

Time for Joy

Katarína Poliačiková

Curator: Markus Waitschacher
Exhibition design: Maroš Greš

*“Das Glück is a Vogerl” (“Happiness is a little bird”) is the title of a famous Viennese song, written by Alexander von Biczo and set to music by Karl Kratzl sometime more than a **hundred** years ago. The refrain goes:*

“Happiness is a little bird, sweet but shy.

It’s hard to catch, yet quick to fly away.

The heart is its cage, and if you don’t watch it carefully, suddenly you’ll have neither happiness nor peace.”

Happiness, then, is a little bird. If we don’t hold on to it, it flies away; squeeze it too tightly and it dies. But what exactly does this bird look like? And how can we know whether it really is the one? And not simply another creature disguised with wings?

*For some time now, Katarína Poliačiková has been collecting such little birds from different people. The **Ministry of Small Pleasures**, which she founded, has made it its task to collect and share moments of joy. The collection gathered so far is remarkable—not only, but also, because as a ministry it operates both very locally and very internationally.*

Have you ever invented something small?

*The happiness described in the Viennese song is **shy** and difficult to grasp. Is this what makes happiness special? That it often arrives unnoticed? That it is difficult to see and to comprehend? Difficult to describe? Sometimes simply too small?*

*Of course there is also the grand, obvious happiness. That is what Bollywood or Hollywood are for. Here, however, we want to focus on the many small ones. They can be extremely strange and then again extremely banal. In fact, many people—no matter how different they may be—meet each other in similar small moments of happiness. No matter what political **turmoil** we may be exposed to, small joys concern us all.*

In the main image of the exhibition we see a photograph that is almost destroyed. Possibly from Portugal, and perhaps more than a hundred years old. We see children and elegant clothing. We see what appears to be family happiness and the great joy over a small bouquet of flowers. But we also see a serious, determined boy steering the boat, the only one looking directly into the camera. So many emotions are captured here. So fragile, carried across decades. Almost torn, flaking, faded... through how many hands has this photograph—this happiness—already passed? And who tried to hold on to it back then?

What is a great pleasure for you?

Reading the pleasures of a stranger becomes a new pleasure of one’s own. It is less a form of social voyeurism and more a feeling of being held by the knowledge that somewhere in this dark and strange world there is another person who feels similarly to oneself.

A stranger who can sense the nuances of the world much as we do. This special relationship that suddenly emerges with an unknown person is part of the great pleasure Katarína offers us. Chris Kraus, also quoted by Katarína, writes: *“getting larger cause you’re entering another person’s language, cadence, heart and mind.”* (Chris Kraus, *I Love Dick*)

With whom do you like to share a pleasure?

Do we live in joyful times at all? Well, at least we are living. The experience of pleasure and pain surely belongs to the fundamental experiences of being human. We all share one pleasure or another.

On 21 February 1971, Susan Sontag wrote in her diary a longer list of things she liked. The first four items—“Fires, Venice, Tequila, Sunset”—inspired Katarína several years ago to create a book that combined photographs and short essays, shaped by her attentive observation and openness to **serendipity**. For her, it became the beginning of a reflection on small pleasures. It also confirmed the importance of appreciating the contributions of others and bringing them into the centre of one’s own work, thereby sharing the artistic process, at least to some degree.

During the exhibition, Katarína will occasionally be present in person, collecting and sharing pleasures from visitors.

What pleasure do you associate with Trnava?

Perhaps there are human pleasures that have accompanied us since the time when we once sat together around the first campfire, exchanging stories. Perhaps stories of war have survived in collective memory—but the small pleasures have also been passed along. They live on in the humanity of everyday life. And not in war.

The exhibition in Trnava connects sitting in a circle with storytelling.

It is a space for sharing. A space for becoming human.

Co-designed by Maroš Greš, the setting evokes very indefinite feelings of past times.

There are objects from far, very far back—stones of different ages shaped by the flow of the Danube or scorched by fire. At the same time there are garden chairs, with which we probably all associate very different ideas of the past and perhaps a fragment of home. Does a small circle close here with the first image of the exhibition? Are we on a boat trip into the unknown? What happiness do we embrace? Which little bird might be ours? Happiness is kind, but shy.

Sometimes, however, it also deserves to be caught—and shared.

I will end with a small pleasure from our dear friend

Heiderose:

Changing something in the usual routines. For example, turning the light switch with your little finger instead of your index finger.

Think only for yourself about a pleasure that means something to you.

Share it with no one.

Katarína Poliačiková

is a visual artist and writer based in Slovakia. She completed her studies at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava. Her practice weaves together photography, video, text, and performance, often stemming from personal experience or a fascination with everyday reality. Drawn to questions of time and memory, she sees storytelling as one of the oldest and most meaningful ways to connect—with others, with the land, and with ourselves. For her, art is a vessel for cultivating deep attention, curiosity, and empathy.

Katarína's work has been exhibited across Europe and in New York, and she has participated in residencies in Europe, the U.S., and Japan. In 2019, she presented her solo exhibition *Souvenirs of Fire* at the Museum of Natural History and Science in Lisbon. Since 2019, she has been publishing *SOFT BOILED*, a monthly newsletter of personal essays on experiencing the world with slow curiosity. Her recent publication is *Catalogue of Endings – How to End Things*, a collection co-written with Martin Jenča.

In 2024, Katarína began developing the *Ministry of Small Pleasures*, an ongoing project and a lively platform that has taken on various forms, including a book, workshops, a pop-up office, and an exhibition that is now presented at the Jan Koniarek Gallery.

Markus Waitschacher

is an art mediator, curator, and cultural anthropologist based in Graz, Austria. He works in a host of contexts, most of them site-specific and site-sensitive. The main object of inquiry in his curatorial practice is the magnificent lure of the local, its curiosities and legends, its human and non-human relationships and the entanglements and interconnections of all this to and with a larger historical context. The larger projects he has curated include shows at Kunstverein Kärnten, bazament gallery, Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes Visuales, viennacontemporary, Le Cube – independent art room, haaaauch-quer, Kunstverein < rotor >, Art Sonje Center, and ZETA Galeria, among others. At present, Markus works as an art educator at the Universalmuseum Joanneum. He co-edits the annual publication covering the art collection of the municipality Graz, where he engages artists in rethinking new and alternative forms of presenting collections. Since 2021, Markus has been serving as the main curator for visual arts at Forum Stadtpark (Graz).
