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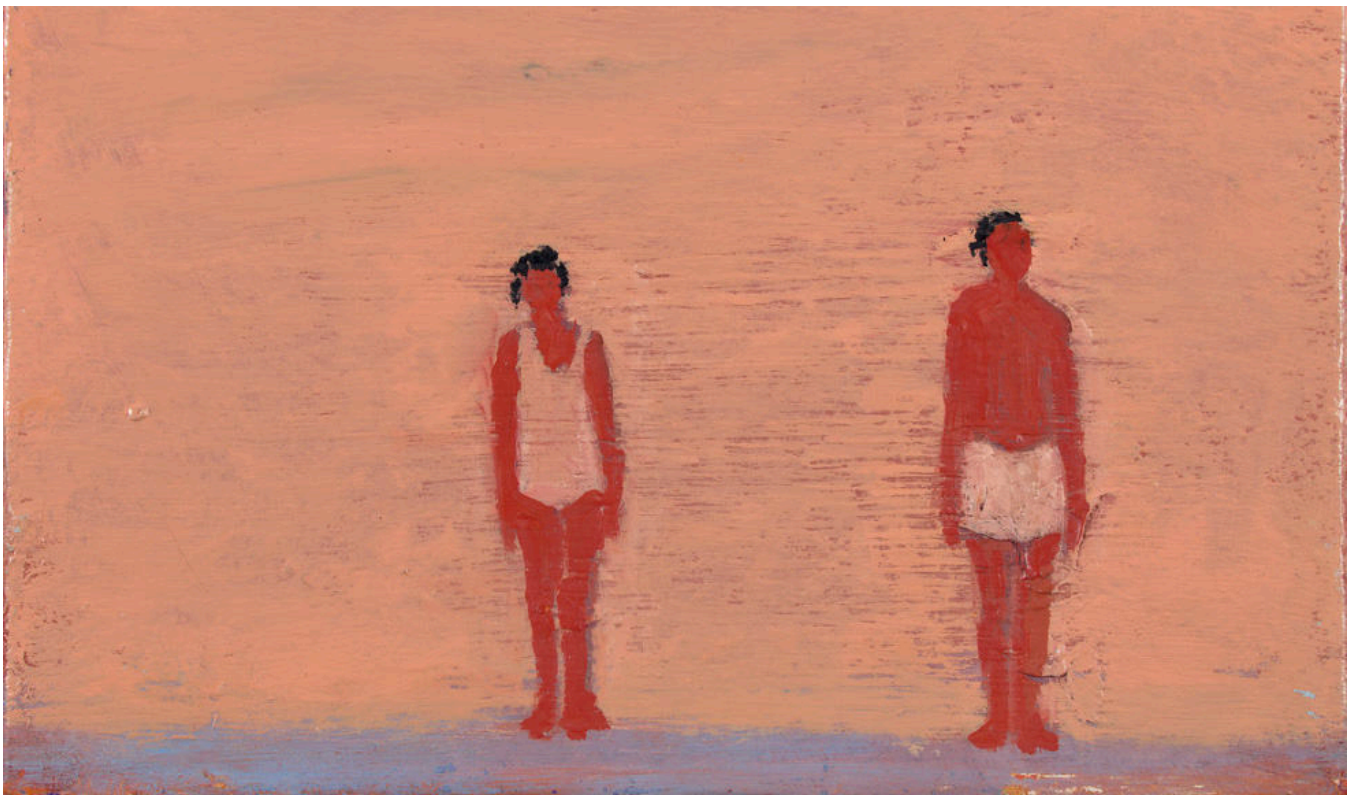
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## A R T L A N D

Shira Wolfe, "What to See in New York Art Galleries Right Now, 'The World According To'", The New York Times, March 1, 2019. Online. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/01/arts/design/what-to-see-in-new-york-art-galleries-right-now.html>.

### Lost (and Found) Artist Series: Katherine Bradford



Katherine Bradford, *Couple on Purple*, 2010. Courtesy Canada gallery

*"A little bit outsiderish, a little bit folk."* – Katherine Bradford

Artland's Lost (and Found) Artist series focuses on artists who were originally omitted from the mainstream art canon, largely invisible for most of their career, or just a bit overlooked until relatively late on. This week, self-taught American artist [Katherine Bradford](#) takes centre stage as we explore her radiant oeuvre. Since showing her work with New York gallery Canada in 2016, Bradford's star has been on the rise.

## Who is Katherine Bradford?

Katherine Bradford was born in New York City in 1942. She did not always know she was going to be an artist. She describes a process of gradually admitting to herself that being an artist was the life she wanted, a vocational choice she had to fight hard to achieve. Her glowing colours have been compared to those of Mark Rothko, while her figures emphasise a universality among people. She is interested in exploring who we are and how we fit all fit alongside each other. She wants to celebrate a community of diversity.



Katherine Bradford, *Midsummer Lake*, 2018. Courtesy Haverkamp gallery

## Leaving Behind One Life in Exchange for Art

For a large part of her life, Bradford was married to an ambitious politician running for governor in Maine, who expected her to support him with his career. They had two children, and lived in an affluent area of Maine where she would help him with his campaign by graciously hosting social events. They moved to the area in the 1970s, and it was there that she started to meet artists, beginning the realization that she wanted be an artist herself.

According to one anecdote, Bradford once actually jumped out of the window when her husband brought some people from his campaign over for lunch. Instead of playing the good hostess, Bradford decided to work on her art in the studio she made for herself in the barn. She was so hungry to change her life, but pursuing her dream came with many sacrifices. For one, her family didn't understand her at all. Her children's grandparents were insistent on the fact that she should stick around to raise the children, and she was never able to speak to them or relate to them about art in any way. She speaks about how she essentially broke the contract in her marriage; she entered into the marriage under the premise that she would be a good, supportive wife for a politician, which she subsequently realised was a life choice she was unsuited to. She finally got divorced and turned the entire focus of her life towards art. It's the sacrifices she had to make for a life in art that make Bradford extra dedicated to her craft, and to the opportunities a creative life affords. She takes it seriously. When she gets up in the morning, it's straight to the studio. In an interview with [Artspace](#), she says: "I'm not going to waste this opportunity because I know it's very valuable – to me, anyway." Bradford started showing frequently in New York in 2007. In 2016, when she first had an exhibition at New York's hip and prestigious CANADA gallery, her career as an artist really started to take off.



Katherine Bradford, Wedding Ceremony, 2019. Courtesy Canada gallery

*"Her figures have progressively gained intensity and depth..." – Campoli Presti Gallery*

## The Colours, the Style, and Above All, the Messages

Bradford often mentions both confidence and vulnerability in her work, which has evolved a great deal over the years. She has started to believe more and more in her way of painting, which she's described as "a little bit outsiderish, a little bit folk." For a long time, Bradford believed that she would have to become more skilled as an artist before she could achieve the results she desired. But she came to see that this isn't necessarily how it works, at least not for her. Skill, she discovered, is something that is less clearly defined than she imagined and often subjectively assessed. It is also something which redefines itself as an artist continues to develop their craft over time.

There's been a great deal of attention on Bradford's formal and stylistic approach, with primary focus given to the soft, luminous quality of the light, the radiantly glowing colours which seem to refer to the color-fields of Rothko, and the universality of the subjects which dot her surfaces. Her worldly and otherworldly subject matter includes outer space, swimming pools, super heroes, and ships. And though these themes and styles are important elements to experiencing and understanding the work of Katherine Bradford, the artist herself emphasises that she would like to be part of the conversation surrounding social and political issues. Her paintings create an open field for communication and reflection concerning the universality of people, and the accompanying questions of identity and community.



Katherine Bradford, Various Heads, 2019. Courtesy Canada gallery.

Paintings like *Various Heads* (2019) and *Wedding Ceremony* (2019) are interesting examples of Bradford's concern with our contemporary discussions and experiences surrounding identity, freedom of choice, and unconventional approaches to life. In *Various Heads*, we see a white-haired woman (possibly a representation of Bradford herself), with many different heads in different colours and genders floating above her. *Wedding Ceremony* depicts two figures who look very similar, and are most likely two women. Above their heads, two rainbows hover, hinting at the pride symbol. Bradford likes all of these possible interpretations to come into play, and loves making art that tends towards unconventional identity politics, subtly undermining the dominant ideas and structures of society.



Katherine Bradford, *Silent*, 2018. Courtesy Canada gallery

## **Katherine Bradford's Influences and Kindred Spirits**

For an artist who came into the art world fairly late in life and who did not have a great number of artistic influences around her before she started embarking on her new path, Bradford has deftly woven herself into the fabric of the art scene in New York, taking inspiration from many contemporary artists. Artists she's identified as kindred spirits include several much younger, male artists: among them Robert Nava, Todd Bienvenu and Lou Fratino. She also takes inspiration from [Rose Wylie](#), the great English artist whom we featured in a previous [Lost \(and Found\) Artist article](#), and Nicole Eisenman, whose 2019 Whitney Biennial piece *Procession* left a profound mark on Bradford.



Katherine Bradford, Storm at Sea, 2016. Courtesy Haverkampf gallery

## Representation and Exhibitions

In 2010, Bradford received the prestigious Guggenheim Award, and in 2011, she was awarded a Joan Mitchell Foundation grant. She is also the recipient of two awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Bradford now exhibits all over the world, represented by Canada gallery in New York, her most recent solo exhibition being *Friends and Strangers* in 2018. She is also represented by London and Paris based Campoli Presti gallery. She had solo exhibitions at both the London and the Paris gallery in 2019. According to Campoli Presti, “her figures have progressively gained intensity and depth through a translucent use of thin layers of colours, leaving the earliest stages more visible.” In Berlin, Haverkampf gallery represents Bradford’s work.

Above all, Bradford’s figures explore the many different ways in which individuals choose to represent themselves. They exude an unconventionality that is very much of this time. Coming from someone who was born during the Second World War, lived one life playing second fiddle to a politician husband, and who discovered art in middle age, the resonance with the topics, issues and battles we face in this age is remarkable. Katherine Bradford is definitely tuned in.



Katherine Bradford, Water Lady, 2018. Courtesy Canada gallery