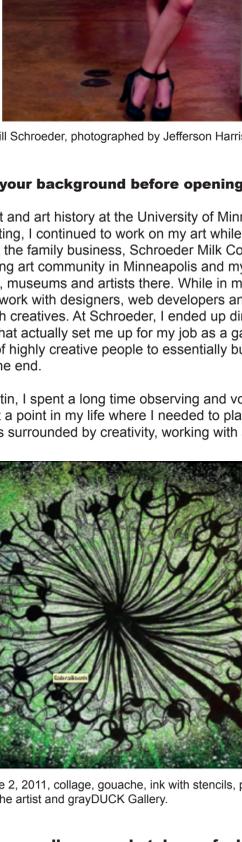




By: New American Paintings
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HEART TO ART: JILL SCHROEDER OF GRAYDUCK GALLERY

When I relocated to Austin from New York City this summer, I became inextricably attracted to grayDUCK Gallery and its consummate Austin vibe. Its location south of Town Lake puts the gallery in walking distance from "Keep Austin Weird" South Congress, and it shares a Zip Code with Torchy's Tacos and indie record store End of an Ear — i.e. Austin all the way. Then there is grayDUCK's rigorous monthly exhibition schedule and its strong roster of local artists. I met with Jill Schroeder, owner and director of grayDUCK, to discuss the gallery's unique presence and her goals for the future. — Brian Fee, Austin Contributor



Jill Schroeder, photographed by Jefferson Harris

Brian Fee: What was your background before opening the gallery?

Jill Schroeder: I studied art and art history at the University of Minnesota with an emphasis in photography. After graduating, I continued to work on my art while also pursuing a job in branding and marketing at the family business, Schroeder Milk Co. Through my artwork, I was exposed to the flourishing art community in Minneapolis and my view of art will always be influenced by the galleries, museums and artists there. While in my branding and marketing job I was lucky enough to work with designers, web developers and writers and learned that I love the collaboration with creatives. At Schroeder, I ended up directing a couple bigger branding projects. I think that actually set me up for my job as a gallerist; I got to bring together different groups of highly creative people to essentially build a product that everyone could be proud of in the end.

When I came down to Austin, I spent a long time observing and volunteering in the art community here. Also, I was at a point in my life where I needed to plan my next step. I knew that I wanted to spend my days surrounded by creativity, working with artists.



Sabra Booth | schwartzte Blume 2, 2011, collage, gouache, ink with stencils, pen & ink on Canson paper, 46 1/2 x 36 3/4 inches. Courtesy the artist and grayDUCK Gallery.

BF: grayDUCK is a young gallery, so what do you feel is its role as an exhibiting space, and your role as gallerist and curatorial eye, in Austin's art scene and beyond?

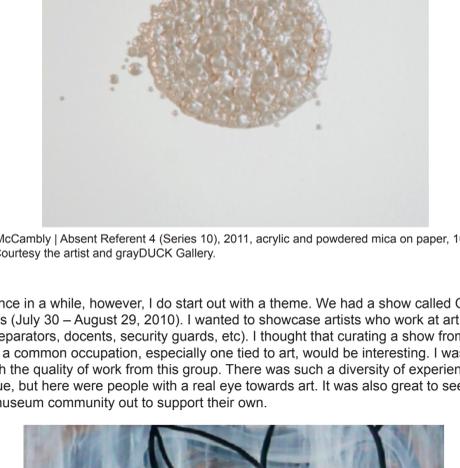
JS: I'm trying to fill a space between DIY, artist-run spaces and high-end, exclusive galleries here in Austin. Giving local artists a place to show their work is grayDUCK's primary goal, but we also like to bring in art from all around the country. We want to expose viewers to what else is going on nationally and give artists from other places the opportunity to show in Central Texas.

Emerging artists may be an over-used term but it's new direction that I show, which may mean: not yet discovered, outsider art, emerging in a new direction. What I'm looking for is solid ideas, excitement and craftsmanship. I want people to know that you could instantly fall in love with a piece, that you don't need to read an entire dissertation to be connected to a work of art. That being said, knowing more about what you're looking at gives the viewer more perspective. And there's always a story, whether it's about how it was created, why or where, or even with what.



Jennifer Leigh Jones | Kick-wheel, 2010, mixed media on MDF, 49 1/2 x 24 inches. Courtesy the artist and grayDUCK Gallery.

I remember buying my first piece of art and how momentous that was for me. I really believe everyone should be able to own and enjoy art. So, the accessibility of my gallery is an important quality for me. With that of course comes the question of affordability. Art has worth, and it's a difficult task sometimes to convey that to the general public. At the same time, my goal is to make art lovers, and it's impossible to do that if all art is unobtainable to someone living within a budget. I want people to be able to fall in love with a quality piece of art, and take it home.



K.C. Collins (NAP #90) | Shoots & Ladders, 2010, acrylic with enamel, 32 x 24 inches. Courtesy the artist and grayDUCK Gallery.

BF: What sort of planning goes into the gallery's practically 30-day exhibition schedule, and what sort of public reaction have you noticed?

JS: My main goal is to maintain excitement, and openings seem to keep the momentum going. Plus, the more shows I have in a year, the more artists I can show. My favorite part of the job is to meet new artists, see where they produce work and hear all about their process.

I also believe that with each new artist and new show I'm diversifying the gallery's fan base. If people come out to two shows, they're usually hooked. They see how the art changes the space, and that there is so much new work out there. They obviously aren't going to like everything, but being exposed to a broad variety of art makes critical viewers. That's a good thing.

BF: I noticed thematic elements behind grayDUCK's exhibitions, from the materiality in the current show (Pattern Play) to the organic forms in Rock, Paper, Carbon (May 6 – June 19, 2011) to an exploration of objects, and sometimes their summary destruction, in Objectivity (June 24 – July 25, 2010). Do you choose artists specific to themes in mind, and how do these exhibitions manifest?



L. Renee Nunez | Octofloss, 2011, painted cut canvas, 55 x 82 inches. Courtesy the artist and grayDUCK Gallery.

JS: I would say that a theme typically develops after I meet with an artist I want to show. As an example, Dameon Lester submitted his work to me and I was intrigued and wanted to see more. After meeting with Dameon, Renee Nunez came to mind because they work with the same ideas. I knew Renee was working on a new body of work and we met to see if it would be a fit for the show and it was. Now I had a theme, or more like a thread connecting these two artists, but I wanted one more artist to round out the show. I searched through submissions and through references from artists I've shown in the past with this thread in mind and eventually approached Jessica McCambly who I feel is a great fit for the show.



Jessica McCambly | Absent Referent 4 (Series 10), 2011, acrylic and powdered mica on paper, 10 x 10 inches. Courtesy the artist and grayDUCK Gallery.

Every once in a while, however, I do start out with a theme. We had a show called Closed Mondays (July 30 – August 29, 2010). I wanted to showcase artists who work at art museums (preparators, docents, security guards, etc). I thought that curating a show from the basis of a common occupation, especially one tied to art, would be interesting. I was bowled over with the quality of work from this group. There was such a diversity of experience and technique, but here were people with a real eye towards art. It was also great to see the whole museum community out to support their own.

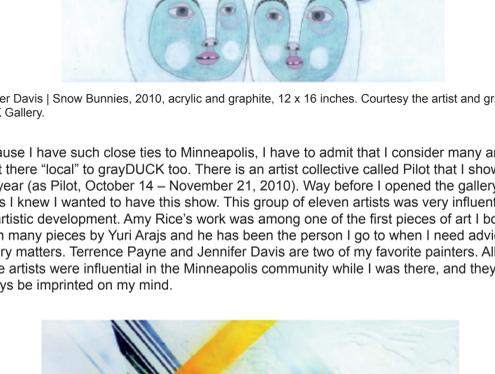


Cassandra Smith | Inevitable Results of Life ..., 2010, oil on canvas, 60 x 48 inches. Courtesy the artist and grayDUCK Gallery.

BF: There were collaborative works between exhibiting artists in grayDUCK's past two exhibitions, Candy Cornbread (Aug 26 – Sept 25, 2011) and Identity Crisis (Jul 15 – Aug 21, 2011). I am thinking specifically of the screenprints between Red Bluff Studios and all exhibiting artists in Candy Cornbread. Were these elements planned, via your intervention, or did they arise from the artists themselves — or some combination therein?

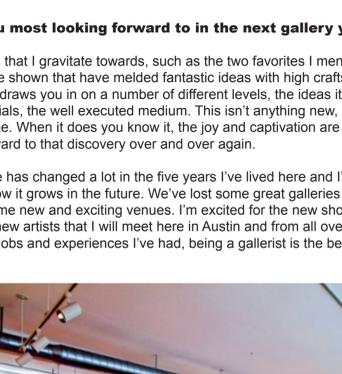
JS: I can't take credit for it, but I'm hoping to see more of it in the future. What set those two shows apart was that they each started with one point of contact for the entire exhibition rather than picking multiple artists individually to form a group show. Often, the artists that I group together don't even know each other, and they meet for the first time at the opening. I really enjoy watching the artists relate to each other during the show. Maybe that meeting will actually spark some future collaboration.

For Identity Crisis, Hector Hernandez approached me with an idea for a show and I was very receptive. Hector had a few artists in mind, and he had actually worked with them all previously. The artists were strong and the idea was compelling. I also liked how this show would be different from my previous exhibitions. We met over a few months to fine tune things. Hector put on a fantastic show!



Hector Hernandez | Mrs. Nitroglycerin, 2011, photographic print, 20 3/4 x 28 1/2 inches. Courtesy the artist and grayDUCK Gallery.

Similarly, for Candy Cornbread, it started with an artist I've worked with in the past. Satch Grimley and I had talked off and on about his desire to elevate the screen print to more of an art object. Satch and Jaime Cervantes are master printers and have been working with local artists for years. When I saw the first few prints that they had created for this series it convinced me to have the show. We had six Austin artists in the show including Satch and Jaime. The idea of showing the artist's traditional artwork along with the prints percolated to the top during one of our group meetings. I think it was an integral part of the show, to see where the influence for the prints came from. The show also was a great way to get art in the hands of the people who don't normally buy art.



Jeffrey Swanson | PBRainbow, 2011, screen print, 26 x 40 inches. Courtesy the artist and grayDUCK Gallery.



Satch Grimley | Ronald, 2011, screen print, 26 x 40 inches. Courtesy the artist and grayDUCK Gallery.

BF: Who are some of your favorite local artists and what are they up to? Plus in the global art scene, taking it stateside, national, international...

JS: This is such a hard question! All of the local artists we've had at the gallery so far are fantastic. I could randomly pick any one of them and go on and on about what I like about them. So, here are a couple that I haven't shown, because really I try to go see as much as possible.

Belli Liu: I saw her Bound #2 installation with those huge pieces of weathered wood and the delicate red thread and needles at D. Berman and was instantly hooked. She lives and teaches in Austin and has been shown widely here, but she's been an international star as well.

Joseph Phillips: precise gouache paintings where nature and human structure are bound together in seemingly natural and unnatural ways have always drawn me in. I first discovered Phillips at D. Berman too. In fact, I miss David and his gallery. I know he is only an hour away but he was a big influence on the Austin art scene and very helpful to me when I opened up.

Jennifer Davis | Snow Bunnies, 2010, acrylic and graphite, 12 x 16 inches. Courtesy the artist and grayDUCK Gallery.

Because I have such close ties to Minneapolis, I have to admit that I consider many artists I met there "local" to grayDUCK too. There is an artist collective called Pilot that I showed last year (as Pilot, October 14 – November 21, 2010). Way before I opened the gallery doors I knew I wanted to have this show. This group of eleven artists was very influential in my artistic development. Amy Rice's work was among one of the first pieces of art I bought. I own many pieces by Yuri Araj's and he has been the person I go to when I need advice on gallery matters. Terrence Payne and Jennifer Davis are two of my favorite painters. All of these artists were influential in the Minneapolis community while I was there, and they will always be imprinted on my mind.

Melissa Breitenfeldt | 09_05, 2011, enamel, ink on birch board, 2 x 2 feet. Courtesy the artist and grayDUCK Gallery.

BF: What are you most looking forward to in the next gallery year?

JS: There are artists that I gravitate towards, such as the two favorites I mentioned and a number of artists I've shown that have melded fantastic ideas with high craftsmanship. Seeing artwork that draws you in on a number of different levels, the ideas it generates, the unique use of materials, the well executed medium. This isn't anything new, but it doesn't happen all of the time. When it does you know it, the joy and captivation are fantastic. I continually look forward to that discovery over and over again.

The Austin art scene has changed a lot in the five years I've lived here and I'm looking forward to seeing how it grows in the future. We've lost some great galleries but slowly we are gaining back some new and exciting venues. I'm excited for the new shows that will be developed and the new artists that I will meet here in Austin and from all over. I have to say that out of all of the jobs and experiences I've had, being a gallerist is the best job ever.

GrayDUCK Gallery interior and Objectivity installation, photographed by Jefferson Harris.

Jill Schroeder studied art and art history at the University of Minnesota with an emphasis in photography. She developed her artwork while pursuing a branding and marketing job at her family's business, Schroeder Milk Co., and familiarized with Minneapolis' flourishing art scene. Collaborations with designers and creatives eventually led to a move to Austin, where after volunteering in the art community Jill opened grayDUCK Gallery to the public in May 2010.

Brian Fee is an art punk currently based in Austin, TX. His culture blog Fee's List covers his three loves (art, film and live music) occurring in his other three loves (the Lone Star State, the Big Apple, and Tokyo).