

Press Release

**Mark Bradford. Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen**

Hauser & Wirth Monaco  
29 September 2023 – 11 May 2024



Hauser & Wirth Monaco presents Mark Bradford's 'Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen', a major new solo exhibition centered around a selection of paintings based on the historical tapestries known as 'The Hunt of the Unicorn,' first exhibited at the Fundação de Serralves in 2021. A site-specific wall painting that will wrap the entire gallery space and an adaptation of 'He would see this country burn if he could be king of the ashes' (2019) will complete an immersive experience that draws the viewer into Bradford's ongoing engagement with the themes of predation, destruction and the hope of rejuvenation for those in crisis.

'The Hunt of the Unicorn' tapestry cycle, thought to have been woven in the Netherlands at the turn of the 15th Century, illustrates in rich detail the story of a band of hunters and hounds in pursuit of a unicorn and its eventual capture and death. Often considered to be an allegory for the crucifixion and resurrection from Christian theology, the tapestries portray a dense, dreamlike world populated by hundreds of plant and animal species where ecosystems of predator and prey proliferate. Bradford reconstructs this landscape using accumulated layers of paper and caulk processed with his signature techniques of sanding, tearing and oxidation. As he dissects the historical legacy of one of Europe's most beloved works of art, Bradford illuminates parallels between the contemporary world and the Dark Ages, centering on figures relegated to the margins of history who are often the last to receive aid and comfort in times of turbulence.

Drawn to Medieval tapestry for its role as a preferred medium of storytelling used by those in power to cement their interpretation of historical events—what Bradford refers to as old-school comic books—here, the artist reinterprets the mode of display and trades the Great Chambers of European châteaux for a somber, immersive installation at Hauser & Wirth's Monaco gallery. The tapestry paintings sit on walls covered in a monumental site-specific paper work, and black globes with bleach-burnt continents hang from the ceiling, creating celestial shards of natural light emerging from a skylight above. Varying in size, the globes hint at the myriad prisms of social, political and economic circumstances through which individuals may approach the world.

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An additional site-specific work entitled 'The Map of Hell' (2023), inspired by a Botticelli illustration depicting the 'Divine Comedy,' is installed in the stairwell leading down to the main gallery space, a journey reminiscent for Bradford of Virgil's descent into the bowels of hell. Bradford frequently responds directly to the specificities of the spaces in which he exhibits, interventions that add to the immersive and experiential nature of the work.

The title of the exhibition, 'Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen,' borrows its name from a traditional spiritual—songs sung by Africans enslaved in the United States of America during the 17th and 18th Century. In keeping the titular 'I' unidentified, Bradford withholds answers, explanations or prescriptions, leaving the socio-critical impact of the work to flow from its material and thematic resonance.

Also on view as part of the program in Monaco, a large-scale standing mobile sculpture by Alexander Calder, entitled 'Slender Legs' (1959), is displayed next to the gallery in the Jardins des Boulingrins until 30 November 2023.

### **About the artist**

Mark Bradford (b. 1961 in Los Angeles) is a contemporary artist known for his large-scale abstract paintings created out of paper. Characterized by its layered formal, material, and conceptual complexity, his work explores social and political structures that objectify marginalized communities and the bodies of vulnerable populations. After accumulating layers of various types of paper onto canvas, Bradford excavates their surfaces using power tools to explore economic and social structures that define contemporary subjects. His practice includes painting, sculpture, video, photography, printmaking, and other media. In addition to his studio practice, Bradford engages in social projects alongside exhibitions of his work that bring contemporary ideas outside the walls of exhibition spaces and into communities with limited exposure to art.

Bradford received his BFA from the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in 1995 and his MFA from CalArts in 1997. He has since been widely exhibited internationally and received numerous awards. Recent solo exhibitions have taken place at the Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art; Hauser & Wirth, Menorca; the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth; Hauser & Wirth, London; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington DC; and Long Museum West Bund, Shanghai.

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## Caption and courtesy information:

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Mark Bradford  
The Hunters Return to the Castle  
2020  
Mixed media on canvas  
368.5 x 390.5 x 5.2 cm / 145 1/8 x 153 3/4 x 2 in

Mark Bradford  
The Unicorn Crosses a Stream (detail)  
2020  
Mixed media on canvas  
369.5 x 392.5 x 5.5 cm / 145 1/2 x 154 1/2 x 2 1/8 in

Mark Bradford  
The Unicorn Defends Himself (detail)  
2020  
Mixed media on canvas  
367.5 x 399 x 5.5 cm / 144 5/8 x 157 1/8 x 2 1/8 in