

# REGEN PROJECTS

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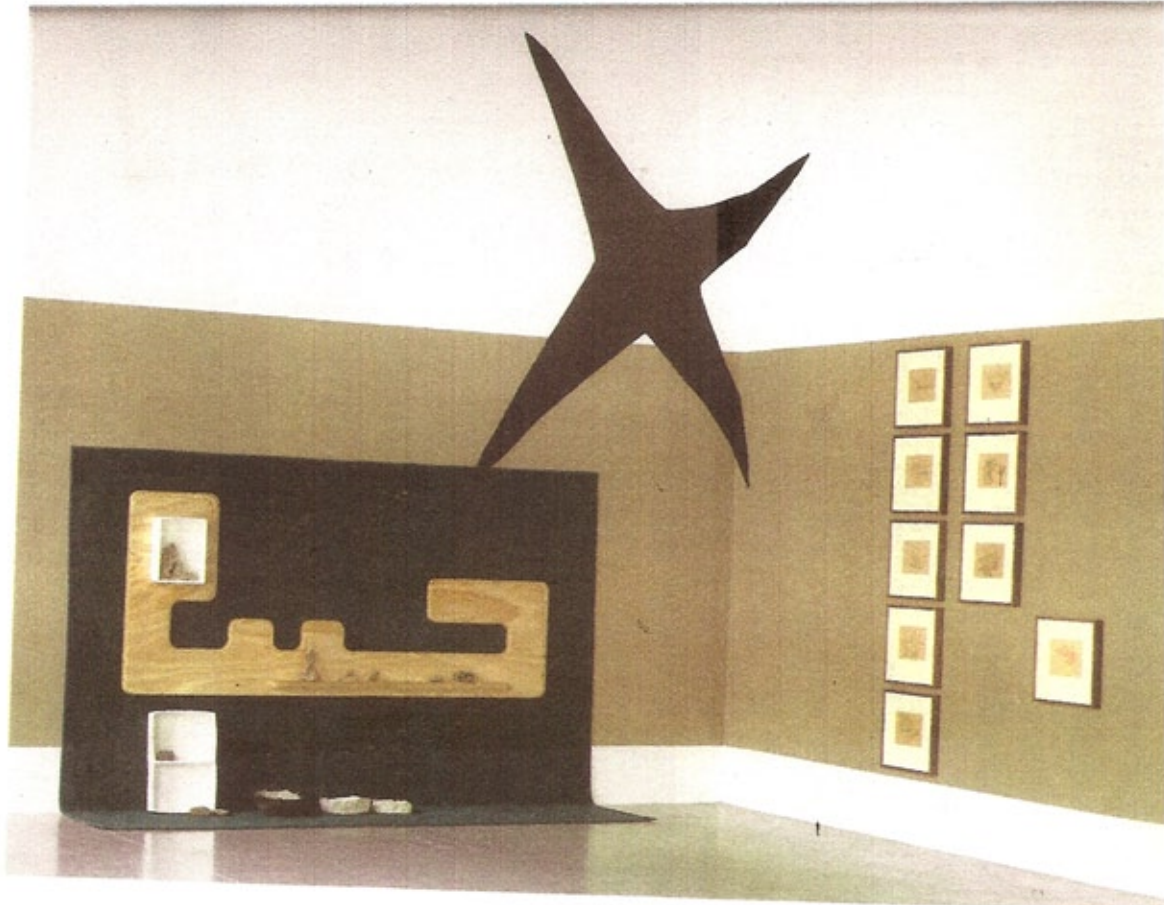
*Cristina Travaglini*



*A-Z Homestead Unit from A-Z West, with Customized Rough Furniture. 2001 - 2004 - courtesy Regen Projects, Los Angeles*



*Advanced Technologies, mostra personale presso la Galleria Massimo De Carlo, marzo-aprile 2007 - courtesy Gallerie Massimo De Carlo.*



Andrea Zittel was born in Escondido, California, in 1965. Her sculptures and installations transform everything necessary for life—such as eating, sleeping, bathing, and socializing—into artful experiments in living. Blurring the lines between life and art, Zittel's projects continually reinvent her relationship to her domestic and social environment. Influenced by modernist design and architecture from the early twentieth century, the artist's one-woman fake organization, "A-Z Administrative Services," develops furniture, homes, and vehicles for contemporary consumers.

Your work seems to tend towards design as a privileged tool for getting in touch with the real audience, that is composed by people who live the same life that you live and consume and use the same things. You seem to think that design is powerful because it concerns solutions for everyday life, do you?

I am less interested in design because it creates solutions, and more interested the way that it pinpoints the issues, problems, concerns that define our culture. The topics that (we) artists address in art often feels so arbitrary to me – as if they are parcels of intellectual real estate that artists "claim". Not only does design touch us through the act of day to day living (as you suggest), but also in most design (even bad design, or advertising) one can divulge latent issues that reveal the psychological needs, desires and the perceived realities of our time.

In this light the role of the artist in the society changes, he is not anymore a mere portrayer but someone with a revolutionary potential, in the position of acting on the structure of modern living. And here we can recognize the utopian attitude of Modernism. How do you face with this tradition?

I think that the early modern movements were formed in a highly transitional historical moment – hence their ability to affect the makeup of a new society... a new way of living. What I take from the utopian attitude of modernism is the intensity of focus on the everyday practicalities of "modern life."

What I'm trying to say is that this historical moment of "art of change" paralleled real change in all facets of society at that time. Since we have little real change in our culture now, it is difficult to create an art of change unless it is an art of personal change, which I guess (for better or worse) is what I am engaged in. I think that my work attempts to define (and sometimes either critique or reconcile), "modern" issues such as individuality, authority, autonomy, and consumerism as they manifest themselves within an American culture of which I am a product.

Something that you share with Modernism is the attempt to suggest a new way of organizing people's life, through the production of living units, objects, clothes that overturn the standards of living; I guess that it happens also in opposition to the creative stasis of contemporary art. You said that good art should exactly suggest a new take on the world's working, but at the present time there's no art doing this job. So you think that art has used up its potential?

I think that art simply has to figure out its role in society in order to function again. I'm not convinced that art should determine how people should live, although it would be quite helpful if art could help us better understand our "condition".

My personal belief is that art has to change it's economic structure in order to change itself – but I'm still unsure how this could happen in a way that doesn't replicate problems with other kinds of economic systems such as mass marketing. I'm at a point in my life where I have more questions than solutions, but perhaps that is what makes it so interesting to be an artist working right now.



*A-Z Timeless Chamber: Model 004, 2000 - courtesy Regen Projects, Los Angeles*



*A-Z Travel Trailer Unit - Customized by Miriam and Gordon Zitel, 1995 - courtesy Regen Projects, Los Angeles*



*A-Z Comfort Unit II, 1994 - courtesy Regen Projects, Los Angeles*

Why did you need to present yourself under A to Z Administrative Services?

Art and design are both facets of a culture of commodity. Design emerged out of art. It is a "hand" of art. One could say that most art nowadays is design, as easily as you could claim that design is art. The bigger difference of course (as you suggest) is the difference between corporate structure and a more individualized market system. I have played with the identities of both the "individual" and the "company".

One of the main differences between what you do and corporate design is that you try to overthrow the idea of consumption as an endless process, intended to repeat itself because of the wear and tear and the obsolescence that things are subjected to. In this light the artistic gesture seems to be a reparative gesture, promoter of a new way of producing things, tended to endurance: *Advanced Technologies*, like the title of your current exhibition at Massimo De Carlo gallery. Yours seems to be an act of resistance, even if it takes place inside the process of production and not outside of it...

Yes, but I've noticed that now even the big corporations are beginning to use this same language as a way to brand commodities. Sustainability, green living, recycling, and other tags of "resistance" have become the new capitalist marketing tools. It makes me question my own language and agenda when I see how quickly it is devoured and reinterpreted by the machine.

Maybe that's why you've suggested ways of getting isolated from society... I'm thinking of *Pocket Properties*. Sometimes I feel like your work wavers between the tendency to separation and the tendency to integration, between inside and outside... So you think you try new solutions for the world or new solutions for living apart? Do you choose conflict or reparation?

I personally thrive on being alone. It is the only time I feel truly free. But I wonder if this romanization of the individual is something that has been imposed by a culture, which more and more strives to separate and individualize its citizens in order to make them better consumers. Because we are alone we are lonelier and we have more time and more needs and we work harder to make more money, which makes us better purchasers... I cannot change my desire to separate, but understanding how this fits in as a historical and culturally influenced archetype helps me to deal with it in a more productive way. Despite a desire to be an individual (and to be alone), I believe that it is crucial to nurture civic engagement and collective responsibility in order to feel fully empowered as a human being.

You've used this expression, talking about *Pocket Properties*: *capsulation*. It reminds me some anthropological theories and the idea that in modern life you're destined to a specific way of living and thinking since before you're born, you're destined to a determinate practical and ideological model. Strangely it seems to be exactly what you're trying to fight back...

In *Take your Rough*, for example, the idea is that everybody should be able to live in accordance with his own habits, just taking no interest in accepted customs, isn't it?

By capsule I was referring to the lack of social contact as a result of spending all of our time in our cars, homes, telephones, and internet -- there is very little contact or civic life outside of shopping malls and McDonalds. The pocket properties were intended as an account of what I perceive as a viable extension of capsulated living in Southern California.



There's an endless literature on the return to primitive state, considered as an idyllic state where it was in use an egalitarianism lost in advanced societies. An experiment like *Pocket Properties* seems to draw on this tradition, does it?

Yes, I have always been fascinated by our inherent desire to return to a more "natural" kind of order (especially when what we consider natural now is actually a totally constructed or mediated scenario). The works that play with this the most directly are pieces like *Rough Furniture* and the *Fiberform Garments*. I've always been intrigued by the way that the most progressive designs often look backwards towards a perceived original or pure state of being.

You've also lived in the island for some time.. How did it work?

It actually didn't work out all that well because of the weather! I conceived of the island while living in Southern California so it seemed to me like the perfect summer getaway. But of course in Scandinavia it was freezing and rained a lot and the water was very rough.

And after staying on this uncomfortable island you've decided to build a house in the desert... why?

The problem was that, as soon as we anchored the island out in the sound near Copenhagen, it seemed like every person in the harbor who had a private boat came out to circle the island. So, instead of having peace and quiet I ended up feeling like a circus freak. So with the fantasy of aloneness, and while still on the island, I started to fantasize about where I could really be alone, and decided to start looking for a house out in the desert.

It looks like you consider yourself as a human cavy, in order to test and verify the projects' practicability and effectiveness. Don't you think that as an artist you're maybe a too receptive subject? I mean, have you ever thought to test your projects on other people?

The problem is that I do not feel comfortable imposing potentially negative experiences upon other people... but I have no fear of imposing it upon myself. I also think that I like to present my work and my personal experimentation as an "example" of a life rather than as a model for one.

There is a Jerry Brown statement that I really like - he talks about the importance of becoming a 'citizen' versus just becoming a 'consumer'. I worry that we've become so conditioned as consumers that we're only capable of choosing from the options that are presented to us. What I would like to show people is that we're capable of creating other options, that there's a whole other world of possibilities beyond just what we're being offered.