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- Harry Mount, the London Telegraph

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### FEBRUARY 2016 Gallery chronicle

by James Panero

On “Katherine Bradford: Fear of Waves” & “Elisabeth Kley: Ozymandias” at Canada; “Carolanna Parlato: A Delicate Balance” at Elizabeth Harris Gallery; “Ronnie Landfield: Five Decades” at Stux + Haller; & “Lori Ellison” at McKenzie Fine Art.



Katherine Bradford, *Fear of Waves* (2015), Oil on canvas.

Over the last few years, the haunting work of Katherine Bradford has been



### By the author

#### Gallery chronicle by James Panero

On the Joan of Arc Memorial in Riverside Park.

#### The vengeance of the Vandals by James Panero

ISIS followers have proven that they are the Vandals of our time.

#### Gallery chronicle by James Panero

On “Painting Is Not Doomed to Repeat Itself” at Hollis Taggart Galleries; “Checked History: The Grid in Art & Life” at Outpost Artists Resources; “Tempos: Selected Works by Elizabeth Gourlay, 2013–2015” at Fox Gallery NYC; “Diphthong” at the Shirley Fiterman Art Center; “Todd Bienvenu: Exile on Bogart Street” at Life on Mars; “Occo Socko!” at Stout Projects.

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On “Alex Katz at the Met” at the Metropolitan Museum of Art & “Brand-New & Terrific: Alex Katz in the 1950s” at the Colby College Museum of Art.

#### Exhibition note by Marco Grassi

On “Maestà: Gaddi’s Triptych Reunited” at the New-York Historical Society.

#### Exhibition note by Mario Naves

On “Greater New York” at MOMA PS1, New York.

### Most popular

hard to miss. Her small paintings have popped up in dozens of group exhibitions. Roughly painted images of ships or supermen or space aliens: the iconography may shift, but the mood conveyed is unmistakably her own. Her paintings might be new works, but they feel like old souls, like rediscovered artifacts or shop signs. In their studied distress, her paintings recall the wear that Elie Nadelman might rub into his sculptures, or Albert Pinkham Ryder bake into his ships—objects once tightly held but now forgotten. Bradford’s primitivist paint handling reflects her lost subject matter, fragments of fuller, once glamorous stories that have now been effaced, or even submerged.

The specter of water has been a recurring theme for Bradford, a longtime fixture of New York’s alternative art scene, both in her paintings of ghostly ocean liners and in her faceless divers, traveling down in the opposite direction of her rising supermen. In Bradford’s subtle hand, water has a reactive, mystical, ultimately ominous quality, refracting shapes, oxidizing colors, and overwhelming her subject matter.

Now on view at Canada gallery on the Lower East Side, Bradford has reached a high-water mark with large, ambitious canvases that heighten the mood and raise the anxiety around, as the exhibition puts it, a “fear of waves.”<sup>1</sup>

In his 1950 book *The Enchafèd Flood: or, The Romantic Iconography of the Sea*, W. H. Auden writes that “the sea, in fact, is that state of barbaric vagueness and disorder out of which civilization has emerged and into which, unless saved by the effort of gods and men, it is always liable to relapse.” In the modern age, water is sold as a luxury: deluxe ocean passages, summer days at the beach, oceanfront vistas, dips in the pool. But reality still cuts against these leisurely ideals. Floods, sinkings, and drownings pull us under. The dread of disaster is never fully washed away from our primitive consciousness, or our modern view.

Bradford takes the images of water-bound recreation—swimming, diving, playing in the waves—and subsumes them in a mood of uncertainty and peril. In *Fear of Waves* (2015), one of the larger paintings here and the one that gives its title to the exhibition, a crowd of beachgoers observed far off from an elevated perspective, like the view from a bluff, assembles waist-deep in a pool of light blue. A set of white waves rolls towards them from the right side of the canvas. At first they appear to be relaxing in the surf. On closer inspection, they are revealed to be attempting to swim away from deep water, reaching for an unseen shore as their lips scream out in terror.

A similar sensation comes across in *Surfer* (2015) and *Surf Party* (2015). The bottom half of each painting shows figures in the water at play. But the top half conveys something else: the rising spray of an oversized wave, the potential for disaster. The outcome is a mystery. A halo of color predominates each canvas, erasing and blinding us to the particular emotions of the distant figures.

This feeling for the unknown has only increased as Bradford has located her

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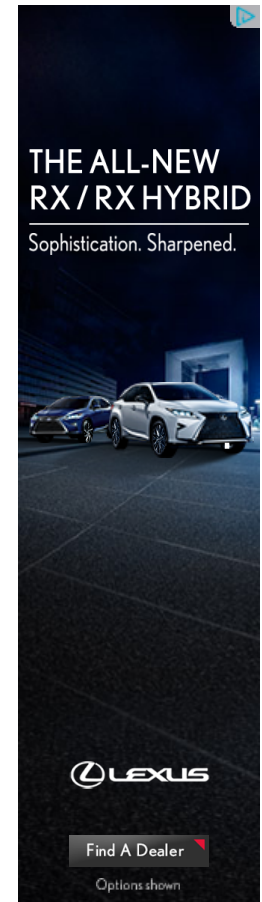
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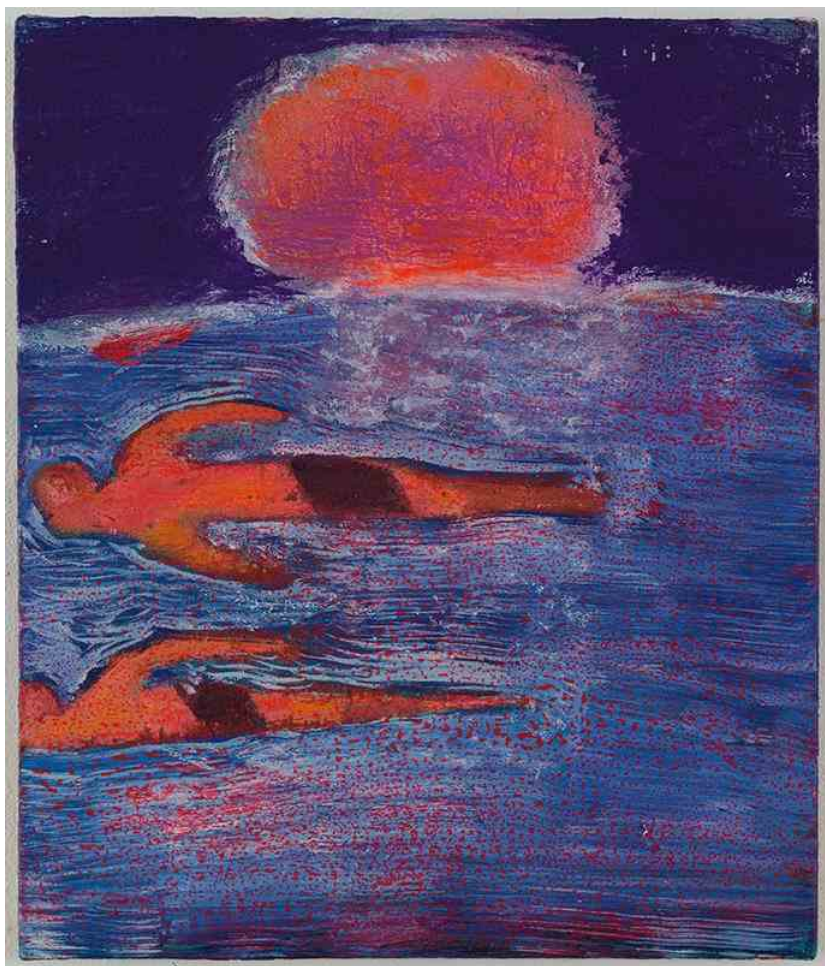
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scenes in increasingly ethereal settings. Bradford has long worked through the iconography of cosmic kitsch, with comic-book UFOs, planets, and stars appearing in her work. In her most recent paintings, some of them dated 2016 and seemingly still wet from the studio, Bradford elevates her water-bound figures into the astral plane. These settings make literal Auden's understanding of the sea as the "symbol for the primordial undifferentiated flux, the substance which became created nature only by having form imposed upon or wedded to it." Oversized galaxies appear in the black sky of *Floaters* (2015). In *Swim Team Miami* (2015), divers prepare to jump from orbiting planets. *Swim Team Outer Space* (2015) floats on the curving surface of a purple planet illuminated by a glowing moon. While in *Fathers* (2016), the largest and most fraught canvas in the exhibition, nude figures face each other around the edge of a circular pool, which itself floats in a starry void.



Katherine Bradford, *Couples Swim* (2015), Acrylic on canvas.

With her sense for mood, Bradford comes across as a latter-day Symbolist. The smaller painting *Couples Swim* (2015), a favorite of mine that features two figures floating under a midnight sun, recalls nothing less than the work of the Symbolist Edvard Munch. In *Symbolism*, his 1979 study, Robert Goldwater observed how Munch put "the meaning of his pictures into design and colour, and into the stance and gesture of the whole human body, whose pose and contour flowed and fused with a larger composition that gave direct expression to the mood and substance of the theme."

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**The Walter Duranty Prize  
for Journalistic Mendacity**

On May 5, 2014, *The New  
Criterion* and PJ Media  
presented the second

[Walter Duranty Prize for  
Journalistic Mendacity.](#)

The award is given to highlight egregious examples of dishonest reporting. Also awarded this year was the Rather, a new award for lifetime achievement in mendacious journalism. The Duranty Prize is named after Walter Duranty, the *New York Times* Moscow correspondent in the 1920s and 1930s who whitewashed Joseph Stalin's forced starvation of the Ukrainians (the Holodomor) and many other aspects of Soviet oppression. Duranty was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1932 for his efforts. It has never been revoked. Audio copyright Ed Driscoll,

[www.eddriscoll.com](http://www.eddriscoll.com).

## Introduction to The Kennedy Phenomenon

Roger Kimball introduces The Kennedy Phenomenon, a conference presented by *The New Criterion* on Tuesday, November 19.

**The Kennedy  
Phenomenon: "Watching  
the Kennedy Train-  
Wreck"**

Roger Kimball reads Peter Collier's paper on oft-overlooked unsavory details of the Kennedys' lives. Much of



Bradford shows a similar sensibility, and a similar fearlessness around fearful sentiment.



*Elisabeth Kley, installation view at Canada.*

Meanwhile, in Canada's second gallery, Elisabeth Kley presents striking black-and-white ceramics that appear pulled up from an unknown deep. Working with "homemade underglazes, with wax resist and sgraffito," Kley impresses rough designs of unknown ethnographic origin onto her hand-made vessels of flasks and lobed bottles. Abstract trees, crosses, seraphim, eyes, tulips, leaves, axes, and flags decorate these objects in matte black-and-white, and, on the reverse, white-on-black. Prints and wall-painting round out the monochrome space, contrasting with Bradford's colors next door, with the earthenware objects arranged symmetrically on pedestals in museum formation. In the art world, we are in a ceramic moment. Kley's clay looks to the future by unearthing the forgotten past.

the paper is drawn from Collier's book, coauthored with David Horowitz,

*The Kennedys: An American Drama.*

## Weblog



### Week in review

by *Benjamin Riley*

Feb 05, 2016 12:39 PM

### Meet the Met

by *James Panero*

Feb 04, 2016 03:34 PM

### New York's new maestro

by *Eric C. Simpson*

Feb 02, 2016 11:04 AM

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