

Fitzgerald, Shannon. "Allison Schulnik" Excerpt from *The Protagonist: Narrative & Animation* exhibition catalog. Rochester Art Center, Rochester, MN. May 17 – August 25, 2013.



Allison Schulnik, *Hobo Clown*, 2008, stop motion video, 5:05 minutes (still).  
Courtesy of Mark Moore Gallery, Culver City, CA.

## ALLISON SCHULNIK

b. San Diego, 1978; lives and works in Los Angeles, CA

With cunning intelligence and an enchanting imagination, Allison Schulnik merges the materials and concepts behind painting, sculpture, theatre, and animation to create whimsically dark narratives whose protagonists (in clay) mine individual and collective human emotion and experiences. In her most recent film, *Mound*, she creates an eerily, yet optimistic, other-worldly setting for which a melodic choreographed tale about human and non-human metamorphosis, transition, and a journey unfurls. Featuring over 100 hand-sculpted and sewn puppets, expressive claymation adroitness, metaphor-rich music, and accompanied by Scott Walker's song *It's Raining Today*, a splendid melancholic band of wanderers—all featuring her now trademark obsessive globs, drips and gooey gestures—convene, converge, and seamlessly morph. As the lyrics intone "we repeat our dreams for someone new," an undeniable sense of longing pervades this short film.

Equally engaging, is Schulnik's animation short film *Hobo Clown*. She presents a painterly and highly expressive solitary figure as a sad, rejected, and lonely nomad whose range of emotions, bodily grace, and disposition—heightened by the vagabond's fashion sensibility and penchant for flowers—manages to evoke empathy and a peculiar joy. The desolate sojourn, accompanied by music by the Indie-rock band Grizzly Bear, takes on a quiet heroic quality as the desire for human connectivity and acceptance elicits a sympathetic fondness and eventual hope for the isolated protagonist.

Accompanying the films are two paintings pushing scale and materiality with two solitary hobo, clown protagonists. Isolated as singular subject, each figure is infused with spirit and character by virtue of the heaps of expressive paint built up and often formed by hand in sculptural bas-relief, with immense color and adorned with blossoms, caked-face, and costume.