



APRIL 2017

PAINTING WITH PAPER

My Grandmother Felt the Color | Mark Bradford



VISIT THE BMA

and see *My Grandmother Felt the Color* in the Contemporary Wing.

Mark Bradford (American, born 1961).
Detail, *My Grandmother Felt the Color*. 2016.
Mixed media on canvas. 132 × 156 inches.
The Baltimore Museum of Art: Purchased as
the gift of Anonymous Donors, BMA 2017.37

Mark Bradford's painting is teeming with circles—some the size of saucers or dinner plates; others as big as serving platters. Black and gold circles are everywhere, caught in a web of fine lines that shoot across the canvas. The gold, red, and black lines come from all sides, radiating outward from common points like beams from a flashlight.

This work may reflect Bradford's longstanding fascination with maps. The artist has often used maps of Los Angeles and other cities as starting points for his own abstractions. Here, however, he expands his range, perhaps suggesting a vast fictional universe filled with planets, asteroids, far-off galaxies, meteor showers, and cosmic debris. On the other hand, he might be imagining a world too small to see with our own eyes. Groupings of light and dark circles hint at colonies of human cells awash in fluid, seen through a powerful microscope.

Bradford describes this work as a painting, but there is no paint to be found anywhere on this canvas. The wall-size picture is made exclusively of white, blue, gold, red, and black papers applied to the canvas in layers and then attacked with a pressure hose. After the layers of paper become thoroughly wet and malleable, Bradford spreads the broken-down (but still brightly colored) fibers around the canvas as if manipulating paint with a brush. Serene blues and whites are smeared together only to have their calm interrupted by sudden gashes of bright red. Now completely dry, the black and gold circles are rough and crusty, and long grooves—created by pressing string into sodden paper—have hardened into supercharged diagonal lines that energize the canvas.

CHALLENGE FOR STUDENTS

Create an abstract composition using only circles and lines.

Use a map or diagram as a point of departure for your own abstract composition.

Go to bit.ly/2n5T8AS to see Bradford at work on earlier projects.
For a longer interview, see bit.ly/2n7ew9q

Mark Bradford will represent the United States at the prestigious 2017 Venice Biennale. See bit.ly/2ojU2e0

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