

SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

Art New England
June 2004

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June/July 2004

Mario Diacono at Ars Libri/Boston, MA
www.arslibri.com/MarioDiacono.htm

ANN CRAVEN: THIS WAY NO THIS WAY (AUT AUT)

It takes only minutes to look at the two paintings in this exhibit. The oversize images of songbirds and hollyhocks have immediate impact, their aggressiveness countering any decorative or ornithological and botanical descriptions that might call for visual lingering. With optical subtlety and complexity kept to a minimum, the work requires a shift from perception to analysis. The denial of prolonged visual involvement releases ideas and resulting ironies that continue to brew long after leaving the paintings.

A single bird painted with broad, feathery strokes against a black background in *Nevermore* perches almost edge to edge on the 90-inch-by-72-inch canvas. Hollyhock blossoms, buds, and serpentine stems provide a patterned, simple context. The other painting (of the exhibit's title) is even larger, with the bird mirrored in horizontal informal symmetry. The black background of its comparison has turned cosmetic pink. While Craven's brushy paint application stops way short of deKooning's invested emotional fervor in his equally large, iconic, and confrontational *Women*, standing in front of these bird paintings destabilizes both pictorial and actual space.

Diacono, in his essay accompanying the work, cites the artist's use of a unique process in replication or reproduction of image (she copies and paints the birds over and over again), and traces her assimilation of historical precedent through every post-World War II art movement. In the end, Craven effectively tests the use of history to make art. With irony-laden intent, she neither accepts nor rejects the premise. Her most forceful statement is made in taking an image associated with vulnerability and freedom, then enlarging it so that it becomes a threat to the space and freedom of its beholder. Any movement into the next chapter of the history she references then becomes secondary to the moment at hand, brief as it may be. *Meredith Fife Day*



Ann Craven, *This Way No This Way (AUT AUT)*, 84 x 120", 2004.

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