

STARKWHITE



Amanda Newall and Olav Westphalen | SAFE

02 March - 01 April 2023

Starkwhite, Queenstown

Artist-led workshops on Saturday 4 and Sunday 5 March

In *A Theory of Human Motivation*, American psychologist Abraham Maslow examined how a hierarchy of psychological needs governs decision making. Safety is one core need that drives human behaviour and motivation. But how has this basic need been commodified, taken to extreme expressions, and projected into objects? Artists Amanda Newall (NZ/UK) and Olav Westphalen (GER-US) explore the ambiguity and complexity of how we perceive safety, or lack thereof, in their collaborative exhibition *SAFE* at Starkwhite Queenstown. Offering a cultural geography of time, place, and collective anxiety, Newall and Westphalen take a deep dive into billionaire bunkers and childhood toys alike.

Amanda Newall's practice explores role of costume within the context of contemporary art. Her works draw from personal history, anecdote, environment, and landscape, to function as an investigation into society, transforming wearable items into performative and critical tools. Her practice is rich in parafictional scenarios populated with artworks that reside in the space between fact and fiction. Juxtaposing recognisable cultural references and

STARKWHITE

symbols she mixes and combines contexts to create new hybrid narratives of people and place.

Alongside a selection of antique velvet seance capes, hoodies, and drawings Newall is presenting a costume that casts back to her childhood and web of family connections. “*Blue Ted* is from memory, a human scale replica of the first teddy bear my grandmother purchased for me when I was newly born” the artist tells. The plot thickens when Newall only realised as an adult that her grandmother had given the exact but different coloured ted to her cousin. Gifts of soft toys become symbols of the love and care their givers wish for a child. But, although given with love and intended an object of comfort, what protection does a teddy bear actually offer? And how does super-sizing a teddy into a wearable costume of human scale change its intentions... when does cute become creepy, or overwhelming?

Objects promise the illusion of safety we crave throughout life. Whether psychological – a cuddly toy, new outfit, or car to fend off (or highlight) a mid life crisis – or physical, we invest emotionally in the power of objects to soothe and protect. If Newall’s questioning of the illusion of security offered by soft toys is an early example of the suspended anxiety that floats across our lives from child to adult, Olav Westphalen examines it on steroids. Across a series of drawings, video works, and related script Westphalen explores the extreme expression of our greatest fears: the billionaire bolthole.

As the mythology of New Zealand as an unaffected paradise teeters due to extreme weather events and terrorist activity, Westphalen’s project *Bolthole Down* considers the rumoured billionaire hideaways in the Queenstown-Lakes region and the growing phenomenon of survivalist prepping. Across a series of drawings replicating landforms in Otago, Olav Westphalen depicts vertical cross sections showing imagined bunkers infiltrating the land. Recognisable and softly textured mountain ranges, lakes, and valleys are pierced with underground constructions and networks of tunnels the colour of deep rust, human-made intrusions into the land. Hung salon-style on the gallery wall they take on the feeling of a crime scene investigation, an evidence board of place, motive, and logistics.

The bunker has become the most extreme example of perceived danger: from pandemics to climate change and political unrest they are physical responses to threat, whether real or imagined. The bunker is a metaphor, a more obvious example of the gated communities, increasingly larger cars, hostile architecture, and security cameras that populate our lives. Both a source and symptom of our collective anxiety, it is a multi million dollar business and disaster capitalism writ large. Less concerned by whether the rumoured bunkers around the

STARKWHITE

Queenstown-Lakes region actually exist, but the psychology behind them and our need to create perceived zones of safety, Westphalen's project offers a thoughtful parody of the world we live in.

Are bunkers teddy bears for billionaires?

Amanda Newall is an interdisciplinary New Zealand artist and educator based in the UK. She is the current recipient of the Olivia Spencer Bower Foundation Award. She is currently pursuing a practice-led PhD 'Costume in Art Education and Institution' at University of the Arts London. Her bespoke costumes, often only used once, act to extract ideas to activate agency. Sculpture, intermedia, sound, moving image, storytelling, digital inter-actives, performance, humour and enactment feed into a practice that incorporates the built environment including automobiles and architecture as costume. Landscape, anecdote, oral storylines, B-grade sci-fi, trade and exchange and fragile economic money systems similarly inform her work. Newall has exhibited and performed in internationally including exhibitions or performances at: *Habeo*, Stockholm, Sweden, *Blue Ted*, *Sensitivity Training*, Bulgaria, *Chrome Slime*, The Junction, *Austin Tea Rooms*, Sculpture on the Peninsula, NZ, *Hotel Jaguar*, Exposed Arts Projects, London, UK; *Costumed Social Dreaming*, Folkestone Triennial, UK; *Public Dreaming*, the Nordic Biennial, Momentum 9, Alienation, Moss Norway, z33 Belgium; *The Hoover Diaries*, Mejan Galeri Stockholm, Audio Foundation, Pyramid Space, The Wunder Bar, Geraldine Theatre; *Blood Loop*, BALTIC 39 / Newcastle Science Festival, UK, Fremantle Art Centre, Australia, *Beyond Vice*, Uppsala City Theatre, Sweden; *Mis Tanzania*, Weld Stockholm; *Dolly Decay*, Shunt Lounge, UK; *Mostly Harmless* and *Aboriginal Terraformations*, Govett Brewster Art Gallery, NZ; *The Excellence Experiment* and *Sic Games*, the New Zealand Film Archive. She has held positions as Senior Lecturer at the Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm, Lecturer, Lancaster Institute of Contemporary Art, MSVA, and at the University of Auckland.

Olav Westphalen is a German-American artist whose practice frequently takes the form of games, entertainment or experiments. He works on both sides of the HI-LO divide, producing mass-media comedy and cartoons while exhibiting in respected museums such as The Whitney Museum, ICA London, The Swiss Institute NY, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Brandenburgischer Kunstverein, Museum Fridericianum and others. From 2007 to 2017 he was Professor for Performative art at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm and is currently Professor of Drawing at Hochschule für Künste, Bremen. His work is in the collection of the Centre Pompidou, Moderna Museet, MoMA, New York, and the Dallas Museum.

STARKWHITE

Publications include: "Sensitivity Training," Textem 2022, "Helden und Geschichten," Carlsen, 2009; "Ü," with Dan Graham, OCA, 2009; "24 Artworks," Shelf, 2010, "Dysfunctional Comedy," Sternberg Press, 2016. Westphalen is the founder of MoMCo (The Museum of Modern Comedy in Art), and one of the founders of the Association for the Palliative Turn.

Supported by:



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