

After ten minutes, the young woman in the video lurches forward over and vomits. On the table beside her sits a bowl filled with pastel-colored nasturtiums and pansies and a half-filled pitcher of strawberry milk.

The young woman with the perfectly coiffed blonde hair is Jenny Schrief, the subject and creator of "Mature Milk," a video installation that is part of the "Mature Milk and Beautiful Beasts" exhibition currently on display at the Deborah Colton gallery.

In "Milk," Schrief wears a white gown reminiscent of a child's Cinderella costume. She sits on a too-small chair in a too-small room and alternates between gulps of milk and mouthfuls of flower petals. "Milk" questions social preoccupations with beauty and youth; **physically eating flowers becomes a manifestation of perfection gone wrong, of wanting to "adorn your insides" to the point of excess.** "There are societal pressures on women to be pretty and young," Schrief argues, and sometimes these pressures "go too far."

Even though "Milk" is hard to watch, I respect Schrief's unusual expression of the consequences of our modern conceptions of beauty. She is at once Alice in Wonderland, a woman trapped by domesticity and a teenager playing a vile game of truth or dare.

A native Houstonian, Schrief knew she wanted to be involved with art by the age of three. While working toward a BFA in sculpture and a BA in art history from UT, Schrief worked to expand the opportunities available to young artists and started a non-profit called PECA (People for Excellent Collegiate Art) **in order to provide an outside avenue for students to show and celebrate their work.** After a stint with critical magazine, *Art Lies*, Schrief moved into the Deborah Colton Gallery and has been there since November.

The second of the video installations, "Impressing Phil, Peter and David," invites the viewer into a study of voyeurism. Schrief energetically bumps and grinds to three infamous songs about love: "Invisible Touch" by Phil Collins, "Sledge Hammer" by Peter Gabriel and "Oh You Pretty Things" by David Bowie. At first, "Impressing" simulates a poorly shot aerobics tape. The chair I'm sitting in suggests an easy-chair your grandfather might have used, complete with crocheted doilies covering tattered arms. After a few minutes of staring at Schrief's headless twitching midriff, I begin to feel uncomfortable. **I shouldn't be watching this. This is private.**

"Impressing" succeeds in its ability to make you question the line that defines public and private life. The chair is intentional, Schrief explains. By sitting in it, you become "that guy... [I]'s meant to put you in the position of a dirty old man."



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In addition to the video installations, the exhibition features eleven works on paper. In the *Boyfriend/Girlfriend Triptych*, the *Diary Delight Triptych* and the *Horseplay Series*, among others, two competing aesthetics are consistently present. Crafted with stickers, markers and imperfect lettering, the works are ostensibly charming and evoke memories of animated staples like *My Little Ponies* and *Rainbow Brite*. However, the implications of the bubbly words and suggestive characters, when juxtaposed against Schrief's saccharine approach, are shocking. **It's about "naïve execution versus mature content..." I dupe the viewer. The picture seems harmless but then...POW!!"**

In the *Beautiful Beast Dyptic*, Schrief "wanted to sexualize [her] science class." Schrief jabs at issues of creationism while taking traditional subjects in every child's upbringing and placing them in an unorthodox context. The dyptic features two anatomically correct dinosaurs, *Dinagina* and *Dinadick*.

Schrief's works on paper, sexualized beasts, thwarted princes and surly princesses are contradictions in themselves. For a few minutes, you are five years old again. Then you notice the curse words, the reproductive organs, the fallen heroes. In a way, Schrief's works reflect their own brand of innocence. They are seductive and lethal at the same time, poison apples that beg to be tried.

As "Mature Milk" nears its third regurgitation, Schrief tucks a wisp of blond hair behind her ear and whispers, "Sorry!" **In a grass-green t-shirt, cuffed jeans and white kitten heels, she reminds me slightly of an eighties version of Tinkerbell.** It seems fitting, though, for I'm not entirely sure she was there.

Schrief works out of her home in the Heights and looks forward to an upcoming solo show at Red Bud in February. She can be contacted at jennyschrief@hotmail.com. "Mature Milk and Beautiful Beasts" will be on exhibit through August 18, at the Deborah Colton Gallery, located at 2500 Summer Street on the third floor. Information is available at www.deborahcoltongallery.com.