

Suzanna “Suzie” Zak
Become A Landscape Ina Landscape, 2019
Mixed-media installation

Standing With Your Back Turned Away From the Center, Looking Out
Steel welded artist frames, matte board, chromogenic prints

Complicated Foreground Space
Rope, salt, deadfall branches, chromogenic prints, string, steamer, chain, grommets, hooks, hair

There’s No Need For Vistas
Chromogenic prints, push pins, Humitector™ Maximum Humidity Indicator Cards

Mushroom Eye Ground Cover Training Material for Tactics of the Counter Sublime
Salt, apple, twig, peels, glitter fruit stickers, Yellowstone National Park brochure, Glacier National Park brochure, Golden Spike National Historical Park brochure, California National Historic Trail brochure, Managing Wildland Fire brochure

Salt lies scattered across a creased tourist pamphlet, the kind you get on a visit to a national park. You might find it wedged into a wooden stand at the visitor center, a place filled with trail maps and dioramas of the local flora and fauna. The pamphlet is an authoritative guide to the sites, a memento of experience. Far away from its point of origin and dislocated from the landscape to which it refers, it lies spread open on the ground of the gallery as refuse. Bits of text emerge between the coils of salt piled irregularly across the tattered paper, leaving its glossy sheen mostly obscured. “Managing Wildland Fire,” reads one emphatic sans-serif title. The explanatory passage that follows is illegible, buried under debris. A candy wrapper glistens, golden, beside the half-covered pamphlet. Nearby, an unbleached, brown paper napkin folds around a plastic spoon. Is it still litter if strewn on the gallery floor and not in the “wildlands”?

Suzie Zak’s installation, *Become A Landscape Ina Landscape*, situates the human within the ecological. Salt, the material that winds its way across the floor to link the array of objects, occupies an intermediary space between the often-opposed realms of the natural and the manmade to trouble, and ultimately dissolve, the boundary between the two. Harvested from the sea, salt comes from that overpowering symbol of ungovernable natural force. And yet, in its extracted form, salt is the most banal of human commodities, contained in shakers on kitchen countertops and tossed across roadways to facilitate snowmelt. Salt’s preservative properties have long made it an essential commodity, but it also corrodes. Its widespread use might imply humanity’s dominion over nature, but also evinces our inescapable entwinement with the natural world.

Above the salt scatter, a Humitector™ Maximum Humidity Indicator Card hangs on the wall, a reminder of nature’s intrusion into the supposedly controlled spaces of human life. The card visualizes the environmental conditions of the exhibition space through shifts in the blue, pink, and lavender tones of color swatches. Stuck up with a thumbtack, it duplicates the display

strategy used for the photographs that form a dense cluster on the central curtain wall dividing the room. Like the indicator, the photographs respond to humidity, curling away from the wall with fluctuations in moisture. These barely perceptible shifts enact a reminder of the materiality of the photograph as a chemically processed object and not just an intangible image.

The pinned photographs are largely those that Zak took on visits to canonical, often-pictured works of land art: *Spiral Jetty* by Robert Smithson (1970), *Sun Tunnels* by Nancy Holt (1974–76), and *Double Negative* by Michael Heizer (1969). Mimicking the helical structure of Smithson’s *Spiral*, the photographs loop inward on the wall. Nearing the center, the subject matter shifts from monumental works of land art to the quotidian streets of New Haven: a picture, for instance, of a discarded red Solo cup on snow-caked cement. This arrangement traces the visual history of Zak’s process. The installation also reproduces the cyclical temporality of a work like *Spiral Jetty*.

Past and future coexist across the multiple invocations of land and landscape. We see not only artworks but also their environs; typical tourist views appear alongside their obverses. We get “the shot” and also the *wrong* shot, the “not-shot”—the discarded image of a marginal or overlooked space that exists next to a work of art but rarely attracts a photographer’s lens. Multivalent histories are also implicated by the salt-encrusted artifacts at the center of the installation. Two crisscrossing iron spikes on the floor present a reminder that *Spiral Jetty* exists not far from Golden Spike National Historic Park, where the Central Pacific and Union Pacific railroads famously met in 1869. That site metaphorically linked East and West to (theoretically) transform the nation into one, united, traversable space.

Zak work’s derives its title from Frank O’Hara’s poem, *To You* (1960). The original line reads: “you become a landscape in a landscape.” In Zak’s title, personal pronoun excised, the processual (becoming) takes precedence over the personal (you). The suggestion of a bodily transmutation into earth remains. Human beings and their surroundings, then, are not isolable or distinct. This interrelation both spells possibility and threatens danger—the encroaching hazard of environmental catastrophe, but also the ancient and familiar terror of the unknown.

—Marina Molarsky-Beck