

## Local Fine Artists Go Pop

By Erica Orden

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A detail of the painting by Will Cotton that adorns the cover of Katy Perry's forthcoming album, 'Teenage Dream.' EMI Music

Like many of pop singer Katy Perry's male fans, Will Cotton has compiled a cache of clippings of the chanteuse in a variety of sultry poses. Unlike many of those fans, Mr. Cotton has a legitimate professional excuse for admiring Ms. Perry's curvaceous figure: He created the cover portrait for her album "Teenage Dream," scheduled for release on Aug 24.

The project was a world apart from the downtown gallery scene normally inhabited by Mr. Cotton, a celebrated painter whose work is represented by veteran art dealer Mary Boone. But he is not the only New York-based fine artist as of late to pick up his paintbrush in service of a pop star; the cover of Kanye

West's forthcoming album will feature an abstract portrait by George Condo, whose work is included in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art.

In addition, both musicians enlisted fine artists to create new music videos for them. Marco Brambilla created a video work for Mr. West's "Power," and Mr. Cotton served as the artistic director for Ms. Perry's hit "California Gurls."

Musicians often tab artists to design their covers; contemporary Japanese artist Takashi Murakami created the image that graces Mr. West's "Graduation," for example. But in these cases, the artists were not known for Murakami-like enthusiasm for commercial collaborations.

The task of creating an album cover for a major pop star is "not something I would normally seek out in principle," Mr. Cotton said. Similarly, Mr. Condo said he "very seldom" accepts commissions: "I basically hate [them]." And Mr. Brambilla has not previously worked on a music video, nor does he typically engage in collaborations, he said.

But for Mr. Cotton, the similarities between Ms. Perry's playful, feminine aesthetic and his own softly rendered portraits of beautiful young women wearing crowns made of

lollipops, or lounging nude on billowy beds of pink cotton candy, turned the commission into a natural extension of his previous work.

"She has a real pin-up kind of body and look, and a lot of the paintings I've done over the last few years are of these mid-century pin-up figures," Mr. Cotton said. "Given the name of this record and her general taste and my work, I thought that would be right thing to do."

In Mr. Condo's case, he was impressed that the musician was already a fan of his work: Mr. West arrived for a meeting armed with cherished examples of Mr. Condo's figurative paintings. Mr. Condo created two portraits of Mr. West: a screaming, disfigured face and an image depicting the rapper as a fallen emperor, with his crowned, decapitated head speared by a sword.

"I like the idea of putting a face on the concept of power," Mr. Condo said.

Mr. Brambilla added that part of the appeal of working with Mr. West was the opportunity to use the musician's own iconography. Mr. Condo agreed, citing his interest in creating "a hystericized expression of madness."

Despite the high profiles of their collaborators, none of the artists predicted a resultant boost in business. "It is so far out of art-world scale," Mr. Cotton said of the size of Ms. Perry's audience. "But I could honestly see this not really selling any paintings. In terms of market, I don't know that it will make any difference."