

ANNA ZORINA GALLERY

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— Diversion

At the Galleries Winter 2023

By Karen Wilkin

“John Bradford: For the Love of Paint” at Anna Zorina Gallery in Chelsea was the painter’s freewheeling homage to his artist heroes and an affirmation of his belief in the eloquence of materials. Scenes of studios, exhibitions, people working en plein air, and the like, some rooted in actuality, some wholly or partly imagined, presented us with works about Courbet, Cézanne, Renoir, Morisot, Picasso, and Braque, as well as Gainsborough and Stubbs. While the titles were mostly as explicit as *Berthe Morisot in Her Studio* or *Cézanne in the Louvre*,



John Bradford, *Renoirs in the Studio*, 2022. Acrylic, oil on canvas, 36 x 48 in (91.4 x 121.9 cm).

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everything was conjured up by Bradford's characteristic, witty shorthand, in generous spaces populated by small, schematically rendered, agile figures. Repetitive stabs and pats of a loaded brush accumulated into carpets of subtly modulated color, congealing into canvases on a wall, spectators, and interior spaces, often bathed in light and always full of air, despite the thick, textured pigment.

Bradford's love of paint, manifest in these dense expanses, all but submerged the generating images, making us think hard about the relationship of the nominal subject and what we saw. The economical images seemed to have been wrestled out of the paint, creating invigorating tension between what we knew about the reference and what was before us. The suave paint application and modeled forms of a Renoir nude, for example, were translated into minimal swipes and stipples of thick oil paint, somehow without losing sensuality. On one level, Bradford's show was a delightful game for art lovers. On another, it was a festival of compelling, lushly modulated images.