

Shortest Way to Happiness

Curator: Noam Alon

Givon Art Forum

June 3 – August 27, 2022

Happiness, a supreme value that has directed daily life since antiquity, today embodies one of the foundations of neoliberalism. Since the beginning of the 20th century, happiness has become a kind of religion, whose believers hope to find an unattainable haven of peace, full of sunshine and self-fulfillment. Imagined as a utopian vision, the pursuit of happiness becomes the justification for all the difficulties imposed by the economic system. In supporting this system, psychology never blames our living conditions, but rather asks us to improve ourselves, to submit to reality as it is and adapt to it. Under the pretext of the false promise "that we can all be happy as long as we choose to be," we unwittingly agree to pursue the paradox of Sisyphus, living under exponential stress and exhaustion. When leaving paradise, God has already predicted to Man that he will eat his bread by the sweat of his brow. Ultra-capitalism adds to this fate the need for resilience in the face of problems and unforeseen events, flexibility with regard to the demands of the employer, as well as autonomy, efficiency and speed.¹ In spite of the perpetual anxiety and lack of confidence, we are expected to perform at our best at work, and to do so with a smile.

After so many years during which the consumer culture ruled our emotional lives (when it associated a certain product with a certain social image, for example), the dream that abundance could satisfy all our needs is proving to be false. Soon after the initial excitement of the purchase, we come back to the starting point and realize that all the packages are empty. For this reason, the discourse on happiness seems to have given way to the discourse on mental balance. When the joy of acquisition proves to be

obsolete, we still feel obliged to take care of our mental stability in order to be able to return to work the next day. This mental maintenance takes various forms of escape, among which the most convincing would be borrowed from non-western cultures. The New Age, the new era of spiritual doctrines condensed in books of personal development, in magic formulas or in merchandise of multiple colors.² Thus meditation, originally practiced to cancel any attempt to reflect on the source of these thoughts. The various breathing exercises have also become a way to stabilize a regular rhythm and avoid any mental collapse. Yoga again is accompanied by affirmations whose purpose is to maintain narcissism and competition ("I move confidently towards my power", "I am a money magnet" or simply "I enjoy life?"). In general, all these techniques, not devoid of Western logic based on individualism, separate us and prevent us from reflecting collectively on the failure of the capitalist paradigm.

The artists presented in this exhibition live and work in the two most expensive cities in the world in the year 2021 – Tel Aviv and Paris. The selected works each provide a different perspective on a life that is so economically burdened that it allows only one mode of operation – akin to a never-ending race. Shortest Way to Happiness seeks to highlight the fact that despite the ambition to succeed at all costs, the body and mind are often on the verge of a total implosion, and wish to indulge in fatigue, anxiety or idleness. The replacement of the fake representation of a perfect life by the attempt to make room for depression or rage is an opportunity for cessation of activity, thereby destabilizing the dominant order. Despite the economic danger involved, it is only in this pause that we can realize the political potential of unproductivity. The abundance of the 21st century does not put us at rest in the struggle for survival: would the emancipation of weakness allow us to question the law of the strongest? And if our aspirations do not lead us to happiness or mental balance, what reason for existence remains? Indeed, the question that arises is the following: what alternative ways of life

can we imagine to create a reality in which happiness would not be at the service of a system but would simply respond to our intimate desires?

1. Eva Illouz & Edgar Cabanas, Happycracy: How the Industry of Happiness controls our lives. Polity Press, 2018
2. J.G. Ballard, The “Future of the Future” in A User’s Guide to the Millennium: Essays and Reviews, Picador, 1997
3. Yoga with Kassandra, Yin Yoga & Affirmations for Success – 30 min Yin Yoga Full Class, YouTube, 2019