

# Time to Paint the Doughnuts

**EMILY EVELETH LAVISHES THE RICHNESS OF OIL PAINT ON ONE OF OUR RICHEST DESSERTS.**

BY EDWARD M. GÓMEZ



REGARD THE winsomeness and modesty of ordinary, three-ounce, jelly-filled doughnuts, those sweet, sticky emblems of the everyday that are so easy to take for granted and overlook — except, of course, when submission to their charms leads to a busted diet and a reluctantly loosened belt. Take note of this puffy pastry's inherent eloquence, too— and if such an estimation of mere lumps of sugary fluff sounds too grand, consider the surprisingly revealing pictures of doughnuts the American painter Emily Eveleth has been making for many years. Each one is an insightful study of light, form and texture, and an essay in capturing, as the most skillfully rendered portraits do, something of the spirit of their subjects' fleeting, ineffable air.

Despite their subject matter, Eveleth's images are not Pop Art in either style or attitude. Eveleth admits that she brings a certain sense of irony to the task of producing them

in richly layered brushstrokes in lustrous oil on canvas, but she does so without the cool detachment of many postmodernists' supposedly subversive "appropriationist gestures." Instead, she unabashedly revels in her exploration of the expressive power of oil paint's luminous, viscous goo.

Eveleth, who lives and keeps a studio in a town near Boston, notes, "I enjoy seeing what happens when I approach the painting of a doughnut like I do that of, say, a classical still life or a heroic landscape." She adds, "There's a tension that results when you realize that such an ordinary subject is being given this kind of painterly treatment. It's not what you would expect. I like the tension that can be felt as the image appears to constantly shift between genres. Is it a portrait? A still life? Some kind of landscape? As you look at these paintings, though, each one always returns to its source: They're doughnuts." Speaking philosophically about the character of the category-bending pictures she creates and how they tease a viewer's sense of perception, Eveleth says, "How can you make an image that almost denies the nature of the subject itself?"

Eveleth's solo exhibition of new paintings, which is on view at Danese/Corey Gallery in New York through April 16, includes some surprises among the artist's latest paintings of doughnuts in all of their lusciousness and, well, majesty. For along with her typically large canvases — scale can deeply affect the emotional impact of Eveleth's images — she will show some tiny pictures of the same subjects. Will these smaller paintings, surrounded by generous expanses of wall space, counterbalance her larger, monumental portrayals of her humble subjects and provoke a special sense of intimacy between image and viewer?

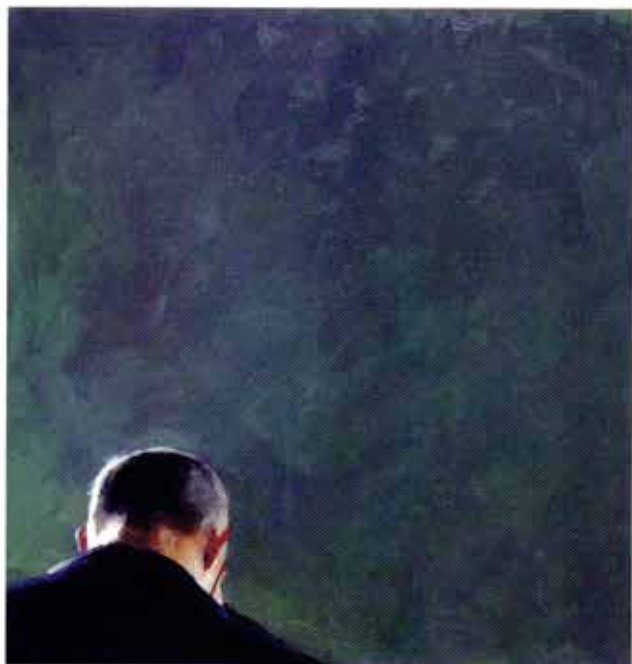
One of the artist's new works shows a doughnut hunkered down on a white ledge, split in half, with its raspberry-red filling oozing out of a gaping hole. If Eveleth's subjects often appear as vulnerable as they do exuberant — confident and aware of the beauty of their shimmering surfaces and their tempting voluptuousness — here her portrait "sitter" appears both exultant and



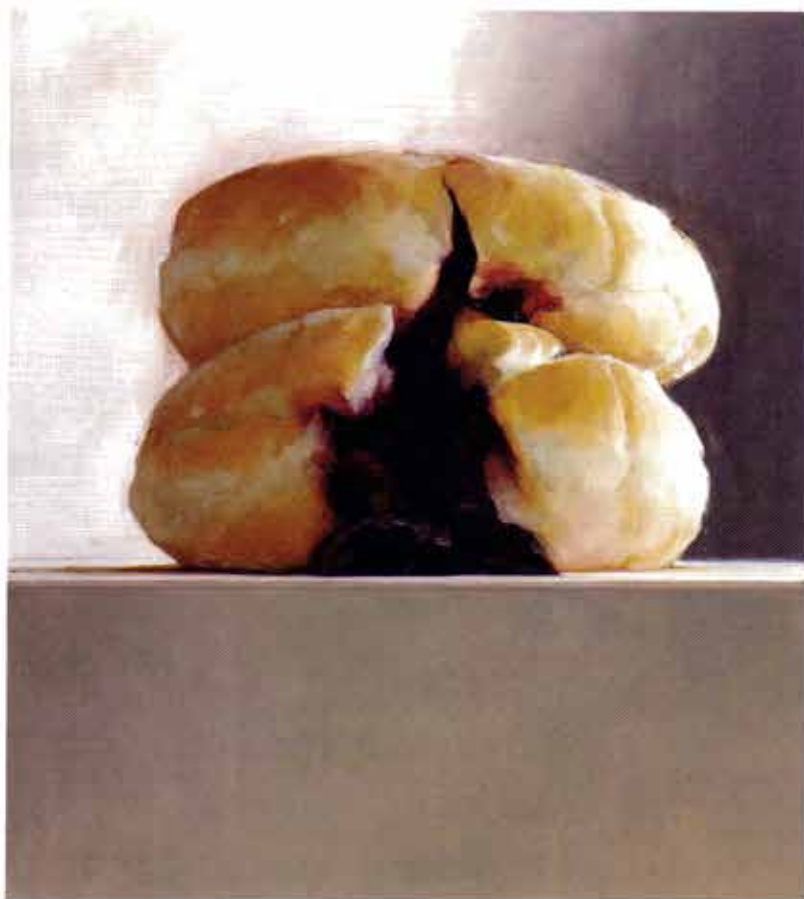
Opposite page, from top: Emily Eveleth, *Departures*, 2016, oil on canvas, 62 x 84 inches; *Wonderland*, 2015, oil on canvas, 17 x 23 inches.  
This page: *Big Pink*, 2016, oil on canvas, 78 x 60 inches.

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Clockwise from top left: *Fold*, 2001, oil on canvas, 44 x 42 inches; *World Bank*, 2010, oil on canvas, 34 x 38 inches; *Unintended Consequences*, 2007, oil on canvas, 68 x 60 inches.



wounded at the same time. Another picture shows a doughnut set on table or platform in a dark space, split open and spilling its custardy guts in a play of light and shadow that brings to mind the darkness of 16th-century Spanish oil painting and the ephemeral quality of 17th-century Netherlandish works, which Eveleth has studied with care. Expressions of that interest in the way light helps give perceptible form to objects in space and in how paint can capture light and recreate that visual sensation can be found throughout Eveleth's oeuvre, including her paintings from past years featuring views of male figures or hands, and glowing reflections bouncing off bald men's heads.

It's not every day that a subject as unassuming as a doughnut is examined with the precision of, say, a Chardin still life, or celebrated with the élan in every knowing stroke—a flick of transparent gray-white for sugar glaze here, a touch of hot pink for frosting there—that typifies John Singer Sargent's emblematic portraits and rendering of skin, hair, fabric and other textures and surfaces.

"Any work of art is an act of presentation," Eveleth observes, acknowledging the sense of drama and the psychological atmosphere that surrounds her subjects, which she tries to grasp in her painting as much as she strives to vividly depict what she sees. "Believe it or not," she explains, "I don't feel any emotional attachment to my doughnuts. Instead, I want to capture their aura — and also see what kind of aura I can bring to them." ■