A Home Depot shopping excursion was scheduled to provide the art supply support for the site-specific wall drawing. The list of materials included:

- Acrylic medium
- Matte black spray paint
- Tubes of white and black acrylic paint
- Lengths of readily available artist tape

Bradford also sent a list of audio-technical equipment to Wadsworth Atheneum.

The exhibition called Mark Bradford: Matrix 172 was on view at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, June 4 – September 6, 2015.

The exhibition contained many previous works. Much of what was going on was peeling away layers of colors and histories. A new drawing was being added once again. This time, it was a site-specific wall drawing with a process to create something new.

Once again inspired by the MATRIX artist, and the MATRIX technique. Alongside assistants rolled out parallel lines, and then proceeded to build a new process to create something unique.
“The most important imperative to be questioned is the one that tells you to go to the art supply store to be a painter.”

—MARK BRADFORD

A Home Depot shopping list landed in my inbox about two months before this exhibition was scheduled to open. It contained the materials artist Mark Bradford would require for the site-specific wall drawing he planned for his MATRIX project:

- Acrylic matte varnish
- Matte black paint
- Tubes of clear caulk
- Lengths of multicolored rope

Bradford also sent boxes of colored paper from his studio.

The exhibition concept had developed very quickly. During Bradford’s site visit to the Wadsworth Atheneum in June of 2014, he was attracted to the four Sol LeWitt wall drawings on view at the Museum. He recalled a project he had done at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago in 2011, in which he uncovered a LeWitt wall drawing. The Mark Bradford Project, a year-long audience participation residency that engaged the Chicago community, included Pinocchio Is On Fire, a work created on the site of many previous wall drawings, including one by LeWitt that had been painted over. By peeling away layers of subsequent white paint, in the form of letters, LeWitt’s palette of colors was revealed and became integral to Bradford’s newly created, text-based wall drawing addressing the subject of identity.

Once again inspired by Sol LeWitt—Hartford native, Conceptual artist, three-time MATRIX artist, and founder of the “wall drawing” art form—Bradford proposed a site-specific wall drawing of his own, but employing his signature materials and technique. Along the sixty-foot wall in MATRIX’s Bunce Gallery, Bradford and two assistants rolled out a field of black paint, adhered long lengths of rope in horizontal parallel lines, and applied dense layers of vibrantly colored paper, which the artist then proceeded to sand, peel, strip, and cut away from the wall in a subtractive process to create a vivid and textured composition. Akin to an excavation, Bradford views his installation as a metaphor for form and structure. (2015 marks the inaugural MATRIX exhibitions for women artists.)

Bradford’s wall drawing was created specifically for his site at the Wadsworth Atheneum. Developed by the artist at his Los Angeles studio, Bradford’s wall drawing was created from colored paper. Titled Pile of Blocks, Bradford was curious to see if the colored paper would react to the black background and possibly reveal a new color. The outcome turned out to be a more complex design balanced across a sixty-foot wall.
views his installation—a physical process “more about labor than theater”—as a metaphor for forty years (or layers) of MATRIX history at the Wadsworth Atheneum. (2015 marks the fortieth anniversary of the MATRIX series of Contemporary art exhibitions for which Bradford has designed a limited-edition poster. LeWitt designed the inaugural MATRIX poster in 1975.)

Bradford’s wall drawing—Pull Painting 1—accompanies two paintings created specifically for his MATRIX exhibition. These “pull paintings” feature a new technique developed by the artist through the process of testing MATRIX wall drawings in his Los Angeles studio. In a nod to the rigid structure of early Sol LeWitt wall drawings, Bradford’s wall drawing and paintings share similar horizontal, parallel lines but created from colored ropes, which have been sanded or stripped from the surfaces. Titled Pile of Blocks (2015) and Wet Grass (2015), the former comes from the book Bradford was currently reading, Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898 (1998), and the latter, Wet Grass, suggests Bradford’s deep interest in urban, and how this interest can be read as a “seem to point to” mixed messages between nature but also urban, to a developed city, and a “bifurcation” that two canvases reveal—images—collage, this union of abstract, and natural, and political, and the black, and the white, and the gray, and the grayest. In the after King verdict (res) beyond. In the after...
and the latter, *Wet Grass*, is a phrase Bradford has always liked. Together, the titles suggest Bradford’s stated interest in “the junctions demarcating the natural and the urban, and how these converge and overlap. I like the idea of fissure, not just from nature but also urban channels.” (Gotham chronicles New York from a natural Eden to a developed city.) A voracious reader, Bradford often quotes texts for titles that “seem to point to some strange, psychological space…. [are] soft and biting,… [or give] mixed messages.” Although similar compositions of the same size, just with different color palettes, the contrasting titles of *Pile of Blocks* and *Wet Grass* illustrate the “bifurcation” that carries through his body of work. Here, close inspection of the two canvases reveals that the surface abstraction gives way to underlying texts and images—collaged sheets of discarded billboard paper of local street advertisements. This union of abstract form and social engagement exemplifies Bradford’s art.

Mark Bradford grew up in South Central Los Angeles—where in 1965 the Watts riots upended his neighborhood and in 1992 the Los Angeles riots (ignited by the Rodney King verdict) resulted in mass arson, looting, assault, and murder in the same area and beyond. In the aftermath of the King riots, cyclone fencing was installed around the
her, the titles natural and the not just from natural Eden for titles that biting,...[or give] text with different illustrate the section of the lying texts and advertisements. ward’s art.

The Watts riots by the Rodney same area and spread around the
MARK BRADFORD, STUDIO TEST PAINTING FOR WADSWORTH ATHENIUM MATRIX EXHIBITION (DETAIL), 2015.
PHOTO: JOSHUA WHITE
destruction and eventually merchant posters began to appear as the initial signs of an economic renewal. Such everyday realities of the local community and urban landscape inform his racially and politically charged work. Known for tactile, signage-based and map-like collage paintings, Bradford’s trademark monumental, mixed-media abstractions layer string and advertising posters stripped from the city streets infamous for gang violence. The artist maintains his studio here in the same Leimert Park neighborhood where he lived until the age of eleven.

In some of Bradford’s best-known work, posters from local merchants—their texts traced and raised with string—are layered with paper and largely painted over. When sanded through by the artist, glimpses of the sign texts betray the area’s problematic social and economic issues. Tacked to telephone poles and plywood construction-site fences, advertisements for bail bonds businesses, money-cashing stores, and paternity- and disease-testing clinics target and prey upon the local people in need of these services. These social and political interests intrinsic to Bradford’s “post-black” work are symbolically represented, veiled in abstraction.

“As politically intense as the content of my work is, I wanted to be an artist who gave people a chance to see the culture that I live in,” Bradford explains. “I didn’t want to look at it as a thing in itself or in front of me. I wanted to be an artist who was looking in at my own life and trying to understand how to change it.”

Bradford calls himself a “repurposer” and uses the streets of South Los Angeles as his subject matter, taking signs and advertisements from the neighborhood and layering them into his paintings. He says, “If you look at my work, you can see the city layered through the paint. It’s not just a painting, it’s a city. It’s a reflection of the city I grew up in, lived in, looking down on.”
Bradford explains his position as an African American artist from the sun-blistered streets of South Central breaking into the art world in the 1990s:

“As politically intense as the ’50s were, I felt that when I came on the scene and wanted to be an artist, it was just as intense and the imagery was right in your face. The internet had made everyone so accessible; everyone could go online and understand black culture through hip-hop. This included the imagery, the clothes, the language, the social norms and communication. It became so product-laden, so static, that for me, I couldn’t breathe. And so I realized I would have to abstract it. I think all of my work comes out of the body and the disappearance, traces and hints of the body, through the traces of the materials that were there. The memory of the body—people lived in this place, the erosions of cities and spaces, topographies of where people lived, looking down on communities.”13

Bradford calls himself a “paper-chaser,” and the term is apt, for his practice of repurposing merchant signs, tattered posters, and battered billboards is at the very core of his commitment to abstraction, call it dizzyinglynio, subtly delivered, a timeless work of version of a wall from a local hard...
MARK BRADFORD, BREAD AND CIRCUSES, 2007. MIXED MEDIA AND COLLAGE ON CANVAS; 134 ¼ X 253 ½ IN.

PATRICIA HICKSON
Emily Hall Tremaine Curator of Contemporary Art

core of his commentary, locally sourced but universally relevant. Call it social abstraction, call it political critique, these beautiful and issue-laden paintings are subtly delivered, in a form both original and of their time. Yet, in response to the timeless work of Sol LeWitt, Mark Bradford hits the target in a colorful, high-relief version of a wall drawing entirely his own, rendered in everyday materials purchased from a local hardware store.

MARK BRADFORD, UNTITLED, 2007. MIXED MEDIA ON PAPER; 19 X 22 IN.

MARK BRADFORD, UNTITLED, 2006. MIXED MEDIA ON PAPER; 12 ¼ X 22 ¼ IN.
EDUCATION
1995  BFA, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA
1997  MFA, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS
2015  Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Mark Bradford / MATRIX 172, Hartford, CT
       Hammer Museum, Scorched Earth, Los Angeles, CA
       Gemeentemuseum den Haag, Mark Bradford: Sea Monsters, The Hague, Netherlands
       The Rockbund Art Museum, Tears of a Tree, Shanghai, China
2014  The Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Mark Bradford: Sea Monsters, Waltham, MA
       The Tom Bradley International Terminal at Los Angeles Airport, Bell Tower, Los Angeles, CA (Special Commission)
2012  San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Mark Bradford, San Francisco, CA
2011  MCA Chicago, Mark Bradford, Chicago, IL

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS
2015  Whitney Museum of American Art, Is Hard to See, Sharjah Art Fair, Sharjah, UAE
       Wexner Center for the Arts, Mark Bradford: Smoke, Columbus, OH
2013  9th Gwangju Biennale, Gwangju, South Korea
       Museum of Contemporary Art, Factory, Los Angeles, CA
       Museum of Contemporary Art, Smoke, Los Angeles, CA
2012  12th International Sharjah Biennial, Sharjah, UAE
       Wexner Center for the Arts, Smoke, Columbus, OH
2011  6th International Media City Seoul, Gwangju, South Korea
       12th International Media City Sharjah, Sharjah, UAE
2010  6th International Media City Sharjah, Sharjah, UAE
       Whitney Museum of American Art, Smoke, Los Angeles, CA
2009  11th International Sharjah Biennial, Sharjah, UAE
       5th International Media City Seoul, Gwangju, South Korea
       Wexner Center for the Arts, Smoke, Columbus, OH

AWARDS
2014  US Department of State, Washington, DC
2013  National Academy of Design, New York, NY
2009  MacArthur Foundation, Chicago, IL
       Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH

WORKS IN THE ESTATE OF MARK BRADFORD
All works courtesy the Mark Bradford Estate

Pull Painting 1, 2015
Paint, paper, rope, sash, Dimensions variable

Pile of Blocks, 2015
Mixed media on canvas, 72 x 84 in.

Wet Grass, 2015
Mixed media on canvas, 72 x 84 in.

Through the Pyre, 2015
Paint, paper, rope, Dimensions variable

Pile of Blocks, 2015
Mixed media on canvas, 72 x 84 in.

Wet Grass, 2015
Mixed media on canvas, 72 x 84 in.

Born in Los Angeles, Lives and works in Los Angeles.
Born in Los Angeles, California, 1961
Lives and works in Los Angeles, California

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2015 Whitney Museum of American Art, America Is Hard to See, New York, NY
2013 Wexner Center for the Arts, Blues for Smoke, Columbus, OH
2012 9th Gwangju Biennale, ROUNDTABLE, Gwangju, South Korea
2011 12th International Istanbul Biennial, Untitled, Istanbul, Turkey
2010 6th International Biennale of Seoul, Media City Seoul, Seoul, South Korea

AWARDS

2014 US Department of State’s Medal of Arts, Washington, DC
2012 National Academician, New York, NY
2009 MacArthur Fellowship Award, Chicago, IL

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

All works courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth.

Pull Painting 1, 2015
Paint, paper, rope, sealant, and varnish on wall
Dimensions variable
Pile of Blocks, 2015
Mixed media on canvas
72 x 84 in.
Wet Grass, 2015
Mixed media on canvas
72 x 84 in.

ARTIST TALKS

MATRIX Gallery Talks
Mark Bradford
Thursday, June 4
6 pm and 7 pm

Mark Bradford will discuss his work with Eleanor H. Bunce Gallery
The MATRIX program is generously supported in part by Jeffrey G. Marsted and Marcia Reid Marsted, as well as the current and founding members of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art’s Contemporary Coalition. Additional support was provided by Hauser & Wirth. Support for the Wadsworth Atheneum is provided in part by the Greater Hartford Arts Council’s United Arts Campaign and the Department of Economic and Community Development, which also receives support from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.

ARTIST TALKS

MATRIX Gallery Talks
Mark Bradford
Thursday, June 4
6 pm and 7 pm

Mark Bradford will discuss his MATRIX project in the Eleanor H. Bunce Gallery.

All Mark Bradford images are courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth. © Mark Bradford

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2 Mark Bradford, telephone conversation with the author, 31 March 2015.
3 Ibid.
4 Email correspondence to the author from Tate Dougherty of Hauser & Wirth, forwarding information from the artist, 14 May 2015.
6 Email correspondence to the author from Tate Dougherty of Hauser & Wirth, forwarding information from the artist, 9 May 2015.
8 Mark Bradford in Susan May, p. 79.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Email correspondence to the author from Tate Dougherty of Hauser & Wirth, forwarding information from the artist, 19 May 2015.
13 Mark Bradford in Susan May, p. 84.