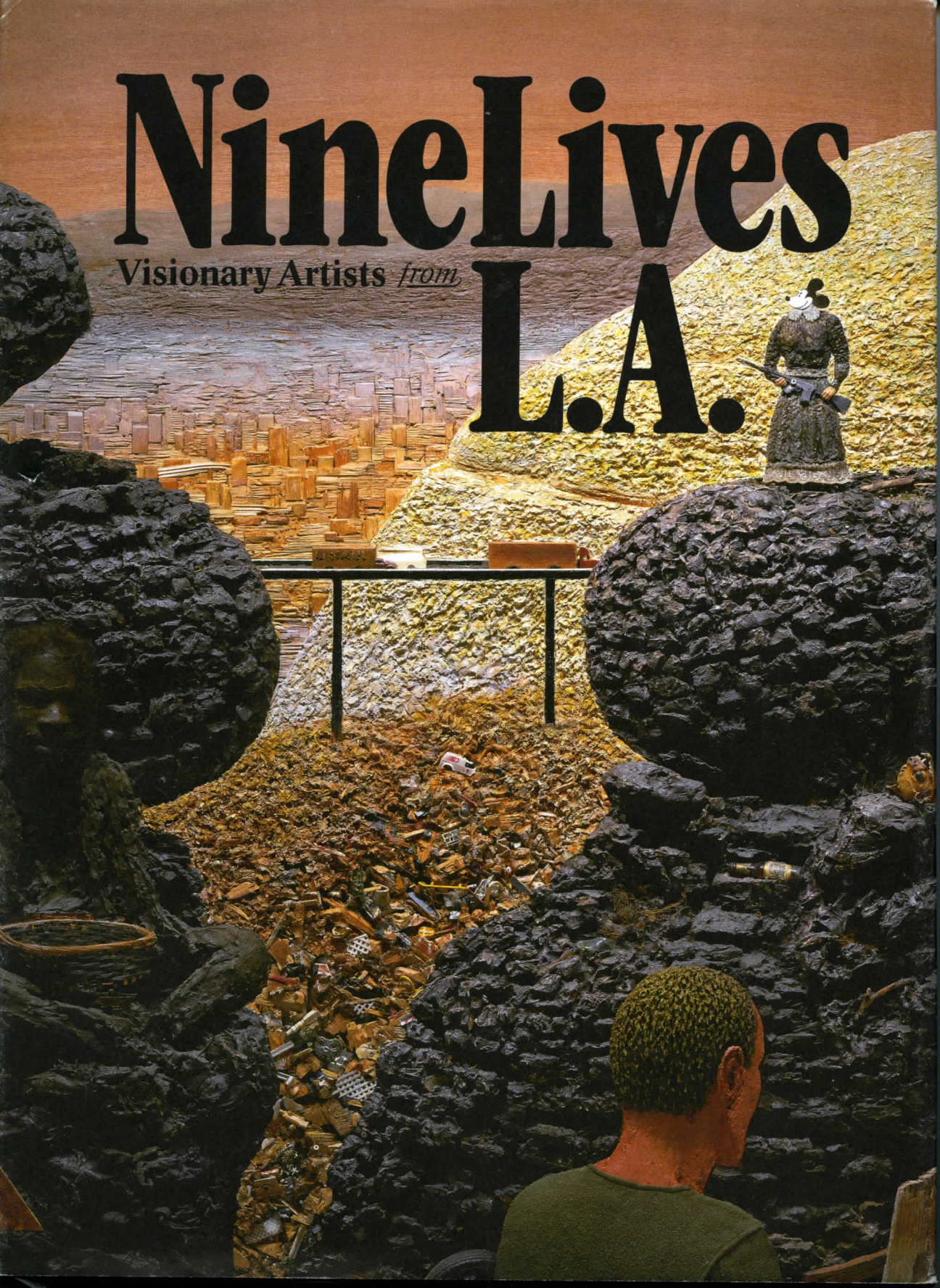


Nine Lives

Visionary Artists *from* **L.A.**



Lisa Anne Auerbach



Independent Woman, 2006. Ultrachrome print. 7 1/4 x 18 in. (18.4 x 45.7 cm). Courtesy the artist and Gavlak, West Palm Beach, Florida.

I just suck the world in through a straw and shit it out in a million different ways. I am such a product of my environment, of what's around me. I am just a mollusk.

—Lisa Anne Auerbach¹

Lisa Anne Auerbach's work makes you laugh and gets you to think about things you probably would never have even considered if it weren't for her provocations. She is incredibly prolific, producing countless works in a multitude of media, from knitting to photography to publishing and more—she even makes soap. She's a shining example of the do-it-yourself approach to life. She transitions naturally from one craft to another, motivated by frugality and a belief that it isn't necessary to have money to make things. Like an Energizer bunny, she is always active, making and doing something. "I am interested in people taking the reins, making their own reality, changing their own world, and thereby changing everyone's world."

Auerbach happened upon knitting almost accidentally. When she graduated from school, she lost access to a darkroom, so she couldn't make color photographs as easily anymore. She obsessed over custom-knit sweaters that Rick Nielsen, lead guitarist of Cheap Trick, wore. "Nielsen's sweaters were like T-shirts, but because they were sweaters, they were more serious, more urgent, more meaningful." Some simply displayed the band's name, and others had ridiculous sayings, such as "Don't Steal My Girlfriend." She explains: "Cheap Trick is the whole reason I started making sweaters in the first place. I wanted to knit so I could make myself a customized Cheap Trick sweater. Their music was catchy, but I cared more about their costumes and personas."² So Auerbach checked out some knitting books from the library and taught herself to knit. Her second sweater (*Sandy Koufax Sweater*, 1996) is a simple blue cardigan bearing a huge white Star of David on the back. She photographed herself modeling the sweater wearing a short white latex tennis skirt, standing on a forklift, her back toward the camera to show off the star. This started an ongoing series of photographs in which she models her knitwear, and she can't help but spice things up with saucy catalog poses. For her it's logical, motivated by necessity rather than vanity—she's there and free, so why not use herself as the model?

Auerbach has co-opted the traditional female craft of knitting and turned it into a tool for wry, pointed political messages. One knit skirt and sweater set looks innocuous, until you read the text. On the front: "Did you hear what Bush said when asked about Roe vs. Wade?" And on the reverse: "I don't care how they get out of New Orleans." Knitted into the body of another sweater is a design that resembles a belt of explosives that might be worn by a suicide bomber, but airport security doesn't even take a second look—to them it's another reindeer or lamb sweater that Grandma made. Auerbach knows how easy it is to take things for granted, and she puts these messages out into the world in a subtle, almost subliminal fashion that slowly penetrates our consciousness. She's gently prodding and poking at a complacent public: "I like to convince people gently, lure them into seeing things

from my perspective, and change the world slowly, virally." With her knit works, Auerbach has entered into an entire subculture of knitting fanatics. She is incredibly prolific and has made nearly one hundred sweaters to date.

For a series of self-portrait photographs (without the knit products) Auerbach plays quirky and traditional female characters with a humorous twist: she's a housewife greeting the UPS man, a modern-day superhero hoisting a rifle, or a mannequin in a sex doll factory. She's like the Tina Fey of the art world—totally deadpan, cute, and spot-on with her impressions. She began posing for photos when she and fellow artist Daniel Marlos worked on slide mounting and copy work at the photo lab of the Griffith Observatory and published a zine called *The Casual Observer*. They took turns being on the cover, adopting a stiff but casual, cheeky but upstanding style for the publication. The cover-girl persona then morphed into a naughty version. For the cover of an unpublished zine called *Knit & Shit*, she's sitting on a toilet knitting; for her biking zine, *Saddlesore*, we see her sexily lying in the dirt next to her bike after a fall, with the cover line: "Oops, I did it again." Another issue features Auerbach in a hilarious postcoital embrace, under a sheet with her bicycle.

Writing is also a major component of Auerbach's practice. She edits several Web sites with blogs and regular project updates.³ In the mid-1990s she began reviewing porn for an industry trade magazine. She went in thinking it would be the greatest opportunity ever to make the best art about porn. But it was actually less exciting than she thought it would be. She lost interest in the idea of making art about porn; it became more of a side job or an anthropological experiment. She did, however, love going to totally nondescript locations and "finding five bored nude women playing Twister, talking about body hair in some master bedroom of a rented house. It helped me to imagine that behind every boring facade there is something going on that you might never expect." Auerbach also wrote for ski and art magazines. "I felt like I was living in some holy triumvirate of culture." She'd bring parts of each industry together, sharing porn with the skiers and impressing the art world with her porn experience. "I loved seeing how all three worlds were nearly identical; people throwing themselves literally into their work, physically, in terms of skiers and porn stars, but artists too, to a certain extent, becoming a public persona, putting themselves out there in their work. And all three perceived of their world as the center of the universe. They had their own magazines, their own conventions, their own superstars." Auerbach soon realized that she preferred the independence of her self-published zines and journals, even though the readership is smaller. She hasn't turned her back entirely on mainstream media, though; she recently published an article about tract publishing in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*.

Auerbach is consumed by the blend of the banality of everyday life and curious humor, "especially humor combined with anger or humor combined with the everyday or humor combined with anger and the everyday." She uses humor to disarm and seduce: "Humor is the spoonful of sugar that helps the medicine go down. If you prattle on about

something complex, everyone falls asleep, but if you make a joke about it, maybe they'll actually pause to think." Auerbach has already lived more than nine lives, and she doesn't seem to be slowing down at all. If her work wasn't so funny and relevant and engaging, it might make you feel lazy.

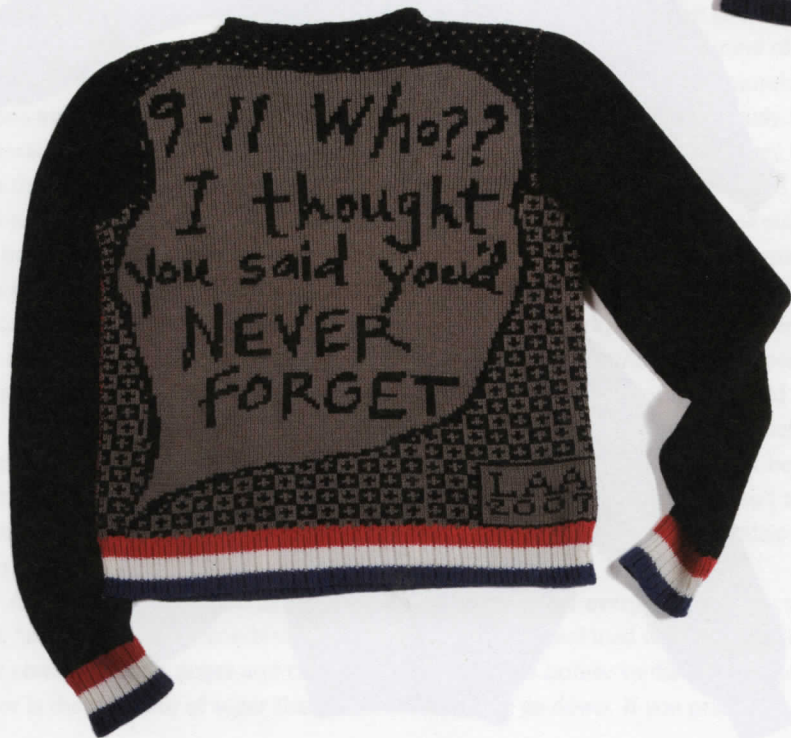
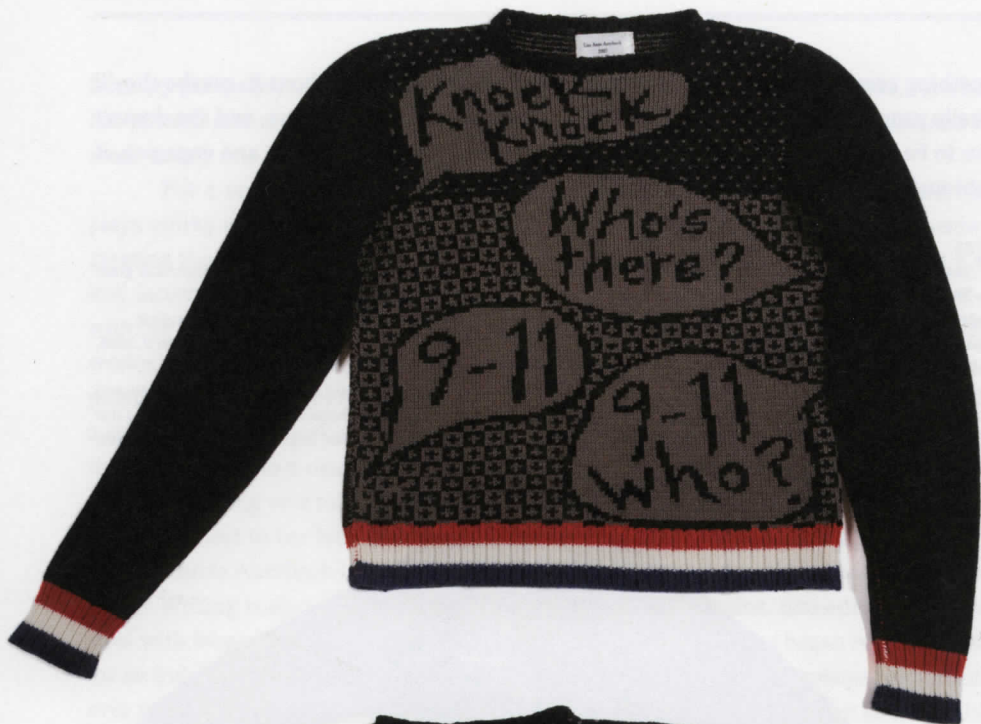
NOTES

Lisa Anne Auerbach's projects for this exhibition were funded in part through the Artists' Resource for Completion grant from The Durfee Foundation.

1. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the artist are from conversations or e-mail correspondence with the author.
2. Lisa Anne Auerbach, "I Want You to Want Me on Wilshire," *The Little Red Blog of Revolutionary Knitting*, November 2, 2006, <http://stealthissweater.blogspot.com/2006/11/i-want-you-to-want-me-on-wilshire.html>.
3. Auerbach's Web projects include an artist's site (<http://www.lisaanneauerbach.com/>), *The Little Red Blog of Revolutionary Knitting* (<http://stealthissweater.blogspot.com/>), and *The Tract House* (<http://www.thetracthouse.com/>), as well as others that she has contributed to (<http://www.knittersforkerry.com>, <http://www.highdeserttestsites.com>, <http://www.hamburgerla.com>, <http://www.whatsthatbug.com>, and <http://www.americanhomebody.com>).



Sandy Koufax Sweater, 1996. Wool and mohair. Medium. Courtesy the artist and Gavlak, West Palm Beach, Florida.





When there's nothing left to burn, you've got to set yourself on fire, 2007. Merino wool. Medium. Courtesy the artist and Gavlak, West Palm Beach, Florida.



SADDLESORE

Small adventures in the big city

SSI

SADDLESORE



SADDLESORE



SADDLESORE



Opposite: Lisa Anne Auerbach and Chris Buck.

Cover of *SaddleSore #1*, 2004. Courtesy the artist and Gavlak, West Palm Beach, Florida.

Top left: Lisa Anne Auerbach and Daniel Marlos.

Cover of *SaddleSore #2*, 2005. Courtesy the artist and Gavlak, West Palm Beach, Florida.

Top right: Lisa Anne Auerbach and Daniel Marlos.

Cover of *SaddleSore #3*, 2006. Courtesy the artist and Gavlak, West Palm Beach, Florida.

Bottom left: Cover of *SaddleSore #4*, 2007. Courtesy the artist and Gavlak, West Palm Beach, Florida.

Bottom right: *SaddleSore Patch*, 2005. Fabric. 3 x 3 in. (7.6 x 7.6 cm). Courtesy the artist and Gavlak, West Palm Beach, Florida.

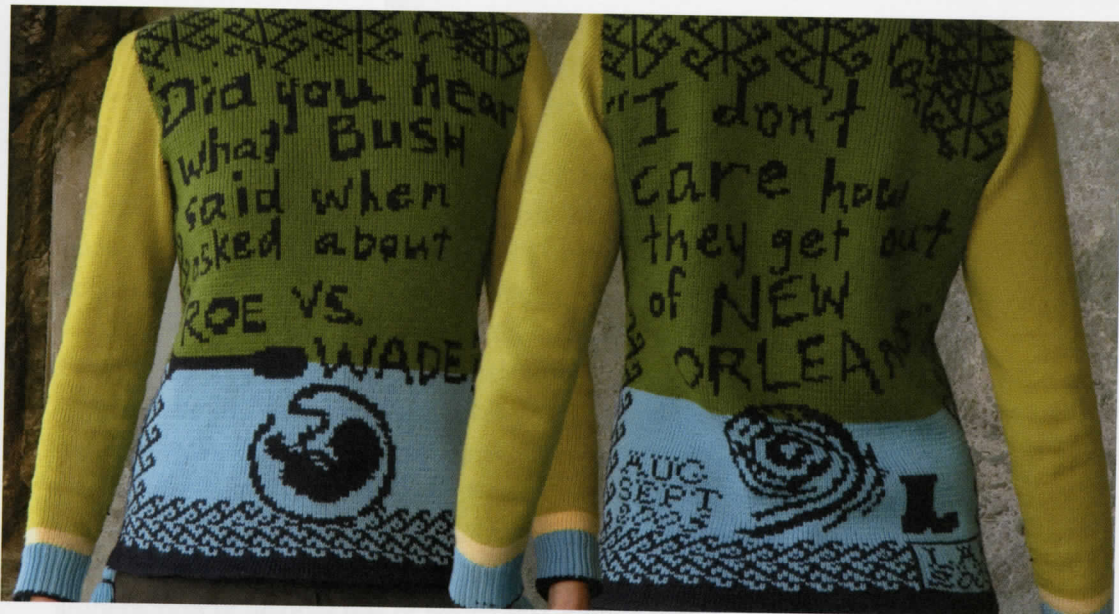




Lisa Anne Auerbach and Daniel Marlos. *December*, from *American Homebody "Sweetheart" Calendar 2001–2002, 2001/2008*.
Ultrachrome print. 16 1/2 x 16 1/2 in. (41.9 x 41.9 cm). Courtesy the artist and Gavlak, West Palm Beach, Florida.



Cookie Monster, 2007. Chromogenic print. 20 x 16 in. (50.8 x 40.6 cm). Courtesy the artist and Gavlak, West Palm Beach, Florida.



would die, he thought without any interest for me or cooperation. In the final stage of his breathing—the last's last moments—by the morning light which entered the bedroom, he had a look of surprise, which his painful and almost unbearable eyes could not see the day which might be called the anniversary of his death. He had a look of surprise, of something well back and very faint—the opposite of the look which started with the white village buildings in the road above green or blue by the rough spotted columns of cypress, but the legend of various families, whose names—names and faces and even names were all—and families in back corners of the United States and of America and of the world whose lives of conflict and the lives and the lives had never existed.

He didn't want to die. He never wanted to die because it was wrong, but only because he had the long long and too steady for that, but because he had too much more about the thing and years, he came from the long-still arrival the thirty-four years ago when at fourteen he had found the brainstem of a weathered freight train, the little red Nebraska town named its possessed wife, his father's name, and statistics—a town to be sure, but only in the sense that was shadowed by the object which kept it. It was still harder than he had ever known it at five and six—the projected and increased shadow of a small outpost of resistance against the immense condition of the place where his father, the living one, had been led to easy to bring water during the six days between those whose shadows in spring

Did You Hear What Bush Said When Asked about Roe vs. Wade? 2005. Wool. Dimensions variable. Beth Rudin DeWoody; courtesy the artist and Gavlak, West Palm Beach, Florida.