



Swept Away, 2000

MARK KOSTABI on Will Cotton

AFTER HAVING PUFFED THE BRIGHT-EYED, YOUNG ART STAR Will Cotton in December 1998, when he showed at the modest Daniel Silverstein Gallery—before he signed with the legendary Mary Boone—the typical hack journalist in me didn't want to write about him again for *Shout*. But today, after sauntering out from the Ludlow Street headquarters of Kostabi World to Cotton's Allen Street studio for a casual visit, which we exchange frequently, I was floored, blown away and rendered breathless by his new, painfully beautiful masterpiece, "Chocolate Thaw." And I said, "I'm afraid I'm going to have to write about you again." Cotton grinned boyishly as he quietly said "great." I felt sucked into his clever trap.

Cotton buys his candy from The Sweet Life at 63 Hester Street, on the corner of Ludlow. Then he makes twisted, tabletop candy-landscape constructions out of the sweet stuff, before zooming in on dynamic details with his digital camera. The resulting photos end up framed under broken glass, dabbed with infinite shades of pink and brown and are propped up, inches away from his huge, sometimes 10-foot-high canvases.

These fascinating photos function as structural springboards for even more fascinating paintings, which distantly echo artists as diverse as Vermeer, Theibaud, Sargeant, Morandi, Caravaggio, Chardin and Hopper. But Cotton ultimately emerges as a true original—a faux-Photorealist. His real forte is fierce formalism: the dynamic orchestration of light and shadow, soft-focus versus razor-sharp precision, lyrical brushwork abutting rigorous, militaristic compositional thrust.

The new Cottons contain a new narrative edge: The candy is melting. Disastrous floods wreak gooey havoc on the candy landscapes. Cotton says this sudden turbulence may be a metaphoric parallel to events occurring in society, like the melting sweetness of the Internet economy, and to events occurring in Cotton's personal life.

Okay Cotton, I've puffed you twice in *Shout*, not to mention the numerous mentions in my advice column at artnet.com. Now I expect a kickback. Because I am a critic on the take. Next time in an interview, when you are asked to list your favorite living artists—don't just tell 'em what you told me: "Inka Essenhigh, Damian Loeb, Michael Phalen, David Salle, Ross Bleckner, John Currin and Eric Fischl." Add "Mark Kostabi" to the top of the list. ♦

Mary Boone Gallery, 745 Fifth Ave., 212-752-2929, March 29 through May 5.

Mark Kostabi is an artist and composer who lives in Rome and New York. He also writes an advice column for artists at artnet.com.

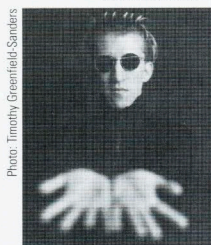


Photo: Timothy Greenfield-Sanders