

**AROUND THE GALLERIES**

DAVID PAGEL



Mark Moore Gallery

**ALLISON SCHULNIK:** "Hobo With Bird" shows the artist's penchant for slathering on paint with abandon.

## Successes that are hard won

The cast of characters in **Allison Schulnik's** messy paintings comes from society's underbelly: hobos, clowns, losers and vermin.

Such out-of-luck figures have been favored subjects by artists for several centuries, forming the core of much gritty Realism, dreamy Romanticism and angst-addled Expressionism.

Schulnik is at her best when her gooey paintings tap into that history without coming off as mannered rehashes — per-

fectly competent compositions that hit all the right notes but do not make their own music. It's a tough task, and the young L.A. artist manages it admirably in her second solo show at Mark Moore Gallery, where the hits outnumber the misses.

Schulnik piles on paint with abandon, slathering it on thickly and vigorously, like nobody's business.

She shifts scale like a pro, going from page-size pictures of flower-filled vases to larger-than-life-size portraits and landscapes that measure more than 7-by-11 feet.

And she crafts loosely realistic animals, a raccoon and two opossums in ceramic and porcelain.

Her best works feel hard-won, struggled over, resolved. "Man With Cats," "Hobo With Bird," "Black Monkeys," "Red Flowers #3" and "Raku Raccoon" make vulnerability, trepidation and doom palpable. These powerfully subjective states correspond to the way her works have been painted: urgently, unself-consciously, even desperately.

In contrast, Schulnik's duds seem to have been tossed off, the result of motions gone through mechanically, without the emotions being awoken.

Despite its self-conscious grubbiness, "Klaus #2" feels like a paint-by-numbers kit; "White Possum" comes off as cutesy; "Rug Girl" tries too hard; and "White Flowers #2" looks fussed over.

In the back gallery, a stop-action animated video commissioned by the band Grizzly Bear strikes just the right note: light-handed and tragic, endearing and heart wrenching, dreamy and unsentimental. It shows Schulnik to be an artist worth watching, whose best work is yet to come.

**Mark Moore Gallery**, 2525 Michigan Ave., Bergamot Station, Santa Monica, (310) 453-3031, through Feb. 6. Closed Sundays and Mondays. [www.markmooregallery.com](http://www.markmooregallery.com)