

## KATHERINE BRADFORD “Night Swimmers”

February 19 – March 26, 2022    CLOSED: Sun, Mon, National Holidays

Tomio Koyama Gallery is pleased to present “Night Swimmers,” the long-awaited first solo exhibition in Japan with 79-year old American artist Katherine Bradford.

Katherine Bradford currently has many fans all over the world. Bradford began her art career relatively late, receiving the Guggenheim Fellowship, American Academy of Arts and Letters Award in 2011 at the age of 69, and presenting a solo exhibition at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas in 2019 when she was 78 years old. From July to September 2022, the artist will hold a solo exhibition “Flying Woman: The Paintings of Katherine Bradford” at the Portland Museum of Art, Maine. Also a recipient of the Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant and the Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant, Bradford is today recognized as a highly acclaimed artist, with works housed in the collections of numerous museums including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Brooklyn Museum, and The Portland Museum of Art, among others.

This exhibition will be a highly valuable opportunity to view a selection of 12 or so latest works by the artist.

### 【On the Exhibition “Night Swimmers” and the Featured Works:

**Luscious colors, anacathesia, peaceful calm and fear, light and shadow, unrest and humor】**

Bradford states as follows regarding the exhibition “Night Swimmers” and the painting works featured.

“These new paintings continue my exploration of the figure in water. What interests me about night swimming is the subtle changes in light and shadow and how each situation presents its own world of color. I have included the glow of the moon in several paintings as well as the need for all of us to have a lifeguard watching over us on a high seat. Along with a moon I like to include planets as sources of eerie nocturnal bright spots. The figures are rendered in a blueish light so that their bathing suit often provides the only light. Night swimming is primordial and wavers between a peaceful calm and a generic fear of the dark. Water at night tends to appear black but I have given the water a luminosity to signal the possibility of a warm embrace. The ocean at night holds so many mysteries I am always eager to try to paint it.”

Bradford has repeatedly painted motifs such as swimmers, night skies, and the ocean, taking several months or sometimes a year to complete each work, slowly developing them over time. Distinguished by a palette consisting of soft shades of pink, blue, purple, orange, and yellow, certain feelings of anacathesia permeate the painting space. The figures depicted in the works appear almost expressionless, yet their emotions are conveyed through gestures and facial directions, evoking the fun and joy, sorrow, loneliness, and disquiet of the ocean at night. These contrasts give rise to a unique atmosphere and element of humor, manifesting in the form of dreamlike scenes that captivate the viewer.

While the simple color-field surfaces and atmospheric backgrounds are inspired by the abstract paintings of Mark Rothko and the work of various artists such as Forrest Bess, Milton Avery, and Philip Guston, Bradford expresses a desire to pursue her own manner of “representation” through a free and distinct approach to produce an unparalleled oeuvre.

Bradford describes her reasons for depicting swimming figures as follows.

“Really what I love is transparency and cropping, and that’s a good reason to do swimmers. People want me to say that swimming is a metaphor or that I was on the swimming team. But I am speaking as someone who is a painter – I make paintings. So my main motivation is to create a transparent look in a painting: that has always been fun for me. In terms of the cropping, I love to create an image where the water and the body are interacting. So what I’m trying to do is to get the human body to be enfolded in the paint, and therefore in the water.”

She has also commented on the themes for her previous works.

“I feel that in this moment in the art world, people are responding to social and political issues. ... but I’m really emphasizing a universality. I feel that’s important, that I’m exploring who we are, how we fit in, how we fit in together visually, how we all stand next to each other, and there are quite a lot of options for how to look and be with one another. I’m interested in the community, and I love the community that you and I are in, which is full of really odd, different kinds of people.” (Loney Abrams “ ‘I’m not going to fool around’ : An Interview with Painter Katherine Bradford.” Artspace July 12, 2019)

### **【About Katherine Bradford: Her passion in becoming an artist, and achieving her own identity】**

In an interview three years ago, Katherine Bradford mentioned how she wakes up every morning grateful for (and a bit surprised with) her life as an artist. While she has currently gained much success and receives acclaim for her work as an artist, her path to arriving at this life had been a difficult one.

Bradford was born in 1942 in New York, and currently lives and works in Brooklyn. Without formal training, she began creating abstract paintings in her thirties while raising twins, hoping to change her life as a wife of a politician in order to pursue an artistic career. She had moved with her family from New York to the rural state of Maine for her husband who was talking about running for governor, yet there she encountered a community of hippie artists that further ignited her ambitions. There is an anecdote that Bradford, in hopes to escape her current circumstances, literally jumped out the window during a gathering of her husband’s political friends and ran in to her studio, which was in a barn.

After her divorce, Bradford moved to New York City as a single mother to pursue art in closer contact with contemporary painting discourse. She enrolled in graduate studies at State University of New York at Purchase when she was around 40 years old, completing her MFA and meeting her partner of the same sex who she continues to maintain a relationship with. In the subsequent decades she continued to pursue her artistic endeavors, receiving high acclaim for her paintings of the vast ocean, boats, swimmers, and superheroes that she began producing in her sixties, thus finally coming to be widely recognized in the art world.

Maine, home to the city of Portland, is blessed with beautiful bayshore coastlines and rich forests, and is visited by many people who enjoy activities such as swimming and skiing. Bradford currently spends her summers in Maine, and while it was once a place she had been so eager to leave, the images of its ocean and the people who swim there indeed had a significant influence on her work.

Furthermore, Bradford’s brother is an architect as was also her grandfather, and although being blessed by this visual environment her mother had continued to discourage her interest in art. This oppression from her mother had deeply afflicted Bradford, and some viewers find the artist’s mother to be depicted in a comical manner among the swimmers that serve as a key motif of the work.

Considering the times, it would have been much more difficult than today for Bradford to become an artist, abandon her secure position as a politician’s wife, and start a relationship with her same-sex partner.

Katherine Bradford had indeed achieved and developed her identity through her very own effort. Her twin children, who in their early age had been puzzled by their mother’s sudden change of environment and decision to live as an artist, now take pride in their mother’s work, bringing much joy to Bradford.

While brimming with her free spirit, her works evoke a certain relaxed sense of humor, melancholy, and joy. We invite viewers to take this opportunity to embrace the world of Katherine Bradford’s work.