



## Will Cotton at Mary Boone Gallery

By David Hunt

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Will Cotton, *Devil's Fudge Falls*, 1999, oil on linen, 96 x 144 inches

Not since my parents loaded up my Easter basket with chocolate bunnies and Cadbury eggs have I seen such a cornucopia of candied delights as Will Cotton's six sugared landscapes at Mary Boone, Cotton's paintings also take me back to the morning after Halloween or Christmas. Remember that sense of greedy anticipation as you poured out your bulging sack or stocking? While American nostalgia is generally tinged with a melancholic recall of an irretrievable idyllic past, Cotton's paintings evoke a happy nostalgia of continual abundance and security. His waterfalls of melted chocolate and fountains spewing frosting are like a child's wishing well, granting every desire with overloaded vistas of flowing caramel and glazed treats. But while many kids hoard their trick-or-treating booty, mesmerized by the glittering wrappers, Cotton reveals a sensuous world of shimmering surfaces and tactile availability. The dimpled craters of an Oreo cookie refract light, while geometric wedges of dark chocolate provide a shadowy backdrop for precisely arranged confectionery altars.

This sense of a stylized shrinelike atmosphere is key to Cotton's work because the paintings have a wraparound quality- the center retreats into the distance, while the edges curl out to embrace us. His totemic lollipops are planted like flags at various heights, giving the illusion of deep space. Cotton finesses this illusion of an infinitely retreating horizon as an invitation to enter his Edenic world, where appetite and its fulfillment are everything. And from about five feet away, we practically fall into his paintings.

From that distance, a candied Valentine heart or a pastel Popsicle has a soft-edged amorphous quality, creating a kaleidoscopic effect. But from across the gallery, a peanut-brittle chalet gains a tightly focused photorealistic quality recalling Richard Estes's cityscapes. Cotton's paintings amaze for exactly this reason: Even when reality is most suspended at close proximity, they still entrance the viewer.