

ALEXANDER POLIČEK - MAKE YOURSELF, HARD TO KILL

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GALERIE BERNAU

Scenario 1: How certain are you that today's world will still exist tomorrow? Perhaps you would answer this question differently today than you would have done last year, because a pandemic has changed everyday life. Perhaps you stockpiled in March in order to have enough to feed yourself at home for a few weeks. Perhaps you are visiting Galerie Bernau with a face mask and made an appointment to do so.

Scenario 2: Recently it was possible to observe the comet Neowise in the sky. Astronomers discovered it at the end of March and calculated its trajectory. The comet passed by at a great distance from the earth, yet one could still see it with the naked eye. Many photos of Neowise appeared in the news, in newspapers and on social media. The comet was spectacular, but not dangerous. Nevertheless, what if it were to have hit Earth?

Preppers always expect the worst in such situations. They fear catastrophic events that will shatter social order. They call them "Day X", "Extinction Level Event", "Shit hits the fan" or "the end of the world as we know it". Preppers (from the verb to prepare) prepare themselves to survive self-sufficiently, independent from social communities. They create alternative supply chains for food, build specially protected shelters and stock up on other supplies. Out of mistrust of governments and other people, Preppers are not afraid to use weapons and violence to defend themselves.

This mentality is illustrated by Alexander Poliček's posters in the exhibition *Make yourself, hard to kill*: conveying scenarios that Preppers fear. Using the aesthetics of spectacular catastrophe films, they show visions of the end of the world: asteroids hitting the earth, zombie apocalypses, natural disasters, world wars. Alongside presenting these dangers, the posters also include a list of tips for protection, of which armed self-defense appears to be one of the most important. Looking at these images evokes fascination, entertainment, or real fear.

Walking Rust (2020) shows a man running non-stop through a landscape, possibly after an apocalypse. The video is another fantasy, imagining a scenario for which Preppers are preparing and is based on the computer game *Rust*. In this survival game, you start as a naked human in a pre-industrial time and fight against other players and an algorithm in order to survive. Poliček's video exaggerates the fiction of the game by allowing its protagonist to wander around aimlessly without encountering any danger. Where is he heading? Is he actually in any danger? And can he survive completely on his own?

Hidden behind a curtain in the gallery is an installation reminiscent of a so-called "Bug Out Location". Preppers set up these kinds of locations in bunkers or on cordoned-off private property where they can hide away in case of an emergency. But the furniture in this hideout has been amateurishly repaired with plasticine and is therefore not functional. A poorly repaired jug threatens to break again as soon as it is filled with liquid. The vacuum-packed earth is enough for a flower pot, but not enough to plant fruit and vegetables.

Poliček is not recreating an intact retreat for preppers here. Everything in this shelter has almost, but *not quite* been done right - or has maybe been used for too long. The room seems abandoned, as if it had never been finished, or as if its inhabitants had never returned. It thus stays unclear what the apocalyptic scenario is at stake in this abandoned place: that of not being sufficiently prepared, or that in which the best preparation has not provided enough protection?

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