

Grunts Rare Books is honored to present the first solo exhibition by Chicago-based painter Peter Carney.

In *Les deux raies* (1920), Henri Matisse presents two stingrays laid out upside down on a rocky beach. Their bodies are alike with wings spread and dead eyes. The sea sits behind the shore, and the horizon arrives without announcement. Matisse painted the scene in Étretat twice more, replacing the stingrays with an eel in one canvas and with a plate of fish in the other.

*Les deux raies* is a vanitas image, like two chickens hung on metal hooks. The twinned stingrays echo the posture of classical bathers—limbs extended, torsos reclined. Like a scene staged by Bouguereau, the erotic is displaced by a zoological calm, an animal calling. Matisse repeats the schema almost completely, except his subjects are cold and blue.

“No one senses the call of the ocean

The ocean which called my name today”<sup>1</sup>

Carney’s ten works revisit enduring motifs in painting’s history through a language of soft estrangement. Across still lifes and seascapes, familiar elements emerge: figures move across beaches to meet the sea, perishables lay out to rot, and horizons appear in shifted registers.

In *I haveno hard feelings but I have feelings*, for instance, Carney deconstructs a seascape into hard edge split planes of red and fuchsia. The slanted shoreline meets a table adorned with a plate, spoon, and lemon borrowed from *Nature morte au citron* (1917), a still life by Matisse. Like the chickens in *The constant taste of blood*, the lemon is a recognizable trope signaling to mortality.

Other scenes regard the beach as a theater. For example, in *Oregon timber*, Carney paints a still from Maya Deren’s avant-garde film, *At Land* (1944), in which an unnamed woman embarks on a journey of discovery after washing up on foreign sands. In *Dance dance revolution* and *Music farm animal toy*, two circus monkeys are caught on an absurdist shore by the relentless spin of the discoball beneath them. Elsewhere, a mariachi band plays through the night on a dark beach in Oregon.

Carney treats the shore as a visual system, a landscape often returned to, called by something vast and unresolved. “The Night Side of Eden” assembles the conditions under which a seascape might emerge: a backdrop for allegory, a site for the sublime, or a scaffold for abstraction. Here, Carney disassembles the genre and rebuilds it in slow, painterly code.

---

<sup>1</sup> “Nightside of Eden” (1993) by Disembowelment.