

Video Transcript

Title:

David Shrigley | Seriously Happy

Summary:

David Shrigley's work is instantly identifiable as his own. Through drawings, sculptures, videos, photographs and books, his dry humour highlights the absurdity of our everyday fears and aspirations. We visit him in his Brighton studio to learn more about his work: the influence of Dada, the appeal of the absurd, and how a sort-of-cartoonist isn't really interested in cartoons.

Duration:

05:54

Transcript

[David Shrigley and his assistant working in his studio. Shrigley takes a stack of drawings out of a cupboard and they look through them, sorting them into piles].

David Shrigley

I have a lot of correspondence with people with mental health problems who see me as a kind of kindred spirit, or as a person who's providing them with some kind of therapy, or some kind of alternative way of thinking that's useful to them. And that's something that I find very – it makes me very happy.

I think the nature of the work has maybe changed as I've got older. I think it was darker and more morbid, more depressing before, whereas it's kind of lighter. There is a certain – a kindness and generosity is perhaps more thinly veiled than it ever was before. And I think that's probably because, as a person I just don't have the stomach for the misery anymore [laughs].

[Shrigley tears up a drawing. The camera cuts to shots of his studio: paint pots and a filing cabinet covered in stickers].

Even though I'm sort of a cartoonist, and my work sort of is cartoons, I've never actually been interested in cartoons. Like, I don't really have any interest in graphic novels and stuff. My education's all about fine art – it's all about Marcel Duchamp and Andy Warhol.

[Image of Marcel Duchamp's 'Fountain' followed by images of Shrigley's own work].

Going back to what Dada was, it was something that was completely other – anarchic and rebellious. Taking everything and subverting everything – doing things that are completely absurd. And the comedy of it, I guess, really excited me.

[Cut to an animation by David Shrigley. A man on a horse gallops across the screen. They enter a building with 'LAUNDERETTE' written on it. The man and his horse walk past a number of washing machines. Cut to another man behind the counter, who is reading a newspaper].

Man behind counter

Good morning.

Man with horse

Good morning to you.

[The horse climbs into a large washing machine. Cut back to the man reading the newspaper, and the sound of coins being inserted into the machine and the washing machine cycle starting. The man behind the counter blinks].

Man behind counter

Excuse me sir.

[The man with the horse is sitting beside the washing machine reading a newspaper. We can see the horse going around in the washing machine].

Man with horse

What?

Man behind counter

It is not permitted to put your horse in the washing machine.

[Shrigley in his studio, talking to camera].

David Shrigley

I've always made work that's intuitive, and responds to a certain situation, and it's – I suppose it's become a certain body of work where there's certain facets to it.

[Images of Shrigley's work].

But it's really just happened by accident to some extent, but then I'm really aware that that way of making work is sort of the reason why I can't do anything different.

[Shrigley and his assistant working in his studio, looking through drawings].

Um, I quite like that one, but the egg's not very good.

[Shrigley tears up a drawing].

You know, the drawings just end up being whatever gets drawn in a certain time, and the ones that don't get torn up and thrown in the bin.

I go to exhibitions and I see other people's art, and I'm like, 'wow, that's great. I really love that work'. But I know that I can't make that kind of work – I'm sort of not allowed. And whilst, you know, I do sort of deviate and make performance things and make other things, I'm on this path, and I can't suddenly just be a shape shifter and make something else.

[Shrigley is showing a series of black, abstract-shaped, single-stringed electric guitars to the camera].

A series of electric guitars that I made, where – I designed them – my friend Tom actually made them. They're sort of designed aesthetically rather than in order to play well.

[Shrigley plays a series of notes on one guitar].

I think when you're in your early 20s you don't, I don't know, I didn't really have a perception of what a career as an artist could be. I didn't really think that was an option at the time, so I think that's why I started making books. I thought that maybe I could have a career as a cartoonist, even though I didn't really know very much about cartoons or graphic art, and I actually really liked making the books, and I liked making the drawings and suddenly that became the central part of what I did.

[Shrigley is working on a new painting: applying red paint to white paper].

A completely another way to make sense of the world and another way to make art. I guess you have to understand that this was in the age prior to the internet, so had I graduated, I don't know – 15 years later, maybe I would have done something rather different.

[Close-up shot of a painted red face with pink features. Shrigley continues to work on the same painting].

I've been a professional artist I suppose for more than 20 years, and been an artist, well been a student artist and a struggling artist for my entire adult life, but I do think that making art is a healthy thing for people to do, so I think that I'm lucky to do that as a career. I think I've become more aware of my role, or what I perceive to be my role, in the world, and that is to try and make it a better place rather than to make people uncomfortable [laughs]. So there is a message, a positive, optimistic message, buried beneath the mordant, darkness with in my work – hopefully. And people just see it as being ironic because of what I've done before [laughs], whereas I genuinely mean it.