

SHTF

A REVIEW BY AMELIA NAVASCUES

Many of Salvador Dalí's works were consumed by a fascination with paranoia. His 'Paranoid Critical Transformation Method', which used relatively new Freudian psychology at the time, became what we now know as Surrealist art. The works were innately hallucinatory, self-obsessive in subject matter and produced without the aid of drugs or from a neurodivergent perspective.

Today, extreme survivalism might be of modern equivalence. Those fearing for an imminent apocalypse are often known as 'doomsday preppers', and they externalise their neuroses to focus on a world they feel to be always 'on the brink'. Geopolitical uncertainty, environmental destruction, the worry of crumbling financial institutions and the potential for religious armageddons are just some of the fears preppers obsess over most.

People in prepper cultures find themselves on constant alert, readying themselves for when shit-hits-the-fan¹ or SHTF. Some collect particular objects, while others resort to more extreme methods, isolating themselves from society entirely. For many, it's a community and culture rooted in weapon fascination.

But regardless of whatever method or fear preppers focus on, they seem to share a need for order. For Guy Louden, Loren Kronemeyer and Dan McCabe, the artists behind Firstdraft's September exhibition about preppers called SHTF, the subculture is 'the spirit of our times'¹.

The aesthetic of prepper culture is strictly utilitarian. Dan McCabe's piece, FirstLite (2017) – made from automotive carbon fibre vinyl, oxidized 'gun- blued' steel and stainless steel – evokes this aesthetic immediately. His other work, Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta (2017) also creates a sense of militancy prominent within the culture of preppers. Knife displays in one corner of the room show casual weapon-use, whilst meticulously tied ropes fastening many of the pieces.

Loren Kronemeyer's works, Mangle, Strangle, Dangle V (2017) and VI (2017), are undoubtedly the two centrepieces of the exhibition, perhaps if only due to their sheer size and scale, as two life-sized booby traps. V is a suspended rope, from which a torso-sized

piece of stone dangles. It hangs only inches above the average height of a person. VI is a readied composite bow and arrow, fastened by zip ties and cinderblocks. It points directly at the wall opposite, where three arrows have already been struck. And yet, the wall is otherwise completely blank, containing nothing, and empty from any tangible or 'real' threat. The things preppers' fear almost always seem to be near, but never seem to materialise.

Individual responsibility for the booby traps is also absent. There appears to be no trace of a human mark, with the exception of an iPhone left at the site of each work. A further comment by Kronemeyer perhaps, on how technology may be keeping us forever connected, yet simultaneously dislocated from one another. And more specifically, as is the case often in the eyes of a prepper, she might be hinting at newer modes of anxiety made possible in an oversaturated information age.

Guy Louden's works are digital and he taps more into themes of playfulness and danger. He has produced a series of giclee prints made from digital renders and a custom PC game called What are you prepping for? A laptop screen loops a moving image of a park, resembling one in a city. It looks almost like a screensaver. The trees in the image are splintered by monochromatic grey triangles which hover overhead. It speaks to the temporal splicing and disconnects present when modern survivalism is enacted in an urban setting. It's fractured, displaced and always on the move. Propped up at the back of the exhibition, Louden's invitation to explore the mentality of the prepper's mind through gameplay might be even more fearful than Kronemeyer's overt weapon play.

The works all evoke the fears and anxieties experienced in an extreme survivalist's always 'ready' mind. Reactive, sometimes violent and always cautionary are the shared sentiments across all of the pieces.

Differing from Dalí's standpoint, preppers invert former definitions of paranoia from being an inward exploration of a self-prescribed chaotic self, to being a worldview obsessed with finding control where chaos everywhere seems unavoidable.



Credit: Zan Wimberley, courtesy Firstdraft



Contained within the walls of the white cube, Kronemeyer, Louden and McCabe subvert the experiences of those who fear most to make a broader statement. They have successfully transformed a contemporary sub-culture into a larger metaphor for our current climate. SHTF is a moment in time, a culture, but also an attitude. Unapologetic in approach, it emphasises a near-constant modern state of deliriousness and global sense of anxiety, applicable to almost anyone living in this moment.

The 'brink' might even be closer than we think.

SHTF exhibited at Firstdraft in Woolloomooloo, Sydney in September.

¹ Kronemeyer, L. Louden, G. & McCabe D. (2017) 'SHTF Web Catalogue', web.