

# SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

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## ART PAPERS

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Ann Craven, New York  
by Lara Kristin Lentini, pg. 62



### ANN CRAVEN NEW YORK

July in Chelsea typically signals the advent of a host of summer shows as sweet and weightless as Italian ice at the seaside, and every bit as easy to digest. With serious collectors away in the Hamptons and editors compiling museum-heavy, tourist-oriented summer listings or turning their attention to fall previews, gallerists plan their own vacations and fill their under-attended spaces with light fare suitable for lazy summer days: group shows with unchallenging themes, surveys of gallery artists, and so on. This July, however, saw a minor shift in favor of the serious stuff that usually awaits fall to rear its ugly head. Critical dissections of themes such as war, racial hatred, environmental decay, and other perennial bumsers abounded.

At first glance, Ann Craven's solo show *Deer and Beer* [Klemens Gasser & Tanja Grunert; June 20—July 18, 2006] seems to buck this mini-trend: the title alone conveys a summery insouciance. Once inside the cool gallery space, where deer stare from the walls and a carefully arranged litter of empties recalls mindless recreational pursuits, the sweltering streets of Manhattan seem a million miles away. You may as well be sitting on the porch of your very own Fire Island summer share.

Idle questions may pop into your mind: is Ann Craven getting better at painting deer? Is she trying to? Her repetition suggests a harmless obsession—a girly counterpart to the teenage boy who practices the same Led Zeppelin riff on his guitar over and over. In this age of mechanical reproduction, Craven reproduces her works by hand, with industriousness that seems both mindless and meaningless.

But first glances are nearly always deceiving. To begin with, a few layers must be peeled away to uncover

the source of Craven's deer images. *Deer*, 2004 is a reproduction-by-hand of *Deer*, 2002, which owes its existence to *Deer in Daisies (The Life of a Fawn)*, 1998. In turn, the source of this image is neither the real thing, nor a child's toy, nor yet a Disney cartoon. It's the dystopian science fiction film *Soylent Green*, which portrays a future in which the natural world, having been destroyed, is only preserved in images, in reproductions.

Considering this, Craven's project takes on a ritualistic, superstitious dimension. She paints and re-paints the same image, not for the sake of a sly deconstruction of the value of labor in an era of mass-produced consumer goods, but as part of a fervent rush to preservation. She paints to preserve herself, her work, and her world—our world—from forces as vague as they are menacing.

*Deer and Beer* is, ultimately, only a light summer show on the surface, and the artist good-naturedly invites us to surrender to the simplicity of that layered surface. Beneath sweet images of one of nature's most timid creatures, beneath facile puns and a rhyming title, there is the elemental satisfaction of looking at similar things side-by-side, appreciating symmetry while scanning for differences. This seeming simplicity is proffered in an appropriately relaxed, casual, summertime mode.

Craven's refusal to signal the seriousness of her intentions is quite endearing. A cursory search for underlying seriousness might generate echoes of smart-alecky fun along the lines of Warhol's silkscreens or Koons' puppies. But the similarity is misleading, as it further conceals an endeavor more earnest, more melancholy, and more contemporary.

—Lara Kristin Lentini

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Ann Craven, *Deer in Emerald Field*, 2006, oil on canvas, 60 x 48 inches [courtesy of the artist and Klemens Gasser & Tanja Grunert, Inc.]  
Ann Craven, view of the exhibition *Deer and Beer* at Klemens Gasser & Tanja Grunert, Inc. [courtesy of the artist and Klemens Gasser & Tanja Grunert, Inc.]

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