

ARTFORUM

DÜSSELDORF

Niklas Taleb

LUCAS HIRSCH

Birkenstrasse 92

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Niklas Taleb, *Reverse psychology*, 2020, archival pigment print, tissue wrapping paper, glass, tape, 28 3/8 x 20 7/8".

It has been weeks since most museums and galleries reopened in Germany. Still, it remains difficult to visit any public art space without pondering how permanently and irreversibly pandemic lockdowns have altered our ability to engage with the outside world. Rarely do such melancholic musings feel as appropriate, even productive, as in the photographer Niklas Taleb's snappy solo debut at Lucas Hirsch in Düsseldorf. In this show, the home confinement mandated by Covid-19 is made to rhyme with the domesticity occasioned by another happier condition: parenthood. Taleb produced the five works in this show earlier this year, all but one inside the home he shares with the artist Phung-Tien Pan and their toddler, Luna. Nonchalantly uncomposed snapshots—of a blurry orange shopping bag, of a family friend looking just past the camera—cultivate a sense of refined banality that Taleb balances out with handmade custom frames, executed as either refined tulipwood mounts or jankily taped-together glass sandwiches.

The show's undeniable anchors are two portraits of Luna. The small *Reverse psychology* (all works 2020) hanging across the room from a deadpan interior shot titled *Psychologie*, 2020, shows the little girl shooting a dissatisfied glare across her bowl of breakfast cereal. In the other, *Untitled*, she appears to have charged toward her portraitist quickly enough to transform into a looming, out-of-focus apparition filling half the frame. The show's Denglish title, "Dream again of better Generationenvertrag," extrapolates these moments of quotidian parent-child confrontation into something like an overarching theme. It cites a German phrase that translates as "generations contract" and is often used to bemoan the unfair burden placed on future generations by present-day political decisions. Taleb's show reminds us that what many of us have been experiencing over the past few months is really not about isolation and withdrawal from the world but about reengagement with those who, be it through attachment, necessity, or some combination thereof, have come to dwell together.

— Gregor Quack