

Ann Craven SOUTHARD REID

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View of “Ann Craven,” 2015.

Ann Craven’s third solo exhibition in London was also the first devoted entirely to her palette paintings. As the name of the show, “Untitled (Palettes: Naked, Tagged), 2013–14,” implied, the fifty canvas objects on view in the gallery, all 24 x 18 inches, had first been used as palettes to mix paint; Craven says she finds it “easier to mix color on a canvas than on paper palettes.” The pieces are dated from October 2013 to October 2014 and hung chronologically in a single line along each of the two floors of the gallery; each work corresponds to a single painting or group of paintings for which it served as a surface for mixing color. Hence, the 2014 palettes (along with some from 2013) that were exhibited in London, for example, are documents of a series of representational paintings exhibited at Hannah Hoffman Gallery in Los Angeles that year. Despite their origins as a kind of by-product, the New Englander’s paintings deepen our understanding of her project.

Each palette, in effect, not only captures a period of time, but also forms a physical archive of color for each corresponding painting. In some cases, Craven adds a quick sketch of the companion work. To accompany this visual data, she also notes the dates, subject matter, and, often, location within each title. For example, a pink linear sketch of an owl on a white palette with splotches of yellow, orange, and red along the right side and a large gray patch in the middle is named *Untitled (Palette, Cushing, Snowy Owl, Doves, 10-25-14 - 10-27-14), 2014*. The details on each palette help specify the precise work it documents, which would otherwise be unclear, as Craven often repeats the same images and colors, sometimes almost exactly.

Craven’s imagery (e.g., of birds, flowers, deer, trees, people, the moon) is predominately taken from nature, while her gestural paint application highlights expression over representation. Considering the artist’s use of repetition, one may be somewhat surprised to find that this emotive approach is at the service of a more systematic program. And it’s not just her palettes that perform an archive function; Craven’s stripe paintings—two of which were on display in the gallery’s office—are created with leftover paint. These stripes also document the process of painting. This show in particular highlighted the fascinating incongruity between Craven’s expressionistic approach (in energetic, if sometimes clunky, strokes) and her broader conceptual framework. These palettes are cousins to Gerhard Richter’s *Atlas*, 1962–, and On Kawara’s *Date Paintings*, “Today,” 1966–2013. And yet Craven’s palettes are bursting with personality and individualism such as one would never expect from such precursors. A few of the works also feature shallow tin cans (for paint medium) affixed to the surface, suggesting exploded Daniel Spoerri assemblages, while the large abstract orange blur of *Untitled (Palette, NYC, Moon Halo, Last Night, 11-04-13), 2013* has a palette knife sitting on the bottom edge like an unruly exclamation mark. In others, plastic wrap—used to delay evaporation of paint—has stuck on the now-dried medium, forming a crinkly, seemingly windswept sculptural event, while *Untitled (Palette, NYC, 11-08-13), 2013*, consists merely of large dollops of paint, seemingly troweled on with a palette knife and hardly touched. Unlike Craven’s more familiar representational paintings, this series has a *laissez-faire* quality; some are very minimal with just a large central swipe of paint, whereas others are full of events and serendipity. These paintings log a stretch of time. But unlike Kawara’s experiences, Craven’s are made physical. How else do painters live but through their painting?

—Sherman Sam