

# PRESS HERALD

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### ANN CRAVEN FINALLY SHOWS THE MIDCOAST WHAT SHE'S BEEN PAINTING

By Bob Keyes



One of the many moons Ann Craven has painted in Maine. Photos courtesy of Center for Maine Contemporary Art

From an artist's perspective, Ann Craven understands the personal nature of Maine art history and the importance of place in a painter's practice.

Since the 1990s when she began coming to Maine, Craven has made her painting studios in a borrowed barn in Lincolnville; in her own barn that she converted into a studio, also in Lincolnville; and, since 2008, in a converted garden shed on the banks of the St. George River in Cushing, where she lives when not in New York.

Lincolnville and Cushing have supported artists for generations with scenery, mystery and the character of the land and its people. In spirit and in life, Craven's artist-neighbors have included Neil Welliver, Bernard Langlais, Andrew Wyeth, Alex Katz, Lois Dodd and many others, all deeply connected to Maine and for whom Maine was, and still is, more than a home and more than a source of inspiration and motivation. It is part of their character.

This summer, Craven will show her paintings in Maine for the first time, with an exhibition at the Center for Maine Contemporary Art in Rockland through Oct. 13. The show is called "Birds We Know," and it includes mostly colorful portraits of birds, moons and flowers, as well as a painting of a tree and an example of her painted bands of color.

Showing her work in Maine makes her more nervous than showing in New York, she said. "All eyes on you. It's a little like showing in my hometown. It's scary," she said, and quickly added, "but it's not my hometown. I am from Boston. But Maine is where my heart is and my creativity is. I have literally just been in Maine using it

as a workshop and not thinking about an exhibition – thinking about the opposite, to be honest – just thinking about solitude and making work and painting. But it’s a perfect place to show, because it’s a reflection of what I do and what people who paint in Maine do.”

Craven also is anxious because she wants this work to feel authentic to people who know Maine well. She made her first moon painting on the beach in Lincolnville, and she paints the moon as it rises in Cushing. The birds are birds she sees in Maine. Maine is the source of nearly all the work.

“People in Maine might not see this as Maine work. It’s funny to think about the audience, which I never think about. The audience is never an issue. But in this case, for people who really understand Maine, I hope I do justice to Maine,” she said.

Craven’s work is about the time, memory and the relationship and movement between both. Her work is a diary, with paintings marked by date and time. Across her subjects, she is a serial painter, with the moon, birds – and more recently, a tree on her Cushing property – serving as markers of time and memory.

“It’s going forward and moving back at the same time. Looking back, looking forward. The moon never changes, although it changes rapidly all the time,” she said.

She began painting the moon at a lobster pound on Lincolnville Beach in 1995. The owner let her use his picnic tables if she promised to cover them. She packed her car with canvases that she prepared during the day and drove down at night, and painted as the moon rose over Islesboro.

“That was for a show in New York, my first show in New York – 101 moon paintings. I painted 150 but showed 101. I thought 101 was a good number to show. Not too much and not too little.”

In Rockland, the bird paintings range from 1997 through this year. The moons are from 2012.

Craven says her painting in Maine “really kicked off” when she moved from Lincolnville to Cushing in 2010 “because it was so secluded, and just really simple things like the moon rising over the St. George River versus Lincolnville isn’t too much different, although it is because you have time to just leave the canvases and longer time to develop ideas.”

In moving to Cushing, Craven tapped into the legacy of the St. George River and the artists it has supported, from Wyeth to Langlais to Dodd, a neighbor who has become a friend. The power of place hangs in the air, she said.

“The Cushing legacy, it’s just killing me, the power of this town,” she said. “You don’t really understand until you live there how much history there is. Just going to the visit the graveyard of Andrew Wyeth and the Olsons, it’s just an incredible sense of time – the audacity of time, really. The Maine landscape is a culprit, in a way, of this history, but at the same time it’s just an inspiring place to be.”