



Fenced In, Kept Out

The politics of **Lacey Jane Roberts'** sculpture *We couldn't get in. We couldn't get out.* may seem obvious at first. Her classic chain-link and concertina wire structure automatically begs the question of any fence: who or what is being kept out?

But this fence's sculptural presence is about another kind of barrier. "Physical boundaries are a lot less scary than the invisible boundaries we stay within in order to control ourselves and control others," Roberts says.

Prior to embarking on what turned out to be a yearlong project, this San Francisco resident created hand-knit artwork that explored less obvious boundaries, specifically those relating to gender and queerness.

Her 10-foot-high by 20-foot-long fence is a more overt statement, with its exaggerated features leaning toward campy. Its amplified use of pink is Roberts' commentary on culturally prescribed femininity, while its overall comic effect undermines the typically serious purpose of fences.

To make the fence, Roberts and a crew of her

friends hand-cranked more than 300 skeins of yarn on a 1970s Mattel Barbie Knit Magic and other children's knitting machines ordered online. The resulting strands of 15-foot-long yarn tubes were threaded with wire to form the zigzagging fence pattern. "I wanted to over-perform the craft element in order to emphasize that it's entirely handmade," the artist explains.

Since every border is read in context — whether it's the Berlin Wall, Israel and Palestine, or the U.S.-Mexican border — the artist was curious to see if people would trespass against a floppy, neon-pink fence. Most people did not even ask to pass — not even in cars. At an art opening, people had conversations through the fence, "which was really creepy."

Roberts installed it in San Francisco's famed, mural-filled Clarion Alley, where it stayed for a day. "What side of the fence is important?" she wonders. It depends on who built it.

—Katie Kurtz

» **Boundary-Busting Knitting:** laceyjane.com