

# REVIEWS



STOCKHOLM

## Tarik Kiswanson

Bonniers Konsthall

“Becoming,” a survey of Tarik Kiswanson’s new and recent work, immersed viewers in an ethereal, poetic realm. While these meditative works convey solitude, stasis, and detachment, they also—like life’s transitory stages—embody transformation. All of these considerations stem from Kiswanson’s background. As the Swedish-born child of Palestinian parents, who

traveled from Jerusalem to Jordan by way of North Africa and then relocated to Halmstad, Sweden, he grew up balancing at least two cultures and languages. In addition, Swedish immigration authorities changed the family’s surname, Al Kiswani, to Kiswanson, to give it a Swedish ring.

With this upbringing, likely punctuated by confusion, discontinuity, and

isolation, it is no wonder that Kiswanson’s works appear to float unmoored, not only expressing aimless drift, but also actualizing how time drags and underscoring the need to cling to personally significant objects and events. The “Recall” series (2020–23)—including *The Accident* (2023), which freezes the moment when a ballpoint pen fractures, and the blood-containing *In my blood* (2020)—confirms the importance of such touchstones, conserving and commemorating them in blocks of transparent resin.

Kiswanson, who is also a published poet, has explained that throughout his life, he has “used sculpture and writing to explore transitory and interstitial states of the human condition.” The first room of the exhibition confirmed the multifaceted nature of his practice, which also includes performance, drawing, sound, and video. The small collage *Homebound* (2020) conveys the promise of a new home through a telescopic view of a map of Halmstad from a ship battling a stormy sea. *The Window* (2023), on the other hand, presents an image of temporary confinement. While the anonymous hand pressed against frosted glass in this little drawing is quite realistic, its owner’s body is just a blur. These diminutive pieces contrasted sharply with the life-size *Cabinet* (2019), an austere, elevated space containing three metal filing cabinets, and the more ambiguous *Cradle* (2022)—the first of several

cocoon-like forms in the exhibition. Rising to the top of the gloomy crawl-space under *Cabinet*, this resident-in-waiting bides its time as the immigration process chugs tediously to its conclusion.

Further references to levitation appeared in the video installation *The Fall* (2020), as well as other works. Time clearly crawls for the boy detained after school; he decides to push his chair backward, but never experiences the thrill of crashing. The unconnected soundscape *Shatter* (2020) supplemented and completed *The Fall*’s silent and slow-motion projection, the sounds of objects breaking, muted Arabic music, and periodic tapping intimating the boy’s frame of mind.

*The Cradle* (2023), which seemed to rise freely in contrast to the semi-observed presence of the first cocoon, pins a crib to the ceiling. Like *Homeland*, this floating mode of transport echoes hopes and fears for the future. The source of *The Cradle*, a small color photograph installed in a nearby alcove, also formed its second part, revealing Kiswanson’s expectant mother leaning against his original crib. Three additional cocoons—all titled *Nest* (2020–21)—manifested a cryptic symbiosis, their skins matching the color and texture of the walls. Placed at various heights in different parts of the room, they formed a counterpoint to the floor-based “Recall” sculptures. Juxtaposing incubators and archive, the dichotomy situated viewers between the future and

THIS PAGE: JEAN-BAPTISTE BÉRANGER, COURTESY THE ARTIST AND CARL ERGEBALER / OPPOSITE, TOP: JEAN-BAPTISTE BÉRANGER, COURTESY BONNIERS KONSTHALL / OPPOSITE, BOTTOM: JEAN-BAPTISTE BÉRANGER, COURTESY THE ARTIST AND SFEIR-SEMLER GALLERY

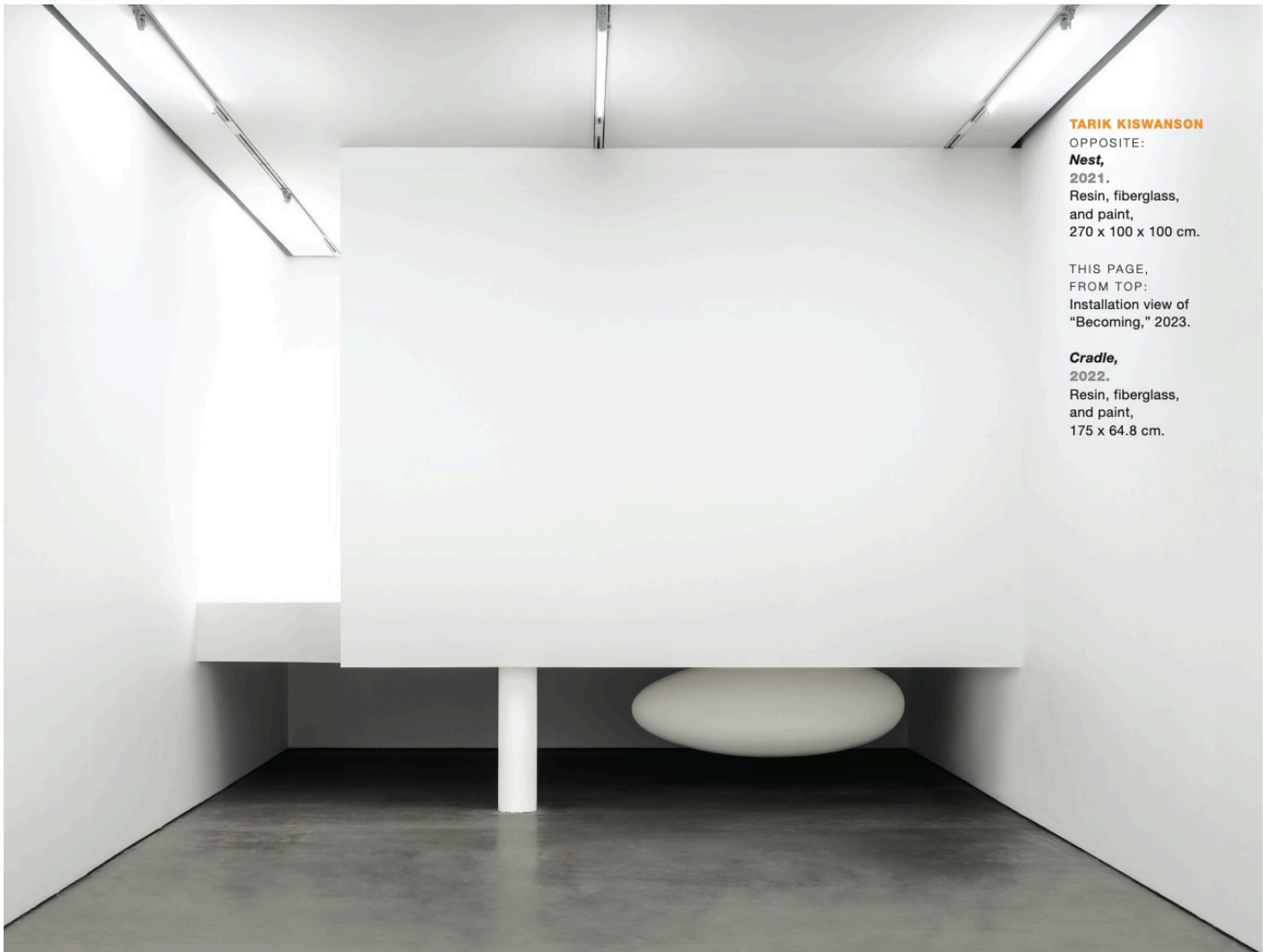
chapters drawn from the artist's past. A similar sense of intermediacy was produced by *Robe* (2016), a large and highly polished stainless-steel panel with cut and bent elements that mirrored the architecture and everything else in the space. Making viewers aware of two realities—the actual one and a fragmented, alternate version—the reflectivity also acts as a foil to thwart understanding of the panel's physical structure.

The processes of acculturation and coming to terms with one's complex history were perhaps most lucidly represented in *Passing Mother* (2022). Created by layering images of clothing—Kiswanson's hoodie, his mother's embroidered Palestinian dress, and a 17th-century Swedish bodice from the Hallands Konstmuseum's collection of textiles—the work links diverse ways of living. The fact that this ghostly image was made with a chest x-ray seems

especially significant, calling attention to the heart and humanity in general, reminding us that we all breathe the same air.

— JOHN GAYER

*"Tarik Kiswanson" will be on view at the Salzburger Kunstverein in Salzburg, Austria, through December 17, 2023. His work will also be featured in the Prix Marcel Duchamp 2023 exhibition at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, October 4, 2023—January 8, 2024.*



**TARIK KISWANSON**

OPPOSITE:  
**Nest,**  
2021.  
Resin, fiberglass,  
and paint,  
270 x 100 x 100 cm.

THIS PAGE,  
FROM TOP:  
Installation view of  
"Becoming," 2023.

**Cradle,**  
2022.  
Resin, fiberglass,  
and paint,  
175 x 64.8 cm.