

Niklas Taleb

Der stille Hund, der fest zubeißt

Opening: February 21st, 6-9 pm
February 22nd – March 28th, 2025
Caprii, Orangeriestraße 6, 40213 Düsseldorf

As an artist, I am writing an introduction to the presentation by my colleague Niklas Adel Taleb. Born in 1986, Taleb belongs to the last generation to grow up without the Internet and smartphones. I myself, born in 1988, share this experience. What do we have in common? Formally, our artistic forms of expression are very different, but if I put my finger directly in the wound: it's liminality that interests and unites us. We are also the last generation of the old order, who only became familiar with the digital world late in life.

Liminality - a term from ethnology, coined by Arnold van Gennep in 1909 and later developed further by Victor Turner in the 1960s - describes the state of transition, the hovering between the past and the future. In this state, individuals or groups have left the old order behind but have not yet entered the new one. Originally, this term was used in relation to initiation rites where the boy is neither a child nor a man. Today, in a world without clear rites of passage, we experience adolescence as an endless, unresolved state in which identities and stages of life are constantly blurred. Liminality therefore refers not only to the physical space between two places, but above all to a symbolic space of dissolution in which social norms are called into question and irrationality, amorality or even anarchy can find space. A state that can be felt everywhere in our present - in the transitional spaces of our lives, the moments of uncertainty, the passages that do not lead us to a fixed destination. These threshold phases are everywhere. In the corridors, the waiting rooms, the indefinite minutes between arrival and departure. They are the places where we speak without saying anything, where we rest without really coming to rest. Taleb's works are permeated by this atmosphere.

The exhibition features photographs that he took a few years ago, some of them during the pandemic. Nothing remarkable happens - he merely seems to be reproducing his visual impressions. There are upside-down views out of the window, views of a screen broadcasting a poker tournament. In a framed photograph, a self-portrait that reveals nothing more than his closed lips and a plaster, perhaps concealing a pimple, hidden behind the door. Many of the works are presented between two panes of glass. In addition, Taleb shows a spatial intervention from 2021: a natural-colored wooden strip, mounted in front of a white lacquered wooden strip of the gallery. The lengths are not correct everywhere and so there are again, surprise, gaps. This installation was originally designed for Lucas Hirsch's gallery space, hence the missing parts. However, it fits harmoniously into the current spatial experience. In terms of both content and space, these works deal with the concept of liminality and their airy existence reminds me of the opposite of a Matryoshka doll. The pandemic certainly also plays a role - a collective moment of liminality in which the familiar slipped away without the new consolidating.

The empty streets and deserted places of spring 2020 seem like architectural manifestations of this state: spaces that have lost their function, time that has come to a standstill.

And perhaps we are still trapped in it - in an in-between world that knows neither past nor future, in a state that does not dissolve but moves on, indefinitely and endlessly.

Looking at Taleb's work, I am finally struck by how much it breaks away from the decadence and rigidity of the old systems of thought. The prey is meager, but their silence seems to focus on the question of whether an image holds the ability to generate strong emotions, bypassing the problem that feeling an emotion is not the same as understanding it, nor is it the same as taking action.

Finally, I would like to add that Taleb actually works in the fashion industry, part-time, but he stays in the background and doesn't take on the role of a photographer shooting campaigns, but rather in the background of a modeling agency making sure everything runs smoothly.

It's probably a fact worth mentioning, as he meets me here at Caprii in a state of strange openness and movement through the in-between. Taleb offers the sideways glance of a father of two working in the creative industry, in a simple and everyday form.

In a way, this banality can even be seen as revolutionary. I leave with the words of an important thinker, Rosa Luxemburg: Those who do not move do not feel their shackles.

Or perhaps even more aptly: it is the movement itself - walking through the unknown - that makes us realize how tied up we are.

Stanislava Kovalcikova