

Jason DeMarte: Garden of Artificial Delights

Jason DeMarte's hyperreal photographs present viewers with an immersive world filled with unexpected and deeply unsettling sensory temptations. DeMarte (b. 1973), a Michigan-based photographer, creates images of local flora and fauna plagued by unnatural weather conditions. In his imagined environments, glossy paint, whipped topping, and candy rain down from ominous, cloudy skies. His photographs conjure a sense of wonder coupled with bewilderment, evoking Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) and Frank L. Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* (1900). These photographs even recall the long tradition of fantastical landscape painting—from the Netherlandish artist Hieronymus Bosch (ca. 1450–1516) to the American Martin Johnson Heade (1819–1904)—in which illusionistic scenes of decadent behavior, exotic flowers, and strange wildlife both signify and warn against the excesses and ephemerality of their time. The artificial adornments depicted in DeMarte's images are undoubtedly materials found on contemporary store shelves. Smothered by these saccharine interventions, the flowers and plants begin to wilt, threatening the survival of the birds and insects, and, in turn, the broader environment we inhabit together.

DeMarte foregrounds the destructive impact the production and consumption of these creations have on humans and the environment. In this panoramic installation of photographs and artist-designed wallpaper, viewers witness the unsettling ecological deviations from a ground-level vantage point. DeMarte constructs his photomontages digitally from individual and highly detailed photographs, making the experience of his environments all the more visceral. His lush settings seduce viewers, much as advertisements aim to do with consumers. Yet the contrast between the seamless quality of his constructions and the unnatural depictions in the images heightens our sense of unease. The glistening worlds depicted by DeMarte call attention to the fraught relationship between humans and the environments they inhabit, cultivate, and, perhaps inadvertently, destroy. *Garden of Artificial Delights* illuminates the complicated visual circumstances of our contemporary moment and provokes us to consider this imagined, oversaturated, and polluted world as analogous to our own.

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All works courtesy of the artist.

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