

# HOST Tenant of Culture Jan 31 – Aug 3, 2025

The ContemporaryAustin

# The Contemporary Austin

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# HOST

HOST is an exhibition space and program series that amplifies The Contemporary Austin's commitment to centering artists and welcoming publics. With each exhibition cycle, an artist will create a newly commissioned environment in the HOST gallery space at the Jones Center. Programming will accompany each work. Throughout the run of each exhibition, artists will invite visitors into their worlds.



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Tenant of Culture, *Puzzlecut Boot Miscellaneous* (detail), 2021. Image courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London. Photograph by David Sterjnholm.

# Tenant of Culture

**Tenant of Culture** is the moniker of artist Hendrickje Schimmel (b. 1990, Arnhem, Netherlands; lives and works in Amsterdam, Netherlands). Originally trained in fashion design and textiles, Schimmel explores the material impact of the fashion industry, particularly the volume and speed at which it produces, consumes, and discards. Using secondhand clothing, Schimmel deconstructs and reassembles them—often combining elements from multiple garments, transforming them into new sculptural works that transcend their original form.

The installation begins in the museum lobby, a space defined by shop windows that hint at the building's previous life as a department store. On steel and glass pedestals reminiscent of boutique displays, the *Puzzlecut Boots (Series)* are patched together from mismatched leather (or faux-leather) handbags and accessories. Presented here in Austin, these works nod to the history of leather craft in Texas, once a specialized trade in the United States that, like many other manufacturing industries, has largely been outsourced abroad.

In the gallery, *Tenant of Culture* highlights a less visible side of the fashion industry. Suspended from tracks evocative of conveyor belts and factory rail systems found in manufacturing spaces, *Dry Fit (Series)* is a monumental textile made of waterproof outerwear. Its synthetic fabric is tied to one of the

most polluting industries in the world, with production requiring vast amounts of water and releasing harmful chemicals into the environment. Combining two ongoing bodies of work by the artist, this installation references a tension between the seductive, consumer-facing displays and the hidden realities of industrial spaces like production warehouses and fulfillment centers.

Tenant of Culture's assemblages mirror the systematic patchwork of globalized production, where a single garment can be made involving materials and labor from disparate locations—only to be discarded as quickly as it is produced. For the artist, however, these materials are not an end but a starting point. By remixing garments into new forms, Tenant of Culture proposes a more cyclical process where materials can be continually restructured, serving as a means of critique and reimagination in our world of overproduction. As with her practice, her works embody the possibility of transformation through destruction.

— **Julie Le**, Assistant Curator, The Contemporary Austin



Portrait of Tenant of Culture (Hendrickje Schimmel).





Tenant of Culture, *Puzzlecut Boot Brown* (detail), 2021. Recycled shoes and belts, shoe last, glue, and thread. 12 1/2 x 13 1/2 x 3 1/2 inches. Image courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London. Photograph by Kunst-dokumentation.com



**Julie Le:** *Hendrickje, you originally trained and worked in fashion before you moved into an art context. Could you talk about this shift?*

**Tenant of Culture:** My background is indeed in fashion design and textiles, and I worked in the industry for several years mostly designing outerwear. Over this seven-year experience, I started to feel a kind of alienation towards the fashion object. Whilst researching critical thinking about fashion, I realized that when fashion is discussed, it's discussed as an image, as something ephemeral and contingent guiding our collective desires and senses. This way of understanding fashion ignores intricate systems of resource extraction, manufacturing, consumption, disposal, and decomposition. I wanted to create a more material understanding of the fashion object by starting at the very end of a garment's life cycle rather than at the beginning.

**JL:** *How did you arrive at the moniker "Tenant of Culture"? I understand it's a reference to Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*.*

**ToC:** Yes, it originates from Michel de Certeau, a French historian and cultural critic. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, he uses the allegory of the "tenant" to destabilize hierarchical relations between producers and consumers. Producers are often perceived as "active" and consumers as



"passive," but he reframes consumers as "users," who, by misusing or reinterpreting a mass-produced object, can alter, redirect, and even subvert the intentions of producers. This theory gives a layer of complexity to the idea of recycling or upcycling, techniques central to my work. *Tenant of Culture* also references traditional fashion couture labels that often refer to themselves as a "House" or "Maison." *Tenant* twists this idea of a stable brand identity, and points to the precarity and dependence that renters experience. de Certeau's metaphor explores how tenants live in flats they do not own, yet still make alterations to personalize it. I like this idea of non-structural adaptations that can still be powerful and subversive.

**JL:** *Could you share how you source your materials?*

**ToC:** Sourcing materials takes up about 70% of my practice. Almost all my materials come from secondary marketplaces—digital platforms, charity shops, or donations. The garments I use don't classify as waste, but rather as objects on their way to obsolescence. This is the most interesting place for me to source from because garments in secondary marketplaces speak most obviously of the processes that eventually render them obsolete. The garments there are neither vintage nor indexical garments of archival value, but of very recently extinct trends. Finding certain garments in excess at secondary marketplaces is a kind of reverse trend spotting. It illuminates what has



fallen out of style and is on its way to becoming redundant all together.

**JL:** *You often investigate the volume and speed at which fashion is produced and consumed. How do you see your work in relation to this relentless cycle? What does it mean for you to bring these materials into an art context—is there a futurity in your work?*

**ToC:** I reference past “trends” in my work, but the future is something I often consider in the context of the creation of the “new” in a world with finite resources. While awareness of the environmental and ethical consequences of (fast) fashion increases, the industry continues to expand each year. I’m interested in thinking beyond notions of waste versus preservation and instead looking to methodologies that reconsider materials in a world where production of the new may cease to exist. What impact would this have on the way things are assembled and the language we use to address them? I guess this is something I try to explore in my pieces by speculating on how an alternative (visual) language could be formed.

**JL:** *Could you talk about how you play with modes of display in your exhibitions, and how you brought that to your show here at The Contemporary?*



**ToC:** Displays I create usually reference environments related to the fashion industry. This layout references the tension between visual strategies designed to seduce customers, like window dressing, versus mass distribution centers that remain invisible to consumers, such as stock warehouses, fulfillment centers, and dark stores. For this exhibition, I looked specifically at sites in the garment supply chain serving our shopping practices which are moving increasingly online. Austin, for example, is home to vast Amazon fulfillment centers, where orders are stored and processed 24/7. The rail in the exhibition evokes garment conveyor belts, suspended high above eyeline, from which masses of garments are hung, whereas the custom plinths are designed for individual encounters.

**JL:** *You lead upcycling workshops with the public. How do they relate to your practice?*

**ToC:** In my workshops, I invite participants to bring garments they no longer wear, as well as donations from other sources, which we de- and reconstruct into newly wearable or display pieces. Analyzing the garments whilst taking them apart, looking at tags and the production process and materials that went into the garment, we also consider reasons why the person who brought the garment no longer feels like wearing it. We then start the process of reconstruction in an immediate and improvised way. The workshops center around the age-old

tradition of singing and chatting whilst doing crafts, often a practice among groups of women performing repetitive labor involving textiles. Conversations that arise are as important as the final outcome. The aim is to turn common structures of production into collective conversation and collaboration, reclaiming agency as “consumers” by altering mass produced garments and accessories.

**Tenant of Culture** is the artistic practice of Hendrickje Schimmel (b. 1990, Arnhem, Netherlands), who lives and works in Amsterdam. She received her MA in Mixed Media from the Royal College of Art, London, and a BA in Womenswear at ArtEZ Hogeschool voor de Kunsten, Zwolle, Netherlands. By disassembling and rebuilding manufactured garments, Tenant of Culture examines ways in which ideological frameworks and power structures materialize in methods of production, circulation, and marketing of apparel. Materials used in her textile assemblages are sourced from various stages of the production cycle, as well as secondary-use platforms and refuse. She recognizes commodities not only as the result of a standardized 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. Select solo shows include Galerie Fons Welters, Amsterdam (2024); Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp (2023); Soft Opening, London (2023); Camden Art Centre, London (2022); Kunstverein Dresden (2021). Her work was in the 2023 British Textile Biennial and is in the collections of The Fries Museum, Leeuwarden; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; among others. In 2021, she was awarded the Frieze Camden Art Centre Emerging Artist Prize. Her first monograph, co-published by Soft Opening and Charles Asprey, was awarded the Swiss Most Beautiful Book Award (2020).

**Julie Le** is Assistant Curator at The Contemporary Austin.





Tenant of Culture, *Dry Fit (Series)* (detail), 2022. Recycled outerwear and sportswear, elastic, toggles, thread, and fabric. 157 1/2 x 130 inches. Image courtesy the artist and Galerie Fons Welters, Amsterdam. Photograph by Kristien Daem.