



WILL COTTON

interview
JOHN NEWSOM

portraits
NICO ILIEV

*John Newsom speaks with Will Cotton
about his delicious paintings*





Cotton Candy Sky (Mona)
oil on linen
72" x 84"
2006
Courtesy of the Artist and Mary Boone Gallery

MISSASTIRABLE



Will Cotton Interviewed by John Newsom for FLATT

JOHN NEWSOM: One of the things I've always admired about your work is your drawing ability. You draw like Watteau on a sugar high. Can you elaborate a bit on the relationship of drawing to your studio practice?

WILL COTTON: Drawing is really the structural underpinning of everything that goes on in the studio. When I'm beginning to plan my next painting I'll typically make quick sketches of the composition I have in mind, and all the props I'll need to build. Some of these are like mechanical schematic drawings and materials notes that help me to figure out how to construct full scale sets and table top maquettes. Then there's a second stage of drawing (once I have whole a scene in front of me) that's really about getting deep into the arrangement and material characteristics of the scenery. When there are models involved, there's a lot of figure drawing as well.

JOHN NEWSOM: The technique, the touch, the spirit of atmosphere that resonates in your work... How did you personally develop this quality, outside of academia?

WILL COTTON: I've spent a lot of time in museums, to the point that I feel very much engaged in a dialog with the history of painting. It's as though each of our predecessors over the last 500 years has used essentially the same medium to invent a new language. A lot of what goes on in my work is, in that sense, somewhat quotational.

JOHN NEWSOM: In knowing your work from basically the beginning of when you first began exhibiting in New York, I would like to ask you... When was the transitional moment, and with what

painting, did you experience a 'cross-over' into your mature style?

WILL COTTON: I can see a thread from the work I'm doing today that goes back to a painting I made in 1997 called Candy House. It was the first time I began a painting by first building a maquette to work from.

JOHN NEWSOM: So obviously there are the iconographical examples of accumulation and consumption in your paintings from the last say 10 years. Do you honestly have an opinion for or against this underlying narrative? Or is it just a quality that is naturally built into the pictorial elements of your work?

WILL COTTON: I've found that approaching that subject matter with either an exclusively positive or negative opinion is unnecessarily limiting to the potential complexity of the image. I'd rather come at it with a spirit of curiosity and focus more on asking the questions than answering them.

JOHN NEWSOM: I was in LA last year and walked into your show at Michael Kohn Gallery. The reality of escapism within your paintings instantly struck me, in a good way, like looking at a wonderful DeChirico or late Picabia, etc... like a dream. Is this an interpretation that you might experience as well in the making of the work?

WILL COTTON: Maybe it's because I've spent so much time working within this particular construct, that I don't really feel like I'm escaping anything. It's a visual language that for me still has a strong relationship to real world ideas, though I know it appears dream-like.

JOHN NEWSOM: Another position that your paintings seem to take is that of an enduring sentimentality. Again, I preface

Previous Spread:
Insatiable
50" x 24"
oil on linen
2008

This Page:
Mona
40" x 30"
oil on paper
2007





this in a positive way, because you seem to genuinely care for and actually enhance the characteristics of your subjects to their benefits. Thoughts?

WILL COTTON: I find nothing wrong with sentimentality in it's more specific forms, I think artists get in trouble when sentiments become more generalized. That's where it can cross over into kitsch.

JOHN NEWSOM: It seems that you are a painter that benefits from 'the muse', in the high manner. Is this a motif that you are able to return to with ease? Or does it ever become an obsession, and if so, how? Because this is one of the most luxurious vantage points in world painting.

WILL COTTON: I always try to defer to the narrative and listen to the painting. That's what dictates what sort of model I need to find. That said, I've been lucky enough to work with some people who are so well suited to the subject that I've painted them many times, but I think of them as actors.

JOHN NEWSOM: Although it might not be instantly recognizable, there is a real 'American-ness' to your work. From Rosenquist to The Beach Boys and beyond... the pin-ups, dolls and bikinis, candy and Pop, etc. How, as an American painter, does the concept of America play into your oeuvre?

WILL COTTON: I'm glad that comes through, though I suspect it's so tied up in who I am that I couldn't avoid it if I tried. It's something I've really had to come to terms with since I remain deeply interested in European painting and culture. It seems to me now that national identity is just a recognition of shared experience, so the symbolic language I look for in my own work is the one that is most readable within the context of 21st century America.

John Newsom is a New York based painter who's works are included in numerous international private and public collections. He is represented by Marc Straus, New York and Patrick Painter Inc., Los Angeles. A new monograph on his work was recently published by CHARTA to coincide with his first survey exhibition at The Richard J. Massey Foundation for the Arts and Sciences, NY and will be available and distributed by D.A.P. this spring.

This Spread:

Ice Cream Cavern
53" x 60"
oil on linen
2007

Following Spread:

Consuming Folly
72" x 96"
oil on linen
2012

