

Niklas Taleb
* 1986 in Munich
Lives and works in Essen

We talk on the phone and laugh a bit as well out of embarrassment and although and maybe also because there's not much to laugh about at the moment.

I remember that I was deeply touched when I first saw Niklas Taleb's works. First, I wasn't quite sure why. Then, I thought that it had something to do with relationships, or a/his being in relation with the world that his pictures convey so beautifully. The possibility of just that, all that. They talk about a surprisingly tender way to relate to this world, that I have somehow lost or don't have, cannot touch upon, or now.

I read an excerpt of *The Coming Insurrection*, a book by *The Invisible Committee*, that I had read years ago, in the recent issue of *Purple* magazine, online. It begins with: *Attach yourself to what you feel to be true. Begin there.* And later: *There's a truth beneath every gesture, every practice, every relationship, and every situation. We usually just avoid it, manage it, which produces the madness of so many in our era. In reality, everything involves everything else.* Taleb doesn't seem to *manage* truth. But he might help us see some of it. You may fail to see/be when nobody is watching.

Taleb plays on the side of reality. There's something uncomplicated in his pictures, a certain clarity, or maybe rather more access/acceptance. He is close to his subjects. He seems to know how to listen. Know how to be present. Which is not easy, not necessarily. Or because he knows how to be present, his pictures do as well. They seem innocent or maybe rather uncorrupted, free?. He seems to see what is actually there. He seems to be actually there.

Scheiße Alles brings together five pictures that were taken in, or show something of four different countries, Germany, Algeria, Vietnam, and France.

Gestures are on display in his photographs, looking is. The bodies we see here, a friend's and his little daughter, are turned-away from us, or rather turned towards something else, towards art or a big statue of a mouse. They are in relation with something via looking or touching. We see a hand pointing to the Zugspitze in a picture of a cemetery on a laptop, and a postcard of Boufarik in Algeria held in a picture on a laptop in another. The latter is mounted to a smaller picture that shows Taleb's friend in the Louvre looking at a painting. The only picture without a body is the night view out of a panorama window during a family holiday in Saigon. Even the mouse doesn't face us directly, only the laptops, parts of paintings, and the reflection of a lamp in nightly Saigon.

Humans are slow, and it may be important not to forget that. Taleb's pictures have time, display time, give us time. Having time is comforting. His works remind us of that. There is something silent and cautious in his photographs. And this although and because photography describes a relation between light and delay, which both don't make a good or tangible partner. It can be read as a figure of negativity or a medium for *Aufhebung*.

In *Scheiße Alles*, as often in Taleb's works, the colours are withdrawing. And the pictures are relatively dark. But there's light if indirect at their centres, or once a touch. A lamp mirrored in a panorama window in Saigon, the laptop display in a flat in two of the works, exhibition light reflected in a salad of a painting in the Louvre in Paris in another, and a child touching or half-hugging in passing a huge orange statue of a mouse in Cologne. Though all in all, there's not much light here.

Things are complicated. There are pictures in pictures, and there's a mix of outside and inside. Laptops showing pictures of the outside (a cemetery and Boufarik) on a table inside a flat, parts of paintings depicting an outside/landscape inside a museum, a view from a window of a city picturing as well the inside of an apartment, a lamp, and a frame. And this statue of a mouse, which is the mouse of *Geschichten mit der Maus*, the long-term German children's TV programme, outside on the street. There are hands without arms that point to something in a picture on a laptop, or holding a picture in a picture on a laptop, and an arm without fingers, the fingers hidden inside the jacket, that half-hug a statue of a mouse in passing, maybe just very briefly.

The pictures suggest a narrative, and they also don't, not necessarily, or they do, though not just one but a few, and without any distinct beginning or end. I don't think Taleb's work needs words. Despite his titles, of course. His pictures say or do things to me that only pictures can say or do. Something language doesn't capture. In a way, they figure as answers to questions that might not have been posed.

His frames, usually built by Taleb himself, leave tape at times, show their being produced (as art) hands-on. Also, how he has literally and very subtly framed the gallery itself in his last show at Lukas Hirsch hints there.

I do love what Taleb's works do. How they take their time. What they do to me. Even if, or because, they at times at least also make me feel more lost, barred (?) or lonelier still, confront me with my impossibility, with my desires towards the world, or for a position in it, who am I in it?, and/or a real relation, even if difficult, or disorganising with it. There's a rare calmness. Patience? Fewer questions. At least they appear to be closer to something (what?) that I wish I would be closer to, as well.

- Lisa Holzer