

Allison Schulnik at Laguna Art Museum (Orange County)

Bruna Massadas

March 2013



Left: Allison Schulnik, *Green-Wood #3*, 2012. Oil on canvas stretched on board, 24 x 30 inches. Courtesy of Private Collection, Miami, FL.

Right: Allison Schulnik, *The Scarecrow (Ray Bolger)*, 2012. Oil on linen, 84 x 68 inches. Courtesy of WEST-SUN CAPITAL Art Collection, Montreal, Canada.

Walking downstairs, I enter a dark room with animated videos of bizarre creatures with big hollow eyes and melting bodies. As these creatures move, they transform. There is death and rebirth at every moment. I somehow empathize with them; I understand their emotions. I am hypnotized by their beauty and strangeness. After a few minutes of being mesmerized, I smell an intoxicating scent of oil paint that comes from a bright room to my right. As I walk into that room, I see two sculptures as well as twelve portrait, landscape, and still life paintings of creatures with similar features as the ones in the videos. Walking into *Ex-Pose: Allison Schulnik* at the Laguna Art Museum is like diving into the underworld.

The excessive amount of paint in **Allison Schulnik's** paintings creates not only a visual experience but also a respiratory one. The paintings become dead bodies -- seeing a painting with gravestones helps me make this association. The large quantity of paint on Schulnik's canvases also gives a sculptural sense to the paintings. The materiality of the paint makes it difficult to identify each painting's composition. The paintings, which are representational, are abstracted by the excess of paint. At times, my eyes adjust to the composition, while, at other times, I can see only chunks of paint. The most unexpected and exciting discovery while seeing these paintings in person is noticing that there are areas with no paint. In some places, the canvas is exposed.

Green is a dominant color in this group of paintings, and when a painting doesn't have a lot of green, it is mostly painted with Halloween colors. I say Halloween colors because the paintings' subject matter suggests an uncanny theme in her work. Schulnik depicts clowns, cemeteries, and weird creatures surrounded by a nature that only these creatures could inhabit. When coming closer to these paintings, I see their colors change. What looked like complementary colors now holds an extensive array of colors; what seems dark and scary becomes colorful and playful.

Experiencing these paintings in person has changed the way I see Schulnik's work. When I looked at reproductions, the paintings appeared to be painted in a grotesque way. Seeing them in person -- smelling their odor, discovering variety on their surfaces, and noticing their shifts in color -- made me recognize their elegance.

Source: <http://www.thefacepainters.org/Allison-Schulnik-at-Laguna-Art-Museum-Orange-County>