



WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE?

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Making and Breaking the Rules We Live By

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Ed Krčma

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Rosy Gray

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Foreword by Jago Cooper

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- An engaging examination of an age-old question
- Accompanies a series of exhibitions but also stands alone as a philosophical consideration of life through art
- Includes 50 colour illustrations

Taking the most existential question, 'What is the Meaning of Life?', this publication dissects creative expression, considers the place for frivolity, and unpacks the rhythms and rules of the everyday to address how we might live more meaningfully.

In this highly illustrated book, John Kenneth Paranada looks at how creativity can offer a greater sense of purpose, and the role of art in resetting the tempo of a distracted culture. Ben Highmore and Sam Tacconi explore how embracing play and a gaming approach to life can bring value and make sense of behaviours, both on an individual level and across communities, while Ed Krčma and Jessica Barker address the evolving daily routines and societal rules by which we live our lives, examining how these impact our sense of purpose and belonging. Finally, Rosy Gray reflects on how grief can offer pause and how we can find solace in the multiverse, urging us to re-consider the meaning and value of our (many) lives.

This book accompanies a season of exhibitions and projects at the Sainsbury Centre.

Jessica Barker is Senior Lecturer in Medieval Art at The Courtauld in London. Her research focuses on sculpture from c.1200–1500 in northern Europe and Portugal, with a particular interest in questions relating to the body identity, and materiality. She has published widely, in journals including *Art Bulletin*, *Art History*, *British Art Studies*, *The Burlington Magazine*, *Gesta* and *The Sculpture Journal*. Her prize-winning book, *Stone Fidelity: Marriage and Emotion in Medieval Tomb Sculpture* (2020), explores the relationship between love and death in funerary art. She also sits on the Fabric Advisory Committee for Norwich Cathedral. **Jago Cooper** is Executive Director of the Sainsbury Centre, and Professor of Art and Archaeology at the University of East Anglia. Jago has worked for and with museums, universities and heritage organisations around the world to explore and communicate aspects of the great human story. His books and publications provide innovative perspectives on cultural experience and interpretation of material expression. His research has ranged broadly across universal questions facing global society, including climate change, technological revolution and social innovation. Jago's recent publications include *Living Art Sharing Stories* (2023), *Mapping a New Museum* (2022), *Peru: A Journey in Time* (2021) and *Arctic: Culture and Climate* (2020). **Rosy Gray** is Head of Living Art at the Sainsbury Centre. In her role, Rosy cares for over 5,000 artworks from across the globe, overseeing collections research, artist projects, conservation, loans and acquisitions. Joining the Sainsbury Centre in 2024, Rosy has previously developed collections, exhibitions and artist commissions across a range of public institutions in the UK. Her research interests focus on representations of the body in art and literature, with a particular emphasis on dress. **Ben Highmore** is Emeritus Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of Sussex and a Fellow of the British Academy. Currently he is an Honorary Professor at the University of Liverpool attached to the Centre for Culture and Everyday Life. He is the author of 11 books, most recently *Lifestyle Revolution: How taste changed class in late-twentieth-century Britain* (2023) and *Playgrounds, the experimental years* (2024). He is currently working on two book projects: the first is a monographic study of the abstract painter Sir Frank Bowling, the second is an exploration of the experimental nature of the humanities at a time of multiple, competing emergencies. **Ed Krčma** is Associate Professor of Art History at the University of East Anglia. His research focuses on European and North American art in the 1950s and 1960s, as well as on contemporary practice more broadly. He has a particular interest in the history and theory of drawing, and in the relationship between recent art and the longer art historical past. His first monograph, on Robert Rauschenberg's illustrations after Dante, was published by Yale University Press in 2017, and his articles have appeared in various scholarly journals, including *Art History*, *American Art*, *Oxford Art Journal*, *The Burlington Magazine* and *Umění*. **Tania Moore** is Head of Exhibitions at the Sainsbury Centre where she has brought in a programme that tackles the most urgent questions facing society, having delivered seasons such as *What Is Truth?*, *Why Do We Take Drugs?*, *Can the Seas Survive Us?* and *Can We Stop Killing Each Other?* She has published books alongside each of these seasons and earlier books include *Rhythm and Geometry: Constructivist Art in Britain Since 1951* (2021) and *Henry Moore: Friendships and Legacies* (2020). In 2019, she received the New Collecting Award from the Art Fund to acquire sculptors' drawings by contemporary women and non-binary artists for the Sainsbury Centre collection. **John Kenneth Paranada** serves as the Curator of Art and Climate Change at the Sainsbury Centre, funded by the John Ellerman Foundation, and is a researcher at the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, University of East Anglia. His interdisciplinary expertise spans museum studies, curatorial studies, art history, community engagement, climate communication and energy management. He co-edited the publications *Can the Seas Survive Us?* (2025) and *Planet for Our Future* (2023). His other publications include: *A Path Forward: Curating Art and Climate Change at the Sainsbury Centre*, in *Museum International* (2024) and *How Do We Begin a Meaningful Conversation About Art's Place in the Climate Crisis*, in *Design for our Planet* (2023). **Samuele Tacconi** is an archaeologist specialising in the ancient cultures of South America and holds a PhD from the University of East Anglia. His research investigates the entangled stories of objects and people, connecting museum collections and archaeological artefacts across time and space. His doctoral work explores the role of play and games in the ritual and political life of the pre-Columbian Andes, with a focus on material culture. His recent publications include *Benedict XIV's Donation of Amazonian Objects to the Istituto delle Scienze di Bologna*, in the *Journal of the History of Collections* (2021) and *Games and Social Organisation in the Pre-Columbian Andes* (PhD thesis, 2025).

