

Triple Threat! Will Cotton: the Book, the Show, the Ballet

By David Cohen

Saturday, May 5th, 2012

Will Cotton is all over town. The first monograph on the artist is out from Rizzoli, with a preface by Francine Prose. His latest show has just opened at Mary Boone's uptown space. And he has collaborated with legendary choreographer Karole Armitage in a variety show that runs at the Abrons Arts Center on the Lower East Side this Frieze weekend.



To see the names Prose and Cotton in this monograph almost seems an incongruous riposte to the poetic license and silken surfaces of the paintings reproduced. Cotton inhabits a unique niche in contemporary painting with his Bouguereau-meets-Haagen-Dazs sexed-up saccharine pop-fantasy realism. His paintings see Americanized Alexandre Cabanel-style nudes supine on billowing clouds of candyfloss, beautiful young women in cupcake tiaras, and melting landscapes of icing and toffee. “Like Giotto’s heaven,” writes Prose, “Will Cotton’s is populated by attractive angels—in this case, nude girls who, as they say, aren’t as dumb as they look. In fact, these girls are smart enough to function simultaneously as a representation of desire, a joke about desire, and a sly commentary on the commoditization of desire.” But not necessarily, it seems, a joke about representation: the book is strong on the artist’s drawings, and these hint at an

earnest engagement with the language of form that transcends what is otherwise a parade of faux-oldmasterliness in their conventional gestures. The monograph concludes with an extensive conversation with Toby Kamps (and no, that’s not a pun on “to be camp”: Mr Kamps is the new modern and contemporary curator at the Menil Foundation.)

Werk! The Armitage Gone Variety Show, reaches its final night at the Abrons Arts Center tonight, Saturday May 5, with performances at 7.30 and 10 pm. The other artists who collaborate with Armitage on *Rave*, a new work, are Doug Fitch, Kalup Linzy, Richard Phillips, Aida Ruilova and William Wegman. Armitage has a long history of collaboration with visual artists dating back to the ex-Merce Cunningham dancer’s first works with David Salle in the 1980s.

Will Cotton: Paintings and Works on Paper. Text by Francine Prose, Interview by Toby Kamps. New York: Rizzoli, 2011. 172 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8478-3667-3. \$60.00

Will Cotton at Mary Boone Gallery, May 3 to June 30, 2012. 745 Fifth Avenue, between 57th and 58th streets, New York City, 212.752.2929