

The Modern

ART ASSIGNMENT

OPEN CALL

MARK BRADFORD

In conjunction with the exhibition *Mark Bradford: End Papers*, the Modern's education department is pleased to announce an OPEN CALL for high school and middle school student responses to two key works in the show, *Medusa*, 2020, and *Kingdom Day*, 2010.

It is highly recommended that each student visits the Modern's galleries to view the selected works in person. The exhibition is on view through January 10, 2021. This packet is a supplement to the gallery experience and offers background information on the artist and works, as well as ideas to consider and activities to complete for the open call.

Admission to the Modern is free for participating students.

OPEN CALL submission guidelines can be found at the end of this packet.

Mark Bradford (b. 1961 in Los Angeles; lives and works in Los Angeles) is a contemporary artist best known for his large-scale abstract paintings created out of paper. Characterized by its layered formal, material, and conceptual complexity, Bradford's work explores social and political structures that objectify marginalized communities and the bodies of vulnerable populations. Just as essential to Bradford's work is a social engagement practice through which he reframes objectifying societal structures by bringing contemporary art and ideas into communities with limited access to museums and cultural institutions.

Bradford grew up in his mother's beauty salon, eventually becoming a hairdresser himself, and was quite familiar with the small papers used to protect hair from overheating during the process for permanent waves. Incorporating them into his art was catalytic for Bradford, merging his abstract painting with materials from his life. The thin, delicate sheets are almost translucent and create the effect of soft brushstrokes across the surface of his compositions. Bradford has said, "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. . . . It all began in the beauty salon."

Using everyday materials and tools from the aisles of the hardware store, Bradford has created a unique artistic language. Referred to frequently as "social abstraction," Bradford's work is rooted in his understanding that all materials and techniques are embedded with meaning.

I don't know why we, in the art world, cannot unpack things and sort of make hybrid notions of a practice. We're very rigid. It's funny though; in music, we have no problem sampling, mixing and remixing. But in the art world, why can't we take little parts of history and mix it together? — Mark Bradford (Art in America Interview with Michele Carlson)

Please watch and read the selected videos and texts about Mark Bradford. These resources will provide context about the artist before you begin the activities.

Art Term, Tate, "Sculpture"

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/s/sculpture>

Art Term, Tate, "Abstract Art"

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/abstract-art>

Art Term, Tate, "Décollage"

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/d/decollage>

Mark Bradford, *Art21*, "Paradox"

<https://art21.org/artist/mark-bradford/>

Mark Bradford, *Art21*, "Politics, Process and Postmodernism"

<https://art21.org/read/mark-bradford-politics-process-and-postmodernism/>

Mark Bradford, Hauser & Wirth, "Mark Bradford: Cerberus"

<https://www.hauserwirth.com/stories/25949-mark-bradford-cerberus>

Medusa, text by Abigail Cain for *Artsy*, "What Depictions of Medusa Say about the Way Society Views Powerful Women," 2018

<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-depictions-medusa-way-society-views-powerful-women>

Hephaestus, *Greek Mythology*, "Greek God of Blacksmiths and Fire"

<https://www.greekmythology.com/Olympians/Hephaestus/hephaestus.html>

Mark Bradford, text by Jori Finkel for the *New York Times*, "An Artist's Mythic Rebellion for the Venice Biennale," 2017

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/27/arts/design/mark-bradford-venice-biennale.html>

Mark Bradford, text by Andrew Goldstein for *artnet*, "Mark Bradford Is Our Jackson Pollock: Thoughts on His Stellar US Pavilion at the Venice Biennale," 2017

<https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/mark-bradford-is-our-jackson-pollock-thoughts-on-his-stellar-u-s-pavilion-at-the-venice-biennale-957935>

Mark Bradford, text by Cara Ober for *Hyperallergic*, "Democracy's Dark Side and a Glimmer of Hope in Mark Bradford's Venice Biennale Show," 2017

<https://hyperallergic.com/379763/democracys-dark-side-and-a-glimmer-of-hope-in-mark-bradfords-venice-biennale-show/>

Mark Bradford, interview in *Minus Plato*, "She Was a Bad Woman: Mark Bradford as Pygmalion," 2017

<http://minusplato.com/2017/09/she-was-a-bad-woman-mark-bradford-as-pygmalion.html>

OPEN CALL RESPONSE PART 1: DÉCOLLAGE AND LAYERING

In this two-dimensional response, think about the ways Mark Bradford uses the techniques collage and décollage when making his paintings.

Collage is an additive process, building up layers of materials. Décollage is a subtractive process, taking away from existing layers.

Bradford will often take materials he finds out in the city back into his studio. Discarded materials can be filled with a history that marks their time and space within the world. By finding value in these things, Bradford reminds us that we can reconsider so-called “fine art” materials and use pre-existing images in new ways.

Spend some time with the following image from a series of works Bradford called *Merchant Posters*. This series addresses the formal and conceptual concerns of his works on paper through collage and décollage.

Consider some questions as you study the image:

1. Do the uneven margins and layers of torn edges give you a sense of the action and removal?
2. Do you notice a background layer that gives you a clue of what the original paper source might be?
3. Do you notice complete words or word fragments throughout the image?
4. Do the words BRAND and LUCK appear to have been collaged to the paper or décollaged from the paper?
5. Does this mixed-media collage evoke a sense of chaos or calmness?



Untitled, 2007
Mixed media on paper
39 1/2 x 30 1/4 inches
© Mark Bradford

In one of Bradford's works in the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth's permanent collection, *Kingdom Day*, 2010, there are multiple layers of materials applied to the surface. Bradford's process involved adding, covering up, scraping away, tearing off, etc.

*Please note that the scale of *Kingdom Day* is so large, the following images divide the painting into left and right segments.



Mark Bradford
Kingdom Day, 2010 (detail of left side)
Mixed media on canvas
120 x 480 inches
Collection of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Museum purchase
© Mark Bradford



Mark Bradford
Kingdom Day, 2010 (detail of right side)
Mixed media on canvas
120 x 480 inches
Collection of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Museum purchase
© Mark Bradford

Consider some questions as you observe *Kingdom Day*:

1. Do you see fragments of faces or text emerging from the background?
2. Do some zones of the painting appear to have more layers removed than others?
3. Does the multilayered buildup give you a sense of the layers of time that went into the making of this painting?
4. Do you notice that there are no layers that remain untouched or unchanged? Every layer seems to have something else added on or taken away.

The following image details of *Kingdom Day* reveal textures and hidden forms that become more legible as you get closer to the painting.





Another work included in the Modern's permanent collection also involves the processes of collage and décollage.



Jacques Villeglé

Rue de Tolbiac, c'est normal, c'est normand, 1962

Ripped posters mounted on canvas

52 ¼ x 76 ¼ inches

Collection of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Museum purchase, Sid W. Richardson Foundation Endowment Fund

© Jacques Villeglé / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

In the late 1940s, Jacques Villeglé helped pioneer the development of décollage, a technique that reversed the additive technique of collage. Rather than adding or pasting disparate elements to a flat surface to create an overall composition, as the Cubists or Surrealists had done, décollage involved taking the parts away from an existing image by tearing, ripping, or erasing. Villeglé searched the streets for posters, removing selected sections and mounting them on a surface such as canvas.

Now it's time to begin your collage/décollage response to Bradford's work.

Recommended Materials:

- various kinds of paper
- various brushes
- liquid school glue
- markers
- acrylic paint
- exacto knife
- miscellaneous materials such as cloth, aluminum foil, etc.

Please note that due to the many additive and subtractive layers you'll incorporate, this project cannot be completed in one session. You will need to allow each layer to dry before starting a new one. I encourage you to relate this project to a marathon rather than a sprint.

Think about the way fragments of something recognizable appear in the examples you've reviewed. Sometimes a word or a face is visible, but not completely legible.

Do you remember noticing that there were no layers that remained untouched or unchanged? Every layer seemed to have something else added on or taken away.

Throughout this collage/décollage response, try to be aware of the ways in which layers interact and merge into one another.

Begin by deciding what the final dimensions of your work will be. I recommend something between 8.5 inches x 11 inches and 13 x 19 inches.

Please note that work exceeding 20 x 20 inches will not be accepted.

Next, begin adding your first layer of materials. Add or remove more elements. Repeat.

Choosing which type of paper or material to use throughout each layer is an important part of the creative act in this response. Does the material have distinct visual information? The front page of the November 4 *New York Times* would be a very different layer than black pieces of construction paper.

Remember that throughout this multilayered process, what your collage/décollage looks like at an earlier stage may only partially resemble what it looks like in the end.

Consider burying text in an early layer so that you can excavate part of it later.

When we work with abstraction, it is not important for words or images to be completely legible or recognizable.

Each layer may involve subtle or drastic changes to the previous layer.

Please review the following images as examples of how one layer might transition into another.



OPEN CALL RESPONSE PART 2: LAYERING AND SCULPTURE



Medusa, 2020
Mixed-media sculpture
Dimensions variable
© Mark Bradford

THE VENICE BIENNALE PRESENTATION

The Venice Biennale was established in 1895 and is one of the most prestigious cultural institutions in the world. The main art exhibition takes place in the Giardini, which houses 30 permanent national pavilions. Countries that do not own national pavilions stage smaller exhibitions in the Arsenale and at satellite venues throughout the city.

In 2017, Bradford represented the United States in the American pavilion of the Venice Biennale. The building consists of five rooms, which Bradford chose to think of as “salons.” One of these salons housed a dark painterly *Medusa*’s head exploding with a heaping, tangled mass of bleached paper and varnish, an abstract rendition of the snakes that came out of the Greek goddess’s head. In Greek mythology, Medusa was a guardian and protectress. Bradford’s *Medusa*, 2020, is an homage to his mother, who ran the salon where he worked as a young man.

Also included in Bradford’s exhibition was a series of works called *Odyssey*, three shimmering black-purple paintings that surrounded the sculpture *Medusa*.

Please review the following image and texts related to *Medusa* and the *Odyssey* series.



Installation view, *Mark Bradford: Tomorrow Is Another Day*, Venice Biennale, 2017, US Pavilion
Courtesy the Artist and Hauser & Wirth
Photo: Joshua White
© Mark Bradford



Hephaestus, 2017. Installation view, Mark Bradford: *Tomorrow Is Another Day*, Venice Biennale, 2017, US Pavilion
 Cement board, in two pieces
 Each piece: 83 3/4 x 48 1/4 inches
 © Mark Bradford

Hephaestus
I mean nobody likes to admit it
Somebody threw me out of my house
They told me it was my mama
But let me tell you somethin'
The hands dragging me to the cliff
(And I kept my eyes wide open)
Were not the hands of my mother.
When I got up
My foot was broken.
Limping through the ruins of a
Burned-out promise
There stood Medusa
Mad as hell
I looked her dead in the eye
And knew her.
She hid me inside her crown
I was quiet, I was safe
Watching
Watching her turn men to stone
But in a windless calm
Black shades
Hidin' money-makin' cargo
Stole me out to sea
In the belly of a great dark boat.
Let me out, let me out
Damn! I should have gotten out at the last light.
A stone man can't hear.
The lust of these men would only be
Satisfied by black gold and the new world.
But when you ask me,
All I remember is walking
All I remember is falling.

Medusa is the only sculpture included in *Mark Bradford: End Papers*, prominently situated at the top of the Grand Staircase at the Modern. This is the first work of art viewers experience as they ascend to the second-floor exhibition space.

It is essential to view the sculpture from all sides. Unlike a painting, which has one central viewing angle, a sculpture exists independently in space, just like a human body or a ladder.

The following sequence of images will simulate what you might see as you walk around the sculpture in person and experience multiple viewing angles.

Consider some questions as you observe *Medusa*:

1. Does it appear as if this is one continuous coil of paper or many individual coils layered on top of one other?
2. How do you think the paper looked before it was bleached black?
3. Does this form look like a clear representation of a creature you've observed in the world or a vague interpretation of something mythical?



Medusa, 2020
Mixed-media sculpture
Dimensions variable
© Mark Bradford



Medusa, 2020
Mixed-media sculpture
Dimensions variable
© Mark Bradford



Medusa, 2020
Mixed-media sculpture
Dimensions variable
© Mark Bradford

Now it's time to begin your layering sculpture response to Mark Bradford.

Recommended Materials:

- various kinds of paper
- various brushes
- hot glue gun
- black acrylic paint + any highlight colors
- miscellaneous materials such as cloth, aluminum foil, tape, etc.

Please note that due to the many additive layers you'll incorporate, this project cannot be completed in one session. You will need to allow time for glue and paint to dry before you proceed to new layers. Again, I encourage you to relate this project to a marathon rather than a sprint.

The sculpture you are responding to is large-scale. This means that it is BIGGER than the human body. For this project, you will be creating a small-scale version of *Medusa*, something that could be held in the palms of your hands.

Begin by imagining what the target dimensions of your work will be. I recommend something around 12 inches in height x 8 inches in width x 8 inches in depth.

Please note that work exceeding 12 x 12 x 12 inches will not be accepted.

Next, select a small base to begin gluing your twisted and shaped pieces of paper onto. For example, this base could be a small cardboard box or plastic cup. In the end, it will not be visible.

Remember that throughout this multilayered process, what your sculpture looks like at an earlier stage will only partially resemble what it looks like in the end.

Each layer may involve subtle or drastic changes to the previous layer.

Please review the following image examples to get a sense of how the sculpture could progress as layers accumulate and are painted.



The early stages still show the cardboard base interior and unpainted paper materials. These stages mostly involve the physical layering of the paper coils.



The middle stages begin to conceal the cardboard base interior and refine the overall structure.



The latter stages involve painting the model black. Covering the interior nooks and crannies takes more time than you would imagine. After your small-scale model has been painted a base color, begin considering how you will add highlights. You might find that adding some black paint over highlights (and back and forth) gives you the results you want.

Remember that a sculpture should be viewed from all angles. The following images give you an impression of a possible final object.





ART ASSIGNMENT OPEN CALL GUIDELINES

Thank you for participating in this ART ASSIGNMENT OPEN CALL in conjunction with *Mark Bradford: End Papers* at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth.

We look forward to reviewing your submissions and the ways they interpret ideas and processes associated with Mark Bradford.

Student responses will be evaluated on selection of materials, use of collage and décollage in the layering process, understanding of nonrepresentational (abstract) images and objects, and experimentation and play.

All works will be juried by the Modern's Assistant Curator of Education (Academic Programs) Jesse Morgan Barnett and Teacher Advisory Council members Shahrzad Abassi, Matthew Booth, Kay Ford, Ed Harris, and Phyllis King.

All submissions will be included in a virtual presentation on the Modern's website.

In addition, jurors will distinguish 3 notable student submissions as "juror's choice awards."

Submission Guidelines:

- Submissions will be accepted from November 16 to January 17, 2021.
- Each student can submit two works, one response each to the sculpture and the décollage projects.
- Student work can be dropped off at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth at the information desk in the Grand Lobby.
- Students must fill out the submission form at the end of this packet. Any work without a submission form will not be accepted.
- All entries must be received by January 17, 2021.
- Juror's choice artists will be notified via email by January 26, 2021, and will each receive a gift card to Asel Art Supply in the amount of \$100.

If you have any questions about the art assignment instructions, submission guidelines, or art work submission form, please don't hesitate to contact Jesse Barnett, Assistant Curator of Education (Academic Programs), at jbarnett@themodern.org.



ART ASSIGNMENT **OPEN CALL** SUBMISSION FORM

ARTIST
NAME: _____

ARTIST EMAIL
ADDRESS: _____

ARTIST PHONE
NUMBER: _____

ARTIST SCHOOL
NAME: _____

TWO-DIMENSIONAL WORK

TITLE: _____

DATE: _____

MEDIUM: _____

DIMENSIONS: _____

THREE-DIMENSIONAL WORK

TITLE: _____

DATE: _____

MEDIUM: _____

DIMENSIONS: _____

Disclaimer: Student works will be handled with the utmost care and supervision; however, the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth is not responsible for accidental damage to, or the loss of, works held in storage (info desk or otherwise) during selection, or after pick-up dates.

ARTIST SIGNATURE _____ DATE _____