

CAMPOLI PRESTI

Press release

Katherine Bradford
Les saltimbanques
20 April – 17 June 2023

Campoli Presti is pleased to announce *Les saltimbanques*, Katherine Bradford's fourth exhibition with the gallery. The world of the acrobats, their colorful costumes and masks infuses a particular use of lines, patterns and colors while evoking the micro-society in which artists and spectators are projected.

The imagery of the *commedia dell'arte* has inspired a large number of works throughout art history and has held a particular fascination amongst modern artists working in Paris, from Seurat to Matisse to Picasso. Some traces of this tradition can be seen in Bradford's work, such as Matisse's oval shaped faces or Picasso's focus on the figures rather than the background, left almost empty or filled with blocked colors. Besides the bright visual spectacle, these artists were fascinated by the social implications of the circus, which can be extrapolated to other scenes involving humans in need for attention and validation. For Bradford, it is a symbol of the artistic community, one full of pleasures, fantasies and expectations, where a group performs, travels, shows and lives together.

The work's points of connection with the visual arena of the circus start thus with simple shapes and figures. Stripes and patterned apparel have been recurring in Bradford's work as a way to organize figures but also to stress the relationship between foreground and background. Lined tents, diamond-shaped patches or circular juggling props recompose not only a theme but a particular way of embracing abstraction, using shape, colors and gestural marks to achieve a visual effect. Trapeze artists convey movement and airiness to the canvas while also providing structure to the composition. The gravity-free environment of the circus can also relate to her earlier paintings in which floating figures like swimmers and flying superheroes attempt to traverse the picture plane - sometimes awkwardly, like in *High Wire Act* (2023).

The figures in Bradford's new paintings continue to address the nature of social interactions. Masks are explored here as a theatrical metaphor to explain how one presents oneself in different social situations. Communication is mediated either by body movements, gestures and acrobatic skills, but also by props like cloud swings, high wires and hoops. In *Circus performers with blue horse* (2023), humans reach out, bear the weight of, or attract one another in isolated scenes yet tied together by the broader gaze of the viewer, an active part of the spectacle's audience. Juggling can be a meditative, solitary activity, but balls and props can also be a strong means of communication between players. Between melancholia, playfulness, mutual support and collaboration, the works delve into the environment of the circus to reflect on performance within the artistic community.

Katherine Bradford (b. 1942) lives and works in New York. She started painting at the age of thirty while living in Maine and was among the group of artists who moved to Williamsburg, Brooklyn in the 1980s. In 2022 Bradford was the subject of a touring retrospective organized by the Portland Museum of Art in Maine. Bradford has exhibited widely at institutions such as MoMA PS1, New York; the Brooklyn Museum; the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, TX; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AR; the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum, Skidmore College, NY; and the Ogden Museum of Southern Art, New Orleans, as part of the fourth Prospect New Orleans Triennial.

Her work is included in collections such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Brooklyn Museum; the Dallas Museum of Art; the Menil Collection, Houston; the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Overland Park, KS; and the Portland Museum of Art, ME.

Bradford is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship and a Joan Mitchell Grant. She has taught at institutions such as the Yale School of Art, Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia.