

ZIEHERSMITH

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

New York

Allison Schulnik

ZIEHERSMITH

516 West 20th Street

September 8–October 8

Allison Schulnik's previous exhibitions employed theatrical settings to display her stop-motion animations, ceramics, paintings, and drawings. Here, she narrows the focus to her two-dimensional output. Her heavily impastoed narrative paintings, which possess the same physicality and rawness of her works in clay, warrant the attention.

The exhibition's title, "Hoof II," alludes to Schulnik's training as a dancer, as well as to the central role unicorns and centaurs occupy in the show. With their suggestive horns and erections, Schulnik's unicorns are decidedly male, though their eyes are depicted as vaginal forms, perhaps reflecting their carnal desire. Developed from a group of small gouaches made in 2015, her female centaurs are dubbed "centaurettes," a term likely borrowed from Disney's 1940 film *Fantasia*, a clear touchstone for Schulnik's subversive and darkly erotic vision. Two of the show's largest paintings—despite their bucolic settings and creamy, pastel palettes—are violent, salacious . . . qualities patently un-unicorn-like. In *Two Long Unicorns*, 2016, a pair of these battle-scarred creatures are entwined in vicious combat; while in *Centaurette and Unicorn* (both 2016), the latter poses victoriously over the defeated former, who is prostrated across a lush forest floor, with an uneasy crowd of plants and critters taking in the scene.

Gin #13 and *Lady* (both 2016), two bewitching self-portraits painted so thickly that the figures physically emerge from their nocturnal backgrounds, cast the artist as conjurer of these tableaux. If the spotlit drama of Schulnik's prior installations immersed the viewer within her mythic realm, here we are spectators, like the sylvan gawkers—frightened, but enchanted



Allison Schulnik, *Two Long Unicorns*, 2016, oil on linen, 100 x 78".

— Chris Murtha