

# ARTNEWS

ART OF THE CITY

## WELCOME TO THE GOOD LIFE: LEARNING FROM WAYNE THIEBAUD

by: Andrew Russeth | 10/07/2014

No surprise, Wayne Thiebaud's second show at Acquavella Galleries on Manhattan's Upper East Side is a tender, elegant pleasure. The Sacramento, California-based artist is 94 next month, and he has still got it. He has filled the townhouse with his immaculate cakes, his landscapes, beach scenes, and portraits—49 paintings and drawings in all, the majority from the past 15 years, with a few older gems sprinkled throughout. He makes it look easy, no sweat.

What is there left to say about the work of perhaps America's greatest figurative painter? Well, for one thing, the unbelievable silence and stillness of his objects still shock me every time. They hover, gracefully, in the present tense. The best work here, the large painting *Cold Case* (2010/11/13), holds four pies and four cakes that are so carefully frosted that you just know that they will never be cut, that they will be fresh forever. Same for the undated pint of beer, which he has delicately rendered in pen and ink, a paragon of froth. And that pure pink honey ham, adorned with a sweet pineapple: you can almost taste it.



Wayne Thiebaud, *Cold Case*, 2010/11/13 © WAYNE THIEBAUD

The conventional wisdom about Thiebaud remains true—he's best with the pastries, which outshine all his other subjects, and his portraits, especially recent ones, look wooden, but 1975's *Man with Cigar* crackles—its goateed sitter has a little grunt in his face; he looks like he's about ready to start a fight. And two recent landscapes are stunners—*Big Bluffs* (2013) suggests a Diebenkorn landscape, with vertigo-inducing verticals, somehow smothered with the soaring white meringue of a baked Alaska, while *Green Hill Farms* (2008–11) drops two gorgeous truffle-like hills into electrically colored, gridded abstract farmland.

What drives Thiebaud? In the catalogue, artist Jock Reynolds tells the by now semi-famous story about attending his graduate class at UC Davis in 1970, in which Thiebaud, he writes, “rather quickly explained to us that he and his peers couldn't teach any of us to become artists, that we simply had to assume that identity for ourselves and get on with making our work.” Reynolds continues the story:

*Thiebaud then added, almost cryptically, that there were some very practical things he could teach us that might be useful during our years at Davis. He then requested that we produce pencil and paper. What followed was a remarkably lucid lecture on where we were to buy the best and cheapest salami, cheese, coffee, fruit, bread, cakes, wine, and more in the region, things our professor insisted would significantly enrich the quality of our lives.*

That's the ethos that of his art, that makes it look always new: find perfect, simple things and then enjoy them.

You should see the show, and then perhaps go enjoy a pastry in the neighborhood. Below, stealing a bit from Thiebaud, are some pastry and ice cream recommendations in New York's art neighborhoods, for times when gallery going needs just a little bit of added sweetness.

### Upper East Side

– Lady M Confections, 41 E. 78th: A few doors down from Mnuchin and almost as pristine and decadent—eating the mille crêpes cake tastes like drinking a bottle of cream, and the green tea version is even better.

– Ladurée, 864 Madison, btw. E. 70th and 71st: Creamy, crisp macarons. Not as great as Bouchon's, but still great. Like Gagosian, they are now a worldwide empire—and consequently they sometimes lack verve—but we all continue to go there for a reason.

– Untitled, in the Whitney: Caramel apple pie from Brooklyn's redoubtable Four & Twenty Blackbirds with vanilla ice cream—another thing to enjoy at the Whitney's Breuer building before it closes.

– Sant Ambroeus, 1000 Madison, btw. E. 77th and 78th: The Tiramisu.

– Café Sabarsky, in the Neue Galerie: You can't go wrong, but I like the luscious pistachio and chocolate Mozart-Torte with fresh whipped cream. Wish I could live here.



Green tea mille crêpes at Lady M.



Banana cupcake at Billy's. Bakery. COURTESY BILLY'S BAKERY

### Chelsea

– La Bergamonte Patisserie: 177 9th, btw. W. 20th and 21st: Highly underrated. Everyone should be stopping here on the way to and from Chelsea, but I have only ever seen a few discerning dealers at the counter. The opera cake is pretty much a block of pure butter and chocolate.

– Billy's Bakery, 184 9th, btw. W. 21st and 22nd: Their icebox cake makes a joke of Magnolia's, and the banana cupcakes are excellent. There's a high-quality but laid-back vibe, sort of like Anton Kern Gallery's.

– Bottino Takeout, 246 10th, btw. W. 24th and 25th: Sometimes you see so much art you need to go into a food coma for a few hours and that's what Bottino's bread pudding is for.

– Ronnybrook Dairy, in the Chelsea Market: Pauline's pistachio ice cream, which is laudably savory.

– wichcraft, 601 W. 26th: Not chic, but their Cream'wiches—two cookies filled with cream—are precise, potent hits of sugar and butter.

### Midtown/57th Street

– Bouchon Bakery, 1 Rockefeller Plaza, E. 48th, btw. 5th and 6th: It's a little walk from the 57th Street galleries, but it's the best bakery in town and the only place one needs to stop when doing a Midtown stroll—they have a Better Nutter cookie heavy enough to anchor a boat, an Oreo-like cookie called the TKO that might make you cry, and the best macarons in New York. Like nearby Marian Goodman, Thomas Keller is about quality—a tough job done right.



Cookies at Bouchon: TKO at back and Better Nutter at right. BOUCHON BAKERY



### Lower East Side and Chinatown

- Chinatown Ice Cream Factory, 65 Bayard: Almond cookie ice cream.
- Donut Plant, 379 Grand: The blackout cake donut.
- Il Laboratorio del Gelato, 188 Ludlow: Guinness gelato, but they're all great.
- Morgenstern's Finest Ice Cream, 2 Rivington: This place is next level (too next level?). The menu is divided into vanillas, chocolates, coffees, etc.—but the ice cream backs up the pretension. Every single flavor I've tried has been out of this world. Plus it's across the street from Richard Prince's old Spiritual America storefront, which is now a clothing store of the same name, so you can eat ice cream and think about that.

### Café Sabarsky's Mozart-Torte.

- Sugar Sweet Sunshine, 126 Rivington: Before cupcakes were cool and then uncool again, there was SSS—the Bob cupcake (yellow cake with chocolate almond buttercream) is awesome. This is the Canada gallery of pastry shops.

### SoHo

- Balthazar Bakery, 80 Spring: The only canelé that matters.
- Ceci Cela Patisserie, 55 Spring: Bright, buttery madeleines. Also, Documenta 13's director, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, is a fan.
- Kee's Chocolates, 80 Thompson: The cognac truffle.

### Williamsburg and Greenpoint

- Pie Corps, 77 Driggs: Not a fan of the martial-sounding name of this place, but two big helpings of the apple crumb with rosemary caramel pie and a visit to Real Fine Arts make for a nice little weekend day trip.
- OddFellows Ice Cream Co.: Their deranged cymbal-playing mascot is confusing, but then you have the miso cherry ice cream and that doesn't matter anymore. It's a convenient 5-minute walk from The Journal Gallery, and there's also one in the East Village two blocks away from American Contemporary.
- Peter Pan, 727 Manhattan: A grand donut institution, more than 60 years young.



Pear, rum raisin, sour cream cobbler.ARTNEWS