

HIGH DESERT TEST SITES

High Desert Test Sites (HDTS) first launched in 2002 as a free ranging and ever-evolving series of contemporary art events in the Southern Californian desert. It was scrappy, experimental, and inspiring. Two of the organizers—Andrea Zittel and Andy Stillpass—offered sites on their own land (Zittel at her A-Z West compound in Joshua Tree and Stillpass in Gamma Gulch near Pioneertown) and negotiated with residents and businesses to procure other sites in desert communities from Yucca Valley to Twentynine Palms and Wonder Valley. Scores of volunteers assisted participating artists with their projects each year.

Over the fifteen-year run represented in this exhibition, and in the Nevada Museum of Art's recently acquired HDTS Archive, some common themes emerged among the projects. The desert in all its guises—from the unforgiving nature, wildlife, and local characters of the vast, rugged terrain to stories of the supernatural—was always the inspiration. Artists concocted elaborate personas, staged performances in costume, deconstructed a parade, held a pig roast, created a pop-up restaurant, and published zines and booklets. The HDTS catalogues, which contain driving maps and artist lists alongside ads for local businesses, tips on where to eat, drink, hike, and shop, horoscopes, and how-to instructions for building a telescope, becoming a Joshua Tree, or dancing The Electric Slide, capture the flavor of the pre-Airbnb high desert.

Many of the projects were intended to be ephemeral, whether a one-time performance or works that lingered and decomposed on the desert floor, and, as a result, the archive is comprised of printed materials, preparatory sketches and models, audio and visual recordings, remnants, and artifacts. For this exhibition, some projects are represented by exhibition copies or new photographic reproductions. A selection of videos created for HDTS is on view in the Wayne L. Prim Theater on the Museum's first floor.

Disturbances in the Field: Art in the High Desert from Andrea Zittel's A-Z West to High Desert Test Sites

In 2000, the artist Andrea Zittel moved from New York to California and established A-Z West in the high desert near Joshua Tree. Since then, A-Z West has grown from a five-acre parcel to a sprawling compound that occupies more than fifty acres and includes Zittel's home and studio as well as a weaving studio, guest cabins, and her site-specific *Planar Pavilions* and *Wagon Station Encampment* installations. Ten acres are dedicated to High Desert Test Sites projects. Zittel considers A-Z West a laboratory for living where her own daily life and art practice are inextricably linked.

Recognizing not only the potential of the vast desert landscape as a site for art but also the creativity of the local community, in 2002 Zittel and a group of friends, including John Connelly, Shaun Caley Regen, and Andy Stillpass, founded High Desert Test Sites (HDTS), a non-profit organization that supports immersive experiences and exchanges among artists, critical thinkers, and the public. The artist Lisa Anne Auerbach joined the team and spearheaded the publication of zine-like catalogues for many of the early events. Since its founding, HDTS has hosted more than 450 artists from near and far, eleven expansive site-specific events, and twenty-five solo projects. Intended to challenge conventions of ownership, patronage, and property, HDTS invited artists to create artworks directly for the landscape of the high desert.

Recently acquired by Nevada Museum of Art, Center for Art + Environment, the High Desert Test Sites Archive includes posters, maps, photographs, costumes, ceramics, sculpture, audio and video works, and other original artifacts from the eleven events staged from 2002-2017. Through this material *Disturbances in the Field* tells a story of creativity, community, and the desert environment as a testing ground for art and for living.

This exhibition is guest curated by Brooke Hodge, with assistance from Elena Yu, Vanesa Zendejas, and Andrea Zittel

Nevada Museum of Art, Center for Art + Environment Archive Collections, The Robert S. and Dorothy J. Keyser Foundation Art of the Greater West Collection Fund

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HDTS CHRONOLOGY

High Desert Test Sites (HDTS), an initiative of the artist Andrea Zittel and her colleagues John Connelly, Shaun Caley Regen, and Andy Stillpass, launched in 2002 as a weekend-long annual art event that included performances, readings, site-specific artworks and installations. Over the years, the number of participants grew and the number of sites increased. HDTS provided a platform that was geographically, socially, and psychologically removed from the confines and expectations of the established art world. Visitors traveled from all over to take part in a desert scavenger hunt of sorts; picking up rudimentary maps, they drove vast stretches of the dramatic landscape in search of the art projects. Scrambling through desert brush and over rocky outcroppings was often required.

As HDTS became more well known, it was occasionally organized as a collaborative endeavor with partners including the Socrates Sculpture Park (2006), Orange County Museum of Art (2008), and Epicenter in Green River, Utah (2015). HDTS 8 (2011) was the first time the original organizers handed the reins over to guest curators (McCarthy Family, Robert Stone, and Brooks Hudson Thomas). For the 2013 event the terrain devoted to HDTS expanded dramatically, with 53 artists creating work for sites from the high desert of California to Albuquerque, NM. HDTS 11 (2017), organized by L.A.-based curators Sohrab Mohebbi and Aram Moshayedi, was the most recent event, and is included in both the HDTS Archive and this exhibition. HDTS continues to present regular programs and stage large-scale art events in the high desert.

www.highdeserttestsites.com.

Below is a chronology of the HDTS events represented in this exhibition. Unless otherwise noted, all events took place in the Californian high desert from Yucca Valley to Wonder Valley.

HDTS 1	November 23-24, 2002
HDTS 2	May 24-25, 2003
HDTS 3	October 25-26, 2003

- HDTS 4 October 23-24, 2004
- HDTS 5 May 6-7, 2006
- HDTS 6 May 12-13, 2007
- HDTS 7 November 7-9, 2008 [a collaboration with the Orange County Museum of Art's
California Biennial 08; this event is occasionally referred to as HDTS CB08]
- HDTS 8 October 15-16, 2011
- HDTS 9 October 12-19, 2013 [projects were on view from the high desert to
Albuquerque, NM]
- HDTS 10 October 9-12, 2015 [a collaboration with Epicenter, a Green River, Utah-based
organization; projects only presented in Green River; also referred to as HDTS
2015: Epicenter]
- HDTS 11 October 21-22, 2017

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