

## Will Cotton at Mary Boone

By Owen Drolet

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Monumental landscapes comprised of sickeningly sweet-looking desserts and dreamy pictures of women, alone and in groups of two and three, clad in lingerie and smeared with cake or frolicking lazily in fantasy settings of sugar beaches and lakes made of chocolate. Add to this the whiff of lesbianism, though not as it is found at folk music festivals or on the back greens of the LPGA tour, but rather as it "occurs" in the soft-focus, bubble bath realm of the male imagination, and you have, in Will Cotton's latest body of work, a veritable poster-child for political incorrectness. What could be more socially unacceptable than a celebration of the imaginary convergence of high-fat, sugar-filled foods and heterosexual male fantasy? And yet it all seems harmless enough.

After all, the girls are eating cookies, not smoking crack, and however absurd this fantasy may be, it doesn't rely for its thrills on anybody getting hurt or humiliated. But with a broad swath of the art world having been set aside as a sort of game preserve for the ethically pure, where altruistic or otherwise socially redemptive sentiments are clearly favored, these images, which redeem nothing other than the artist's desires, manage to shock or at least embarrass, however sweetly.

Skillful, earnest, and almost humorless in his execution, Cotton delights in the tension between paint's ability to create illusion while simultaneously asserting its own sticky materiality. Unlike Wayne Thiebaud his great pastry-painting predecessor, he exploits paint's natural mimetic properties without resorting to the sort of haptic-optic trickery that has often left his elder looking like a banal illustrator. The pictures become, in essence, condensed confections in which paint, ice cream, and human flesh appear forged out of the same luscious goo. But there is a price to be paid for living in this candyland, found in the gluttonous lazy manner that the girls evince. Sated to the point of nausea, they remind us that our wildest fantasies are better left as just that. Our eyes are, after all, unreliable barometers of our appetites, and ultimately we'd never really be able to stomach what our subconscious cooks up. Coming from a series of paintings- still the most sensuous of all media- this is the closest thing to a moral you can hope for.



Will Cotton, *Crème*, 1999, oil on linen, 48 x 72 inches.