



DECEMBER 2018

PUSHED TO THE MARGINS

Spoiled Foot | Mark Bradford



As you enter the gallery that holds *Spoiled Foot*, you are confronted by a bulbous mass that hangs from above, suggesting a collapsed ceiling. Its pockmarked red and black surface is made by layering commercially printed paper, blasted with a pressure hose by the artist. Experiencing *Spoiled Foot* in person, you realize how little space there is between the artwork and the wall for you to move around. Therein lies one of the key lessons of *Spoiled Foot*—what happens when you have no choice but to move to the margins. In this case, it's the physical margins of the gallery space, but artist Mark Bradford is thinking broadly about the many people today increasingly forced to the economic, geographic, and social margins.

In this work, the artist also references Greek mythology, specifically the Greek god Hephaestus, who was cast out from Mount Olympus—the home of the gods—because he was born with a deformed foot. Bradford takes this story of exclusion and pain and connects it to the story of his own youth—his experience of being singled out for his difference, buffeted by social rejection and violence—and other stories of aggression and rejection that he has witnessed in his own lifetime. *Spoiled Foot* recalls those recent histories, from the explosion of HIV infections under government inaction in the 1980s to the moldy, water-logged homes damaged in the massive floods from Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005.

Bradford invokes some of the most devastating crises of our times, but *Spoiled Foot* is not only a meditation on disaster. It is also the story of survival. *Spoiled Foot* leaves the viewer just enough room to maneuver around it, even if on hands and knees. The artist allows for a sense of possibility in recalling the resourcefulness and ingenuity that people call upon to move through hard times.

VISIT THE BMA

and come see *Spoiled Foot* in the *Mark Bradford: Tomorrow Is Another Day* exhibition.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Create a mixed-media sculpture that invites or forces some kind of physical movement or positioning from the viewer. Have classmates interact with each other's sculptures. What were those experiences like?

Discuss what it means to be on the margins of society. What are the reasons that people are pushed to the margins? What do people do to survive on the margins of society? Who is on the margins of our society? What are the effects of being in the margins? The artist, Mark Bradford, created an experience in *Spoiled Foot* where people had to physically retreat to the margins rather than just imagine being in the margins. Why do you think he made that choice?

Mark Bradford (American, born 1961). *Spoiled Foot*. 2016. Mixed media on canvas, lumber, luan sheeting, and drywall. Dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth

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