

# ANDREA

MARCH 4–MAY 14, 2007  
THE GEFKEN CONTEMPORARY AT MOCA

# ZITTEL: CRITICAL SPACE



*Escape Vehicles, 1996*

*Andrea Zittel: Critical Space* is the first comprehensive survey of Andrea Zittel's work to take place in the United States. Over the last 15 years, Zittel has used her own day-to-day living—her needs and fantasies relating to food, furniture, clothing, and shelter—as the impetus for her artwork. From designing garments to be worn every day for six months, to devising diets based on dehydrated food, to producing furniture to affect one's sense of hierarchies and space, there is no area of daily living, no matter how basic, that she has not been willing to examine.

# ANDREA ZITTEL:

Born in 1965 in Southern California, Zittel moved to New York City in 1990. The contrast between the cleanliness of suburban California and New York's gritty urbanism provided fodder for her early series *Repair Work* (1991), a group of badly damaged objects that she collected off the street and on which she performed extremely rudimentary repairs. In 1991, Zittel established *A-Z Administrative Services*. Zittel uses this company name—derived from her initials—as a corporate banner under which she produces and markets her work. The name not only suggests her interest in questioning how individuals function in a society dominated by branding and corporate identities, but also hints at her ambition for encyclopedic competency. Functioning later as a naming device or brand identifier for all of her works, *A-Z Administrative Services* initially allowed her to negotiate fluidly with animal breeding companies that would not have been as responsive or immediately trusting had she presented herself as an artist. At that time, she was contacting such companies as part of an exploration of breeding and husbandry as analogous to ideas of selection and judgment both in the art world and in society at large. However, her interest quickly shifted from animals to humans. Even as she began to gain attention for works such as the *A-Z Breeding Unit for Averaging Eight Breeds* (1993) that was presented in the 1993 Venice Biennale, her interest in human behavior was evident in sculptural models such as *Family Tree Apartment Complex* (1991), as well as in the drawings that make up the *Clone Series*

(1992). In fact, Zittel almost immediately began to see herself as the subject of her investigations and her own lifestyle as a source of creative potential.

*A-Z Administrative Services* was established in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, as the first of a series of live/work spaces that were critical to the evolution of her work. The 200-square-foot storefront space had to contain all of Zittel's living and working needs: 100 square feet in front as a public work space and the back for private needs. This constrained environment motivated the first experimental structures that she designed to facilitate all of her eating, cleaning, socializing, and storage needs in no more than 60 square feet. The *A-Z Management and Maintenance Unit, Model 003* (1992) is the earliest extant work of this type and the precursor to the *A-Z 1993 Living Unit* (1993). A portable version of the same idea, the *A-Z 1993 Living Unit* can fold down to the size of a steamer trunk to be transported and reassembled wherever necessary. In 1994, Zittel expanded on this idea by collaborating with clients, customizing each basic structure of the environment by working with them to tailor the details according to their needs and desires. This culminated in the series *A-Z Escape Vehicles* (1996), which took this collaboration from the realm of utility to the realization of her clients' escapist fantasies. Adorning a small portable pod with anonymous metal siding, Zittel created interior environments that, like the *A-Z 1993 Living Unit*, could be

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Instead of specifying surface details or choosing objects, clients requested detailed and intimate environments such as a flotation tank, a cave-like grotto, and a lounge based on customized panel vans popular in the 1970s. The *A-Z Escape Vehicles* touch upon ways that people often attempt to escape a large and increasingly uncontrollable world by imposing limitations on themselves.

In 1995, Zittel purchased a small three-story building in Williamsburg that she christened *The A-Z*. In this environment, she produced furniture prototypes and held social events for people in the community. By turning her home into a showroom and testing ground for her work, Zittel began an investigation into the socially constructed divisions that

we make between private and public life in contemporary society. After the establishment of *A-Z West* in Joshua Tree, California, in 2000, the Williamsburg space became known as *A-Z East*. While the work Zittel produced in New York often explored ways in which urban constraints could be addressed creatively, works produced at *A-Z West*, such as *A-Z Cellular Compartment Units* (2001) and *A-Z Homestead Units* (2001–05), carried her living experiments into the ex-urban and frontier environments of Southern California.

One of the highlights of the exhibition is a representative selection of Zittel's *A-Z Uniforms* (1991–2006). Like *A-Z Administrative Services*, the *A-Z Uniforms* were conceived as a solution to maximize Zittel's extremely limited resources.



*A-Z Homestead Unit from A-Z West with Rough Furniture, 2000–05*

color and material—and a clear evolution of material choices. The series began with the group of *A–Z Six-Month Personal Uniforms* (1991–94), multi-functional black-and-white garments produced to be able to be worn for all work and social engagements over a six-month period, allowing her to look stylish but avoid the expense of seasonal fashion changes. This collection was followed by one made from simple rectangles of woven cloth inspired by the Russian Constructivists, which she called *A–Z Personal Panel Uniforms* (1995–98). Zittel then reduced the rectangular panel of fabric to the strand, which she successively knitted, crocheted, and finally hand-knotted to compose the *A–Z Single Strand Uniforms* (1999–2001). For the *A–Z Fiber Form Uniforms* (2002–06), she worked with raw wool, a process that led her to realize that it is easier to be creative when the parameters are narrowed than when all options are possible. Zittel coined the term “Rough” (pronounced “raw”) in relation to her use of simple materials and elemental design strategies to make objects that look better as they become naturally worn or undone as a result of lived experience.

Zittel’s drive for direct control and immediacy often parodies methods of industrial production and corporate branding while exploring the ironic way that so-called progressive designs often refer to supposedly pure or primitive models. She uses “A–Z” in all of her titles, as one would a logo or brand. The production of the early uniforms on a regimented season-

by-season basis plays off the rhythms of the fashion industry, while the annual variations of the *A–Z Living Units*, *A–Z Comfort Units*, and *A–Z Escape Vehicles* operate much as a suburban home model or car brand gets modified and updated each year. Ultimately, Zittel uses her own lifestyle as a vehicle for experimentation to raise questions about responsibility and emancipation in a consumer culture in which promises of leisure-time freedom have worn thin.

*Andrea Zittel: Critical Space* is co-organized by the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston and the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York. The exhibition has been made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, a Federal agency; the patrons, benefactors, and donors to the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston’s Major Exhibition Fund; and the Peter Norton Family Foundation. The accompanying catalogue has been made possible by a grant from The Brown Foundation, Inc., of Houston with additional support from the Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation. MOCA’s presentation is supported in part by Andrea Rosen Gallery and Maja Oeri and Hans Bodenmann.

FRONT: *Escape Vehicles*, 1996, mixed media, 62 x 40 x 84 in. each, various collections, installation view, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, photo Bill Orcutt, courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery; CENTER: *A–Z Homestead Unit* from *A–Z West with Rough Furniture*, 2000–05, powder-coated steel, birch paneling with paint and polyurethane, corrugated metal roof, sculpted foam furniture, fleece blanket, pillows with pillowcases, camp stove with tea, and felted wool *A–Z Fiber Form Uniform* and *A–Z Containers*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Modern and Contemporary Art Council and Contemporary Art Deaccession Fund, photo © Joshua White; REVERSE: *A–Z Personal Uniforms*, 1991–2006, 45 handmade dresses, installation view, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, Emmanuel Hoffman Foundation, permanent loan to the Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel, photo Oren Slor, courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery

## RELATED EVENTS

### MOCA ART TALKS PRESENTED BY GALLERY C

These informal discussions—featuring leading artists, curators, critics, writers, and other experts—are free with museum admission and open to the public. INFO 213/621-1745 or [education@moca.org](mailto:education@moca.org)

SATURDAY, MARCH 25, 3pm

**Trevor Smith**, exhibition co-curator

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### FIELD TRIP HINTERLAND REDUX: THINGS CHANGED AND NOT, IN THE DESERT PROPER

SATURDAY, MAY 5, departs 9am

MOCA GRAND AVENUE

In conjunction with *Andrea Zittel: Critical Space*, the **Center for Land Use Interpretation** is conducting a bus tour into the landscape east of Los Angeles. The daytrip will include sights, sites, and stops in the region around Joshua Tree, 29 Palms, and Desert Center. The tour will travel the same route covered by the Center 10 years ago, as part of the exhibition and tour program *Hinterland*. It will include a stop at Zittel's *A-Z West* and will look at some of the recent developments and changes in this region: the "desert proper," heart of California's desert, filled with romanticism, mysticism, escapism, and second home-ism.

Advance reservations required; no refunds \$70 MOCA members; \$85 general public  
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### FIRST SUNDAYS ARE FOR FAMILIES!

These hands-on, artist-led workshops are FREE for families with children ages five and up.

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SUNDAY, MARCH 4, 1–3:30pm

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Can one space be the place where you eat, sleep, and play the sport you love? Take a cue from *Andrea Zittel: Critical Space* and work with artist **Alison Goldberg** to design your perfect pod for living.

SUNDAY, APRIL 1, 1–3:30pm

THE GEFFEN CONTEMPORARY AT MOCA

Customize your clothing to make it super-useful and uniquely expressive. Bring extra clothes from home or prepare to experiment on what you are wearing in this workshop led by artist **Lisa Anne Auerbach** and inspired by *Andrea Zittel: Critical Space*.

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SUNDAY, APRIL 8, 3–5pm

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Contemplate domestic and urban life in *Andrea Zittel: Critical Space*, then create your own imaginative design solutions with artist **Jeff Cain**.

Education programs at MOCA are supported by The James Irvine Foundation; the William Randolph Hearst Endowment for Education Programs; Jean and Lewis Wolff and Family; the Weingart Foundation; The Lura Gard Newhouse Charitable Lead Trust; the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors through the Los Angeles County Arts Commission; The Joseph B. Gould Fund for Education; Wells Fargo Foundation; the Department of Cultural Affairs, City of Los Angeles; MCI; The Capital Group Companies; and David Hockney.

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