

Sebastian Jefford: Interview related to the exhibition Optimised Fables about a Good Life

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Sebastian Jefford 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?

Graham Lambkin – The Currency Of Dreams

The tool of the exhibition, which we offer as a kind of supportive element, is the genre of the fables. It is a narrative that somewhat mechanically instructs and provides guidance for the good life, usually in an attempt to impose the truisms and virtues of a given social order on the reader. The identification of man with the animal and his apparent domination over it naturally offers a number of critical and unanswered questions. Who subjugates whom or what, who cares for whom, and above all who is defined here as an independent subject, are all subject to scrutiny. Could you empathize with some form of fable? Who or what would be its main protagonists?

Watch the Water – The Shadow Ring

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

I Like To Stay Home – R. Stevie Moore

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?

Zum Wohl – Cluster

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

Barok Main – Mica Levi and Oliver Coates

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

Motore Immobile – Giusto Pio

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?”

30,000 Monkeys – Lightning Bolt

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 Like Sitting – Ivor Cutler

Do you ever have a compulsive need to run away from your own work ethics, schemas, visuality, form, way of communicating, i.e. in general, what you have set as your own rules?

AB/7A – Throbbing Gristle

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?

The End of The World – Skeeter Davis

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?

Une Voix s'en va – Ghédalia Tazartès

I've attached the spotify playlist:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/1tkSCjnJKOc3fVJfC9PHbe?si=ec29822e28a24268>



In his work, Welsh artist Sebastian Jefford (b. 1990) explores reconstructed and revived ideas in which time, history and image are inextricably intertwined. Inevitably, the theme of artificiality emerges in his explorations. His large-scale rosettes installed on traditional gabled roofs refer to medieval paintings full of moralism, whose sediment envelops our contemporary encounters with everyday life. The surface of the soft foam wall relief works recalls the mortifying process of pressing flowers. The artist questions how our understanding of history is shaped and internalized by our seemingly symptomless “natural” linear thinking. The artist studied at the Royal Academy Schools in London, the University of the West of England in Bristol, and the Universität der Künste in Berlin.

