

The setup determines the scenario; the scenery defines the scene. Every environment defines and alters what happens within it. The creation of an environment is the beginning of a story.

The instrumentality of built space in various facets of human life such as cognition, selfhood, and social relationships is so pervasive that we are sometimes oblivious to its effects. Even fundamental spatial parameters – how wide or narrow, open or closed, high or deep a space is – can reinforce or create specific emotional conditions; these, in turn, influence thoughts, concepts and ideas. For instance, interiors of cathedrals are built to enhance the religious experience through lighting and acoustics. Similarly, grandiose architecture of power not only stages the authority of owners, but also suppresses resistance. The office designs of leading tech companies are intended, on the one hand, to maximize the performance of the employees while simultaneously leaving no doubt about the significance of their activities. Temporary spaces, like port-a-potties, are to be abandoned as quickly as possible. The list goes on.

Many artists have explored the production of functional environments since the early modern Avant-Garde. In his work *Cellules*, the Israeli artist, Absalon, made six full-sized prototype structures for single occupancy living for his own use. Absalon explained the significance of this architectural system in a statement that accompanied the cells' first exhibition in 1993: "The Cell is a mechanism that conditions my movements. With time and habit, this mechanism will become my comfort ... The project's necessity springs from the constraints imposed ... by an aesthetic universe where things are standardized, average ... I would like to make these Cells my homes, where I define my sensations, cultivate my behaviours. These homes will be a means of resistance to a society that keeps me from becoming what I must become." (Absalon, *Cellules*, 1993, unpag.)

The legendary dancer, choreographer and artist, Ann Halprin, designed the dance deck, a built outdoor space, in Kentwood, CA thereby enabling the development of new dance techniques based on observation and awareness. The performances developed on the dance deck by Merce Cunningham became a means of initiating the conversation between one's body and a specific environment.

Kurt Schwitters made his studio and family home into a giant inhabitable abstract collage called *Merzbau*. More than a studio or a home it was itself a constantly evolving piece of art. In its ultimate transformation, *Merzbau* was destroyed by the allied bombing during WWII while Schwitters was in exile.

Broadly speaking, artists' field of thought, production, and existence is particularly well-suited to

creating environments and spaces, and thus designing settings for scenarios that exist beyond market research tools and technocratic visions of the future.

The artists represented in *Setting the Scene* each investigate the production of settings intended to enable, shape or examine what takes place inside them.

In the collaborative project *Vagabund*, Jochen Weber and Alex Wissel converted a Mercedes van to serve as a mobile artwork/dwelling. Artists used the windowless van – with functional toilet and shower sculptures – for a few weeks as a residence. A generous fuel voucher enabled the work’s purposeful (and possibly aimless) mobility.

Maximiliane Baumgartner’s mobile spaces of art and action are created to unfold with the participation of children and adults. These “action spaces” are intended for urban public spaces – a street or school campus – where they critically investigate power structures.

Verena Issel’s expansive installations establish an oft humorous ambiguity about the nature of their individual elements. They may be independent works, parts of an installation, or a stage for the actual work.

In the final 16 years of his career, after a diverse oeuvre that included not only painting but serially produced furniture, Poul Gernes turned his back on galleries and museums in order to continue his work with the colorful design of public buildings, including hospitals, schools and, prisons.

Conversely, private, domestic and personal structures are the subject of artistic examination pursued by Andrea Zittel. Her works enable or influence ordinary actions or activities. Zittel lives in and continually develops *A-Z West*, her “institute for investigative living” situated in the California desert.

Jonas von Ostrowski has been working for several years on *Los Angeles*, a habitable sculpture garden in rural central Germany. The sculptures by various artists are often practical, such as Ostrowski’s *House with Clear Shapes and a Complex Entrance*, thus transforming *Los Angeles* to a functioning built space in which to live and work.

The aim of *Setting the Scene* is to shed light on the creation of settings and scenarios as part of the artistic practice, thereby investigating the potential of artistic work with regard to a transformation of aesthetic and social reality.

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