



The Art of Life

Zygmunt Bauman

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In our individualized society we are all artists of life - whether we know it or not, will it or not and like it or not, by decree of society if not by our own choice. In this society we are all expected, rightly or wrongly, to give our lives purpose and form by using our own skills and resources, even if we lack the tools and materials with which artists' studios need to be equipped for the artist's work to be conceived and executed. And we are praised or censured for the results - for what we have managed or failed to accomplish and for what we have achieved and lost.

In our liquid modern society we are also taught to believe that the purpose of the art of life should be and can be happiness - though it's not clear what happiness is, the images of a happy state keep changing and the state of happiness remains most of the time something yet-to-be-reached.

This new book by Zygmunt Bauman - one of the most original and influential social thinkers writing today - is not a book of designs for the art of life nor a 'how to' book: the construction of a design for life and the way it is pursued is and cannot but be an individual responsibility and individual accomplishment. It is instead a brilliant account of conditions under which our designs-for-life are chosen, of the constraints that might be imposed on their choice and of the interplay of design, accident and character that shape their implementation. Last but not least, it is a study of the ways in which our society - the liquid modern, individualized society of consumers - influences (but does not determine) the way we construct and narrate our life trajectories.

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