

ARTFORUM

Ludel, Wallace. "Katherine Bradford." *Artforum*, 24 Jan. 2024, www.artforum.com/events/wallace-ludel-on-katherine-bradford-at-canada-2024-548569/.

Katherine Bradford



Katherine Bradford, *In the Lake*, 2023, diptych, acrylic on canvas, 6' 8" × 11' 4".

Central to Katherine Bradford's painting practice is the phenomenon of weightlessness—figures frequently tread water or float somewhere in the universe. Even those planted here on Earth have a propensity to hover and levitate about while remaining tethered to one another and the picture plane by some irrational gravitational force. To enter these grand settings—space, the ocean—is to risk engulfment, getting swallowed up by water or sucked into the void, as can be said of surrendering to love's undertow. So we watch as those who populate Bradford's paintings test the boundaries of selfhood, navigating this sort of grandiosity that dresses itself up as everyday life.

There's a loneliness to the way many of her subjects relate to one another: We see it in their discomfort, in the postures they assume. The artist nods to the fact that, even in the best of circumstances, we are fundamentally alone even when we are together. Nonetheless, Bradford's figures still reach for something greater, transcendent. Take *Swimmers Under Pink Sky*, 2023, portraying what could be a family—a mom, a dad, two kids—wading in knee-high water, posing awkwardly. Their apprehensiveness is palpable, but there is something familiar and endearing about the tableau. Or *In the Lake*, 2023, a showstopping diptych that's more than eleven feet wide, which features half a dozen swimmers treading water. In many ways the subjects are solitary, but they meet in a space of quiet awe, sharing a sense of communal wonder.

Other canvases on view here presented singular figures quietly navigating the world. *Back Dive in Darkness*, 2023, for example, is a small work depicting a swimmer jumping from a diving board into an unspecified body of water, with sky and liquid largely undifferentiated from one another. Here, Bradford's paint handling creates a sort of vibration wherein foreground and background, subject and object, blur into one ecstatic mess. The work recalls Paul Thek's diver paintings, which some scholars speculate were inspired by the 480 BCE fresco *Tomb of the Diver*, in which an image of a man leaping into water represents transition into the afterlife.

The theme of domesticity suffused the show as well, as the renderings of these works' Georgian-style homes—which abound in New England, where Bradford has spent much of her life—attested. In *Under My House*, 2022, a figure lies prone in the foreground while the titular structure stands erect in the near distance. The canvas is awash in a delicious violet, calling to mind a midcentury Color Field painting more than a conventional landscape. In *Women and House*, 2023, two seemingly nude female figures pose with a home behind them, the work perhaps a queering of Grant Wood's 1930 *American Gothic*. The sixteen-by-twenty-inch canvas *In Bed Together*, 2023, melded the domestic with the otherworldly more explicitly than any other work here, as it depicts a couple, cozy in their connubial bliss, floating among the stars, reminding us that the here and now is imbued with as much depth and paradox as the cosmos.

Bradford paints pictures of people interacting with one another while also encountering forces much larger and more mysterious than themselves. The way she depicts everyday life—and the sundry miracles embedded within it—seems to me part of a greater project, one that is shot through by an abiding sense of care. She looks so attentively into our world that, indeed, she falls into it: deeply, lovingly, and endlessly.