

Ann Craven's Orbital View

By Ricki Morse



Ann Craven (b. 1967) views the natural world through her intense presence in each moment, as both observer and memoirist, reflecting the constantly changing and intimately remembered worlds of birds, trees, flowers and the moon with an almost childlike candor. Each sketch, painting and dated palette is retained as evidence of the passing experience, mementos of the past still relevant in the present moment.



Ann Craven's *Pink Canary*, 1997, oil on canvas, one of the few paintings that escaped the 1999 studio fire.

From early childhood in Boston, her mother nurtured her innate talent, providing her first set of oil paints when she was six-years-old, and enrolling her in an adult painting class. When she was thirteen the family made its first trip to Maine, and it was there that she witnessed

the moon in the evolving sky. She says she captures the memories of that trip, standing outside in the moonlight, in each moon painting.

She is as meticulous in recording her process as she is in recording the phases of the moon. Each palette is numbered and retained as a record of her color choices. Left over paint is applied in stripes to used palettes and becomes part of the collection. Thus the artistic process is retained, ongoing.

This process began at the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston and continued through her MFA at Columbia University where she became a studio assistant to Alex Katz, a position she kept for eight years, developing her skills as an *plein aire* observer, a wet on wet painter in oils as well as a skilled watercolorist. Upon her return to New York City, she acquired a studio loft, launching a series of bird and flower paintings based on collected postcards and printed images, executed mostly in watercolor, and moon oil paintings drawn from serial sketches made at night, from her New York City roof or her cabin in Maine. recorded and memorialized just as are the passings of the moon.

In 1999, a few years after her first gallery show, fire swept through her studio, destroying all her paintings and collections. Craven's



Ann Craven photographed by her husband, the artist Peter Halley, ARTnews, Feb. 10, 2016. You may remember our 2015 exhibition of his paintings, *Geometry of the Absurd*.



Ann Craven's studio, a wall of serial moon sketches and flower paintings, a day's work for a volumetric artist.

response rose out of her orbital way of seeing the world. She began replacing all the works from memory, relishing the opportunity to revisit each image and draw on a fresh presence with each. She was interviewed by Bomb Magazine about this process and recalled her grandfather saying, “Just keep it going, keep it going.” He was a roofer in Boston, replacing old shingles with new. She recreated every work, refreshed, not for the market but for the re-experiencing.

Craven was interviewed in her studio by ARTnews in 2016, listening to lots of Johnny Cash, admiring Craven’s bulldog puppies, Moonlight and Magic, (small white faces, otherwise all black) while she prepared for her first retrospective called “Time” at Le Confort Moderne in Poitiers, France. Her work had been appearing in galleries throughout Europe for several years, as well as in the United States. Her work is found in museum collections like MOMA, the Whitney and our own. Our recent acquisition of *12 Moons* gives us the opportunity to share her presence in moonlight with these personal aspects of the moon, always in orbit, always vanishing, always returning. Enjoy!



Ann Craven, *12 moons*, 2022, oil on canvas, SBMA, Museum purchase with funds provided by Kandy Budgor; Luria/Budgor Family Foundation.

Bibliography

Ann Craven, Karma Books, 2018, New York.

Consumer Papers: Ann Craven, ARTnews, Feb. 10, 2016.

Greg Lingquist, *Ann Craven, Twelve Moons*, The Brooklyn Rail, April 2023.



Watch for Ricki’s essay on works from our upcoming *Serenity and Revolution* exhibition in the April issue of *La Muse*.

Wilfredo Lam, Wilfredo Lam, *The Casting of the Spell*, 1947. Oil on burlap. SBMA