



CROWNING GLORY

TOM FORD ON WILL COTTON

Will Cotton was painting in his Chinatown studio one day last year when he got a phone call from his dealer Mary Boone with news that Tom Ford had bought one of his canvases—a female nude reclining on a bed of cotton candy clouds. The piece now hangs in the fashion designer's home in London.

WILL COTTON: So that model in the painting you bought, the red-haired girl, Mona. I'm wondering what it was about her that you responded to.

TOM FORD: She looked like a big piece of candy. The fact that she's floating in pink clouds and she's so pink, and her red hair, and her skin was so flawless—the way she was posed. A lot of women criticize the objectification of females in our society—I'm an equal opportunity objectifier. I like paintings of beautiful men just as much.

WC: What do you have hanging in your home?

TF: When I started making enough money to start buying art, I bought things that I associated with or had seen or had struck me as a kid. For example, I have a Calder that was Georgia O'Keefe's that Calder had made for her in 1943. I grew up in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and my grandfather knew her, so at age 11 I saw this thing hanging in her living room—it was the very first Calder I ever saw. I asked what it was, and she told me, and later my grandfather bought me some Calder books. And when she died, I went to her estate and asked if it was for sale. It wasn't and so it took me a few years, but

now I have that very Calder hanging in my house. I also have several Ellsworth Kellys, a Franz Kline, Robert Motherwell, and quite a few Warhols. Really, for me, they're the classics. I also think all of us have woken up a bit to figurative painting lately.

WC: In my mind, there's always been someone sort of carrying that torch, but figurative painting's definitely one of those things that goes in and out of fashion in the art world.

TF: But I think that's also happening in—and I don't mean to necessarily connect art to decorative arts or what's happening culturally in the world, but we've just come out of a renaissance of 20th century, mid-century modernism, where everything's been so stripped down, pared down. I've just done a new fragrance, which is so different from the fragrances I was working on in the '90s, where you were stripping the scent down to almost nothing. The fragrances were transparent and the bottles were clear and everything was quite minimal and streamlined. And I find myself hungry for ornament now, hungry for color, hungry for a story.

WC: And for something that refers to something outside of itself. I think soul is a distinction—it's what we're after.

TF: Good art for me has such a strong character and personality that becomes, when you live with it, as important as the people you live with, or your dog.

WC: Put it up on the wall, and see if it lasts for you.

TF: Exactly, because if it's just graphic design, it won't last—like wrapping paper.

WC: When you were in my studio, you saw that Tom Sachs duct tape painting on the wall and said you have one of his pieces as well.

TF: Yeah. He made a toilet brush for me—because he wanted a Gucci toilet brush, and I said, "I'll give you one if you give me a Tom Sachs toilet brush." So he made me a toilet brush out of a stick, some foam core, some string, and an old sponge, and some tape.

WC: Excellent.

TF: I got the better deal [*laughs*] 'cause my toilet brush is just manufactured chrome—not very interesting—although very kind of glamorous and beautiful and expensive.

WC: Was this your personal toilet brush? Had it been used?

TF: No! It had not been used! I gave him a brand-new Gucci toilet brush.

WC: Hey, have you seen the piece I made for you?

TF: No!

WC: Well, it should be on its way to you.

TF: And did you actually paint it?

WC: You know, it was never my intention. I was going to do this little ink drawing, and then it just kept bugging me how that pink ribbon wasn't pink.

TF: Oh, I'm so glad you painted it.

WC: Thanks, Tom. I hope you like it.

TF: I'm sure I will. ■

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