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INTERVIEW: Mark Bradford: "Everybody should have a little protective, a little bit of a net and society should give it to us"

By Ana Finel Honigman
Mar. 31, 2020

Mark Bradford, Happy, 2007, oil on canvas, 108 x 144 in. Artwork © Mark Bradford

SANTA MONICA, The first year of the Rose Museum exhibition, the inaugural at Broadie Christina Wilkins, Bloomsbury, in Oxford, the UK, Mark Bradford was a finalist. It was a great thing for a particular, specific kind of year-round, family-friendly, Los Angeles-centered, [illegible] to [illegible] Bradford's work. Bradford's work is [illegible] to [illegible] Los Angeles. Bradford's work is [illegible] to [illegible] Los Angeles. Bradford's work is [illegible] to [illegible] Los Angeles

BRAXTON'S Good Lots are the grass. Cutting means that I would have to start taking care. It's hard to think of you get out and it's not there, it's all over the world. So long as the grass is there, and you will never scatter it. But if you let me be very, very intensively look to my stay, then on Friday, when we don't have to go to Lowes, I often think, especially in the end, the world, they are waiting for us. Are the grass. I have to remember to that I have to. I'm out of a third of a little. I'd so much like. It would be comfortably difficult.

SELL. You want to talk about your work? Can we start with Tan Montoya?, your exhibition at the Rose Museum, where we met? I had about the trade-name branding.

BRAXTON'S I used to go to publishers and anthropology sites from Ed Ruscha's book of prints. I'd send to Ken Pelka and anthropology, he is a world of people. He listens to the world, and he's a world-beater. I'm always into immersed in maps and tools, tools. For my people, how I get here, the Middle Passage and tools taken. Well, my tools, I'm always into the tools. I'm always into the tools and the tools of the Americas. The early manipulation of the tools. I'm always into the tools. I'm always into the tools that created in these systems. The first manipulation prototypical the one as a tool, plays in demands where people, they tools. I'm used to tools, my people, I'm used to anthropology, I'm used to people, the tools, I'm used to tools. I'm always into immersed in maps and tools, tools. For my people, how I get here, the Middle Passage and tools taken. Well, my tools, I'm always into the tools. I'm always into the tools and the tools of the Americas. The early manipulation

HILL: A component of your contribution to the Biennale is your work with women in prison in Venice. What do you bring from your foundation work and your art to these women?
BRADFORD: It's a collective and there are six different collectives throughout Italy. They're basically a cottage industry – women making goods and selling them. They learn to show up on time, balance the books and interface with the clients. These are building blocks of education. It's not enough. They need more visibility and more money. They also need a profile in the city. They need a store in the city.

A spread from Mark Bradford's Contemporary Artist Series book, published by Phaidon

HILL: Do you think of these women as the 'fringe', as you say?

BRADFORD: Absolutely. When I first met them, their eyes were always down. I did a talk and I brought pictures, all the way back from the boarding house, and all of my story, and by the end of it they were like, 'We know you.' Then it changed. I have a six-year commitment. We have a store, so when women get out of prison, they can work in the store and don't have to leave the country. They have work and also have ownership. They share in the proceeds. They put the money back into the collective. They hire more people. Some are Italian, some refugees, some gypsies and some undocumented immigrants. A lot are Africans, and they all have this feeling that they're bad women.

HILL: They're the Medusa?
BRADFORD: Yes, that's true. Full of rage. I say, 'No. You've maybe done some things that you aren't proud of, but hold your head up.' As a representative of the United States, I wanted to introduce the women to other people in the art world who could support their programmes and to designers who can help them get better at the sewing. I wanted to connect the women prisoners to power and to money. That's the project for me. For some people, living on the fringe is such a romantic thing. There are those who really are from the centre, but who run to the fringe so they can experience a kind of angst. But there are a lot of people who exist on the fringes of culture and the fringes of society and the fringes of the economy who don't want to be there. They don't know how to change: men with prison records, women with records, dyslexic people who can't spell.
HILL: Would that include your foster youth?
BRADFORD: Right. If we can provide a non-judgemental site where they can feel safe enough to really express to you who they are, let's go.

HILL: I have this picture of you, taken at some point in your childhood. You're clearly creating something. Tell me what was going on with you at that time.
BRADFORD: I was about eleven years old. I was in our apartment in Santa Monica and my mom had bought me a potter's wheel. I'd sit at that potter's wheel for days and days and days. I have the same look on my face now when I work. I was a very delicate, sensitive child. I realized that there were a lot of things in the world that were going to really fuck with a little boy like me.

A spread from Mark Bradford's Contemporary Artist Series book, published by Phaidon

HILL: How did you ...
BRADFORD: Deal with it? I learned to run really fast. I think I had to emotionally move on because physically I looked the way I looked. I was other and I wasn't protected by the pack.

HILL: Do you ever feel scared now?

BRADFORD: No. Not at all. No. In the art world I don't feel like that. The art world is a safe place with safe ideas.

HILL: It seems to me that so many of the things that you're accomplishing are making the world safer for people.
BRADFORD: Yes. Yes. Yes. I never thought about it until you said it, but yes, you're right. I do want to make it safer. I do want to make these little safe spaces where it's: 'We're going to work in this little safe space and figure out how to get some armour on you.' Yes. I think everybody should have a little protection. I think everybody should have a little cover, everybody should have a little bit of a net and I think that society should give it to us, but for so many people society doesn't do that. You have to build that net for yourself by any means necessary.

Mark Bradford, the Phaidon Contemporary Artist Series monograph

HILL: Do you ever sit still?
BRADFORD: Every night. I don't work past about six.

HILL: Where does your mind go when you sit still?
BRADFORD: My mind doesn't go anywhere. My mind is like the airport. Airplanes are like ideas. They land, they fuel and they take off. I read.

HILL: I've seen your library. You read everything and I see it in your art, the ideas that you began to study at CalArts have exploded.

BRADFORD: They take off. I don't keep too much around in my head. I never have really. That's why I'm here. I have an incredible focus wherever I am. I'm 100 percent there. Then in two hours, I'll be at In and Out Burger, and a lady has just ordered and I'll look at her hair and look at her shoes and look again. And the only thing I'm ever interested in is what I'm working on right now. I can't go back and do something. I can't remake it. I'll say 'I'm going to go back and make five of these. I'm going to make so much money.' I never do. I'm living in my power, but as I'm living in my power, I'm constantly pointing to the fringes of society and saying, 'There are people hurting. We can do more. We can do more. We can open our mouths when we know something's not right.'

HILL: You can do art.
BRADFORD: I can do art. That's what I do. That's the whole thing.

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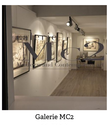

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