

Will Cotton at Galerie Daniel Templon

By Julia Langbein

May 27, 2010



Will Cotton, *Consuming Folly*, 2010, oil on canvas, 72 x 96 inches.

The five recent paintings in this exhibition are in step with Will Cotton's ongoing project: portraying landscapes of cake, candy, molasses, fudge, and other confections. Since about 2002, occasionally nude or nearly nude pinup-style models have populated these candy-land scenes. As in the past, the artist focuses intensely on rendering the tactile quality of this fanciful glut. In *Apennine*, 2009–10, the depicted mountain of scooped ice cream has the dull luster of Elmer's glue as it liquefies beneath a languid, distracted, dairy-splattered studio-lot babe.

But whereas Cotton's previous landscapes dripped with foreboding—from *Endless Winter*, 1999, to *Sugar Death*, 2007, whose gumdrop-gabled houses sink in sugary swamps, unfettered consumption allegorized as gooey quagmire—these recent works do not moralize as much. They also seem less weighted, literally: In *Consuming Folly*, 2010, pink breasts and pinker clouds point upward as two button-nosed Esther Williams-style starlets in oversize cupcake tiaras carelessly ride wind-whipped tufts of cotton candy. Threatening consequences have evaporated into blue skies, vanity now without *vanitas*. Cotton's handling of oil paint alone bears the burden of seduction, especially in the masterful delivery of complex surface texture—the flaxen crystals of cotton candy or the gunpowder density of cracked chocolate.

One painting among the group, *Rose*, 2009, is markedly different: A female figure (cropped demurely at the shoulders) faces down the viewer, and in the background, where one expects to see a dessert buffet, one finds pure black, as if the painter is out to prove how he paints without the sugar.