

Eager for Allison Schulnik at ZieherSmith

by GRACE MOSS on 01/14/2014



ZieherSmith gallery was buzzing with conversation and life when we walked in between the two live sets commissioned to accompany **Allison Schulnik's** latest stop-motion claymation film, *Eager*. The artist had a strong presence at the opening, moving about the room throughout the night, speaking with a number of guests and fielding all sorts of questions. (For instance, I learned that the classic podiums and the marble-top table upon which *Boneless Horse* was placed were sourced from an antique shop.) She was simply elegant, wearing a light pink chiffon dress that reached the floor, creating a fairly stark contrast to her deeply dark and serious works on display that night.

The walls, and parts of the floor, were filled with a cohesive collection that referenced her film in some manner. In a variety of mediums around the room, Schulnik exposed a yearning for life in all of her subjects, in a visceral and commanding way, her work draws you in, begging you to linger in front of pieces such as *St. Louis Man*, who quite literally rises off the canvas, his nose a palpable bulb at least an inch off the canvas, in order to be closer to the living. He faces the viewing room for the film, mere curtains and a throng of people between him and the beautiful procession of life that played over and over on the screen. An iteration of the nature surrounding the *St. Louis Man* can be found in the film. Her other subjects, several of which come straight from the film, are eager for life as well. The small men climbing on and around the flower sculptures may well be there to investigate the origins of life, examining the colors that drip down the sides of the flowers, thick with emotion and paint. The blue specters seen in the film have been captured on paper and reach out to the viewer, their souls presented stark naked.

In her film, Schulnik further explores the concepts of life and death through shifting forms: the absent faces of the dancers in the film contort from flowers to *vagina dentata* and more. The circle of life can be seen in the gathering of bodily forms to create one being who is capable of riding the boneless horse. This horse is seen in the gallery, exuberant and nearing ecstasy, but bridled by his shoes, domesticated, and therefore stuck between raw pain and pleasure—something that can be seen in his blank black eyes. Schulnik shows her breadth of experience in all sorts of mediums: paintings both in oil and gouache, ceramic and porcelain sculptures, and of course film, for which she created a choreography for her subjects that she then brought to life in order to dance to a piece of music commissioned specifically for this 8-minute short, which is truly the shining star of this solo exhibit.

The artist includes herself in the last minute or so of the film, dancing in a manner that hints at Pina Bausch, what with the use of light and presence of nature, which was felt throughout the entire exhibition. Her influences show up again in the smiling faces of the flowers who then eat each other: a warped interpretation of Disney's *Fantasia*, which Schulnik's former teacher helped to animate.

Schulnik's show comes to the viewer with a sort of personal anonymity; she presents forms with basic, throwaway names like *Blue Dancer #3*, as if this weren't a representation of a soul gasping for life. The whole experience of the exhibit is a bodily one, one based in nature that has returned to the beginnings of life to examine what happens there. The searching, the yearning for life all come from vulnerability—without such openness, the eagerness would go unnoticed.

I have to say, I'm curious where all this is coming from and where it might lead—and I imagine we'll find out, because as the artist told me herself, she has "no secrets."

Source: <http://artefuse.com/eager-for-allison-schulnik-at-zieherSmith/>