

Özgür Kar: Interview related to the exhibition Optimised Fables about a Good Life

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Özgür Kar answers questions about a good life, well-being and the conflicts this topic causes.

The artist participates in the exhibition Optimised Fables about a Good Life (22/9/2022–1/1/2023) at PLATO.

There is probably no one who has no free time. The office is not a permanent retreat and Sundays have become an institution. In these glorious hours of leisure, therefore, everyone should in principle have the opportunity to wake up to real boredom. But even if people do not want to do anything, something happens to them: the world makes sure that they do not find themselves.” (Henri Lefebvre, Critique of Everyday Life, 2014). How do you navigate yourselves in so-called free time?

It feels like the only “free” time I have is when I’m with my dog. When I give all my focus to my dog, everything disappears. He lives every minute with love and content. I try to learn how to live like that from him. Otherwise, most of my time is spent on screens, working or worrying while doomscrolling.

Is your everyday routine and healthy living constantly chased by unhealthy rituals? If so, could you name some?

I think our contemporary life is full of unhealthy rituals. To be honest, I can’t name one healthy ritual. Because it seems like each ritual we somehow decided to be healthy for ourselves, ends up ruining something else. If not another human’s life, then the nature. I’m not a healthy person. I gave up. I have too much existential dread to be healthy.

American cultural theorist Lauren Berlant's book *Cruel Optimism* is about living within crisis, and about the destruction of our collective genres of what a 'life' is. Lauren Berlant's signature phrase 'cruel optimism' explains further: "when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing". Berlant argued, where the tools we depend on to achieve 'the good life' — a safety net, job security, the meritocracy, even 'durable intimacy' in our romantic lives — have degenerated into 'fantasies' that bear "less and less relation to how people can live". How the desire for a certain idea of "the good life of the 20th century, the postwar period" (or the belief that if one works hard enough or meets certain conditions, one can achieve it) often prevents people from taking the steps necessary to protect their own interests; to imagine a different possible future. Are you willing to reveal your personal unachievable fantasies of the good life?

The Earth without humans. That's my unachievable fantasy.

Do we choose our lifestyle, or are we chosen by it?

Did you choose to be born into this mess?

Nowadays privacy means staying offline. Is Screen Time something you can fully control?

I guess if you are privileged enough, you can stay offline. You don't need to be looking at screens all the time. Unfortunately, I'm not that privileged. I have to work. I'm almost always looking at a screen.

German art theorist Isabelle Graw (*In Another World: Notes, 2014-2017*) claims: "one of the conditions of neoliberalism is that the market encroaches on areas that were previously considered 'private' and protected from its evaluative logic — such as the body, health, social relations — making these areas also subject to economic optimization. Thus, even our most intimate lives — our hobbies, relationships, bodies — become essentially cost centers. If we fail to optimize them, we feel

disadvantaged. Thus well-being replaces morality, but far from energizing us, it creates its own tyranny. Indeed, when self-improvement becomes the goal, narcissism becomes a disease. Are you working effectively, making enough money, eating right, exercising enough? Are you optimizing yourself?”

I wish I could. Sometimes I wish I was a narcissist. Don't you?

Free activity stands quite consciously outside of 'ordinary' life as something 'unserious' but at the same time immersive, without temporal and spatial boundaries — and above all without the vision of profit. Since artistic work is often mistakenly perceived as a free activity, do you actually spend your free time doing something other than work?

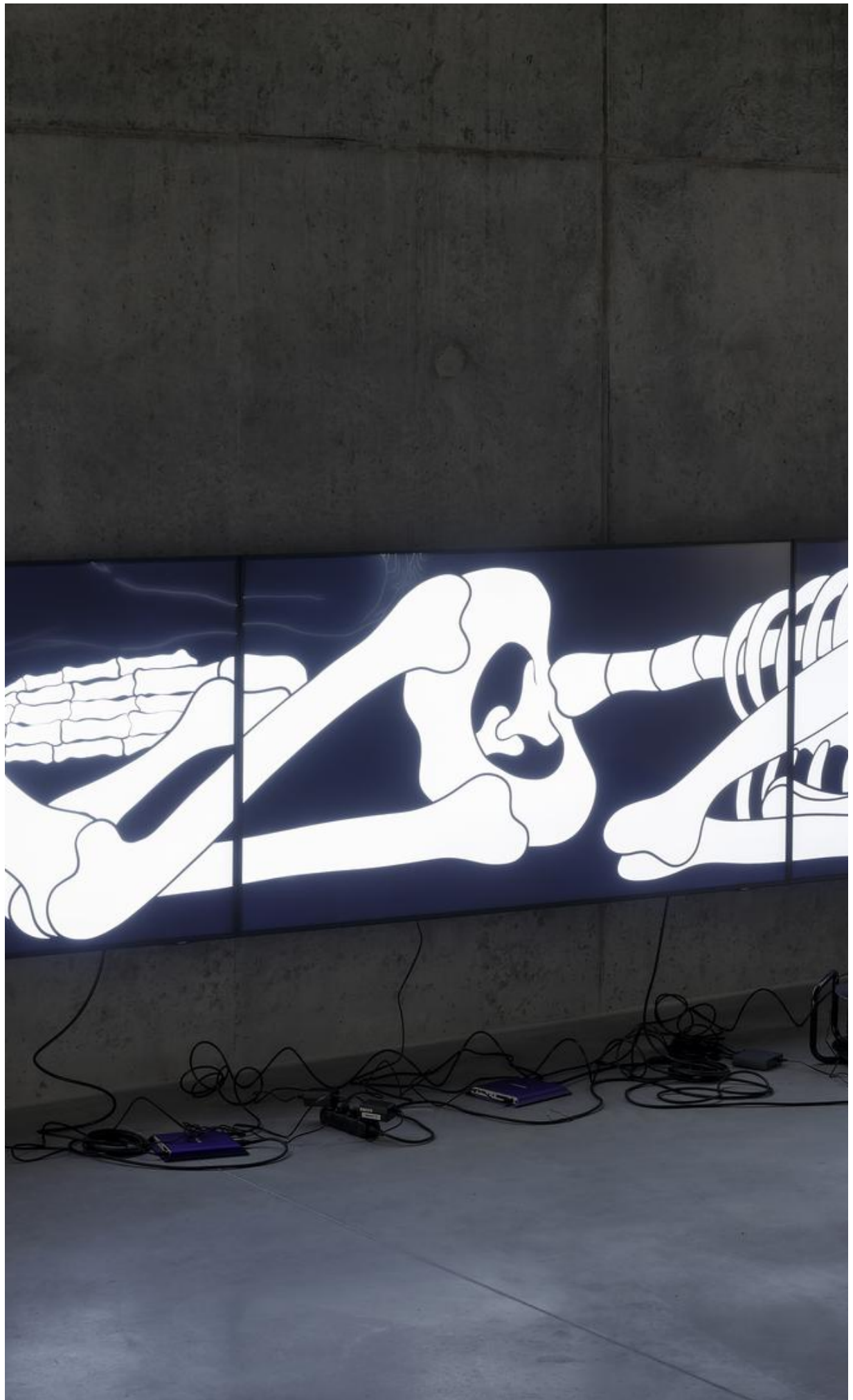
I also mistakenly perceive artistic work as free activity. Otherwise, I would feel like I'm working non-stop all the time. That would be very depressing and sad for me.

In a moment that we have all indicators that the Planet is going to collapse: Do you feel any conflict linked to your decisions that are intertwined with the production of artworks and environmental issues?

Yes, I can't produce anything that will be thrown in the trash after the show. That is why all my works are on screens or speakers. I rent equipment, and later on those equipments are being used elsewhere. Of course, the initial production of these equipments and their effect to the environment is another issue. But at least they can be used as a TV at someone's house afterwards. Covering exhibitions spaces with carpets, or fake walls that will be thrown in the landfill annoys me. This annoyance definitely shapes my practice. It's also silly, because if I really cared, I guess I shouldn't be making work to begin with. I guess we are all silly like that when it comes to environment. We just want to feel like we care and help, we do our part, but actually aren't we just fooling ourselves? I feel like at this point every moment we live is bad for the environment.

Wellbeing seems so self-evidently good that it escapes scrutiny, enabling it to slide from useful tool to expectation; of ourselves and of others. In fact, wellbeing has taken the place of morality. Instead of working to improve the world, we work to improve ourselves. What kind of wellbeing activities of the future can you predict?

Wait, I thought in order to improve the world, we need to start with ourselves first?



In his black and white animations, Özgür Kar (b. **1992**) breathes life into anthropomorphic characters struggling with existential questions. The bodies are seemingly trapped in the limited frame of giant flat screens while they are protected from the outside world. These lonely giants, existing in ingenious technological installations, slowly awaken between long pauses, and the muffled murmur of their melancholic monologues invites the audience to reflect, at least for a moment, on a theme that is now ubiquitous and fundamental to a good life—death. The Dutch-Turkish artist was an artist-in-residence at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten and studied at the Sandberg Institute in Amsterdam.

