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Young Artists: Lara Schnitger

November 2008 | Photography by [Kate Taylor](#)

With names like *Fun Bags*, *Beijing Bitch* and *Jealous Flasher*, Lara Schnitger's giant fabric creatures suggest a tribe of very un-p.c. puppets. "Sometimes the characters come out of things I hear on the news," Schnitger says, referencing *Suicide Mom*, which she made after reading about female suicide bombers. Others, she says, have their roots in "the frustration of being a woman and not liking the way I'm represented."

Born and raised in the Netherlands, the tall, striking 39-year-old grew up performing in local plays and competing in singing and dancing contests. She was also an avid sewer and fashion designer and at art school began creating the textile sculptures, which are stretched over intricate wood frames.

That the works are lightweight, despite their monumentality—some are as large as 8 by 10 feet—suits her nomadic lifestyle, Schnitger says. (After school, she moved to China and Japan. For the past 10 years she's been based in Los Angeles but is often in Europe for exhibitions and to visit family.) "When I travel I take some of the sticks out, and I ship the fabric flat, like a tent," she says. She also likes the polarity between the interior and exterior of the sculptures: "The inside is this crazy mathematical structure," she explains, while the outside "is fragile and feminine."

Her materials are always influenced by the places in which she lives. In China fabric was hard to find, "so I ended up buying clothes and cutting them up," she says. In L.A. she was thrilled to discover a vibrant thrift-shop culture. She made one piece, *Vanity Man*, out of dozens of old neckties, and another from vintage jeans and T-shirts.

Although she follows a tradition of feminist artists embracing so-called craft techniques and "women's work," and while she plays with themes of gender and pornography, Schnitger is not ideologically driven. "Her work has a great sense of humor," says Amy Cappellazzo, cohead of postwar and contemporary art at Christie's. "Usually when you say 'craft' or 'female work,' the art is kind of dour."

Schnitger insists that it was never her goal to make feminist art. But, she says, while visiting an exhibition about the history of the genre at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles last year, she was struck by how much the pieces on display had



Lara Schnitger in her Los Angeles Studio.

in common with her own work. "I'm using collages, I'm using a lot of fabrics, and I'm dealing with some of the same issues," she says. "It was interesting to see that, since I didn't really grow up [knowing] that history."

This past December her *Rabble Rouser*, composed of scarves, political protest T-shirts and bumper stickers, was a centerpiece of the inaugural exhibit at the new building of the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York. "The show confirmed that [Lara's] vision and her attitude—that combination of rage and craft, that sculptural anger combined with a strange softness of materials—are part of a much larger movement," says Massimiliano Gioni, one of the exhibition's curators.

These days she's revisiting her theatrical roots, collaborating with members of an L.A.-based collective called *My Barbarian*, who use her sculptures in live performances and videos. "It's nice working with other people," Schnitger says, but adds that her two-year-old daughter (with artist Matthew Monahan), *Tingri*, isn't a fan of her new work. At a recent performance, says Schnitger, laughing, "she was scared!"