SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

Time Out New York September 2002



Ann Craven
Klemens Gasser & Tanja Grunert,
through Oct 5 (see Chelsea).

ne of the most gorgeous landscape paintings currently on view is by Ann Craven: It shows a deer caught in a field of uniform green dotted by waving, sun-dappled daisies. The picture's idyllic calm is all the more compelling since the flowers' white petals are variously marked by the artist as flat, hard strokes or as delicate. nearly immaterial washes. This technique upsets any traditional notion of perspective, since some blossoms are blurred in the foreground while others in the background remain in perfect focus. The entire scene seems unnaturally crystalline—a painting ready to compete with HDTV. And this impression of nature being filtered through a synthetic lens is, in fact, well founded. The scene composites imagery that originally appeared in Soylent Green, a 1973 science-fiction film depicting a burned out future in which deceased humans are the only source of food.

Craven obviously has a handle on the formal questions raised by painting in the era following photomechanical reproduction. Several canvases feature images of birds modeled on pictures from bird-watching guides; these forms appear against backdrops extrapolated from Craven's studies of flowers made during her recent residency at Monet's gardens in Giverny. The compositional disjunction between figure and ground creates the impression of photographic space—a severe, exclusive focus on the central subject while her slight, soft distortions of flowers and stems recall the mute swipes of Gerhard Richter.

Yet Craven is less interesting for the way she engages the painting-versusphoto debate than she is for creating a Blade Runner-like sense of replication. As in director Ridley Scott's androidfilled Los Angeles, in which it became virtually impossible to distinguish sentient being from cyborg, viewers are hard-pressed to discern Craven's sincerity amid her tacky arts-and-crafts color combinations and hokey subject matter. Consider the triptych Hello Hello, three canvases featuring the same bird. Only the slightest differences exist among the pictures, yet these compositional discrepancies originate in the artist's gestural brush strokes. Rather than emulating a machine, like so many painters before her. Craven emulates the expressive, sentimental human touchmuch like a bird might mimic language. The result is a kind of cloned painting in which questions of real and simulated emotion dissolve into a thin millennial air.—Tim Griffin

COUNTRY CLOCKWASE TOP TO BOTTOM COURTESY CACISSING CALLEPY, COURTES YALMING CASSER & TANA GRANERI, NC. PROTOCEARM BY MARK LL.