

# SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

ArtForum  
November 2002

NEW YORK / BOSTON

## ANN CRAVEN

KLEMENS GASSER &  
TANJA GRUNERT /  
ALLSTON SKIRT GALLERY

Two concurrent and complementary exhibitions of oil paintings from the past four years by Ann Craven attested to the artist's masterful treatment of natural imagery. With these colorful works—made after a variety of sources, including bird paintings by Ed Ruscha and Ross Bleckner, deer canvases by Gustave Courbet and Gerhard Richter, vintage illustrated field guides, and still and digital photographs—Craven has invented a unique vocabulary that proves her a gifted *animalier* and a significant markmaker. Her recent juicily painted birds perched among hollyhocks, cymbidium orchids, and berries provided—despite the scenes' Audubon-like arrangements—vehicles for the painter's unconventional amplifications of scale, heightened colors, and deliberate blurring of focus and distortion of perspective.

Craven works in a variety of sizes that range from eleven by fourteen inches to fifty by seventy-four inches; each work demonstrates her equal agility with paintbrushes large and small, whether it's a fine-artist's size 8 or a housepainter's five-inch brush. In fact, the New York show was mostly a pumped-up version of the Boston show: Almost every painting at Gasser & Grunert appeared in a smaller version at Allston Skirt Gallery, with the exception of the former show's monu-

mental *Hello, Hello, Hello*, 2002. This exquisitely rendered triptych composed of the repeated giant image of an African grey parrot sitting among white-and-purple cymbidium orchids is a kind of avian homage to Monet's Rouen Cathedral paintings. Each bird varies slightly in shading and detailing; luscious shingles of curvilinear strokes make up the feathers, hinting at a gutsy AbEx touch. Like Monet, whose gardens at Giverny provided the source for many of her soft-focus flowery backgrounds—she participated in an artist's residency there in 2000—Craven is a remarkably adept series painter. But rather than use a repeated motif to capture variations of light, she addresses issues of mass-media reproduction. The combinations of yellow canaries and synthetic-pink backgrounds of blurred hollyhocks and cherries in her several versions of *Yellow Fello* (all 2002), suggest a greeting-card aesthetic.

Lest the viewer mistake these paintings for modified Hallmark images, however, it should be made known that another thematic source for the work was the 1973 sci-fi classic *Soylent Green*, in which twenty-first-century New Yorkers live in an overpopulated, sunbaked world. Craven's large-scale *Dear in Daisies*, 1998, and smaller postscripts such as *Dear and*



Ann Craven, *Dear and Daisies (The Life of a Fawn)*, 2002, oil on canvas, 14 x 18".

*Daisies (The Life of a Fawn)*, 2002, and *Little Dear*, 2002, feature an innocent-looking young fawn nestled in a sylvan field of daisies—the deer image lifted directly from the film-within-a-film of *Soylent Green*'s beautiful and antiseptic planned-death clinic called Home. (In the scene, Edward G. Robinson's dying character, Sol Roth, listens to soft classical music and gazes at movies of how Earth once was.) Using Photoshop and other digital tools to combine and layer images of the deer taken from the apocalyptic movie, along with scanned photographs of daisies on vintage postcards, Craven created her own ersatz nature.

While often linked stylistically with Karen Kilimnik and Elizabeth Peyton, Craven does not share their allegiance to kitsch teen worlds. Rather, her nostalgia has to do with the place of nature, and perhaps even of nineteenth-century nature painting, in a world that is becoming more and more like that of *Soylent Green*. Her heartfelt canvases, touched by an almost religious reverence for the planet's flora and fauna, are themselves products of an artificial, digitally enhanced reality.

—Francine Koslow Miller

2021 S WABASH AVE  
CHICAGO IL 60616  
+1 (312) 226 2223