

Artist of the month

Liz Craft

Interview by Nicolas Trembley, portrait by Rainer Hosch

A leading figure in the **Los Angeles** contemporary-arts scene, Liz Craft has always had a taste for transgression. Hers is an art that is profoundly inspired by the culture of her **native California**, its folklore and its customs, but also its natural environment. She's also a player in the art market, running a gallery space with the painter Pentti Monkkonen, as well as being a co-founder of the **Paramount Ranch alternative art fair**.



Born in 1970 during the Californian hippie movement, Liz Craft is now one of the most important art-world figures in Los Angeles. Representative of a certain West Coast style, where no difference is made between high and low culture, Craft chooses subjects that have nothing to do with the classic canons of good taste – witches, magic animals, bikers, trolls or spiders are recurring figures in an oeuvre that follows no fashion, apart perhaps from her own. Attentive to the local arts scene in a city that's undergoing a major cultural renaissance, she looks after a gallery space with her partner, the painter Pentti Monkkonen. In parallel to the growing number of big galleries who are setting up shop in L.A., she founded, with the Freedman Fitzpatrick Gallery, an alternative art fair that takes place at Paramount Studios, with work being shown on an old ranch set. *Numéro* met up with her in the City of the Angels.

Numéro: What's your background?

Liz Craft: I'm from California. I had hippyish parents, with a sense of humour, who were young and somewhat reckless. I had a varied collection of grandparents with a lot of eccentricities. I studied art in Los Angeles at Otis Parsons and then UCLA. I thought I would go into fashion, but realized I was more of an artist than a designer.

How did your background shape your identity and taste?

I guess my family was kind of weird. And not really concerned with taste, except in music. I think I sought out friendships with similar people as I got older, and they were often artistic people. Really I had very little exposure to art, it's something I got into on my own.

Who inspired you? What were your references in art?

When I was 17, I took a road trip with my uncle across the country to see my childhood friend in Washington D.C. I saw David Smith sculptures and Joseph Cornell assemblages in the Hirshhorn Museum that made me curious about art. Then I found out about Eva Hesse in art school – she was another major influence. Also Mike Kelly, John Baldessari...And in grad school, I studied with Charles Ray, who was important to my development.

You're mainly known for your sculptures. Do you consider yourself a sculptor in the classic sense?

I guess if you think the main thrust of classical sculpture is a reflection of the natural world, then yes. But I'm including the mind, rationality, psychological subtexts and dream states, which I think are also part of the natural world.

There is an important element of craft in your work, for example with the ceramics. Do you produce all your pieces yourself?

I'm a studio artist and I make discoveries by making my own work. I don't think of myself as being very technical, certainly not with ceramics. I just don't make anything that's

too difficult. If it's difficult or too labour intensive, like bronze casting, someone helps me do it. I have always been into materials and combining them, but I think that's more of an interest than a technique.

Why are animals a recurrent theme in your work?

I use things from the world, so I suppose animals just make their way in. They're just around, like cats and spiders. I like the way they look and move. I'm also very aware that they have certain connotations, and that's something I like to let into the work as well.

With Pentti Monkkonen you're running a gallery space called Paradise Garage. What's behind that?

Well I think we needed to re-establish a position that we felt was lacking in L.A., and create a context for ourselves that made sense. Now it seems the momentum is going, and there are a lot of cool things around. I'm not sure in what form we will continue at this point.

You're also a founding member of the Paramount Ranch art fair. How did that come about?

It was initially an extension of the Paradise Garage idea. Then we partnered up with Freedman Fitzpatrick, who had similar desires to us. And they could actually make it happen because they knew many people internationally and had the energy.

Do you feel you're part of a group of artists? How would you describe it?

Yes I do. When you're in school you have your peers, but this kind of falls apart as school gets further in the distance. I think starting the gallery made me think about this again: who do I respect and want to hang out with, who do I want to associate with? Art is actually a social activity, despite all the time alone it requires.

Who is your audience? And is there anything you want to make people conscious of through your work?

I think artists usually think of other artists looking at their work, or people who can really see it. But I also make art that has a certain level of understanding that I think anyone can appreciate. What would I like to make people conscious of? Rules are made to be broken? [Laughs.] I don't know.

What projects do you have coming up in the near future?

A group show at the Whitney next summer and then an exhibition at Real Fine Arts in September 2016.

Liz Craft is represented by Jenny's in Los Angeles, Real Fine Arts in New York and Truth and Consequences in Geneva. The group show at the Whitney is set to open in June 2016. www.paramountranch.la.

Spider Woman Black Dress (2015), detail. Papier mâché and mixed media.

