

Lara Schnitger

ANTON KERN GALLERY

Spiderwebs of black nylon, made by tensing women's hosiery over wooden chopsticks into interconnecting spiky snowflake forms, extended from floor to ceiling in Lara Schnitger's latest show, partitioning the gallery and screening the objects. The look was equal parts Halloween decoration and s/m gear, but both fast proved red herrings; this is her mildest work in years. Instead of the rowdy patchwork sculptures for which Schnitger is best known, the bulk of the exhibition comprised mixed-media textile paintings, and her previous sexual and political frankness has been traded for signs of snug domesticity. The raunch factor has not evaporated, but for every quasi-pornographic pose one found a woman lounging around with a cat or taking care of a child.

A new formal sophistication is in the bargain. Tamer turns out also to mean subtler, and often more interesting: The spatial dynamics that animate the sculptures—between surface and support, absence and relief, transparency and opacity—persist in the rekey from three dimensions to two, but seem to have been focused, and in turn fortified, by the collage technique. The limbs of the female pair entangled in *Room in My Heart for Another Cat* (all works 2009) are limned both positively (with scraps of calico) and negatively (in colorless silhouette), and the figures appear, together with a quartet of feline companions, at once superimposed on and embedded within a ground of eyelet lace so sheer it exposes the stretcher grid. Schnitger displays a natural grasp of the syntax of collage, steady-ing the medium's additive mode with subtractive agents such as splashes of bleach, and using the same or similar elements to signify in opposing ways (the gossamer fabric in *Woman with Cat*, for example, is employed as a layering material as well as a stencil for the application of paint). The most compelling compositions are the densest, most ambitious ones—*A Night of Many Positions* is a vortex of black mesh eddying à la Italian Futurism; *Cupidity (After Bronzino)* a reprise of the Mannerist allegory whose tableau of interleaved women and animals is so elaborately stitched and pasted together that planarity dissolves and technical means are obscured.

The three sculptures on view, still characteristic swaths of cloth stretched or draped over large wooden scaffolds and adorned with the occasional bloated excrescence, also felt pared down in comparison to earlier work. Lacking the slogans and messages of much of the artist's past output, and limited by more judicious palettes, their nonchalance offsets the complexity of the paintings; *Petite Mort* in particular is almost airy. For the moment, though, what Schnitger terms the "flat pieces" engage the most productive tension between her means and her subjects—which very much remain female desire and sexuality, however mellowed out. (If more homebound than before, her women still want and are wanted: Facial features are impastoed with what looks like vampish makeup; flesh is rendered in lush swirls; crows, rabbits, and panthers stand in as mates.) The Dutch-born artist has lived in Los Angeles, proving ground of Pattern and Decoration, for

Lara Schnitger,
*Room in My Heart
for Another Cat*,
2009, mixed media,
75 x 92".



the past several years, and while her knitwork and remnant fabrics have long channeled P&D, the new paintings tap directly into the bloodline of what Miriam Schapiro termed *femmage*, an amalgam of painting and collage filtered through and in turn transformed by feminism. For Schapiro, the addition of "women's work" and craft to traditional two-dimensional mediums functioned to radicalize them. So it seems for Schnitger as well.

—Lisa Turvey