

# Tenant of Culture, *Press*

*Haul (series), 2023 (details)*  
Plastic bag, garments, thread,  
ribbon, rivets, dimensions variable

# Portrait TENANT OF CULTURE

# 76

Courtesy: the artist and Soft Opening, London. Photos: Mark Blower







**Tenant of Culture has had enough of the milkmaid dress. Not just its square collar and eco-trad longings, but the whole fast-fashion industry summed up in their "timeless" fad. As the Dutch artist tells *Lydia Eliza Trail*, her sculpture is adding friction to the system of cheap-chic circulation, mainly by reminding us of what a garment really is.**

*Receptacles (2, series), 2025, shoe soles, Tyvek, stuffing, laces, 21.5 x 26.7 x 10 cm*



Courtesy: the artist and Ehrlich Steinberg, Los Angeles. Photo: Eben Welsh





View of "Tenant of Culture: Cutting Stock," Soft Opening at Peana, Mexico City, 2024

Courtesy: the artist and Soft Opening, London. Photo: Ramiro Chaves

Working under the moniker Tenant of Culture, Hendrickje Schimmel (\*1990) looks at the self-cannibalization of the fashion industry, drawing especially on its trend-fatigue and environmentalist cosplay. Think of the so-called "baddie apocalypse" of 2016–20, when apps like Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat saw an influx of hot women wearing milkmaid tops, in reference to a 1783 painting of Marie Antoinette: costumed in a *robe en chemise* by painter Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun, the queen had been scandalously transformed into a Rousseauian ideal of a subordinate woman. The 18th-century sentiment was subsequently reproduced, en masse, in fast-fashion e-commerce: dog-ear photo filters, \$5 bell-sleeve tops, woven baskets carried through trad-wife blog content. Tenant of Culture dissected the trend as it occurred, along with fashion's shallow uptake of sustainability, outfitting three-quarter plaster busts with workwear garments that riff on the motif, interwoven with organic matter like straw and flowers. With its insistence on materiality, the work, presented in "Elogues (an apology for actors)" (Nicoletti Contemporary, London, 2019), sets actual ecological fragments against so-called "sustainable" substitutes, while at the same time critiquing a pastoral narrative of a greener past.

As fashion produces evermore self-reflexive, environmentally friendly, or "twee" objects that call out to a non-existent, even erosive past, the artist metabolizes these moves in sculptural form and dissects their deceptions; most recently, her exhibition "Science and Worms" (Ehrlich Steinberg, Los Angeles, 2025) found her hand-darning holes designed in a Zara sweater. In the following exchange, we discuss preserving the un preservable, what twenty yards of linen have to do with Karl Marx, and what the trend oracle sees for 2026.

**LYDIA ELIZA TRAIL** If you had to describe your practice to a viewer, from the conception of an idea, to its fruition in a gallery space – like with your most recent show, "Science and Worms" – where would you begin?

**TENANT OF CULTURE** My work begins in the material culture of the fashion object. I will always have a reference in an existing garment, whether in a style I see online or in an industrial process related to its production. I think in terms of the methodology of [Karl]

View of "Tenant of Culture: Belogues (an apology for actors)," Nicoletti Contemporary, London, 2019



Courtesy: the artist





**There was so much emphasis on "The New" in the 20th century that, today, we are left with this heap of unmetabolized images to process for contemporary life.**

# Spike Art Magazine, 2026

*Flash s/s (Series)*, 2020,  
recycled leather dogs and  
handbag, glue, found fixings,  
cardboard, eyelet, thread, steel,  
68.5 x 29 x 22 cm





Marx, who (in “The Commodity,” *Capital*, 1867) had an equation for discussing the hidden value-substance in labor: 20 yards linen = 1 coat. The “garment” is such a loaded object – the Industrial Revolution is often spoken of in terms of railway tracks or steam engines, but it was really the spinning wheel and the loom that drove the acceleration of production.

In “Science and Worms,” I looked at fashion objects as entangled entities, shaped by labor, production, waste, and their roles within global supply chains. My focus was objects whose preservation for posterity was not a priority: cheaply produced trainers, broken kitten heels, or tourist-shop t-shirts. By using them, I am, in a sense, also archiving them – they *could* end up in an institution. Does something that’s explicitly contemporary, that references a fad, age faster than those that aren’t? There is an idea of timelessness in sculpture at large, but what happens when you start placing fashion’s *memento mori* within sculpture? I’m interested in the idea that an artwork which visibly indexes a specific fashion trend won’t age very well, shortening its lifespan by making it feel obsolete sooner.

**LET** In the show, you focus on an object going down one of two paths: decomposition or preservation. How do the materials you use, like supportive cushioning or museum-grade protective covers, capture this?

**TOC** I wanted to acknowledge this archiving protocol aesthetically: in museums like the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, they preserve shoes with specially designed, bluish cardboard boxes and custom cushions. For the show in LA, I used Tyvek, an acid-free, non-woven, moisture-releasing fabric to make custom garment bags, each of which I filled with a garment – like a tourist jumper printed with I LOVE NEW YORK (Other, 2025) – then sliced open, both to reveal what’s inside and to leave it subject to decay. For the shoe sculpture series “Receptacles, 1–9” (2025), I used latex, which isn’t a preservation material, so much as a nod to when, at music festivals, people pull plastic covers over their shoes. In *Receptacles 1*, the shoe has totally rotted – only the latex container is left.

**LET** Do you see a connection between your work and today’s young fashion connoisseurs? Online, I see experts and amateurs filming themselves dissecting archival pieces as a form of social study.

**TOC** Our culture has accelerated; everything is accessible online. It interests me that internet fashion archivists like Rian Phin (@thatadult) or Mandy Lee (@oldloserinbrooklyn)

**I am trying to construct a material understanding of the way things are produced, and of the consequences of that production.**

have used this hyper-visibility to reflect on previous collections, because as I mentioned, I am trying to construct a material understanding of the way things are produced, and of the consequences of that production. It’s good to see fashion critique de-centering the new, but so much remains unsaid in these revisitations of the same garments, of the same collections (Alexander McQueen’s *Highland Rape* [A/W 1995–96]; Marc Jacob’s work at Louis Vuitton [1997–2013], Hedi Slimane’s Dior Homme years [2000–07]), time and time again. In the boot piece, *Receptacles (3, series)* (2025), I used a knock-off Balenciaga bag, the Converse All Star logo, and ribbon-backed Uggs – specific brands and surfaces that evidence how trends circulate, sediment, and return.

**LET** Why do you think nostalgia, repetition, allusion, and recycling play such central roles in youth and fashion culture today?

**TOC** Mark Fisher’s hauntology – his diagnosis of pop culture as haunted by its unfulfilled futures – still helps explain how the now is an endless quotation of the past. There was so much emphasis on “The New” in the 20th century that, today, we are left with this heap of unmetabolized images to process for contemporary life. Paired with a historically Western, teleological account of progress, the weight of this past on the younger generation is producing a dystopian – or utopian – reflex of repetition.

**LET** Which aspects of your work, specifically, look to unpick how the fashion industry obfuscates mass production? Particularly in recourse to the skewing of time through the production of pre-worn, -ripped, or -damaged clothing?

**TOC** I am interested in this tension between destruction and decoration, and fashion trends that aestheticize



*Receptacles (1, series), 2025, shoe sole, rubber, thread, 30.5 x 12 x 5 cm*

**I am interested in the trend report beyond its consumer function. Speculating on a collective future is an important ritual.**

waste and damage, historically as well as contemporary. The work *Sabotage in Acrylic (Series No. 3)* (2025), for instance, deals with the idea of an industrial knitting machine producing a frayed sweater, making almost instant an effect that would normally be achieved through decades of wear. The work mocks the totally contrived, pastoral, or “twee” notions of darning and patching, which are costly, and also feeble, counter-actions to mass production. I think it’s important to construct an aesthetic that moves beyond the smooth, frictionless exchange of garments that pervades our present, because I am interested in how, in the future, we will regard signs of use or wear beyond just the aesthetic of deconstruction.

**LET** Your exhibitions have previously been described as functioning as “trend reports,” contextualizing visual fads within the history of mass production. I’m thinking of “Elogues (an apology for actors),” where you followed the milkmaid archetype – her bonnet cap, roused sleeves, and woven sun hats – from an 18th-century, pre-industrial goddess to a voluptuous Instagram baddie.

**TOC** My work is almost the reverse, actually, because I examine items that have already been discarded. I am interested in the trend report beyond its consumer function. Speculating on a collective future is an important ritual. The works in “Elogues” looked at how criticism of fashion’s environmental impact can be refigured into an aesthetic, the response to which is often a kind of strategic “environmentalist kitsch”: brands release collections that evoke a visual narrative of a simpler time, often framed through a female stereotype like the milkmaid. This whole exhibition was trying to reckon with the labelling of my work as “sustainable.” I made these bust sculptures without

features, which wore objects that referenced milkmaid fashion, but were actually de- and reconstructed second-hand garments from Depop and eBay.

**LET** What’s your trend report for 2026? Personally, I believe the resurgence of American Apparel, both in its uniformity and its very un-woke associations, signals a conservative shift.

**TOC** For 2026, I see people wearing military-style hussar jackets with gold frogging details, which are ornamental braids you’d find on members of high ranking. It feels like we’ve moved past the phase of dressing “poor” and are looking toward opulence again. It’s interesting to see how mass-produced clothes now lean on pre-industrial symbols of status to signal value. It’s not something I agree with, but it marks an interesting shift away from the aesthetics of scarcity. —

**TENANT OF CULTURE** is the moniker of Hendrickje Schimmel (1990, Arnhem, Netherlands), an artist living in Amsterdam. Recent solo shows took place at Ehrlich Steinberg, Los Angeles (2025); PEANA, Mexico City (2024); Soft Opening, London; Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp (2023); Camden Arts Centre, London (2022). Recent group shows include “The Practice of Everyday Life,” Capc Musée d’art contemporain de Bordeaux, Bordeaux; Textile Biennial 2025 “Interwoven Futures,” Museum Rijswijk, Netherlands (2025); “Material Worlds: Contemporary Artists and Textiles,” Hayward Gallery Touring; “Three Sides Enclosed, the Fourth Open to a Wash of the Weather,” Ensemble, New York; “Gradients of the Grotesque: A Stampede of Crocs, Buffalos and Gazelles,” Last Tango, Zurich (all 2024).

**LYDIA ELIZA TRAIL** is a writer and art critic based in London.



# Spike Art Magazine, 2026

*Extensive Range of Carrying Options (Series) Parka*, 2022, recycled plastic handbags, thread, found mannequin body, stainless steel, 165 x 70 x 70 cm

Courtesy: the artist and Soft Opening, London. Photo: Theo Christellis



Bottom and left: Courtesy: the artist and Ehrlich Steinberg, Los Angeles. Photos: Evan Walsh



*Sabotage in Acrylic (series nr 3)*, 2025 (detail). Zara knitted pullover, merino wool yarn, 76 x 45.7 cm

## Tenant of Culture Skewers Fast Fashion Through Sculpture

Janelle Zara

Apr 5, 2025 12:09AM



Tenant of Culture, installation view of *Puzzlecut Boot Miscellaneous (2)*, 2021 in "HOST: Tenant of Culture" at The Contemporary Austin, 2025. © Tenant of Culture. Photo by Alex Boeschstein. Courtesy of the artist, The Contemporary Austin, and Soft Opening, London.



Tenant of Culture, installation view of *Dry Fit (Series)*, 2024 in "HOST: Tenant of Culture" at The Contemporary Austin, 2025. © Tenant of Culture. Photo by Alex Boeschstein. Courtesy of the artist, The Contemporary Austin, and Galerie Fons Welters, Amsterdam.

In the mysterious and fragmented world of clothing production, "It's really difficult to track where something is made, how it's produced, and under which conditions," said the Amsterdam-based artist Hendrickje Schimmel. Operating under the name Tenant of Culture, she essentially runs the production process in reverse, taking secondhand garments nearing the end of their life cycles and summarily "unmaking" them. Breaking down eBay or thrift store finds, she told Artsy, she examines their individual parts for clues: "what type of glue is used, the intentions of the designer, how long they're supposed to last." From there, the artist reassembles the scraps according to her own formal and conceptual logic, mixing the materials and techniques of disparate eras, functions, and styles.

The resulting works, on view now at her two concurrent, debut U.S. solo shows, offer a critique of industrial overconsumption and waste. Some pieces are deconstructed into total abstractions, while others remain legible as clothing—albeit freakishly altered and radically reimaged.

In her conceptual practice, Tenant of Culture is about extending fashion's notoriously short life cycle, recycling its essentially worthless debris into rigorously constructed sculpture. At "Host: Tenant of Culture" at The Contemporary Austin (on view through August 3rd), *Puzzlecut Boot Brown* (2021) is a single Frankenstein heel, sutured with purse straps and belt buckles and stacked from the soles of other shoes. "Science and Worms" at Ehrlich Steinberg in Los Angeles (on view through April 5th) features a newer suite of similarly de- and reconstructed footwear, as well as *Sabotage in Acrylic (series nr 3)* (2025), a piece made from a synthetic Zara sweater that once featured trendy, machine-made holes. Schimmel laboriously repaired them by hand to highlight the difference between "industrial time" versus "craft time": "Something that was produced in probably less than half an hour took months and months to restore." Found secondhand with its tag intact, the sweater also embodied fast fashion's increasingly rapid cycle of replacement; it had been discarded before it was ever worn.



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Tenant of Culture, installation view of *Puzzlecut Boot Miscellaneous (2)*, 2021 in "HOST: Tenant of Culture" at The Contemporary Austin, 2025. © Tenant of Culture. Photo by Alex Boeschstein. Courtesy of the artist, The Contemporary Austin, and Soft Opening, London.



Tenant of Culture, installation view of *Dry Fit (Series)*, 2024 in "HOST: Tenant of Culture" at The Contemporary Austin, 2025. © Tenant of Culture. Photo by Alex Boeschstein. Courtesy of the artist, The Contemporary Austin, and Galerie Fons Welters, Amsterdam.

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# Artsy, 2025

## How Tenant of Culture deconstructs the fashion industry



Portrait of Tenant of Culture. Courtesy of the artist.



Tenant of Culture, *Sabotage in Acrylic (series nr 3)*, 2025. Photo by Evan Walsh. Courtesy of the artist and Ehrlich Steinberg, Los Angeles.

For many years, Schimmel professionally designed outerwear for a mid-sized company, after training in garment-making at London's Royal College of Art and interning at Alexander McQueen. Ultimately, she explained, she felt alienated by the industry's secretive production methods and wasteful culture of overconsumption: "Everything that fashion produces is already on its way to be destroyed."

The artist adopted the name Tenant of Culture as a reference to *The Practice of Everyday Life*, a 1974 text by the late French scholar Michel de Certeau. He proposed the misuse and reinterpretation of mass-produced goods as a way for consumers to preserve their sense of individuality. The moniker "Tenant" also acknowledges that Schimmel is not permanently tied to any fashion house. "The whole idea of Tenant of Culture is going against the constant material innovation and newness that fashion demands, and seeing how far and how differently you can go with the same materials."



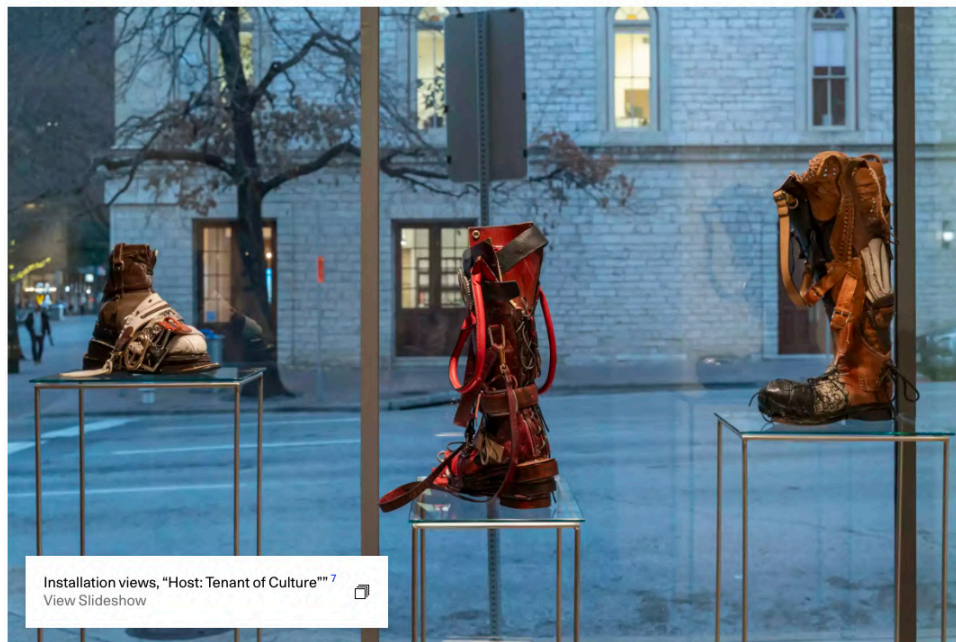
Tenant of Culture *Receptacles (5, series)*, 2025. Photo by Evan Walsh. Courtesy of the artist and Ehrlich Steinberg, Los Angeles.

# Artsy, 2025

Textiles in contemporary art are often made or outsourced by artists approaching the medium from an outsider's perspective, essentially translating the grammar of image making into the language of fiber. By contrast, textile production is Tenant of Culture's first language; she has the fluency to experiment with the material on a structural level, exploring variations on the traditional stitch the way a painter explores new brushstrokes. "I have my own methods of making that probably don't at all meet the standards of industrial technique," Schimmel said. This leaves her free from the practical constraints of making functional clothing.

Paying close attention to trends, the artist incorporates them into different bodies of work, drawing out the historical references frequently forgotten by popular culture. "Eclogues (an apology for actors)," her 2019 show at NiCOLETTi in London, framed the "pastoral nostalgia" surging through high street shops as a strange romanticization of the medieval milkmaid. "Ladder," her 2023 show at Soft Opening, also in London, was about fashion's appropriation of distressed fabrics as pure decoration. The 16th-century slashed sleeve trend among European nobility, for example, was inspired by the tattered clothing of soldiers returning from war. Bringing the look into the 21st-century world of e-commerce, Schimmel cut gashes into the packaging of online clothing orders to create "Haul," a series of strangely beautiful, lumpy soft sculptures of contrasting colors and textures, some adorned with delicately feminine bows.

## Artistic preservation and its fashionable decay



Tenant of Culture is represented by Soft Opening in London as well as Galerie Fons Welters in Amsterdam, and has works in the permanent collections of the Het Fries and Stedelijk Museum in the Netherlands. Her crossover from the fashion industry into the art world has provided interesting new angles to mine. During an early gallery show in 2017, viewers described her work as "trendy." "I didn't realize that that was an insult," Schimmel recalled. In contrast to fashion's ephemerality, she eventually realized that "the status quo within the arts is that something should exceed a certain time period and last for eternity."

# Artsy, 2025

Her current Ehrlich Steinberg show “Science and Worms” merges the contradictions in “fashion time” and “museum time,” abstracting institutional methods of conservation and applying them to shoes that already appear to be falling apart. In her research, Schimmel was surprised to learn “how much effort is put into the preservation of materials that are not meant to be preserved,” she said, as well as some conservators’ desire to maintain the exact point of an object’s existing decomposition. Among her new “Receptacles” sculptures of deconstructed shoes, some are fused at the sole to strange cushions inspired by those in the ~~MFA Boston~~ MFA Boston’s costume archives. Others, fittingly, are held together inside transparent “tombs” of plastic and rubber sleeves. The title refers to Baudrillard’s idea that, in taking cultural artifacts out of their organic context, museum preservation is its own type of unnatural death.

As an ardent critic of the fashion industry, Schimmel is still deeply invested in its artistry and the importance of personal style. She highlighted an important distinction within her practice: “What I am critical of is fashion and its extractive methods as an industrial complex, not fashion as a joyful and important daily practice for so many,” she said. Plus, “I think criticism is much more interesting if you actually really like something.” ■

Janelle Zara



Flash s/s (Series), 2020 Recycled  
 textiles, jesmonite, fibreglass,  
 thread, steel 61 x 41 x 30 cm  
 Photography Theo Christelis  
 Courtesy the artist and  
 Soft Opening, London



**Tenant of Culture** (1990), is the artistic practice of Hendrickje Schimmel (born in Arnhem), who lives and works in London. The artist's most recent solo exhibition **IN SITU** was held at Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp (2023). Prior to this

the artist's most recent solo exhibition at V&A was held at Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp (2023). Prior to this, the artist's first UK institutional solo exhibition, *Soft Acid* opened last year at Camden Art Centre, London (2022). *Soft Acid* will be exhibited this year as part of the British Textile Biennial 2023. Recent exhibitions include *Insides Out* at Kunstverein

Göttingen, Göttingen (2023); *Beautiful Repair* at Copenhagen Contemporary, Copenhagen (2023); *Good Signal* at Duarte Sequeira, Braga (2023); *Piece(d) Work* at Ivory Tars, Glasgow (2022); *Post-digital Intimacy* at the National Gallery Prague, Prague (2022); *Eternally Yours* at Somerset House, London (2022) and *Testament* at the Goldsmiths Centre for Contemporary Art, London (2022). The work of Tenant of Culture is in the collections of the Fries Museum, Leeuwarden; the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam and The Pier Arts Centre, Orkney. In 2020 *Soft Opening* published the artist's first monograph in collaboration with Charles Asprey which was one of the winners of the Swiss Most Beautiful Books Award.

## THE GHOSTS OF FASHION INSIDE TENANT OF CULTURE'S BODY OF WORK. *BY ELEONORA DE CHIARA.*

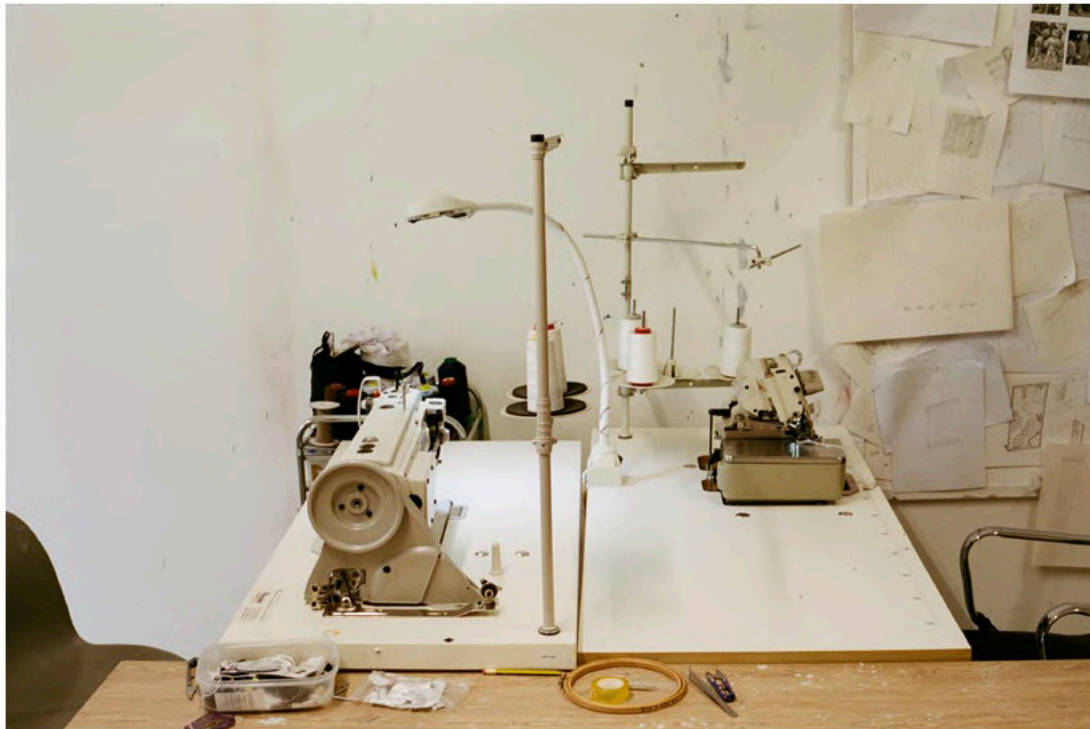
Over the past few years, material culture has become a prominent part of the vocabulary of fashion, referring to the role of garments and physical inputs that make them up, materials, labour, energy, in the study of fashion. While anthropology and archaeology were the first to focus on objects and material, towards the end of the last century a significant attention to the world of objects was made by other disciplines such as fashion history, concerning materiality, its meanings, and its potential for knowledge.

The fashion industry, as a system, demands the continuous creation of new items and the manufacturing of additional fashionable products. This has evident repercussions for materiality, resulting in a surplus of items that have fallen out of favour within the fashion landscape. When we change our focus to consider fashion through its material aspects, we are also forced to consider the implications of the stuff that fashion leaves behind<sup>1</sup>.

The historian Giorgio Riello defined these things as «detritus of history»: residues, debris, fragments of past tendencies. During a lecture at the Bard Graduate Centre, Riello conducted an insightful analysis, spotlighting how the material characteristics of objects significantly impact the preservation and conservation of sneakers at the Northampton Museum and Art Gallery<sup>2</sup>. Nowadays sneakers are usually made by 300 different parts and over 65 assembling steps made in different countries. It marks an acknowledgement that over the past decades fashionable objects were never intended to last long so their struggle to survive seems to be part of a mass consumerist genetic code. In the current era of fast fashion, the lifespan of objects mirrors this swift and ephemeral nature. As fashion is fast in this day, the life of things is equally fast and flitting. He asserts that only a selection of these objects would perfectly remain integrated, the rest would be a ghost of fashion past.







Tenant of Culture's practice questions and transform the material aspects of these fashion remains. In doing so, spectral remnants not only serve as the focal point of her exploration but also become the medium through which she conducts a social critique to consumer culture and the intricate mechanisms promoted by the fashion system.

The moniker Tenant of Culture, embraced by Hendrickje Schimmel, originates from Michel de Certeau's writings about the dynamics between consumers and producers. More specifically, it delves into the methods consumers employ to challenge the strategies of producers, involving the appropriation, reinterpretation, and customization of mass-produced goods. This philosophy closely aligns with Schimmel's body of work, characterized by re-contextualization and transformation extends to a questioning of the fashion *modus operandi*, industrial structures and mass production.

The fashion practitioner's attention is particularly on unused, discarded and abandoned apparel pieces,

Studio Images of Tenant of Culture,  
London, 2023.  
Photography by Albert Riera Galceran.





IN  
The Museum of Contemporary Art  
2023  
Courtesy the artist





# Emergent, 2023

Article

Tenant of Culture

157

in Antwerp (M HKA),  
Christine and M  
SITU Antwerp,  
Clinckx  
HKA



as well as accessories from the prior season, sometimes available at discounted rates and secondary markets, even if they're not more than half a year old.

These materials, which are frequently donated in thrift-shop, find themselves disregarded as people have already moved beyond these trends, despite their continued presence in circulation. They originate from a relatively recent past, and we may still hold fresh memories of their advertisements or appearances in magazines and on our screens. This enduring connection to their imagery adds a layer of complexity to their disposal and transformation.

T-shirts, jackets, belts, and other items are meticulously combined with zippers, bungees, elastics, labels, and handbags, transforming them into intricate textile sculptures that transcend their original wearable forms. These transformed pieces are then suspended from the walls of galleries and museum spaces, as exemplified in the recent solo exhibition "IN SITU" hosted at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Antwerp by the artist.



<sup>1</sup>Woodward, S., & Fisher, T. (2014). Fashioning through materials: material culture, materiality and processes of materialization. *Critical Studies in Fashion & Beauty*, 3-22

<sup>2</sup>Riello, Giorgio (2013). *Ghost of Fashion Past: Material Culture and the Debris of History*. Seminar Series: Conservation Conversations at Bard Graduate Center



In *Soft Acid*, the artist's solo exhibition at Camden Art Centre in London, monstrous masses of synthetically coloured fabric were hanging arrangements inspired by the piping systems employed in dye factories were showcased, exploring high-end fashion presentation methods that mirror the aesthetics of this industrial setting. These garments have undergone a process of deconstruction, bleaching, re-dyeing, reassembly, wringing, pressing, hanging, and stretching. The clothing utilised in these sculptures comprises repurposed denim, waterproof materials, and performance wear—each of which entails a significant consumption of water and chemicals during their production and finishing stages. To achieve their vivid and somewhat toxic hues, these garments have been treated with either acid or enzymes.

Repurposed sneakers, timber clogs, Birkenstock sandals, and athletic shoes are disassembled and divided into soles, laces, buttons, and threads to craft towering shoe structures. These components are then reassembled and reconstructed using





Soft Camden Photography Courtesy  
Art artist the  
Rob and  
Centre, Camden  
Acid London Harris Centre





Soft Acid (Series) Red, 2022  
Recycled jeans, thread, dye, buckles, eyelets  
305 × 80 × 30 cm Photography Rob Harris  
Courtesy the artist and Camden Art Centre







cement, belts, and strings as in the series *Flash s/s* and *Country Styles for the Young*.

The pre-used materials and the subsequent process of transforming them, establish deconstruction as the method through which the fashion practitioner can interpret the clothes and consider the broader systemic challenges related to globalised supply chains, capitalism, and the issue of overproduction. Deconstruction reveals insights about garment's principles, in particular the significance of production, in its interplay with consumption and, moreover, in its choice of working practices, use of materials and techniques, as well as labour relations and provenience.

As the artist mentioned in an interview, the process of deconstruction provides her with a significant amount of information. She pointed out that many products today are designed with a predetermined end-date, embedded in their physical composition. This design choice means a product's strength is determined by its weakest part.

Fashion has historically been characterised as transient and fleeting, rarely a subject of discourse in a tangible or substantial context. With her research *Tenant of Culture* shifts our attention on fashion through its materiality and conciseness. Concentrating on materiality involves contemplating the evolving role of clothing as tangible objects across time and prevailing fashion trends. As Sennett observes in the histories of things, metamorphosis and adaptation play a stronger role across human generations<sup>3</sup>. The alteration nature of *Tenant of Culture's* body of work sheds light on the inherent instability of contemporary fashion cross with materiality and the rhythms of fashion's genesis, from the production to their eventual deterioration, and the subsequent mutability.

<sup>3</sup>Sennett, Richard (2008). *The craftsman*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 15.



Haul (series), 2023 Plastic bag, garments,  
thread, ribbon, rivets 36 x 28 cm.  
Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening,  
London Photography: Mark Blower





Featured in  
Issue 240

## Tenant of Culture Picks Apart the Lives of Our Garments

At Soft Opening, London, Hendrickje Schimmel challenges linear constructs of creation and usage by manipulating end-of-life materials



BY KIMI ZARATE-SMITH IN EXHIBITION REVIEWS | 29 SEP 23



'Ladder' is Tenant of Culture's attack on cycles of mass production and fashion, high and low.

Hendrickje Schimmel, the artist behind the evocative moniker, recycles end-of-life materials into zombified and necrotic shoes, bags and other functional objects. At Soft Opening, we find her retracting from her usual, pieced-together maximalist craft, favouring a more minimal and ordered approach. The show interrupts not only the industrial object's afterlife but also its conception, picking apart the lives of our garments.



Tenant of Culture, 'Haul', 2023, plastic, garments, thread, ribbon and rivets, 36 x 28 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Soft Opening, London



# Frieze, 2023

*Sabotage in Acrylic (mint)* and *Sabotage in Acrylic (taupe)* (all works 2023) appear stretched between three pillars at the centre of the gallery. The works have been put on trial – repeated punctures, rips, and exit wounds perforate the fabric. The artist's treatment of her material is a gentle take on designer Rei Kawakubo's *Jumper* (1982), a black knitted ensemble scattered with holes, referenced in an accompanying text by Eilidh Duffy. As Duffy explains, Schimmel has modified – or broken down, in this case – her knitting machine to replicate Comme Des Garçons' late-1980s production method, which, in turn, was inspired by the disruptive acts of the French saboteurs, who protested poor working conditions during the industrial period. Schimmel's intervention culls specific threads even before they come into being.

The 'Drawn' series sees the artist deconstruct salvaged tote bags, obliterating their functionality. After undoing the bags' original composition, the resulting negative space is ladder-like with the remains of warps and wefts, then twisted into locks – cascades of open-work embroidery drop into an organized fall. Stare long enough at the corpse-like *Drawn* or *Sabotage in Acrylic* and the threads morph into little talons, then genomic structures, strands of DNA, veins, chromosomes. Schimmel goes back and forth, reworking her materials at their beginnings and ends. She alternates between destruction and construction, which has the potential to be the same thing in a sustainable world.



Tenant of Culture, 'Ladder', 2023, installation view. Courtesy: the artist and Soft Opening, London

The 'Haul' series repurposes an assortment of fast-fashion deliveries: the unworn garments bulge and emerge from their sheer polyethylene sacs like aliens from the e-commerce realm. Schimmel manipulates the found material toward kitsch aesthetics by introducing quilts, ribbons and ruches. Still-sealed bags are incised with new openings, while her attack on the cloth subverts creation and usage as linear constructs. 'Haul' contains simultaneously delicate, Shibari-esque workings of beautified constraints and grisly releases of tension. As detailed in the text, the work nods to the *Landsknecht*, early modern Germanic mercenaries often depicted in outlandish garb, such as bright and expensive silks under their battlewear.

# Frieze, 2023

With a satirical eye, 'Ladder' encompasses short-lived and flamboyant things: trends, fast fashion, German foot soldiers and mass production. There is nothing punk about making excess waste and buying into it. Schimmel was influenced by the recent 'Avant Apocalypse' trend – a new something-core from the online fashion niches – whose wearers identify with a future fallacy, inspired by the 2021 film adaptation of Frank Herbert's novel *Dune* (1965), in which we'll all be wearing torn-up Rick Owens on a giant Tesla flying away from a destroyed Earth. The show feels sharply ironic, a contextual battle with our late-capitalist tendency to look artificially hardcore. Distressed garments are often pure decadence. Why pursue a type of labour that will get my double-denim dirty when Acne Studios can do it for me? I could walk a hundred miles in these shoes ... but I'll have the soles broken in *à la* Maison Margiela. The worn-out look really is for those who stay in.



Tenant of Culture, *Untitled*, 2023, velour tracksuit treated with devoré, thread and buckles, 179 × 160 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Soft Opening, London

Schimmel's 'Ladder' is a twisting one of ups and downs. The works are informed by the future as much as by what's left behind. As the aesthetic of decay and incompleteness quickly become contrived, 'Ladder' seems to ask: 'What happened along the way?'

Tenant of Culture's 'Ladder' is at [Soft Opening](#), London, until 21 October

Main image: Tenant of Culture, 'Haul' (detail), 2023, plastic, garments, thread, ribbon and rivets, 27 × 32 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Soft Opening, London

# The Spectator, 2023

Laura Gascoigne

## Surreal, pacy and fun: Christian Marclay's Doors, at White Cube, reviewed

Plus: the funny, beautifully fragile work of Hendrickje Schimmel

📖 From magazine issue: 16 September 2023



Still from 'Doors', 2022, by Christian Marclay. Image: © Christian Marclay. Courtesy: White Cube



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Christian Marclay: Doors

White Cube, Mason's Yard, until 30 September

Tenant of Culture: Ladder

Soft Opening, until 21 October

**S**liding doors may change your life, but there's no mystery in their transparency. A hinged wooden door is another matter; you're never quite sure what's behind it.

Christian Marclay has a thing about doors; not an obsession, he insists, just a general interest 'in things we don't pay much attention to'. For the British launch of his new video montage 'Doors' he has filled the ground-floor gallery of White Cube Mason's Yard with doors picked out of London skips, sawn up and reassembled into what could be taken for minimalist sculptures if the knobs, knockers, locks and hinges weren't still attached: 'I don't want to mess about with their "dooriness"', he explains. A solid wooden Victorian door is carved into a cross, while modern veneered doors are chopped and stacked in blocks, exposing their filling. 'In cutting you discover what's inside the door,' he says.

In the film downstairs you discover what's behind it, or you would if Marclay hadn't messed around with its 'filmness'. Like 'The Clock', the work that won him the Golden Lion at the 2011 Venice Biennale, 'Doors' is a collage of sampled clips from different

*Balenciaga's beaten-up 'Paris' sneakers launched in a limited edition last year for \$1,850 a pair*



# The Spectator, 2023

films. Unlike 'The Clock', which had a surprisingly easy birth for a 24-hour film you can tell the time by, 'Doors' has been ten years in gestation. Marclay gave up twice. With clockfaces it was easy to jump cut from one image to the next, but doors presented particular problems of continuity. Was the hinge on the left or the right? Was the door opened by pushing or pulling, and how fast?

Without the inexorable passage of time, he could at least run the clips in any order. Genres switch from noir to comedy in the blink of an eye and sequences of non-sequiturs are cleverly paced, with hectic chase scenes intercut with interludes of ominous calm. It's noticeable how actresses are typically filmed quietly opening doors into domestic spaces, while actors tend to burst through doors with guns. Close-ups of keys being turned, bolts drawn, locks picked and keyholes peered through – accompanied by the creaking of hinges and the clicking of latches – heighten the tension.



Avant apocalypse: close-up of one of the works from the 'Haul' series, 2023, by Hendrickje Schimmel (aka Tenant of Culture). Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London. Photography: Mark Blower

Repetition is employed to surreal effect. Brigitte Bardot pops up at intervals to open a door with an 'Oh, pardon!' to a series of actors in different films, including John Wayne in *Rio Bravo*; a man returns repeatedly to the same office to pick up a packet with the line: 'I forgot the money'; a young woman runs down a hotel corridor pursued by a posse of shrieking girls. Most of the time I had no idea what film I was in, but I'm no film buff and neither is Marclay; disorientation adds to the fun. The video's 54-minute loop is designed, he says, to replicate the gallery experience of artists' videos where you have no way of knowing at what point you came in and 'wonder how long you're going to be stuck there. It gives video a bad name'. When I hear the word 'durational' I reach for my sleep mask, but no one would sleep through 'Doors' because it's pacy and fun. 'Art doesn't need to be so serious,' thinks Marclay. 'Life is funny sometimes.'

Young Dutch artist Hendrickje Schimmel's first solo UK institutional exhibition, *Soft Acid*, at Camden Arts Centre last year had its funny side, but the 33-year-old's current show *Ladders*, at Bethnal Green gallery Soft Opening, is more serious. Operating under the alias Tenant of Culture, Schimmel – who has a background in fashion – has acquired a reputation, like Marclay, for sampling. In her case unstitching and rehashing handbags and trainers into monstrous caricatures of fashionable footwear that question the desirability of walking around with things on your feet streamlined to resemble steam irons or superyachts.

# The Spectator, 2023

Now she has turned her attention to the trend for artificially aged clothing, purposely pre-torn, slashed and frayed by the garment industry to cater to the 'Avant Apocalypse' market. At the luxury end the look can cost a fortune – Balenciaga's beaten-up 'Paris' sneakers launched in a limited edition last year for \$1,850 a pair. At the affordable end it's cheap as chips. For Schimmel's new 'Haul' series, instead of sourcing clothes from eBay and charity shops she has been ordering high street brands online and slashing them through their unopened plastic packaging, suturing their gaping wounds with tape. A pair of monumental knitted hangings titled 'Sabotage in Acrylic' is perforated with repeating patterns of designer holes and ladders made by specially programmed factory machines, but it's Schimmel's handmade – or unmade – work that is most effective. For her 'Drawn' series she has pulled the threads from canvas tote bags to create designs of old-fashioned openwork embroidery that render the objects beautifully fragile but useless as bags. Her work used to look like a spoof of fashion; now it looks like art.

WRITTEN BY

*Laura Gascoigne*



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**Arts Reviews**



## DISTRESSING FASHION: ARTIST TENANT OF CULTURE EXPLORES FASHION'S OBSESSION WITH DECONSTRUCTION IN NEW EXHIBITION

PUBLISHED ON 14 SEPTEMBER 2023

Art and culture editor Christina Donoghue speaks to Tenant of Culture, aka Hendrickje Schimmel about their latest exhibition at Soft Opening, which explores the political history of fabric and garment reconstruction.

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Artist projects come to fruition for a whole host of reasons. Whether it be due to an assigned brief or an inspiration, a fleeting idea or a blurry dream. Whatever the initial spark is that ignites creativity, the beginning of an artist's process can (and often does) look radically different from the end result.



Tenant of Culture Haul (series), 2023 Plastic bag, garments, thread, ribbon 67 x 32 cm Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London Photography: Mark Blower

For fashion practitioner and multimedia artist Tenant of Culture, the beginning doesn't start with a vision but, instead, the space her work sits within. Last week, the artist unveiled her new show *Ladder* at Soft Opening in Bethnal Green, an area of East London with roots in the weaving industry pre-industrial revolution, a history that hangs like a dark cloud of smoke over the exhibition, informing its concept from beginning to end. 'When it comes down to a starting point, I always look at the places I am showing work in. Especially in the UK because it's quite often the case that if you show anywhere in England, there is some kind of link to the industrial history of textiles', the artist - whose real name is Hendrickje Schimmel - told me over Zoom. 'Spitalfields, Bethnal Green and Cambridge Heath played quite a crucial role because they were the first industrial suburbs of London. All had a big weaving industry going on there.'

# SHOWstudio, 2023



Haul (series), 2023 Plastic bags, garments, thread 59.5 x 32 cm Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London Photography: Mark Blower



Tenant of Culture Haul (series), 2023 Plastic bag, garments, thread, ribbon 52 x 35 cm Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London Photography: Mark Blower

If you're thinking of The Luddites (the 19th-century textile workers who smashed machinery to stabilise wages but also against mechanisation and the dispartent of skilled labour), Tenant of Culture is asking you to think deeper. 'I came across this fairly unknown history of The Cutters movement and the 'Cutters' Riots in Spitalfields, which came before The Luddites', noted Schimmel. Like The Luddites, The Cutters also rebelled with destruction, but their efforts are less well-known. 'They had this method of rioting by going to other workshops and cutting through the looms and the work on the looms of other textile workers', Schimmel says. Despite the somewhat malevolent gesture, the very action of cutting, slashing and destroying has consistently informed Schimmel's practice. 'Cutting through something as a means of protest I found quite interesting in relation to damaged clothing that we see today as a fashion trend'.

*Ladder* doesn't just hark back to events 300-plus years ago; it's also anchored in today's fashion waste problem - a notion that Schimmel has been endlessly fascinated by since she started developing her work as a practitioner over ten years ago. An example linking fashion's problem with waste and its ties with rebellion can be seen in the artist's series *Haul* included in the show, where sliced garments are stitched into packaging materials next to clothes that have also been reconfigured. The sealed plastic encasing the work represents damaged goods. At the same time, the repetitive method of slicing instead implies a carefully planned aesthetic act - just how it is with ripped jeans, off-the-shoulder tops, or, put simply, anything by a Fashion East scholar on the runway. In short, *Haul* serves as more of a literal commentary on today's not-so-circular commerce system, used by online retailers like Shein, Boohoo and Pretty Little Thing.

Interested in the artist's bold and clever attack on the fast fashion system, I decide to put Schimmel in the hot seat, asking her who she thinks is really to blame for the damaging e-retailer system that isn't only perpetuated by retailers but also its consumers, who - despite being aware of the damages their purchases are doing - are continuing to shop until they drop. 'It's dangerous to place responsibility on consumers only', she confidently states. 'On the other hand, it feeds into the demand vs supply chain, but ultimately, the only thing that can change is legislation. And there is too much money to be made to cause that change on such a micro level. Schimmel then makes a point that I'm sure not many would've pondered before. 'The reason fashion is so interesting is because it has the ability to co-opt its own critique in aesthetics', she elaborates. I asked her to explain. 'So, Gorp Core as a trend, the trend of using hiking gear to imply a kind of affinity with nature, has been going on for a long time. It's one of the most persistent and widely adopted trends ever. Yet all this tech clothing is mass-produced and made of polyester, an oil-based plastic which does not disintegrate. There is so much to explore within the individual desire and the realities of production, but it's not my expertise necessarily. I'm an artist looking at these themes and linking them to the industrial history of fashion, which is mainly my interest.'



# SHOWstudio, 2023



Tenant of Culture Drawn (series), 2023 Found canvas tote bag, thread 107 x 37 cm Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London Photography: Mark Blower



Tenant of Culture Haul (series), 2023 Plastic bag, garments, thread, ribbon, rivets 36 x 28 cm Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London Photography: Mark Blower

Other historical references that have also influenced the recurring theme of deconstruction as an aesthetic in *Ladder* include an unknown mercenary army who 'wore silk undergarments beneath their uniforms', says Schimmel. 'So, when they came home after fighting, their tattered uniforms were decorated with these rich colours underneath'. This trend then spread across European courts like wildfire, influencing anyone who belonged to the aristocracy and encouraging them to adopt such a way of dressing (you only have to look at the Tudor paintings hanging in the National Portrait Gallery to know).

When you look at Schimmel's work through the lens of appropriating waste in fashion, suddenly, the artist's historical references align to reveal something much more modern. 'I think the appropriation of tattered clothing in contemporary fashion reads as something very contemporary, but it actually really isn't. It is as old as fashion is', Schimmel informs. 'Today's fashion landscape is obviously very different, especially with mass production and fast fashion. So I do try to locate it within the realities of production today'.

The exhibition is accompanied by a long-format essay by design historian Eilidh Duffy, who succinctly unravels the metaphorical threads that connect *Ladder*. Through words, material textures collide with their attached historical references, making us face the reality that distressed clothing as a 'trend' is as old as time itself. Schimmel's work doesn't laugh in the face of consumerism; it forces us to confront our complacency in a system that cares for no one. If you have yet to question your relationship with fashion commerce, *Ladder* may help you change your mind, and even better, your habits.

*Ladder* at Soft Opening, E2 9EH will be open to the public until 21 October.

## Tenant of Culture, the Artist Taking Aim at Fashion Consumerism

FASHION & BEAUTY / FEATURE



Tenant of Culture, Residual Hue (Series) Kitten Heel, 2022 Courtesy the artist. Photography Rob Harris



**As her new London exhibition opens, Tenant of Culture – aka Hendrickje Schimmel – talks about Rei Kawakubo and the thinking behind her radical, deconstructed textile sculptures**

SEPTEMBER 08, 2023

TEXT Madeleine Rothery

Neatly sliced and wrapped packaging bursting at the slits with clothing, unravelled (and then re-ravelled) tote bags, holey knit murals: at **Tenant of Culture's** new show *Ladder*, at Soft Opening in London, the objects and aesthetics feel familiar and foreign at the same time. Displaced, destroyed, deconstructed – these material remnants of our consumeristic behaviours, which are the toxic heart of the fashion industry, are conceived of as sculpture, posing a very real question: why are we so obsessed with destruction as decoration?

Fabricated or “pre-consumer” destruction is the point of tension through which Tenant of Culture continues the exploration of the cognitive dissonance between “the individual relationship that we have with the garments versus the industry in which they are produced.” “I try to really hone in on one particular material process and then expand from there,” the artist explains, “looking at certain historical events in relation to that, and then also connecting them to contemporary manufacturing.” By placing contemporary aesthetics – like purposefully destroyed garments which defined last year’s ‘avant apocalypse’ trend à la *Balenciaga* – within an expansive historical context, Tenant of Culture makes fashion tangible and material, a continuing modality rather than an ephemeral concept.

Tenant of Culture is the name of Netherlands-born designer Hendrickje Schimmel’s artistic practice. With a background in fashion design and textile, including a stint working as an embroidery designer, the art world’s white cube gallery space may seem like an odd resort for someone used to the fast-paced functionality of fashion. “I think trying to address issues in fashion through fashion is very complicated because of the timeframes – the very quick pace and short attention spans,” she says of her choice to exhibit within the realm of art. A gallery provides both space and time: as couture becomes sculpture, the observer can digest the multidimensionality of the problems Tenant of Culture is tackling. “But I still see myself as a fashion practitioner,” she adds, “because all my research is in the history of design, fashion, and manufacturing.”

*Ladder* is divided into three parts, each addressing different conceptions of destruction in the manufacturing process. *Haul* is a series of assemblages in which soft fast-fashion packaging is lattice-sliced to reveal bursts of second-hand garments. “It refers back to the slashed sleeves of the Swiss Mercenary Army in the early Renaissance,” Schimmel explains. “Underneath their fighting costume, they would wear bright silks. Their tattered costumes would then expose this lining.” This trend was replicated by the European aristocracy, imitating through style the heroism of the young soldiers.



# AnOther, 2023



Tenant of Culture, Haul (series), 2023 Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London. Photography by Mark Blower

*Drawn* taps into her knack with textiles as the threads of tote bags. The plastic bag of our times are picked apart and then rewoven using open work embroidery. The result is a lace-like tapestry with the tote's branding disfigured into abstract imagery. The final series, *Sabotage in Acrylic*, similarly considers destruction through craft. Stretched across the gallery space, the holey knitted mural, created in collaboration with knitwear designer [Ilana Blumberg](#), calls to mind perhaps the most famous of destroyed garments: [Rei Kawakubo](#)'s drop-stitched sweater 'Holes.' "It does actually connect to how Kawakubo sabotaged her own machinery," says Schimmel. "Sabotage comes from the French word *saboteur* which refers to the *sabots*, a type of clog worn by labourers." To stabilise wages, these clog-wearing labourers would destroy machinery – an early form of trade unionism. "It's really funny that sabotage initially started off as something that labourers did in order to kind of have a negotiating position," she adds, "and then it becomes aestheticised as a look. I find that tension quite interesting."

Tenant of Culture's exhibition is accompanied by a long-format essay by design historian Eilidh Duffy, which expertly weaves together the multitude of references hidden throughout *Ladder*. But even on their own, the works push us to consider fashion as more than static garments to be consumed within trend cycles. Rather, it adds texture to our daily wear by shedding light on the technical journey each piece has endured before it reaches our wardrobe. And when placed in the context of history, we realise that 'newness', the fuel of contemporary consumerism, is just a fiction after all.

[Ladder](#) by Tenant of Culture is on show at Soft Opening in London until 21 October 2023.



Flash Art, 2022

# Flash Art

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## Flash Art, 2022



## Living in a Material World

### **TENANT OF CULTURE** IN CONVERSATION WITH **PHILOMENA EPPS**

**In July, Camden Art Centre opened “Soft Acid,” the first institutional exhibition of Tenant of Culture (the anonym for the artistic practice of the Dutch practitioner Hendrickje Schimmel) in the United Kingdom. The research behind this ambitious, site-specific presentation was informed by the historic and contemporary processes used in textile production, and their wider relationship to consumer waste, mass labor, and environmental pollution. As Tenant of Culture, Schimmel has become known for her sustained exploration of the fashion industry, overproduction, and the intense cyclical nature of trends, with her skilled and materials-driven practice transforming used and discarded garments and accessories into complex, amalgamated sculptures and textiles. Philomena Epps met with the artist, mid-installation, on a humid summer afternoon a few days before the exhibition was due to open.**

*Residual Haze (Series) Plimsoll II, 2022. Recycled shoes, thread, glue, paint, jesmonite. Photography by Alessio Bolzoni. © Flash Art. Courtesy of the artist and Soft Opening, London.*



# Flash Art, 2022

*Edogras (Series)*, 2019. Recycled handbags, cement, and screws. Variable dimensions. Photography by Theo Christakis. Courtesy of the artist and Soft Opening, London.

S2





# Flash Art, 2022

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*Eologias (Series)*, 2019. Recycled garments, curtains and accessories, thread, resin clay, eyelets, cord, elastics, felt, stoppers, paint, varnish, and handmade wig by Francisca Fresche 168 x 40 x 27 cm. Photography by Theo Chistelis. Courtesy of the artist and Soft Opening, London.





# Flash Art, 2022

*Ruzzlecut Boot Outblood*, 2021. Recycled shoes, handbags, padding, shoe last, glue, and thread. 17.5 x 39 x 28 cm. Photography by Kunst-dokumentation.com. Courtesy of the artist and Soft Opening, London.

Living in a Material World

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# Flash Art, 2022

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*Puzzleout Boot White, 2021. Recycled shoes and handbags, acrylic paint, padding, shoe last, glue, thread, steel, and glass.*  
161 x 39 x 28 cm. Photography by Kunst-dokumentation.com. Courtesy of the artist and Soft Opening, London.





**PHILOMENA EPPS:** I wanted to initiate our conversation by inviting you to talk about the research you undertook in the archives at Camden Art Centre while preparing for the exhibition, and how that process then led you to the British laundry industry.

**TENANT of CULTURE:** Camden Art Centre started as an artist-run space in the 1960s called Hampstead Arts Centre. Martin Clark [Camden Art Centre's director] told me that there had been lots of workshops here in those days. Workshops are such an intrinsic part of my practice, so I wanted to find documentation of these events. In my 2021 exhibition "et al." at Kunstverein Dresden, I ran workshops for two weeks and then exhibited the results for the remaining run. In the archive, I found a flyer for an exhibition that took place in 1967 called "The Londoners." It was about industries that employed large percentages of the population, and it was there that I read about the laundry industry. I'd never heard the phrase before, and it initially intrigued me because it sounded so domestic. I started doing some research. Although it was hard to find anything at first, I managed to find two books on the subject: *English Laundresses: A Social History, 1850–1930* (1986) and *Steam Laundries: Gender, Technology and Work in the United States and Great Britain, 1880–1940* (2003). Especially the last one elaborated on how this industry was forgotten within the history of the industrial revolution because of its associations with domesticity and femininity. I also read about the rising standards of cleanliness, and the upwards mobility that came from looking clean and wearing bleached and starched whites. The middle classes used their clothes to distinguish themselves from the working classes, who couldn't avoid dirty clothes because they worked in the coal industry, for example. In these rapidly urbanized environments, there was also an increasing anonymity, so it was even more important to present a certain way for a good first impression. I find all these things very engaging, particularly how something might become a trend because of wider material circumstances.

**PE** I'm assuming the majority of the workers in the laundry industry were women?

**ToC** Exactly. When you think of the era of industrialization, you might associate it with men working in steel mills, but the laundries almost entirely employed women, although they were still run and managed by men. It was married women, too, which was unusual. The work was so powerfully gendered and associated with domesticity that it didn't unsettle the gender standards.

**PE** I was reading an article [on *striking-women.org*] that explained how despite many women being employed during that period, their income was not accurately recorded within the sources that historians have relied on. If their wages were seen as "secondary earnings" to men's wages, they wouldn't have included it on the census, and it therefore didn't appear in statistics.

**ToC** That's really interesting. I also couldn't find any personal accounts from laundresses. There has been a similar lack of information regarding the industrial history of fashion. Fashion has been more commonly associated with the beauty industry, rather than heavy industrial activity. It was important for me to make links with contemporary industry. The processes used in the laundries informed modern-day mass production. The same machines are used in factories today. This contradiction interested me, particularly how the machines that cleaned items are now used to make them look artificially dirty or faded, something like acid-wash denim. I also looked at the treatments and finishing processes used on sportswear and activewear, such as waterproofing or sweat-proofing. Before these items even hit the shops, their materiality has been deconstructed and broken down. The title of the exhibition, "Soft Acid," references the chemical agents used to soften garments and to make them comfortable to wear. I liked the name, as you don't commonly think about bleach or acid in this way. I also wanted to consider the dyeing practices that are used before something even becomes a garment. These finishes and materials require significant amounts of water to make. I've previously looked at post-consumer waste, but I became engaged with water wastage and pre-consumer waste. A garment is only 5% of the raw materials used to make it. 95% is invisible waste, largely consisting of water. That water, which is being used to feed crops, will then be contaminated and lined with chemicals and microfibers.

**PE** In addition to vast levels of waste, fast fashion has been directly contributing to water pollution and carbon emissions.

**ToC** These effects are also invisible. I wasn't aware of how much water it actually takes to make these garments. The UK and Europe have very neatly tightened their water laws regarding water pollution and rely almost entirely on production elsewhere, but water doesn't care about boundaries; it flows all over the world. When I went to a garment factory to have the large-scale denim pieces *Soft Acid (Series)* (2022) dyed, I discovered that they were one of the last remaining factories in London that does it. The legislation is so strict that these factories can't afford to do it anymore. They're being forced to off-shore it, which happens continuously in the fashion industry. The *Residual Hue* (2022) shoe sculptures were dyed with waste ink collected from fabric printers by Aliki van der Kruijs for her project Afterseason, but for these denim pieces, I wanted to choose colors that were not associated with the natural world or anything organic. The yellow dye is my favorite, it looks so toxic.

**PE** It looks hazardous, almost dangerous.

**ToC** As it should be! It is dangerous! I wanted to walk the line between looking abject, grotesque, and unfriendly, but still somehow sexy.

**PE** It's seductive. How did you construct these textile works?

**ToC** I bought all this acid-wash denim off eBay and from charity shops, and sourced all these pre-bleached and pre-washed items, and started deconstructing them. I always like to let the garment itself guide me. As soon as I started sewing them together, you get a map of the stains and washes that have been used. Some are lasered on. You can have an abstract idea of how something is constructed, but once you start handling the material, it always changes. You start to understand more about the supply chain and the intention behind its design. This material knowledge is really important to me — that's when it really starts to live. These items become an archive of their own processes. The seams reveal whether it was stitched together before or after being dyed. Items which were fabricated more cheaply can be easily dismantled.

**PE** In addition to being stitched to one another, the different sportswear materials in the *Dry Fit (Series)* (2022) also appear tied and bundled together?

**ToC** My own selection process has the potential to create waste, so I make sure to use the whole piece where I can and not cut it into fragments. It is an intimate and multi-sensory process. I use bungees and elastics, and sew toggles on the back so they can be tightened and tied up. It would be over ten meters long otherwise, like a sort of sea monster. The bunching also refers back to laundry practices, like the action of wringing out or hanging a garment.

**PE** The adjustable aesthetic feels more practical, somehow multipurpose. It also means the patchworked sculpture is three-dimensional and not flat. The work commands a strong sense of corporeality, which triggers associations with its original purpose as a garment.

**ToC** It is really important to me that you can still somehow see how you might style it. *Dry Fit (Series) Green* has a hole in the middle, so it becomes almost wearable. Another segment has a sleeve hanging out. I want you to encounter the textiles in the exhibition space and perhaps think, "I have some jeans that might match that quite nicely." I don't want to completely leave the realm of fashion. My methods are rooted in artistic practice, but I see myself as a fashion practitioner rather than an artist. I always mimic and stay close to the assembly methods that the garment initially had, despite sometimes exaggerating them. Here, I used sportswear techniques, and on the other pieces, I used denim stitches. It keeps you in the same atmosphere.

**PE** I'm intrigued by your relationship towards the gallery space as a quasi-boutique. You

often riff on fashion merchandising, such as using glass-and-steel display pedestals that evoke high-fashion shop design, and have previously made mannequin busts out of plaster. What is your relationship to these specific environments?

**ToC** I like to sometimes appropriate the luxury feel of a shop, particularly the persuasiveness of those which use stainless steel and transparent materials. The installation at Camden Art Centre is comprised of a bespoke hanging system based on the system of pipes used in dye factories. I was interested in how the aesthetic of that industry is being emulated by high-end fashion display mechanisms, such as the Balenciaga flagship store. It is strange that this aesthetic is being used in shops without actually addressing the means of production. I don't usually use a living body or a full-body mannequin. I don't want to render features or take it too close to the human body. The continued absence of the body is crucial, otherwise it relates too closely to identity or styling.

**PE** I read an interview you gave in which you mentioned that you aren't interested in blaming these issues regarding consumption solely on the individual, and prefer to comment on wider systemic issues regarding globalized supply chains, capitalism, and overproduction. Perhaps that is also related to the lack of bodies in your practice?

**ToC** That's really true, I want to stay away from blaming individual consumers. Consumerism should be referred to as "producer-ism." It is not the fault of the consumer; it is the fault of the producing entities. They produce so much surplus, and they create elaborate strategies so that you consume that surplus. It is a personal enquiry for me. It all comes from a love of clothes, not a hatred of fashion. When I was in fashion school, I found it so hard to get a conversation going that wasn't just about fashion as image. I wanted to talk about how something was produced, start to finish, but found that information was totally inaccessible. Fashion was always discussed as something ephemeral, fleeting. It was never talked about in a concrete and material sense.

**PE** Through this enquiry, you're stating that you're also part of this system and part of this culture, which brings me to your chosen moniker: Tenant of Culture.

**ToC** I liked the associations between being a tenant and being a consumer, being a participant who is subjected to these more powerful structures. The phrase Tenant of Culture is also based on an allegory that the French historian and theorist Michel de Certeau used to talk about the hierarchies that exist between producers and consumers. He specifically used the term to address the kind of tactics that consumers use to defy the strategies of producers, such as misusing, personalizing, and reinterpreting mass-produced goods.



# Flash Art, 2022

*Extensive Range of Carrying Options*  
(Series) Parka, 2022. 165 x 70 x 70 cm.  
Recycled plastic handbags, thread, found  
mannequin body, and stainless steel.  
Photography by Rob Harris. Courtesy of the  
artist and Soft Opening, London.

Living in a Material World

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# Flash Art, 2022

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TENANT OF CULTURE in conversation with PHILOMENA EPPS





# Flash Art, 2022

*Surgical Site (Series)*, 2019. Recycled shoes and soles, laces, plaster, tiles, and grout. 42 x 43.5 x 10 cm. Photography by Theo Christelis. Courtesy of the artist and Soft Opening, London.

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# Flash Art, 2022

61

TENANT OF CULTURE in Conversation with PHILOMENA EPPS



*Residual Hue (Series) Puzzlecut, 2022.*  
Recycled shoes, glue and jesmonite,  
thread, afterseason ink collected by Alki  
van der Kruijs, and paint. 46 x 50 x 12 cm.  
Photography by Theo Cristelis. Courtesy of  
the artist and Soft Opening, London.



# Flash Art, 2022

*How To Style A Chore Coat (Series)*, 2020.  
Carers, deconstructed used cotton overalls,  
textile glue, and eyelets. 212 x 142 cm.  
Photography by Theo Christakis. Courtesy of  
the artist and Soft Opening, London.

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By altering and recycling garments in my work, I want to unsettle the notion that consumerism is a passive practice. In the workshops that I have run, the energy of remaking is so much fun. I don't give instructions aside from showing some techniques. People have a natural intimacy with clothes because it's a daily practice, and there is pleasure in assembling an outfit. Although, I have sometimes noticed that people find it really hard to cut up an item that has a label on it.

**PE** Because they attribute value to that label?  
**ToC** And a sense of loyalty.

**PE** Brand loyalty!  
**ToC** It's cleverly created. It's important to realize how we are being manipulated as consumers, such as through the acceleration of planned obsolescence.

**PE** Can you expand on these strategies of planned obsolescence?  
**ToC** In technology, it is more evidently seen through battery life. But with garments, you have both material and psychological obsolescence. If you stitch something with rubbish thread, it will fall apart more quickly, even if it is a great quality fabric. Then, it will be cheaper to replace it rather than restore it. When the garments are cheap to buy, you also might not think it is worth restoring. In addition, if you make something look very current, then it will become obsolete quicker, thereby shortening that replacement cycle. There is so much money invested to manipulate people into making these purchases, but it isn't real demand: it is artificially created demand.

**PE** What do you think will halt this frenzy?  
**ToC** Legislation. We need laws. This is down to legislation anyway: the shifts in trade policies, strategically planned economic globalization, and the dismantling of unions, to name a few. We can't find the answer by looking deeply within ourselves and buying organic baskets! Production wise, anything goes now. If you can't do it here, you can do it somewhere else. It's just a race to the bottom. Food legislation is very strict, you have to declare on the label where it was packed, where it was grown, but this is not mandatory in the fashion industry. Governments are acting like entrepreneurs, rather than protecting people from production practices that are causing harm.

**PE** Constant trend cycles are a key part of this surplus of created demand. Earlier, you mentioned how trends also relate to wider circumstances in society. In your "Eclogues" works from 2019, you considered the prevalent rustic aesthetic and the romanticized nostalgia for the pastoral idyll in contemporary fashion, such as the proliferation of peasant blouses and milkmaid-style dresses, in addition to the wider "cottagecore" agricultural trend. Then, in your 2020 exhibition "Georgics (how to style a chore coat)" at Galerie Fons Welters, you looked at the rise of workwear, such as the

rural "chore" jacket, which had ironically been very popular with urban, desk-based workers.

**ToC** It was in response to a politically fraught time. This pastoral tendency, to refer back to a simpler, apolitical time, is as old as the Greeks. With that rustic milkmaid trend, I saw it everywhere, from all aspects of the market, low to high end. I was also seduced by it; I was wearing it, which made me more interested. I want to look into something once I've fallen for it. I don't want to critique from the outside. I am the most switched on when I am intrigued by something's ambiguity or contradictions. These trends remind you that you are part of a much larger subconscious. Every garment has a history that is very elaborate. There is not that much innovation in clothing styles; we wear largely the same idea of garments that we have since the industrial revolution.

**PE** It's more psychoanalytic, that approach. You're reflecting on and questioning your own consumer behavior. What do you think the current, or even future, trends are?

**ToC** I'm always behind the trends. I'm not in the business of trendspotting or forecasting, despite finding it fascinating. Sourcing materials is 70% of my practice. It can be quite unpredictable. I source my materials from the secondary market, so I'm looking backwards. People have already moved on from these items but they are still in circulation. I see them as not yet decomposed images from the past that still need processing.

**PE** I like your subversive use of the phrase "secondary market," which is at odds with the way that term is conventionally understood in the art world. You're talking about discarded and rejected scraps, whereas in the art market, secondary sales often assert and reinforce an artwork's value and reputation.

**ToC** I know that I'm misusing the term. It also means something different in economic theory. I couldn't find a better word for it. Vintage means something else, as it similarly signifies a sense of value. These clothes are very recently made — some are less than six months old. There are stacks of items in charity shops that still have the original tags on them. How are consumers being persuaded by producers to buy something and get rid of it again so quickly?

**PE** In his essay "Tenant of Culture, Ragpicker of Fashion History," Jeppe Ugelvig draws a comparison between your practice and the historical figure of the ragpicker, who salvaged refuse and other discarded objects for the purpose of recycling and reusing them.

**ToC** The ragpickers collected glass that could be melted down and reused as raw material, or would skin dead cats and dogs and make them into furs. Similarly, in the workshops I run, you are constantly evaluating materiality, seeing what a certain fiber or textile piece can do, and

# Flash Art, 2022







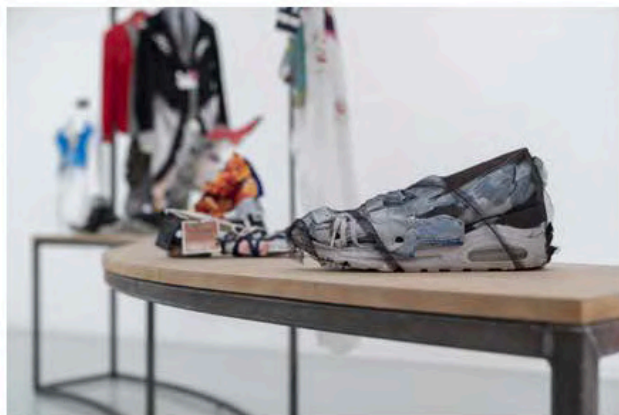
*Raschid Hise (Senas) Kitten Heel, 2022.*  
Detail. Recycled shoes, glue and jesmonite,  
thread, afterseason ink collected by Alld van  
der Kruijs, and paint. Left: 37 x 32 x 12 cm;  
right: 39 x 32 x 15 cm. Photography by Theo  
Cristalis. Courtesy of the artist and Soft  
Opening, London.

# Flash Art, 2022





"Et Al" Exhibition view at Dresden Kunstverein, 2022. Photography by Alexander Reitz. Courtesy of the artist and Dresden Kunstverein.



*Drift Fit (Series) Green*, 2022. Detail. Recycled outdoor and sportswear, elastic, toggles, buckles, thread, fabric, bungee cord, washing machine, and counterweight. 30.5 x 110 x 160 cm. Photography by Alessio Bolzoni. © *Flash Art*. Courtesy of the artist and Soft Opening, London.

**Tenant of Culture** (Hendrickje Schimmel b.1990, Arnhem) lives and works in London. By disassembling and rebuilding manufactured garments, Tenant of Culture examines the ways in which ideological frameworks and power structures materialize in methods of production, circulation, and marketing of apparel. The materials used in her textile assemblages are sourced from various stages of the garment production cycle as well as secondary-use platforms and refuse. She recognizes commodities not only as the result of a standardized production process, but also as the social relations that arise in the process of their usage and wastage. Working across mediums such as garment, sculpture, workshop, and installation, her work suggests implicit potential for both destruction as well as transformation. Tenant of Culture's solo exhibition "Soft Acid" is on view at Camden Art Centre, London, through September 18, 2022.

**Philomena Epps** is a writer, art critic, and researcher living in London.

then turning it into something else. It is all about seeing how something can be transformed and not just seeing it as a solid entity. We should feel agency within the material world, rather than being passive bystanders. We have lost touch with the making of things. We have been alienated from it, always encouraged to buy something new.

**PE** In your previous works, through the use of cement, epoxy clay, and wire armatures, the garments and shoes in your sculptures have looked like they are decomposing, or are even fossilized. In the *Extensive Range of Carrying Options (Series)* (2022), where you've made a parka, a trench coat, and a blazer from recycled plastic accessories, the associations now read differently and could even seem futuristic.

**ToC** It's true, that idea of plastic as progress. The materiality always relates to the subject matter I'm working on. When I was working with rustic materials, the aesthetic related to that trend. I'm now working with no organic materials and using this synthetic and noxious color palette. Those sculptures are made from those transparent handbags you see everywhere now and plastic mannequins. I bought used ones which were yellowing and murky. I was also thinking about Ursula K. Le Guin's 1986 essay "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction," and the container or receptacle as the first technology rather than the tool. This relates back to the women's laundry industry being largely forgotten because it was so heavily associated with domesticity and femininity, and questioning who writes the history of an industry.

**PE** Your exhibitions could be read as "research-in-progress," with the material improvisation reflecting your current research during that period of time.

**ToC** That's exactly it. I'm also not offering solutions or a proposal for a better world. My practice is a constant material enquiry.

*Drift Fit (Series) Green*, 2022. Recycled outdoor and sportswear, elastic, toggles, buckles, thread, fabric, bungee cord, washing machine, and counterweight. 30.5 x 110 x 160 cm. Photography by Theo Castells. Courtesy of the artist and Soft Opening, London.



## Tenant of Culture: the artist turning fast fashion into radical hybrid sculpture

Ahead of a major new installation at London's Camden Art Centre, we speak to Tenant of Culture, whose art-meets-fashion practice dissects the darker sides of our material world



Tenant of Culture, 'Post-digital Intimacy' installation view at National Gallery Prague, Prague, 2021. Courtesy the artist and National Gallery Prague

**D**econstructed, reconstructed, bleached, re-dyed, hung, wrung out, stacked; Tenant of Culture – the moniker of Dutch artist Hendrickje Schimmel – has a way of handling material.

Known for creating works from used (and sometimes nearly new) garments, Schimmel – who won the 2020 Camden Art Centre Emerging Artist Prize with Frieze – creates cross-bred art-meets-couture sculptures that are at once monstrous and sumptuous. The artist's work illustrates an industry of extremes and dissects the psychology of break-neck fast fashion and a material world of rapid obsolescence.

On 8 July, Tenant of Culture will unveil 'Soft Acid' at Camden Art Centre. The artist's largest installation to date, it draws directly on the history of the gallery, and stitches together complex stories of gendered domesticity and the hierarchies of supply and demand.



# Wallpaper, 2022



Installation view of Tenant of Culture, 'Soft Acid' at Camden Art Centre

**Wallpaper\*:** Your installation at London's Camden Art Centre began in the gallery archives. What did you uncover during research, and how did this inform the work?

**Tenant of Culture:** I spent some time in the Camden Art Centre archive, initially to look for documentation of workshops held there during the 1960s and 1970s. Instead, I happened upon a leaflet of an exhibition called 'The Londoners, A Visual Survey of London Working Life from 1866 to 1966', held in 1966. One of the professions it mentioned was the laundry industry, which I had never heard of. It stated: 'When the soap tax, enforced until 1852, was finally removed, there was a swing in fashion towards pale-coloured clothes, light muslins and chintz furniture covers. This was echoed by a sudden expansion in [the] laundry industry.' I decided to focus my research for this exhibition on the history of laundry and its importance in the mass production of textiles and garments, historically as well as [in] contemporary [times].





# Wallpaper, 2022



When the laundry industry first emerged, it employed almost solely women, even though the work was extremely tough. Laundry is often associated with domesticity and remains one of the more gendered tasks. It is not something I ever connected with heavy industry, which is probably why there is a distinct lack of research into the subject, in comparison to railways and steel mills for example.

I found a book on the subject by Dr Arwen Mohun called: *Steam Laundries, Gender, Technology and Work in the United States and Britain 1880 to 1940*. This book traces the social and material conditions that made the commercial laundries so omnipresent, such as urbanisation and changing hygiene standards. In a contemporary context, looking at methods that are used now to mass-produce garments, I mainly focused on processes such as acid and enzyme wash used for the artificial ageing of denim, and finishing processes such as waterproofing and sweat-proofing performance wear. Processes that use enormous amounts of water, which is often released back into the environment, lined with microfibres and traces of chemical dyes.

## W\*: What can we expect from 'Soft Acid'?

ToC: The title, 'Soft Acid', is a direct reference to the processes mentioned above. Acid is often used to soften a garment before it is distributed, making it more comfortable to wear. The works in the exhibition are all made from second-hand garments, textiles and accessories, that are re-dyed, deconstructed and re-assembled into wearable or non-wearable pieces. I've worked a lot with colourful garments this time, and with garments that have gone through some of the processes I mention in [response to] the first question. All of them are suspended from stainless steel construction that references the environment of the commercial laundry and dye factories as well as high-end shop displays.



# Wallpaper, 2022

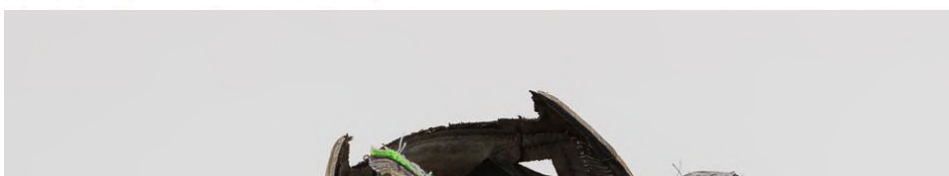


Tenant of Culture, *I FORGOT TO TELL YOU I'VE CHANGED*, installation view at Fries Museum, Leeuwarden, Netherlands, 2020. Courtesy the artist and Fries Museum, Leeuwarden, Netherlands

**W\*:** Your sculptures incorporate discarded garments and accessories. Where do you normally source these materials from?

**ToC:** I source my materials mainly from secondary market places, such as eBay, charity shops, yard sales, or sometimes wholesale vintage. The garments and accessories I use are not necessarily discarded, they are just expelled from the realm of newness. Rejected by their first, second or third owners. I find these the most interesting places to source garments from as they are in the process of becoming obsolete but often are still in great condition, hardly worn, often with tags still on them.

By looking extensively at what is no longer desirable, I learn a lot about psychological obsolescence as well as the material trajectories of garments. When they are discarded for good, they enter a different realm. In a way, my work is not about waste in the sense of garbage or debris but more about the extremities in volume and the speed at which fashion is produced, consumed and discarded.





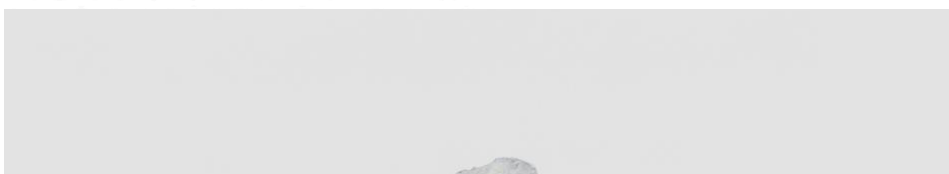
# Wallpaper, 2022



Installation view of Tenant of Culture, 'Soft Acid' at Camden Art Centre

**W\*:** You confront themes of waste, and mass consumerism, particularly concerning fast fashion, and the invisible, exploitative economies that support it. As conversations around sustainability in fashion and beyond continue to escalate, what do you hope viewers will take away from your work?

**ToC:** It's great that there is currently a lot of interest in these subjects from the consumer side. It is crucial to have these conversations. It is also important to realise that regardless of this, the industry continues to grow exponentially and the number of garments created each year continues to rise. Therefore, I think it is important to specifically address the production side of things and the structures that enabled this industry to accelerate beyond comprehension. Shifting the blame to consumers is a strategy that benefits the producing entities. To rethink consumption we need to begin by understanding the hierarchical relationships between supply and demand. ★



# Wallpaper, 2022



Tenant of Culture, *Country Styles for the Young*, 2020, Recycled clog-style shoes, cement, yarn, rope and cork, Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London Photography: Theo Christelis

## INFORMATION

Tenant of Culture 8 July-18 September 2022, Camden Art Centre, London. [camdenartcentre.org](https://camdenartcentre.org)



# Plinth, 2022



On Soft Acid

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## On Soft Acid

12.08.2022

In *Soft Acid* at Camden Arts' Centre, seams, zippers, and stitching abound. Having garnered reams of treated plastics, acid-washed cottons and leathers, and chemically enhanced nylons, Tenant of Culture takes the discarded fabrics of the fashion industry and turns them into monstrous sculptures. As if standing above a scrap heap in which all of the abandoned metal has been welded together, these sculptures are mass graves of use.



Installation view of Tenant of Culture: Soft Acid at Camden Art Centre, 2022. Courtesy Camden Art Centre, Photo: Rob Harris

*Soft Acid* is London-based, Dutch artist Hendrickje Schimmels' first solo exhibition in the UK. Taken from French historian Michel de Certeau, Tenant of Culture is a moniker that speaks to Schimmel's vision of the artist as merely a temp worker among capitalism's structures of ownership, one who has to work within the world's hierarchies. After being awarded Camden Art Centre's Emerging Art Prize in 2020, this latest exhibition of her work continues her exploration of fashion's active devastation of people and planet.



# Plinth, 2022



Installation view of Tenant of Culture: Soft Acid at Camden Art Centre, 2022. Courtesy Camden Art Centre, Photo: Rob Harris

Here, three excessively large fabrics are strung up from high up on the ceiling, hanging bold in their capacity to make the familiar strange again. In taking the waste of global capitalism's constant manufacture of the new, Schimmel's sculptures turn wearable objects into nightmarish tapestries, expanding the viewer's sense of the global scale of the manufacturing of garments by stitching multiple commodities together.



Installation view of Tenant of Culture: Soft Acid at Camden Art Centre, 2022. Courtesy Camden Art Centre, Photo: Rob Harris

These sculptures are monuments to the brutal reality of production, drawing the viewer's attention to the processes of chemical burns and washes inferred in the exhibition's title, as well as the countless, nameless workers who made them. But they stand also as bizarrely beautiful objects, recrafted through Schimmel's thousands of hours of work. Previously a fashion student, one can easily imagine the arduity with which the artist unstitched and restitched the discarded – these are monuments to the patience and conviction of loving objects through crafting them.





# Plinth, 2022



Tenant of Culture  
Country Styles for the Young, 2020  
Recycled clog- style shoes, cement, yarn,  
rope and cork 31.5 x 24.5 x 12.5 cm  
Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London  
Photography: Theo Christelis

'Ringing out, drying, pressing, hanging' – that's how Schimmel describes the intensive processes that go into the washing of fabrics before they get turned into clothes. In a series of pieces by the artist, from which there are two in the exhibition, 'Dry Fit', the artist stitches dozens of repurposed bits of technical wear together. The togs, ties, and fastenings of the anoraks are taut with the tension of the material world – but they take on uniquely human dimensions, the title invoking the state of a person vomiting.



# Plinth, 2022



Tenant of Culture  
I FORGOT TO TELL YOU I'VE CHANGED  
installation view at Fries Museum,  
Leeuwarden, Netherlands, 2020  
Courtesy the artist and Fries Museum,  
Leeuwarden, Netherlands

In observing the tension in the pull-fastenings in these expanded, mutant tapestries, I thought of the long descriptions of muscular activity in Karl Marx's *Capital*, what happens when the production of commodities sucks the life out of the working body, seeing Schimmel's sculptures as the machinic absorption of this human moving, the pulsing, wriggling organs of pressurised life. By following the lines of labouring in the original garment, the work traces these processes. This imaginative labouring reanimates what Marx called the dead labour of the manufacturing process, all of the wasted energy transformed into spectacular profits that hangs above our heads, much like some of these sculptures do.

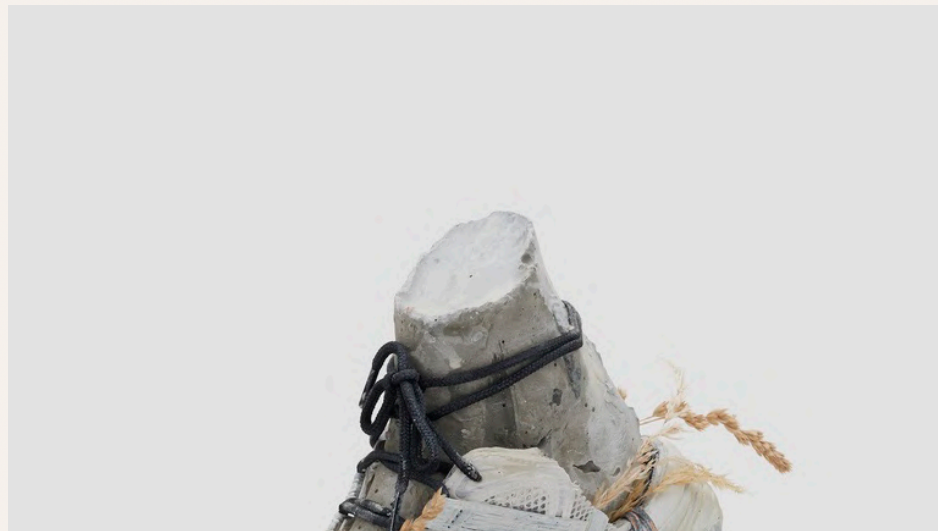
We all live among and have purchase on the obscure reality of global supply chains. Schimmel's art objects enhance the catastrophic tension in these chains. By stitching together the grotesque from abandoned objects, these objects reveal our complicated desire for the new, for self-improvement, and the horrendous consequences of our purchases and our labours without reducing this to moral condemnation.



Installation view of Tenant of Culture: Soft Acid at Camden Art Centre, 2022. Courtesy Camden Art Centre, Photo: Rob Harris

This work is refreshingly undidactic in its revelation of the material world and its constant refabrication, and the harm that that places on human bodies and the ecological stability of the world. Perhaps this work provides us with a way to reimagine the impact of our very real nightmares.

The branding on which contemporary marketing depends is about marking ownership. In its more historical meaning, it suggests that something has been eviscerated, burned or obscured, skin or otherwise.





# Plinth, 2022



Tenant of Culture  
Country Styles for the Young, 2020  
Recycled clog- style shoes, cement, yarn, rope  
and cork 28 × 24.5 × 12 cm  
Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London  
Photography: Theo Christelis

At the very end of the last century, Naomi Klein's *No Logo* (1999) ripped off the marks of iconic brands, looking behind the Nike tick and peering into the wounds. She revealed the hyper-exploitative labour relations in the global south. The title of the book even summarises a specific radical scepticism around branding that defined the first decade of the next century. I remember how in 2005, it was definitely not on to wear a pair of Air Force Ones if you hung out with anticapitalists.

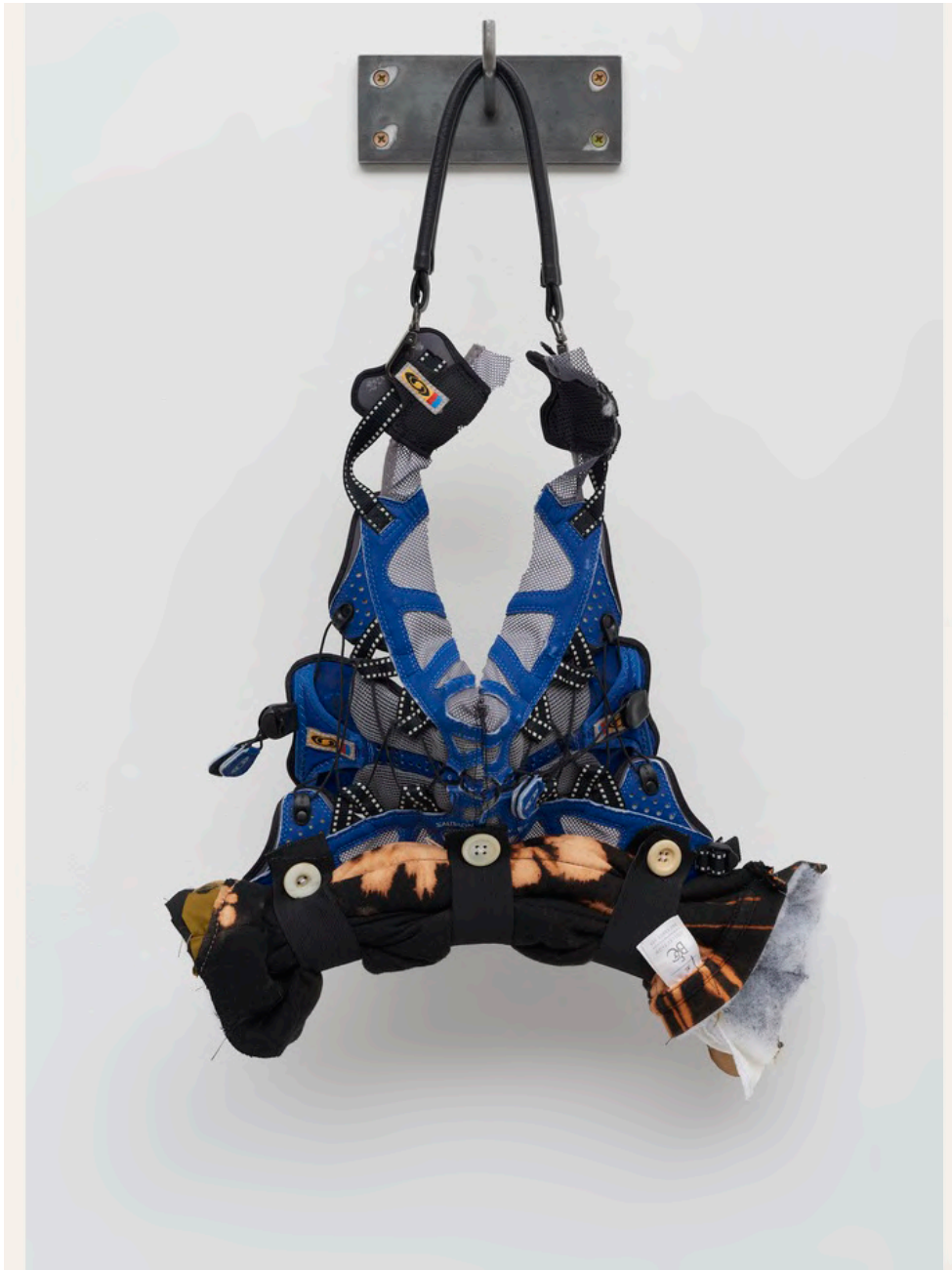


Installation view of Tenant of Culture: Soft Acid at Camden Art Centre, 2022. Courtesy Camden Art Centre, Photo: Rob Harris

That idea has now become passé for a number of reasons, some good and some bad. But exploitation is still the hidden element behind all of our wavy garms. In 2017, a WHO report discovered that in the Bangladeshi regions of Hazaribagh and Kamrangirchar, where black leather is manufactured for European markets, 90% of the working population die before 50 due to the hazardous chemicals that engulf these areas.

Nowadays, we have become used to green capitalism, its promises of sustainability and its marketing images of racially diverse utopia. To protect their reputation, many brands even outsource production to hide the exploitative conditions that make their clothes. While brands have re-engineered their image, the wounds remain.

# Plinth, 2022



Tenant of Culture  
Flash s/s (Series), 2020  
Recycled shoes, garments and bag, elastic,  
padding, buttons, thread, steel  
63 × 41 × 17 cm  
Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London  
Photography: Theo Christelis

By breaking down the significations of branding, the commodities of a cultured marketplace become something else. There is a utopian thread in Schimmel's work built from her own laboured acts of recombination. This is particularly clear in the peculiar temporal status of these sculptures: objects presented as past, now stand as if they emerged within an obscured future, one with a completely different concept of utility.

In *Soft Acid* discarded garments have been recovered, repurposed, and disentangled from an exploitative and unstable concept of use; equally, for all of the ways that Schimmel has attempted to reimagine these objects, there is a pessimism in this work. The future from which we come to view *Soft Acid* might be one where these sculptures are little more than monuments to a world that has already been abandoned. Is the viewer buried in the scrap heap of culture or observing the workshop of utopian desire? You decide.

By [Ed Luker](#)

Cover image: Detail from *Tenant of Culture, Cutting Stock (series)*, 2021





Courtesy the artist

# Art Review, 2022

The Interview  
*by Ross Simonini*

## Tenant of Culture

“Fashion acknowledges its own instability  
and employs that as a system”

Tenant of Culture is the moniker of Hendrickje Schimmel, a Dutch artist working in the space between sculpture and couture. Her objects are assembled with the flying tempo of fashion production, but these garments are clearly not factory made. The hand is visible inside every cut, stitch and rip. The work has been gripped and jammed into itself.

Schimmel's objects range from near-functional clothing to collaged tapestries of ragged fabric. The garments are provocations,

pointing towards radical futures, obscure historical movements and the strobing micro-trends of the current moment. The footwear is abstract; the hats are speculative and the tops dystopian. It's all patched together from upcycled scraps, and when I imagine the culture that might grow up around these outfits, I am impressed by its vision and concerned for its quality of life.

Until 2016, Schimmel studied fashion and art in undergrad and graduate school,

respectively. Now she occasionally works with public workshops, as a nod to the mechanics of clothing production, but behaves like a solitary artist, working in the studio and showing in galleries. She is, by her own declaration, not a designer.

In our conversation, conducted over video, Schimmel was kind and ebullient. She responded to each question with earnestness, energised by her own practice and by the flitting vicissitudes of culture.



# Art Review, 2022

## The Mini Bag Trend

ROSS SIMONINI *Where are you right now?*

TENANT OF CULTURE I'm in London. I'm originally from the Netherlands, but I've lived here on and off for about seven years.

RS *Will you stay?*

TOC I think my departure is coming closer and closer, actually. I always say, next year I'll leave, and then I stay another year.

RS *Where would you go?*

TOC Belgium or Germany. Somewhere where living is a bit cheaper.

RS *Why did you move to London?*

TOC I did my masters here and obviously it's a great city for fashion.

RS *Would you say London was the centre of fashion at that time?*

TOC When I was studying, the centre for fashion was definitely Paris. That's where all the high-end fashion houses were. But London was more about street fashion and young labels.

RS *Did you have the intention of working for a fashion house in school?*

TOC No. I was never really looking to work for a big label. It's funny that you say that, because the name of my practice actually makes a playful reference to the fashion house. You know, there's lots of fashion houses that have *Maison* in their name.

RS *Right, and your name suggests that culture is the house.*

TOC It's a bit of an open term, I borrowed it from [French historian and theorist] Michel de Certeau, who uses it as an allegory to reference the hierarchical relationship between producers and consumers. He uses that term to address the tactics that consumers employ to go against the strategies of producers through the misuse and reinterpretation of mass-produced goods. So it refers to that, but also to how lots of designers have a brand name, whereas in art it's more common to use your own name.

RS *You speak about theory often. Is your work grounded in theory?*

TOC Theory is important to my practice, but when I make, it's not theoretical at all. They exist

separately. I mean, there's an exchange, of course, but I always really depart from the materiality of a garment and see what journey that takes me on. I start from the concrete object. I open the seams, read the labels. It's a very tactile and multisensory process. My work should speak for itself visually, without theory.

RS *Do you research much?*

TOC Yeah, definitely. I'm always reading. I read a lot of fashion magazines as well. Recently I've mostly been researching the industrial history of the fast-fashion industry, and how this relates to globalised supply chains.

RS *I've noticed that it seems near impossible to find clothing made in ethical ways.*

TOC Yeah, it's really virtually impossible. And I think working up against that impossibility is also what I try to do in my work, by using postconsumer waste from the industry. A lot of brands currently present themselves as ethical, but there are so many different ways in which you can be ethical. Like as a brand you can be environmentally aware but not have ethical labour practices, for example. There's such a highly developed division of labour within the fashion industry, through subcontracting and



*Cutting Stock (series), 2021.*

Photo: Theo Christelis.

Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening Gallery, London

# Art Review, 2022

globally scattered assembly lines, it's really hard to track where and under what conditions something is made.

RS *How do you deal with this in your own clothes?*

TOC I make a lot of my own clothes, which is very fun to do. I also upcycle a lot of garments. I like doing little tweaks to a garment to personalise it. I use the same methods that I use to construct my work. It becomes a bit of a blur, and sometimes I wear pieces that I was going to use for my work as well. It's a real exchange.

## Kind of a Sick Outfit

RS *Do you tend towards any particular personal style?*

TOC That's a good question. I don't think I have one style. Sometimes it's business casual, sometimes it's sporty [laughs]. I enjoy following trends to try and understand why they emerged and identify with them on a personal level.

RS *Are there any trends that you're tracking right now?*

TOC I've always been interested in trends that employ a sense of pastoral nostalgia in one way

or another, like the hiking gear trend, worn in a city environment, which entirely defies its utilitarian nature and instead becomes decorative. I'm intrigued by fashion trends that are very contradictory in the way they sit in the cultural landscape they operate in. Like, the mini-bag trend.

RS *When you look at these trends, do you think about them in a sociological sense? Like, what does the mini-bag trend say about people?*

TOC I'm interested in fashion's semiotics, for sure. It's an interesting dynamic, because as a phenomenon fashion is designed to escape analysis. A trend disappears as soon as you're able to identify it as such, because for exactly this reason it has already lost its pull. People desire what they can't grasp yet.

RS *Fashion trends seem to move more quickly than art trends.*

TOC Well, essentially fashion is the very definition of change.

RS *While art often aims to create something timeless...*

TOC Fashion acknowledges its own instability and employs that as a system. But somehow the idea of trendiness is looked down upon in art,

which is concerned with autonomy and the individual genius.

RS *In the future, do you think your current work will look very 2022?*

TOC I think it's interesting to make things that look very current, and see how they age and what happens to their perception later on. That's what fashion can do. When you look back at what you were wearing, you could really cringe, and then later on you can be like, actually that was kind of a sick outfit. It is cyclical.

RS *What would be the closest thing to timelessness in fashion? Is there some kind of garment that you think hasn't been affected that much over time?*

TOC Maybe the white sneaker. Since its invention, it's been an absolute staple. There are other iconic garments, too, like a beige trench coat, blue jeans, white T-shirts and black leather jackets, which never change much, but I wouldn't say there's a garment that escapes time altogether.

RS *Socks?*

TOC Yeah. Maybe because they're not as visible. Though I walked past a shop today that sells only socks: all colours, materials, shapes. I saw a bunch of police officers in there looking at socks.



*Sample Sale (series), 2018.*

Photo: Theo Christelis.

Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening Gallery, London



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RS I often base clothing choices on the feeling of the material. Do you?

TOC Yes. Synthetic clothing makes me feel really sweaty and trapped in it, if it's for example 100 percent viscose. So I check labels. I used to be able to wear almost anything as long as it looked good, but I've given up on that.

RS Do you identify yourself through what you wear?

TOC Yeah, absolutely. Everyone has to dress themselves in the morning, which is very much an intentional, sometimes even strategic act, and you can't escape it. So when somebody says, oh, I really don't care about what I wear, you know, that's still a choice in a way. That's why, when I show work, everyone has a very personalised opinion on it.

RS Can you give an example of an article of clothing that expresses identity for you?

TOC Perhaps the chore jacket. Inspired by the French farmhand's jacket, cotton, with four pockets on the front and a flat collar, straight cut, not much shape in it. It's currently popular among creative people here in London, often

in indigo blue. It is usually artificially faded as well, as if bleached by hard work in the sun. It's very interesting to think about what that jacket communicates, because essentially it's appropriating the clothing of the rural working class. And why would you wear that in a city environment when you probably work behind a computer? The jacket effectively communicates a kind of indifference towards fashion and a sense of uniformity, but actually is extremely specific from a design perspective.

RS When you make an object or garment, are you taking its demographic into consideration? For example, the jacket that you made out of straw hats...

TOC Definitely. I was interested in the appropriation of rural working-class dress in the cottagecore phase that was very evident on social media at that time. One aspect of this was the reemergence of the milkmaid look, which included straw hats and frilly tops with a bit of shoulder showing. It's so heavily nostalgic. I found a book on this by Meredith Martin called *Dairy Queens: The Politics of Pastoral Architecture from Catherine de' Medici to Marie-Antoinette*. This book is about how historically,

in the French courts from the sixteenth century onwards, the dress of milkmaids was employed to make women of the nobility who weren't able to conceive or who were disobedient to appear more fertile and virtuous. They commissioned dairy follies for the women, where they would act out this pastoral play, which was entirely for the purpose of restoring their reputation.

RS You often consider class in your work. Were you raised in a way to be made aware of class?

TOC Well, I think fashion relates very much to class and hierarchies, and I come from a very long line of Dutch farmers, so perhaps that explains the interest in rural dress.

## The Instigator of Stylistic Newness

RS You seem very productive to me. Does it feel this way to you?

TOC I can work quite fast, materially. That's my fashion background. The speed of production is very different in a fashion context than in an art context, and that also determines what my work looks like. It is only the making



et al., 2021 (installation view, Kunstverein Dresden; all works made by participants in various workshops held at Kunstverein Dresden).

Photo: Alexander Peitz. Courtesy the artist and Kunstverein Dresden



*Elogues (series)*, 2019.  
Photo: Theo Christelis.  
Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening Gallery, London





*Puzzlecut Boot (series), 2021.*  
Photo: kunst-dokumentation.com.  
Courtesy the artist and Sophie Tappeiner Gallery, Vienna

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process in which I make quick decisions, the research and material sourcing takes much longer.

RS *How much of what you make do you show?*

TOC A small percentage. I make a lot of textiles rather than sculptural pieces. I was trained to work this way when I studied textiles, to make a lot of samples. So I have a pile of reject samples, which I often reincorporate into other pieces. I also de-assemble a lot of work and remake it even after I've shown it.

RS *Is your studio filled with clothing?*

TOC Yeah, definitely, it's like a carpet of discarded and second hand clothing, an environment of endless piles of materials. I go to my studio to be in that chaos. Everything is just spread out over the floor or in open shelving. So I have my eye on everything. And the process is almost like felting. Things meet each other on the floor of my studio, and they form this kind of visually interesting moment.

RS *When you conduct workshops, how much of the work is being made by you and how much of it is made in a collaborative fashion?*

TOC Yes, I host workshops where we re- and upcycle discarded clothing. This is something that I'm really experimenting with at the moment. I have done workshops where people made their own pieces and it's their work. In other workshops we collaborate on pieces. I always wanted to be part of a collective experience of making. Which is also where the notion of the fashion house comes from historically: the concept of in-house production. Everything was made in-house, from the design to the execution, it was all done collaboratively under one roof. That is a by-gone era, pre-division of labour. But I do think the principle of that can be very interesting. I don't think I would ever actually start a fashion brand, though.

RS *Do you sew by hand or use machines?*

TOC Mostly machines. I had quite a technical education and I have a few industrial sewing machines that I often use, that stitch through the thickest of fabrics. I also use a heat press. I look at how a garment is produced and try to recreate that production method, to gain insight into its method of assembly. I'm not patient enough for hand sewing.

RS *Since we discussed trends, do you see your art as a part of a trend of what's going on in the artworld?*

TOC I think, yes, absolutely. There are a lot of garments and fashion references in contemporary art these days. And I think perhaps that is because fashion is very interesting and worth examining as a phenomenon as well as an industry, but within the fashion world itself there is not much space or time to reflect on it.

RS *Why do you think art and clothing are coming together in this way now?*

TOC I think what we have to reckon with at the moment is overproduction, and fashion is one of the driving factors behind overproduction, because it is the instigator of stylistic newness. Capitalism relies heavily on the system of fashion to always create a desire for something new. It is important that we collectively reflect upon this, and I think you can achieve this through the re-contextualisation of garments in an art context. Art obscures all this industrial reality more, where with fashion you can see it on everyone you meet.

*Ross Simonini is a writer, artist, musician and dialogist. He is the host of ArtReview's podcast Subject, Object, Verb*



*Flash s/s (series), 2020.*

Photo: Theo Christelis.

Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening Gallery, London



# Tenant of Culture

Extracting  
meaning  
from the  
discarded



I *Puzzlecut Boot Oxblood, 2021*





II *Flash s/s (Series)*, 2020

Written by MAX WILD

Fashion is a transnational language we all speak, even if we refuse to practise it. By simply wearing clothes and stepping in to the public eye, a statement is made visible. Garments are ingrained in the routine of everyday life, ubiquitous objects that tell stories of identity, affiliation and status. Loaded with implication, garments can adhere to a certain time in history, even a certain event, manifesting itself as a pillar of pop culture and history. What has shifted is how we perceive clothes as part of a globalised industry, incorporating wretched production sites in Third World countries, massive fast-fashion stores and eventually, an unfathomable amount of excess, either having their last dance at thrift stores, flea markets and charity shops, or being incinerated out of sight from the (seemingly) conscious consumer. The glaring truth is: The fashion industry has yet to come up with a coherent solution for its waste. The sector still makes up 10% of humanity's emissions and is the second biggest polluter after the oil industry – but we all know that already. The mills grind slowly while advocating for a sustainable solution on a public matter of this size. But these trenches filled with waste exist, nonetheless. Within these masses of fashion scraps, the artist Hendrickje Schimmel, working under the moniker *Tenant of Culture (ToC)*, has found her very source for an artistic practice.

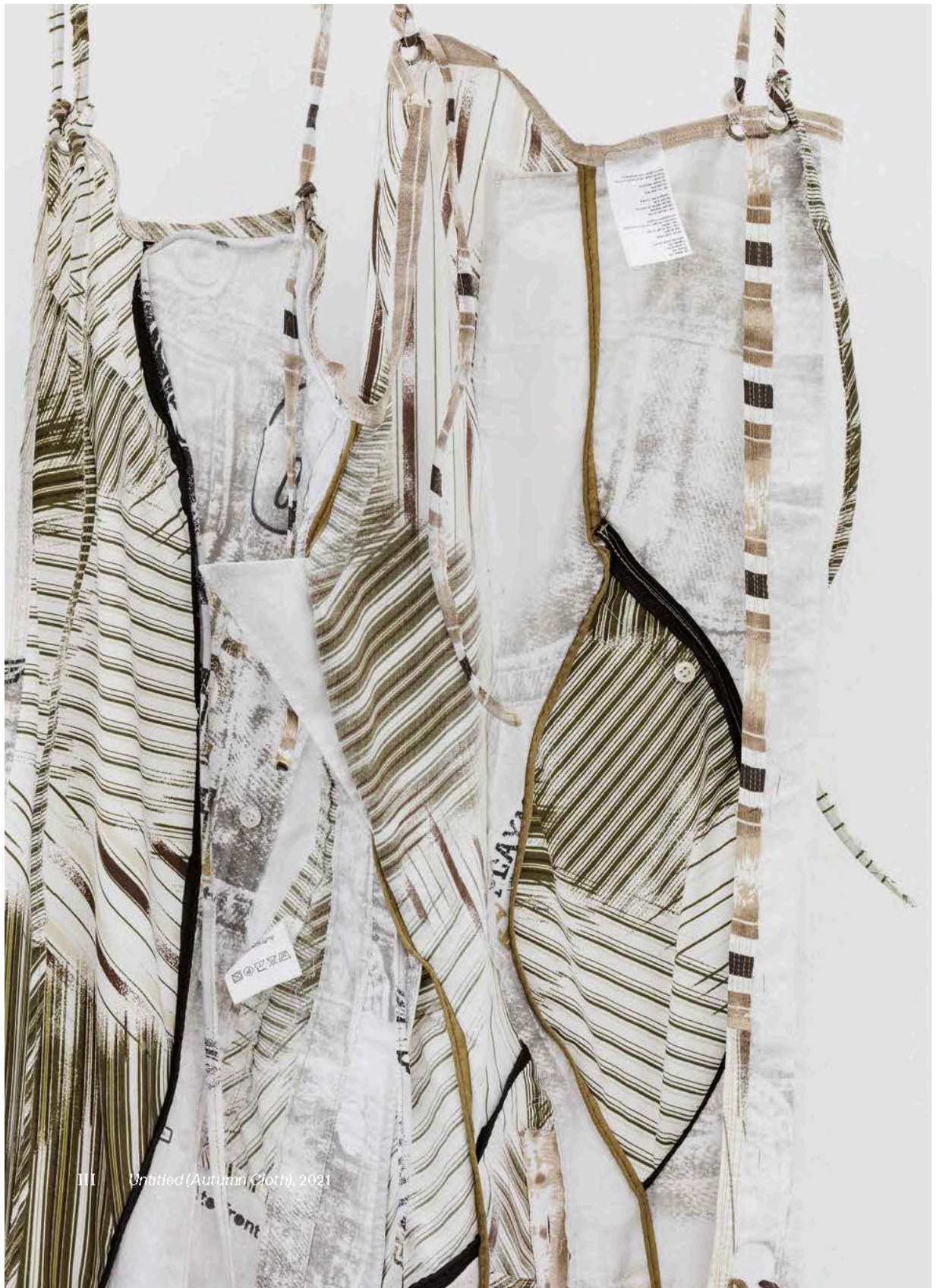
Having a background in womenswear design and textiles, Schimmel's fondness for garments as her primary material is deeply rooted. While strolling through the streets of central London and observing the window displays in constant flux, she developed a gaze for the historical and socio-economic aspect of clothing. It is when garments enter the second market, when another trend has washed a surplus of garments ashore and into the vintage stores, that Schimmel takes a closer look. Rather than following the pieces through the industrial structures of production, for example, wearing them, she chooses to revert the process: She picks the garment apart, thereby learning through its contours and seams how it was produced; but while doing so, she lays bare the socio-economic past which is attached to the garment. The deconstruction of the garments serves two purposes: For one, they are being stripped from their original purpose, becoming only a mere gesture of what it once was. Through her engagement with the garment, Schimmel strips away its meaning as a nostalgic, fetish-like object from the past. Secondly, Schimmel decodes the material from its original use and reboots it as a source material.

Her artistic approach brings to mind the French term *bricolage*. The term was introduced by the French ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and stands for a practice in which the subject solves tasks with the resources at hand, rather than acquiring new materials designed for that specific endeavour. By using this approach of assemblage, Schimmel skilfully cre-

ates an area of tension, where the fields of fashion, consumerism and art engage. Her objects are all a testament to this: In the sculptures from the *Sample Sale* series, the original substances remain recognisable. Leaving the iconic shape of classic sneakers as it is, *ToC* evokes a sense of familiarity for the spectator. And yet, they are deconstructed, their individual parts held together (or separated, for that matter), by clay, cement, resin and plaster. It is this constant negotiation of the familiar with the slightly-off that keeps one examination pending, and therefore, engaged with questions of materiality and fabrication. The *Deadstock* and the *Eclogues* series show Schimmel's eye for quintessential silhouettes and her understanding of fashion history. At first glance appearing like perfectly wearable, patched-together garments, the pieces could derive from the Maison Margiela archives, where Martin Margiela once paved the way for recycling and repurposing clothes and branding them as high fashion. He made visible what had previously remained hidden in fashion – its constructional character. Still, the discourse remained within the fashion sphere. What Schimmel does is to depict her objects in an art context, thus ingeniously taking out the dizzyingly rapid pace of the fashion apparatus, allowing the spectator more room for engagement and reflection, disclosing the historical and cultural narratives that are sewn into every garment. 'I find it so tricky to say that everyone is individually responsible for making good purchases because you open a whole different socio-economic chapter. Not everyone can make that decision at all. The accessibility to garments has been democratised, which is a good thing, at the expense of the environment, but the environmental discussion is inextricably linked and cannot be detached from equality,' Schimmel said in a conversation with the fashion newsletter *Denier*.

The language Schimmel transports through her oeuvre as *ToC* also brings to mind the prolific work of the renowned German artist Isa Genzken and her similar approach of collaging everyday objects as insignia of the consumer world. Both gesture towards a critique of the capitalist boom, but their bodies of work function without any didactic aid. The glooming problem, or solution, of the consumer era, is systemic. However, we can't refrain ourselves from it; in a way, we are all accomplices. *Tenant of Culture* connects to the artist's search for a contemporary sculpture and is an expression of her permanent self-questioning both as a creator and consumer. The self-awareness of Schimmel is also manifested through the prudent decision of working through the alias *ToC*. Michel de Certeau, a cultural historian and philosopher, uses the term *tenant* in his book *The Practice of Everyday Life*. It refers to renting from a pre-existing, archive-like structure. Here, ownership is to a certain degree, a secondary aspect of culture. In the context of Schimmel's work, this parable works especially well: She works with second-hand material. By interlacing the past in her work, Schimmel is documenting its presence





III Untitled (Autumn Cloth), 2021







V *Eclogues (Series)*, 2019





VI *Eclogues (Series)*, 2019



VII *Eclogues (Series)*, 2020  
*Untitled*, 2020

*Eclogues (Series)*, 2019  
*Eclogues (Series)*, 2019





VIII *Sample Sale (Series)*, 2018







X    *Untitled, 2019*

# Studio Magazine, 2022

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>I <b><i>Puzzlecut Boot Oxblood</i>, 2021</b><br/>Recycled shoes, handbags, padding,<br/>shoe last, glue, thread<br/>173 × 39 × 28 cm<br/>Courtesy the artist and Sophie Tappeiner<br/>Photography Kunst-dokumentation.com</p>   | <p>VII <b><i>Eclogues (Series)</i>, 2019</b><br/>Recycled garments and accessories, thread, human hair,<br/>hair accessories, plaster, epoxy clay, paint, varnish<br/>170 × 40 × 27 cm<br/>Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London<br/>Photography Theo Christelis</p>                            |
| <p>II <b><i>Flash s/s (Series)</i>, 2020</b><br/>Recycled trainers, string, plaster, paint<br/>Dimensions variable<br/>Right shoe 19.5 × 32 × 13 cm<br/>Left shoe 18.5 × 32 × 13 cm<br/>Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London<br/>Photography Theo Christelis</p>       | <p>VII <b><i>Untitled</i>, 2020</b><br/>Fibreglass, recycled garments, thread, steel<br/>170 × 40 × 27 cm<br/>Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London<br/>Photography Theo Christelis</p>   |
| <p>III <b><i>Untitled (Autumn Cloth)</i>, 2021</b><br/>Recycled garments, piping, thread, eyelets, rope<br/>147 × 74 cm<br/>Courtesy the artist and Sophie Tappeiner<br/>Photography Kunst-dokumentation.com</p>   | <p>VII <b><i>Eclogues (Series)</i>, 2019</b><br/>Recycled garments, curtains and accessories, resin clay,<br/>eyelets, cord, elastics, felt, stoppers, paint,<br/>varnish, handmade wig by Franziska Presche<br/>168 × 40 × 27 cm<br/>ist and Soft Opening, London<br/>Photography Theo Christelis</p> |
| <p>(all images)</p> <p>IV <b><i>Deadstock</i>, 2021</b><br/>Recycled handbags, scrap leather, thread,<br/>styrofoam, steel, cement<br/>185 × 80 × 23 cm<br/>Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London<br/>Photography: Theo Christelis</p>                                  | <p>VIII <b><i>Sample Sale (Series)</i>, 2019</b><br/>Recycled shoes, socks, tiles, grout,<br/>plaster, wood, glue<br/>42 × 43.5 × 10 cm<br/>Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London<br/>Photography Theo Christelis</p>   |
| <p>V <b><i>Eclogues (Series)</i>, 2019</b><br/>Recycled overcoat, cotton canvas, textile glue,<br/>thread, buttons<br/>Dimensions variable<br/>Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening<br/>London Photography Theo Christelis</p>   | <p>IX <b>Curated by Jeppe Ugelvig</b><br/>20 August – 17 October, 2021<br/>Huset for Kunst &amp; Design, Holstebro, Denmark<br/>Images courtesy of the artists<br/>and Huset for Kunst &amp; Design, Copenhagen<br/>Photography David Stjernholm</p>   |
| <p>VI <b><i>Eclogues (Series)</i>, 2019</b><br/>Recycled straw hats, thread, jute<br/>72 × 50 × 15 cm<br/>Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London<br/>Photography Theo Christelis</p>   | <p>X <b><i>Untitled</i>, 2019</b><br/>Recycled shoes, resin, clay, paint, thread, wheat<br/>38 × 30 × 8 cm<br/>Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London<br/>Photography Theo Christelis</p>  |
| <p>(from left to right up to down)</p> <p>VII <b><i>Eclogues (Series)</i>, 2020</b><br/>Recycled garments and accessories, jute,<br/>coin, thread, fibreglass, steel<br/>140 × 50 × 30 cm<br/>Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London<br/>Photography Theo Christelis</p> |  |

# A Magazine Curated By, 2021

Hendrickje Schimmel's  
**TENANT OF CULTURE**  
in conversation with Madeleine Holth



*Eclogues (series)*, 2019.  
Recycled straw hats, thread, jute.



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Known as Tenant of Culture, the Dutch artist Hendrickje Schimmel is no stranger to the intricate cobweb of fashion. With an MA in design and textiles from London's Royal College of Art, Schimmel has since shifted her postgrad focus towards alternative horizons in the fashion sphere, where ideas such as waste, the life cycles of clothes, and garment de- and reconstruction have triumphed over the more traditional path of fashion design graduates. The result is a hybrid art practice that involves an intriguing agglomeration of the familiar: mixed media sculptures that crystallize her philosophy of fashion objects as consumer relics in the third dimension.

Tenant of Culture — a term of responsibility borrowed from French philosopher Michel de Certeau's book *The Practice of Everyday Life* — is both the name of Schimmel's fashion/art practice and her most recent publication, a self-titled monograph published in collaboration with Charles Asprey and Soft Opening, the East End gallery of London curator Antonia Marsh. With its first edition sold out and a reprint in the works for 2021, *Tenant of Culture* challenges the notions of what an art book can be, with various paper qualities and inspirations drawn from the format of the fashion magazine and the traditions of product photography. Alongside an essay by the Danish curator Jeppe Ugelvig and a conversation with curatorial duo 650mAh, the book offers an extended opportunity to gaze at Schimmel's work in ways that allow the viewer to interpret her fossilised garments on a personal and emotional level.

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Topics such as waste, a garment's 'DNA', collective garment workshops, improvisation and consumption were on Schimmel's mind as she spoke to Madeleine Holth about this evolving body of work.



Tenant Of Culture, 2020. Published and edited by Soft Opening and Charles Asprey.

**How does the creative process start for you? Is it in the garment or the blooming idea of the structure it can have? Or perhaps the structure it cannot have?** Besides ongoing theoretical research, my making process really starts from the actual garment. Every piece I work with is different and requires a different technique for its de- and re-construction. Workwear for example, takes force and patience as it is designed to be durable. Whereas lighter items and cheaply produced items come apart without much effort. This stage in my process is where I start to gather information about the garment and its method of design, assembly and use. Every time you take something apart there are unexpected marks

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within the material such as handwritten instructions straight from the assembly line, uneven stitches, hairs trapped in lining or sweat stains. A story unfolds that is beyond my control and that narrative is really where the work begins.

**Has fashion consumption reached its absolute peak? What are your thoughts on fashion consumption *à la* 2020?**

I'm afraid that it hasn't reached its peak yet. The industry keeps growing by approximately 6% each year. It has been a long and complex process to reach the speed and ease of textile and retail production that we operate with now, but the real acceleration started in the 1980s with increasing global trade liberations. The global industry serves the political interests of the countries that have pushed the outsourcing of production to lower-income countries under the ideology of the free market. Therefore I don't want to focus my work too much on individual consumer responsibility as this has a lot of socio-economic implications. New ways of consuming are easy to propose for a demographic that has the means to pursue it, but it's not realistic to ask this of everyone. Shifting the blame to the consumer is the strategy of the producing entities. In order to rethink consumption, we should begin by understanding the hierarchical relationship between supply and demand.



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**Like Ugelvig explains in his essay, there's something almost fossilised about your work — like the remains of our wearable history and at times even emotionally-triggering garments. What sparked this idea, to encapsulate items that would eventually be discarded?**

The choice to work with second-hand garments is the culmination of multiple ideas. It was a cheap option for sourcing a wide range of materials when I was studying, but I've also always found it more interesting to depart from something pre-existing — it's easier in a sense, less intimidating. When I decided to make this process a methodology in my practice, I started to understand more about the implications of 'ex-nihilo' artistic production. Then it also became a conceptual statement against the territorial aspects of heroic autonomy, the artist who seemingly produces without any interruptions or influences. I am interested in the porosity of working with pre-used materials, to acknowledge my transient position in the lifecycle of an object.

**The birth and death of a garment is an interesting conversation. What is your theory on the shelf life and 'wear life' of a garment?**

Birth and death are interesting metaphors to describe the lifecycle of a garment, physically and symbolically, as both play an important role in how we understand fashion. I am interested, for example, in the economic strategy of planned obsolescence. This is the notion that the majority of products that are produced today already have their end-date programmed within their physical DNA. It's really a design decision: a product is only as strong as its weakest component. If a bad quality yarn is used to

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stitch a garment together, it can't last beyond a certain time. The same thing happens psychologically in the form of trends. A garment that is designed to be very trendy will seem obsolete for the wearer in a short time. These strategies were invented to shorten the replacement cycle of products and have been implemented since the 1950s, but I think we have internalised them as mechanisms that define us. It is difficult to unlearn such notions of temporality and contingency in relation to physical objects, but in my practice, I attempt to create a material understanding of these concepts.



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*Deadstock (series)*, 2018. Recycled handbags, scrap leather, thread, styrofoam, steel, cement.

**Where does this interest in fashion production stem from? I know you have a design degree, but I'm curious if you found yourself particularly interested in the journey towards the end product which they vigorously teach at fashion school?**

My interest in the journey of a garment indeed stems from my fashion and textile education and professional experience working for brands. As I felt more critical towards the industry, I became more interested in its start to finish production but also in



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the political and social history of global textile and apparel production. I think fashion is too often regarded and processed as image-only, I prefer to focus on its materiality and methods rather than on how its end product is positioned and perceived. Even in fashion theory, the garment is discussed only in its relation to trend and its cultural significance, as something ephemeral and fleeting. I wanted to make work about fashion that is tangible, weighty and almost abject, to attempt to create an embodied understanding of the subject.

## **Perhaps you can explain your garment-making workshops?**

My workshops are indeed very important but also really fun. When I find a place to host a workshop, I use the walk-in format. Anyone can come at any time and participate, which can result in anything from an intimate setting of two participants to a wild day of 50 people in a space. In these workshops, we start off with the deconstruction of second hand donated garments or clothing the participants bring themselves. We use various improvisational and traditional methods of garment making to reconstruct clothing or textiles. I try not to focus on the end product but really on the conversations and relationships that start to occur during these days. It's intriguing to see how hesitant people are to take apart a garment, especially if it's branded. There's a very strange loyalty to this finished product. All these small shifts in awareness about the clothes we wear are what I would like to achieve during these workshops, eventually reinstating an intimacy with a garment and the way it is constructed.

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**What improvisational challenges do you face when working with something that is already structured and has its final form? How do you work with pushing it to a new dimension when it's not on its original trajectory?**

My aim is to alter an existing garment to a stage where it says something about its essence, yet utilising the ingredients that are already there. The best part of this is that you never know what you are going to find once you've sliced open a piece.

Improvisation is an important aspect of my working method as you can't really plan ahead for what you will find. Conceptually the improvisation part also matters as it's a way for me to push against structural strategies of mass production and abstraction of labour that are prevalent in the apparel industry.

**Do you work with waste or do you work with fashion? I'm curious to hear more about categorisation through your process?**

That's a very interesting question! I think the categorisation itself is one of the subjects I aim to address in my practice. In my work I examine this dynamic: how do we determine what to save, protect and preserve and what can decompose and rot? The objects I work with would technically not qualify as waste as they are still in circulation. They are part of what I call the secondary market. This word is actually used differently in economics but I employ it to define the market of all that is expelled from the realm of newness but is not by any means waste.

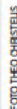
Second-hand sounds too innocent for me as it highlights individual usage only, it makes it seem as if it concerns a gift or charitable donation. Even

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though this is a part of the secondary market, it is also an industry in itself. Clothes we consider waste don't just end up in a charity shop, they become bulky, problematic entities that conglomerate elsewhere, out of sight, implementing themselves in new economic entanglements. I don't source my materials from landfill even though I sometimes incorporate aspects of garments I have found on the street or in the trash. Most of my material is as good as new, yet rejected.

Words by Madeleine Holth





**Tenant of Culture. Sample Sale 3**

Door onze medewerker **Hans den Hartog Jager**

| MUZIEK | THEATER | KLEINKUNST | CABARET | BALLET | OPERA | DANS |

PODIUMKUNSTEN



Natuurlijk heeft kunstenaar Hendrickje Schimmel zich geleefd voor de gelegenheid. Tijdens ons gesprek in een woning boven galerie Fons Welters in Amsterdam, draagt ze een zwart vintage dress van toen-jae, dat, zolang ze uit, op het oudste werkje is geïnspireerd. „Dat betekent: vier zakken, puntige kraag, utilitarian dat sluit, sluitings rechts over links en knopen: die staan voor handenarbeid, pre-industrieel. De stof is ook wat vaal, of het heel vaak is gedragen. Typisch toen-jae dat op dit moment populair is bij de artistieke middenklasse: omdat het soberheid lijkt uit te stralen, bescheidenheid, en solidairiteit met de arbeider. Helemaal de tijdgeest.“ Ze lacht vrolijk.

Da Schimmel vandaag juist dat jasje aan heeft (samen met, onder andere, enigszins grove zwarte Salomon op door de sneakers, 'heeh hip mo', sluiten aan bij de hiking-trend?), is geen toeval. Ze is bij Welters namelijk druk bezig met het inrichten van haar tentoonstelling *Georg (how to style a chore coat)*, die helemaal om dit type werkklardraai draait. Het oeuvre van Schimmel, die werkt onder de naam *Tent of Tents*, gaat altijd over de kunst van de klleding. Voor haar tentoonstellingen heeft ze heel de zeden-daagse werk- en outdoor kleding uit elkaar om de losse delen met behulp van klei en stukken steen en te touw tot vreemde, exuberante kunstwerken te transformeren. Zo hangt er bij Welters een cowboyachtig jasje (al zitten er geen fransjes aan), dat grotendeels is gemaakt van opgesneden witte sneakers, veters er nog in - alleen de bruine mouwen komen er nog uit. Het jasje is gemaakt van een soort touw dat de kunstenaar, ook toort ze een knalrode overjas, als de eerste helemaal heeft gedeconstrueerd tot de stukken waaruit hij was opgebouwd. Die plakke ze op een groot zwart doek, waardoor er een soort puzzel van onbestemde lichaamsvormen ontstaat - opvallend slap en leeg. Of neem de stevige zwarte outdoor schoen, waar ze eerst een zool in een andere maat onder zette (zo dat die een stukje uitsteekt) om daarna de zijkant open te snijden, en de binnenkant van de schoen met stoffen te vullen. Het resultaat is een heel symbool van machtsloosheid en ongemak - denk aan het beruchte strooitje in je schoen of aan de drager als willoze vogelverschrikker.

## Sneakers

Precies dat laatste maakt Schimmels werk ook goed: voor elk beeld deconstrueert ze de oorspronkelijke kledingstukken zo ver dat de nieuwe beelden commentaren worden op de beloftes die de oorspronkelijke kledingstukken impliceerden. Loop je op sneakers echt alsof je zweeft? Koop jij, stadsbewoner, die zware outdoorscheenen echt omdat ze je beschermen tegen de elementen? Zonee,

waarom dan wel? En zelfs als je daar niet meteen aan denkt zijn het fantastische beelden, die een terrein verkennen tussen sculptuur, mode en archeologie waar niet veel kunstenaars tot nu toe zijn geweest.

Toch is het effect Schimmel wel naar meer. Met haar 'modebeelden' wil ze vragen oproepen over de functie en de betekenis van mode, over de rol van kleding in de samenleving en over de mensen die die kleding dragen - wij allemaal dus eigenlijk. En laat ze zien dat we kleding weliswaar graag als onze belangrijkste vorm van persoonlijke expressie beschouwen, maar dat we deze expressie tegelijk volledig onder de bestuurlijke vingers van de mode-industrie plaatsen. Hoe doet de mode-industrie dat precies, vraagt Schimmel zich af, voor belang heeft ze daarbij en waar voor invloed heeft dat op het individu? Daarbij belandt ze in een fascinerende paradox, zeker voor iemand die zo modebewust is als zij zelf: juist iemand die zich heel bewust bezig houdt met mode, die kleding beschouwt als een belangrijk deel van zijn of haar individuele identiteit, wordt uiteindelijk verstopt aan de leiband van de mode-industrie. Kun je aan die macht ontlopen? En moet je dat wel willen?

Dit alles maakt Tenant of Culture ongetwijfeld tot een van de interessantste Nederlandse kunststalten van het moment, wat juist mede komt omdat ze de kunst vanaf een afstandje bekijkt. Niet dat ze er onbekend mee is: Schimmels ouders zijn de bekende Nederlandse kunstenaars Kinke Kool en Roland Schimmel. Mijn jeugd was helemaal doordrenkt met kunst", vertelt Schimmel. "Mijn ouders hebben mij van klein af mee naar de tentoonstellingen genomen en er werd voortdurend over gesproken. Toch toen ik eenmaal in de kunstwereld terecht kwam, moest ik wel wennen. De onuitgesproken codes, de gebruiken zijn in de kunst heel anders dan in de mode. Ooit, bij een opening in Londen, zie iemand tegen me op: 'Jouw werk is altijd zo trendy'. Ik vatte dat op als een compliment, want in de mode is het allermeest wat de allerhoogste. Maar dit was in een galerie, en daardoor heb ik daar ineens dat gevoel van een bedrog. Het was niet zo geweest. Want kunst gaat juist over autonomie, wil onafhankelijk zijn van de wereld - en dan is trendy helemaal niet de bedoeling."

## Vervuiling

Schimmel (1990) volgde eerst de mode-opleiding aan Artez in Arnhem, daarna de textielopleiding aan het Royal College in Londen (waar ze nog steeds gedeeltelijk woont) en werkte daarna twee jaar bij het hippe outdoormerk Greenstone, waar ze 'heel veel leerde over kleding en productie'. Langzaam drong zo tot haar door hoeveel impact kleding heeft op de wereld. Natuurlijk viel iedereen dat mode, kleding, een miljardenindustrie is en hebben we allemaal dagelijks met kleding te maken, maar dat het bij voorbeeld ook





FOTO HANS RUDOLF STÄGER

Tenant of Culture: **Works and Days**

een heel vervuilde industrie is hoor je al veel minder, laat staan dat het bijna onmogelijk is daar iets aan te veranderen. Dat laatste, zegt Schimmel, komt vooral doordat het productieproces zo complex en onoverzichtelijk is geworden. „Dat proces is in allemaal kleine stukken opgeknipt“, zegt Schimmel, „zoveel dat niemand er individueel nog overzicht over heeft, zelfs de grote mode-ontwerpers niet. Staat er op een label bijvoorbeeld 'Made in Italy', dan is het daar meestal wel gestikt, maar het is vrijwel zeker ergens anders gesneden en weer ergens anders gewerkt. Een kledingstuk gaat soms de hele wereld over, wat mede komt doordat fabrieken in een gigantische concurrentiestrijd met elkaar zijn verwikkeld

en grote merken soms maandelijks van fabriek wisselen. Er is geen vertrouwen, geen loyaliteit en geen gedeelde kennis. Dat maakt het erg moeilijk iets te veranderen.“

Ondertussen maakt de mode-industrie zich volgens Schimmel ook onkwetsbaar, door elke vorm van kritiek en idealisme, als een soort allesverslindend monster, meteen op te slurpen en te transformeren tot iets wat alsnog aan de wetten van de mode voldoet. „Ontstaat er bijvoorbeeld een stroming die zegt dat mode belachelijk slecht is voor het milieu, dan heeft de industrie meteen een antwoord: ze komen met kleding van organisch ogende stoffen, in gedempte kleuren, waarmee zowel de industrie als de drager zoge-

naamd laat zien dat ze oprecht zijn en betrouwen. Maar aan de productieketen verandert er niks.“

#### Recycling

Precies om die reden komt 'recycling' steeds in het werk van Tenant of Culture terug. Dat begint al met haar naam, 'huurder van de cultuur' („best wel lekker Nederlands hè“), die ze ontleende aan de filosoof Michel de Certeau. De 'huurder'-term impliceert dat ieder mens altijd een passant is, en dat je ervoor moet waken dingen niet te veel te beschouwen alsof je de laatste gebruiker bent - ook na jou gaat de wereld door. Daarom werkt Tenant of Culture ook vrijwel altijd met gebruikte spullen - niet eens uit principe, maar om-

FOTO GERT JAN VAN NIEUW/COURTESY DE KUNSTENAREN GALERIE FONSWELTERS

Tenant of Culture: **How to style a chore coat**, 2020 bij galerie FonsWelters, Amsterdam

dat ze juist door transformatie de blik op dingen wil veranderen. Dat lijkt ook het kernthema van Schimmels werk: door spullen, mode, kledingstukken, op een nieuwe manier te bekijken, wil ze die een andere betekenis geven en ook een andere waarde - wat kan door van oude kleren nieuwe te maken, maar ook door ze in kunstwerken te transformeren. Daarom geeft Tenant of Culture ook veel workshops, waarbij de deelnemers oude kledingstukken uit elkaar halen en er nieuwe van maken. „Daarbij gaat het me eens niet om het eindproduct, maar om het gesprek dat daarbij ontstaat. Mensen blijken het doodeng te vinden om een bestaand kledingstuk uit elkaar te halen, zeker als er een label op zit. Dat vind ik een prachtig voorbeeld van het enorm krachtige imago dat de kledingindustrie om zich heen heeft weten te scheppen. Uit elkaar halen voelt voor veel mensen bijna als heiligschennis, terwijl het toch alleen maar textiel en imago is. Bullshit eigenlijk.“

#### Maar als je echt iets wilt veranderen in de mode, zou je je dan niet helemaal moeten losmaken van de industrie?

„Ik vind het interessanter om dingen vanuit mijn eigen medeplichtigheid te bekijken dan ze van een afstand te bekritiseren. Ik hou van mode, mijn liefde voor kleding en voor de codes van de mode is heel belangrijk in mijn werk. En ik denk ook dat het onmogelijk is om helemaal uit het systeem te stappen: zoals mode omgaat met de wereld, dat monster dat alles opvreut en voor eigen gewin aanwendt, is precies wat de kapitalistische wereld voortdurend doet - alleen wordt het in mode het beste zichtbaar. Ik streef in mijn werk ook niet naar eenduidige oplossingen. Ik laat liever de complexiteit zien van het systeem.“

**Tenant of Culture:** Georgics (how to style a chore coat), Galerie FonsWelters, Bloemstraat 140, Amsterdam. T/m 8 januari 2021. [nl.fonswelters.nl](http://nl.fonswelters.nl)

#### Over deze serie

In de rubriek 'Wereldkunst' schrijft Hans den Hartog Jager maandelijks een beschouwing of polemiek over kunst die hem opvalt. Eerdere afleveringen zijn te vinden op [nrc.nl/cultuur](http://nrc.nl/cultuur).



Mensen blijken het doodeng te vinden om een bestaand kledingstuk uit elkaar te halen, zeker als er een label op zit

Frieze, 2020

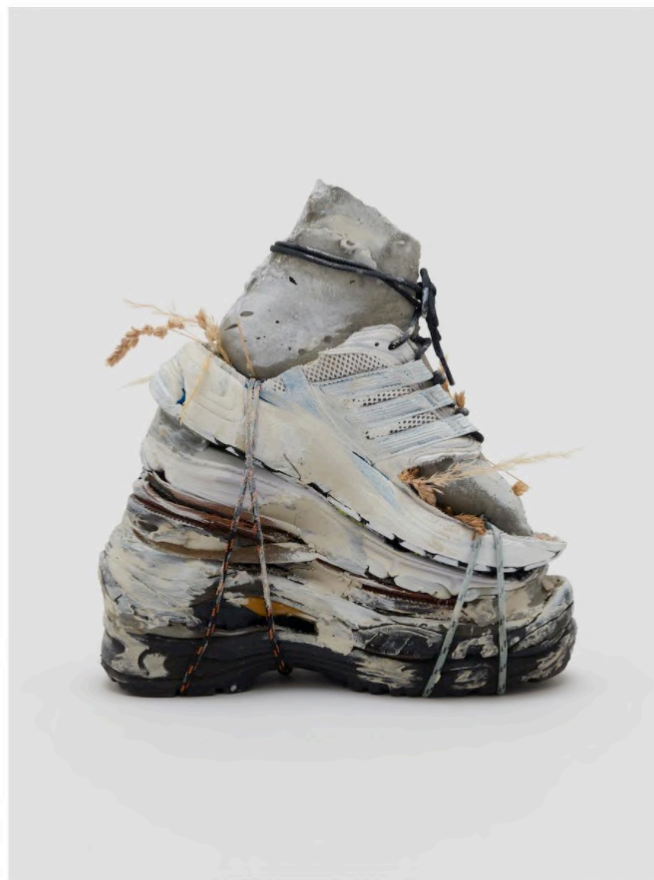
## Tenant of Culture: Winner of the Camden Art Centre Emerging Artist Prize with Frieze

The London-based artist will realize a major solo exhibition at Camden Art Centre in 2022

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*The artist literally opens up and exposes narratives of labour, production, luxury and waste held in the processes and products of the fashion industry, as well as the broader social and cultural histories of the clothes we wear. These ideas speak to increasingly urgent issues beyond the worlds of art, design and fashion. –Martin Clark, Director, Camden Art Centre*

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Tenant of Culture, *Untitled*, 2019. Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London. Photography Theo Christelis



# Frieze, 2020

**Tenant of Culture** is the recipient of the 2020 Camden Art Centre Emerging Artist Prize with Frieze. Tenant of Culture, who is represented by Soft Opening, London, will realise a major exhibition at Camden Art Centre in 2022.

The annual Emerging Artist Prize – unveiled for the first time at Frieze London 2018 and now in its third year – offers invaluable critical exposure to an emerging artist, concurrent with their first show at a London institution. The prize winner will be supported by the experienced Camden Art Centre curatorial team, and the show will be underpinned by an extensive programme of public talks and events.

Tenant of Culture is the artistic practice of **Hendrickje Schimmel** (b. 1990, Arnhem, Netherlands), who lives and works in London, UK. The artist's practice is characterised by a repurposing of discarded materials to birth new forms in a critique on consumer culture and wastefulness.

Tenant of Culture was selected from the 35 galleries from 21 countries in the Focus section of the Frieze Viewing Rooms, the fair's celebrated section supporting younger galleries and artists in earlier stages of their careers.

# Frieze, 2020



Tenant of Culture, *Deadstock* (Series) , 2018. In collaboration with Marko Baković. Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening. Photography Theo Christelis

The 2020 Prize was selected by a panel chaired by Martin Clark (Director, Camden Art Centre), with Gina Buenfeld (Exhibition Curator, Camden Art Centre) and Rob Leckie, Director, Spike Island, Bristol. A group of UK and international patrons have generously supported the Prize, including Lead Supporters Alexandra Economou, Noach Vander Beken and Georgina Townsley. These patrons share an interest in supporting the work of emerging artists and the economy of younger galleries within the contemporary art scene.

# Frieze, 2020

For over 25 years Camden Art Centre has been committed to supporting and nurturing artists in the formative stages of their careers. The Camden Art Centre Emerging Artist Prize at Frieze continues this work, building on the gallery's previous collaborations with artists including Emma Hart, Christian Nyampeta, Ruth Ewan, Jennifer Tee and Haroon Mirza. The 2018 Prize was awarded to **Wong Ping** (Eduoard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong) whose exhibition 'Heart Digger' was realised to critical acclaim at Camden Art Centre and an off-site space at Cork St Galleries (from 5 July – 15 September 2019). The 2019 winner, **Julien Creuzet** (High Art Paris) will realise a show at the Centre in 2021.

*Frieze Viewing Room, hosting Frieze London and Frieze Masters 2020 editions, is now open until Friday 16 October, midnight BST.*

**[Visit Frieze Viewing Room Now](#)**



Artsy, 2020

# Soft Opening

Frieze London, Focus Sector

With works by Tenant of Culture and Stephen Polatch



Tenant of Culture, *Flash s/s (Series)*, 2020. Photo by Theo Christelis.  
Courtesy of the artist and Soft Opening, London.

## Artsy, 2020

London gallery Soft Opening is showing sculptures by the Dutch artist Hendrickje Schimmel, who goes by Tenant of Culture, and British painter Stephen Polatch. The works have few formal or thematic correspondences, but they play off each other improbably well. “There is definitely an unexpected unity to be found in their formal consideration of medium or material,” said Soft Opening’s director, Antonia Marsh. “Both artists create an image or object from separate fragments—Stephen Polatch uses deftly positioned dabs of bright color to create dreamlike folkloric visions, while Tenant of Culture uses scraps of fabric or deconstructed garments to build sculptural assemblages.”



**Soft Opening**

[View Slideshow](#) 5 Images

Tenant of Culture’s sculptures are made from disassembled pieces of mass-produced clothing and accessories that she strings and fuses back together into Frankensteinian creations, which are priced between €3,000 and €4,800 (\$3,500 and \$5,600). Polatch’s intimately scaled egg tempera paintings

## Artsy, 2020

depict mysterious scenes peopled with seemingly mythical figures and ominous animals, and are priced at €1,200 and €1,400 (\$1,400 and \$1,600). Tenant of Culture's works dissect the stuff of everyday consumer capitalism, while Polatch offers up inscrutable allegories that hark back to the Symbolists and Surrealists. The combination makes for a one-two punch of poignant dissection and escapist intrigue.



## Tenant of Culture talks about her work

With every season comes a new version of the familiar sneaker; low-top and nostalgic plimsols, chequered slip-ons, bulky, pumped-up hiking boot fusions, to name a few. Product descriptions span every aspiration; *Urban-Friendly Trail Runner*, *Gore-Tex Everything*, *Dad Shoes are Forever*.

I remember my grandmother telling me that her grandfather wore sneakers to outwardly emphasize that he was a socialist, the cheap sneaker being a signifier of rebellion against the formal attire affiliated with the upper classes. The sneaker in recent history is associated with the urban poor, having its rubberized origins in early 19th Century recreational attire presumably for the more well-heeled. Today of course they are made in their millions for every niche of society. A quick Google search located a bulky, diamond-encrusted pair by Gucci, yours for £1,075.00.

This contrast in both symbolic and material value is intrinsic to the fashion industry's oxymoronic nature and the ideological frameworks that unfold in its methods of production and distribution. Surely a reckoning is due post-pandemic about fashion's scandalous contribution to global emissions and use of cheap overseas labour.

Influenced by Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1974) I aim to take a dialectical position with my practice by examining industrially produced garments and shoes not only as commodities through which a productivist economy articulates itself, but also as social relations that arise from the process of their manufacturing and utilisation.

By dissecting and reassembling second-hand apparel I look to gain insight into various industrial production processes. Through analytical deconstruction I encounter imperfections invisible on the surface of the product. Sewing directions written by hand in the lining, serial numbers, wonky stitches, glue stains and labels that reveal the origin of the material.

I incorporate these fragments into sculptural assemblages that exaggerate the recognisable details and shapes of the shoe. Using traditional sewing techniques such as patchwork and appliqué, I recycle elements of various sneakers and combine them with materials with contrasting properties.

Existing somewhere between sculpture and product my re-stitched assemblages are reanimated with a pathos they deserve, somehow no less elegant but far away from their fashionable origins.

*Tenant of Culture is the name of Hendrickje Schimmel's artistic practice. A new publication on Tenant of Culture will be published in October by Soft-Opening, London.*

# Picpus, 2020



Tenant of Culture,  
*Untitled (From the series  
Works and Days)*, 2019,  
Courtesy the artist.

Tenant of Culture,  
*Untitled (From the series  
Works and Days)*, 2019

Tenant of Culture,  
*Sample Sale (series)*, 2018  
Courtesy the artist  
and 650mAh.  
Photo: Veli-Matti Hoikka



## TENANT OF CULTURE

Interview by Federico Sargentone

**Federico Sargentone** Spanning different media, your practice exists at the threshold of fine art and DIY, bootleg fashion. Despite often incorporating and transforming clothing items and accessories, you show your work in art galleries—most recently with a solo exhibition at Nicoletti Contemporary in London, on view through 12 December. How do you negotiate these different contexts and concerns?

**Tenant of Culture** Informed by my fashion background, my work explores how clothing can be both the subject and medium of social critique. I am fascinated by fashion as a phenomenon—how it operates, its discourse, how trends circulate and evolve, and the way it manifests itself in contemporary culture as simultaneously a tool to connect and to differentiate. Existing somewhere between sculpture and product, my work tends to look strangely familiar to everyday articles of dress, but are re-stitched, destroyed, unwearable and mutated objects. Re-contextualizing these objects, I create paradoxical hybrids that suggest implicit potential for both destruction as well as transformation. Through the process of post-production, I examine the power structures behind the creation of waste and relate this to the hierarchical relationship between producer and consumer.

**FS** You've recurrently incorporated sneakers—which in your work are cast, deconstructed, re-assembled. Why did you choose these objects, so ordinary yet so charged with symbolic meaning?

**TC** I started making the sculptural shoes in response to the fashion trend of outrageously large and bulky sneakers, by taking the stacking of soles and materials to an extreme, adding mosaic and cement and extra laces and trimmings and lining. Sneakers are supposed to be utilitarian so I accelerated the functionality to the point of no return; where the pieces had become

an actual ornament. Trough the deconstruction of these mass produced objects, I unveil the seams, stains, and wear and tear. I get a sense of the design decisions that have been made, and see traces of the hands of the labourer who assembled it, illustrating how many hands it takes to construct a mass produced object. The purchase of mass-produced commodities seems like a frictionless exchange yet takes a lot of resources, creates a lot of waste and requires a lot of physical labour. These processes are often messy, grimy and ethically ambiguous, yet invisible on the shiny exterior of the new commodity. My approach determines the outcome of the work whilst simultaneously being a method I practice to gain insight into various industrial production processes.

**FS** Within this same framework—one that addresses functionality, aesthetics, consumerism—I'm curious to know where you position your work, and how you tackle the "fine art" dynamics coming with it.

**TC** That's a good question. Art's function might not be obvious, as in the object itself might not have a user function but still it very much lives in the realm of conspicuous consumption yet this 'function' of art is very mystified. The gallery is essentially a shop but the shopping element is hidden. By implying this exclusivity status as "not commercial" you are actually increasing the value of the object. So the functionality of art might not be displayed on its surface but it is embedded in the structural framework of the realm it exists in. If an object can generate status for its owner, to me it has a function as much as a high street hiking boot.

**FS** You choose specific models of sneakers to work with, and the effect is reminiscent of Balenciaga's infamous Triple S, or Salomon's ubiquitous hiking boots. It seems to me that you're also commenting on current trends.

**TC** I do, but I always choose items that have a history in a very different market than the luxury one they happened to find themselves in. I'm interested in the appropriated items such as hiking boots and "cheap sneakers." In my work I find it important to shed a different light on these items than the must have status they've acquired and look at the historical context and function of these items. I'm interested in the context shift of the Salomon hiking boot, for example, from tech hiking gear for pensioners

on a trip to the highlands to young rich kids that don't like them for their high altitude durability but purely for their anti aesthetic i.e. status generating. The dynamic behind this says a lot about how desperate we are for something new, but also about how almost everything can become trendy.

**FS** I believe your commentary on fashion market dynamics is also related to ecological concerns. In 2017, your first solo show in the UK, at Clearview.ltd in London, was titled "Climate Change."

**TC** One of the main features of the phenomenon of fashion is its transient and contingent nature. I am interested in the way fashion as a system employs permanent instability. I am simultaneously suspicious of and intrigued by this notion of fleetingness. A result of this is that ideology in a fashion context quickly becomes a capitalist narrative and is reduced to an aesthetic, employing the ideology narrative as a "look" rather than a tool for actual change. One of the main questions I address in my practice is, how do we determine what should be saved, restored, protected and preserved? Considering all the possible death scenarios of a commodity—ranging from institutional (death by representation) to organic (decay) and everything in between—I aim to examine the border negotiations that unfold between what is rejected and what is admitted, products and waste.

**FS** A commodity's "institutional death," as you call it, often occurs when it's declared to be "over" or "unacceptable" by certain social groups. Sneakers are especially subject to these implacable cycles of hype, and for this reason they might be the artefacts that best encapsulate the contradictions of our late-capitalist times...

**TC** Yeah, maybe sneakers are the future fossils of our time—I can imagine that. The most illustrative of sneakers as a symbol for our late capitalist times I find in the intentionally distressed sneakers that appeared on the high luxury market a while ago. They were artificially made to look like they've been worn for ages, yet so subtly that you could still see that the wearer would have purchased them for hundreds of pounds and didn't actually have to wear the same sneakers for years. The worn-out nature of the clothes of people who can't afford brand new ones, all of a sudden becomes a status symbol amongst elitist circles. Speaking of contradictions.

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**HENDRICKJE SCHIMMEL** (Dutch, b. 1990) is an artist who works in London under the moniker of Tenant of Culture.





Tenant of Culture develops her sculptural practice by articulating a critical perspective on the social and political history of single garments, following their production and distribution to examine how they function and move in the world. However, her methodology works backwards. Starting at the end of the production cycle – the finished product – she looks into the complexities of the un-transparent labour system that is the fashion industry. Tenant of Culture refuses to embrace the environmentally friendly rhetoric that surrounds the term 'recycling'; instead, she frames her interest as an analysis that addresses the use of products philosophically, and problematizes fashion's monetization of ideology. By shifting the focus to the hierarchical relationship that connects producer and consumer, her work proposes an inquiry into the strategies and contradictions inherent in fashion's contingent nature, and interrogates the performative aspects and status marking gestures that inscribe one's participation in fashion under capitalism.

**Your work considers concepts like recycling and upcycling. Can you speak about how you relate to them, and how you source and deconstruct your pieces?**

Recycling is important for me on many levels. It started as a necessity measure; being enrolled in an expensive masters course in an expensive city a few years ago I had to find ways to source materials. I became obsessed with the charity shops in London, they don't exist in this capacity anywhere else. From there I started to become very interested in the history of a single garment; its methods of production, intended strategies of distribution and its movement through the world. But also what does a certain fabric choice, colour or button say about what a garment needs to communicate, and what is its social and political history? In *Das Capital* Marx uses his own linen coat to analyse the fashion industry and the role it plays in the development of capitalism. I find this methodology of working backwards from the end of the production cycle much more interesting than

beginning from scratch. When a garment is already designed, produced, distributed, used and thrown away there is a lot more to discover. As a fashion practitioner you are part of a system that is extremely un-transparent. The division of labour is so complex that it is impossible to keep track of the production process of a garment. If you go to fashion school and continue to work as a designer for a large company there are so many aspects of the process of producing a garment that remain invisible. The process they teach you in fashion school is, in chronological order: mood board, drawing, toiling, final collection, show. I'm still very interested in all those aspects of the fashion process but I apply, deconstruct and visualise them differently.

The name of my practice Tenant of Culture also relates to this; the allegory of the tenant in *The Practice of Everyday Life* by Michel de Certeau is used to look differently at the hierarchical relationship between producer and consumer. The way we often see it is that the producer dictates what the consumer buys through elaborate strategies of staging; staging window displays, fashion shows, and creating imagery that 'contextualise' the garments on sale. By designing clothes into carefully curated sub-sections and themes. And we tend not to see anything other than that. That's what we talk about and analyse. But what Michel de Certeau elaborates upon in this context is the social relations that appear in the production and utilisation of the product. In that scenario the consumer becomes an active agent in the life cycle of the garment and I find that so much more interesting. The way I understand this is that this all articulates the process of 'recycling' in a much more interesting way than focussing solely on the environmental aspects of recycling. I hesitate to describe my practice in terms of environmentally friendly because this rhetoric has come to be a virtue signifier in the fashion industry. It is a term that is abused and monetised so frequently that I want to explain the utilisation of existing product by addressing it in a more complex way, as a philosophy, to problematize the monetization of ideology in fashion.

**The presence of functional details and of certain elements of display – such as steel structures that evoke rigging, or the hooks and ropes reminiscent of sports equipment – seems to be recurrent throughout your work. Sometimes it lends the exhibition space an almost architectural feeling, creating a sense of place where waste and rubble mix with newly built structures. Where does your interest in these components stem from?**

The rigging structures I use are derived in part from set design and structures used in the theatrical environment and special effects. They also incorporate bungee cord and climbing hooks, referencing luxury extreme sports or 'athleisure'. This combination of display mechanisms is installed to support certain sculptures. It came from the idea of 'ornamental survivalism', a trend that uses extremely utilitarian looking garments not for their functionality but for their aesthetic. Think Vibram barefoot experience shoes in a London tube carriage or a Regatta fleece in an air conditioned office. I love this contradiction that is so intrinsic to the contingent nature of fashion. When the aesthetic of leisure-survival becomes a status signifier. A lot of these ideas are derived from *Theory of the Leisure Class* by Thorstein Veblen.

The theatrical element of choosing to wear such items, the idea of survivalist hiking gear in the urban environment to me is a performance. A performative gesture to communicate survivalist skills, to show fellow urban dwellers your attachment to nature and to imply that you would prosper in a rural setting. It is interesting to see this conspicuous utility trend now accelerate into a more apocalyptic one. With tactical vests and camouflage making a re-appearance. This is so telling of the sensibility of fashion. Even though the people who can afford to buy into this trend lead such comfortable lives, they still feel the need to participate. This ties back into the idea of the 'staging' of product that happens in fashion through the use of elaborate set design and props that are utilised to contextualise products. The spatial elements that I use in those installations refer to this. The props are hollow and flimsy, have no apparent function but an aesthetical one, but are somehow convincing.



**I like how you bring into discussion the production of waste by focusing on its deeper cultural, moral and hierarchical implications. In your opinion, could fashion bring significant change in this regard? Or should we look for answers (and ask questions) elsewhere?**

**Waste is a part of the strategy of capitalism because everything, materials, nature, humans, animals are thought of in terms of profit. To categorise in that way means expulsion; moving people as well as materials to the periphery of existence free to be capitalised upon and used in ways that suit more profitable entities. The fashion industry is a prime example of this because the aforementioned extremely complex division of labour. Because it's so un-transparent it is hard to point out who is responsible. The complete acceleration of the speed in which collections are produced by high street chain stores is unprecedented, the toll it takes on the environment is as well. Yet it seems hard to point the finger in the right direction. Fashion as a system will never be able to change this because fashion is the embodiment of change itself. As a fashion practitioner you have the ability to change your production methods but under capitalism your effort will not be rewarded in the form of profit, so you have to be willing to give that up or have other resources to sustain your initiative. A one liner solution such as H&M disclosing information on how their products are produced on their website is clownish and grotesque. It doesn't even attempt to actually change its production methods and take responsibility. I guess the only solution would be to eradicate every form of industrial apparel production, but this would hurt the livelihoods of many people in countries that rely on the income of textile production, no matter how small. Change would require an economic system less anticipated on growth and progress.**

Mousse 70 TIDBITS

# Reification of the Milkmaid: Tenant of Culture

Share

by Michael Eby

When Donald Trump announced August's bout of punitive tariffs on China, he shifted the terrain of the dispute toward the commodity that had sedimented the belligerents' relationship decades prior: clothes. The measure would levy a fifteen percent duty almost exclusively against the import of Chinese apparel, textiles, and footwear. The announcement set into motion two consequences. First, global market confidence in the world's largest exporter of garments—an epithet acquired not without the assistance of U.S. capital eager for access to cheap labor—slumped. Second, competitors in the region, each poorer and similarly prone to international labor law violations—Bangladesh, Cambodia, Vietnam—eagerly jumped at the chance to increase their export earnings in China's absence.

On the high streets of urban financial centers, the principal place that we encounter the malign political-economic turbulence that constitutes the global textile trade is through the off-the-peg, alienated commodity form of mass-produced and mid-tier clothing. In turn, the seasonal merchandising of fast-fashion behemoths like Boohoo, Topshop, Nasty Gal, H&M, and Zara becomes a vehicle for an additional layer of cultural abstraction: the trend. This is where the Dutch artist Tenant of Culture (Hendrickje Schimmel) situates her practice: in an era of the trend's despotism. Tenant of Culture's critique of representation in fashion delineates the processes by which resources at the forefront of geopolitical tensions and imperial aggressions—silk and cotton, wool and yarn, staple fibers and crocheted fabrics, synthetic filaments and laminated wadding—crystallize as fluff for influencer marketing and ossify as subject positions under capitalism.

# Mousse, 2019

In the artist's latest show at London's Nicoletti Contemporary, *Eclogues (an apology for actors)* (2019), the subject position in question is that of the milkmaid. For centuries, the milkmaid's slender bodice and leg-of-mutton sleeves have served as signifiers of female voluptuousness and fertility, recognizable throughout art history in the genre paintings of Lucas van Leyden, Johannes Vermeer, Jean-François Millet, and Gustave Courbet. In recent years, the culture industry has developed a renewed interest in mass-market attire reminiscent of the milkmaid, in part aided by the promotion of a glamorized peasantry aesthetic through the trendsetting social media accounts of Kylie Jenner and Rowan Blanchard. In *Eclogues (an apology for actors)*, Tenant of Culture adorns mannequin busts in inexpensive milkmaid-esque garb culled from fast-fashion retail clothing stores. These anthropomorphic assemblages of recycled garments, wigs, frayed swatches, and epoxy clay are accompanied by cement watering cans onto which leather handbag panels and shoulder straps have been fastened. Woven damask labels protruding from several of the items indicate factory production locations in China, Poland, Madagascar, Ireland, and England. The bare wire columns upholding the mannequins give the installation the seductive, fresh off-the-runway sheen of an in-store display.

Wide-brimmed hats, bonnet caps, denim corsets, gingham dresses—the image of the milkmaid allows Tenant of Culture to absorb and aggravate the contemporary cultural form, diagramming its political fissures in fabric. Rather than referring to this reemergent figure as symptomatic of an apolitical collective desire for a return to pastoralism, Tenant of Culture's milkmaid—an ad-hoc, faceless purveyor of transient cultural modes—reconsiders this gendered archetype as a subject position more accurately characterized by a historical and contemporary class subjection. The material-technical and the social-economic aspects of the production process are constitutive of, as well as inscribed in, the milkmaid ideal; the historical social form of the milkmaid's emergence is rendered inextricable from the physical value-form that the present commodities assume.

The exhibition thus outlines the ways in which historical subordination of the peasantry and contemporary subordination of the factory laborer have generated this purely stylistic fodder for bourgeois cultural intervention. Reification—a term used in Marxism to describe “the transformation of social labor into a property of the products of labor”—installs itself in ideological superstructures buttressed by the boho-chic cyclical merchandising of Topshop and Boohoo.<sup>1</sup>

For Tenant of Culture, exhibitions function as “trend reports.” Clothing is indeed an apt site for staging such interrogations, as the history of clothing closely matches that of the modern commodity: from the Industrial Revolution's mechanized cotton mills and bleach drying all the way up to fast-fashion's short shelf lives and shop-fitting. But the *Eclogues* title refers also to Virgil's pastoral poems, to scenes of an Arcadian golden age consistently allegorized following periods of relative economic progress. By internalizing the latent ideological residue intrinsic in these collective moments, Tenant of Culture is able to lay them bare: uncovering the manifold reactionary fantasies that serve to legitimate new forms of social domination.

[1] Isaak Illich Rubin, *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value* (1928; repr., Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1973), 121.



## This group art show celebrates unity in Europe

ART & PHOTOGRAPHY - FEATURE

**Featuring 21 artists from 16 countries across Europe, this exhibition maps out the creative landscape of the continent**

10th April 2019

Text Ashleigh Kane

### Metamorphosis. Art in Europe Now

25 IMAGES



The Berlin Wall fell in November 1989, and with it, Communism across east and central Europe began to crumble. In its place sprang new freedoms and movements which led to a meshing of cultures. Two decades on, however, and Europe faces the obstruction of a new wall. While not a physical erection, the restrictions on free movement between Europe and the UK will be felt deeply. When, in summer of 2016, a majority of the UK cast its vote to leave the European Union, it set in motion a series of debates, conversations, and controversies which are still far from resolved.

*Metamorphosis. Art in Europe Now*, which opened last week (4 April) at Paris' Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, showcases the work of 21 artists, each born between 1980 and 1994, and having grown up in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall. They hail from 16 countries across Europe, including the UK, and many have studied, or now live, in countries other than the one they first called home. This, the show's programme says, "shows the very real mobility that exists within the European cultural space".



Metamorphosis Art in Europe Now (Kris Lemsalu) © Thibaut Voisin, 2019

# Dazed, 2019

Traversing the mediums of painting, sculpture, fashion, design, video, and installation, the 21 artists in the show were chosen from more than 1,000 portfolios. Curator Thomas Delamarre explains that the initial selection was made from intuition. In the next stage, he found that “suddenly threads began to appear, and we started to follow those”. The ideas which surfaced are aptly summed up in the show’s title of *Metamorphosis*, which Delamarre says relates to notions of collecting, pasting, reassembling, and fragmenting. “These can touch on the materials themselves but also the historical narratives,” he adds. Borrowing from folklore, collective memory, and legacies, like in music, Delamarre says “the artists are sampling and remixing” from a huge range of globally relevant ideas. It’s a melting pot of identities, techniques, materials, ideas, and aesthetics – all of which combine to enrich the layers of a Europe we now know.

Ideas of hybridisation, collage, and archaeology run throughout the space’s two levels and are explored in various ways. UK artist, George Rouy combines traditional painting with computer software, enlisting Photoshop to help map out his compositions. He creates canvasses filled with his signature large, looming figures. Whereas Greek artist Alexandros Vasmoulakis looks at ways to present painting in new ways. In this instance, he utilises DIY wallpaper to hang his works and create new visual experiences for the viewer.

Disciplines also overlap. Self-described “cultural post-producer”, Dutch artist Tenant of Culture (aka Hendrickje Schimmel) repurposes and sews together discarded materials to birth new forms in a critique on consumer culture and wastefulness. Opposite these, sits works by Italian duo Formafantasma, who transform electrical waste into useable furniture for the future.



Metamorphosis Art in Europe Now (Alexandros Vasmoulakis) © Thibaut Voisin, 2019

# Dazed, 2019

Other notions of hybridisation come in terms of identity. Syrian-born, Paris-based painter, Miryam Haddad's works are made up of fragments of memories of her hometown complete with new visions from her imagination. "My imagination is built on real images, architecture, and everyday life, but I don't work from a photo so I don't want it to be realistic," she explains. "What happens on the painting is a translation of what I have in mind and my imagination, these little fragments of memory and real life and what comes together." Swedish-based Lap-See Lam pays homage to her Chinese ancestry by presenting a film featuring 3D scans of Chinese restaurants and voiceovers from the Chinese diaspora. Titled *Mother's Tongue*, Lam comments on the "cultural reality of immigration and how it affects the construction of identity and otherness over time".

While the show itself doesn't explicitly reference Brexit, a map of Europe – borderless and with country names omitted – is presented on the ground floor, which Delamarre calls "a statement in itself". Brexit instead looms as a metaphorical storm cloud and threatens to dampen the energy and connectivity of the European art community. Despite this, Delamarre is determined to shine a light and light on its unity. "There are a lot of questions on the state of Europe right now," he says. "Of course, there are pretty dark things happening, but there's also an incredible dynamic from the young generation. So the show is about looking at this vitality and bringing the artists together in order to celebrate Europe and its many relationships. It's about the idea of a very wide Europe – the one that most of us want." In this sense, it's a reminder of a unity that we might soon be missing.

*Metamorphosis. Art in Europe Now runs at Paris' Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain until 16 June 2019*



## It's Nice That

### Tenant of Culture uses football jerseys to rethink archiving

Words Bryony Stone

11 January 2017

2 minute read



Artist Hendrickje Schimmel is better known under his moniker Tenant of Culture. Originally from the Netherlands, Hendrickje now lives and works in London. A 2016 graduate of the RCA, where he gained a masters in Mixed Media, last year also saw multiple shows by Tenant of Culture, most notably his inclusion in breaking artists showcase *Bloomberg New Contemporaries* at the ICA.

Working with wearable garments, from shoes and t-shirts to footballs, Tenant of Culture builds multi-layered textile installations which take an unconventional look at culture. Among the most striking of Hendrickje's artworks are *Sportswear Paintings*, a series of misleadingly-named 2D canvases which made up Tenant of Culture's RCA graduate show.

"The sportswear paintings are part of the series *A Just Game / How to Preserve a Happening* which examines the process of documenting a 'happening', taking the sports game as the point of departure," Tenant of Culture tells It's Nice That. "The main research question is: how to represent and document something that is based on the principle of event-hood. Something that needs to be lived through or witnessed, something that exists by the virtue of 'realtime'. What happens when such a thing needs to be archived? The first part of the title refers to the hierarchical selection process that is inherent to the act of archiving. Making use of the dichotomy of meaning of the word 'just': 'just' referring to morality, representing the 'right' and the 'neutral' but also 'just a game', addressing the fleeting and contingent entertainment of the sports game."

"I used different kinds of materials to encapsulate and fixate garments that are typically used in sports," Tenant of Culture explains of his process. "The jerseys were cut open and pressed in between a layer of cotton and transparent silk organza with a heat press. The result looks like a modernist painting because of the graphics often used in sportswear. The abstract and colourful shapes that imply movement and action. The 'paintings' look cheerful and optimistic but they also intend to address the problematic side of the politics of the institutional archive."

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