

SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

Artillery
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REVIEWS

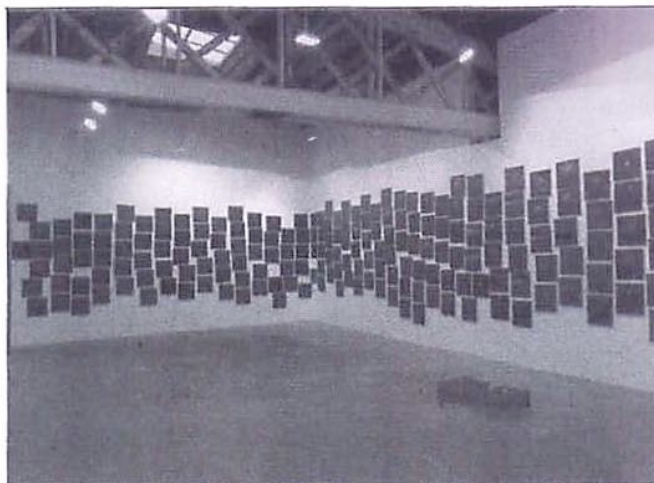
NEW YORK

ANN CRAVEN
Gasser & Grunert

THE PAINTER ANN CRAVEN has a tendency to repeat herself. In the past this has meant re-painting an entire show with a single adjustment: doubling the size of the canvases. Last year in a show featuring 15 nearly identical paintings of deer, she scattered empty beer cans all over the gallery and provided free beer for visitors during gallery hours — a concept created in collaboration with the painter Josh Smith — and titled “Deer and Beer.” This time around she’s painted the moon, from life, 400 times over the course of a single month — each painting identical in size and scale. A concurrent show at the Cincinnati Art Center featured a series of 400 duplicates — paintings that she made from the 400 originals. As an added twist, in a nod to Felix Gonzalez Torres, two stacks of small posters were placed on the floor. One was a reproduction of a painting from the original series, the other, a reproduction of a painting from the series of duplicates.

The 400 moon paintings are stretched around the room salon-style and resemble a sort of fragmented, off-kilter grid and call to mind the word “constellation,” given the celestial subject matter. Each of the relatively small, square canvases presents a fresh variation on her theme — ranging from nearly monochromatic to cloud-obscured views, murky concentric circles of fog, moody glimpses through skeletal silhouettes of tree branches and several elegantly efficient treatments of yellow or orange crescents.

With her narrow set of constraints and carefully limited palette, Craven exploits seemingly every possibility available and reminds us that, for as long as it’s there, people will always stare at the moon and invest its image with romantic, emotional, poetic and meteorological significance. Adjacent paintings are grouped roughly into themes. The appearance of a single bold stroke representing a moon-obscuring cloud felt brazen and thrilling next to a stretch of nearly austere crescents. Her paint handling in each was both light and self-assured — towing a fine line between loose and controlled, though erring on the side of too loose, and was reminiscent of both Katz and Richter, yet distinctly her own.



Ann Craven, *400 moons*, installation view, 2006

At any rate, her method of repeating herself may have less to do with the encyclopedic array of art-historical references which she’s incorporated into her work and more in common with a musician practicing a simple melody in order to assimilate its subtleties into physical reflexes. And while her various conceptual maneuvers are generally well-received, I did wonder if the trick of reproducing 400 paintings is absolutely necessary. This is beside the point: by tying together ostensibly disparate practices and ideas, Craven isn’t simply trying to convince us of her own cleverness (or how inside of art history she is), but rather to channel the inchoate joys of art, art history, and (while deigning to dismiss the issue with sly, humble irony) the ever-effulgent possibility of the new.

— Elywn Palmerton

Craven, courtesy Gasser & Grunert

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