

Daniela & Linda Dostálkova, Marek Pokorný: Optimised Fables about a Good Life

Translation: Kateřina Danielová

Curatorial text to the exhibition Optimised Fables about a Good Life.

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PLATO, city gallery of contemporary art

Artists: Etel Adnan, Yalda Afsah, Krystian Truth Czaplicki, Oskar Dawicki, Habima Fuchs, Agata Ingarden, Sebastian Jefford, Christelle Kahla, Özgür Kar, Lars TCF Holdhus & Martin Kohout, Pavla Malinová, Zdenek Seydl, Franciszka Themerson, Jana Želibská

Curators: Daniela and Linda Dostálková, Marek Pokorný

What is a good life and how should it be led? A good life was something different at the end of the 19th century, when Ostrava's municipal slaughterhouse was established, than it is today, when a gallery of contemporary art has been built in its place and any kind of animal slaughtering has lost its legitimacy. Opinions vary, but instructions and techniques to improve our lives are ubiquitous. Examples proliferate and contradict each other. And we contradict ourselves in our daily routines and in our attempts to disrupt them.

Today, our desire to lead a good life and spend our time well is based on the assumption that nothing is static. Our only hope, therefore, is to keep discovering "little truths" that will help us when it comes to our preferences, tastes or behaviour. For the nuances of our actions are difficult to record or express in any way; they can be inferred retrospectively, but we can never know and describe them perfectly. The intent of the exhibition is therefore to capture the culture of the present and the recent past, to tentatively construct their critical history and to try to understand how we actually live. We are interested in what taste and politeness allow to "survive" and to be further

communicated as a message about our existence, as well as in what is at the edge of this “success”.

Optimized Fables about a Good Life are based on the assumption that where ethics discuss how one can do good in the world, welfare asks what is good for oneself. Where ethics assume giving and accepting, the exchange relationship and our well-being lead to increasing self-absorption. Our innermost lives – our hobbies, relationships and bodies – then essentially become cost centres. If we fail to optimize them, we feel disadvantaged. Well-being replaces morality. But far from energizing us, it creates its own tyranny.

Prosperity, both as a vision and a reality, creates a condition in which we no longer work or spend our leisure time in our own way, but instead, we play and perform. Leisure and the activities associated with it have been increasingly and consciously understood as something that takes place outside of “ordinary” life, as something “unserious” but which at the same time absorbs us; as something without temporal and spatial boundaries – and above all without the vision of profit. But, within a system that is by definition profit-oriented, do we really believe we are pursuing the well-being of the body and society in a completely selfless way? After all, lifestyles accelerate consumption, reproduce social inequalities and promote individualism en masse. Moreover, fantasising about lifestyles ironically becomes an anxious part of existence at the very moment when all the indications are that planet Earth is about to collapse. This turn, largely technological, is more than a lifestyle choice and less than a movement. And it also determines how and where, for example, culture is being created and displayed.

The exhibition explores art forms as social satire and how political uncertainty has influenced art in recent years. Using media such as video, installation, photography and painting, we show how satire can both ease the turbulent and divisive atmosphere of the contemporary world and at the same time disturbingly comment on it. In fact, the artists reveal the anxieties caused by obsessions with our modern need to lead a good life, and the fates of some of them may even serve us as examples and lessons. In a time of collective neuroses, we emphasize the importance of art and satire in making detailed analyses of power structures, for questioning social norms and visualizing political unrest; with art providing us, at the same time, some relief from the uncertainties of life.

Through associations, intuition and various ways of reading, an environment is created in which the question of a good life arises gradually and very

individually, as well as an answer to it as a reaction to the artworks exhibited. Seemingly omitted and neglected, but crucial to the understanding of what is happening in art today, the genre of the fable is a filter offered to the visitor as some kind of aid. The fable is a short literary work in which animals usually think and act like humans. Not only that, natural elements or individual body parts also act as subjects, and interspecies interaction occurs quite naturally. In Europe, where the fable is closely associated with the figure of Aesop and, in classical literature, with the literary bravura of Jean de La Fontaine, this genre has a borderline position. On the one hand, in the Aesopic tradition, it is an emancipatory and subversive genre, with a high degree of ambiguity; on the other hand, especially in the school or simplistic revivalist sense, it is a narrative that, in a somewhat mechanical way, instructs and provides guidelines for a good life, usually in an attempt to impose on the reader the truisms and virtues of a given social order.

The works of the artists through whom the theme of a good life is presented represent different generations, social and historical experience and intentions. Together with them, we enter the new venue of PLATO Gallery. Burdened with its former function, but with the hope that we'll be able to keep in the game all the paradoxes of a good life in the future.

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