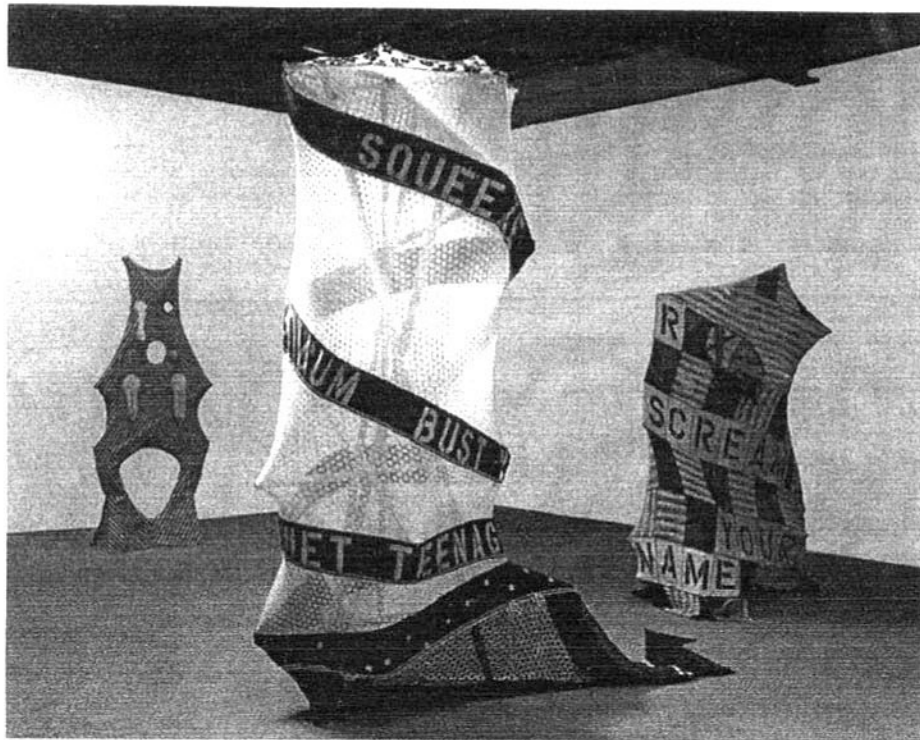


Lara Schnitger

I moved to L.A. in 2001, on my birthday. My husband Matt Monahan and I had been living in the Netherlands, where I'm from. Before that we lived for a year in Japan. We had a great experience there, and it opened up a whole new vision of the planet. So coming back from Japan and living in Amsterdam, we felt like we were missing a major part of the world. The Netherlands seemed kind of small.

A great many cultures are here in L.A. My studio's close to little Tokyo, and you've also got Thaitown, Koreatown, Chinatown—that's really attractive—combined with the feeling that you have tons of space. We both got to love nature in Japan, and the nature here is beautiful. Also, the art scene was booming here at the time we arrived. The gallery China Art Objects was really jamming, and the whole Chinatown art scene was starting, so there was a real community feeling.

In Holland, the social system is strong; it gives you grants, it takes care of you. Here there's no safety net, so you really need your friends. We had an artist friend here, Jeff Ono, whom Matt knew from Cooper



Left to right, Lara Schnitger's *Fun Bags*, *Kinky Neighbor* and *Dix-huit+*, all 2005, fabric, wood, mixed mediums; at Anton Kern Gallery, New York.

Union. So we got together with the friends of Matt's friend, and it got to be like a total gang—painters, performers, musicians, dancers. In the beginning, not coming out of one of the schools here was definitely a disadvantage, socially. We would go to openings, and fortunately we'd have our friends. They'd tell us about the openings, introduce us to the people they know. It's a very small, very friendly world here; you'd quickly meet the artists and the gallery owners. But without that contact we would have been really lonely. I was showing already before we got here. I've been with Anton Kern since 1996; we met in the Netherlands. When I had just moved here, the Santa Monica Museum had a project room, and they invited me to do a project. It all happened fast: I was here, I met the curator, she had this new job, it was part of that whole getting together.

Moving to L.A. changed my work somewhat. I had started by doing pieces made from stockings or garbage bags that stretched in space; since they did not have an armature inside, they needed the walls to exist. I was doing these huge extravaganza pieces, taking over whole spaces. In L.A. I made freestanding works using

yards and yards of fabrics. I had made my first free-standing pieces in Japan. People there are much more introverted, and that's when I started making more introverted pieces, where the tension would come from the structure inside, instead of from the walls.

Sculpture was always something very exciting for me. I wanted to get it off the pedestal; let it walk, talk, move around; play with the space. I always like to see things get made in new ways. I feel myself more a sculptor than an object-maker: I definitely deal with gravity and space and materials.

This downtown neighborhood is a very interesting area. You have little Tokyo, which is Japanese, clean, very organized and structured. Right next to it you've got skid row, which is pretty much all the homeless people from L.A. hanging out around the missions. The homeless scene is fascinating to me. They team up with each other, they build their tents at night with boxes and fabrics and second-hand clothes. The next block is the fabric area, and that's astonishing: you see all these people from all over the world, and rows and rows of materials. It's like part of my studio is over there. Having access to that has really influenced my work. Part of

what fascinates me is L.A.'s second-hand culture. It's a kind of desert place. Maybe that's why sculptors come here: it's so flat you feel you could fill it up.

So I started to use a lot of second-hand clothes in my work, and I also started doing theatrical works, working on costumes, which I'd never done before. I worked a bit with *My Barbarian*, a group of our friends who do great performance.

Sewing is something I've always done. I used to make my own clothes before I went to art school with a concentration in textiles. What I love with fabrics is that they're so plastic—the flatness of the material with no shape of its own, and its transformation when you put it on. So you can transform your body or you can make sculptures.

I work mostly by myself. When I actually hired someone, it was for the big bumper-sticker piece; that was a production piece. I had people printing texts, and I had a woman helping me sew. But I don't have assistants in the studio, I do it all myself; now because I am pregnant I am thinking about having somebody help with the shipping. [Tingri Ely Monahan was born on July 15.]

Important people outside of my gang would be Paul

McCarthy and Mike Kelley. I don't know them, but the other day I was thinking of them. I am working on this turkey piece now, using fabric, and I thought, this is really ridiculous. Then I said, "Wait a minute, I'm in fucking L.A.! Paul McCarthy just did a whole show of pirates, and I can *do* a turkey piece!"