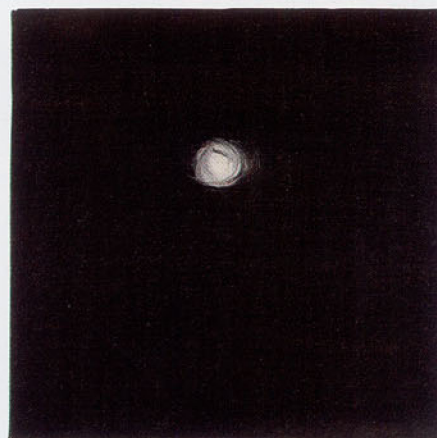
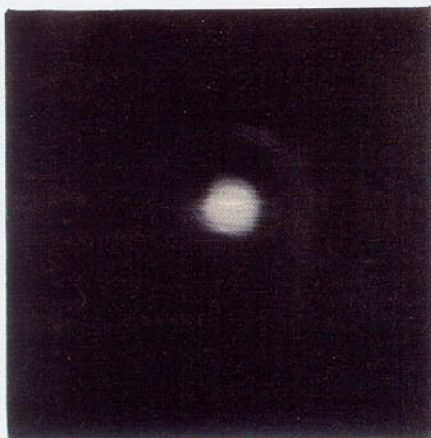


MODERN PAINTERS

FEBRUARY 2007

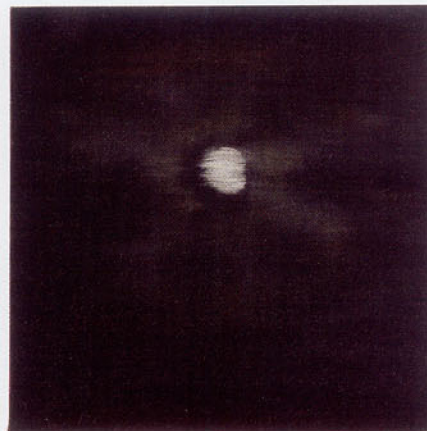
ANN CRAVEN
MOONS: UNTITLED (DETAIL)
ALL PAINTINGS 2001-2006
OIL ON CANVAS
14 X 14 IN EACH
COURTESY THE ARTIST



Erratic systems
and irregular cycles

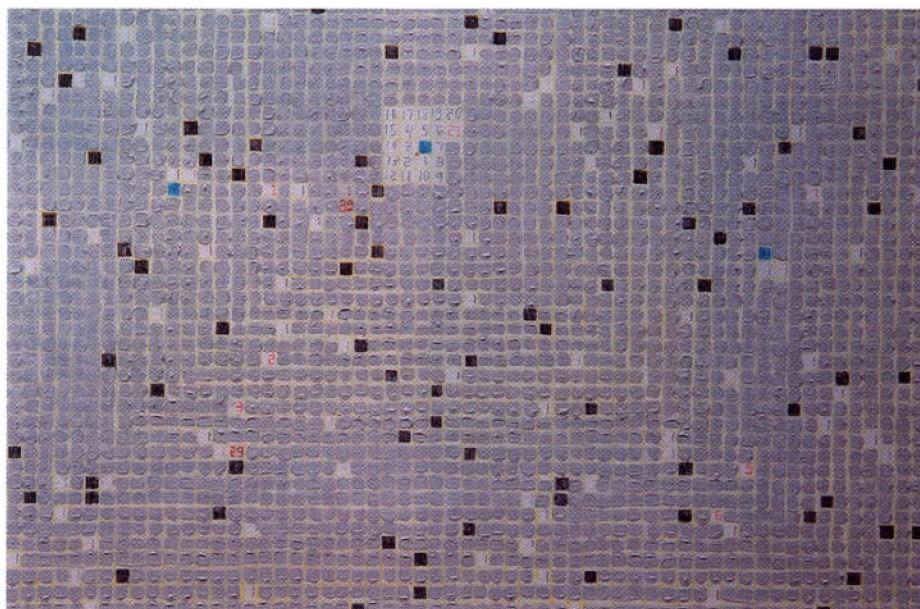
BY MATT KEEGAN

Straight to the Moon, Alice!



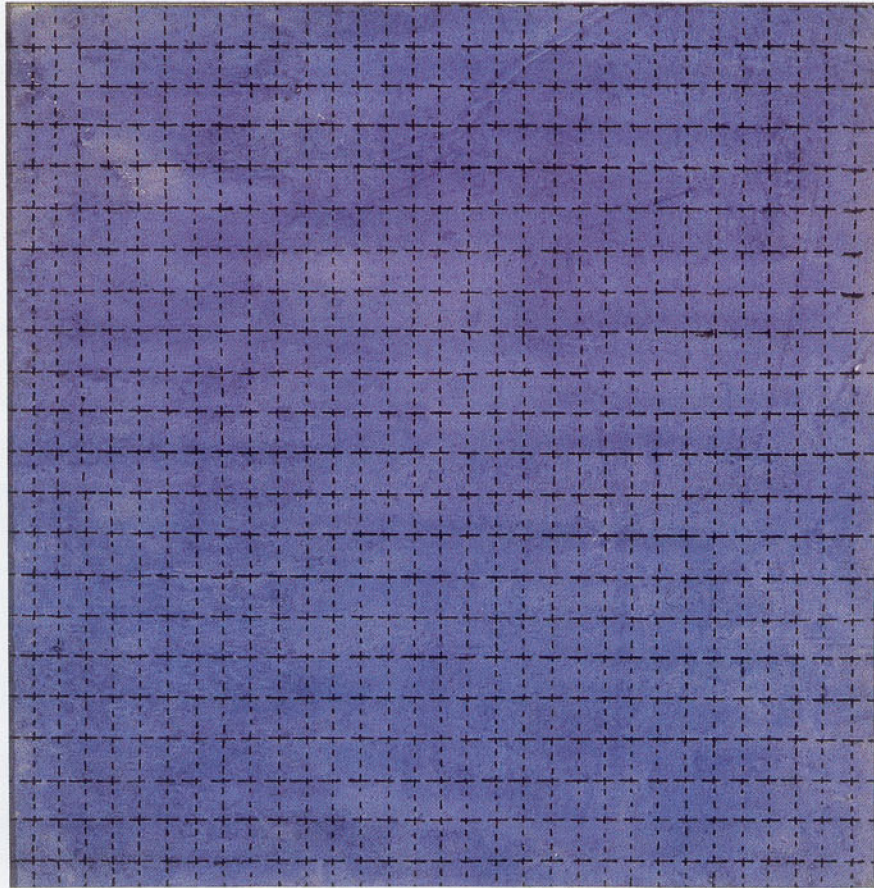
In 1996 artist Ann Craven exhibited 101 oil paintings of the moon at the now defunct Lauren Wittels Gallery in New York. Many of these were lost in a fire that occurred in her studio in 1999. In 2001 Craven began painting the moon again, working in the open air on the roof of her building in Harlem and in rural Maine during the summer. Last November, 10 years after her initial lunar showcase, Craven exhibited a sequel of sorts at the Klemens Gasser & Tanja Grunert Inc. gallery, also in New York—four hundred new paintings of the moon that duplicate the size and shape of the first set, 14-inch squares. At the same time, Craven exhibited her handpainted copies of these four hundred at the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati (in an exhibition that I co-organized as part of Public-Holiday Projects). Thus eight hundred of Craven's moon paintings were on view: four hundred originals and four hundred copies in two sites hundreds of miles apart. Although Craven has made it a part of her practice to remake her shows, this was the first time she put on two same-scale, duplicate exhibitions simultaneously.

RIGHT: DETAIL
XYLOR JANE
FULL, BLUE MOONS
1963-1999, 2006
INK, COLORED PENCIL,
GRAPHITE, AND OIL ON
PANEL, 43 X 43 IN
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND CAC,
CINCINNATI



Craven's artistic practice, and her use of the moon within it, resides at the hub of a network of related issues central to artmaking today—repetition, systematization, permutation, and their intersections with time; a foregrounding of process; and a tension between the unique and the mass-produced. Museums and art galleries are, for the most part, spaces perpetually erased of their history; they're like computers, their screens constantly refreshed. The work of Craven and similar artists is inclined, however, toward data retrieval. They insist on memory in a space designed for forgetting, treat time in ways that extend beyond a 30-day exhibition cycle, and require the venue of viewing—be it a physical space or a magazine—to be activated over and over.

On Kawara's "Today Series" (1966–) consists of hand-rendered monochrome paintings whose only subject is the date on which they were painted. These works abide by a set of rules—eight possible canvas sizes, for example, all horizontal in orientation. Kawara also starts each work with a newly mixed color, causing these pseudomechanical works to vary slightly in hue. Like Craven, Kawara has a meticulous studio process, but unlike her, his works have highly finished surfaces absent of flourish (which in Craven's case results from wet-on-wet paint application). In 1993 Kawara exhibited paintings from the "Today Series" over the course of a year in an exhibition titled *One Thousand Days One Million Years* at Dia Center in New York. Paintings were rotated in and out on a monthly basis, requir-



“Whereas Martin wrote, ‘For we can see perfectly, but we cannot do perfectly,’ Craven’s painting is an act of copying as filtered through memory of a continuous ‘just past.’”

ing visitors to make multiple trips in order to get a complete view of the project. This use of the exhibition site is very much in line with Craven’s project of remaking, rescaling, and doubling exhibitions: for both artists the experience of visiting an exhibition is cumulative, something that unfolds in passing time.

Both Kawara and Craven map time according to personal schema that intersect with that of a viewer asked to return to an exhibition in a month, two years, or 10 years. But time can, of course, be tracked in more familiar ways. Craven’s MFA thesis (written at Columbia University in the early ’90s) focused on a perhaps unlikely subject: the paintings of Agnes Martin, and in particular her use of line. In Martin’s hands, line becomes a visual emblem marking time, one moment flowing imperceptibly into the next. Craven initially decided to use the moon, she says, as a substitute for Martin’s line, as something that measures time cyclically in its recurring appearance and disappearance. Also, just as Martin’s line makes endless minute shifts, the moon changes every instant. “For we can see perfectly, but we cannot do perfectly,” Martin wrote; Craven finds that it’s impossible to capture the moon fluctuating before her, and her painting is an act not of mimesis per se but instead one of copying as filtered through memory of a continuous “just past.”

Xylor Jane is an artist from San Francisco who currently lives and works in Massachusetts. Herself compared to Agnes Martin (by Roberta Smith in the *New York Times* review of Jane’s exhibition at the New York’s Canada gallery, in fall



LEFT AND ABOVE
ALLAN MCCOLLUM
THE SHAPES PROJECT
(DETAILS), 2006
SMALL FRAMED MONO-
PRINTS, 4 1/4 X 5 1/2 IN.
COURTESY OF FRIEDRICH PETZEL
GALLERY, NEW YORK

“ McCollum's *The Shapes Project* gives the effect of a tidal wave of plotted options—an antiquated computer, circa WarGames, with an almost-manageable rate of output. ”

2006), Jane creates abstract diagrammatic works based on counting systems that begin with a hand-drawn skeletal structure. When painted, these plottings result in visually vibrating spiral shapes or grids. Since 2002 Jane has made paintings and drawings of moon cycles, varying from the occurrence during her lifetime of blue moons (the second of two full moons that fall within a single calendar month)—for example, *Full/Blue Moons 1963–1999* (2006)—to the moon phases during the seasons of an upcoming year. For exhibitions and as inserts in such publications as *Esopus*, Jane has created posters that are to be used as calendars; a recent one, which suggests how Jane seeks to reconfigure objective time into something more personal, lasts five years. Through their Op-like appearance and potential utility (hypothetical though it may be), Jane's moon works extract the moon from its sentimental trappings and place it squarely in the context of a mathematical system.

Painting the moon from a Harlem rooftop à la Craven sounds romantic. But laboring on four hundred copies of paintings of the moon is not. Although her work is often misconstrued as sentimental, in part because of subject matter that includes candy-colored birds and deer, as an artist Craven is a bit like Sherrie Levine. By revisiting, repeating, and remaking works, Craven destroys the concept of an “original.” Being in a room with works existing in duplicate and triplicate elicits not an emotional response but a cognitive shudder, something closer to déjà vu or a sense of the uncanny. With his recent *The Shapes Project*, Allan McCollum takes the systematization impulse and lays it over romantic ideas of the individual to an absurd and even disquieting degree. McCollum states baldly: “I’ve designed a new

system to produce unique two-dimensional “shapes” ... for every person on the planet.” He anchors his project in an open system, with near-infinite permutation and endless subsets of application and output. The bleacherlike tiered shelving unit at his exhibition at Friedrich Petzel Gallery in New York last year, which displayed more than seven thousand small framed shapes, gives the effect of a cresting tidal wave of plotted options—an antiquated computer, circa WarGames, comes to mind, one with an almost-comprehensible rate of computation and output. McCollum's humor and aesthetic touch make the show's design inhabitable and the overall system's growth apprehendable to the viewer, as if it's happening before one's eyes.

Agnes Martin once wrote: “Experiences recalled are generally more satisfying and enlightening than the original experience. It is in fact the only way to know one's whole response.” With Craven, Kawara, Jane, and McCollum, whose artistic formulas yield richer and more complex results over time—and for whom time itself might be said to be a prominent medium—multiple viewings are essential, and the portfolio of images shown here helps move toward one version of a “whole response.” A magazine exists as a kind of time capsule: after it has become last month's news, it can be shelved and accessed in the future, extending the logic of these works' own idiosyncratic temporalities even as it indexes them to a particular moment in history. The reader of the future—or of today—can look at these artworks and make groupings of entirely different sorts, as vectors of logic intersect in new and unexpected ways, forming a grid of memories and meanings that multiplies *ad infinitum*.

Turn to Index, on page 110, for detailed information about all of the artists in this feature.