

Drawn in, only to be repulsed

"Salty Air," Allison Schulnik's third solo show at Mark Moore Gallery, is an indiscriminate extravaganza that shows the L.A. artist at her very best and very worst.

The difference between Schulnik's stop-motion movie and her paintings of ugly mermaids and ghoulish sailors is so extreme that it seems her talents are unequally distributed between moving and still images. But that is not the case. Six shell-shaped sculptures, seven mid-size still lifes and several small

gouaches reveal that Schulnik's capacity to pit attraction against repulsion is not limited to "Mound," her melancholic movie in which lumps of clay come to life and turn to mush, their brief life spans eliciting sympathies that resonate long after the credits roll.

Schulnik's still lifes stand out because of their emotional ambivalence. The way they are painted, perfectly blending curdled creepiness and lascivious deliciousness, matches their subjects: glistening fish flesh, slick conch shells and freshly cut flowers, all of whose fragrant sumptuousness is destined to go bad before long.

Such intimations of mortality play no part in Schulnik's three big paintings of wizened sailors and five big paintings of crone-faced mermaids, two of whom have sprouted human legs, all the better to display their genitals. While Schulnik paints sailors in a way that maintains some scrap of dignity, she paints mermaids as if shooting fish in a barrel. That's not a particularly fan-friendly activity, nor a very good model for art-making.

Mark Moore Gallery, 5790 Washington Blvd., (310) 453-3031, through July 7. Closed Sundays and Mondays.
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