



Above: Mark Bradford in his studio, April 2007. Photograph by Juan Carlos Avedaño.
Work featured: *Bread and Circuses*, 2007. Mixed media on collage on canvas. 133 x 253 inches

Mark Bradford

Whitney Museum of American Art

Written by Yaelle Amir
 Image courtesy of Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York

Neither New Nor Correct, the title of Mark Bradford's exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, encapsulates the essence of his paintings succinctly and poetically. This saying is derived from a book about historical maps, which describes the case of an inaccurate world map from 1715 that was heralded at that time as "new and correct," but in fact was neither. Due to a lack of knowledge and perspective, the map's popularity was vast and its fallacy inconsequential to its collectors. Similar to this anecdote, Bradford's paintings also present a mapping of sorts, yet they do not correspond directly to a location, nor do they represent new information. On the contrary, his paintings are fluid and dynamic, rather than systematic, and display relics of a place and time, instead of communicating new information.

This modest exhibition is comprised of three monumental paintings, each of which occupies a wall in the gallery space. From afar, they appear as detailed maps, yet from a closer proximity, they reveal abstract compositions altogether. The paintings contain a contrasting structure of dense graphic and linear elements versus bare silver spaces. They display the latest phase of Bradford's unique and elaborate technique—a physical manifestation of the works' conceptual essence.

First, Bradford collects multiple layers of posters, fliers, and discarded ads that hang along the streets of his neighborhood, South Central Los Angeles. After returning to his studio, he processes the layers using different methods—he soaks them in water, separates them, or adds other materials—prior to adhering them to the canvas. Between the layers of urban debris and paint, he places black strings

that flow along the canvas in various forms. Once the top overlay of paper is complete, he sands the surface in selected areas in order to unearth underlying elements of strings and random signage. Remnants of various sayings or product imagery appear among the dynamic curvy lines, such as the phrase "Find your Flavor" in "The World is Flat" (2007) or the tip of an Absolut bottle in "Noah's Third Day" (2007).

Although Bradford perceives his paintings as mappings of space, they do not display the traditional outline of architecture and parks, but rather of social systems and local commerce. Instead of deriving his subjects directly from urban space, he captures its physicality from the city's very own components. By using local advertisements as raw material and embedding them within the loose map-like structure formed by the strings, Bradford provides us with an abstract delineation of South Central L.A. These paintings capture the zeitgeist of not only a place, but also a specific period, echoing the current myriad subcultures through the language and design of the posters. Memories of the vibrant multitude of cultures, the bustling streets, and the local, down-to-earth trade are retained conceptually, as well as literally, while the urban energy finds its expression in the dynamic linear elements. Thus, "Neither New Nor Correct" is an apt statement for Bradford's new body of work, as he both preserves and reinvents the streets of South Central L.A., in turn creating a unique portrayal of his own urban surroundings.

