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Will Cotton: *Flawed Utopia*

17 November – 21 December 2023

Preview Evening: Thursday 16 November 2023, 6–8pm



Will Cotton, *The Unicorn's Dream II*, 2023, oil on linen, 210.8 x 147.3 x 3.8 cm

Ronchini is proud to present its second solo exhibition of the American painter Will Cotton. Featuring new oil on linen paintings, this exhibition will explore the artist's otherworldly, immersive landscapes of flawed utopias composed of sweets, pastries, and melting ice cream, and populated with unicorns, mermaids and pin-up cowgirls.

Cotton's works are layered with art historical and pop-cultural references from voluptuous Rococo painter François Boucher and Hudson River School landscape artist Frederic Edwin Church to mid-century American pin-up painter Gil Elvgren, amongst others.

In *The Hunt*, a shimmering mermaid holding a candy striped trident sits on an island of melted ice cream under a baby blue sky. Cotton is fascinated by the mermaid character, stating:

She exists outside any paradigm of good or evil. In mythology mermaids are enticing, often deadly, sometimes killing for no reason, or accidentally drowning the sailors they fall in love with. This is what they share with my concept of candy land, an attractive but ultimately inhospitable place where the result of all your desires being fulfilled all the time is self-destruction. An idea which came out of my experience with drug and alcohol addiction.

Like the mermaid in *The Hunt*, *The Cowgirl* is a powerful, lusty figure, fully immersed in candy land. Armed with a gun and a candy heart bludgeon, she answers to no one, nor any system of subjugating moral code imposed on her. Her narrative is implied, and with a smile on her face her destiny is hers to unfold.

Contrasting the dynamic women featured in *The Hunt* and *The Cowgirl*, *The Unicorn's Dream II* depicts a solitary, adolescent pink and white unicorn on a melting ice cream float amidst a vast ocean, with a hopeful rainbow overhead. Historically the unicorn has symbolized everything from

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purity and grace to religious allegory and death, while in contemporary pop culture the unicorn is seen more as a symbol of fantasy or rarity. Cotton describes his fascination with this mythical creature by explaining:

I've been thinking about the notion of belief and how a unicorn may depend on our belief for its own sense of self. It may be gripped with fears of irrelevance, never certain whether or not it actually exists.

Cotton's fantastically real, yet wildly inventive narratives effectively reinvigorate this lexicon of pop cultural iconography.

About the artist:

Will Cotton lives and works in New York. He has a BFA from Cooper Union in New York City, and also studied at the Beaux Arts in Rouen, France and the New York Academy of Art. Cotton's paintings have been shown at the San Francisco Museum of Art (2000); Seattle Art Museum (2002); Kunsthalle Bielefeld, Germany (2004); Hudson River Museum, New York (2007); Triennale di Milano, Italy (2007); Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris (2008); Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana (2009); Albright-Knox Art Gallery, New York (2009); Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh (2013); Virginia MOCA (2013), Orlando Museum of Art (2017); and Louvre Lens, France (2023), amongst others. His work is in the collections of the National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C.; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; Seattle Art Museum, Washington; Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio; Orlando Museum of Art, Florida, as well as many prominent private collections.

Exhibition: Will Cotton: *Flawed Utopia*

Dates: 17 November – 21 December 2023

Opening Hours: Monday – Friday 10am – 6pm, Saturday by appointment

Location: 22 Dering Street, London, W1S 1AN

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