

Art in America

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Scott Reeder: *Free Acid*, 2013, acrylic on canvas, 20 by 16 inches; at Lisa Cooley.

SCOTT REEDER

Lisa Cooley

A disarming honesty permeated Scott Reeder's first exhibition at Lisa Cooley, from its folksy title "People Call Me Scott" to its lineup of 30 small, bright acrylic paintings of stenciled word combinations. Reeder first gained attention for breezy oil-on-canvas mash-ups of canonical modernist art and humorous figuration involving fruit, sex, death and drugs. In 2011, the Detroit-based artist, who is also a professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, had his first solo museum exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.

Reeder's new paintings (all 2013) are clear of explicit references to art history and are contextualized in a personal cosmos by two sculptural installations and neon signage. In the word paintings, the use of an airbrush, stencils and a tangy color palette evoke a downbeat teenage aesthetic, like a merchandise stand for a beloved rock band. There's an aura of polite transgression in the word pairings, such as *Free Acid*, set against a rainbow color fade; *Cops Kiss*, on a magenta ground; and *Lady Bong*, spelled out like the lights of an old-fashion marquee sign.

The conflation of a zany, slightly nerdish conceptual flair with blunt material specificity was most evident in five large acrylic-and-enamel paintings from the "Pasta Series," created by airbrushing over dried and cooked pasta. In these works, straight lines and wormlike squiggles are neither particularly expressive as abstract forms nor as food—a lifetime away from James Rosenquist's juicy close-ups of spaghetti in red sauce. The monochrome backgrounds (baby blue, pea green, cold gray) seem like arbitrary design choices. The most visually exciting work in the series reads as a starry night sky, with each tiny alphabet-soup pasta letter registering as a point of light when seen from across the room.

In the gallery's back room, two large canvases, *Alternate Titles for Recent Exhibitions I've Seen* and *Song Titles*, are covered with lists of handwritten chalk lines on chalkboard paint. They poke at the entwinement of commerce and digital media in the contemporary art world ("Just Think Of Me As a Philosopher Who Sells Things," "We Do It 4 The JPGS"), while also exuding a shrugging complicity with the state of things. In contrast to the brisk, repetitive cursive in John Baldessari's text piece *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* (1971), Reeder's amiable chalk lettering reads as insouciantly generic, indicative of a practice more concerned with the limitations of contemporary culture than with a serial investigation into language as mate-



rial. One of Reeder's alternate exhibition titles, "Napping on Acid," perhaps best describes the artist's dilemma: the psychedelic rapture of art wasted in sleep.

Sharing the gallery's back room with the chalkboard paintings are the artist's phone number spelled out in white neon and "Bad Ideas," a series of four painted aluminum sheets resembling crumpled paper balls, symbols of artistic frustration writ large. A fifth *Bad Idea*, a large version of the smaller four, evokes a delicate yet goofy send-up of classic Minimalism. Less ham-fisted is *Paper*, nine letter-size sheets of white aluminum, discreetly scattered in a corner at the base of the word paintings. Viewed in tandem with the word pairings, the piece suggests fresh starts and a Mallarméan roll of the dice. Reeder's use of language in his paintings makes his work cannily accessible and sometimes even unbearably up-to-date, with overt references to the Internet and social media. But the inclusion of these simple, blank-faced sculptures wipes the board clean once more.

—Nora Griffin