

500 WORDS

Andrea Zittel

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Left: View of living space inside Indianapolis Island. Right: **Andrea Zittel**, *Indianapolis Island*, 2010, mixed media, dimensions variable. Installation view, Indianapolis Museum of Art.

Andrea Zittel has received international acclaim for nearly two decades. Concurrent with exhibitions of her work in Florence at the Palazzo Pitti and Sadie Coles HQ in London, the Joshua Tree, California–based artist recently debuted her latest installation, Indianapolis Island, a makeshift island in 100 Acres, the new “art & nature park” at the Indianapolis Museum of Art.

THE ISLAND is iconographic for conditions of autonomy, independence, and individualism in our culture. It represents our greatest fears and greatest fantasies; everybody wants to be an individual and to have autonomy—but we also want to feel like we are part of a community. The desire for individualization is linked inextricably to consumer culture: People consume to individualize themselves and they also consume to combat the resulting feelings of isolation or loneliness. This facilitates fascinating oppositional forces of desire, repulsion, and impulsion simultaneously.

I grew up in suburban Southern California. My parents built our house in what was originally a very rural and undeveloped area in dry scrubby rolling hills a little north of San Diego. At the time, the area was becoming completely developed. I don't think that people from cities can understand how parasitic that kind of rapid growth can feel. Each family that moved into our neighborhood built a large home on a freshly surveyed piece of land. I remember feeling very aware of how the resulting yards were then landscaped. Each was thematized as if it were its own country; one yard was a jungle, the next a forest, and perhaps the next parcel would be a desert. People lived as if they were isolated in self-contained estates that were wholly separate from the larger community.

If you look at the larger historical evolution of architecture and domestic spaces, our homes are increasingly segregated and compartmentalized. It was the norm when I was growing up for each child to have his own bedroom. This is something that is historically quite new. I often wonder if it is the reason why it's so difficult for adults of my generation, and those since, to cohabituate or have close interpersonal relationships. I believe that we have become so successfully individualized that it is difficult for us to live collectively.

When beginning to travel to Europe in the early 1990s for shows like Documenta and Münster, I became highly aware of the differences between European and American conceptions of personal space. My series of small deserted islands, which were first made for Münster, comes out of this consciousness. The Indianapolis project is an evolution of a larger idea for a habitable island. The first habitable island I made in Scandinavia was so large that it had to be destroyed, and since then I have been looking for an opportunity to make an island that would be a permanent piece.

My use of a natural landform in Indianapolis is also influenced by *Point of Interest*, which I made for Central Park in 1999. After researching different representations of nature and understanding how strongly Central Park was influenced by a nineteenth-century perception of “pastoral” nature, I wanted to present a late-twentieth-century conception of nature with action, adventure, and eco-sports.

How to interface with the public is an ongoing problem in my work. I am always looking for a function that my work can play. There has to be a reason for it. I did not want the *Indianapolis Island* to be an inert sculpture in the park. The project needed an integrated social function. Originally, we were going to make the structure very big. But when the economy tanked, we had to shrink it to stay within our budget. It actually became a much more interesting project under the new constraints. The island’s revised size was just large enough for two people to live in. Then “Indy Island” became a really interesting experiment. We chose two island residents who would be mediators between the public and the work. So much of my output is about personal experience, and the island inhabitants will act as instruments of interface between their own experiences and those of the public; they will be rowing people and facilitating visits to the island. I am generally a private person and could never interact so successfully with people myself, but the island residents [Mike Runge and Jessica Dunn] are charming, charismatic, and comfortable with the public—they are writing a blog to document their experiences.

Really good art simultaneously reveals both good and evil. It brings up complicated questions rather than proposing smug answers. “Indy Island” brings into focus fundamental issues of need, comfort, security, and privacy. (I noticed that many of the park visitors were very interested in where the island residents would poop). It is an interesting exercise for people to examine their own day-to-day lifestyles and consider what they could live without, or live with. I am, however, hesitant to jump on the eco-bandwagon, because I feel that its moralistic point of view is not very interesting. Much of the movement for sustainable living is just another form of commoditization, which simply creates new levels of desire. I see many advertisements for people to get new and expensive eco-friendly products, but little of the current mentality has to do with thinking about actual needs. Do you really need a car? Do you need all the clothes? Do you need a new computer every two or three years? Without being moralistic or preachy, I hope that these are the questions my work will inspire.

— As told to James Eischen