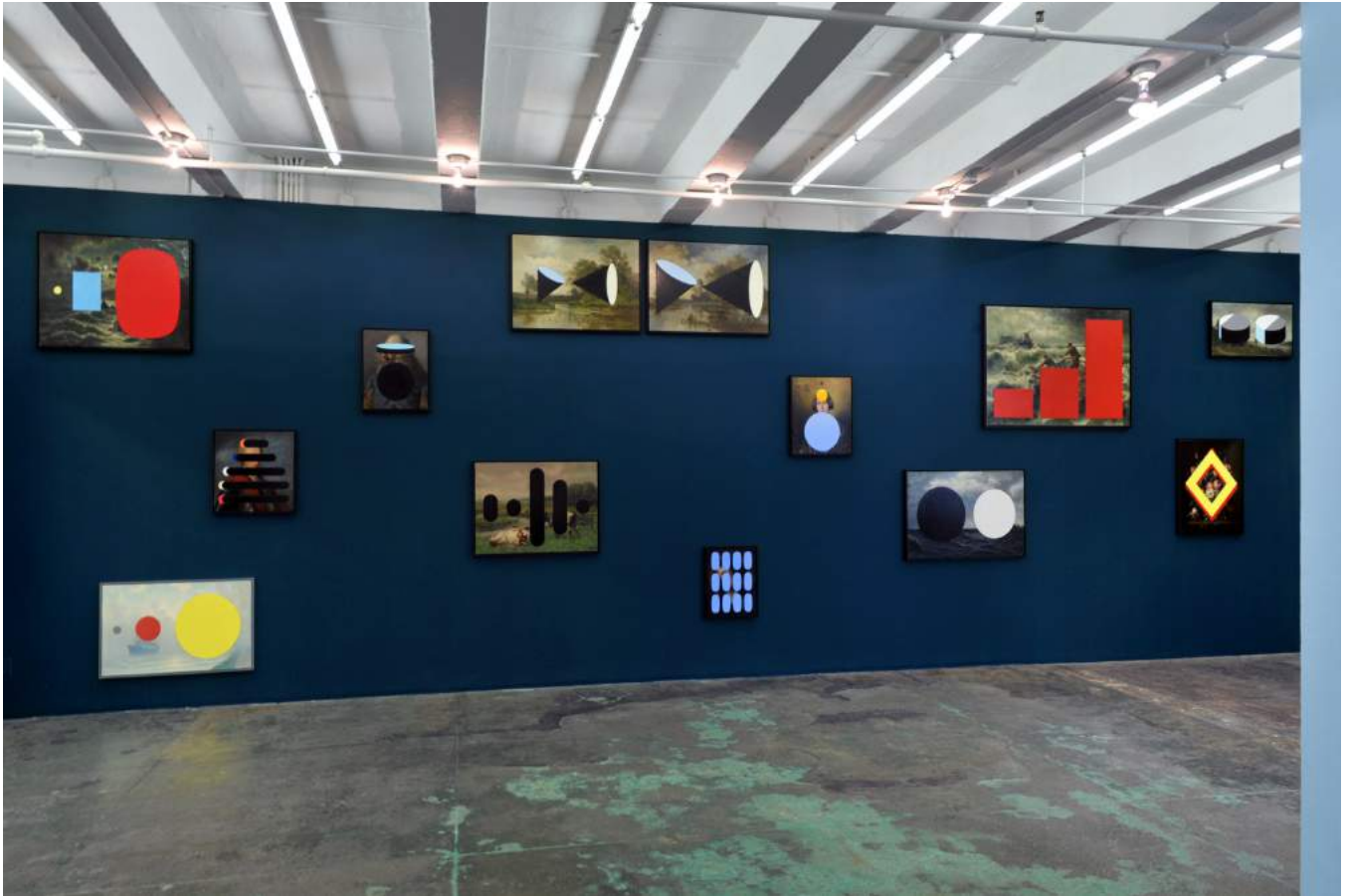


Thomas Erben Gallery



**Stefan Sagmeister**

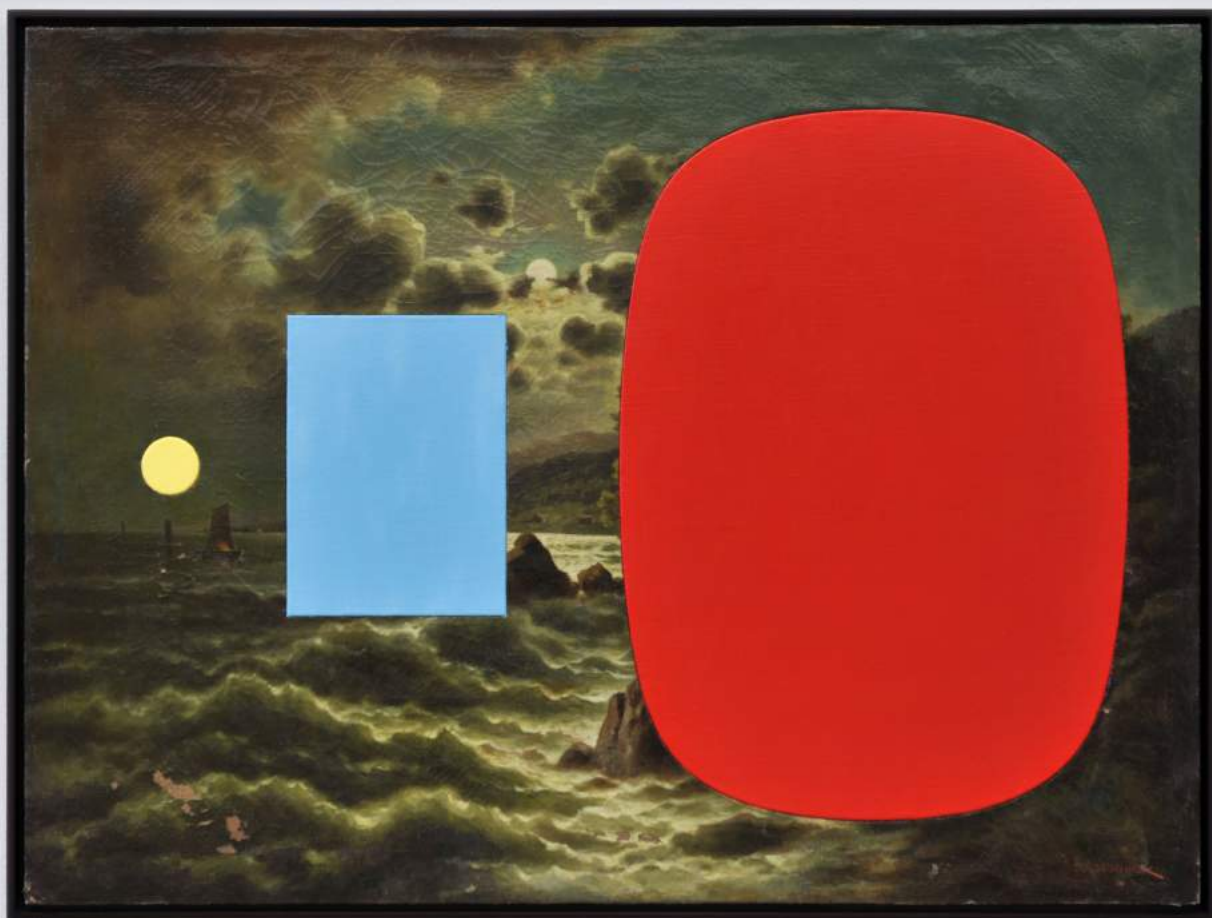
*Beautiful Numbers*  
April, 10 - May 15, 2021



Installation view, west wall

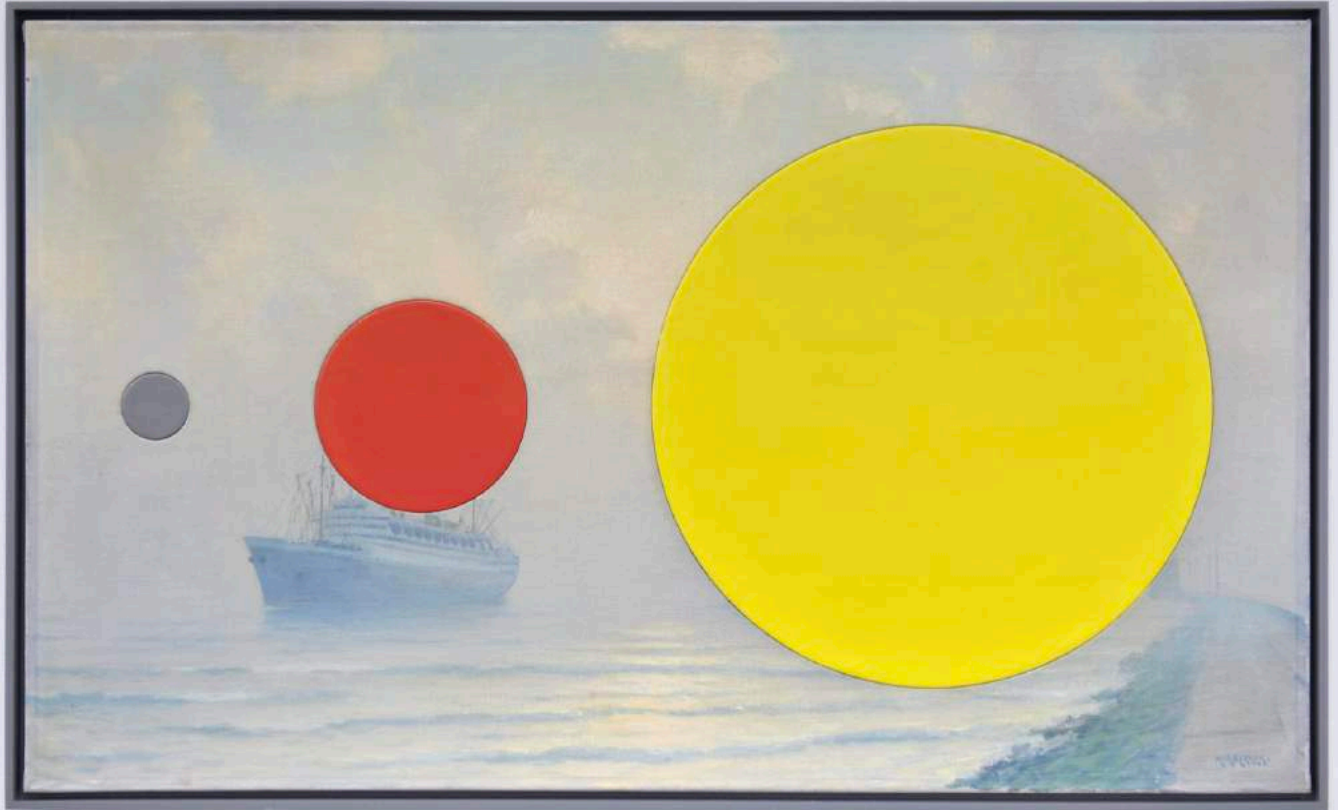
***Beautiful Numbers***, Sagmeister's new body of work, was conceived in 2020 as the daily lived experience – and short term media – reflected a world seemingly out of control, with democracy in peril, ubiquitous conflicts and an overall outlook of doom. Instead of focusing on attention catching daily headlines, the long term perspective – the only way making sense – shows actual improvement: there is less war, hunger and illiteracy; fewer people die in natural disasters, more people live in democracies, an increased number of women serve on Parliaments and life expectancy has increased.

Sagmeister has visualized data collected over 100 years and transformed these graphs into inlaid 19th Century genre paintings, embroidered canvases, lenticular prints and hand painted water glasses – all of which will be for the first time on display at the gallery.



*Carbon I (1800/2020), 2021.*  
19th Century oil on canvas mounted on masonite with inlays, 39 3/8 x 29 1/8 in.

"Cumulative emissions of CO2 into the atmosphere:  
yellow - China,  
light blue - USA,  
red - Europe."



*Oil (1970/2010), 2021.*  
19th Century oil on canvas, mounted on masonite with inlays, 39 3/8 x 23 5/8 in.

"Gray dot - large oil spills, 2010;  
red dot - large oil spills, 1990;  
and yellow dot - large oil spills, 1970."





*Democracy I (1945/2015), 2021.*

19th Century oil on canvas, mounted on masonite with inlays, 21 1/4 x 21 5/8 in.

"Number of democracies worldwide:  
1945 - 30, 1965 - 40, 1985 - 60, 2005 - 80, and 2015 - 85."



*Life (1800/2020)*, 2021.  
19th Century oil on canvas, mounted on masonite with inlays, 18 1/4 x 22 1/4 in.  
"Global life expectancy, average:  
1800 - 29 years, 2020 - 71 years, which is 2.5 times as long."

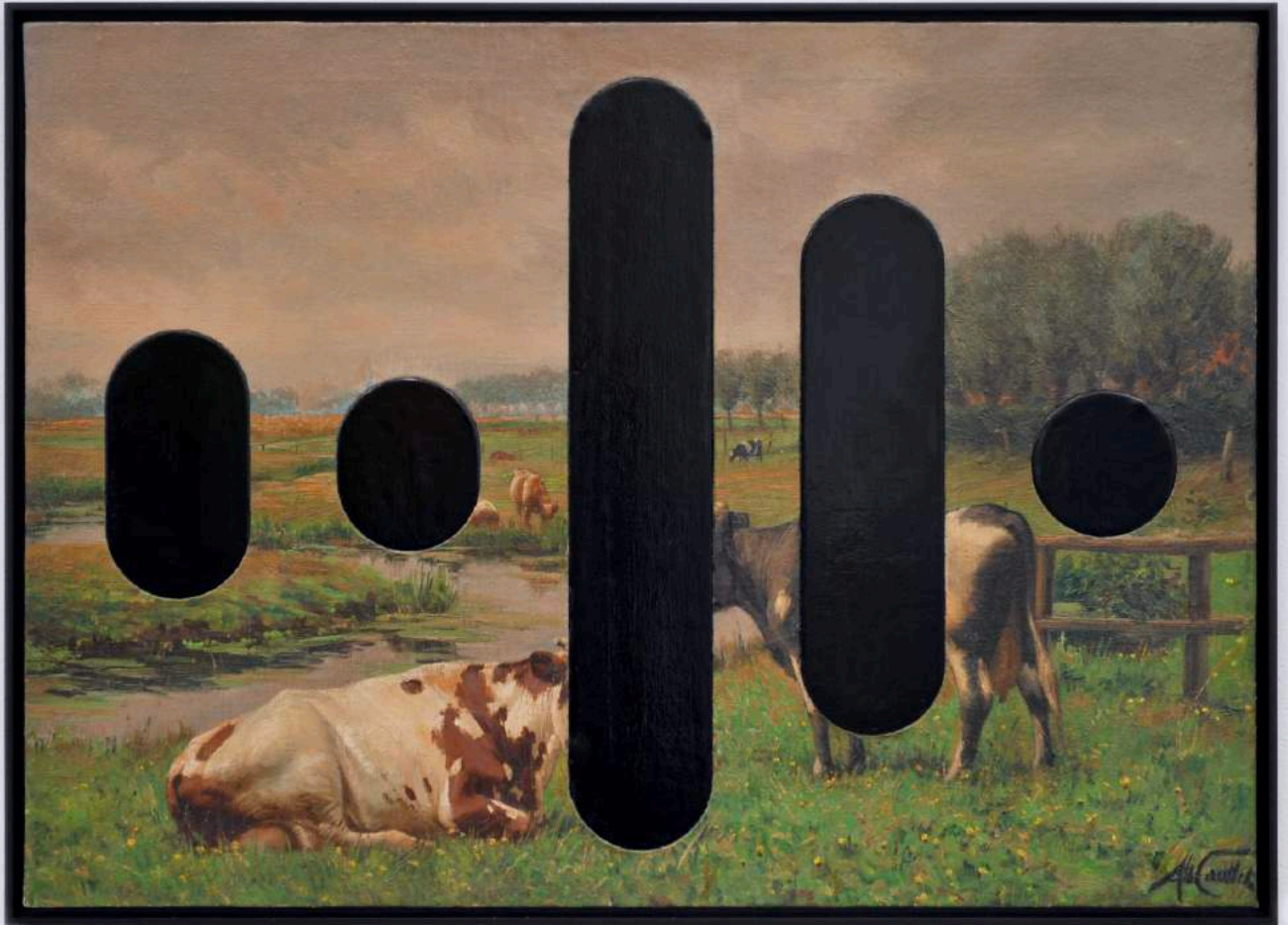


Installation view, west wall with Stefan Sagmeister.

**Stefan Sagmeister** is a New York based designer (b. 1962, Bregenz, Austria) whose philosophically driven, unconventional approach to his profession – and often status quo upending inventiveness paired with masterful execution – has earned him international recognition with major institutions exhibiting his work.

As a testimony to the extent to which Sagmeister is willing to question his own assumptions, he used himself as the investigator and the investigated in *The Happy Film* (2016) which is about one artist's search for bliss and the quagmires it led to. It is an intensely personal search in which he sets up three methods for himself to find happiness through meditation, therapy and psychopharmaca, grading himself along the way.



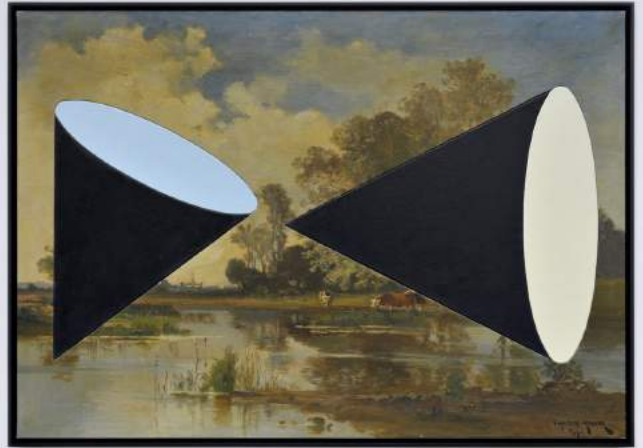
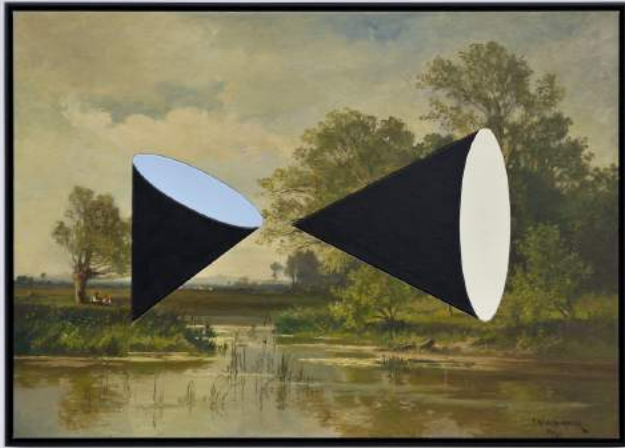


*Carbon II*, 2021.

19th Century oil on canvas, mounted on masonite with inlays, 36 1/2 x 26 in.

"Carbon footprint of protein-rich foods from left to right: cheese - 85kg CO<sub>2</sub> per 1kg of protein, chicken - 43kg, beef - 250kg, lamb - 200kg, and farmed fish - 35kg."

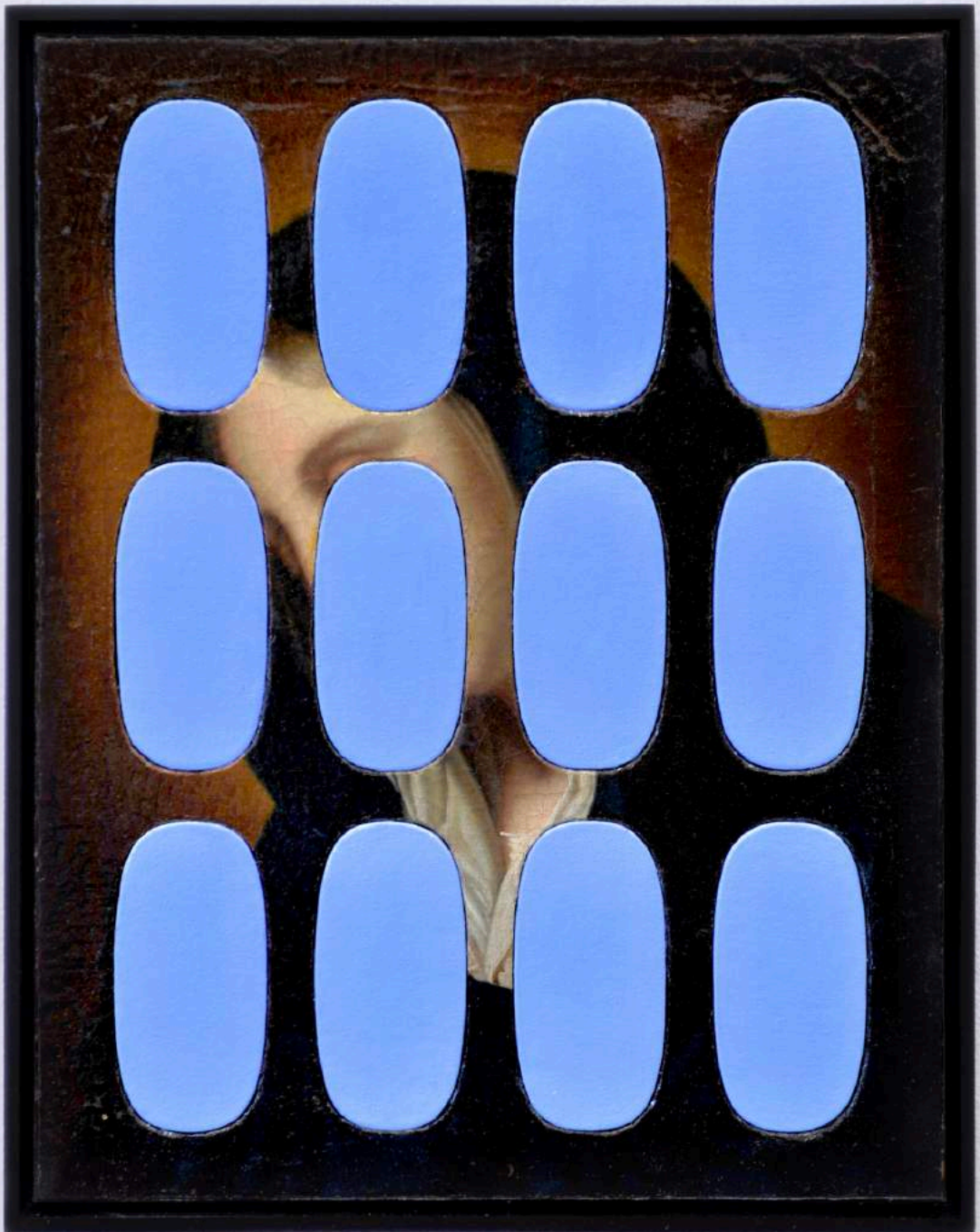




*Water (1990/2015), 2021.*

19th Century oil on canvas, mounted on masonite with inlays, 38 1/2 x 27 in.

"Share of people with water from protected sources: 1990 - 75% , 1998 - 81%, 2006 - 86%, and 2015 - 90%."



*Suicide I (1950/2005)*, 2021.

19th Century oil on canvas, mounted on masonite with inlays, 16 x 20 1/5 in.

"Suicide rate: USA - 1950, 1955, 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000, and 2005."



*Woman II (1900/2020), 2021.*

19th Century oil on canvas, mounted on masonite with inlays, 20 1/16 x 23 5/8 in.

"First female members of Parliament: 1900 - 2020."

Q. What was the impetus behind the project?

A. This started when I was invited to be a designer in residence at the American Academy in Rome.

I was working out of a gorgeous studio and participated in the fantastic lunches and dinners with artists, writers, architects and archeologists in the courtyard. These were quite salon-like meals with ever-changing pairings of table mates. One evening I wound up next to a very sharp lawyer, who was studying at the European court: We got to talk politics and he told me that what we are now experiencing in Hungary, Poland and Turkey, but also in Brazil and the US is really the end of liberal democracy.

So after dinner I looked it up! When did modern democracy start? How did it do over the past two centuries?

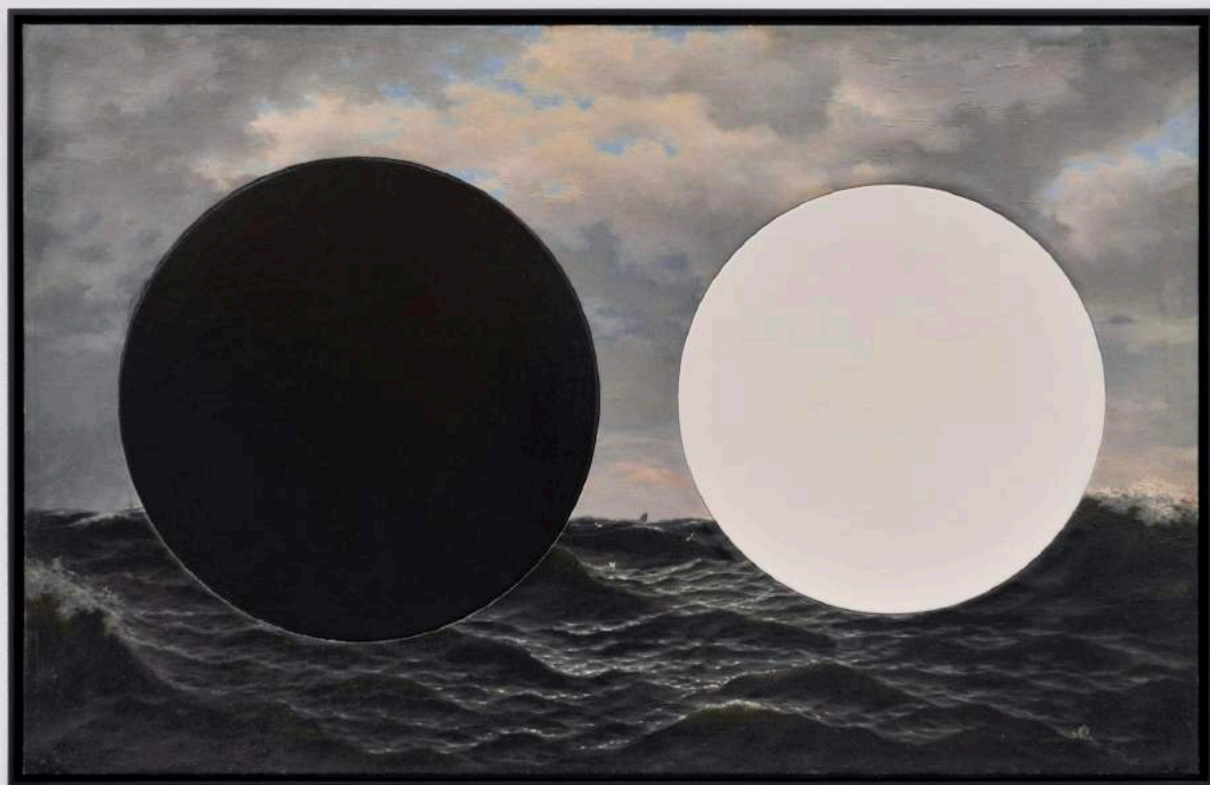
Where are we now? Well, in 1821, arguably only a single democracy existed, the United States. In 1921, there were already 18 democratic countries, following the first World War. In 2021 we now have 96 democratic countries, for the first time in human history more than half of the world population lives in a democracy, so he COULD NOT HAVE BEEN MORE WRONG: Not only are we not seeing the end of liberal democracy, we are living in the absolute golden age of liberal democracy.

How is it possible, that a highly educated person could get the world he lives in so completely wrong? This seemed an interesting question to spend more time on.





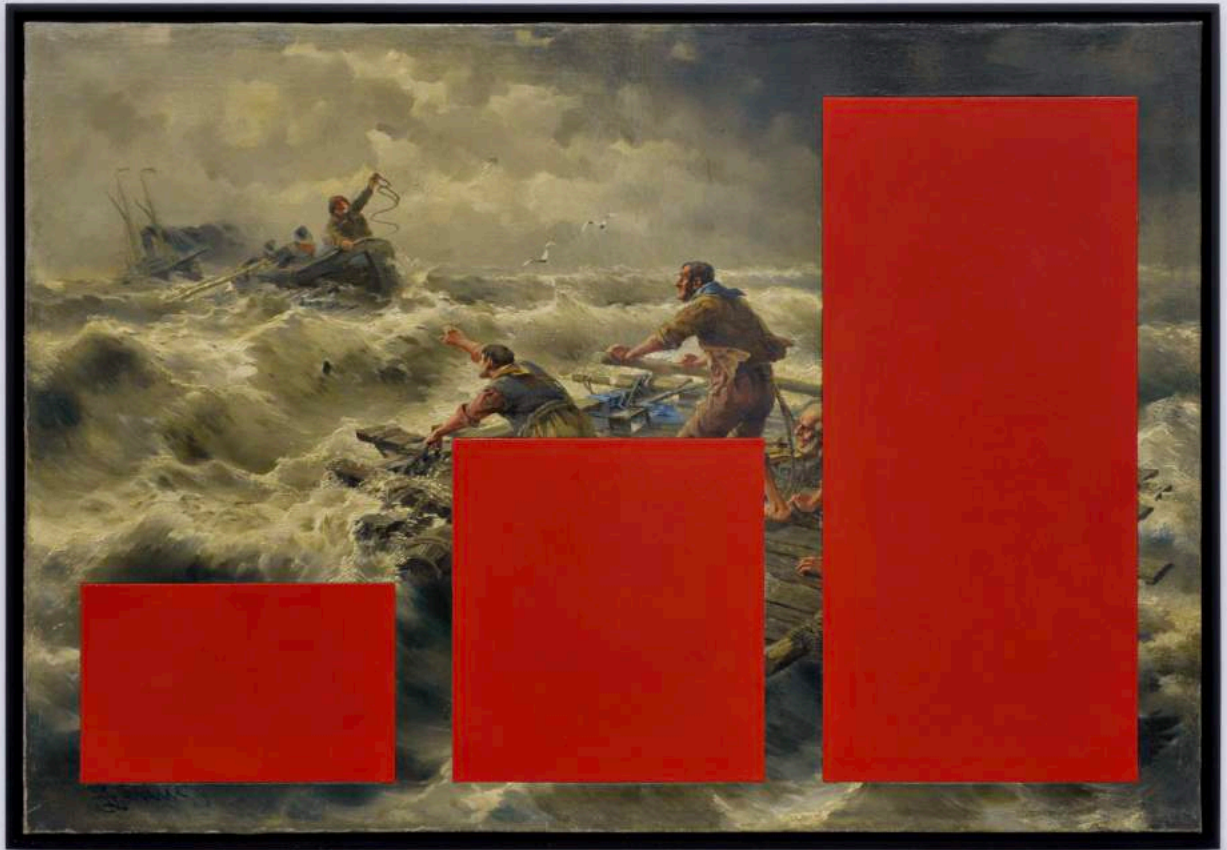
Installation view, west and north walls.



*Suicide II (2000/2015), 2021.*

19th Century oil on canvas, mounted on masonite with inlays, 43 x 27 1/4 in.

"Suicide rates worldwide, number of deaths per population of 100,000:  
2000 - 13 and 2015 - 11."



*Death Penalty* (1970/2010), 2021.

19th Century oil on canvas, mounted on masonite with inlays, 38 3/8 x 16 1/2 in.

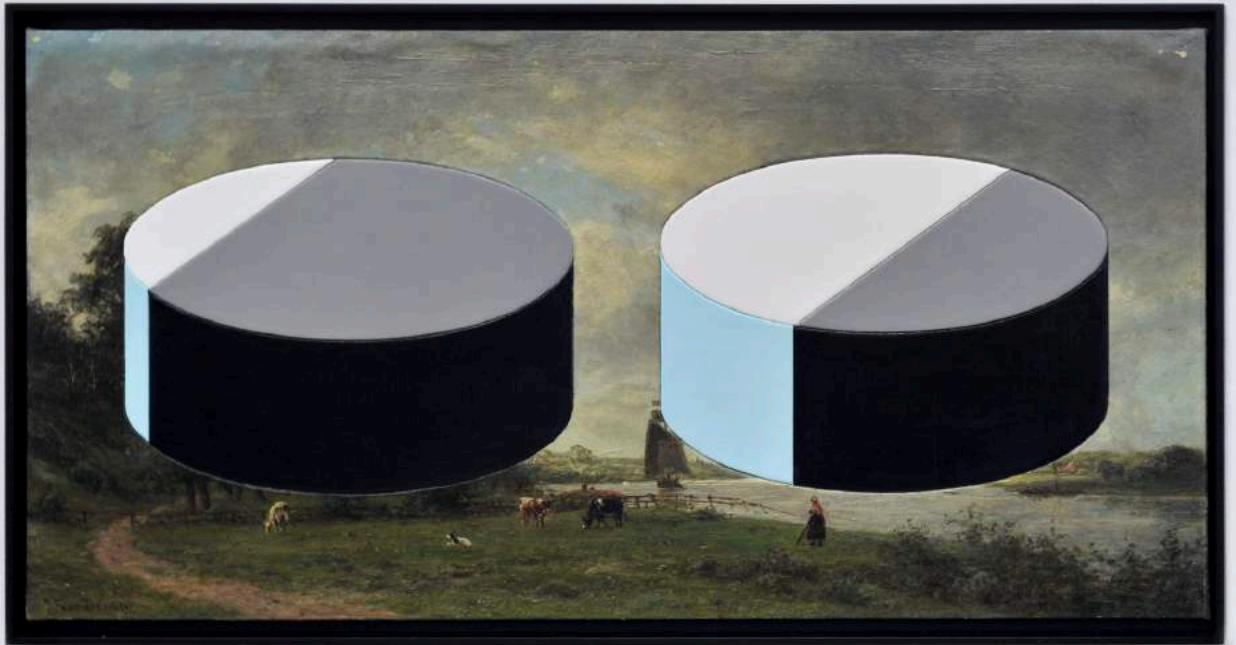
"Abolishment of death penalty:

1970 - 21 countries, 1990 - 66 countries, and 2010 - 98 countries."





*Famine I (1860/2000)*, 2021.  
19th Century oil on canvas, mounted on masonite with inlays, 27 1/2 x 31 1/2 in.  
"Famine victims: yellow - 1860 and red - 2000."



*Democracy II (1920/2020)*, 2021.  
19th Century oil on canvas, mounted on masonite with inlays, 35 3/4 x 17 2/4 in.

"Numbers of democracies vs. autocracies, worldwide: 1920 - 18 democracies vs. 132 autocracies,  
and 2020 - 99 democracies vs. 80 autocracies."



Installation view, north wall.

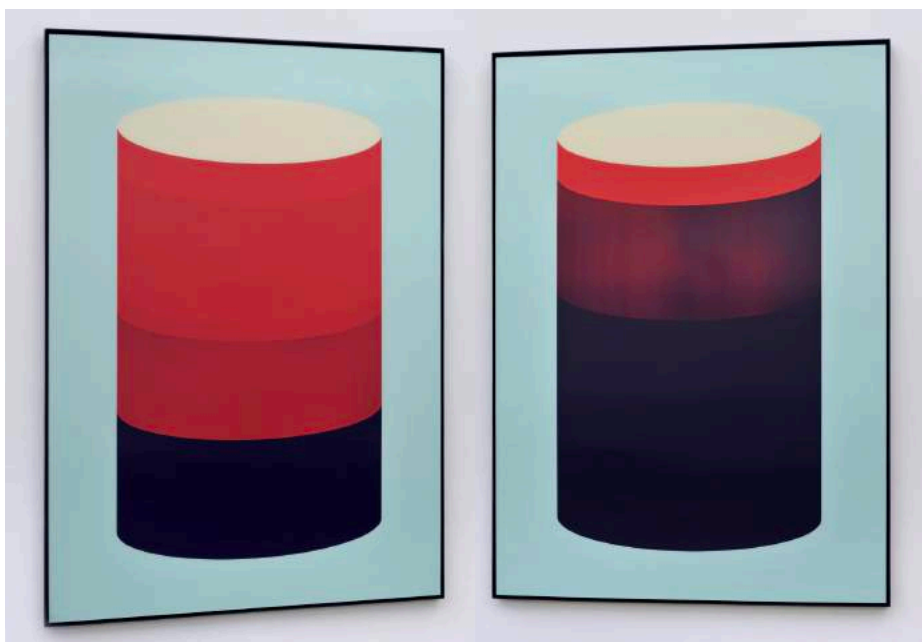
Q. How does this body of work, or art in general, relate to your wider practice?

A. I see these as a continuation of my design practice: I look at a very large subject, and see how I can make this communicate-able. It is shown in an art gallery because I would like people to see the pieces, buy them and hang them above their sofas. I'd judge the project a failure if nobody does that.





*Inequality (1900/2000)*, 2021.  
Lenticular print, edition 6 (+1AP), 46 x 60 in.  
"Income Inequality: UK, Gini Index 1900 - 2000."



*Disasters I (1900/2000)*, 2021.  
Lenticular print, edition (6 +1AP), 46 x 60 in.  
"Total number of people dying from Natural Disasters: 1900 - 2000."



*Famine II (1900/2000)*, 2021.  
Lenticular print, edition 6 (+1AP), 46 x 60 in.

"Total number of people dying from hunger, 1900-2000."



Installation view, north and west walls.





*Woman I (1900/2000)*, 2021.

19th Century oil on canvas, mounted on masonite with inlays, 16 15/16 x 19 5/8 in.

"Female voting rights: 1900, 1950, and 2000."

Q. And what do you hope people will take away from *Beautiful Numbers*?

A. Short term media like Twitter and hourly news create an impression of a world out of control, with democracy in peril, ubiquitous conflicts and an overall outlook of doom. But if we look at developments concerning the world from a long term perspective - the only sense making way - almost any aspect concerning humanity seems to get better.

Fewer people go hungry, fewer people die in wars and natural disasters, more people live in democracies - and live much longer lives - than ever before. 200 years ago 9 out of 10 people could neither read nor write, now it is just 1 out of 10.

Even if you look at pandemics from a point of view of 100 years, you will see that the Spanish Flu killed 45 million people, Aids/HIV about 30 million people. This of course does not mitigate the unbelievable 2 million humans (and counting) that lost their lives during Covid 19, but it does put the often quoted view that we live in 'unprecedented times' into perspective.

Interview questions by Megan Williams for [creativereview.co.uk](http://creativereview.co.uk), 04/16/2021

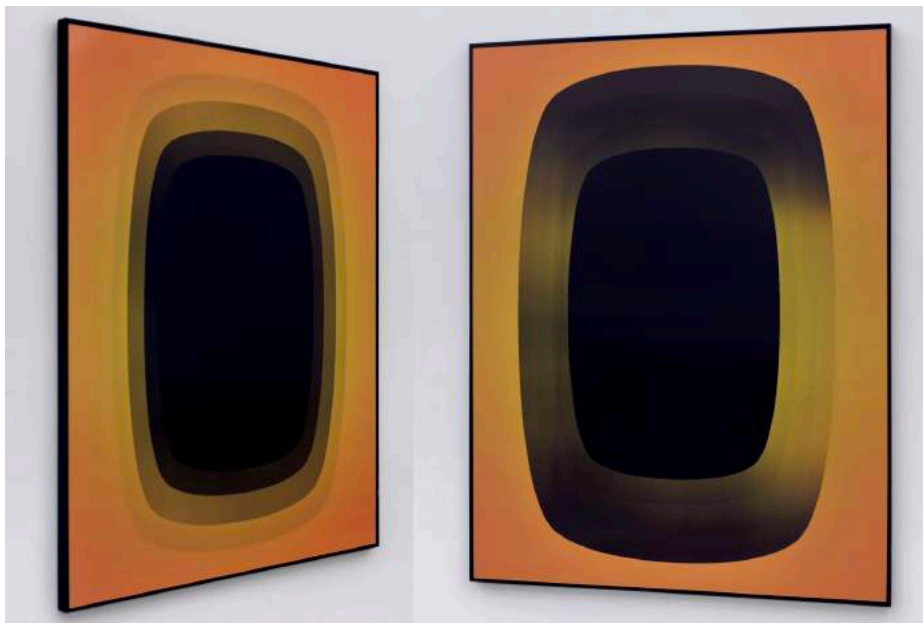


Installation view.



*News (1955/2000), 2021.*  
 Lenticular print, edition 6 (+1AP), 46 x 60 in.

"Tone of the news in the US: 1955 - plus 3, and 2000 - minus 2."



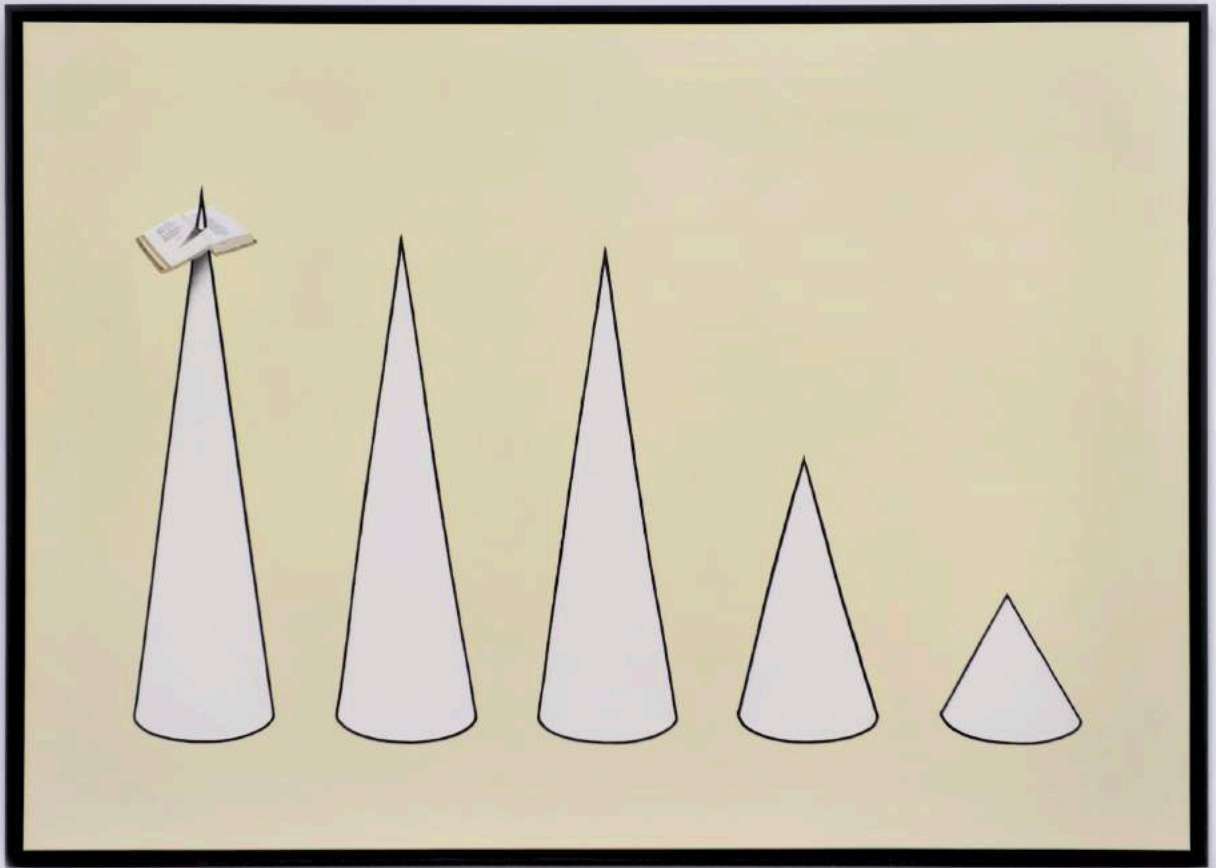
*Stuff (2000/2015), 2021.*  
 Lenticular print, edition 6 (+1AP), 46 x 60 in.

"Amount of stuff we use per year, in the UK: 2000 - 15 tons/person and 2015 - 10 tons/person."



Installation view, east wall.



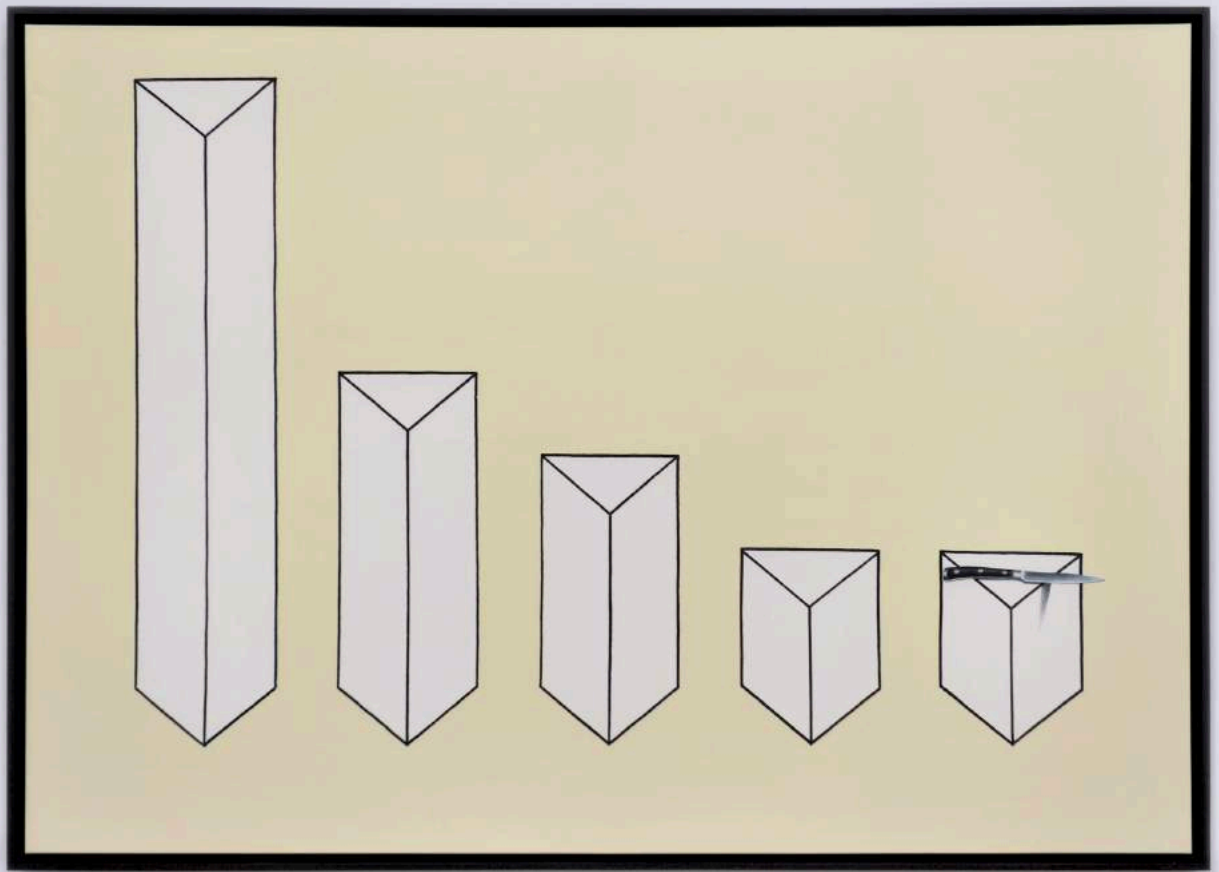


*Illiteracy, (1820/2020), 2021.*  
Embroidery on cotton, 77 1/2 x 54 5/8 in.

Credit – Yau Jiang Ping, Su Embroidery, China.

"Illiteracy levels worldwide: 1820, 1870, 1920, 1970, and 2020."



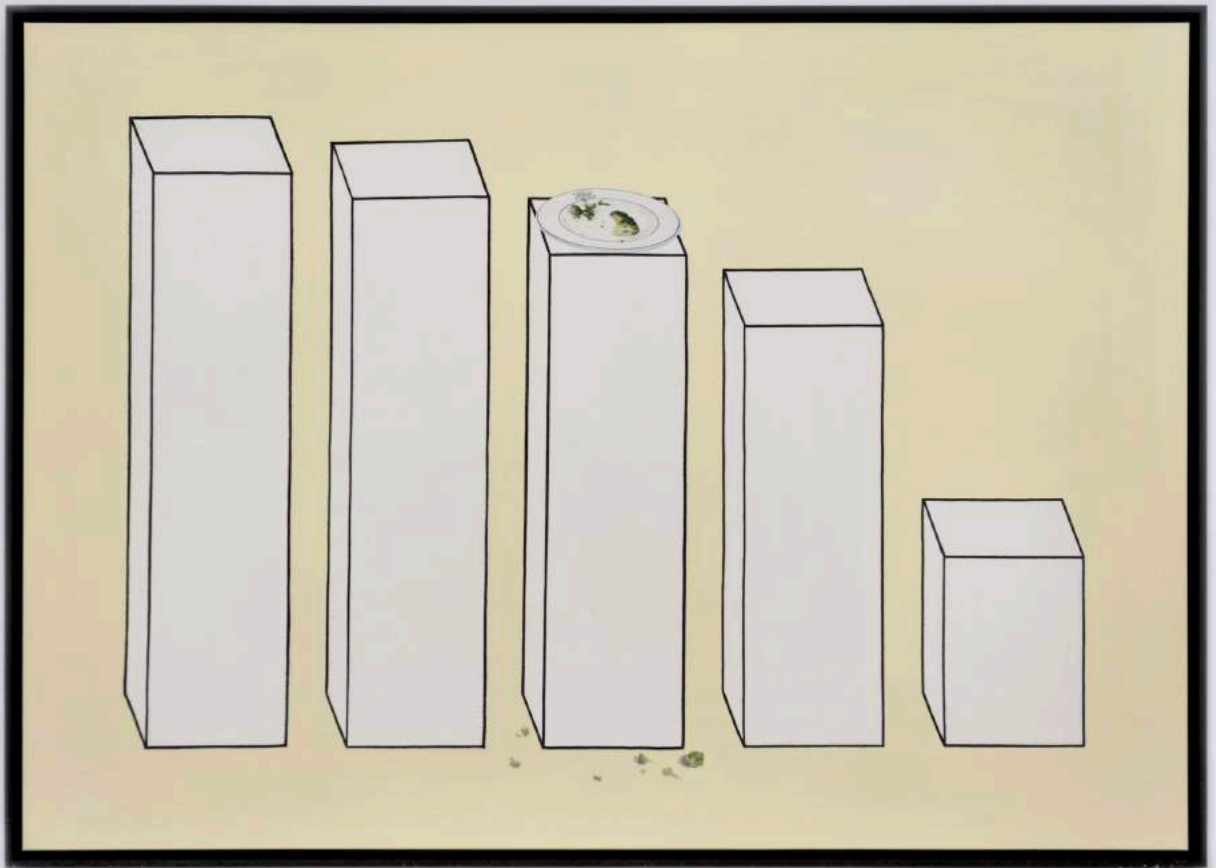


*Homicide, (1820/2020), 2021.*  
Embroidery on cotton, 77 1/2 x 54 5/8 in.

Credit – Yau Jiang Ping, Su Embroidery, China.

"Homicides in Italy: 1820, 1870, 1920, 1970, and 2020."





*Poverty, (1820/2020), 2021.*  
Embroidery on cotton, 77 1/2 x 54 5/8 in.

Credit – Yau Jiang Ping, Su Embroidery, China.

"Absolute poverty worldwide: 1820, 1870, 1920, 1970, and 2020."





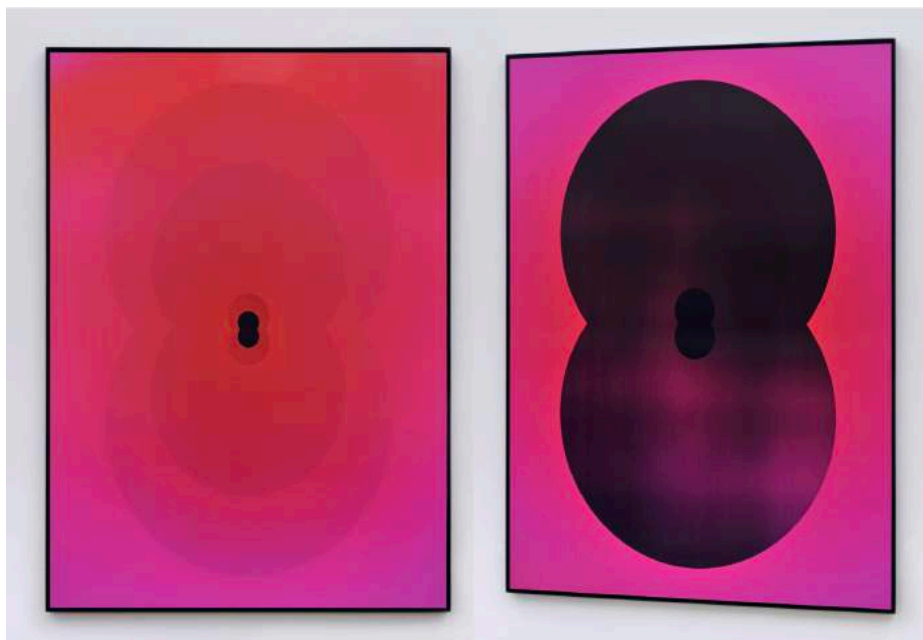
Installation view, south wall.





*Guitars (1960/2015), 2021.*  
Lenticular print, edition 6 (+1AP), 46 x 60 in.

"Playable guitars per 1 million people: 1960 - 200 and 2015 - 11,000."



*Disasters II (1920/2020), 2021.*  
Lenticular print, edition 6 (+1AP), 46 x 60 in.

"Death from natural disasters, worldwide per population of 10,000: 1920 - 25  
and 2000 - 2."



Installation view, east and north walls.



*Literacy I (1900/2000)*, 2021.  
19th Century oil on canvas, mounted on masonite with inlays, 16 1/6 x 20  
7/8 in.

"Literacy 1900, 1950, and 2000."



**Stefan Sagmeister** received his MFA from the University of Applied Arts in Vienna (MAK) and, as a Fulbright Scholar, a master's degree from Pratt Institute in New York. Sagmeister formed the New York based Sagmeister, Inc. in 1993 and has since designed for clients as diverse as the Guggenheim Museum, the Rolling Stones and HBO. Having been nominated eight times, he finally won two Grammy awards for his design work with the Talking Heads and Brian Eno & David Byrne. He has also earned practically every important international design award.

His multimedia exhibitions have been exhibited widely in museums and galleries, including the **Venice Biennale** in 2018. *The Happy Show*, for example, originated in 2012 at the **ICA Philadelphia**, and travelled to the **Design Exchange**, Toronto, as well as **MoCA LA**, Pacific Design Center (both 2013). **The Mak**, Vienna, organized *The Beauty Show* in 2018, conjointly with the **Museum für Angewandte Kunst**, Frankfurt, with subsequent stops at **Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe**, Hamburg (2020) and **Fondation Martell**, Cognac (2021).

Over the years, other venues included **Maat**, Lisbon (2018); **Museum of Vancouver** (2015); **Chicago Cultural Center**; **Jewish Museum**, New York (both 2013); **Israel Museum**, Jerusalem (2010); **Deitch Projects**, New York (2008); **Wolfsonian**, Miami (2007); and **Zeroone Design Center**, Seoul (2004). His work is in the collections of **MoMA**, New York, the **Philadelphia Museum of Art**, **Art Institute of Chicago**, **SFMOMA**, as well as many other international institutions.

He teaches in the graduate department of the School of Visual Art in New York and lectures extensively internationally.