

# SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

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## Ann Craven

KLEMENS GASSER & TANIA  
GRUNERT

Sweeter than a pair of Bam-bis, two nearly identical paintings of dewy-eyed fawns welcomed visitors to Ann Craven's delectable show. Rendered in luscious wet-on-wet brushstrokes, the images seemed as digestible as cream puffs but left behind a strange aftertaste.

Craven's ostensible topic is nature, with one room filled with pictures of deer and another with monumental paintings of budgies, parakeets, and parrots. But this exhibition was as much an encounter with kitsch as it was with the natural world. The birds and animals in the paintings most resemble those displayed in souvenir shops—on plates, napkins, salt shakers, notecards, and the like. Craven is able to recreate the sappiness that draws people to these tchotchkes while at the same time underscoring the fallibility of commercial reproduction. She makes it impossible for viewers to find the original among her reproductions or, by extension, to know why they



should value one style of painting over another.

In one triptych, *Hello, Hello, Hello*, three paintings of parrots imitate one another, repeating without necessarily improving the colors, expression, and background of the first one. In fact, like the mimicry of parrots, the repetition was delightfully surprising, especially in light of Craven's loosely authoritative painting style, which seems completely spontaneous. Even when she is not repeating herself, Craven continues to focus on the contest between painting and reproduction. A wall of individual portraits of parakeets against treacherously pink backgrounds maintained a fine balance between being gorgeous and dumb. It is a magic trick that brings viewers back to the pleasures of painting, despite a brief side trip into more conceptual territory.

Craven's enjoyment of the act of painting and her appreciation of the sentimentality of kitsch were apparent throughout. She is neither mean-spirited nor ironic. Instead, she relishes the lurid colors and skewed perspectives—the hallmarks of kitsch as "bad art"—as vital clues to the popular appeal of these images. And in her insistence on comparisons she opens up the possibility of rejecting traditional hierarchies in art, while still retaining the highest standards for herself as a painter.

—Barbara Pollack

Ann Craven, *Hello  
Hello, Hello*, 2001, oil on  
linen, 72" x 48".  
Klemens Gasser &  
Tania Grunert.

2021 S WABASH AVE  
CHICAGO IL 60616  
+1 (312) 226 2223