

The Magazine of California Institute of the Arts | Spring/Summer 2012

calARTS



Allison Schulnik

(Film/Video BFA 00), Artist, Filmmaker

"My fixation on rejects and misfits is not intended to exploit deficiencies," says Allison Schulnik of the enigmatic, forlorn, lumpish—yet markedly sensuous—figures that populate her work, alternately in paintings, stop-motion animated films, sculptures and drawings. "I'm trying to find valor in adversity," she declares.

"Whether they're hobo clowns, misshapen animals or alien beasts, the characters usually have an awkward humanity," Schulnik explains. "I like to blend earthly fact, blatant fiction, and lots of oil paint and clay to form tragedy, farce, and raw, dark beauty. Sometimes it's capturing an otherworldly buffoonery, and other times it's presenting a down-to-earth dignified moment."

Having arrived at CalArts with a background in painting, as well as some dance, she began taking cues from films, cartoons, comics and music as she worked closely with three of CalArts' most venerated, beloved animation faculty—Jules Engel, Mike Mitchell and Corny Cole. "They were the most amazing people, and the best teachers for me," she says, recalling how her distinctive style of figuration, using thick, goopy paint and robustly handled clay, took on more confident, evocative shapes across a variety of media. "I've been making the characters in different media and then deciding what works the best visually."

After graduating, Schulnik took jobs at small animation studios and did not make a film for another eight years. By 2007, finding little satisfaction in making work aimed at small children, she decided to turn

full-time to the churning of her own idiosyncratic imagination. Since then, while her stop-motion claymations have been selected by festivals in Los Angeles, Ann Arbor, Melbourne and elsewhere, her output has been shown primarily in galleries and museums in the U.S. and Europe. "I like exhibiting the paintings and the films together," Schulnik says, "to create a sense of conversation between the two."

The artist's latest claymation, *Mound*, was the centerpiece of a one-person show last fall at ZieherSmith in New York. It also screened last month at LACMA in connection with *In Wonderland: The Surrealist Adventures of Women Artists in Mexico and the United States*. "*Mound* is a celebration of the moving painting, featuring animation as a very physical macabre dance," she says. "Like all of my videos, it's a purist hand-made claymation, with all the effects done in-camera."

Schulnik's current gallery show is on view through July 7 at Mark Moore Gallery in Culver City.

