

CAMPOLI PRESTI

Katherine Bradford
Artists, Cops and Circus People
14 October – 30 November 2019
Campoli Presti, Paris

The American figurative painter Katherine Bradford has described the way she paints as "a little bit outsiderish, a little bit folk." It is precisely that "outsiderish" status that has fostered and protected the breathtaking originality of Bradford's work. When discussing Bradford's paintings critics mention Ryder's treatment of light and Rothko's rich color, but the truth is she has no obvious antecedents and very few clear influences. Like Aphrodite, Bradford seems to have sprung fully formed from the forehead of Zeus possessed of a unique vision and an innate genius for visual expression. In recent years her gift has matured and exploded with phenomenal speed.

With the new paintings in her show with Campoli Presti in Paris Bradford has gone beyond anything she's done before and entered a daring, risky arena. She has gently, subtly entered the realm of the political. The miracle of this development is that Bradford has managed to address some pressing social issues without losing a shred of her humor, her exuberance, her sense of mischief and joy. What Katherine Bradford knows is that nothing worth exploring is ever found in convention or normalcy. The greatest interest lies at the edges of the world, in the unanswered questions, the uncertainties, the unexplored, the weirdly incongruous, the unexpected.

Several of these new paintings are riveting in their strangeness. All of them tell a story. Like the Greek myths, they are wild, fantastical stories and part of the great pleasure of studying them is that they are open to more than one interpretation. They are mysterious, dream-like, filled with deep-seated universal human emotions and primordial motivations. In "Circus People" a circus woman hoists herself up onto the moon and sits for a rest in a place of self-appointed privilege while her strange, slender, awkward, colorful and slightly elongated circus colleagues float upward and erect, standing together yet slightly apart, each figure occupying its own space yet the entire group united in its professional strangeness. They seem to be on their lunch break, resting, and yet by their very existence they are a performance. They are alone, yet united in their unconventionality. They fit together but perhaps don't fit in the world. If circus people are freaks, so be it. These particular circus people exude bravery and dignity.

The fearlessness and honesty Bradford exhibits in these paintings is breathtaking. She has the awful alienation of Munch and the tenderness of Van Gogh. She has bravely gone straight to the heart of the matter: the drama about being alive is how huge our egos are and how unavoidably vulnerable we are at the same time. We live amidst enormous night skies, huge oceans, fear and anger, racial and religious hostility, uncontrolled passions and unexplained motivations. We are alone, fearful, precariously close to harm, and over-concerned about what the other guy is thinking about us. But though we may look nothing alike, the fact is that we are one and we are all in this together, daily going out on a limb just to survive and, with courage, prevail. As human beings we know we share a fundamental vulnerability and have plenty of shared emotions, but it takes a truly inspired stroke of artistic genius for one person to be allowed not just to know but to actually *feel*, however fleetingly, what's in another person's heart. Katherine Bradford's paintings brilliantly capture that alchemy, that transfer of universal emotion. When you look at the figures in Bradford's paintings, you don't just observe them, you *are* them.

- Rosemary Mahoney

Katherine Bradford (1942) is a New York based painter. She had a solo exhibition at The Modern Museum in Fort Worth, Texas (2013) and participated in group shows at P.S. 1 MOMA in New York; Chrystal Bridges Museum, Arkansas; Prospect 4 New Orleans Biennial and The Nerman Museum in Kansas. She received a Guggenheim Award in 2010 and a Joan Mitchell Foundation grant in 2011 as well as two awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In 2017-2018 she was Senior Critic on the faculty of the Yale School of Art in New Haven.

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