

Art in America

Berlind, Robert. "Katherine Bradford." *ARTnews.com*, ARTnews.com, 26 Oct. 2012, <https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/aia-reviews/katherine-bradford-61326/>.

Katherine Bradford

Katherine Bradford's latest paintings (all 2011 or '12) feature ships at sea and Superman aloft. Well, it's a *version* of Superman—not the one in DC Comics or the movies, perhaps, but the trademark "S," those primary colors and his flying about leave no doubt as to who he is. Rendered in loose, blobby shapes, a spiral or zigzag sometimes tracking his path, Bradford's Superman embodies a peculiar idea of flying, as he floats in air tentatively, even vulnerably, and certainly does not proceed "faster than a speeding bullet." The depictions are not cartoony and have none of the attitude or crisp design of Pop art. They evoke childhood without being ingratiating or sentimental. The deliberate naïveté of Bradford's paintings of Superman and of boats suggests not so much a child's notions as an adult's dreamy regressions.

In *Superman Responds, Night*, we look up at the figure, bent forward as though at the high point of a dive, and set against the rubbed, matte darks of an atmospheric sky marked with small bursts of color that we take for stars. A flattened red "Z" at the bottom may signify land or an earlier trajectory of flight. The 4-by-3-foot image is at once offhand and emblematic.



Bradford's way of working is predicated on a trust in possibilities beyond her conscious intentions or formal inclinations, and on a responsiveness to what shows up on the canvas. She builds her paint through funky accretions, scumbling, scraping, wiping down and in some cases layering white over bright colors as though to begin again. The evident revisions of surfaces and formal structures suggest that many of the paintings have been accomplished over long periods in the studio. I imagine the artist waiting, while working, for the image to assert itself, to dare her to recognize it and then back off.

Sargasso and *Midsummer Night* both evince numerous stages of development and a resulting complexity of texture. They were the richest, most luminous works in the exhibition. *Sargasso* and the other paintings of ships, some seen as if arriving, some in profile as if in transit, have a visionary character. They suggest some mythic backstory recalled from childhood or dreams. The exhilarating payoff of Bradford's cultivated spontaneity can be a distinctive power and

beauty. Less successful paintings-I'd nominate *Lady Liberty* and *At Home*-rest too much on narrative particulars, limiting associations.

A group of small gouaches with collaged elements, 15 by 11 inches each, demonstrated the artist's assurance, powers of invention and finely tuned sense of scale. These images show Bradford's edgy exploratory impulse and deep feeling for her subjects in perfect sync.