



**STEFANIE SCHNEIDER**  
*California's "extreme colors" and "destroyed dreams," she says, influence "OK Corral." People "come with this one suitcase and think they're going to make it, and hardly anyone will."*



Susan Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects

# In L.A. for art's sake

They came, they saw, they created. What brought these four artists and a new wave of émigrés from around the world to Southern California? (Hint: It wasn't just the palm trees and sunny weather.)

By Louise Roug, Times Staff Writer

Four artists -- Sone, photographers Karin Apollonia Müller and Stefanie Schneider from Germany, as well as Austrian-Italian painter Hubert Schmalix -- are part of the new émigré wave. They found L.A. in different ways, but they stayed because the fit is just right. For them, Los Angeles is, at the least, a muse; at the most, their central subject. They like the light, the space. And then there's the weather.

## She's seen the light

Without Los Angeles, Stefanie Schneider wouldn't be an artist.

Art school in Germany had destroyed her interest in photography. Contemporary German photography "is not very emotional. It's very strict," she says. And if you work outside that aesthetic, "people kind of make fun of you."

She came to L.A. six years ago to help her cinematographer boyfriend produce a film. Infatuated with the space, color and light, she picked up an old Polaroid camera.

It's both the idea and actuality of Southern California that attract the 34-year-old artist. "The American West that you grew up with on TV, it's there and you can see it," she says. The dream of the West, and the nightmare, are primary elements in her large-scale color photographs.

All her work is shot in Los Angeles or the desert.

"It seems much brighter," she says of the Southern California light, by phone from Berlin, where she develops her oversized Polaroids.

"For a European it's very different. The desert has so much space, it's so clean, and the colors are clear and brilliant. In Europe, I couldn't do this work." In Germany, she says, "the main color is gray"

And, whereas Europe is sturdy, lasting centuries, Schneider sees impermanence in her adopted city.

"Tomorrow, everything can be gone. Somehow, I like it. It doesn't make people so arrogant. I guess there's a little bit of fear, always."

Getting a gallery in L.A. was as accidental as starting to shoot again. At a party of German émigrés she met a former ambassador who with Susanne Vielmetter of Los Angeles Projects was planning an exhibition of work by L.A.-based German artists. She is now represented by Vielmetter.

Schneider likes California's "might-be happy endings, the deserts and blue skies, magic hour and, of course, the palm trees, not natural to the place," she writes via e-mail. "I guess place means everything to me."

Schneider spends six to eight weeks every year in Europe, where it's more affordable to develop and print her images and where she's represented by two galleries.

"L.A. is home, here is just the working condition -- the post-production," she says of Berlin. "I never felt comfortable in Germany. Everything has to be a certain way."

In Los Angeles, "nobody cares, and you're free," she says. "You leave the plane and you start breathing."

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