

PLATO

Press release

21/9/2022, Ostrava, Czech Rep.

In the PLATO Gallery, you can try to figure out how to live a good life

After two years of being restricted by pandemic measures, how to deal with our lives? How to live well? And which instructions are the right ones? These questions are answered by the international exhibition *Optimised Fables about a Good Life* which opens on 21/9/2022 at 6 p.m. The exhibition is organized by the PLATO municipal gallery in Ostrava in the former slaughterhouse building. The works of fifteen artists of different generations offer visitors a space for an intense experience and reflection on the question: What is a good life and how should we live it?

Ostrava's municipal slaughterhouse was established in the 1880s and became one of the symbols of good life in the city, alongside other investments in infrastructure at that time, which guaranteed, for example, better sanitary conditions, supply, or connections to the world. 140 years later, when a contemporary art gallery moves into this building, the good life means something very different. The new PLATO seat is an illustration of this change as one of the current social topics is that killing animals for human use has lost its legitimacy.

Fifteen artists whose works were selected by the team of curators consisting of Daniela and Linda Dostálková and Marek Pokorný touch on various aspects of a good life. The composition of works is varied in place and time, the oldest works on display were created in the 1930s, the most recent were created specifically for the converted slaughterhouse. The exhibition aims to present approaches to good life from the perspective of several generations. It leads to reflection on the concept of good life in its contemporary and individual conditionality. Using exaggeration, grotesque, empathy, irony, and criticism.

"The filter we offer the visitor as a kind of aid is the genre of fable. Seemingly ignored and neglected, but crucial for understanding of what is happening in art today. A fable is a short literary work in which usually animals think and act like humans. But not only that, elements and individual body parts also act as subjects and interspecies interactions occur quite naturally," explains Marek Pokorný. He alludes to an attempt to deal with the original function of the new PLATO building through the exhibition. In Europe, a fable is firmly associated with the figure of Aesop, and in classical literature with the literary virtuosity of Jean de La Fontaine. On the one hand, it is a genre that is both emancipatory and subversive, with a great deal of ambiguity; on the other hand, especially in the school or simplistic revivalist sense, it is a narrative that somewhat mechanically provides instructions and guidelines for a

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good life, usually in an attempt to impose the virtues and values of a given social order on the reader.

Leisure time and the anxiety about spending it “properly” that we experience in the capitalist world play a significant role in the idea of a good life today. “*Opinions on its use vary, and instructions and techniques to improve our lives are ubiquitous. The examples multiply and contradict each other. And we contradict ourselves in our daily routines and in our attempts to disrupt them,*” add Daniela and Linda Dostálková reflecting the theme of the exhibition.

Individual works of art do not illustrate the general theme of a good life and the social pressure to accept a certain form of it. They rather mirror it from different perspectives using their own questions, formal treatment, or reference to the fate of artists who have often gone through difficult life situations. The curators of the exhibition therefore deliberately give the viewer considerable leeway in the interpretation of individual works of art.

The life story of the Polish-British artist Franciszka Themerson (1907–1988) was affected by World War II, but her joyful hyperbole and willingness to experiment not only with painting, but also with film images, illustrations and stage setting remained in her work. One of the exhibited artworks, the film fable *The Adventure of a Good Citizen* created with her husband Stefan in 1937 is now a classic piece of the world cinema. A set of masks designed by Themerson for the first performance of Alfred Jarry’s King Ubu in 1951 in the British Isles was loaned to the PLATO Gallery by the Museum of Art in Łódź. The mesmerizing film images of two videos – *Tourneur* and *Centaur* – by the German-Iranian artist Yalda Afsah (*1983) explore the ambiguity of the relationship between humans and animals, while the organic sculptures/objects by the Polish artist Agata Ingarden (*1994) can be seen as a commentary on the ambiguous relationship between nature and technology in an era when the development of our planet as a whole is for the first time being fundamentally influenced by human activities. The life-size animated characters of Özgür Kar (*1992) invite the viewer to reflect for at least a moment on a theme that is so ubiquitous today and so essential to a good life – death. Since the 1960s, Jana Želibská (*1941) has been exploring the interplay between the image and reality of the female body and the cultural conditioning of our ideas in her installations, photographs, and events. The works lent by the Slovak National Gallery and the artist present the Czech viewer for the first time in years with a representative sample of the work of one of the greatest figures of post-war art in Slovakia.

The exhibition is accompanied by a brochure with introductory texts by the curators, short interviews with the artists and a list of the exhibited artworks. As part of the exhibition and in collaboration with the Fra publishing house, PLATO has published a book of poetic reflections *Night* by the Lebanese painter and writer Etel Adnan (1925–2021). Thanks to Martin Pokorný’s translation, we have the first Czech excerpt from the literary legacy of an artist who was internationally acclaimed only in the last years of her life.

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The *Optimised Fables about a Good Life* exhibition runs from 22/9/2022 to 1/1/2023.

Artists:

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

Opening hours: Daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Wednesdays until 8 p.m., closed on Mondays

Admission (3 types according to the visitor's fondness for the institution):

You are a fan – CZK 1; You support it – CZK 30; ♥ – CZK 100

PLATO is a dynamic and open institution founded by the city of Ostrava, Czech Rep. Since 2016, it has been presenting current forms of contemporary (visual) art without building its own collection. Since September 2022, it has been located in the former slaughterhouse building and also runs PLATO Bauhaus.

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