

REGEN PROJECTS

Steffen, Patrick, "Andrea Zittel," *Flash Art*, Vol. XLIV, No. 281, November – December 2011, p. 34

LOS ANGELES

ANDREA ZITTEL

Patrick Steffen

Patrick Steffen: *The installation Lay of My Land, part of an exhibition of new and ongoing work currently on view at Regen Projects, has a very raw aspect and reminds me of a building site. Normally your artwork is always perfectly finished and polished. Is this a new direction that you are exploring?*

Andrea Zittel: My work has evolved a lot since the clean minimalist *Living Units* from the early '90s. By 1998 I had begun exploring an ideology and accompanying aesthetic that I called "Rough," which was very much about letting things be less finished, or in some cases, finished and then undone by wear and tear. With *Lay of My Land #1* we had to find the actual elevations of the land that were then used to make the steel framework underneath. Once I saw this structure, it was so beautiful that it was impossible to cover up entirely. I really like that the work contains so many layers of perceiving the "shape" of land, from the grid-like system created by the parcel maps, to the undulating lines that are used to communicate elevations to the more organic, "natural" landscape on which they all are then superimposed.

PS: *The notion of pattern seems to be essential in your work. It also makes me think about the series A-Z Personal Uniforms 2004-2014, which evokes a strong continuity in your work, as if repeating a pattern is a seamless font of organic inspiration.*

AZ: I've spent a lot of time thinking about patterns that are bound to things like habits, schedules and rules. So you are completely right in connecting the uniform series to the overall idea of patterning. And it is true that regularity and restrictions of the uniform project set a stage for endless creative exploration. I think that the idea of a pattern functions in an interesting way as a psychological projection as a kind of fantasy of "everlasting continuity."

PS: *In the press release, you write:*



"human progress is a sort of parasitic or viral expansion." Is this the reason why you progressively moved away from the city to live in the desert?

AZ: When I was very young our house was located in a very isolated place. We had only one neighbor. But while I was growing up the entire area turned into a massive suburban community, complete with a shopping mall. Now it seems like all of Southern California is being devoured by cheap generic tract housing, and all of the undeveloped land is disappearing. I'm very disturbed by this unchecked growth, but am also aware that by moving out to the desert instead of living in an urban environment I'm actually part of the problem. It is an interesting conundrum, to be so critical of a society of which I'm also a product.

PS: *You are among the founders of High Desert Test Sites (HDTS), a site-specific experimental project by artists and architects throughout the High Desert of Southern California. How did the project start and how has it evolved?*

AZ: I moved to the desert because I was interested in seeing how contemporary art would function in the world at large. HDTS is an extension of this idea: it supports artists who want to make art

that is inserted into a landscape or community, but not within the constraints of what we would typically consider "public art." Over the last eight years the inner workings of the project evolved quite a bit. Many of the other founders had other projects or art careers that began to take up most of their time, so I handled HDTS myself for several years. We have no funding, so this was incredibly tough! Now I've enlisted an administrative director, Aurora Tang, to help run the project. HDTS has always been very much "in the moment," but it is fun to brainstorm with another person about the future of the project.

PS: *The very recent book Lay of My Land (2011) is basically a 160-page conversation between you and curator Richard Julin. How relevant is it for you to talk about your work and your personal life experience?*

AZ: I write about my work as much as I talk about it; this process is important as a form of externalized thinking. Being a visual artist creates the expectation that the ultimate culmination of one's experiences and thought processes will be contained in the work itself, but these conversations and writings certainly help me to hone my craft and to understand more consciously what is often a very intuitive and personal process.

ANDREA ZITTEL, installation view at Regen Projects II, Los Angeles, 2011. Courtesy the artist and Regen Projects, Los Angeles. Photo: Brian Forrest.

PS: *Speaking about the project Prototype for A-Z Pocket Property and your experience on the floating island in 2000, you said, "Most of my work is about creating an intimate, personal and controllable situation." Eleven years later, does this statement still apply?*

AZ: My immediate response would be to say "no," and to explain that my work is all about living in the world and being open to unmediated experience and risks. But when I think about the projects I have done in the last ten years, there is always a high degree of intimacy and the personal in them. For instance, after moving to Joshua Tree I wrote a lot about the idea of an "intimate universe." Instead of trying to turn art into an export commodity, I believed it would be more interesting to create work within a small intimate community for which it could have a more tangible and profound effect. Perhaps the one thing that has changed the most in the last eleven years is that, because I'm now older and stronger and more experienced at living life, I'm also much more open to the uncontrollable and to undertakings that embrace chance or imperfection.