



HYPERALLERGIC

GALLERIES

Andrea Zittel's Sculptures for Survival

The artist's current exhibition at Andrea Rosen Gallery explores and interrogates what it means to be a participant in American culture.

Cynthia Cruz | 31 minutes ago



'Andrea Zittel' at Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, September 9–October 8, 2016 (© Andrea Zittel, photo by Pierre Le Hors, courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York) (click to enlarge)

Andrea Zittel's [current exhibition at Andrea Rosen Gallery](#) is a continuation of the artist's work of the past 25 years — work that explores and interrogates what it means to be a participant in American culture. The show is relatively small, consisting of only six pieces. These come from Zittel's most recent series, *Planar Configurations* and *Linear Sequences*, both of which are continuations of her lifelong project, [A-Z West](#), located in the California Mojave Desert.

Spread out over 50 acres of land in the desert near Joshua Tree, A-Z West is a fluid project consisting of Zittel's home, studio, and art and design testing ground. The artist, who lived in New York for years but was raised in Southern California, moved there in 2000. In one sense, her relocation can be seen as a kind of homecoming; at the same time, her move to a remote desert area on the outskirts of a city can be seen as a form of dropping out. I have [written previously](#) about female artists who, after being immersed in the New York City art scene for some time, have chosen to drop out — of both that specific world and the public eye in general. Cady Noland is one such example, as is Lee Lozano.



Andrea Zittel, Experimental Living Cabins, Wonder Valley, CA (© Andrea Zittel, courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York) (click to enlarge)

What's genius about Zittel's project is that she has, in a sense, dropped out, but she has also incorporated this act into the very core of her practice. In doing so, she models an alternative escape route for both artists and others who find that they cannot, or prefer not to, live within the dominant culture.

Before moving to the desert, Zittel had begun making work in relation to her everyday life — structures and objects that provided basic necessities such as shelter, clothing, food, and furniture. Since creating A-Z West, she has continued and expanded upon it. The work is dynamic because it speaks to a myriad of concerns, foremost among which is the question of survival. What do we need in order to survive? By creating such objects as small, mobile living spaces and textiles — items that fulfill our primary needs — Zittel articulates this question over and over in an essential manner.



'Andrea Zittel' at Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, September 9–October 8, 2016 (© Andrea Zittel, photo by Pierre Le Hors, courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York) (click to enlarge)

The artist maintains a [website](#) where she writes regular diary entries with photographs. This activity of documenting the everyday, the so-called “mundane,” may seem trivial — to some, it may seem all the moreso due to the author’s gender — but the act of a woman recording the banal moments in her life can be seen in direct conversation with the Action artists of the 1970s. In particular, I’m thinking of some of the artists of the former Communist Bloc, among them Ion Grigorescu, who discovered that one could practice actions in one’s own home and even without a witness present. By recording everyday occurrences on a website available to anyone with internet access, Zittel is demonstrating that one can survive away from urban centers and suburban sprawl. She is modeling a means of resistance.

Part of Zittel’s project in the desert consists of offering tours of the space and workshops for the public. One such workshop led by the artists Michael Parker and Alyce Emdur was titled “How to Survive” and demonstrated to participants how to make their own solar ovens. This brings to mind Zittel’s comments in a 2001 [interview with Allan McCollum](#):

One of the main things that I have been wondering about is how one can actually live a “liberated” life, or if this is even possible. My idea right now is that perhaps the only real way to liberate oneself is to slip in between the cracks of larger authoritative systems. It interests me how often we do this by making smaller, more enclosed systems that are even more restrictive than those in the outside world. You can become so cocooned in these little self-invented structures that you almost believe the larger systems don’t actually exist anymore.

Returning to the works currently on display at Andrea Rosen, the pieces are abstract, geometric structures that can be seen as designs for modern furniture. Made from wood and aluminum, the constructions provide what appear to be small, human-size cubbies or places where one could, in theory, situate one’s body (though climbing in and on the artwork is not allowed). These spaces serve as metaphors for the action that Zittel suggests; they are places for slipping in between the cracks. The works can be seen as architectural models or visual instructions for how to make one’s own survival structures.



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On the walls of the gallery are black-and-white images, enlarged photographs of the desert and the inside of an artist's work space. The use of these images as a backdrop suggests dual possibilities for the sculptures: to be used as both furniture indoors and shelter outdoors. The press release adds that versions of the structures included in the show are simultaneously installed in the desert, inside various units of housing including the artist's home. This transparency — the way Zittel offers her own life, fluid and in motion, as material alongside her artwork — is just one more example of how her project is an ongoing collaboration on many levels. We, the viewers, are always invited in, while being offered a map of where we might take our own lives, should we venture out of the fold.

[Andrea Zittel's exhibition](#) continues at Andrea Rosen Galley (525 W 24th Street, Chelsea, Manhattan) through October 8.

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