

# The New York Times

*Mary Boone Gallery  
745 Fifth Avenue, at 57th Street  
Through March 18*

Will Cotton's big, smoothly painted close-ups of gleaming, melting piles of color-coordinated candies and sweets are savvy and clueless at the same time. They appropriate from 80's setup photography and early 90's installation art, including Felix Gonzales-Torre's piles of candy and Lauren Szold's poured batter pieces, once more proving painting's adeptness at co-opting relatively market-resistant art forms.

The peanut brittle house of "Cracked House," the cascading chocolate and caramel of "Devil's Fudge Falls," the milk fountain and meringue banks of "Old Faithful," the strawberry jam pool surrounded by candy hearts of "Love Me" all started out as the main events of elaborate table-top models built and then photographed by the artist.

Yet Mr. Cotton's paintings, despite their seductive play of color and light, don't go much beyond early 1970's Photo Realism. Their conceptual framework is so easily apprehended as to be generic: the oozing surfaces conflate the delectability of dessert with that of oil paint, bringing to mind such saccharine derivatives of Abstract Expressionism as Lyrical Abstraction. They also evoke 19th-century American landscape painting and the modernist tradition of white-on-white abstraction. Also implied are consumer excess and a certain obsession with sweets, which in turn conjures up the hollow celebrations of birthdays and holidays that are among our cultural staples.

But once this easy read is over, one is left with the paintings on their own, and like simple carbohydrates, they don't supply much nutrition. It doesn't help that up close their surfaces are dull and lifeless as if overly reliant on an opaque projector. These surfaces make one feel that Mr. Cotton had more fun- and certainly faced more of a challenge- building his sugary concoctions than painting them.

*ROBERTA SMITH*