

Sincere Issues: Paul Pescador's *The Year After: Season 2* at Adjunct Positions

By Alicia Eler

Artist Paul Pescador and I knew each other from around LA's art scene, but we didn't really start talking until he became involved in my Karen Pence Project on Facebook. In this ongoing social media rant/performance, I narrated a world in which I was in a three-month sexual relationship with the Second Lady (SLOTUS), wife of homophobic and misogynistic VP Mike Pence. Paul began commenting and engaging with posts wherein I would write my feelings about Karen — usually I was either missing her, or angry at her for her closeted, pillow princess ways when we were intimate. Other times, I would narrate her life as if I were a fly on the wall, pondering the possibilities of her relationship to Mike Pence, and then to her relationship with God. Paul's comments on my Karen posts confused me, because they offered a level of sincerity on the highly curated and performative space that is social media. His comments were performative in nature, like my posts, but they were also kind. I felt like Paul was #connecting with the Karen character that I was writing, or maybe connecting with me. Eventually, Paul messaged me and we started talking, and we became friends IRL, enjoying brunches and coffees and art openings until I moved away from LA, to the state of Minnesota where sincerity is an everyday occurrence and people don't take well to sarcasm, irony, or anything that's not "real."

It's with these questions of sincerity that I approached Paul's 10-episode series, *The Year After: Season 2*, which is screening in the main gallery of Adjunct Positions, the artist-run project space in front of 5041 Coringa Drive, the place I called home for two years.¹ Over 10 episodes, Pescador animates crudely rendered drawings — think blobbish versions of stick figures — of a variety of characters that, roughly speaking, constitute his coming-of-age and coming out story, growing up in the California desert community of La Quinta out by Joshua Tree. He fills in other imagery with images found via Google Image Search — often times still with the copyright watermark in tact — and also creates scenarios using household objects. Household objects stand-in for people, playing the roles of lovers.

The plotline is simple and, at times, pushed me to a place of identification. I remember being a gay teenager, with that constant sense of melancholy and desire to find others like me. But in the episodic series, I wondered: Was Pescador's narration and storyline meant to be sincere, or was this just an integral part of telling a coming-out coming-of-age genre story?

In *The Year After: Season 2*, we follow a main character named Paul as he works a shitty customer service job at an ice cream/pretzel stand in a Southern California Westfield

¹ To be clear, I did not live inside of the gallery. I had a bedroom on the other side of the indoor gallery's wall. I was also once Adjunct Positions' only writer-in-residence, a position I took up when I first moved into the house, and was trying to figure out LA, channeling signage like Steve Martin's LA WANTS TO HELP YOU from his film *L.A. Story* (1991).

Mall, falls in love with a guy who's interested in another guy, and then gets his heart broken. In other episodes, viewers follow the gang as they escape their small town in the middle of the night to hit up a gay bar in Palm Springs, and also learns how to survive high school. In moments sincere, I felt like I was watching an artist rendition of *My So-Called Life*, the gay teen Southern California desert version. Except *My So-Called Life* only ran for one season. It's as if Paul's 10-episode series were the continuation of that, no Ricky character necessary.²

The day after I watched Paul's work, I decided to discuss it with my roommate David Prince, who runs Adjunct Positions Gallery. We were in our kitchen. I didn't talk about every Adjunct Positions exhibition with David, even though I lived there for two years and the art was all around me. But I felt more engaged with Paul's work, probably because it reminded me of my own.

"I'm wondering about Paul's decision to use images from Google searches and those roughly rendered drawings in the animation, and to narrate every character," I said to David. "Like at times it's a bit hard to even differentiate the characters. Was that purposeful?"

David replied in the way that David always replies: With a gentle, matter-of-fact, and very even-keeled intonation in his voice. He explained that Paul was having questions about sincerity, and that in fact this was the most sincere work he'd made in some time.

Since living in LA, I've always wondered the extent to which the entertainment industry's gross over-attempts at sincerity and engaging audiences have actually served to repel visual artists away from sincerity in their work. I wondered aloud to David about that as well as Paul's intentionality. His lo-fi aesthetic and dry wit remind me of David Shrigley's humor, entirely cheeky, crude and cartoonish, and it's also similar aesthetics-wise. Shrigley's engagement with the banal echoes the banality of the conflicts in Pescador's sitcom-mimicking episodic, as well as a fascination with everyday materials.

"But is it meant to be sincere?" I asked David again. He shrugged. The answer to that question is, sincerely, up to the viewer.

Alicia Eler is a culture writer with published writings in Glamour, CNN, New York Magazine, Guardian, LA Weekly, Hyperallergic, Aperture, New Inquiry, Artforum, and many others. Her first book, THE SELFIE GENERATION (Skyhorse) is out in Fall 2017. She is currently a visual art critic/reporter at the Star Tribune newspaper in Minneapolis.

² In LA, someone told me that they worked out at the same gym as the guy who played Ricky, but I can't remember who that someone is or which gym. Probably somewhere in Hollywood though, I reckon.