

Press Release

## **STEFAN SAGMEISTER: The Happy Show**

Press Preview	Tuesday, 27 October 2015, 10:30 a.m.
Opening	Tuesday, 27 October 2015, 7 p.m.
Exhibition Venue	MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna
Exhibition Dates	28 October 2015 – 28 March 2016
Opening Hours	Tue 10 a.m.–10 p.m., Wed–Sun 10 a.m.–6 p.m. Free admission on Tuesdays from 6–10 p.m.

What makes us happy or at least happier? Stefan Sagmeister, the “grand master of graphic design,” embarked on intensive research into personal happiness, omitting no possible means in the process. Meditation, cognitive therapy, mood-altering drugs—Sagmeister tested everything that promised happiness on his own body and then translated his experiments into the exhibition *The Happy Show*, which has now arrived in Vienna after previously being on display in North America and Paris. From 28 October 2015 to 28 March 2016, *STEFAN SAGMEISTER: The Happy Show* will pervade the MAK and, with the aid of multimedia, it will be possible for visitors to participate in Stefan Sagmeister’s captivating search for happiness.

For more than ten years, the charismatic graphic designer concentrated on happiness and the lightness of being. Sagmeister (born in 1962 in Bregenz, Austria, lives and works in New York), who closes his New York studio every seven years for some time out, planned his *Happy Show* during his last sabbatical in 2009. With videos, prints, infographics, and sculptures, the inspiring show documents Sagmeister’s intensive experiments on himself and also involves visitors in his happiness research with interactive installations, some of which were made especially for the exhibition.

Drenched in a highly symbolic smiley-yellow, interventions in the MAK Columned Main Hall, the MAK Permanent Collection Contemporary Art, the MAK DESIGN LAB, the MAK GALLERY, as well as less prominent areas of the MAK such as the staircases, corridors, and elevators, provide insights into Sagmeister’s mind and experiences of happiness.



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Is it possible to train the mind to be happy? Or at least happier? Can the mind be trained in the same way as the body? These are only some of the core questions in the show, which can be answered with an unequivocal “yes.” *The Happy Show* demonstrates quite clearly that there are things we can do that will make us happier. It all depends on our attitude, our habits, and our behavior, according to one of Sagmeister’s messages. However, what we expect will make us happier will not always do so. “I normally find definitions rather boring. But happiness is such a huge topic that it is perhaps worth a try,” is Sagmeister’s comment on his own happiness research.

The MAK exhibition is also a stage for Sagmeister’s design creativity. In handwritten commentaries on walls, railings, and in the bathrooms of the museum, he explains his ideas and reasons for the projects on display. Social scientific data by the psychologists Daniel Gilbert, Steven Pinker, and Jonathan Haidt, the anthropologist Donald Symons, and important historians, who position his experiments in a broader context, supplement his personal notes.

Sagmeister addresses a colorful panoply of parameters for happiness, such as religion, money, marriage, sex, activities like surfing on the internet or reading the newspaper, as well as the relation between the number of sexual partners and levels of satisfaction. Is there a moral reason to have children, and does having children make you happier? Many of the statements made in the exhibition are surprising: for example, children do not increase happiness levels, but marriage does. There is an ideal income level, yet money does not make people happier who earn salaries of roughly US\$ 75,000 to US\$ 80,000.

The search for a symbol for happiness will be a collective affair: visitors can push buttons, draw lucky symbols on small strips of paper, draw cards with tasks, and are invited to withdraw money from an ATM while donating 20 cents. A display with silver plates offers visitors Sagmeister’s favorite candies. At the installation *How happy are you?* visitors can answer with their own “level of happiness” on a scale from 1 to 10 by taking a piece of chewing gum from the respective place. In turn, this action will visualize the collective happiness level of the visitors to the exhibition.

Activities as a path to increased happiness is one of the key messages of *The Happy Show*. Many exhibits challenge visitors to do more than simply observe passively. An interactive bicycle fuels the neon signs *Seek Discomfort* and *Actually Doing Things I Set Out to Do Increases My Overall Level of Satisfaction*. As soon as the pedaling stops, the light in the writing goes out. The installation *Being Not Truthful* enables visitors’ movements to manipulate a spider’s web to the point of tearing it—making them entirely forget how they are ridiculously contorting their bodies to do so—in



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public. As soon as the movement stops, the caption “Being not truthful works against me” appears. The work is an example of Sagmeister’s subtle wit and humor, and furthermore a point on the list in his diary, which he published in 2008 under the title *Things I have learned in my life so far*.

Two huge, inflatable, fierce apes marked “Everybody Thinks They Are Always Right” urge self-reflection. In the eyes of Sagmeister, apes symbolize prejudices and self-aggrandizement, and hence traits that Sagmeister sees as responsible for all of humanity’s everyday as well as global conflicts. A direct invitation to laugh is provided by the animation *Step Up to It*, typography made of lumps of sugar, the effect of which is only revealed to happy people: the installation only transforms itself from white into cheerful, light colors for people who are laughing.

The MAK already dedicated a solo exhibition to the graphic designer in 2002 with *Stefan Sagmeister. Handarbeit*. With his characteristic design, which combines typography and imagery in a striking, fresh, ambitious, and unsettling way, Sagmeister has profoundly influenced design culture over recent decades. After completing his degree at the University of Applied Arts Vienna, Sagmeister went to the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn in 1986 on a two-year Fulbright scholarship. In 1992 he answered the call of renowned commercial designer Leo Burnett to join his agency office in Hong Kong. In 1993 he moved to Tibor Kalman’s office in New York; when it closed after only a few months, he founded his own studio, Sagmeister Inc., in Manhattan. Among Sagmeister’s most well-known works are his covers for albums by the Talking Heads, Lou Reed, OK Go, and The Rolling Stones, as well as campaigns for companies like HBO and Levi’s, which have entered the public consciousness. He has won numerous awards, including two Grammys for album designs. Designer Jessica Walsh has been partner of their joint studio Sagmeister & Walsh since 2012.

*STEFAN SAGMEISTER: The Happy Show* is organized by the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania by former ICA Director Claudia Gould, currently Helen Goldsmith Menschel Director, The Jewish Museum, New York. The exhibition was coordinated at the ICA by Associate Curator Anthony Elms. Stefan Sagmeister extends his special thanks to Jessica Walsh and the entire team at Sagmeister Inc.; Ben Wolf, Ben Nabors, and Hillman Curtis from *The Happy Film*; and Kevin O’Callahan.

Primary sponsorship is provided by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage. Additional support provided by The Chodorow Exhibition Initiative Fund; The Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation; The Dietrich Foundation Inc.; the Overseers Board for the Institute of Contemporary Art; friends and members of the ICA and the University of

Pennsylvania (1 March 2014).

Press photos are available for download at [MAK.at/press](http://MAK.at/press).

The exhibition in Vienna is made possible by the Sponsoring *VALUE* program of Erste Bank.



Press Data Sheet

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Curator	Kathrin Pokorny-Nagel, Head of the MAK Library and Works on Paper Collection/Archive
MAK Admission	€ 9.90/Reduced € 7.50/Family Ticket € 13 Free admission for children and teens up to 19
	Erste Bank customers can enjoy discounted admission (€ 7 instead of € 9.90) to the exhibition by presenting a Erste Bank BankCard at the ticket desk.
Curator-guided Tour	Thu, 29 Oct 2015, 5 p.m., with Kathrin Pokorny-Nagel
Expert-guided Tour	Tue, 10 Nov 2015, 7 p.m., with Sonia Laszlo, author and happiness researcher
Guided Tours	Saturdays, 3 p.m.
MAK4FAMILY	Sat, 28 Nov 2015, 2–5 p.m.
MINI MAK	Sun, 15 Nov 2015, 11 a.m.: Happy Show Sun, 6 Dec, 13 Dec, and 20 Dec 2015, 2–5 p.m.: Happy Advent Sun, 27 Mar 2016, 11 a.m.: Happy Easter
MAK Press and PR	Judith Anna Schwarz-Jungmann (Head) Sandra Hell-Ghignone Veronika Träger Lara Steinhäuser T +43 1 711 36-233, -229, -212 F +43 1 711 36-227 presse@MAK.at, www.MAK.at Vienna, 27 October 2015