

Artist Resources – Mark Bradford (American, b. 1961)

[Bradford at Hauser & Wirth Gallery, Los Angeles](#)

In 2007, [Art21 followed Bradford](#) as he gathered materials and installed work in his South LA studio..

Bradford explains his inspiration and process in a [2011 interview with Art21](#). “My practice is décollage and collage at the same time. Décollage: I take it away; collage: I immediately add it right back. It’s almost like a rhythm. I’m a builder and a demolisher. I put up so I can tear down...In archaeological terms, I excavate and I build at the same time.”

Bradford’s discusses recent work and community engagement at his 2009 [artist talk at Walker Art Center](#).

In 2015 [New Yorker profile](#) conducted at Bradford’s studio and home in South LA, not far from where he grew up, he spoke about his attraction to paper, maps, and social history; his time at CalArts and interest in painting; and his foundation with Allan DiCastro, [Art+Practice](#), which creates spaces for artists and community activism.

Bradford talked with Thelma Golden about his relationship with the medium of painting and experiences of being “othered” in a 2015 [video interview](#) in conjunction with his [first show at Hauser & Wirth](#) Gallery, New York. “Abstraction gave me the freedom to play... I want a space where I can play and be vulnerable and not know. In the shadows....my body is removed and stays in the shadows, what you see are the details and the things I’m working out.”



Bradford, 2019. Photo: Sim Canetty-Clarke



Bradford, 2019. Photo: Sim Canetty-Clarke

In 2017, Bradford [installed his first solo exhibition in Washington D.C.](#), at the Hirshorn Museum. The star of the show, [Pickett’s Charge](#) (on view through 2021) is Bradford’s most recognized work, measuring 45 feet in length and composed of eight 12-ft tall canvases. Watch Bradford’s [artist talk](#) at the Hirshorn with Director Melissa Chiu.

Bradford [speaks to a packed audience](#) at the [de la Cruz Collection](#), Miami, Florida in 2015. “I’m always looking for a detail in something that has to do with race, or gender or class. But it’s a detail, and I need to abstract it because those are such large words. Big ‘R’ for race, big ‘G’ for gender. How do I as a person navigate in and out of that, and sometimes I use abstraction because it gives me some freedom even though the language still clings to the edges of it.”

W. Tate Dougherty, Senior Director at Hauser & Wirth, [interviewed](#) Bradford as they prepared for “Los Angeles,” a major exhibition at the [Long Museum in Shanghai](#), summer 2014.

The Modern Art Museum in Fort Worth, Texas unveiled a 2020 exhibition focused on Bradford’s material-oriented process. [Mark Bradford: End Papers](#) includes early work and new pieces created specifically for the show

Mark Bradford (American, b. 1961)

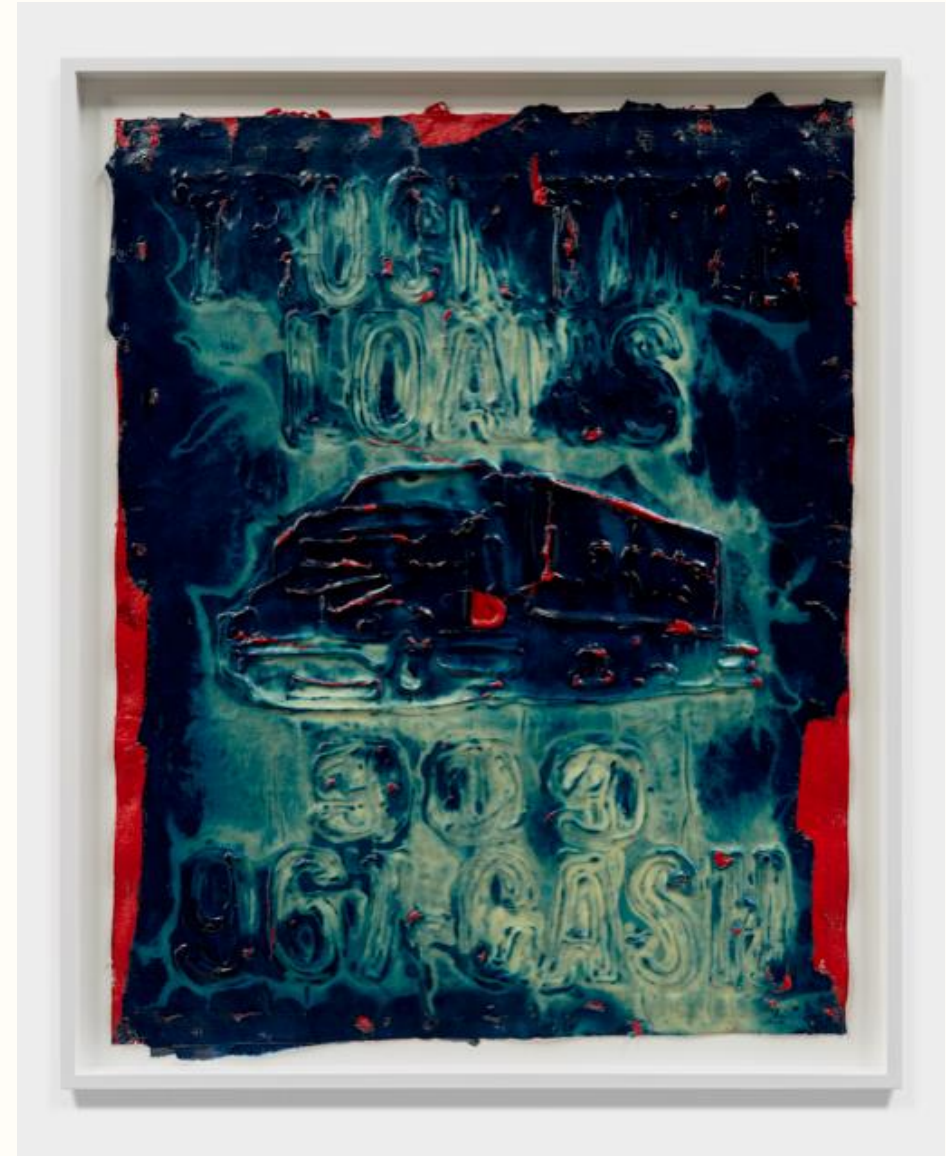
Ghost Ship, 2022

Mixed media on canvas

Private Collection, Los Angeles; L2023:33.3

Born in South Los Angeles, Mark Bradford's large-scale, abstract paintings often engage with histories of place and urban landscape. The artist's practice is referred to as "social abstraction," an approach that recognizes that artistic materials and techniques are embedded in larger socio-political systems manifesting persistent inequalities. In the early 2000s, Bradford began his *Merchant Poster* series inspired by predatory advertising practices directed specifically at low-income communities. The **Ghost Ship** paintings are a recent iteration of this series, based on the exchange of cash loans and trucks for smugglers to operate across the US-Mexico border. In a total of 60 **Ghost Ship** paintings, Bradford imagines these vehicles as floating vessels without a living crew – remnants of a cataclysmic event that disproportionately affects marginalized populations. The paintings were recently sold to support a student residency program at Museo de Arte de Zapopan (MAZ) in Mexico City, where the artist held his own residency and exhibition in 2023.

On view July 5 – October 8, 2023





Mark Bradford (American, b. 1961)

Ghost Ship, 2022

Mixed media on canvas

Private Collection, Los Angeles; L2023:33.2

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Mark Bradford (American, b. 1961)

it took me years to learn the right attitude, 2002

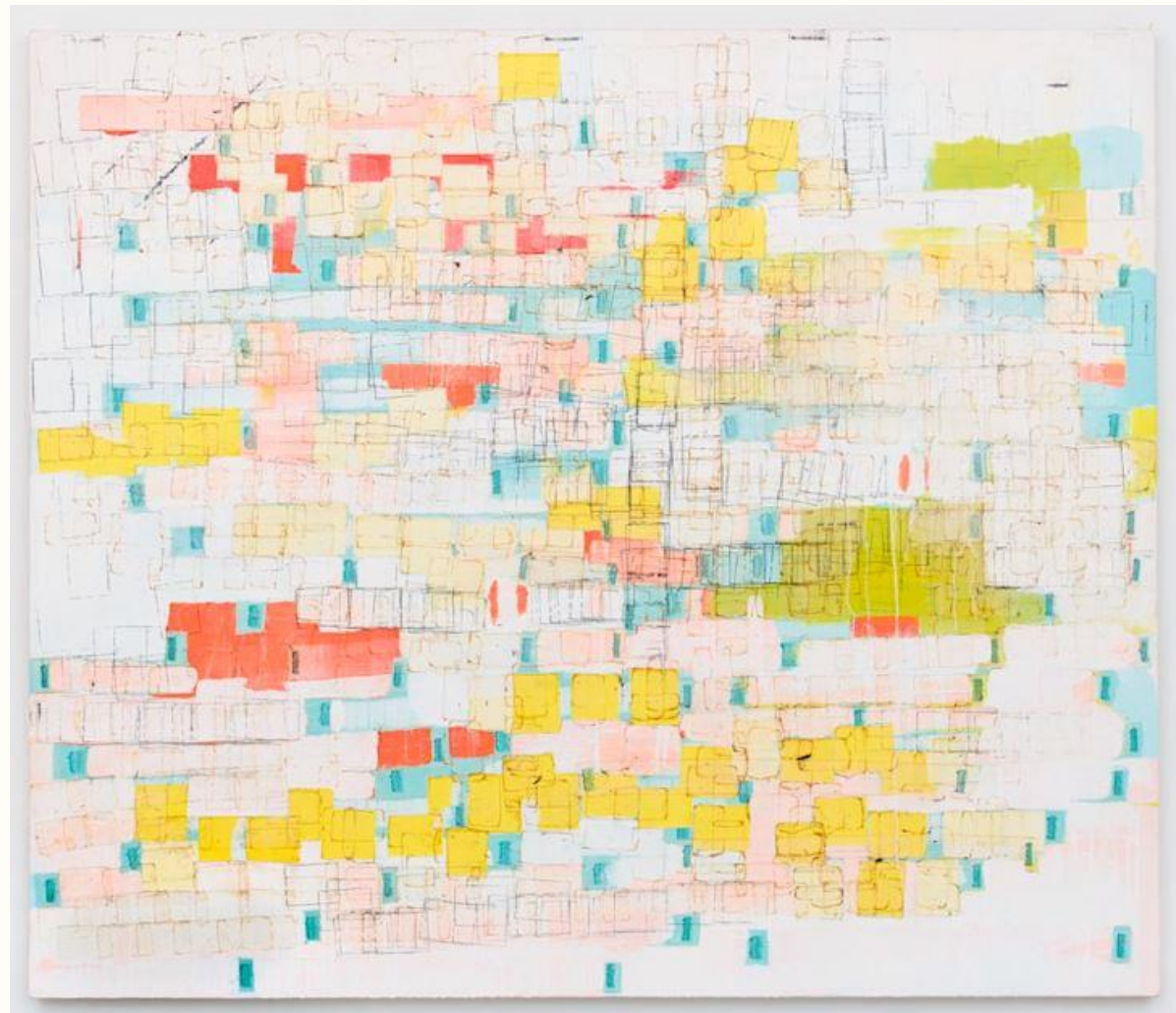
Mixed media on canvas

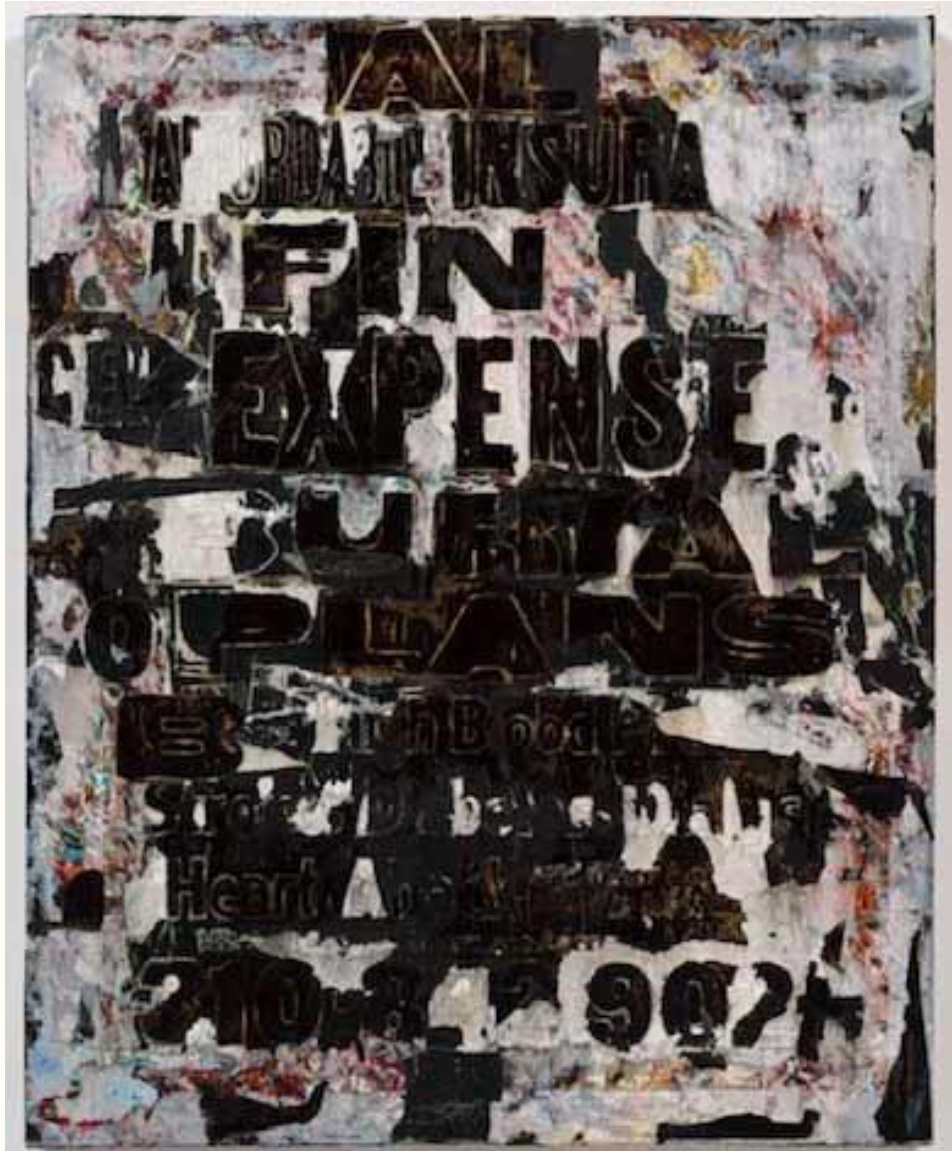
Private Collection; L2021:170.3

Born and raised in South Los Angeles, Mark Bradford grew up working in his mother's beauty salon and completed his own hairdresser's license after high school. His earliest artistic experiments used end papers, or the thin, translucent tissue paper used for perms and hair rolling. End papers have continued to play an important material role in Bradford's practice, as the rectangular sheets often evoke abstract grids and maps in the artist's collages and mixed-media paintings. **it took me years to learn the right attitude** was recently on display at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth in an exhibition focused on Bradford's end paper works.

According to the artist: "The way I layer end papers like a grid across the surface of my paintings lends itself to a conversation about abstraction, but the end papers also serve a purpose and come directly from the world in which I was living. I don't see my abstract paintings and incorporation of end papers as two exclusive impulses. In my practice, they have always gone together."

On view August 3 – November 6, 2022





Mark Bradford (American, b. 1961)
Fin, 2021
Mixed media on canvas

Private Collection; L2021:180.1

On view May 11 – August 14, 2022

Mark Bradford (American, b. 1961)

In the Center Rests the Sun, 2021

Mixed media on canvas

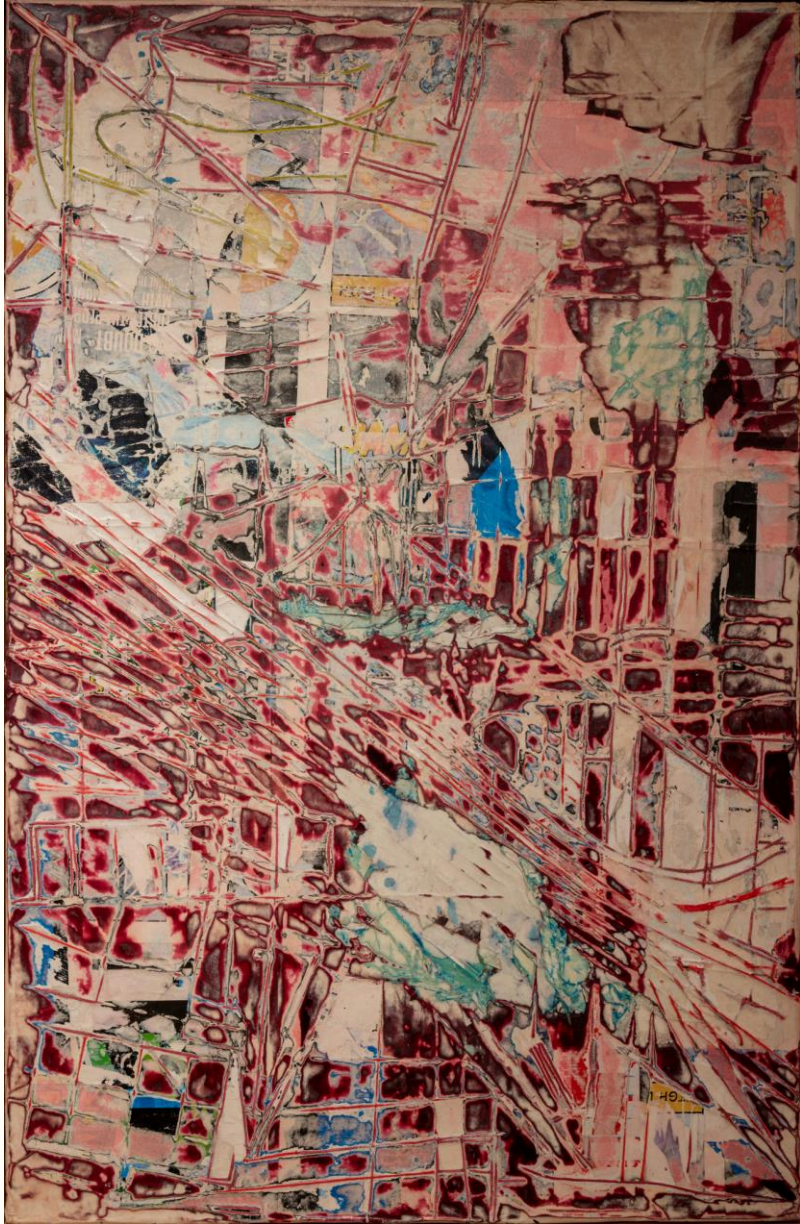
Private Collection; L2021:184.12

Born and raised in Los Angeles, Mark Bradford's wide practice includes painting, video, printmaking, installation, and mixed media art that interrogates world history and culture. **In the Center Rests the Sun** is named after Nicolaus Copernicus's (1473-1543) 16th century declaration that the sun, rather than the earth, is at the center of the known universe. The painting was recently included in *Masses and Movements*, a solo exhibition on the Spanish Mediterranean island of Menorca centered on a 1507 Waldseemüller world map that first depicted a landmass on the other side of the Atlantic called "America." Reflecting latitude, longitude, and networks of navigational charts, **In the Center Rests the Sun** grapples with the "discovery" of the New World, legacies of settler colonialism, and three centuries of the slave trade.

According to the artist: "Maps have always been shady. So much of what we understand about landmasses comes from cartographers and their relationships to power, and the need to always keep a place for Europe at the center of history. I'm interested in the potential for abstraction to pull the stories from the margins onto the pages of that history."



On view April 27 – July 31, 2022



Mark Bradford (American, b. 1961)
I heard Billie sing, 2018
Mixed media on canvas

Private Collection; L2019:157.1

Mark Bradford identifies himself as an artist, observer, recorder, and collector of culture, creating, in his words, a “socially aware activist abstraction” that reflects issues of urban decay and renewal, disempowerment and hope. Though building upon American abstraction of the 1940s and ‘50s, Bradford has different goals, acknowledging the need to recognize what he calls a “post-studio world.” As a student, he sought to move beyond the academic confines of painting and found his earliest inspiration from materials at his mother’s salon, where he worked as a hairstylist while attending the California Institute of the Arts. As he explains, “I learned my own way of constructing paintings through the End Papers—how to create space, how to use color. And how to provide a new kind of content. They were the beginning for me.” In his mature work, Bradford enhances the medium of paint with discarded ephemera like movie posters, advertising flyers, and newspapers gathered from around his studio and home in South LA. The textured, visually stunning amalgamations become nuanced abstracted portraits of places and people, history, and culture.

On view July 1 – October 4, 2020

Mark Bradford (American, b. 1961)

You Don't Know What Kind of World You Woke Up, 2018

Mixed media on canvas

Private Collection; L2019:134.1

Contemporary African American artist Mark Bradford characterizes himself as an excavator and archivist of culture. His trademark mixed-media compositions recycle discarded materials like movie posters, circulars, and newspapers, which he collects from the streets surrounding his studio in South Los Angeles. While his oeuvre has expanded over the last two decades to include installations and video, abstract collaged canvases remain the core of Bradford's creative practice. Each new work demonstrates his continued dedication to making art that is visually captivating, layered with meaning, and tied to community while engaging with national issues. The enigmatically titled **You Don't Know What Kind of World You Woke Up** represents a 2018 series in which the artist returned to one of his early conceptual interests: maps, civic organization, and the physical marginalization of minority communities. Bradford scrapes and sands his constructed layers of paper to create a highly textured surface that recalls an aerial view of a landscape. Vivid blue paint ruptures the ghostly grid-like composition, suggesting the wave of political and social upheaval hinted by the title.

On view February 19 – May 24, 2020

Resources for this work

2019 exhibition of new work, including *You Don't Know What Kind of World You Woke Up*, at [Hauser & Wirth, Hong Kong](#)

[Interview](#) with gallerist Iwan Wirth, 2019



Mark Bradford (American, b. 1961)

Untitled, 2019

Acrylic, tissue paper and rope collage on canvas construction

Private Collection; L2019:154.1

Born in Los Angeles, where he still lives and works, Mark Bradford earned his BFA and MFA from the California Institute of the Arts. He is celebrated for large-scale paintings and sculpture—sometimes shown as installations—incorporating materials such as newsprint, billboard paper, and flyers that he salvages from urban communities around his studio in South LA. Bradford engages with these materials like a social historian or an archeologist, investigating the potential of discarded ephemera to elucidate how broader historical and economic conditions disproportionately affect marginalized populations. He refers to his work as “social abstraction...with a social or political context clinging to the edges.” The buoy-shaped **Untitled** returns to a sculptural installation Bradford created in 2014, in which the artist directed his interest in urban cartography toward medieval and Renaissance maps of maritime exploration. The buoy displays his signature process of building and molding layers of materials, including the addition of rope for added texture and linear elements.

On view February 26 – May 31, 2020

Resources for this work

[Review of buoy installation on façade of Bait Obaid Al Shamsi during the Sharjah Biennial, 2014](#)

[Current buoy installation at Mandeville Gallery, Union College, NY, through July 2020](#)

