

Will Cotton

By Robert Mahoney

April 19-26, 2001



Will Cotton, *Red Pop Ravine*, oil on linen,
116.5 x 72 inches

When Will Cotton first showed his candyland panoramas last year, my response was split between a chocoholic's eureka! And an art critic's huh? His Paintings of cakes and ice cream seemed a return to early Audry Flack and Wayne Thiebaud. Hard on the heels of a show by another Mary Boone artist, Damien Loeb, Cotton's work seemed to be riding a wave of '70s-style photorealist nostalgia. But in his latest exhibition of four large and lush paintings, Cotton begins to dwell, like a Dutch still-life painter, on the allegorical power of his sugary surfaces. His methods are the same- he constricts tableaux of cakes and candy in his studio, then paints from the models- only now, his arrangements are more sophisticated, more subtextual.

In *Red Pop Ravine*, vertical peaks of Popsicles and ice cream cones tower over a valley of pink whipped cream and eggs. The majestic view suggests that Cotton is ironically sweetening Ansel Adam's vision of nature to fit the hi-cal, fat-cat myopia of America today. On the other hand, *Chocolate Thaw* shows a trailer-park-like structure built of white chocolate with dark chocolate bar windows. While still

yummy, *Thaw* also suggests a sort of gothic, Hansel and Gretel undertone of trouble lurking behind the chocolate- of things too sweet to be true.

Flood, a lovely pink candy house caught in a raging flow of syrup, is the highlight of the show. Dramatically backlit ice cream bars, covered in multicolored sprinkles, serve as half-submerged trees. Again, one happily devours the Good Humor scenery, yet the allusions to natural disaster stress that not everything in life is sunshine and lollipops. We all come down from our sugar highs eventually, and all of our frozen solid goodies doth melt. It is this new layer of meaning that elevates Cotton's art beyond the simple and saccharine.