

FLOOR 4

GRIEF AND GRIEVANCE

Mark Bradford

b. 1961, Los Angeles, CA

Untitled, 2020

Mixed mediums on canvas

Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth

Mark Bradford's practice spans collage, installation, video, photography, and printmaking. Engaging in communal networks of exchange, the artist transforms materials that he gathers from urban spaces and hardware stores to create his massive, map-like collages. Bradford is concerned with the lived experience and hidden sites of urban communities, and the tension and flow between public and private space. His works often take on the formal structure of a grid, exploding its intersecting vertical and horizontal vectors to reveal an energy within. In Bradford's works, maps are densely layered with scraps of paper, rope, caulk, and other materials, suggesting the multitude of narratives unaccounted for by any rigid abstract system of representation.

Untitled (2020) is one of several works that take as their starting point a map from the McCone Report, an inquiry commissioned by California Governor Pat Brown eight days after the infamous 1965 Watts Rebellion in Los Angeles. Former CIA director John McCone, who spearheaded the report, identified the root causes of the riot as high rates of unemployment, poor schools, and other challenging living conditions in the predominantly African-American Watts neighborhood. The original map was marked with green, blue, red, and orange dots to denote types of crime, civil unrest, and decay in certain areas of Los Angeles: damaged and destroyed buildings, looted spaces, and deaths. These "hot spots," as Bradford has called them, "flattened the pain" of the people in the Watts neighborhood. In excavating these areas from his works with an X-acto knife, Bradford reimagines the urban grid as "urban jungle," in his words. His forms become organic and unpredictable—allegories of how history is filtered through media and lived experiences.

—Molly Superfine

Rashid Johnson

b. 1977, Chicago, IL

Antoine's Organ, 2016

Black steel, grow lights, plants, wood, shea butter, books, monitors, rugs, piano

Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth

Rashid Johnson creates sculptures, photographs, paintings, videos, and installations that speak to material history, personal identity, and African-American intellectual and creative history. He is well-known for his geometric “shelf” constructions which display objects from the artist’s life as both personal and collective effects.

Antoine's Organ (2016), a monumental sculptural installation made from a rigid armature of black steel scaffolding, assembles a chorus of materials associated with collected social histories of the African diaspora: copies of Randall Kennedy’s *Sellout* (2008), Paul Beatty’s *The Sellout* (2015), and Richard Wright’s *Native Son* (1940) are lined up alongside piles of shea butter and black soap, while video monitors playing selections of Johnson’s previous works sit amid a gridded ecosystem of different plant species. The living installation is a fully sensuous experience, in which the aroma of the plants and illuminant grow lights expand the symbolic associations of the materials on view. The installation also features a performance component: the steel scaffolding is arranged in a grid, with an upright piano in the middle for pianist and music producer Antoine Baldwin (also known as Audio BLK) to play at scheduled times. Music has long been an inspiration for Johnson, who often places musical albums in his installations. But here the “organ” can be understood as a corporeal force of the project as well. Not only are organs musical instruments, they also are body parts, organic living matter: in *Antoine's Organ*, life, growth, composition, and, ultimately, decomposition become entwined.

—Mlondolozzi Zondi

Julie Mehretu

b. 1970, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Left to right:

Black Monolith, for Okwui Enwezor (Charlottesville), 2017–20

Ink and acrylic on canvas

Kravis Collection

Oceanic Beloved (A.C.), 2017–18

Ink and acrylic on canvas

Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery

Rubber Gloves (O.C.), 2018

Ink and acrylic on canvas

Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery

See Gold, Cry Black, 2019

Ink and acrylic on canvas

Private collection

Julie Mehretu makes large-scale paintings that are layered and built up using various materials such as pencil, ink, and acrylic paint. A new type of history painting, Mehretu's works often feature manipulated maps and images of current events that become abstract scenes through processes of additive layering over silkscreened images. The underlying images are often culled from various archival sources such as ancient city maps; architectural sites such as public squares; and other types of urban designs. Other times, the images are taken from news media, with the paintings acting as screens superimposed with traces and memories of various traumatic events. Blurring the boundaries between figuration and abstraction, Mehretu's work resists the hypervisibility of contemporary regimes of spectacularized violence.

In *Rubber Gloves (O.C.)* (2018), the artist begins with an image of the burning Grenfell Tower, a social housing project in West London that was destroyed by a fire in 2017. The found image is first blurred and reduced to clouds of colors; Mehretu then builds up the colossal painting using screen-printing techniques, ink, acrylic paint marks, airbrushes, and erasers. *Black Monolith, for Okwui Enwezor (Charlottesville)* (2017–20) uses images from events such as the white supremacist Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017, and the Ferguson, Missouri protests in 2014 after the fatal shooting of Michael Brown by police officer Darren Wilson. Mehretu memorializes the labors, deaths, and surrenders of those affected by these harrowing moments, not by depicting their features or their actions but by way of concealment.

Jack Whitten

b. 1939, Bessemer, AL; d. 2018, New York, NY

Birmingham, 1964

Aluminum foil, newsprint, stocking, and oil on plywood
Collection Joel Wachs

Alongside peers Sam Gilliam, Alma Thomas, and Howardena Pindell, Jack Whitten was part of a generation of abstract painters working in the 1960s and '70s who exceeded the ethos of the Black Arts Movement, in which representational work was considered the primary artistic vehicle in the struggle for Black liberation. Insisting instead on what he dubbed a “Black sensibility” in his attitude towards abstraction, Whitten dramatized abstract painterly gestures in relation to social politics. Before moving to New York from the segregated South, he was active in student civil rights protests.

In the painting *Birmingham* (1964), Whitten assembles found materials such as aluminum foil, newsprint, and transparent nylon stockings, much of it blackened with oil paint, as a response to the 1963 bombing of Birmingham’s 16th Street Baptist Church, which claimed the lives of four young African-American girls. This act of violence further accelerated the civil rights movement, where African-American protest was met with even more violence at the hands of police. In Whitten’s painting the opening at the center of the canvas reveals a 1963 newspaper photograph of a policeman and a police dog attacking an African-American protester in Birmingham. The artist has covered the photograph of the attack with a nylon stocking, drawing attention to the gratuitous violence against Black people as it is experienced in both spectacular and mundane ways.

Whitten consulted African-American intellectual W. E. B. Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) during the creation of *Birmingham*. The split on the canvas recalls, in a literal manner, Du Bois’s discussion of the African American’s split consciousness. The stocking also alludes to “the veil”: Du Bois described African-American personality as “born with a veil and gifted with second sight,” and encompassing “two souls . . . two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”