



Conflict of Interest

Jill Schroeder of grayDUCK Gallery

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Photo by: Jeff Harris. Painting by Elizabeth McDonald.

If you spend enough time in Texas, your blood thins and despite the red politics, you start to call it home. Maybe you didn't come here to wear cowboy boots every day, but you're a gambling type. Why else would you take the chance on some hippie town down in Texas to open a commercial art gallery?

"Austinites are very supportive," says Jill Schroeder of grayDUCK Gallery. "I couldn't imagine opening a gallery anywhere else."

Schroeder moved to Austin nine years ago from Minneapolis, Minnesota and opened grayDUCK Gallery in May 2010. Keeping the doors open for five years amidst the chronic upheaval of Austin's art community speaks to Schroeder's mettle. Even if Texas winters are not much in comparison, the paltry art market cannot be soothed with summers on the greenbelt and brunch on the weekends.

My first long conversation with Schroeder happened years ago at Dog and Duck on that beautiful wood plank deck (if only they will resurrect the slant at the new location). Schroeder was gracious enough to talk to me and Brian Willey, Curator/Director of Tiny Park, before we took the plunge in starting our own gallery. She paid the favor forward as her own mentor had done for her.

"Yuri Araj's owned a gallery in Minneapolis that had a great vibe that I really wanted to emulate," explains Schroeder. "He convinced me that I could do it and talked me into jumping off the cliff."

Like Tiny Park and more recently Dog and Duck, grayDuck Gallery shuttered its doors in December 2013. But unlike the galleries and businesses closing due to rising rent, Schroeder was moving the gallery to East Austin.

"The new space has surpassed my expectations," Schroeder says. "It was so much work, and I'm so proud of how beautifully it turned out—it makes me smile everyday."

Schroeder wanted to "make the gallery long lasting" which, in Austin's market with rising taxes, still is not an absolute security. However, the space provided her with greater programmatic freedom.

"When the gallery moved to the new space, I started to experiment with different shows," Schroeder describes. "I'm still exploring, and I feel I should be shaking things up, but that means going down avenues I'm not comfortable with. Some things are more successful than others—and it's all out there in the open for everyone to see."

Schroeder has taken many risks and, thankfully, has not faced them all alone. Her partner (who wishes to remain anonymous) acts as her installer/bouncer/bartender and other "board member."

"I couldn't run the place without him," says Schroeder. "We talk about the place constantly and how we can make it better."

Austin is lucky to have trapped the pair. Schroeder has let her hair down a bit—images of her past mohawks and punk/goth phases float freely on Facebook.

"I miss shaving my own head, there was something empowering about that," says Schroeder. "I think deep down I will always feel like a bit of an outsider but I don't need to advertise it so strongly."

As an outsider, Schroeder fits in perfectly in Austin and has built a strong foundation of exhibiting artists, frequent visitors, and interested collectors. At the end of the day, she doesn't lose sight of the bigger picture.

"Artists here take risks and push their creations out to the world," Schroeder remarks. "I feel that the Austin art scene is in its adolescence; there is plenty of room to grow. There are some smart, talented, determined people who care about the art scene and are here for the long haul and will continue to make this place better."

I asked Schroeder for some of her all time favorite bands:

Led Zeppelin, New Order, Tom Waits, Johnny Cash, The Replacements, Elbow, Deerhoof, Dessa, Patsy Cline, Low

...and albums she's listening to and loving now:

Wise Up Ghost: Elvis Costello and The Roots

Love This Giant: David Byrne and St. Vincent

Conflict of Interest Co-Editor Thao Votang drinks with Schroeder almost every weekend. Votang thanks Schroeder and her anonymous partner in crime for introducing her to the world of Dune.