

ARTFORUM

“Scott Reeder” Emily Hall, Artforum. July 1, 2020.

<https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/202006/scott-reeder-83311>

Scott Reeder | Canada



Scott Reeder, *Bread & Butter (Beach)*, 2019, acrylic and oil on canvas, 30 × 40".

In the serenely colored paintings of “Didactic Sunsets,” Scott Reeder’s first solo exhibition at Canada, food and flora go about their daily lives. In a room lit by dawn-colored light (*Green Interior*, 2020), a pear and a banana embrace in bed—a ripped-off peel lies on the floor—as another banana watches them through a window. This banana appears once more in *Purple Interior*, 2019, checking out the pear as it salaciously mounts a bunch of grapes. Another painting finds the grapes on a therapist’s couch in a flatly rendered, nearly featureless office. Single grapes roll about on the floor as the pear listens, looking somehow steadfast and compassionate as its client goes to pieces. In *Bread & Butter (Museum)*, 2020, the titular duo gaze at an abstract painting; elsewhere, the pair spend a day at the beach, where the bread goes for a swim and the butter, unwisely, sunbathes.

The humor in these paintings arises from the incongruity of what the artist and writer Wyndham Lewis identified as “the sensations resulting from the observations of a *thing* behaving like a person.” (A comic by

the New Yorker's Charles Barsotti—a master of canny anthropomorphizing—of a traumatized orange rind and an unrepentant juicer as guests on *The Jerry Springer Show* comes to mind.) Reeder's comedic tableaux are disarming—silly and almost sweet on the one hand, yet deadpan and equivocal on the other. The emotional lives of these foodstuffs, once you stop chuckling, remain ambiguous and somewhat troubling, colored, of course, by whatever the viewer brings to them: We may wonder if the voyeuristic banana is turned on or livid with envy, if the butter is dumber than the bread for trying to get a tan, and what the power and sexual dynamics might be in a fruit-based relationship when patiently sorted out in counseling. There is only one solitary figure depicted in this show: an ice-cream cone gazing at a nighttime cityscape from a posh apartment. It appears wistful, but for all we know it could be nursing a murderous rage.

I looked at Reeder's wiseacre and semi-Matissean images on my laptop during the sixth week of quarantine in New York City, and the works felt like a respite from the endless horrors playing out everywhere. I wondered if I would find them as appealing in a different, less terrifying context. Reeder is a longtime prankster, an art-history underminer who melds glibness and gravitas with varying degrees of success: In the past, he has made abstractions by flinging pasta at canvases; for a 2007 series titled "Cute Communists," he painted portraits of despots—such as Fidel Castro and Joseph Stalin—with big, Margaret Keane-style eyes. Chances are this crop of pictures might be nothing more than a bunch of stoner jokes—though I was happy to let up on my self-seriousness long enough to acknowledge that the paintings ask serious questions about seriousness itself.

—Emily Hall