



**sarah bowen gallery**

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## **CURATORIAL STATEMENT**

**For Immediate Release**

### ***The Pursuit of Happiness***

Group Show Curated by Christopher Howard

**December 1, 2006 – January 14, 2007**

Reception: Friday, December 1, 2006

7 – 9 P.M.

Generally speaking, happiness is a positive state of mind encompassing some level of joy, peace, exuberance, elation, and contentment. This is certainly a definition favored by the authors of the hundreds of self-help books lining the shelves at Barnes and Noble. While those kinds of books often give good advice for describing and achieving happiness, we find that, when digging deeper, a simple catchall definition or recipe just can't be found.

The concept of happiness has been the subject of philosophical inquiry for hundreds of years. Some points of views, including Buddhism and Cynicism, shun material, physical, and social comforts, taking solace in radical self-control and exile to extinguish passion and desire. Others believe any pleasure to be evil. Aristotle's and Epicurus's accounts, on the other hand, include a healthy social life and a certain amount of good luck along with the exercising of reason.

Happiness is also highly subjective. A tyrant or madman can arguably be happy, but for Kant happiness is intrinsic to morally good acts and Plato sees happiness as the greatest good in a virtuous life. Further, another definition of happiness would logically include diminishing pain and cultivating pleasure, but in trust a constant state of happiness would be quite boring. And some Christian philosophies as well as Nietzsche see pain and suffering as necessary, indeed expected, before obtaining happiness, whether in this world or beyond. Dozens of other thinkers and writers have dozens of other theories.

So where does art fit in? A primary aim of art is the understanding and communication of the human condition. If happiness is what we all want to achieve, in one way or another and for varying durations, then this state of being is bound to enter artistic work. Specific to this exhibition: many of the included works contain expressions of happiness and depict forms of pleasure, for example, friends and family, wealth and consumerism, love and sex, fantasies and childhood experiences, the natural world and the good life. (It should also be noted that nearly all artworks here are representational.) With a theme of happiness, visual clichés are unavoidable. But clichés, while occasionally trite, always have some element of truth and authenticity. These clichés, these representations, are attacked critically, while others are embraced unabashedly. Most works, I think, are ambivalent, which makes them part of rational thinking and necessary self-evaluation that people undertake to discover happiness in themselves and their lives.

Christopher Howard is an editor for the College Art Association in New York. He has written on art for such publications as the *Brooklyn Rail*, *Art Notes*, and *The Art Book*, and is completing a master's degree in art history at Hunter College.

sarah bowen gallery is open Wednesday through Sunday, 12 – 6 pm and by appointment. The gallery is located at 210 North Sixth Street, Williamsburg, Brooklyn, NY, 11211. Directions: L Train to Bedford Avenue stop, take Driggs exit, walk one block south to Sixth Street, and then ½ block East. The gallery is located between Driggs and Roebling on the right hand side.