

Will Cotton
25 June – 9 August 2014
Opening reception: Tuesday 24 June 6 - 8PM



Will Cotton, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 2014, Oil on linen, 80x108 inches, Courtesy: Mary Boone Gallery, New York

Ronchini Gallery is pleased to present American artist Will Cotton's first UK solo exhibition curated by Bartholomew F. Bland, Director of Curatorial Affairs at the Hudson River Museum. The exhibition introduces new large-scale oil on linen paintings.

Based in New York, Cotton is known for his works depicting landscapes of a flawed utopia composed of sweets, pastries and melting ice cream, often occupied by pinup style models.

Elegantly created and strategically composed, Cotton's works are layered with cultural references from European 18th-century masters to American mid-century pinup painting. He makes paintings about the pure, the fragrant, the land of plenty, the desirable and the dream of perfection and complete indulgence. Through works which are sincere and masterfully executed, he uses food as an allegory for the human condition; sweets become a substitute for everything desirable and a metaphor for pure pleasure. Cotton explains:

'Sweetness taken to an extreme degree, as it is in my paintings, becomes cloying, even repulsive and that's where it gets interesting for me.'

Cotton starts his process by building maquettes in his New York studio to paint from. These can range from table-top scenery to life-sized sets occupied by models dressed in confectionary costumes that Cotton has created. Constructing these sets allows the artist to see surprising and often unexpected details, enabling him to recreate textures and details in such a way that viewing the works becomes a tactile experience.

In *The Deferred Promise of Complete Satisfaction*, inspired by formal portraiture, a woman is adorned in a headdress made entirely of Ladurée macarons. Her desire for self-decoration and alimentary longing are conflated into one singular and inherently absurd gesture, speaking to the impossibility of actual satiation.

In the highly structured and dense landscape painting, *The Coming Storm*, an ominous pink cloud of cotton candy fills an infinitely vast sky. The title is a reference to a popular subject of 19th and early 20th century landscape painting in which the sublime power of nature is represented by a threatening sky. In the painting the sublime is confectionary and the threat is complete immersion in an atmosphere of one's own desires.

Beyond the Pleasure Principle is a pristine depiction of paradise, in which an iconic nude woman is riding on a sea creature in an ocean of melted ice cream. The creature itself bears a material resemblance to its own surroundings, as if ice cream has taken on animate form. The composition of the work is loosely inspired by a pair of Boucher paintings in the Wallace Collection depicting sunrise and sunset, with foregrounds populated by sea nymphs riding on dolphins.

The abstract painting, *Persistence of Desire 3*, is an exploration of material and symbolic colour. Made using a mixture of oil paint and wax, much of it applied with a pastry bag, and other tools associated with cake decoration, the work has a distinct subject matter. Cotton is interested in cake decoration as a form of adornment and architectural ornamentation, a symbolic indication of reverence for an object that exists only for pleasure.

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); and Virginia MOCA (2013). 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; as well as many prominent private collections.

Cotton's performative works have included a temporary French bakery at Partners & Spade, NY, and *Cockaigne* for Performa 2011. Cotton recently served as the artistic director for the *California Gurls* music video for pop singer Katy Perry. Cotton is the subject of a monograph published by Rizzoli, USA.

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Opening Hours: Monday-Friday 10AM – 6PM, Saturday 11AM – 5PM

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