

ARTFORUM

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ANN CRAVEN

by Eliel Jones

Ann Craven

SOUTHARD REID

7 Royalty Mews

April 26–June 24

Beware, if you're not a big fan of cute animals: Ann Craven's current exhibition is chock-full of them, nearly twenty years' worth. Pandas, birds, cats, and deer, among other critters, are rendered with soft, clean, and precise strokes. The creatures appear regal, as if properly sitting for their portraits, calm and even aware of the viewer's presence—to a rather unsettling degree. Craven's gaze is like that of a proud owner or perhaps mother. The canvases, rich with buoyant pinks, greens, and blues, exude a kind of loving care. Their tenderly delineated backgrounds are full of trees, grass, and flowers.

Craven paints from an extensive photographic archive (she is an avid collector of animal pictures in all states of pretty), though the canvases only quietly allude to this. Paintings such as *Deer in Emerald Field #4*, 2008, 2008, and *Rainy Day*, 1999, 1999, retain some of the frigidness of an art-directed photo. But Craven disables all that—her subtle, painterly gestures supply movement and life to otherwise static subjects. One of the odder works in this show is a small painting from 2002 of a white, furry kitten with turquoise eyes and a pointy tail, framed with flowers and a text that reads, "I love you. Do you love me?" Craven created, well ahead of her time, what today could be understood as a meme. Without the need to go viral, the artist's paintings of animals are, past and present, infused with the internet. And we all know how much the World Wide Web loves a kitty cat.



Ann Craven, *Kitty, I Love You Do You Love Me, Yes, No?*, 2002, 2002, oil on linen, 12 x 10".

— Eliel Jones