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The No No-Exit Closet: An Alternative to No-Exit Pathways

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts degree in Visual Arts

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Abstract

The focus of this dossier is my Masters Thesis project, which is titled *The No No-Exit Closet*. *The No No-Exit Closet* has been a project through which I have developed a heightened ethical awareness of how I consume, store, throw away, and reuse the materials that enter and exit my life. This thesis dossier is divided into three sections: an extended artist statement about my thesis project, photographic documentation of the artwork I produced for my Masters Thesis Exhibition, and a case study on the artwork of Andrea Zittel. The extended artist statement describes my Masters Thesis project which is a meditation on the reconceptualization of the closet as a no no-exit zone. The case study distinguishes similarities and differences between Zittel's artwork and the artwork of the Russian Constructivists, American Minimalists, and American Post-Minimalists.

Keywords:

Storage, Closet, Alchemical Vessel, Process, Waste, No No-Exit, No-Exit, Andrea Zittel, Donald Judd, Minimalism, Post-Minimalism, Russian Constructivism

Lay Summary

The focus of this dossier is my Masters Thesis project, which is titled *The No No-Exit Closet*. *The No No-Exit Closet* has been a project through which I have developed a heightened ethical awareness of how I consume, store, throw away, and reuse the materials that enter and exit my life. This thesis dossier is divided into three sections: an extended artist statement about my thesis project, photographic documentation of the artwork I produced for my Masters Thesis Exhibition, and a case study on the artwork of Andrea Zittel.

Acknowledgements

I undertook my MFA studies without realizing the extent to which art would help me cultivate my focus and vision. Through the completion of the MFA degree I have become more acquainted with the process of refining and distilling an idea. Over the course of the last two years art has been an instrument that has helped me see, engage, and move through my own experience in a more conscious way.

A special thank you to the following individuals who have supported me on my journey –

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---------------------------------|-------|
| Abstract | ii |
| Lay Summary | iii |
| Acknowledgements | iv-v |
| Table of Contents | vi |
| Introduction | 1-2 |
| Extended Artist Statement | 3-19 |
| Practice Documentation | 20-31 |
| Case Study | 32-56 |
| CV..... | 57-62 |

Introduction

It is human nature to put things in places, boxes, and closets, expecting them to never reappear. Invariably, however, these things come back to confront and even haunt us and others, including those who survive us. After having been dispatched to places that we imagined would provide no exit, these objects reappear and demand of us decisions we had hoped would never have to be made. Decisions even more complicated and unresolvable than they would have been had we faced them the first time around. The hoped-for no exit does not exist.

It is with this problem in mind that I undertook my MFA studies and developed a body of work that accompanies my MFA Thesis Exhibition, which is titled *The No No-Exit Closet*. This dossier helps give context to the concept of this work and the research that has informed it. This dossier is comprised of an extended artist statement, photographic documentation of the work developed for my Thesis Exhibition, and a case study on the practice of Andrea Zittel.

The extended artist statement explains the concept of The No No-Exit Closet project. It includes a discussion of the closet as a structure through which I have developed a heightened ethical awareness of how I consume, store, throw away, and reuse the materials that enter and exit my life. The artist statement includes discussions of some of the key ideas of Productivist Russian Constructivism and American Minimalism. Throughout these sections I address the ways my art converges with and diverges from the concerns of the artists involved with these art historical movements. In the artist statement I make the analogy between the workings of my closet and the workings of an alchemical vessel, one that transmutes waste into art. The artist statement also addresses my material choices in terms of how they support the utility and concept of the work.

The photographic documentation included in this dossier shows the installation of my Thesis Exhibition, titled *The No No-Exit Closet*. I have included installation shots as well as isolated close-ups of the individual works in the show.

The case study focuses on the art as life practice of Andrea Zittel. Through a comparative analysis of Zittel's *Aggregated Stacks* (2010-present) and Donald Judd's *Untitled (Stacks)* of 1963-1968 my case study establishes ties between Zittel's practice and the movements of American Minimalism and Russian Constructivism, establishing how Zittel's concerns are a unique remix and realization of Russian Constructivism, American Minimalism, and American Post-Minimalism.

The No No-Exit Closet was exhibited virtually at The McIntosh Gallery between June 24 – July 24th 2021. To view the walkthrough of the exhibition follow this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2RB75xfAdr4>

Extended Artist Statement

The No No-Exit Closet: An Alternative to No-Exit Pathways

Introduction

As an artist I seek to heighten our conscious and ethical relationship to the labours, habits, rhythms, and materials of our domestic lives by directing attention to the otherwise overlooked meanings of these everyday encounters. Everyday structures like storage units, specifically the closet, have been a consistent and recurring theme in my work. The closet is a site through which I have developed a heightened awareness of how I consume, store, throw away, and reuse the materials that enter and exit my life.

My work is a proposition to develop an awareness of the consequences of our everyday actions. It stems from a longstanding interest in consumerism and a need to find solutions to the problem of waste production. In 2019, during the first year of my MFA degree, I designed and built a closet capable of holding all of the waste I would produce as a result of making art over the course of the two-year program. The purpose of this closet was to contain the waste until it could be repurposed into functional objects and art. The title of the closet, The No No-Exit Closet, plays on the No Exit signage one would see upon entering a dead-end street. The No No-Exit twist conveys the idea that what we typically assume to be a dead-end, in fact is not a dead end. In the case of the closet this means that what we put into the closet and expect never to re-enter into life, actually does. The No No-Exit Closet project serves as a way to contemplate the relationship between the consumption and storage of material and the exit points that necessarily follow.

The No No-Exit Closet is a meditation on the movement of materials entering and exiting the closet and the processing and transformation of waste material into new art. The transformative act of repurposing waste into art is made possible—and held—by the closet, which serves as a kind of alchemical vessel, without which the transmutation could not occur. Like an alchemical vessel, The No No-Exit Closet represents both a physical and symbolic space¹. Physically speaking, it is a chamber in which waste is ordered, organized, and held before eventually being repurposed into functional objects and art. Symbolically speaking, it is a transformational container within which material is held in consciousness until what to do with it becomes known, and a threshold which materials must cross in their untransformed and transformed states. It is a practical place to store the waste I produce and a symbolic space that facilitates the contemplation of the trajectory of material, which would typically follow a dead-end path towards a landfill. Like an alchemical vessel, The No No-Exit Closet facilitates the processing of materials. By conceptualizing of the closet as an alchemical vessel, the closet becomes a structure which offers alternatives to the no exit pathways material typically travels.

The No No-Exit Closet provokes an encounter between utility and concept. It provides the viewer with the opportunity to contemplate alternative pathways for materials which would typically produce waste only, and to correct how we often wrongly think about closets as no exit zones, especially for the materials in our lives with which we no longer want to deal. By reflecting on how the project reconceptualizes the closet as a structure which, rather than preventing materials from entering life, ultimately keeps materials within process and life, it is

¹ Adam Mclean, “The Alchemical Vessel as Symbol of the Soul,” in *Alchemical Allegories*, ed. Darrell Gordon (2016): <https://silo.tips/download/alchemical-allegories>.

hoped that the art viewer will adapt this conceptual proposition to the closets that actually and metaphorically exist in their own lives.

Alignment exists between my work and the work of certain Russian Constructivist and Minimalist artists.² The first section of this artist statement, “What I Take With Me”, addresses what some of the key ideas of Minimalism and Russian Constructivism offer me as an artist working today. Within these sections I will address the ways my sculpture both converges with and diverges from these art historical movements with particular attention paid to the consciousness raising objects, utilitarian art, and art into life spirit of the Productivist Russian Constructivists, and the concern for industrial materials, the grid, and ‘presentness’ expressed by certain Minimalist artists.

The second section “Processing What I Carry” speaks to my need to find ways to repurpose my studio waste, and, in a sense, upcycle the downstream waste trend. All of the art waste I produce in my studio is sorted, organized, and stored inside of a closet I have come to call The No No-Exit Closet. This last section explores the central role of the closet’s practical and metaphorical significance as a container that facilitates the transmutation of waste into functional objects and art. I will explore the closet as motif and alchemical vessel, and I will offer a general description of my work through a discussion of my key material elements while reviewing how they support both the utility and symbolic concept of the work altogether.

² I acknowledge that the histories of Russian Constructivism and Minimalism are far from uniform because the concerns of the individual artists involved are often unique and sometimes contradictory. My intention in this statement is to address *some* of the key ideas attributed to these movements.

Section One: What I Take With Me

I have chosen to extract certain elements from both Minimalism and Productivist Russian Constructivism and combine them in ways that feel important for the times I am living in. I am especially drawn to the Constructivist concern for the role that art can play in fostering social change. Concerning Minimalism, its efficient use of materials and cut-to-the-chase presentation conveys an efficient use of material that speaks to the environmental concerns of my project. My work blends the Minimalist and Constructivist influences, yet it also incorporates and openly acknowledges some of their respective attributes.

While Minimalism and Constructivism share certain formal similarities, such as their use of industrial materials, reduced forms, and hard-edged geometries, their reasons for using these formalisms are at times dissimilar. Minimalist artists like Donald Judd and Carl Andre embraced industrial production methods, as opposed to hand-made ones, which the Constructivists favoured. While the Minimalists adopted industrial materials and production methods, which again were favoured by the Constructivists for their important suggestion of the ‘mechanized’ fabrication element of collective labour, these Constructivist points of reference were not the concern of the Minimalist artists who adopted them. Minimalists like Judd and Andre were interested in the potential of industrial production methods and the formal properties of industrial materials. They were not, however, concerned with the social objective of mass production and availability. The Constructivists’ adoption of industrial production methods, on the other hand, were in no way an attempt to condemn the handmade. Rather, their resort to factory production was simply a means of producing affordable goods *en masse*. In fact, the Constructivists

regretted the loss of the handmade aesthetic, but accepted it as a necessary sacrifice in the name of increasing class equality through producing widely accessible goods.³

Most of the materials I used to build The No No-Exit Closet are typical home construction materials. The No No-Exit Closet's walls are constructed from sheets of pegboard. Pegboard is an inexpensive and practical organizational building material, something the Constructivists would have approved of. The use of caster wheels would also be of significance to the Constructivists in that they further enhance the closet's utility by enabling the closet to be easily repositioned.⁴ The way the closet's pegboard grid operates shares something with the Minimalist's use of the grid. The Minimalist's adopted the grid as a system for ordering objects in space because it allowed them to create non-hierarchical, non-linear compositions. Non-hierarchical and non-linear compositions elevate the whole or gestalt, rather than individual parts or the relationships between individual parts.⁵ Within The No No-Exit Closet the grid is a conceptual framework that is useful for the depiction of the waste usage process, which is neither strictly hierarchical nor linear.

Waste materials that enter The No No-Exit Closet are organized within it and held before eventually exiting the closet along a variety of pathways. These pathways, which include being recycled, repurposed, and gifted, represent ways that material can be kept in process and in life instead of following paths that typically produce waste only.

³ Joseph Weinger. "Constructivism: Fashioning Socialist Modernity," *Compass: The Gallatin Research Journal*, no. 6 (2019): <https://wp.nyu.edu/compass/2019/03/28/constructivism-fashioning-socialist-modernity/>.

⁴ Alexander Lavrentiev, "Experimental Furniture Design in the 1920's," *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*, vol. 11:2 (1989): 149, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1503987>.

⁵ Frances Colpitt, "Internal Issues: Systematic Order," in *Minimal Art: The Critical Perspective* (Michigan: U.M.I Research Press, 1990).

Within The No No-Exit Closet the pegboard grid allows organizational adjustments to be made easily and quickly.⁶ The ability to make quick adjustments is important to keeping the waste in The No No-Exit Closet organized. My capacity to keep waste material in process is dependent on the degree to which the closet's contents are ordered and differentiated. I take the position that order is necessary to support the level of creativity, productivity and process the No No-Exit Closet requires to function optimally.

One further advantage of using pegboard is that it enabled me to build a relatively lightweight structure, which contributed to its mobility on casters. The casters also remind me of the fact that my project and the problem it speaks to will always follow me. Whereas certain Minimalists tended to use heavy industrial materials, like steel, concrete, and plywood, and thus the weight, stability and even permanency of their sculptures became significant to the viewer's experience of them, I chose to send a very different signal with my use of casters. Portability is a key component of The No No-Exit Closet's future, which is in contrast to the Minimalist focus on existing in 'presentness.'

The Constructivists thought that society's consciousness and worldview was shaped by the manner in which objects were produced and used in everyday life. Therefore, by extension, they also thought that the way humans related to objects would become the way humans related to other humans.⁷ According to this line of thinking, it was possible to transform society's worldview and consciousness through the production and consumption of 'socialist objects'.⁸

⁶ The modularity of pegboard supports multi-purpose usage which would certainly have appealed to the Constructivists.

⁷ Olga Kravets. "On things and comrades," *Ephemera: Theory & Politics In Organization*, vol. 13 (2013): 423: <http://www.ephemerajournal.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/contribution/13-2kravets.pdf>

⁸ Christina Kiaer. "Boris Arvatov's Socialist Objects," *October*, vol. 81 (1997): 105, doi: <https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.2307/779021>

The Constructivists believed *socialist objects* had the capacity to exist as comrades and coworkers as opposed to possessions.⁹ Ultimately, they believed that fostering a deep connection with *socialist objects* would produce the modern subjects of the Utopian Socialism of which they dreamed.¹⁰ The Constructivist movement was a political movement, an effort to support, through the materials and objects of everyday life, the revolution led by the Bolshevik party. Varvara Stepanova, Vladimir Tatlin, and Alexander Rodchenko were Bolshevik sympathizers and key players of the Constructivist movement. They considered themselves Productivists. The Productivist ideal was that of the “artist-engineer”¹¹, an artist who actively participated in the industrial production of affordable, accessible, and utilitarian goods that supported the Socialist utopia that the Bolsheviks imagined for Russia. Stepanova, Tatlin, and Rodchenko broke from the tradition of art for art’s sake in order to focus on developing products like workers’ uniforms, pots, pans, energy efficient stoves, and packaging and advertising for state owned businesses¹². Alexander Rodchenko’s 1925 chess table, which he designed for the Lenin Worker’s Club, is a good example of Productivist art. He designed the chair using reduced geometries and colours so that it would be accessible to all people. He also designed the chair so that it would fold up, meaning it could be easily moved and stored. Rodchenko’s concern for utility, modularity, and accessibility reflected the Productivist ideal.

⁹ Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005), 1, https://monoskop.org/images/a/a9/Kiaer_Christina_Imagine_No_Possessions_The_Socialist_Objects_of_Russian_Constructivism.pdf.

¹⁰ Duy Lap Nguyen, “Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism,” Review of *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism*, by Christina Kiaer, *Russian Journal of Communication* vol. 6:2 (2014): 220-223, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19409419.2014.917938>

¹¹ Duy Lap Nguyen, “Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism,” Review of *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism*, by Christina Kiaer, *Russian Journal of Communication* vol. 6:2 (2014): 220-223, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19409419.2014.917938>

¹² Joseph Weinger. “Constructivism: Fashioning Socialist Modernity,” *Compass: The Gallatin Research Journal*, no. 6 (2019): <https://wp.nyu.edu/compass/2019/03/28/constructivism-fashioning-socialist-modernity/>.

The Productivist ideal was threefold; to design objects that could foster the new socialist life, to design objects that were utilitarian, and to design objects that could be mass produced by factories. The Constructivists wanted to replace commodity fetishism, which they saw as the dominant mode of relating to the material world under Capitalism, with a different way of being in relationship to objects. They wanted to do this not by renouncing material possessions altogether but by eliminating possessive feelings and behaviours towards them.¹³ Thus, the Constructivists proposed the notion of objects not as possessions but as comrades and co-workers, as themselves “active and animate participants”¹⁴ in life. In conceiving of objects as comrades, the Constructivists were not simply saying, “take better care of objects”, but rather “recognize that objects have their own phenomenology”¹⁵. As interesting as this notion is, it is unfortunate that the Constructivists failed to take their thinking on this subject to a level that would have supported its practical implementation or further theoretical development.

Something of value we can take from this Productivist concept now is how it helps us to mitigate against advanced capitalist practices like obsolescent design. We should also consider how our objects are constructing us, instead of vice versa. What society are we building with all these objects? In our time, we can incorporate the Productivist notion of deepening human object relationships into our contemporary ideas of recycling and re-purposing. In this respect, The No-No-Exit Closet shares a similar ethos with the Productivists by encouraging us to re-examine our

¹³ Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005), 7, https://monoskop.org/images/a/a9/Kiaer_Christina_Imagine_No_Possessions_The_Socialist_Objects_of_Russian_Constructivism.pdf.

¹⁴ Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005), 1, https://monoskop.org/images/a/a9/Kiaer_Christina_Imagine_No_Possessions_The_Socialist_Objects_of_Russian_Constructivism.pdf.

¹⁵ Olga Kravets. “On things and comrades,” *Ephemera: Theory & Politics In Organization*, vol. 13 (2013): 434: <http://www.ephemerajournal.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/contribution/13-2kravets.pdf>

thinking about productive economies and the “lifepath” of materials. The No No-Exit Closet asks, how can we keep materials in process, and thus active participants in life, after our initial use of them is over?

What is clear is that the Productivists were interested in art that supported and anticipated a Socialist culture that had not yet arrived. In this way, we can understand their works as future oriented propositions. Similarly, through The No No-Exit Closet, I imagine a different future; one in which consciousness about consumption and waste is heightened. The No No-Exit Closet operates as a proposition, for rethinking our relationship to waste, with regards to offering, both practically and conceptually, a way of keeping materials in process and in life.

Like the Productivists’ work, my work suggests that artists can participate as designers do, by producing objects with functional use value for the transformation of everyday living. Like the Productivists, I use my artistic skills to develop objects that, due to their utility, close relationship to furniture, and recycling design ethos have a relative mass market appeal. The Productivists believed in an egalitarian art that promoted a collective spirit; and, I too, aim to create art that can be appreciated both for its design-forward form and for its conceptual power to effect social change.

The Productivists believed consciousness could be transformed through the consumption and use of *socialist objects*.¹⁶ My work similarly embraces the belief that objects transform consciousness beyond use-value interaction. The consciousness raising aspect of The No No-Exit Closet is introduced through the reconceptualization of the closet as a no no-exit zone, rather than the no-exit zone which most would imagine it to be. The No No-Exit Closet is an art form

¹⁶ Olga Kravets. “On things and comrades,” *Ephemera: Theory & Politics In Organization*, vol. 13 (2013): 423: <http://www.ephemerajournal.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/contribution/13-2kravets.pdf>

that symbolically presents thought-provoking questions relating to individual and collective material usage. The closet invites the viewer to inquire into, and ultimately consciously own, their material usage process, which is important if we are to transform our single-use and one-purpose only design culture.

Section Two: Processing What I Carry

On the Closet as Container and Symbol

While the reduced abstracted geometries and colour palettes of Minimalism are present in The No No-Exit Closet, they certainly do not exist as abstract meditations on form alone. Some Minimalists, like Donald Judd and Carl Andre, worked with the reduced forms of the square and rectangle because they thought these geometries carried with them the fewest referential associations (perhaps triangles too easily evoked houses and spheres too easily evoked planets). In contrast to the Minimalist's search for the most neutral form, I deliberately modelled The No No-Exit Closet after known entities: an alchemical vessel, changing room, wagon, and shed; utilitarian forms that have strong referential associations and functions.

Two important design elements of the closet are its open ceiling and its colour palette. The frame of the closet was built using found lumber that had been painted red, yellow, and blue. I used these same colours, in addition to black, grey, and white, to paint the door of the closet, thus linking the interior and exterior of the structure together. I designed the closet without a ceiling so that it would be coextensive with its exterior environment. I believe these two design aspects help to achieve the sense of the structure as a whole, as well as express the idea of continuous space; that there are no absolute boundaries between inside and outside. The use of form and colour to foreground the relationship between interior and exterior space was

exemplified by the Dutch architect and designer Gerrit Rietveld, specifically in works such as The Rietveld-Schroder House, built in 1924.¹⁷ The idea that no absolute boundary exists between inside and outside is relevant to my work because it relates to the No No-Exit aspect of The No No-Exit Closet. The idea that we can dispel things, such as waste, to no-exit zones that are separate from our own zones is an attractive illusion, similar to the illusion that you can separate space. When we acknowledge that there is no boundary between inside and outside we are forced to be accountable for how our decisions and actions impact other people and our environment.

One further reason why I wanted to use bold colours to emphasize the door is because the door is an important aspect of the concept of the closet as an alchemical vessel. The door is both the vessel's threshold, which materials must cross in both their untransformed and transformed states, and a signifier of inner transformation. Requiring the viewer to open the door to the closet themselves encourages participation and allows a handing over of responsibility to the viewer to inquire further into the work. Without a door on the closet this important choice would not be given to the viewer. The choice to inquire further, ultimately into the problem of waste that the work presents, is a critical moment in the experience and meaning of the installation as a whole.

For my thesis exhibition, instead of showing The No No-Exit Closet full of actual waste I chose to follow a different approach to presenting the No No-Exit concept. Upon opening the door of the closet viewers will see white laminated labels hanging from peg hooks inserted in the walls of the closet. There are two sets of labels; one printed in dark green text and one printed in red. Green indicates waste materials that have been kept on the right side of process and red indicates waste materials that are on the wrong side of process. The concept of the closet is that

¹⁷ Anthony Zonaga, "De Stijl – Abstraction in Architecture," *Academia*, <https://www.academia.edu/5187702>.

eventually everything will necessarily exit the closet, and that there are environmentally sound and environmentally unsound ways to exit. Green indicates waste materials that are following or have followed the environmentally sound path, and red indicates waste materials that have not followed or are not following the environmentally sound path.

The labels printed in green text read:

MATERIALS I WILL RECYCLE

MATERIALS I WILL REPURPOSE

MATERIALS FOR WHICH I KNOW I WILL FIND A USE

MATERIALS I WILL GIVE AWAY TO OTHERS

A MATERIAL I ALLOWED TO EXIT TO BE REPURPOSED BY SOMEONE ELSE

MATERIALS I WILL USE TO MAKE LAMPS

MATERIALS I WILL USE TO MAKE PAPER BOWLS

MATERIALS I WILL USE TO MAKE PLASTER CONTAINERS

IN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF A MATERIAL I CHOSE NOT TO BUY

The labels printed in red text read:

MATERIALS I KNOW I WILL NEVER USE YET DO NOT ALLOW TO EXIT

MATERIALS I REGRET BUYING YET DO NOT ALLOW TO EXIT

MATERIALS I SHOULD GIVE TO OTHERS BUT DO NOT

MATERIALS I NEGLECTED TO USE BEFORE THEY EXPIRED AND NOW WILL
HAVE TO BE SENT TO LANDFILL

MATERIALS I NEGLECTED TO GIFT WHEN I SHOULD HAVE AND NOW WILL
AT BEST END UP BEING RECYCLED

MATERIALS MY EXECUTORS WILL LIKELY BE STUCK HAVING TO DEAL
WITH

MATERIALS THAT HAVE BEEN IN THIS CLOSET FOR 2 YEARS THAT I AM
PROCRASTINATING DEALING WITH

MATERIALS I HAVE TOO MUCH OF AS A RESULT OF BUYING MORE OF
SOMETHING I DIDN'T KNOW I ALREADY HAD

The labels enable viewers to understand how the dynamics work within the waste process of the closet in relationship to specific materials. Showing the waste materials only wouldn't answer the question of the actual place those materials hold or have held in the closet process. For one thing, we wouldn't know if certain waste materials were following an environmentally sound or unsound path. Also it is only by using the labels that I am able to represent the waste materials that are no longer in the closet. Further, if a waste material has exited the closet in the right way it is important to note that. If the closet concept has kept me from buying material that was unneeded it is important to note that as well. Finally, I believe that showing the labels as opposed to my actual waste better supports the viewer in transferring the closet's concept to their own lives and habits of consuming, storing, and discarding materials. The closet encourages the viewer to contemplate their own encounters with waste production and consumption that they would otherwise leave 'closeted'. It is my hope that The No No-Exit Closet can lead the viewer

to reflect on familiar, almost forgotten, embraced, and rejected materials and objects in their lives, and to find in my work new propositions they can apply to their own material world.

The No No-Exit Closet embraces utility, symbol, and metaphor. The No No-Exit Closet embraces both the power of use-value and the power of the symbolic through the closet's allusion to transformational, transitional structures: alchemical vessels, changing rooms, wagons, and sheds. The closet has use-value because of its capacity to hold my accumulated personal waste and it has conceptual value because it offers the viewer the opportunity to contemplate the No No-Exit premise. Thus the closet's value is both its applicability as a concept and its usefulness as a structure.

I initiated The No No-Exit project in 2019 at a time when I felt my studio process wasn't efficient enough given the waste I was producing. I began keeping my waste as a way to observe the volume of garbage I was creating in my studio and to become aware of the material makeup of my leftovers; was the majority of the waste I was producing paper? Plastic? Wood?

I made a project out of my waste-keeping by designing a closet where, over time, my leftovers could be sorted and stored. Taking this action helped me see that a lot of my waste was made up of material that was still structurally sound and usable. The reality of what I had become accountable for, by way of making the decision to keep my waste, led to the idea of trying to find ways to keep this waste in process. This led to the The No No-Exit Closet concept, especially to the extent that it could be generalized to all closets.

What I did not realize at the outset of this project was the extent to which it would help me see and correct how I wrongly thought of closets, and even containers like garbage cans, as no exit zones. The No No-Exit Closet has been an instrument that has heightened my awareness

of how I both accept and avoid the responsibility of using the closet. This project has not only helped me find ways to upcycle my waste into functional objects and art, it has also helped me to be more thoughtful of my personal waste usage process.

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Practice Documentation

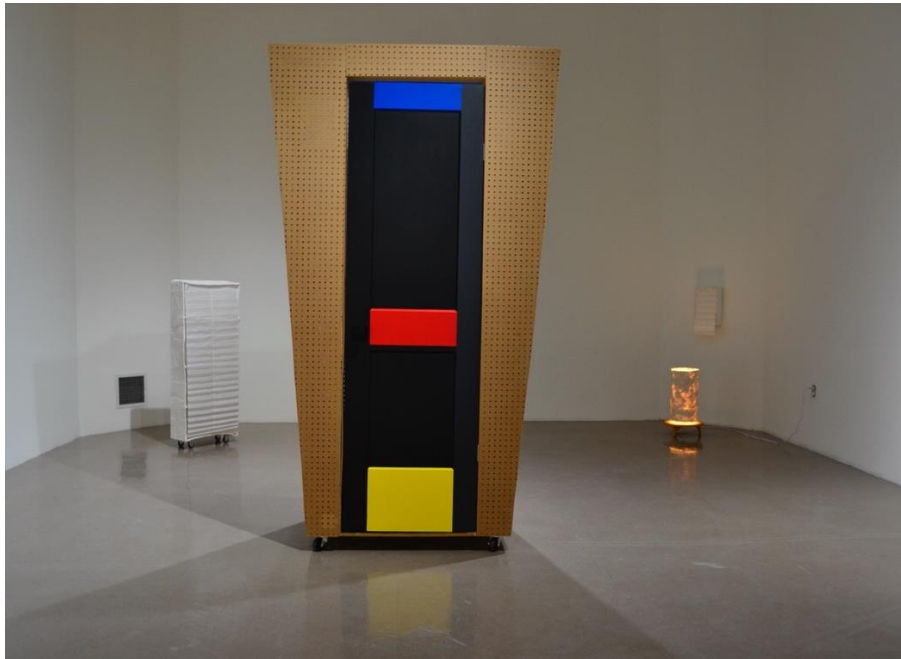


Figure 1. *The No No-Exit Closet*, pegboard, plywood, lumber, caster wheels, door, pegboard hooks, laminated paper labels, 3 x 2.5 x 7 ft, 2019-ongoing. Installed at the McIntosh Gallery, London ON.



Figure 2. *The No No-Exit Closet*, pegboard, plywood, lumber, caster wheels, door, pegboard hooks, laminated paper labels, 3 x 2.5 x 7 ft, 2019-ongoing. Photograph showing the connection between the closet's interior colour palette and exterior colour palette. Installed at the McIntosh Gallery, London ON.



Figure 3. *The No No-Exit Closet*, pegboard, plywood, lumber, caster wheels, door, pegboard hooks, laminated paper labels, 3 x 2.5 x 7 ft, 2019-ongoing. Photograph showing the labels hanging in the closet's interior. Installed at the McIntosh Gallery, London ON.

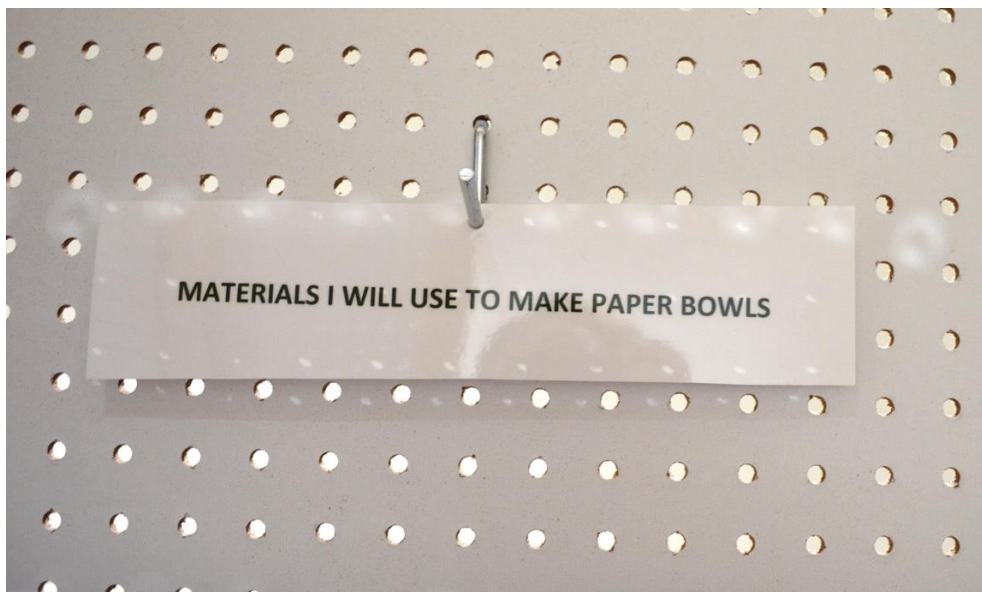


Figure 4. Laminated paper label hanging in the closet's interior. The label reads: MATERIALS I WILL USE TO MAKE PAPER BOWLS. There are two sets of labels inside the closet; one printed in dark green text and one printed in red. Green indicates waste materials that have been kept on the right side of process and red indicates waste materials that are on the wrong side of process. The paper bowl that this label is referring to can be seen in Figure 21.



Figure 5. Laminated paper label hanging in the closet's interior. The label reads: *A MATERIAL I ALLOWED TO EXIT TO BE REPURPOSED BY SOMEONE ELSE*. There are two sets of labels inside the closet; one printed in dark green text and one printed in red. Green indicates waste materials that have been kept on the right side of process and red indicates waste materials that are on the wrong side of process.



Figure 6. Laminated paper label hanging in the closet's interior. The text on the label reads: *IN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF A MATERIAL I CHOSE NOT TO BUY*. There are two sets of labels inside the closet; one printed in dark green text and one printed in red. Green indicates waste materials that have been kept on the right side of process and red indicates waste materials that are on the wrong side of process.



Figure 7. Laminated paper label hanging in the closet's interior. The label reads: MATERIALS MY EXECUTORS WILL LIKELY BE STUCK HAVING TO DEAL WITH. There are two sets of labels inside the closet; one printed in dark green text and one printed in red. Green indicates waste materials that have been kept on the right side of process and red indicates waste materials that are on the wrong side of process.

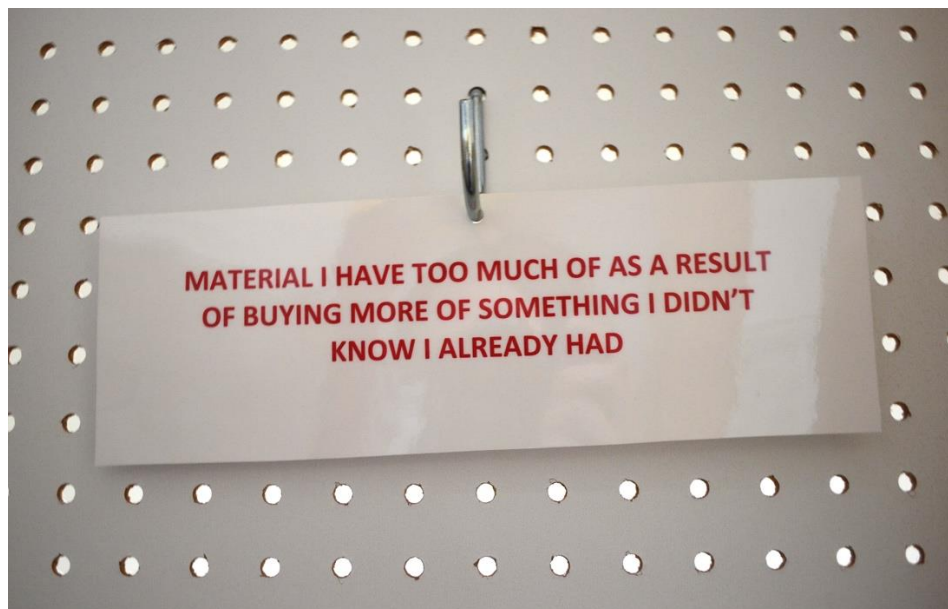


Figure 8. Laminated paper label hanging in the closet's interior. The label reads: MATERIAL I HAVE TOO MUCH OF AS A RESULT OF BUYING MORE OF SOMETHING I DIDN'T ALREADY KNOW I ALREADY HAD. There are two sets of labels inside the closet; one printed in dark green text and one printed in red. Green indicates waste materials that have been kept on the right side of process and red indicates waste materials that are on the wrong side of process.

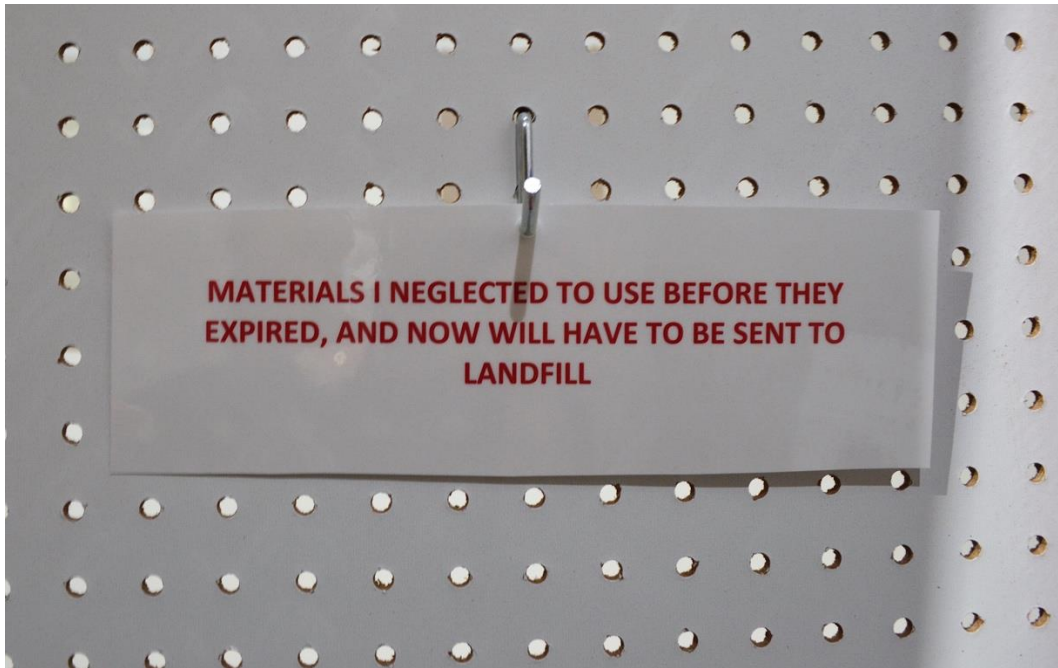


Figure 9. Laminated paper label hanging in the closet's interior. The label reads: MATERIALS I NEGLECTED TO USE BEFORE THEY EXPIRED, AND NOW WILL HAVE TO BE SENT TO LANDFILL. There are two sets of labels inside the closet; one printed in dark green text and one printed in red. Green indicates waste materials that have been kept on the right side of process and red indicates waste materials that are on the wrong side of process.



Figure 10. *Container with legs*, 2021, *Container on wall*, 2020, *Yellow Sheet*, 2021, and *Lamp no. 2*, 2021. Installed at the McIntosh Gallery, London ON.



Figure 11. *Container with legs*, 2021, and *Container on wall*, 2020, cardboard, plaster of paris gauze, 2 x 2.5 ft. Installed at the McIntosh Gallery, London ON. The cardboard box used to make *Container on wall* was the box that the plaster of paris gauze used to make the work was originally packaged in. The cardboard box used to make *Container with legs* was originally the packaging for a remote control car I purchased for an earlier artwork.

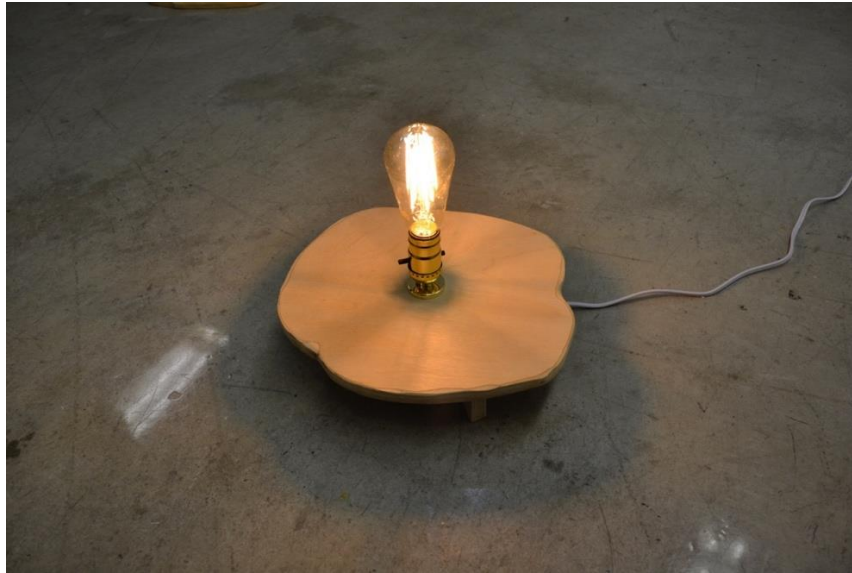


Figure 12. *Lamp no. 2*, plywood, polyacrylic, wax, bulb, 1.5 x 1.5 x 1.5 ft, 2021. Photograph taken in my studio located in the John Labatt Visual Art Centre. The plywood used to make this lamp base was left over from an earlier project.



Figure 13. Photograph showing *Container on wall*, *Yellow Sheet*, *Lamp no. 2*, *White Sheet*, *Pink Sheet*, and *Furniture*. Installed at the McIntosh Gallery, London ON. The *Sheets* are made from pulped down waste paper and dyed with vegetable juice and spices, beet juice and turmeric in the case of *Pink Sheet* and *Yellow Sheet*. The *Sheets* are made in collaboration with Maxwell Lucas.



Figure 14. Photograph showing *White Sheet*, *Pink Sheet*, *Furniture*, and *Container with rice paper blind*. Installed at the McIntosh Gallery, London ON.



Figure 15. *Container with rice paper blind*, cardboard, plaster of paris gauze, rice paper, casters, 2 x 1 x 4ft, 2020. Installed at the McIntosh Gallery, London ON. The cardboard used to make this container was originally the packaging for a metal shelf I bought for my studio.

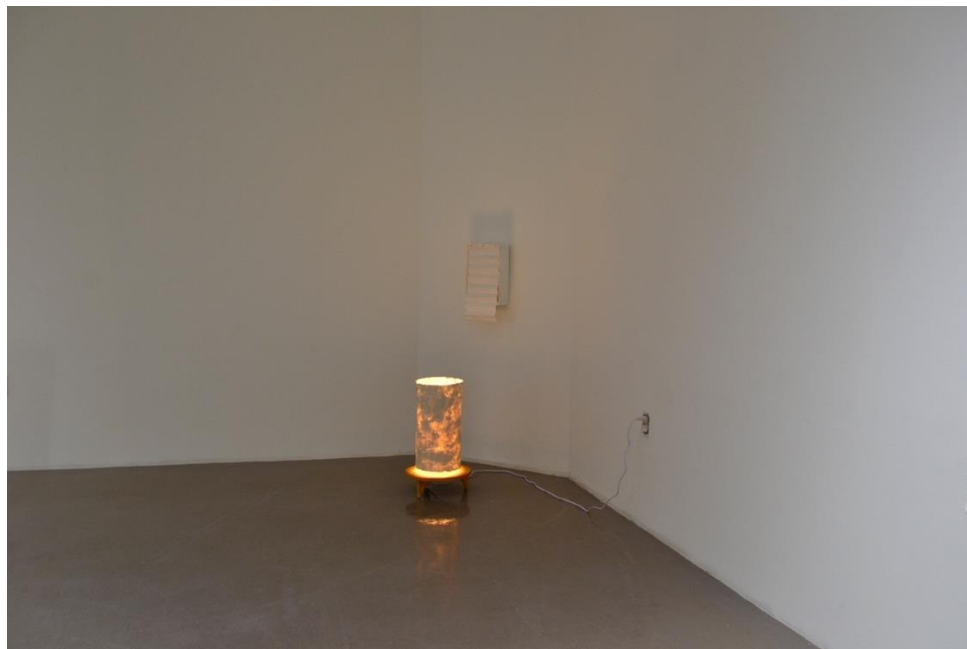


Figure 16. Photograph showing *Small container with rice paper blind* and *Lamp no. 1*. Installed at the McIntosh Gallery, London ON.



Figure 17. *Lamp no. 1*, plywood, polyacrylic, wax, handmade paper, bulb, lamp shade rings, thread, 1 x 1 x 2 ft, 2021. Photograph taken in my studio located in the John Labatt Visual Art Centre. The plywood used to make this lamp base was left over from an earlier project. The shade is made from a sheet of paper which Maxwell Lucas and I made from pulping down waste paper that I had been collecting in the closet since 2019.



Figure 18. Photograph showing *Small container with rice paper blind*, *Lamp no. 1*, *Container on wall*, and *Container*. Installed at the McIntosh Gallery, London ON.



Figure 19. *Container on wall*, cardboard and plaster of paris gauze, 1 x 1 x. 3ft, 2021, and *Container*, paper pulp, flour, water, 2021. Installed at the McIntosh Gallery, London ON.



Figure 20. *Container*, paper pulp, flour, water, 10 x 10 x 4", 2021. Installed at the McIntosh Gallery, London ON. Maxwell Lucas and I made this bowl from waste paper I had been collecting in the closet since 2019.

Case Study

Art that Lives in the World At Large: American Minimalism and Andrea Zittel

Andrea Zittel's work is tied to the history of American Minimalism, specifically its aesthetics and principles. This case study will discuss the ways Andrea Zittel's work both parallels and stands in contrast to mid-century Minimalist art. This paper will distinguish these similarities and differences through a comparative analysis of Zittel's *A-Z Aggregated Stacks* (2010-present) and Donald Judd's iconic *Untitled (Stacks)* of 1963-1968. This paper will also establish ties between Zittel's practice and the movements of Russian Constructivism and Post Minimalism. Analysis will regard materials and processes, composition and order, biography and metaphor, distinctions between sculpture and furniture, and the use value of art.

American Minimalism: out with the old, in with the new

American Minimalism developed as an abstract sculpture and painting movement in the 1950s.¹⁸ One of its defining features was how it deliberately sought to differentiate itself from the canons of European painting and sculpture. The Minimalists challenged the traditions of European painting by concerning themselves with non-hierarchical composition, seriality, and the elimination of representation, illusion, and internal figure ground relationships. The Minimalists challenged the traditions of European sculpture by abandoning the plinth, concerning themselves with horizontality as opposed to verticality, using the grid or the "space lattice"¹⁹ as a non-hierarchical non-relational unifying structure, elevating the importance of the

¹⁸ I acknowledge that the history of Minimalism is far from uniform because the concerns of the individual artists involved are often unique and sometimes contradictory. My intention in this statement is to address *some* of the key ideas attributed to this movement.

¹⁹ Frances Colpitt, "Internal Issues: Systematic Order," in *Minimal Art: The Critical Perspective* (Michigan: U.M.I Research Press, 1990), 61.

whole rather than the individual parts, and by embracing industrial production methods and materials. The use of industrial materials gave Minimalist work the appearance of mass-produced factory-made objects, as opposed to fine art. These industrial materials included LED lights, bricks, concrete, blocks of cement, and sheets of galvanized metal, the fabrication of which was often not done by the artists themselves. This meant that Minimalist work typically did not embody traces of the artists hand, nor anyone's hand for that matter. The traditional methods of making sculpture, like carving and casting, were abandoned, and thus, the Minimalist's task became one of placing, ordering, and arranging industrial material into provocative arrangements; arrangements that drew attention to external relationships between viewer, artwork, and exhibition space - that is to say, by drawing attention to the viewer's real world. This was in contrast to art of the past which drew attention to internal compositional relationships, which in turn drew viewers into the illusionistic world of the artwork, setting up a relationship between the artwork and the viewer's subjective internal world.

American Minimalism was characterized by a cluster of formalisms including reduction, symmetrical ordering, serial ordering, modular structures, reduced colour schemes, and the use of geometric shapes, primarily the square and rectangle. These formalisms resulted in novel visual works but also lead to criticism. The work was considered impersonal and thus austere, too simplified and reduced and thus meaningless. One of the ultimate critiques of the movement was that its aesthetic forms reflected the human ideals of perfection and permanency rather than the realities of irregularity and change. It is interesting to note that Donald Judd denied an interest in perfection claiming instead that his concern was simply for the industrially well

made.²⁰ The embrace of industrial aesthetics and the rejection of the handmade is something that sets American Minimalism apart from the Russian Constructivists before them, who also enthusiastically embraced the use of industrial materials and production processes.²¹

In contrast to the Productivist Russian Constructivists, whose program was centred around the creation of practical useable art, the American Minimalists were not concerned with design aesthetics or function whatsoever. American Minimalists were in favour of an autonomous art and with a model of meaning “severed from the legitimizing claims of a private self”.²² Minimalists like Donald Judd and Carl Andre were not interested in personal self-expression, and they denied symbolic, metaphorical, and biographical readings of their work.²³ Minimalists were concerned with the phenomenological experience of encountering and perceiving an artwork. They wanted attention drawn to the viewer’s experience of light, scale, and form, and to the way the artwork shaped the spatial environment and vice versa. Allen Leepa sums up this aspect of the Minimalist agenda nicely: “Minimal art is [...] an effort to deal as

²⁰ Jill Singer, “Two Lost Donald Judd Interviews, Part 1: On Cor-Ten Steel and the Scourge of Handiwork.” *Sight Unseen* (2016). <https://www.sightunseen.com/2016/08/donald-judd-david-zwirner/>.

²¹ We can deduce from Joseph Weinger’s writing about Constructivist fashion that the Constructivists’ adoption of industrial manufacture had less to do with a rejection of the quality of the handmade and more to do with the fact that industrial production allowed these artists to produce functional objects en masse.

²² Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction* (London: Duke University Press), 221.

²³ A common critique was that the Minimalist’s impersonal artistic expression was incapable of evoking emotion and experience in the viewer. In *Minimal Abstracts* John Perreault makes the significant point that the rational and conceptual are also capable of evoking emotions, and that emotion can be evoked as a result of seeing or experiencing efficiency, clarity and proportions that surprise us.

directly as possible with the nature of experience and its perception through visual reactions [...] impersonality of statement (is an) essential aspect of efforts to base art on a direct and primal kind of visual experience; and [...] Minimal Art is an effort to relate the observer to the thing observed at that point where human perception brings them together – in the *magic* of the phenomenon of experiencing itself”.²⁴ That the Minimalists were invested in a model of meaning severed from the legitimizing claims of a private self could be interpreted as an ambition to relocate art’s meaning from the subjective internal to the objective external, “no longer modelling its structure on the privacy of psychological space but on the public, conventional nature of what might be called cultural space”.²⁵

Stacked Against: Andrea Zittel and Donald Judd

In contrast to the impersonal, autonomous, industrially fabricated, and phenomenologically oriented work of the American Minimalists, Zittel’s work is consciously inspired by her life and often emerges from an effort to solve particular personal problems. Most of her projects result in simultaneously functional and symbolic structures and systems for day-to-day living.

Zittel’s *A-Z Aggregated Stacks* (2010-present) provide a clear example of how she maintains some formal ties with Minimalist art but diverges in her concern for relational

²⁴ Allen Leepa, “Minimal Art and Primary Meanings,” in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 201.

²⁵ Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction*, 221.

composition, the handmade, craft materials, metaphor, usefulness, and the ambiguous status of the art object.



Figure 1. Andrea Zittel. *A-Z Aggregated Stacks*, 2010, plaster gauze and cardboard boxes, installed in the home of the artist, (URL).

Zittel's *A-Z Aggregated Stacks* are made from cardboard shipping boxes, gauze, and plaster. Zittel's home and studio are located in a relatively remote region of the Mojave Desert, and as such, most of her day-to-day necessities and studio materials have to be ordered online and shipped there. Thus, Zittel accumulates hundreds of shipping boxes each year. On her website, Zittel explains: "It is a shame to discard the boxes, especially if they have special proportions or crisp edges and corners".²⁶ Of note is Zittel's concern for the size, proportion, and special material characteristics of the cardboard boxes. These concerns are of note because they are sympathetic to the formal nature of the Minimalist's concerns. Zittel's fondness for the 'special' formal qualities of the boxes is one impetus for the creation of *A-Z Aggregated Stacks*.

²⁶ Andrea Zittel, "Aggregated Stacks," Zittel.org, September 19 2020, <https://www.zittel.org/projects/aggregated-stacks/>.

Another impetus is Zittel's drive to find a solution to the problem of having to throw out structurally sound material. Through repurposing the boxes and turning them into more permanent structures, Zittel operationalizes the "less is more" idea. Reduction, which is characterized by "less is more", is a formalism that American Minimalists consistently employed. However, for the Minimalists, its philosophical impetus and meaning was not economic. For Zittel, reduction operates ethically, in the name of reducing one's personal waste footprint. While both Judd and Zittel employ reduction, they do so for different reasons. In fact, Judd objected to the idea that his work was reductionist. In his interview with Bruce Glaser he explained: "I'm getting rid of the things that people used to think were essential to art [...] if my work is reductionist it's because it doesn't have the elements that people thought should be there".²⁷ For Zittel, reduction is consciously and deliberately operationalized in service of her less is more ethic, which involves recycling and repurposing.

Zittel's *A-Z Aggregated Stacks* reference the simplified forms and colours of Donald Judd's work *Untitled (Stacks)* of 1963-1968. Both artists also share a concern for a democratic art that exists in the real "life space" of the viewer. This is evident in their respective rejection of the sculptural base. Historically, the sculptural base functioned to emphasize "the unreal status of the object it supported".²⁸ For the Minimalists, the rejection of the base was motivated by an interest in creating democratic art – that is, art that could be enjoyed by everyone equally. Removing the base signalled that art and life operated within the same reality plane, where art

²⁷ Glaser, "Questions to Stella and Judd," 159.

²⁸ Francis Colpitt, "Process Issues: The Vanishing Base," in *Minimal Art: The Critical Perspective* (Michigan: U.M.I Research Press, 1990), 35.

was thought to be more accessible and approachable. Judd's *Stacks* are democratically aligned; in other words, the *Stacks* are meant to be experienced equally and together. Judd's *Stacks* do not directly reference furniture or real boxes per se, however, they still imply both – and all other box-like forms. Judd's *Stacks* are abstracted forms meant for artistic contemplation. Zittel's *Stacks* are democratic for a different reason, because they point to the everyday function of furniture. Additionally, Zittel's *Stacks* are made from materials common to “low art” and craft. These materials can be considered egalitarian because they are affordable, relatively accessible, and familiar.

Formally, both Judd's and Zittel's *Stacks* are based on the square, and in Zittel's case on the rectangle also. Zittel's white colour scheme is in keeping with the Minimalist's reduced palette, although the plastered gauze does yellow and brown with use. Thus, while Judd's *Stacks* remain pristine over time, Zittel's *Stacks* show signs of wear. Further, while Judd's *Stacks* maintain an aesthetic purity, in that they remain forever empty, there is the potential for Zittel's *Stacks*, if used as shelving, to become cluttered. In this way, Zittel's *A-Z Aggregated Stacks* metaphorically suggest that emptiness, perfection, and unchanging structures are human ideals, not human realities. Judd's perfect, empty, unchanging *Stacks* can be interpreted as trying to transcend material reality, whereas Zittel's can be interpreted as fully embracing and reflecting it.

While Judd's *Stacks* are comprised of separate, uniform, and equally spaced-out squares, Zittel's *Stacks* are made from boxes of various sizes combined into an irregular whole. While Judd's *Stacks* are formally symmetrical and geometrically perfect, Zittel's are asymmetrical and imperfect; once the crisp lines and folds of the cardboard boxes are coated in plaster they warp and bend, creating uneven and sometimes bloated geometries. The appearance achieved is that of

an irregular and varied grid. The grid is a social construction created by humans to divide and organize, everything from land borders (the Jefferson Grid System) to time (calendars). The grid shapes so much of human life that it is easy to forget that it is not a naturally occurring structure. Squares and rectangles are human geometries and are seldom manifested by the rest of nature. The handmade quality of Zittel's *A-Z Aggregated Stacks* is meant to remind the viewer of the socially constructed nature of the square, rectangle, and grid. Where Judd's *Stacks* simply reflect certain realities of modern life (industrial materials, grid-based systems), Zittel's *Stacks* both reflect and bring consciousness to her critique of those realities. While Judd's *Stacks* reflect a rigid, homogenous, and perfect grid, Zittel's *Stacks* reflect a grid that is imperfectly hand-made and varied in structure. Symbolically, Judd's *Stacks* can be said to reflect homogenous fixed ideals, while Zittel's *Stacks* are structures which reflect the concepts of variation, aggregation, and temporality.



Figure 2 and 3. [Left] Donald Judd, *Untitled (Stack)*, 1970, galvanized iron and amber acrylic sheet, 9 x 40 x 31in., private collection, (2020 Judd Foundation), <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/748308>. [Right] Anrea Zittel, *Aggregated Stacks # 4*, 2011, cardboard, plaster, gauze, 41.7 x 63 x 20.9 in, Spruth Magers collection, <http://www.artnet.com/artists/andrea-zittel/aggregated-stacks-4-h-2011-a-bnRkoD0G8f7GNsxcRjvrrQ2>. Judd's *Untitled Stack* is linear, uniform, and modular. The distance between each component is equal. Once the crisp lines and folds of Zittel's cardboard boxes are coated in plaster they warp and bend, creating uneven and bloated rectangles and squares. The appearance achieved is that of an irregular and varied grid.

While Judd treats the stack as a formal whole, whose individual parts are subordinate to the overall form, Zittel treats the stack as a whole whose individual parts take precedence. For many Minimalists, especially Judd, achieving a strong sense of gestalt was one of the primary goals of sculptural expression.²⁹ In order to achieve a sense of gestalt, the individual elements of the work had to be subordinated to the overall form, as the individual modular elements of Judd's *Stacks* are. Each element of Judd's stack is an exact replica of the others, which means the individual elements of the sculpture can be rearranged without changing the composition. This is

²⁹ Allen Leepa, "Minimal Art and Primary Meanings," 204.

also to say that each element of the stack has the same relationship to all other elements of the stack. In other words, all of the relationships are the same. No one relationship is prioritized and no hierarchy is established. Judd's *Stacks* demand little visual discrimination because the types of relationships within them are limited. This effectively allows the viewer to apprehend the whole form at once.

Judd associated hierarchical composition with the European tradition of art, which he argued reflected a Cartesian Rationalism.³⁰ In an interview with Bruce Glaser in 1966 Judd criticized Rationalism as being a “discredited [...] way of finding out what the world’s like”.³¹ It would make sense, given his rejection of symbol and metaphor, and his concern for the direct experience of sense perception itself, that Judd would be critical of Rationalism, and probably tend toward Empiricism.³²

In contrast to Judd's *Untitled (Stacks)*, Zittel's *A-Z Aggregated Stacks* do feature relational compositions. Shipping boxes are clustered together in seemingly intuitive ways. It is easy to make value judgments about one's preference for certain *Stacks* over others and for certain combinations of squares and rectangles. Additionally, when the *Stacks* are shown displaying objects, the objects are in dynamic relationship to one another and to the structure

³⁰ Bruce Glaser, “Questions to Stella and Judd,” in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 151.

³¹ Bruce Glaser, “Questions to Stella and Judd,” 151.

³² According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, rationalism is concerned with “the extent to which we are dependent upon sense experience in our effort to gain knowledge. Rationalists claim that there are significant ways in which our concepts and knowledge are gained independently of sense experience. Empiricists claim that sense experience is the ultimate source of all our concepts and knowledge”.

displaying them. There is the potential to establish hierarchical relationships between the objects and the boxes. This potential exists for Zittel as the original author of the *Stacks*, and for buyers who choose to replace her items with their own. In this way, Zittel's *Stacks* reflect the concept of relative meaning – that is, objects placed within the cells of the stacks vary in meaning and association relative to where they are located within the structure and what other objects they are in close proximity to. It is not possible to find relative meaning in Judd's *Stacks* because all of the relationships within the *Stacks* are standardized. Zittel's use of the grid as an organizational principle ties her to Minimalism, but her use of relational composition within the grid aligns her with Post-Minimalism. As Pincus Witten outlines, “the nerve centre of Minimalism was its attachment to the “pre-executive,” the intellectual”³³, exemplified by the Minimalist use of the grid. The Post-Minimalist response to this was “the adumbration of new methods of composition”³⁴ that were no longer tied to the pre-executive grid; within sculpture this looked like less symmetry and more expressive open forms, which are certainly found in Zittel's *A-Z Aggregated Stacks*.

³³ Robert Pincus-Witten, *Postminimalism* (London: Out of London Press), 16.

³⁴ Robert Pincus-Witten, *Postminimalism*, 17.



Figure 4. Closeup of an *A-Z Aggregated Stack*, displaying books and what look like shells.

<https://spruethmagers.com/exhibitions/andrea-zittel-pattern-of-habit-berlin/>.

In addition to establishing relational composition, the objects displayed in Zittel's *Stacks* reveal details about her life and collecting habits, as well as what she considers valuable enough to display. The insertion of the personal is another way Zittel diverges from the Minimalist program. For Judd there was no room for personal expression in art. Judd and other Minimalists sought for new models of meaning that were severed from the "legitimizing claims" of the individual. This was part of the Minimalist agenda to distance themselves from the canons of European art. Zittel's work is deeply related to her personal thoughts, feelings, and struggles. Her site of investigation is day to day living itself, and as such her work is rooted in, not severed from, her own opinions, claims, and lived experiences. The presence of personal items in the *A-Z Aggregated Stacks* also invites her viewers to question the status of the *Stacks*, an invitation which would not have been extended to a viewer by Judd. Judd was vehement that his art was art and only that. The categorical position of Zittel's *Stacks* are more ambiguous; are they sculpture

or are they furniture? Are they art or are they design? If I purchase one, do I keep it as is to maintain the artist's pure vision, or introduce items of my own?



Figure 5. Andrea Zittel, installation view of *Pattern of Habit* at Spruth Magers, 2011, Berlin, image courtesy of Spruth Magers,

<https://spruethmagers.com/exhibitions/andrea-zittel-pattern-of-habit-berlin/>.

Installation shot showing *A-Z Aggregated Stacks* with items displayed inside.

Accompanying the stacks on the back wall are bundles of used tea bags hung on wall hooks. The pairing of the Stacks and the wall hooks draws attention to the fact that both structures are sites of accumulation. The pasted quilt of newspaper on the back wall resembles the *A-Z Aggregated Stacks* and draws attention to the form of the newspaper, which is formatted into vertical and horizontal columns, much like the stacks. The newspaper is also a site of accumulation, in its case, of information.

In terms of materials and production methods, Zittel differentiates herself from the Minimalist program by using craft materials and embracing the quality and aesthetics of the handmade. Minimalists like Judd, whose *Stacks* are made of lacquer, galvanized iron, stainless steel, and plexiglass, often worked with found industrial materials, and thus his sculptures were often manufactured in factories. In a 1990 interview with Claudia Jolles, Judd said the following about his embrace of industrial materials and production methods:

the metal pieces are made by the factory from the beginning to the end [...] the works are not handmade by me, but they are surprisingly handmade by the factory. One of the big problems is to keep the handwork out of it, or to keep it down. I don't like the quality of handwork. I don't want the pieces to look as if someone worked on the edge. [...] I think either the world is natural and it is fine and you just leave it alone, or it is man-made – as things go now – it is bad and you better leave it alone. I don't see any reason to play around with it. I would rather do something new, as a complete alternative, as far as the man-made side is concerned.³⁵

Judd's embrace of the industrial could be read as his effort to simply reflect the modern material condition. Iron, steel, plexiglass; these would have been the visual world of everyday life in mid-century America. Certainly factory production served his objective of achieving non-hierarchical composition; it ensured every object was identical in size and shape, in effect prohibiting hierarchical relationships. Factory production also served Judd's agenda to keep self-expression out of art. Industrial materials unworked by the artist's hand would have drawn the viewer's focus away from Judd and his self-expression and directed it toward the art's

³⁵ Jill Singer, "Two Lost Donald Judd Interviews, Part 1: On Cor-Ten Steel and the Scourge of Handiwork."

objecthood. Industrial fabrication thus, was in service of Judd's two-pronged goal; to remove self-expression and to increase the appearance of standardized modularity. Interestingly, Judd's modularity operated at the level of design and not functionality. In other words, Judd's modularity was not in service of real usefulness. The fact that Judd didn't produce the *Stacks* himself also calls the issue of authorship into question. Zittel's *Stacks* also address the issue of authorship, as she is not the only one who makes them, often her assistants do. Furthermore, should a buyer customize an *A-Z Aggregated Stack* with his or her own personal belongings, does he or she become a co-author of the work? A collaborator? In both cases I think Judd and Zittel are deliberately interrogating the notion of the artist as an independent genius.

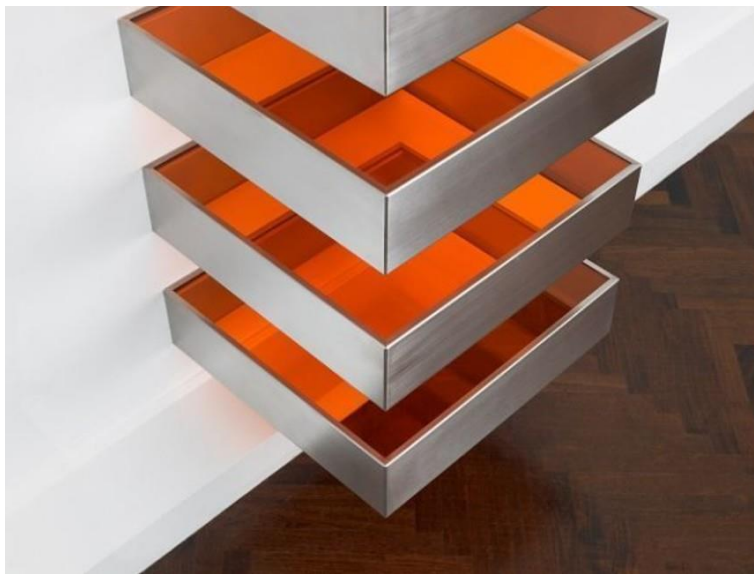


Figure 6. Donald Judd, *Untitled (Stack)*, 1968, stainless steel and amber plexiglass, 6 x 27 x 24 in., Tom Powel Imaging, Inc., <https://wsimag.com/art/4669-donald-judd-stacks>. Detail showing the sleek manicured quality of Judd's industrially produced works.

Judd's *Untitled (Stacks)* and Zittel's *A-Z Aggregated Stacks* are different in terms of the materials used to make them but similar in that steel and cardboard are both industrially

processed. Just as Judd's *Stacks* materially reflect the widespread industrialization of 20th century America, Zittel's *Stacks* can be said to materially reflect the current state of the global economy, which is one that is deeply reliant on and defined by the cardboard packing box. In her *A-Z Aggregated Stacks*, packing boxes are repurposed to serve as display structures for goods, perhaps even the same goods which they once delivered. Zittel's *A-Z Aggregated Stacks* are an interesting example of an artwork which addresses both personal and transpersonal dilemmas. They are a creative solution to the problem of Zittel's personal waste accumulation as well as a reflection of global consumptive practices in an age increasingly defined by online shopping and international shipping.

Modularity and non-relationality are employed by Judd within each of his *Stacks* where he bases all elements on predetermined standardized units and dimensions. Zittel's *Stacks* are relational and serial rather than modular; they all belong to one body of work but are formally differentiated from each other. Seriality was a tactic used by Post-Minimalists to critique the rigidity and uniformity of Minimal modularity, and to reinsert the artist's hand into the work. Traces of the Post-Minimalist program can be found in Zittel's work. Like Eva Hesse's sculptures titled *Sans II* (produced the same year as some of Judd's *Stacks*), Zittel's *A-Z Aggregated Stacks* remain faithful to the serial grid while also embodying slackness and unevenness. These qualities convey a hand-made, rather than machine-made, and therefore human sensibility. *Sans II* and *A-Z Aggregated Stacks* are serial forms, and unlike Judd's perfectly standardized modularity, each of the sculptures are varied subtly, resulting in sequences of objects which are simultaneously related but unique.

Modularity and seriality, while utilized By Judd and Zittel for different purposes, function similarly with regards to challenging notions of the masterpiece, originality, and novelty

(all of which are associated with the canons of European painting and sculpture). Both Zittel and Judd address the issue of authorship through outsourcing the production of their *Stacks*. Zittel further complicates the question of authorship by extending an invitation to her buyers to customize the *Stacks* once they own them.

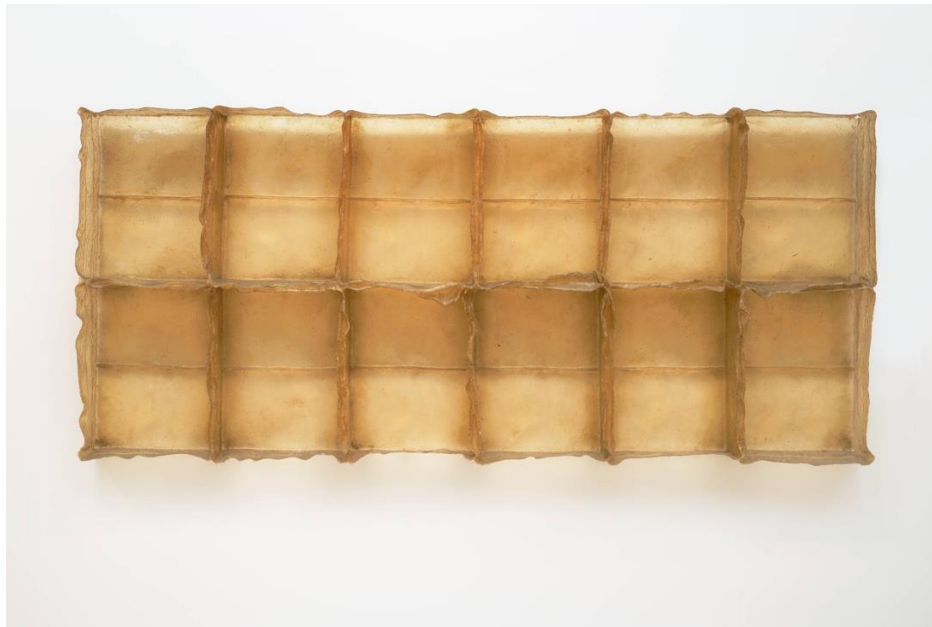


Figure 7. Eva Hesse, *Sans II*, 1968, fiberglass and polyester resin, 38 x 86 x 6 1/8 in., image courtesy of SFMOMA, <https://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/99.364/>.



Figure 8. Andrea Zittel, *A-Z Aggregated Stack # 12*, 2012, cardboard and plaster gauze, 41 x 80 x 17.5 in., image courtesy of Regen Projects, <http://www.artnet.com/artists/andrea-zittel/a-z-aggregated-stack-12-a-Lk8nWiTngTQr1Tngc-vYdw2>. Traces of the Post Minimalist can be found in Zittel's work. Like Eva Hesse's sculpture, *Sans II*, seen above, Zittel's *Aggregated Stacks* remain faithful to the serial grid while also embodying slackness and unevenness. These qualities convey a hand-made, rather than machine-made sensibility.

In terms of orientation, Judd's *Stacks* are always wall bound and arranged vertically as a column. Zittel's *Stacks* are positioned both vertically and horizontally, on the floor and on the wall. These orientations recall furniture, specifically shelving. While both Judd and Zittel's *Stacks* bear resemblance to shelving, Judd vehemently opposed the idea that his art could be used as furniture. Zittel, on the other hand, embraces the ambiguity of her *Stacks*, exhibiting them both as empty structures (sculpture) and as functional shelving displaying a variety of her personal belongings (furniture). Her lack of adherence to the established boundaries that separate

art and furniture and autonomous art objects and useable things, is one of the major ways Zittel diverges from the Minimalist program.

Judd denied the possibility that his art, which looks a lot like furniture, could be used as furniture: “there is no [...] merging of art and design. They do different things [...] A work of art exists as itself; a chair exists as a chair itself”.³⁶ Judd’s position is that furniture, unlike art, cannot exist as a concept alone. It has to manifest materially and be *used*. Zittel obviously takes a different position. For her, the merging of art and design is possible and it occurs in many of her works, including in *A-Z Aggregated Stacks*. Judd’s categorical definitions of art and furniture and art and design are concrete; Zittel’s are fluid.

Like the Constructivists, and in contrast to the Minimalists, Zittel constructs useable artworks for everyday life. Thus, she is a designer of sorts. Design was a fundamental aspect of the Minimalist process too; Judd designed all of his works before making them or sending them off to be made by someone else. One of the fundamental differences between Judd and Zittel is that she designs “prototypes for living”, that is, structures that facilitate daily life activities, where as he designs objects that facilitate perception, self-awareness of perception, and formal contemplation. In a segment for PBS’s Art21 Zittel comments on the power design has to tangibly effect the life of its user, and the unique power being an artist has in terms of being more free to fail:

³⁶ Mark O’Flaherty, “Donald Judd’s Transformational Furniture Stars in a Long-Awaited MoMA Retrospective.”

Robb Report (2020). <https://robbreport.com/shelter/home-design/donald-judd-moma-retrospective-2892984/>.

You could say that design has power because it actually touches people in a much more concrete way; but I think that art has more wiggle room and more flexibility [...] and maybe I am as interested in failure as I am in success [...] there's this question that I ask myself that comes up a lot too, and it's like that question of why to be an artist and not a designer. There's this kind of privileged position of being an artist where you can do things of a more experimental nature simply to see what happens.³⁷

Another significant fact about Zittel's use of design, which differentiates her from Minimalism and aligns her with Constructivism, is that Zittel uses her artistic skills to develop objects that have a relative mass market appeal. Her works are highly saleable in part because of their functionality and close relationship to design. The A-Z branding which she applies to all of her projects, including her stacks, seems like an updating of the professional expertise strategies used by the Russian Constructivists. A willingness to participate in the mass market paired with the belief that art should operate functionally in the world at large is a position taken by both Zittel and the Constructivists. On the other hand, Zittel differentiates herself from the Constructivists by developing 'products' that are both recognizable *and* abstract and symbolic. If we purchase her products, we have to contend with how to consume them – as sculpture or as furniture, as something to keep the way the artist made it or as something to customize, as something to contemplate or as something to use.

So far, this case study has established that Andrea Zittel's work is a unique remix and realization of the concerns of the Constructivists, Minimalists, and Post-Minimalists. Zittel's A-Z

³⁷ *Art in the Twenty-First Century*, season 1, "Consumption," aired on September 28 2001, on PBS, <https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s1/andrea-zittel-in-consumption-segment/>.

Aggregated Stacks and Judd's *Untitled (Stacks)* are similar in that they both make use of the grid as an organizational structure, use similar geometries, reduced forms and colour palettes, are made from industrially processed material, complicate the question of artistic authorship, and reflect a democratic art that exists in the viewer's immediate lived space. This case study has also established that Zittel's *Stacks* and Judd's *Stacks* differ in their reflection of self-expression and biography, the artist's hand, low and high art materials, relational and non-relational composition, impermanency and permanency, asymmetry and symmetry, seriality and modularity, and the gestalt. Zittel and Judd also take different positions with regards to the value of art, and lastly, Zittel and Judd differ with regards to how they define their work. For Judd, art is art. For Zittel, her art is simultaneously art, design, and furniture. Zittel's embrace of the handmade, and thus of imperfection and irregularity, biography, seriality, craft materials, and process, tie her to the tradition of Post-Minimalism. Zittel's *A-Z Aggregated Stacks* are simultaneously aesthetic and useful; not merely objects of contemplation but certainly worthy of it. They subtly suggest that artists "can participate in their societies as designers and architects do – by producing works with practical applications in daily life".³⁸ Through the branding of her art practice as an enterprise Zittel invites the viewer to contemplate her works as both sculpture and product. Through the employment of design Zittel is able to develop objects which serve functional purposes and point to the every-day. As products, Zittel's *A-Z Aggregated Stacks* are unique in that they are made from repurposed materials. They signal a kind of 'making do' with what one has that points to recycling and circular economies (as opposed to linear economies which follow the trajectory of make, use, dispose). In these ways, Zittel belongs to a tradition of

³⁸ "Andrea Zittel A-Z Escape Vehicle: Customized by Andrea Zittel," Moma.org, July 2020, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/80878>.

social involvement reaching back to the Russian Constructivists.³⁹ Zittel's practice is laden with references to Constructivism, Minimalism, and Post-Minimalism but manages to remain differentiated from them. In distinguishing some of these similarities and differences I think this case study serves to support why Zittel's practice continues to be compelling and unique.

³⁹ "Andrea Zittel A-Z Escape Vehicle: Customized by Andrea Zittel," Moma.org, July 2020, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/80878>.

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Curriculum Vitae

EDUCATION

2021-

2019 MFA in Visual Arts Candidate, Western University, anticipated completion 2021

2017 Early Childhood Teaching Diploma (3 – 6 years) North American Montessori Centre,
Surrey BC

2011 2015 B.F.A Honours Specialization, Visual Art, Western University, London, ON

2006 2010 Diploma, A.B. Lucas Secondary School, London, ON

EXHIBITIONS2020 <http://store.tongue.beautiful.goods.temporary.feet.web>, ArtLab Gallery, London ON,
Oct 5-15 20202020 To Dwell, To Remember, curated by Adriana Berardini, Cohen Commons, John Labatt
Visual Art Centre, London ON, January-February 20202019 Black Box: The Objectless Perception Game, folio collaboration with Sarah Munro,
Edna Press, April 20192019 Reading from BLUELAND [tender girl] with Christine Walde, DNA Artspace, London
ON, February 20192018 Public Wall: Lending Library and Curated Research, permanent installation, Forest
City Gallery, London ON

2018 Reading and performance for London Open Mic Poetry, TAP Centre for creativity,

- [in collaboration with Maxwell Lucas], London ON
- 2018 WHISPAIR, Edition Book Fair, Toronto ON
- 2018 Reading from BLUELAND [tender girl] for Poetry London, Landon Branch Library, London, ON
- 2018 Reading and performance for Couplets, TAP Centre for creativity, London ON [in collaboration with Angie Quick]
- 2018 Pefect, In Attendance, Forest City Gallery, London ON
- 2018 In memory of Patience Worth, 42 Adelaide [Upper], London ON
- 2018 Hands, In Attendance, Forest City Gallery, London ON
- 2018 this will never finish, Support Project Space, London ON
- 2017 PDA, Nuit Blanche, London ON, with Elias Movement Project and Koine Ensemble
- 2017 Look at this felt, Nuit Blanche, London ON
- 2017 Look at this felt, Culture Day, London ON
- 2017 Hands with Koine Ensemble, 42 Adelaide [upper], London ON
- 2017 Hands, Words Fest, Museum London, London ON – performing with Koine Ensemble
- 2017 Hands with Koine Project, Aeolian Hall, London ON
- 2017 Up with Art, London ON
- 2016 Plexus, DNA Artspace, London ON
- 2016 Spot of Delight, London ON
- 2016 Proper Names, Good Sport Art Space, Curated by Matthew Ryan Smith, London ON
- 2015 playble, Good Sport Art Space, London ON
- 2015 sawyouseeme, Good Sport Art Space, London, ON
- 2015 Significant Other Body, Forest City Gallery, London ON

- 2015 Uncooperative, Forest City Gallery, London ON
- 2015 Vault, Artlab Gallery, London, ON
- 2015 Home Improvement, 1058 Patricia Street, London ON
- 2015 Please Seat Yourself, The Arts Project, London ON
- 2015 AJE (Annual Juried Exhibition), ArtLAB Gallery, London, ON
- 2015 Shapeshifters, Project Gallery, Toronto, ON
- 2014 Art Amnesty, PS1, Long Island City, NY
- 2014 Paint as Material Contingency, Artlab Gallery, London, ON
- 2014 Gyan Chauper, Nuit Blanche, Fort York, Toronto, ON
- 2014 The Immaculate Selfie, The Black Cat Gallery, Toronto, ON
- 2014 It looks how it looks, Project Gallery, Toronto, ON
- 2014 Salon, Project Gallery, Toronto, ON
- 2014 Enter through the Alleyway, Watterworth Gallery, Toronto ON
- 2014 Within Sense and Chaos, The Arts Project, London ON
- 2014 Make it Move, ArtLAB Gallery, London ON
- 2014 AJE (Annual Juried Exhibition), ArtLAB Gallery, London ON
People's Choice Award Recipient
- 2013 Fear, Project Gallery, Toronto, ON
- 2013 Incognito, Museum London, London ON
- 2013 Conjunction, Concourse Gallery, London, ON
- 2013 AJE (Annual Juried Exhibition), ArtLAB Gallery, London, ON

HIRED WORKSHOPS AND INVITED PRESENTATIONS

Figurative Drawing and Painting Workshop, The University of Michigan, workshop took place in Berlin Germany, May 2016

Winter Arts Academy Workshop, Amica, London ON, January – February 2016

Poetry as Collaboration Workshop and Demonstration, Gibbon's Park Montessori, London ON, 2016

Sculpture as Collaboration, Workshop and Demonstration, Gibbon's Park Montessori, London ON, 2016

Winter Art's and Craft Workshop, Gibbon's Park Montessori, London ON, 2016

Presentation, *Summer Company Business Start Me Up*, London Small Business Centre, London ON, 2011

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Assistant:

Assistant to Christof Migone, May – August 2020

Assistant to Jason McLean, December 2019 – current

Gallery:

Co-founder and curator, 42 Adelaide [upper], London Ontario (September 2017 – November 2018)

Curator and Resident, Good Sport Art Space, London Ontario (October 2015 - present)

Co-Curator, In Memory of Patience Worth, 42 Adelaide [upper], London Ontario (2018)

Co-curator, Town and Country, Goodsport Artspace, London Ontario (2016)

Co-Curator, Home Improvement, 1058 Patricia Street, London Ontario (April 10 2015)

Instructor, Kryart Gallery, Bayfield, ON (2013 – 2018)

Volunteer:

Forest City Gallery, December 2018 – current

McIntosh Gallery, December 2018 – May 2019

Writing:

HOCUS POCUS (2015), the name (2016), I make you say my name (2017), BLUELAND [tender girl] (2018) gue (2018) – the aforementioned artbooks can be found in DNA Bookstore in London ON, The Village Bookshop in Bayfield ON, and in The Bookkeeper in Sarnia ON. There is only one copy of *BLUELAND [tender girl]* and *gue. gue (2018)* resides in a private collection in London ON.

Editor:

Copy Editor, *Voice of Hearing by Vivian Darroch-Lozowski, Aylmer Press, 2020.*

Copy Editor, *Tell-Tale Signs: Unsanctioned Graffiti Interventions in Post-Apartheid*

Johannesburg by Matthew Ryan Smith. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016.

Awards and Scholarships:

Ontario Graduate Scholarship, 2020-2021

Western Graduate Research Scholarship, 2021

Western Graduate Research Scholarship, 2020

Western Graduate Research Scholarship, 2019

A&H – Chair’s Entrance Scholarship, 2019

People’s Choice Award for AJE (Annual Juried Exhibition) at ArtLAB Gallery, 2014

Western Scholarship of Excellence, Academic Scholarship, 2010

Panel:

Critique Panelist, Jane and Jury Crit Night, Glenhyrst Art Gallery, Brantford ON (2017)

Membership:

Forest City Gallery, 2018-2021, London ON

Illustrator:

Illustrator, *Hot Tonight*, Tokyo Police Club music video, Toronto ON, 2014.

Illustrator, GLOBAL21 Magazine, London ON, February – May 2013.

TEACHING AND RELATED EXPERIENCE

Graduate teaching assistantship, University of Western Ontario, Sept 2019-April 2021

Art Teacher and Gallery Manager, Kryart Studio and Gallery, Bayfield, Ontario, 2013-Present

Program Developer and Teacher, Amica, London, Ontario, January-February 2016

Art Tutor, to Hillary Cooper, Bayfield ON, June-September 2015