The seven rooms: a walk round the exhibition

Divided thematically into seven rooms, the exhibition "Apocalypse - End Without End" manages to combine factual analysis with prophecy and speculation and even undisguised delight at the prospect of man's downfall. The layout is complex and deliberately choppy in places: abrupt shifts followed by smooth transitions within and between rooms convey the sense of a single narration interrupted and resumed, sometimes linking divergent discourses, sometimes setting them against one another.

Prelude: The stairs
For visitors who don’t take the lift, the exhibition is accessed via a temporary staircase from the ground floor to the third floor. On the way up, they encounter works by some of the artists involved in the exhibition, while humorous, macabre and fundamentalist film sequences from popular internet videos provide a taste of what lies ahead.

Room 1: The only certainty
The exhibition itself starts by presenting the only definitive end currently foreseeable, the one apocalypse scenario which is certain to occur. In around two billion years it will be so hot on Earth that all life will cease to exist, and in four and a half billion years the sun will swell into a Red Giant and burn out. This particular fate is evoked by a dramatic light installation created by the Berlin-based media agency TheGreenEyl which visually transforms the room more powerfully than any words.
Room 2: The end is always nigh
The second room explores the omnipresence of the Apocalypse - in our beliefs, prophecies and hopes, in media and religion. A goggling array of images and audio documents awaits, including a montage of End Time-related texts read out over five loudspeakers, the Last Judgement-depicting tympanum from the portal of Bern Cathedral, a theatrical production of the Apocalypse of St. John, and a Hollywood jaunt through almost forty apocalyptic films. These visions of the End Time only rarely envisage a definitive end: the eradication of evil and the rooting out of sinners is usually followed by a new and better age. The sculpture “Souvenir from Hell" by Jake and Dinos Chapman, a work of video art by Roberto Fassone and a real-time media installation by Marc Lee lend a delicious touch of irony.

Room 3: Earth at risk
The iconic image of the Blue Planet, taken from space, is a breathtakingly effective ambassador when it comes to Earth's vulnerability. This room, then, is about real dangers: cosmic catastrophes and terrestrial terrors such as meteors and volcanoes. A work by Roman Signer sees the Wörlitz Volcano erupt. The threat from outer space is symbolized by a window from Chelyabinsk in Russia, where four years ago the best-documented meteorite shower in history took place. The greatest threat to mankind, however, remains man himself. The Danish art collective Superflex recreates the Great Flood in a branch of McDonalds, providing a metaphor for the way we are killing ourselves by consumption. Julian Charrière's film of the Bikini Atoll, the site of a series of nuclear bomb tests in the 1950s, does important work in calling to mind what we would rather forget. Other traces of human influence on the planet are symbolized by two particularly striking objects: Andreas Greiner’s two-metre high 3D-printed carcase of an industry-fattened broiler (chicken bones betray the presence of humans all over the world), and an ice core from Greenland which only sophisticated technology makes it possible to display at all. Investigations of polar ice layers show that the carbon dioxide content has risen more sharply in the last decade than in the preceding 800 000 years. Photographs by Armin Linke, and Ingo Günther's globes also speak of changes that are only apparent close up.

Room 4: Wiped out
Natural disasters have caused at least five mass extinction events in the history of the Earth, and it is likely that we are currently experiencing the sixth, this time triggered by human influence. Among the countless victims is the woodchat shrike, which just ten years ago was a common breeding bird in Swiss gardens. Thousands of species disappear globally every year – Joël Sartore's portraits lend them dignity and a face. Even the remaining fish, amphibian, bird and mammal populations are declining drastically - numbers have halved since the 1970s. An animated film projected across a whole wall explores the processes by which species emerge and disappear over millions of years, while a number of silent witnesses, mainly fossils, look on. But people die too under catastrphic conditions, and have done since they began to inhabit the planet. Their cities flourish and decline, as Camille Henrot shows in a fictitious display. Katie Paterson's celestial map charts all the stars that have already disappeared.
Room 5: We'll all be merry and bright
The constant threats that we face spark not just fear but feed defiance, denial and, in some cases, creativity. “Davon geht die Welt nicht unter” (“This is not the end of the world”) sings Zarah Leander, amidst a hall full of Nazi officers swaying in time to the music. The prospect that the end is nigh inspires visions, madness, music, escape plans, rescue schemes - and, as shown by the luxury bunkers available for purchase to Americans attempting to flee the Apocalypse, there's money to be made from it too. Preparing for a catastrophe can lend meaning to life, as the vibrant "prepper" movement proves. The animal world, too, is wired to react to changes in living conditions, inspiring the designer Kathryn Fleming to create three experimental new animal species whose adaptations equip them for the world of the future. And then there's the world outside the world, often imagined in films but now perhaps more real than we thought: NASA is already holding architecture competitions for the design of Martian habitats.

Room 6: A world built on shaky foundations
Many people have experienced "their" world come crashing down. The end of the world can take on significantly less drastic forms than the end of all life or the end of the planet. Dementia patients lose their hold on reality; heartbreak can shatter an existence - the objects from the Museum of Broken Relationships are the debris of such catastrophes. Existential uncertainty abounds in this room, in sobering reports about the state of the deep sea and attempts to pollinate plants using drones, in dystopias and longings and in the illusion of victory which Elodie Pong blasts with an avalanche. Batoul Shimi's world vessels silently demonstrate the pressure they're under, while Gino de Dominicis' attempts to take flight are touching in their futile persistence. A few steps further on, Bazon Brock invites us to pause for philosophy, advising that apocalyptic thinking is a prerequisite for purposeful action.

Room 7: Open end
The world hasn't ended yet - the end remains open. And so, rather than culminating in a conclusion, the exhibition finishes with a changing series of perspectives provided over time by different artists. The rules of the game are simple: the Museum invites an artist to create content for the last room of the exhibition and thus to draw their own personal line under it. The artist's contribution is displayed for a year, meaning that the final comment on "Apocalypse", the statement made from the vantage point of the end, will change over time. To emphasize this, the display will actually be changed in front of the public during exhibition opening hours. Beni Bischof's installation "Fist Teeth Money" opens the series with a spectacular mixture of real life and media realities in which banality, the grotesque and unexpected empathy generate an ever-changing succession of new and surprising alliances.