

“Just Deserts” by Evan Reiser

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Essay by Sarah Thibault

The epic battle of Wile E. Coyote and Road Runner always frustrated me as a kid. Road Runner was always getting away and Coyote was always getting crushed, flattened or blown up. At that age, I didn't understand Coyote's existentialist angst underlying the repetition: the failing and trying again, failing again and so on.

Evan Reiser explores this process of failure and redoubling of effort through his series of paintings and sculptures for tmoro projects' "Just Deserts." The impetus for these paintings was twofold: Coyote's dramatic failures resonated with Reiser after a series of comically bad events post-graduate school that left him single, black-eyed and homeless; meanwhile, the trial and error of Coyote's experiments is familiar to any artist.

This body of work depicts stills from the cartoon- often at the moment of Coyote's demise. Reiser mines a recurring 'camera angle' throughout the series: a top-down, panoramic shot of a canyon as Coyote slowly plummets, hitting the ground below with a cloud of dust. The steep perspective in the paintings allows the viewer to take in the full scale of the fall. The smallness of Coyote's dust cloud underlines the insignificance of his failures and his place in the world- both a disheartening and a comforting thought.

Despite their dark subject matter, the paintings strive for beauty and seduction. The works, depicted in the dusky palette of the American Southwest, are created through wet-on-wet marks resulting in a creamy surface and smooth color shifts. The sprawling landscape of the desert provides a grand stage for the interactions between Road Runner and Coyote and heightens the drama of each failure. As the desert is the site for Coyote's Sisyphean battle, the canvas is the battleground for Reiser; the blank canvas is as worthy an opponent as any Road Runner.

Coyote catches Road Runner one time that I know of throughout the course of the series. In this episode, the two characters chase each other through the desert, running through a series of metal tubes, each one getting smaller causing them to shrink into miniature versions of themselves. As they go back through the tube, Road Runner comes out his normal size, but Coyote has remained small. Road Runner stops and Coyote realizes his prey is right before him larger than life. Coyote gets out his fork and knife, but as RR leans down, he realizes the magnitude of his 'catch' and the impossibility of consuming something that large. Coyote addresses the viewer with two signs that read "Okay, wise guys- You always wanted me to catch him. Now what do I do?" This moment encapsulates the uncomfortable feeling of achieving your goal (fame, fortune, the perfect mark, a breakthrough with your color palette), only to feel unsatisfied with the results. Inevitably the goal post always moves and thank god it does so there will always be a desire for innovation, sex, and the next painting.

About tmoro projects

tmoro projects is an independent, nonprofit 501 (c)(3) organization (pending approval) that serves as a catalyst for contemporary art. Located in the heart of Santa Clara County (Silicon Valley), tmoro projects seeks to enrich this community through a range of contemporary art exhibitions and public programs. It is run with the help of Bay Area artists, scholars and students. It is not driven by commercial interests and hence we do not have a fixed roster of artists.

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tmoro projects is located at 1046 Sherman Street, Santa Clara CA.

Directions to tmoro projects

via Caltrain: Exit the Santa Clara station, walk southeast on Benton Street, and turn left onto Sherman Street. It is a 3-minute walk.

via I-880: Exit CA-82N/The Alameda, turn left onto Benton Street, take the 1st left onto Sherman Street.

via 101: Exit at De La Cruz Blvd, make a slight right over Caltrain railroad, turn left onto Lafayette Street, take the 3rd left onto Benton Street, take the 3rd right onto Sherman Street.