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Artist Jason DeMarte's Seductive “Second Nature”

Miss Rosen / Jul 22, 2016

American artist **Jason DeMarte** (b. 1973) skillfully embraces, then subverts, the passion for artifice that is ever-present in his native land, calling into question the national obsession with recasting the natural world as a dystopian fantasy of perfection achieved through plasticity and alteration.

His work explores fixation with making things prettier than they actually are, of erasing “flaws” and character almost violently in a quest for a flawlessness that becomes grotesquely surreal. And yet, ever so enticing in its corn syrup sweetness, so much so that its appeal is that you know that there’s something sick about it, yet you long to throw caution to the wind.



Jason DeMarte, “Corn Syrup Summer”, 2016



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DeMarte's work is alluring, like a siren's call, igniting a powerful tension between reality and illusion, reminding us how much we want to believe in our fantasies above all. The artist explains, "I am interested in the American modes of representing the natural world through events and objects that have been fabricated or taken out of context. This unnatural experience of the so-called 'natural' world is reflected in the way we, as modern consumers, ingest products. What becomes clear is that the closer we come to mimicking the natural world, the further away we separate ourselves from it."

Working digitally, DeMarte has created works composed of artificial flora and fauna with commercially produced and processed products to produce a compelling body of art. RULE Gallery, Marfa, TX, presents an exhibition of work in Second Nature, now on view through September 17, 2016. This body of work continues DeMarte's explorations in an earlier series titled Confected, which he had shown at the gallery in 2015.

Describing a photograph from that series featuring

an ice cream cone, DeMarte reveals, "The ice cream cone was actually a sculpture made of resin. It was a lighthearted beautiful thing that represents happiness, but it was fabricated. It's a disillusionment: you feel something and understand what you see if fake. It's a disappointment. We have evolved an insatiable desire to craft, engineer, and improve things in order to fit into our lives of consumer leisure."

Indeed, there is a dark lining to the silver cloud of plastic dreams, one that is not only unsustainable but ultimately foretells a fall, for as high as you go up is as far as you have to come down. Reality then comes as quite a shock, reminding us why people are so loathe to deal with truth and prefer to maintain their illusions.

DeMarte observes, "Advertisements and media are a barrage. We seek to be constantly entertained, upping the ante in order to feel stimulated. The natural world falls short. If you go out into the woods, it's pretty boring. It's not 'Wild America' on TV. It's pretty quiet. We've been taught that this is wrong; nature is one thing and reality is something else."

It's that something else that DeMarte embraces in his work, while making sure we don't fall too deep in love with what is not. Within these sumptuous images of nature made false, there is a pervasive sense of infection that lingers throughout. It's much in the same way we understand that sugar is poisonous, and nothing good can come of it; yet we delve over and over again for the instant gratification of short-term satisfaction. We want it, despite whatever ills it may cause.

DeMarte's work takes us through a host of responses, depending on how far we want to go. He observes, "I try hard to make the work operate on multiple levels. We're all attracted to certain things. There's an animalistic attraction and I play on that. I've simplified things to create and to stimulate the animal to react. The work is really large and colorful, that way you can't help but feel it: that beauty. It's seductive."

This is the baseline, from which we begin, and as we invest more of ourselves we discover the layers within, reminding us that not everything that glitters is gold. But if we want it, just for the pleasure of the moment, DeMarte provides. We can enjoy the illusion, or dive in deep to discover what lies underneath the surface of things.



Jason DeMarte, "Candied Cultivation", 2016

