

Caitlin Keogh

*Procession*

1 Nov–19 Dec 2024

39 Walker

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Every week for the past fifteen years, Caitlin Keogh has received images in the mail. Most often they arrive as postcards—sometimes a single card, other times in batches of two or three. Occasionally she gets a big envelope with clippings from museum catalogs and art books. The pictures reflect the taste and expertise of their sender, a specialist in nineteenth-century Realism who Keogh befriended in art school. Many images are too obscure to be online; none of the batches would populate the same Google image search. One week, a postcard of Guido Reni's painting of Atalanta and Hippomenes arrives; the next, a card of Pollaiuolo's painting of Daphne and Apollo; then Henry George Hine's 1850's illustration of *The House that Jack Built*; then a Picabia drawing of two people reading, and so on. The connections among the pictures are personal to the life of the sender and to his relationship with Keogh through art: images from their visit to the Met, what came to mind when they were texting about Joe Brainard's collages, recent discoveries on a trip to Brazil that he thinks Keogh would like. The exchange is an ongoing conversation, largely without words, and a remarkable act of devotion between friends. Perhaps because of that relational trust, Keogh's growing collection of images foregrounds the intuitions and the desires art evokes when shared with others.

Keogh's fourth solo exhibition at Bortolami, titled *Procession*, is itself a generous conversation and act of devotion featuring a cavalcade of images unfurling over eight paintings. To make the works, Keogh pored through hundreds of the images mailed to her, searching for ones whose emotional tone she was drawn to. She looked for unfamiliar images, unburdened by iconic status or overdetermined historical narratives that felt open to interpretation. They were pictures that, to many people in our era of media saturation and aesthetic amnesia, could only be described loosely as "classical" or "historical," making their beauty, mystery, or strangeness all the more potent for generating associative responses. Keogh was interested in how the images in her pile spoke to her and to one another, and, in turn, how they would speak to viewers encountering them through the language of her painting.

To start *Procession*, Keogh first printed copies of the selected images, cut those out, and composed a long collage on paper (she has made collages for numerous past exhibitions but has never exhibited them). Working from the collage, she began to fill the six connected canvases. Figures first emerged as black outlines, evidencing her experience as a technical illustrator. As the process continued, Keogh painted in some of the source materials using trompe l'œil techniques; rendered other images as doubled or mirrored; and wove others into a repeating lattice-work motif. The completed paintings exemplify how precisely Keogh flattens imagery through simplified line and color while amplifying its psychological and symbolic complexity through composition.

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Freud once likened free association, the psychoanalytic practice of saying whatever thoughts come to mind without linear plot or pre-planned agenda, to sitting beside the window of a moving train, describing the changing views of what you see outside. He believed for free association to be effective in analysis, any concerns of indiscretion, irrelevance, or nonsense had to be left behind. When I visited Keogh's studio and saw the *Procession* paintings in process, I thought of them as a kind of view from a train window—a procession of image-associations, however awkward and vulnerable. Something Keogh later wrote in an e-mail confirmed this intuition for me: "I have had the experience many times of having an image stuck in my mind, like maybe a Magritte painting that I'm slightly misremembering, or a sign I saw somewhere. And I think of these mental images as being receptacles for ambiguous feelings."

Torsos are a recurring motif in Keogh's earlier works, symbolizing, she has said, repositories for digestion and metabolism. Some of the paintings in *Procession* include torsos, but unlike Keogh's earlier work, they are not centralized, stand-alone figures. Here, torsos join the populous. These canvases are a parade of relationships and dialogues, dyads and discordant crowds.

—Jenny Jaskey, October 2024

Caitlin Keogh (b. 1982 in Anchorage, Alaska) lives and works in New York. Her paintings were recently included in *New Time: Art and Feminisms in the 21st Century* at BAMPFA, Berkeley, CA. In 2021, Keogh completed a mural in the city of Holbaek, Denmark in conjunction with Holbaek Art. Keogh has been the subject of solo exhibitions at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA; Melas Papadopoulos, Athens, Greece; and MoMA PS1, Long Island City, NY. Her work has also been exhibited at Fondation Carmignac, Porquerolles, France; MoMA Warsaw, Poland; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; Künstlerhaus Bremen, Germany; the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; the Queens Museum, Flushing Meadows, NY; and The Church, Sag Harbor, NY.

Her work is represented in the collections of the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Amorepacific Museum of Art, Seoul; the Rollins Museum of Art, Winter Park, Florida; and the Rhode Island School of Design Museum, Providence.