



Allison Schulnik: *Mound*
Zieher Smith
Through December 17, 2011

On May 5th they isolated the strain of Virus HC-35, which became known as The Flu. On April 1st President Manson declared a State of Emergency, cleared the protesters from Zapruder Park, and issued orders for the Continuous Curfew. And the deaths came in millions. By June the food had run out, and we began to hunt the neighbors. By July the neighbors had run out, and we stayed confined to the 69th floor. Two days ago we ate Amelie. Now Katya is sitting in the living room, counting the last of the drugs on the table. Enough Neroin and Serafem to last only one person for the rest of the month.

“You know, darling,” I say, “You are very beautiful. I am seriously considering turning you into a lampshade.” Katya’s dark eyes narrow. “Don’t be silly,” she says, “we don’t have electricity.” The headaches are continuous because of the recycled air and hunger. I have not had my period in three months. “It’s not the side effects of the cocaine,” I say, with something like affection, “I’m thinking that it must be love.” Katya looks up, her eyes bright, smiling. She whispers, “This ain’t rock and roll. This is genocide.”

Offred mused, in her *Handmaid’s Tale*, that the art of the future would resemble nothing so much as the art of the past. (Fred had brownish, academic portraits hanging in his private office.) Maybe. But the art of the future will likely, more or less, resemble the art of the future. Allison Schulnik makes a compelling argument for what that future art might look like.

In her paintings and sculptures (at Zieher Smith) she presents a worn, derelict population of clowns in *Idyllwild* (2011). (Picture the psycho clowns painted by Red Buttons meeting the clown paintings of psycho John Wayne Gacy.) This is set amongst half-starved, rabid-looking animals, such as *Dempster* (2010) -- mangy and hissing -- and *Standing Gin #3* (2011) -- with black, mutant eyes staring menacingly -- as well as flowers, wilted and irradiated, arranged in still lifes. *Very still lifes*. Like the floral arrangements at some mass funeral or the bouquets left outside tenement playgrounds or doorsteps commemorating soon-to-be-forgotten victims of the next horrific and mindless urban violence. In Memorium to Identity.

Schulnik writes, “My fixation on these characters is not intended to exploit deficiencies, but to find valor in adversity.” Indeed, that is exactly what makes these dystopian denizens so spot-on for our historic moment. Even now, Lower Manhattan is beginning to resemble Schulnik’s landscape. Filled with hunters and gatherers, waiting for a dirty bomb, a meteor, or a tribe of talking apes. Peopled with people like *Yogurt Eater* (2011) or *Blue Head* (2011). Schulnik depicts these pitiable and potentially virulent creatures that we have already come to know and adds just enough of the unknown to make them more alien still. None of Schulnik’s characters carries any placarded manifesto, but if they did, their message would be very clear: We’re the future. Your future. No future for you. - *Bradley Rubenstein*

Zieher Smith is at 516 West 20th Street, New York, New York.

Pictured: A still from *Mound*.

Mr. Rubenstein is a painter, story teller, and smart culture aficionado.