choosing not to conform to Western ideologies that distance people from art.

Ultimately, “No one has ever called their child hunger” goes to show that Ladj’s art is about connection, about being connected to something bigger than oneself. His images remind us of the love and humor shared with friends and family. More than anything, it illustrates that when your world is part of someone else’s, it only makes sense to bring those worlds closer together. This exhibition reflects the depth of a culture and taps into what Stuart Hall describes as a “collective common sense” that “feels like it’s always been there.” Ladj shows us that we don’t have to choose between magic and common sense, because magic is in the process.

His humility when it comes to making art, along with his ongoing practice of recording, sampling, and exchanging the meanings of objects in everyday life, encourages us to imagine new narratives as we make sense of our shared experiences. It’s a journey that requires honesty and integrity, a willingness to fail, to try again, and to fail better. This newfound wisdom invites us to think about new ways of thinking—not only to navigate our realities more joyfully, but to make and remake new ones.

Text: Cynthia Igbokwe