

## Why it's unsettling that anything could be cake, according to science

**Directions: Let's start by just annotating and summarizing...and respond in complete sentences to the requests at the end of the article.**

**Highlight by colors: Look for the main idea (yellow), best pieces of evidence (blue), and interesting words/phrases (green).**



Image 1. This Croc shoe is a cake. Made by Turkish baker Tuba Geçkil, the trend of making and cutting into hyper-realistic cakes took off after BuzzFeed's Tasty shared a video compilation of Geçkil's cakes. Photos: Tuba Geçkil/@redrosecake\_tubageckil on Instagram

By Theresa Machermer, Smithsonianmag.com

In mid-July on social media, all bets were off: anything might've been cake.

Cut off the end of a red Croc shoe? Its center is white cake with pink frosting. What about a pickle? Chocolate cake. Toilet paper roll? Layers of hot pink and white cake. People responded by testing their own household objects, slicing into everything from tissue boxes to newspapers to prove that they weren't cake.

The trend started when BuzzFeed's Tasty shared a video compilation of hyper-realistic cakes created by Turkish baker Tuba Geckil, Taylor Lorenz reports for the New York Times. Geckil first shared the videos of the cakes being cut into slices on her Instagram.

But why did the videos spark such intense widespread interest? Psychologists explain that the sculptural food subverts our expectations—someone thinks they're looking at a photo of an onion, but suddenly it's not a savory allium but a sweet vanilla-and-chocolate treat.

"Humans are programmed to have something called 'schemas' about so many objects. It's simply a way we categorize information about our world." Rebecca Rialon Berry, a child and adolescent psychiatrist at New York University

Langone Health, tells O magazine. Revealing that something is not what it seems contradicts our schemas. "Oftentimes, that can lead to an increase of the stress hormone cortisol in the brain."

Many people online responded to the video by taking it to an absurd extreme for comedic effect, saying for example that you try to call for help, but the phone is a cake. Help arrives, but the help is a cake.

"One big meme right now is two astronauts looking at Earth from space, and one says, 'It's all cake.' The other says 'always has been,' looking at Earth being cut in two and revealing a cake." Don Caldwell, the editor of Know Your Meme, tells the New York Times. The ridiculous, confusing joke keeps people circling back to the original video, and helps the meme spread, he says.

And Berry explains to O magazine that responding with humor "helps to manage that cortisol response—and helps trigger additional positive neurochemical responses."

The hyper-realistic cake sculptures also trick our senses, creating a conflict between what we know—that the Croc is a cake—and what we see—the croc is a croc—and your mind has to either resolve that conflict or live with the uncertainty.

"What you see in hyper-realistic art is that the creator plays with that idea," University of Leuven psychologist Sander Van der Cruys tells Inverse's Emma Betuel. "We feel as if we are next to the actual depicted or sculpted object and the next moment we don't."

The videos showing realistically sculpted cakes are therefore surprising and intriguing. Caldwell also points out to the Times that the videos are sharable because they are broadly appealing without carrying a political point of view or message.

Natalie Sideserf, based in Austin, Texas, has been creating hyper-realistic cakes for years. "I've always called them 'still life cakes,'" she tells the New York Times. "They're like a still life painting. I try to make them as realistic as possible."

"I think we're fascinated by the quality of the illusion — and there's the strange dissonance brought on by perceiving things in two ways," Wheaton College psychologist Rolf Nelson tells Inverse. "In the cake example, we have a conflict of perceiving it as a face or as a cake. Because the face looks so realistic, it takes us a second to reconcile these two things."

Sideserf adds that she's now working on a cake model of herself because her online followers often ask whether a photo of her is actually what it seems, or, "Is it cake?"

But, perhaps most importantly, she says that the cakes are also very tasty.

"I would never put this amount of time and effort into something that doesn't taste as good as it looks," Sideserf tells the Times. "We've spent many years spending time making sure these flavors are delicious."

**1. Write a paragraph that summarizes the article.**

**2. Select evidence from the article which supports the writer's claim(s).**

**3. Use your own words here to comment and offer your view on the piece. Be specific and refer to the article.**