

ALLISON SCHULNIK AT MARK MOORE GALLERY



Man With Cats (2009)

Art Around Town

by Christopher Miles

all her cartoon-ness, Schulnik manages to pull off a feat that often eludes more academic painters, that of delivering a sense of bodies — whether we're talking about people or animals, or the petals and stems of flowers — occupying space, negotiating the tensions, compressions and capacities of their own physical beings, and holding up under gravity. Schulnik also seems to think in terms of constructing a larger narrative, with the collection of paintings offering up scenic backdrops resembling Thomas Kinkadee scenes injected with collagen and doped up on steroids and acid, and a cast of characters — variously including hobos; clowns; people with too many cats; a crusty and explicit nude; emotionally burdened artistic types; goey, Van Gogh-ish flowers; and critters of the sort that claim squatter's rights in your crawl space — that nobody much wants to assemble but in forms you want to look at. The totality of the show is something of a festering, luscious, eroticized train wreck. Through the construction of this milieu, Schulnik creates an additional, unseen but clearly present character, who is the artist she inhabits in the studio — a kind of mannerist/expressionist/pop id whom she's too knowing and coy to give herself over to completely but whom she summons brilliantly. Added treats here are ceramic sculptures that show potential for what Schulnik could do in three dimensions as she gets as comfortable and savvy with formed and fired clay as she clearly is with oil paint and the modeling clay utilized in the show's one actual animation — a terrific artist's video that here is known as *Forest* but which also can be found on YouTube as a music video for the song "Ready, Able," by the band Grizzly Bear. (Look for the video and an interview in *L.A. Weekly's* November 18, 2009, West Coast Sound blog.) Schulnik, who for the last couple of years has been an artist to watch, continues to be so at what seems an exponential rate. More, please.

It comes as little surprise when you learn that Allison Schulnik got her degree (from CalArts) in experimental animation. Her paint — thick as tar but slathered on with a kind of liberty that would make the material expenditures of hot-mop roofers or cake decorators seem puritanical — seems as if you're catching it between stop-action frames, like it's about to creep just a bit in the coming seconds. Such is the result of a method that exploits both the way motion and gesture can be recorded in thick paint — like animal tracks in mud — and the material tolerances of the paint itself. Schulnik pushes the paint so far that its sagging under its own weight becomes both a signature of her process and an embodiment of what seems an odd combination of entropy and liveliness. Meanwhile, the figures in her paintings, despite their often puffy, abbreviated and caricatured anatomy, have a real sense of movement about them that can only come from an artist who has spent a lot of time looking at, and thinking about, how bodies and things actually move in the world. In

MARK MOORE GALLERY

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