

WILL COTTON

Vistas of Candy Land

FEB 16—MAR 20, 2015 / JOHN HARTELL GALLERY, SIBLEY DOME

RECEPTION

Monday, March 2
5 p.m.

John Hartell Gallery, Sibley Dome

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The Consummation of Empire (2008), oil on linen, 84" x 56"

FROM THE LATE 1990s ONWARD New York City-based artist Will Cotton has created paintings featuring gingerbread structures in completely edible environments. Known for his figural work—in particular nudes at rest on clouds of cotton candy and portraits featuring models wearing candied headgear—Cotton has kept his gingerbread and candied landscape pictures unpopulated with the focus on composition and atmosphere.

Cotton works from models set up in his studio. He has taken cooking classes to better fabricate these painstaking miniature worlds. Gingerbread is a relatively strong material, but there is a lifespan to it as well as the candy and the icing that holds it all together. The decay of a single gingerbread house can be read across several paintings where vantage points shift and fogs descend. The use of models encourages this sort of treatment, lends the paintings all sorts of details and lighting effects that would be difficult to achieve from merely fantasizing about the subject. For all of their dreaminess, the painting process is more technical than whimsical. The structural logic of gingerbread assembly is carefully abided to.

Cotton keeps a vintage Candy Land board game in his studio. His architectural creations are not conceived of as autonomous objects, but as part of a complete territory where Candy Land's locales—Molasses Swamp, Candy Cane Forest, Gum Drop Mountain—are realized with deadpan seriousness. The board game has inspired much of the work featured in this exhibition, functioning as a cognitive map.

Cotton studied at the Cooper Union, the New York Academy of Art, and in Rouen, France. His work is in the permanent collections of the National Portrait Gallery, the Smithsonian, and the Seattle Art Museum.

This exhibition is curated by Mark Morris, visiting associate professor and director of exhibitions and events.