

SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

The New York Art World
April 2004

Ann Craven
at Klemens Gasser & Tanja Grunert, Inc.
524 west 19th Street
NY, NY 10011
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By Joyce Korotkin



Ann Craven *HELLO ,HELLO, HELLO* 2004
Oil on Canvas Each Painting 9x6 feet
Courtesy Klemens Gasser & Tanja Grunert

In this exhibition of bird and deer paintings reproduced from reproductions of birds and deer, Ann Craven takes her exploration of the nature of representation and reproduction forward, adding another layer of conceptual complexity to her Pop-inspired stew. Craven's issues concerning our acceptance of mechanical reproductions in lieu of lived experience in a disappearing natural world, as well as the elevation of popular taste and kitsch images into subject matter fit for fine art, and the product-driven marketplace that churns out product, are in evidence. But Craven in this show has done something virtually unimaginable within the context of the contemporary art marketplace that stops

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viewers familiar with her oeuvre dead in their tracks. Quite simply, she has reproduced *in its entirety* her own previous solo show (that was met with wide critical acclaim). The sense of déjà vu one experiences when walking into the gallery is shocking. The three gray parrots are there on the left; the feathery yellow birds are there on the right adjacent to the dainty yet feral “pink ladies”; the “Soylent Green” inspired Bambi-like deer are in the entry space. The works are double the size (as the show itself is doubled), the painterly technique is more delicious than ever, but other than that and the minor differences inherent in hand-made repetition versus that of mechanical, the show is identical.

One immediately questions not only his/her own reaction (*Huh? Didn't I see this show last year?*) but also what on earth the artist can possibly have in mind by doing such a thing. Artists usually march forward to break ground in new territory, sometimes back to pick up references to their own earlier work. Craven here is doing both at once by employing an abstraction to an already existing work. The latter point is the pivot on which this exhibition is precariously balanced. That the work is exquisite with painterly brushwork, radiant and celebratory colors and absolute mastery of technique only adds to the conundrum, forcing the viewer into a state of flux between responding to the sheer visual beauty while at the same time being struck by the repetition of the experience. Which is exactly the artist's point.

Craven here is dissecting the destructive nature of the marketplace on artistic development and production in today's warp speed artworld, via reference to the Renaissance tradition of workshop production in which successful artists with signature styles were expected to develop and deepen their inquiry for years. A Raphael, for instance, would continue to look like Raphael two years or two centuries later, as opposed to today, wherein artists are under pressure to abandon what has been done once in order to come up with something new (again and again). Sometimes the extent of this is such (since artists have become multi-disciplinary veering from painting to video to installation to performance to sculpture) that unless one assiduously follows an artist's career, the work from one show to the next can become unidentifiable. Consumerism in today's global corporate marketplace is fueled by product consumption, and the product supply must constantly change in order to create a demand for more. That the art marketplace functions today within this destructive paradigm is Craven's exclamation point; and she makes it in foot-stamping, fearless open defiance of contemporary convention.

Conceptual underpinnings notwithstanding, those who love paint and painting for its own sake will revel in the work. Craven's manipulation of the material and the way brush marks magically transform from viscous swaths into feathers here, beaks and sinister claws there, or the way representation melts back into abstract radiant color again, is magical. Her sheer passion for painting and her implicit need to own and devour an image by immersing herself in it again and again has ultimate supremacy over her ideological issues. It echoes as well the collector's same passion to own and the public's passion to be immersed in the work that one loves.

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