

## GALERIE SFEIR-SEMLER

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TARIK KISWANSON

*The Relief*

Opening in the presence of the artist: 8 May, 6 - 8 pm

We are delighted to inaugurate this Thursday an exhibition by TARIK KISWANSON. In *The Relief*, KISWANSON continues to examine the repercussions and aftermath of war, trauma, and ruptures across historical events.

Opening on May 8, 2025, a date that marks the anniversary of the end of World War II, this solo exhibition centers on an extremely rare historical object: the “Steinway Victory Vertical,” or “G.I. Steinway”—an upright piano produced by Steinway & Sons in New York in 1942 and parachuted to U.S. and allied troops deployed across Europe to bring psychological relief through the traumatic events of the war. The piano is one of the earliest examples in history of recreational music making. The Steinway family, who originated from Seesen in Germany, kept deep ties to Hamburg, the only German city where the family maintained a factory after their emigration to New York in 1850.

Commissioned during a time when civilian production had been halted and factories repurposed for the war effort, these instruments were uniquely engineered to be as lightweight as possible. Painted in olive drab camouflage, each piano was packed in a custom crate equipped with tools and tuning instructions—ready to be parachuted to where the soldiers were stationed. Of the 2,436 Victory Verticals produced during World War II, almost all were ultimately lost, damaged when landing or chopped for woodfire.

KISWANSON engages with this charged legacy through the careful restoration of one such unique piano. Removed from its original utilitarian function, it is installed in the gallery, detached from its protective casing. The instrument levitates above a child-size white cocoon, in a sculptural gesture that reimagines the wartime relic as a symbol of the historical rupture it embodies, echoing music’s transcendent and recreational potential.

In dialogue with the installation, Tarik Kiswanson’s latest video work unfolds within the Conservatoire de Saint-Denis, situated in the northern suburbs of Paris. The conservatory was established in 1977 as a social project to offer music education to children and adults in the underprivileged and multicultural city. Over time, it has evolved into a comprehensive cultural institution, providing lessons in a wide range of musical disciplines. The film quietly observes the hands of three local children—aged 8, 10, and 11—as they grapple with the task of deciphering the score of the *Anthem of Europe*, commonly known as *Ode to Joy*, drawn from the final movement of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. Through the children’s hands the partition is deconstructed, re-written and reimagined.

Filmed in an unbroken 360-degree pan, the camera’s continuous circular motion resists closure, creating a temporal loop without a clear beginning or end. Presented vertically, the work evokes a sense of suspended time. Through moments of hesitation, silence, and soft piano notes, KISWANSON captures a threshold space—where learning, uncertainty, and the emergence of understanding intersect. The film becomes a meditation on transmission, formation, and the delicate architecture of becoming.

Together, the installation and film form a poetic constellation—one that meditates on fragility, resilience, and the intergenerational transmission of memory. Whether through the weight of a salvaged wartime piano or the tentative notes of a partition learned anew, KISWANSON invites us to listen closely to the interstitial, often overlooked moments that shape cultural identity and collective consciousness. In doing so, the exhibition becomes a space not only of reflection, but of regeneration—a site where the echoes of history resound in the acts of becoming and belonging.

Kiswanson comes from a Palestinian family that was exiled from Jerusalem, by way of Tripoli, and Amman, before finally settling in Halmstad, Sweden, where he was born in 1986. Kiswanson spent ten years in London where he studied art before relocating to Paris where he has lived and worked since 2010. He holds four nationalities and speaks and writes in five languages.

Tarik Kiswanson’s work encompasses sculpture, writing, performance, drawing, sound, and video works. For over a decade, he has explored notions of rootlessness, metamorphosis, and memory through his interdisciplinary practice. A legacy of displacement and transformation permeates his works and is indispensable to both their form and the modes of sensing they produce. While retaining an attachment to the intimate and personal, his work speaks to universal concerns and to social and collective histories of rupture, loss, and regeneration. Kiswanson’s oeuvre can be understood as a cosmology of related conceptual families, each exploring variations on themes like refraction, multiplication, disintegration, levitation, and polyphony through their own distinct language. He was awarded the Marcel Duchamp Prize in 2023 at Centre Pompidou. His work has been the subject of several solo exhibitions at institutions, most recently at Kunsthalle Portikus (2024), Oakville Galleries (2024), Bonniers Konsthall (2023), Salzburger Kunstverein (2023), Museo Tamayo (2023), M HKA-Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp (2022), Hallands Konstmuseum (2022) and Carré d’Art-Musée d’art contemporain (2021). He has participated in group exhibitions and biennials at institutions such as Centre Pompidou, Kunsthalle Münster, Gothenburg International Biennial for Contemporary Art, Lyon Biennial of Contemporary Art, The Ural Biennial, Performa Biennial, Gwangju Biennial, and MUDAM-Museum of Contemporary Art Luxembourg. Kiswanson serves as advisor on the scientific committee of the Edouard Glissant Art Fund.