



Will Cotton  
*Red Pop Ravine*  
 2001

## Two Eskimos

by Charlie Finch

Will Cotton's ex-wife, sound artist Debora Warner, stared at his new painting, *Red Pop Ravine*.

"Will is going to deny it," she remarked. "But this piece is definitely a crucifixion scene."

She may have a point. Based on the ratios of the Golden Mean, *Red Pop Ravine* features an ice cream cone Christ at the center, with the candy crosses of the two thieves on each side, a peppermint candy cane for a shepherd's staff, and a sweet river of blood flowing down a sugary Golgotha towards the viewer.

"It's definitely not a crucifixion scene," Cotton responded, although Mary Boone and her longtime friend and attorney Hugh Freund were not so sure.

"I definitely see some heavy Catholic imagery," commented Boone.

Somehow, the darkest parts of Will's psyche always flow through the sweet varnished muck of Cottonland.



Will Cotton  
*Custard Cascade*  
 2000-2001

*Chocolate Thaw* is definitely a trailer park, the artist told us. There's a phallic Hershey log drifting through this painting, one of only four new Cotton efforts now on view at Mary Boone's uptown space.

The prices are significantly jacked up to the \$50,000 range, with two sold and two on reserve.

All four Cottons feature traditional horizons, gurgling confectionary rivers and groaning explosions of candiolatry.

"I'd like to go swimming in one of them," chirped a Chiquita. She would probably drown.



Will Cotton  
*Flood*  
 2000



Damian Loeb  
*Do I (Dig That Girl)*  
 2000



Damian Loeb  
D-RDI  
2000

Will savored his newfound painterly puissance during the gallery's dinner for him at Eric Goode's hot restaurant, the Park, a sort of Foxwoods on Tenth Avenue.

After ten years of shows at Stricoff and Silverstein, and a promising debut at Boone a year ago, Cotton broke the bread of incipient stardom with Ross Bleckner, John Currin, Rachel Feinstein, Brooks Adams, Lisa Liebmman and other art swells, enjoying the smooth strokes of Cottonelle, with no trips to the bathroom.

The big question is whether, like his progenitor Wayne Thiebaud, Will will now switch to something completely different.

After dinner, Adam Stennett, Damien Loeb's assistant, introduced himself and we walked downtown in the rain.

"I'm from Alaska," Adam told us. "I went to a small art college in Oregon. A few years later I knocked on Damien's studio door, looking for a job. I said to Damian, 'I'm a better painter than you are,' and he hired me on the spot."

Adam explained that Damian, frustrated by continuing legal challenges to his appropriation of photo images, had turned to movie classics for inspiration. Damian compares his new stuff to the moment in *Blade Runner* when Harrison Ford mind-melds with a photograph.

Two nights later it was time to examine Damian's (and Adam's) new handiwork at Mary Boone's downtown space.

Two blondes stared at a sinister pool scene, copped from the film *Boogie Nights*. That's the one I bought, said blonde to blonde. And, indeed, the show is more than sold out.

A lone calf lying dead on the highway appears to be a powerful political comment on hoof and mouth disease, but is actually a scene from Stephen Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.

An airplane interior apparently is part of the movie *Fight Club*, a man fleeing across a dark landscape comes from *The Shining*, and a Hopperesque blonde weeping into her black negligee is strictly *L.A. Confidential*. You get the idea.



Damian Loeb  
D-EYAYF-NVP  
2000



Damian Loeb  
D-EYAYF-NS  
2000



Damian Loeb  
*In Birth and in Death the Generations*  
Embrace  
2000-2001  
(detail)

"It took me one day to paint the highway (in *Close Encounters*) and a month to get the calf just right," Loeb told us.

Damian's vision is a claustrophobic tunnel, dominated by the media's stranglehold on himself and his generation. How can you "steal" any image in a prefabricated world of artificial images, he argues, it's like "stealing" the air we breathe.

Older critics who attack him for the sad, vapid alienation and total lack of positive empathy in every Loeb painting just don't get it -- this is Damian's world and he's not out to make the viewer comfortable.

He's a 21st-century William Blake, ramming his dank spiritual vision down your craw, without apologizing for his awkward eccentricities.

Personally, it's taken me three years to even begin to accept Damian's vision. He is united with Will Cotton in a place where the paint is cold and bold -- no comfort allowed.

Even Judd or Flavin were never this frozen, and god bless the collector who wakes up to a Loeb or Cotton each morning.  
It's a brave new world.

Will Cotton, "New Paintings," Mar. 29-May 5, 2001, at Mary Boone Gallery, 745 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10151.

Damian Loeb, "Public Domain," Mar. 31-May 5, 2001, at Mary Boone Gallery, 541 West 24th Street, New York, N.Y. 10011.

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