



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Mark Bradford,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Mark Bradford in August 14, 2020. The interview took place at Bradford's home in Los Angeles, California,, and was conducted by Nyssa Chow for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's Pandemic Oral History Project.

This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

NYSSA CHOW: Okay, this meeting's being recorded.

MARK BRADFORD: Yeah. Now I can see.

NYSSA CHOW: Okay good. Hi Mark.

MARK BRADFORD: Hi, how're you?

NYSSA CHOW: I'm good. Just an introduction. I'm Nyssa Chow and I'm speaking with the incredible artist Mark Bradford on behalf of the Smithsonian Pandemic Project, um, to talk about this current moment, which is quite a moment that we're living through. And we also know that people have been living this moment very differently in very different ways. Um, for some people the crisis started in March and for some people, much longer than that.

Um, and so as you reflect on where we are now, where we've been before and where we might be going next, what's foremost on your mind?

MARK BRADFORD: Why—what's foremost on my mind at this moment is, um, sustainability. On many levels, I can kind of talk about that because as I watch everything slide away, as I watch people losing their jobs, as I watch museums closing down, as I watch actually sustainability being, um, slid out from under many people, essential workers, everything, especially me having a business in the past, I'm always thinking about the worker and how can they sustain themselves. And artists. So it all kind of tumbles together for me.

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: And even history, I'm a lover of history, but history is something that's written down that we can actually, uh, still have. And once—oral history, they pass and pass and pass until they don't. Um, but now with technology, we can change things a little bit.

Sustainability is something on a personal level. Having a small business that, um, basically after I finished, it kind of died out. And I watched so many small Black businesses die out because of sustained—economic sustainability wasn't something that we thought of in the future. We just thought of feeding our families now. And I learned a lot about sustainability because in many parts of my life, I didn't have it. I didn't have it, um, growing up so much. Um, I didn't have it in school because, um, I couldn't find a space in school that I felt safe in. We call it—we have words for it now, we call it bullying, we call it, um, microaggressions, but this was the '70s. And so even actually at school, I just didn't—I couldn't find the space that I could make a foundation to grow from. Because really when I'm talking about sustainability, I'm talking about building a foundation. And from that foundation, you can build whatever house you want. Everybody builds their own wonderful houses. But if you can't get that foundation, it's very hard to do that.

So for me, um, you know, I had my little dreams at 17 of going off to college like everybody else. And I saw people going away to college. And I asked one of my girlfriends, I said, gurl, you know, what is a SAT? And I remember she looked at me and she said, "Oh, baby, you got—honey, you've got a long way to go." And at that time, I didn't know what she meant.

But, when I tried to go back to school and had to understand what an SAT was, instead of just marking those boxes from basically seventh grade on making pretty flowers out of patterns, I had, um, economic holes, I mean, educational holes. So therefore wanting to go to school, that wasn't, that was not, um—that was not a, um, a realistic dream for me. And I was embarrassed. I

was embarrassed that, I, uh, I was embarrassed. And when you're embarrassed, you don't ask for help.

But somewhere along the line, I says, "You know what? I'm just going to have to be a little raggedy. And I'm just going to have to be a little bit, you know, put my business in the street." You know, people talking about "don't put your business in the street." But sometimes you just have to put your business in the street.

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: And so I just had to realize where I was. And I just had to say, look, "Well I just don't know. So can you just walk me through this?" And I've had to go back to junior college and I had to take that math class about nine times before I realized what that man was talking about. But I started to ask for help. And the moment I started asking for help, that's when the sustainability, and I started to build that strong platform.

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: Um, so many—so many times when I started becoming an artist and um, I was so used to being not sustainable, you know, having \$200,000 dollars' worth of debt, still working in the hair salon making maybe \$200 a week. Uh, no car, on the bus. That's the—that felt normal to me. Um, that felt kind of—but what I was interested in is, "Well how can I—wait a minute now. How can I turn this into a sustainable business?" I'm not talking about being an artist, because I can do that. So really, even as I moved forward and as I really started to think about being an artist and then I started becoming the successful artist, the first thing that I started to think about was, "Well, how can I do something with this platform that I've developed?"

[00:05:19]

And that's when I really started a foundation that works with art and social services. Um, we work with foster youth. And it's really interesting when I walk into the room full of foster youth, and I'm so comfortable because I start talking about, "Look, you've got to get your credit right. You've got to, you know, you've got to get your credit right. If you can't go to school without bad credit, you can't get a car without that credit. You can't a house, you got to get your credit right." We all got those credit cards when we're 18 years old. Ran them up and ran out and ran away.

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: I did it. Yes, I did.

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. [Laughs.]

MARK BRADFORD: But then you have to pay for all that. I like that. Ran them up and ran out. Lord have mercy [inaudible].

NYSSA CHOW: [Laughs.]

MARK BRADFORD: But you've got to get your credit right. And then you got to get your—you got to get your—you got to get your mind right. But the thing that I learned along the way. Because I've had so many people along the way to judge me.

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: I had so many people and I—elementary judge me as wrong. I have so many people in middle school judge me as wrong. Somewhere along the line, I got used to, um, allowing people to have their relationship to my personality, as I said, having their relationship to my personality. But I never really internalized. I would listen and they would tell me, well, you know, "Well, didn't you know that?" I said, "Well, I'm sorry. No, I'm—that must have been another day in eighth grade that I missed."

So I really did not internalize the judgment and I didn't, um, I didn't put my value in someone else's hands, I decided what was valuable to me and I moved forward. And so when I really—when I really started to see, you know, when you start thinking about sustainable, how you can sustain yourself, you have to acknowledge that you're that you're not sustainable. That you're not in a sustained place, and you have to acknowledge how you're going to get there.

And that sometimes is frightening because I grew up with a whole crew of people, and I would never tell anybody that you can't do anything, you can't be anything. But we have to acknowledge that we all don't start from the same place and that even plays into race. Um, we all don't start in the race at the same place. So we—some people are just going to have to work harder. And they're going to, it's sometimes it's going to be a little bit slower. But what I have known, and what I've grown to understand is, if you are honest about the journey, not just the pretty parts of it, but for real, you know, then you're not in a group alone. You're in a collective.

I, um, I never was interested in being perfect. I was interested in sharing my imperfect perfection. That's the thing that I always was interested in. And so when I think about sustainability, I think about—I think about education, I think about, um, lack of access to education. I think of lack of access to—food deserts. Even your body. Your body, you know, is something that—but if you don't have food that can sustain you, that body, the vessel's going to fall down. So it's not just, I'm not just talking about just your credit, even though you do get that credit together gurl—

NYSSA CHOW: [Laughs.]

MARK BRADFORD: And you got the credit you get, you know. You've got to get that credit together. Um, listen, my credit was so bad I couldn't even get a library card.

NYSSA CHOW: God [laughs].

MARK BRADFORD: A library, that's how bad my credit was.

NYSSA CHOW: That is terrible credit.

MARK BRADFORD: You know. But the thing is, though, it's a humbling experience—

NYSSA CHOW: Yeah.

MARK BRADFORD: Because what happens is when you look at your credit, all you're doing is judging yourself of all the stuff you should have done. "Well, I shouldn't have done that and I shouldn't have done that." Well get over it. You know what I told—you know one time I went to the counselor finally, because I graduated from a continuation high school, and then they just, um, so when I finally did go back to junior college and I went to the, you know, the counselor, I just said, "Now look—you look, just tell me what I need to do. I don't need the judgments. I don't need for you to tell me this, that. Look, I'm just telling you, this is what I know, I don't need all the rest, you can save that for somebody else."

And I was just—so for me, um, I think that when people share their mistakes, or when they share their oops, they're taking a risk that you are going to love them, and that you're going to hear them, and you're going to support them. When people tell me the oops, that's when I'm the most in their corner.

[00:10:18]

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: When people, you know, "Well, Mark, you know I might have said too much, or I'm a—," I said gurl—my sister calls me. And she'll say, "Well, Mark, I got mad you know. I cussed her out and I cussed her," you know? And I said, "Well, honey, you've still got the job?"

"Well yeah Mark, I still got the job." I said, "Oh praise the Lord. Praise the Lord." Now, we older now and she don't cuss as many people out and she still has her job. But I can—but, you know, it was just, um, watching people evolve and watching people not be perfect and watching people back up and say, "I'm sorry. I know more now than I did."

I listen to some of my interviews early on and I go, "You know, I don't really think that way so much anymore." Some of it I do, some of it I don't. Um, what I try to do is, I try to—and sustainability is levels. I'm sustainable now. So what I'm interested in is, I'm really interested in helping other people to be sustainable. That's my thing. And sometimes fame actually can work against those one-on-one connections with people who are still struggling.

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: See for me, I can go back to when I was, you know, making that \$20 in the

hair salon, on the bus, my mind, I can remember that. So when I'm talking to somebody about get your credit together. I'm not talking from Mark Bradford in 2020. I'm talking from Mark Bradford getting his credit together. I can—I can go there very easy, because I think it's important—um, everybody's sustainability journey is not going to be starting from the same place. People going to have raggedy relationships to start from. They're going to be in jobs they don't like. Relationships they don't like—all kinds of things.

Even, um, relationships. Um, you might not have the best one with your kids, your partner, whatever, just getting things sustainable in the family so that you can move forward.

Um, and because, or it's just going to be washed away.

NYSSA CHOW: Right.

MARK BRADFORD: Lord have mercy, you know how many, um, things just get washed away when you know—when you don't put down the foundation, things get washed away and then you rebuild it again real quick.

And even I watch myself when I paint or when I'm an artist, I might hurry through the structure and the foundation of the painting. Now I know I should take my time, but I don't take the time. I don't build the structure right. And then guess what? The whole thing falls apart. And I got to start again. Because sometimes building sustainability is just not fun.

I mean, we all want to eat dessert, but sometimes the vegetables just aren't fun. And we get on an emotional trip, "Well this just don't make me feel good." I was like that. "Well I don't feel this teacher, so I'm not—I ain't, you know, I don't feel it." But, you know, I had to get off of that. I had to get off of that.

And then, um, it ain't—you ain't going to always feel like getting out of bed. And you just got to get out of bed. Listen I don't—shoot. Me? I like nightclubs, trying to figure out what side my Jheri Curl was going to go to.

NYSSA CHOW: [Laughs.]

MARK BRADFORD: Shoot, that's what me and my crew did. What? No school. What—you know, that's how we roll. We rolled in the streets and that's what I liked. I liked that. I liked nightclubs and going out and putting on my girlfriend's makeup and everything. Putting on the black liner around them. That's right. They—all of it, baby. They put the black liner around and they put that—they use it for the mascara. They use it for everything. That's what we did.

But the thing is, though, what I learned and even with my whole crew, we all started doing things that we just didn't like to do.

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: We started—

NYSSA CHOW: Yeah. Sorry I just want to—can I—I hear you speaking to the, you know, the—someone who needs to hear this. And I can't help but—I really want to know, um. Where did you learn that you couldn't ask for help? Where did you learn that you couldn't?

MARK BRADFORD: Where did I learn that I couldn't ask for help? Maybe I didn't uh. Where did I learn that? You know the funny thing is you don't learn it. It is almost inferred to [you]—look don't bring none of that sissy stuff around too much. Don't bring that you don't know your time tables by a certain—too much. I might help you a couple times. My mom was very supportive, but my mother is just one person. When you fall behind in class, there's a look from your peers. There's a look from the teachers.

So it's not like someone told me I couldn't ask for help, but it became—if somebody tells you something three times, that should be enough. But what if you don't get it after the third time? I might need it twelve times. Well I stop. I just stop. Uh, maybe a few times, going to the principal talking about somebody's beating me up. But I'm not going to go too much.

[00:15:23]

You kind of—um, I think almost, like, I think in some ways I see women dealing with it a lot more with their relationship to their body and relationships to other people and spaces that make

them uncomfortable. And they say, well, you know, you'll be all right, you know, wishing it away when a woman says something. Well—but why was she there or what was she doing? Always going back to what she said. So for me, it was the same thing. You just stop talking about it.

You kind of just stop talking about it. And it's not like I learned it. And I wasn't, I'm not going to tell you that I was embarrassed. I almost become embarrassed for the other people. Because I—I'm making them uncomfortable.

I'm making them uncomfortable with my needs. I'm making them uncomfortable with my tear—you know, I realize that—because I would cry a lot and I would notice that I would make a lot of, you know, men and parents uncomfortable. And they would look at my mother like, "You are doing something wrong." And I remember I needed to shut that down. Shut that down.

So it's almost like you learn—you take away your own sustainability, you take away your own structure, you—you don't allow yourself to build anything, you start building other people's foundations for them to make them feel better. And you get off of build[ing] your own and that's something somewhere along the line, I had to learn to get off of being somebody else's contractor and learning how to, like, "Well, let me figure out how to build, you know, lay a concrete foundation for my house." Like I didn't—so it's kind of something that happens really, really slow. And you, um, you at some point, I just realized I had to be responsible for my house.

And even though the intensity of what's happening now, I just see—I see the greater need for sustainability even becoming more—there's going to be more people having to build their own homes, their own—they're going to be grappling and fighting to find ways to be sustainable. And we have got to have our ear to the ground and listen, because those people are going to be hurting. They are not going to be able to pay their bills. They are not. And we have to have our ear to the ground enough to listen. People losing jobs is one thing when you look at it as a graph. But when you think about what that means—and many people who are losing their jobs, they were not sustainable before.

When I moved into the hair salon and started helping my mother. My mother had a critical health issue and I knew, well, I better get in here and help, because that was me trying to help with sustainability.

When I drive down the street and I see all of these small mom and pop businesses closed, closed, closed. A lot of them can't get this administration's money because you know what? Some of their paperwork ain't right.

And, but they are part of our community. Okay, their paperwork's not right. Maybe they're first generation immigrants, maybe whatever, however we put it. But their sustainability went from Monday to Friday, closed. So my heart, you know, it um—you know, I see that young men, because of the color of their skin, having to move, having to move through the city and trying to develop something.

But my God, Elijah [McClain], you know, he was a vegan, he was, look, in Colorado and he was talking about "Why are you doing this to me. I'm a cellist. And why are you—I don't I would never kill a fly." But you know what? His sustainability, what he was building for himself was taken away—taken away from him by an architecture of racism that had nothing to do with him. Because those type of architectures are sustainable. They'd been built. They have bollards deep in the ground and they have been built up. So I'm always looking at things, um, that are sustainable. And then I'm also looking at things that, um, they have this delicate roots, delicate roots. And I go between both of them right now.

[00:20:18]

How are young—how are young artists going to have studios? How are they going to support themselves? Um, what is it going to look like? Really, what is it going to—so many young children are going to have educational gaps because they're going to public schools and the public schools are not giving them what they need with the overcrowding and everything. So you're taking Black and Brown people disproportionately already having challenges, telling them all, as if the Internet is equal, "You all just go digital" as if every home has the same equipment. That's not true. They—every home is not digitally sustainable. So these educational gaps you're going to see.

And—same thing that happened to me, it's like a wave. When you miss what you're supposed to learn in the seventh grade, they don't repeat it in the 11th grade. If you miss it, you miss it. And

so that's what I learned.

And basically, for me, um, it became where the school that I was, the high school I was at, he said, "Now, look, I'm telling you what I'm looking at your transcript. And I'm telling you that you're not going to graduate. Anytime—anywhere near what you were—because you're so far behind. My recommendation to you is to go to a continuation school." I said, okay. And that was kind of like—they pat you on the back and they say, good luck. So I went there and I did graduate. I did graduate because I took it on myself to graduate. Um, so these kind of things I'm very much aware of. And, um, even—to tell the story of slavery is because so much of it wasn't written down. So many people can get away with things because so much of it hasn't been written down.

Um, the only reason why we're talking about changing things in the system now, it's not because of people not wanting change—since the '60s we've been wanting change. More than that. The '50s, '40s, wanting change—because someone caught it on cell phone. They are recording these people doing police brutality. And that digital platform—that digital platform is allowing them not to hide. And so I always—when I'm talking about, kind of, you know, sustainability. I jump between the body. I jump between the spirit. I jump between economics. It's on every level for me.

It's on every, you know, it's all—and, you know, if you really think about spirituality, in some ways, I don't know, whatever your faith is, they tell you to be as good as you—be as good as you can be here, because that is helping you when you go to the next place. It's all the same thing but, you know, when I see someone, you know, I don't judge people. I really don't. Whatever their faith is, is fine. And when I see someone standing—a Jehovah's, somebody who's a Jehovah's Witness, and they stand on that street corner because they are doing their hours, honey they're clocking their hours, I'm like, "You know what, gurl, baby? That's right, gurl. You punch in that clock."

But they're building that sustainability that when they take—go to the next level, that they, that that matters. It's all to me, the building blocks. And I think that we all have to build our own homes. I use—I go back to talking about a home, but, um, I'm using it metaphorically our house. Everybody should build their own house. Yes, we all have family. But everybody has their own individual spirit and their own individual needs.

And it's yours. And I may paint mine green and you may paint yours blue. That's cool. When I visit your blue house, I'm good. Everybody. We have collective houses. And I do believe in that—family, partners and all that. But they say the body is a vessel. But I believe that. And I believe that it's an ongoing thing. You build one story, you build another one, and you change the rooms. You put a pool in. You do these kind of things. And the more you learn about yourself the more interesting the architecture becomes.

Um, I don't—I don't see, I don't—I've been in trying times my whole life. I've always had adversaries my whole life, I've always had adversaries. It's never stopped me from holding my head up high. Um, I had to learn how to run, because I didn't want to physically be violated. But it's never—and even though I'm going, sort of like, I almost feel like a salmon going upstream now, because there's a stream of negativity on every level happening now. It's like a stream of it. We have to be salmon and push against it.

[00:25:23]

You're going to feel down sometimes. You're going to feel a little bit depressed sometimes. You're going to feel all that, because you know what? You get tired of going upstream with hope. But you got to do it, because eventually we're going to get there. We're going to get there. But there is a waterfall of negativity just—just coming down with—It is. But we have to.

And you know what I say about sustainability? We all have it in us. See, we've all been down. Just remember that time when you were real embarrassed and you didn't want nobody to know. And gurl, you was in your little corner. And you, some—and you got up—you got up, I'm not talking about the big public stuff where people saw, I'm talking about that private stuff. But you found a way to get up. All you have to do is remember that person. Not the big one. Not the big one. That person.

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: You've got to remember that person in the— in 2020, you've got to remember

that person. As long as you can remember that person, that's going to sustain you. That's what —

NYSSA CHOW: When you remember that person who are you remembering?

MARK BRADFORD: I remember that, you know, I remember that 19-year-old who got kicked out of school, didn't have a place to live and slept on a golf course that night. I curled up on a golf course and slept. But when I woke up, I got up. I walked off that golf course and I started figuring something out. And when I—but it was okay. And I said, "Okay. You know, okay, this is—this is kind of a low point. This is kind of a low point. I remember that person. But I can remember that person at nine years old. I think it's, that person's been with you all your life. It's your—it's your friend. It's that one, that private one all your life.

I remember—19, yeah, I remember. So when I start looking around, I just remember. Well, you know what? Whatever comes that 19-year-old, he can handle it. He can handle it. If I have to—if I have to—if I have to curl up on a golf course again, I'll curl up on a golf course.

But you—just remember that, um. You got to remember that person. And it's not the public person. It's not the one with the degrees and the jobs and the husbands and the wives, it's not that person. It's that private person in the middle of the night by yourself.

And you shouldn't have had that next drink, or that cookie, or smoked, or whatever you did and you just did it.

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: You just did it and you just said, but you know what gurl, tomorrow's another day. And I'm going to do a little bit better, I'm going to do the best I can. That is the person that I carry with me. I carry that person, because I know that that person is going to get me through. You can say it's a spirit. You can say the Lord's helping you with it, whatever you want, however you want to process it. But that is the sustainable part. That's the sustainable part of the soul. And that's private.

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: That's private. That's why I talk so intensely when I talk, because I'm trying to talk from the most, um, vulnerable part of myself. I want to reach across the screen and I want you to hear my words. And I want you to feel like, "Shoot, gurl, he—he's talking like me." You know, I want you to feel—I want us to be together because the one thing you cannot be, you cannot be in this world alone. You cannot be in this world alone.

Honey, being alone is not cute. It ain't cute. It ain't cute. When I need help, I'm going out, you know—however you process that. And so if I'm going to talk, I ain't worried about no Mark Bradford and all that stuff; I could care less about all that. I want to reach across and I want to share something. And the only way that I can do that is to speak from that side, sustainability, vulnerability, when I didn't have it, being embarrassed, um, I carry that stuff because, you know, I might be in a shoe store somewhere. Little girl, little boy, have a little job and they have one foot wrong and one foot right. And I'd look at them. And I'm like, "Well, you know what? Go on. You're doing the best you can." And I might take them aside and say, "Okay, well, you might—you know, tighten it up just a little bit to hold your little job. You're doing good. But, you know, I don't need to know so much about, you know. You got—come on, baby. You pull in the attitude a little bit just to keep your—keep your little job."

[00:30:27]

You know, I will stop. I'm the one. I will. I will. I'll stop. I will stop. I will. I will take the time to let young people know, you're doing an amazing job. And I'm not just talking about the people in PhD programs. I'm talking with the little girl that's the security guard at the bank, the one cleaning up the spot, I'll—everybody. I don't—I like to let people know I see you. When I—when I go and have a show. I know everybody from the security guard to the director and everybody in between. Because that is important. That's important. Because really, my heart, I'm going to tell you, my heart goes out more to that young girl or that young boy, a security guard who's trying to get his life together and has a couple of kids, maybe. And maybe have done a few. My heart goes out to them more. I want to hug them more. I want to tell them job well done. You just keep doing it.

Because, well, you know, because I haven't been a security guard, but I've been in that position and so sustainability starts at different levels. Sometimes just instead of having three drinks tonight I might have two. Well, that's all right gurl, you know, I can—I meet you where I meet you. You do what you can do. This is not a, this isn't you know, this is not a—this is not a race. You do what you can do.

But if we could just—and now I think that it's so funny because things are happening. All we got to do is—we're a little scared, we're all wondering about our sustainability. We all is nervous. We're scared, shoot, we are, we're scared, you know, and um, but when you collectively say that. It—there's a power in it. We all worried about our sustainability, on every level, you know, every level. But when we all say it as a group, it's different than running in somewhere, and saying—we don't know. I'm okay with the flow right now. But I can tell you as soon as the ground stops moving. I'm a—baby, I'm a start trying to put, you know, lay some concrete.

But I had the same feeling in 1981 with the AIDS epidemic. Everybody—I watched 75 percent of the people that I know die. I watched everybody die. And it was the quote, unquote, the bad group. I watched everybody die and I watched people die and felt bad for—they're like, I just watched everything.

And you know what? At that time, I said, "You guys. We can't—the ground is moving. We can't come up with some solutions right now. You just got to get on the surfboard and surf until—you got to just let it be. And that was so hard because everybody looks for answers. I need to have the ground stop moving. Right now, the ground is moving and we don't have answers. We just don't have—every week somebody's got a new answer. "Oh, I—I know what the answer is. Oh, I know what the answer is to the racial injustice from—" Baby, the ground is moving right now.

You can't—it's like, you can't eat gumbo and make gumbo at the same time. That's all. You can't—we making gumbo right now. It's just—and that is just the way that it is. It makes us all feel uncomfortable because nobody wants to live in a house that's moving. Your chairs are moving and stuff is falling down. You put it up, it falls back down. Your TV's rocking everywhere, and you just got to say, "Okay, well I'm going to go to bed in a bed that's rocking." You know, it just makes you uneasy. You know, it makes you uneasy. And you try to do some things—I was telling somebody that—just the other day I said, "Well, gurl, you know how when it's—it's like a big, uh, a deluge of rain. And, you know, you running down the street and you getting wet. And then every once in a while you run into a—an underhang or something.

NYSSA CHOW: Cover, yeah.

MARK BRADFORD: Or something, and you stay there for a minute and you just okay and then you run back. You've got to look for those little spaces, those little—those little spaces in between the rain, you've got—listen and you're going to get wet. But you got to find those little—and you stay there for a minute and you wait and say, 'okay well, looks like the rain's a little less.' And then you run to the next one." That's where we are now.

But, you know, the funny thing is when you're there sometime, you run into a little, under the little awning. Sometimes you look to the left and there'll be somebody there with you. And you say, what are you doing? Oh. And you have a little conversation. You might say, "Well, you know gurl I'm a little nervous, too." "Well, me too." "Yeah." "Well, you know—" And then, you know, you have a little moment. And then you might give each other a little squeeze and say, "Okay, gurl, I'm going to run out here now." Now I say gurl a lot, but it's not—I'm not—it's not gendered for me. It's funny, I grew up saying it, I grew up in the hair salon saying it, it's just, you know, I don't think of it as—it's not even—I'm using the gurl gay tense. It's just having an oral conversation.

[00:35:31]

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: But, um, that's where we are. Right now, me and you, we're standing under a little pass, me and you we're talking, we're having a little conversation. It's raining, raining, but we're having a little conversation and we're getting—we're feeling each other. And I'm getting a little bit of strength from you. And I hope you getting a little strength from me. And that's what we're doing. That's what we're doing.

And then you know what? Because, when this is over, and you got to run out, and I've got to run out, I'm a feel a little bit better. I'm a say, "I kind of liked her; I wonder what her name was. Don't

even need know her name, I knew her. We shared." And then, but that's the moment that we're in. This is the moment that we're in. And that's what we can do for each other.

I, basically, I'm so uninterested when people start talking about answers right now. When we're going to close, when we're going to open. They don't know. Monday we're open. Tuesday we're closed. We don't know. We don't know. It's going to be "we don't know." So, stop worrying about it. Do what you can do on Friday. Monday, they're going to tell you something else. They going to say [inaudible] So that's kind of right now what I'm trying to think of as far as sustainability.

Right now, you know what I'm really working on right now in my sustainability is my mind. 'Cause I know that my body can't. Though my mind—I'm trying to keep it as together as I can.

That's really because I know I can't keep my body together. I can't get on a plane. I can't—I can't—my nieces and nephews, I don't know if they're going to school or not going to school. I can't go to a restaurant. All I can do about Postmates.

NYSSA CHOW: [Laughs.]

MARK BRADFORD: Postmates me and my partner sitting in the backyard. Postmates, Postmates, Postmates. Um, and that's all I can do. I don't see friends. I don't—I don't see anybody. But that's my body. So, that's what I can do and—but what I can do is, I can be truly honest in the work. Because things will become more sustainable. And I think that what's so interesting about doing these oral histories now, you're going to find so many people coming to it from different ways. Some people are just so scared and they just need to know all of the answers. Like, "I got this." Me? I'm like, "No, we don't have anything."

NYSSA CHOW: You've been here before it sounds like.

MARK BRADFORD: Oh—I have. You know what? Oh, that's interesting. Yes, I have been scared many [laughs] a—I have been scared so many times by—I've been scared so many times that I know it doesn't last. I know that we make it more in our minds than it is. I know that, um, I believe that there's better—there's more good in the world than bad. And, um, I have been scared before. And I say, "As I walk through the Valley of Death," I have been scared before. I have been scared before.

And so that, yeah, this is not, it's not new. It's like, "Oh, I kind of remember this feeling."

Um, Trump is a bully. I remember bullies. Oh, yeah, I remember bullies. Oh, yeah. I mean, you got to get out the line of fire with a bully. You got to—oh, yeah. I remember, um, the kind of, uh—the kind of outpouring of grief around George [Floyd]. Oh yeah, I remember that. I remember that feeling of that because the color of my skin that physically, something could happen to me if I turn the wrong corner. Like, I remember that. But actually, I've traveled all over the world. I've traveled all over the world. I was aware.

In the '80s I spent a lot of time in Europe, I went to Eastern Eur—I went to Eastern Bloc and East Berlin and I remember very clearly turning a corner and I—and running into a whole group of skinheads. And I knew that I had to run. They hadn't even seen me yet, but I knew that I had to run. And you guess what? I turned around and ran.

It wasn't like um—so, yes, I have—and I do think that, um, if you look at sustainability, what is—what is the enemy of sustainability? In many ways it's violence. Violence that tears things down. It's war. It's disease. It's violence against your own physical body. So that's why I'm a nonviolent person, because we build and then people tear down. We drop bombs on civilizations that have been there. So, I think I've been scared many times. But violence is an old friend not towards me, but it's just somebody who lives on my block. And you just want to walk by that house and hope it doesn't call you in.

[00:40:44]

And every time I see a George Floyd. Every time I see a George video or Elijah. Or young man he couldn't breathe. I mean there's so many I can't they—I'm like, oh, he got called into that house. And I think as people of color, especially Black people, I do think whether we like it or not. On our block is that house. And it's a haunted house. And you tell your children, stay away from it. Stay away from the police. Don't get into trouble, because if you go in that house, something bad could happen.

And it's not even all of this world. There's no reason for that. There's no reason for George not to be here. He went into that house and something bad happened. And that's even the way that we think about it. We almost think about it in part reality and part almost another—yeah, like a haunted house, part imagination, because my brain can't just locate things like that in reality. Because in reality this shouldn't happen. So I've got to go somewhere else. I've got to go somewhere else to understand it.

It's almost like magic realism. It really is. It's, um—the—how can I—how am I supposed to process a kid playing with a toy gun and, officer comes up and he's just—and he shoots him. In reality, that doesn't make sense. So this mixing of reality and imagination and then, you know, something like Octavia Butler, there was a book by her I think was called *Kindred*, where she was, and in part, she was a slave in one life and then she was reaching back and it was an interesting idea of connecting. But this magic real—it's almost like I almost have to go to a space of magic realism to understand what's happened. To understand this, I have to—I have to weave them both together because it doesn't all belong in this world, because if it belonged in this world, that shouldn't happen.

So being an artist, it's like my mind goes to these spaces when, um, you look up, like when in church and you look up and you—you just know that they can see heaven. When they speak, they, "Oh the spirit moved me. The spirit came inside of me." And so that crossing of the spiritual and the reality, I think is kind of—kind of in us anyway. You know, because when they say the spirit, "Oh the spirit moved me gurl." Gurl, well, that's not real. It's not the, you know, the spirit is not physically lifting you somewhere.

And I think—how to process a pandemic. The outpouring of, you know, the racial strifes, how to—the Trump administration. You have to go to two spaces and combine them. And then I kind of can work inside of it. Because just to say, "This is real." No, it's not enough.

NYSSA CHOW: Right.

MARK BRADFORD: It doesn't hold the breadth of my feelings, it doesn't hold the imagination. This is um, it's almost like being in a Gabriel Garcia Marquez novel. It's almost like *A Hundred Years of Solitude*. I mean really, it's like, woah. Um, so—

NYSSA CHOW: The lived mythologies of this larger, you know, this larger mythological reality that we're inside right now, right?

MARK BRADFORD: Yeah, in and out, around, up and down. So, um, though that is all kind of where my brain is all the time. I mean, you know, where—what I think about and how I can move. When the ground stops moving, what is going to be asked of us?

Um, and again, of course. Me, I go back to sustainability.

NYSSA CHOW: Right [Laughs].

[00:45:10]

MARK BRADFORD: Like, systemic change. Um, like, you know, how are we going to move this racial social justice forward and how are we going to get education, you know, like sustainable platforms? It's like it goes back to those statements for me. But not just, um, an article in the, kind of, *New York Times*, but, because I believe if people are not helping you with sustainability, it's just a gesture, it's just for P.C. [politically correct].

If they're not investing in real sustainability, and sustainability takes money. It takes think tanks. It takes systemic change. It takes at a national level, a grass roots level, and everything in between. If you're not doing that it's like, well, I don't know, you know, like, why bother? What are we talking about here?

So. I'm not interested in—look how long it took us to get you know, the Smithsonian, um, African American Museum [National Museum of African American History and Culture]. It's only—it's very new.

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: Thelma Golden, at Studio Museum still can't build her new contemporary wing. Still. 2020. With all this. So really a lot of times, I'm always telling, I'm—well put your

money where your mouth is. You know.

NYSSA CHOW: Invest.

MARK BRADFORD: Then like, okay, because now if you start doing that, now we're talking about equity at the table. We're talking about equity at the table. And that's a little bit different. Equity is different than diversity. Diversity, they can just kind of let everybody—equity is that you're sitting at the table and you're part of the decision making. Now, that's something different. That's like policy change and that's something different. So I've always been more interested in equity. Diversity is that kind of nice word they like to use. We're very—we're a very diverse staff at The Gap, on the sales floor. But everybody in management is white.

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: That, you know, it's like, that has no interest for me, that has no interest to me. Um, but really, the hard things, when I'm that those are the things I'm interested in. And those are things that we should be interested in. It's um—but I don't know how, what that's going to look like. I don't know what that's going to look like in 2021. Well, there's been a lot of seismic shifts very recently. The African, you know, an African American woman as a vice—V.P. and those are huge.

But then what I want to know is, well I want to know, okay, well, for—if we're, if we're looking at Black women in policy, then we need to look at it like how are we treating and how are we looking at ourself? And what are the messagings around that and what can we do to empower at every level. In the popular culture level. Young Black girls.

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: You know what, there's messaging here, but there's also Instagram. And you really—you know, I do believe that when it comes to sustainability, you've got to—you've got to invite everybody to the party. We can't just have our lofty ideas and intellectualize our ideas. Look, y'all you're going to have to invite Meg[an] Thee Stallion. You're going to have to—you might—it might upset you, but you're going to have to invite Meg. Meg needs to be there. Meg needs to be there, and we're going to have to find a way to bridge. We're going to have to find a way to bridge. And we've—that's just necessary because, they're part of the conversation.

I think we do too much judging. I think we do far too much judging and not enough—they are part of the conversation. And a lot of it is—Cardi B, and—a lot of it is relatable. Now, why are they relatable? You know, why are they relatable? And I'm not, I don't have the answers, but I do know they have to be part of the conversation. I do know that.

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: It's just—it's just a reality. And I'm fine with it. You know, I'm fine with it, but I'm not—I know that—we just can't overintellectualize this and decide who's the right people at the table and decide who's not. Because that was done to us.

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: And some of it's going to make us a little uncomfortable. It is going to make us a little uncomfortable. It sure is. And we're not going to always agree but we need to. We got to listen and we got to invite them to the table. And we do—it does have to be part of the metrics. And I'm, um, I'm always asking my little young niece. "Well, what is that? Run that down again. What do y'all, and what, and you got, and what is that? Wh—and what is that? Well, show me that. Well, okay." Oh, you know I want to know. I do want to know. [Inaudible.]

[00:50:06]

NYSSA CHOW: Right.

MARK BRADFORD: Because that's—I'd rather you—you know, I'd rather you have sex in my house than be out in the streets or some motel doing it. At least I know what you're doing at home.

NYSSA CHOW: Right.

MARK BRADFORD: I mean, that's just—going to do it anyway, so I'd rather you have it at home

where I could kind of look at you.

NYSSA CHOW: [Laughs.]

MARK BRADFORD: I mean, you know, I don't have kids, but I'm just saying. You know, I've had my nieces and look—I'd rather—I want to know. I'm just not—I'm an intellectual, not an intellectual, but a, um, I read a lot. What's that word for it? I'm not, it, um .

NYSSA CHOW: What is the—a thinker? A, uh, I don't know—

MARK BRADFORD: Yeah, but.

NYSSA CHOW: I know what you mean, like reading—

MARK BRADFORD: I read a lot of academic, like, books. I have, you know, all this book [inaudible]. But that's just part of it. We're just part of it. We've got to make some room for the other parts, too. We do have, and we have, now I made room. We've got to make bridges. We've got to make bridges.

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: And the thing is, though, you see, a lot of—you know, we get to a certain age we start cleaning up our history. You know, we start cleaning up that history and by the time—and it makes it difficult to talk with some of the younger people who are doing some stuff that's a little bit different than what we're doing because we done cleaned up our stuff when we're talking to them.

That's what I mean about that vulnerability. You've got to learn to be vulnerable. You've got to—you've got to share those mistakes. And you've got to, you've got to talk to them. When you're—you know when your skort skirt was a little high.

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: Your skirt was a little high, you know, so, um, I think that moving forward we do have to make room at the table. We do have to make room because otherwise this is going to be this kind of like this intellectual process that we go through with the people that we've vetted and we think that these are the good people. I don't think that. I don't, I don't, you know, I don't—I don't think that's going to be sustainable. Look, there I go again. It's not sustainable.

It is not sustainable. You better go—you better—you know, honey, look, a whole bunch of us security guards you better be going in and giving lectures at the security guard's place, Securitize. You know, you better go to Securitize and give some lectures. But I'm laughing, but I'm not laughing. When, I did a show in Chicago and at the museum and I said I just wanted to give, uh, a talk with Black folks. And they said, "Oh, well, you know, our audience—" I said, "No, no, no, no, no."

So what I did was I got in my car and went to South Side Chicago and I went to the church, which is a Black church. And I talked to the preacher, and I told him I was an artist. I want to give an artist talk. And I, we found a way. I told him I wasn't going to cuss. I wasn't going to use no bad—I was respectful, but I wanted to—and after service, I gave my talk with the ladies, with the hats. And it was fabulous. It was fabulous.

Us, it was us. And—but you know what, though? It was the most wonderful artist talk I had, because it wasn't just talking to the converted. You know, we're talking and they knew some stuff about me. You know they asked a couple questions. "Well baby, you married?" I said, "No, ma'am, I'm not." "Well, okay we going to pray for you." I said, "Okay, ma'am." You know, but that's it. I mean, you have to be willing to be that foot soldier and to build those bridges, because it's not going to be sustainable.

I'm not going to—I'm 50-some years old, but I refuse to be scratching my head talking about young folks, oh those young folks. No, I'm—no, I'm not going to do that. No, we're all in this. All, I'm not—they do it different and they will figure it out different. But it ain't that different.

NYSSA CHOW: Can I ask you something, can I ask you what, can we go back to that church where those ladies with the hats? What did you get from that? Why that? Why? Why that? What did you get from there? What was different about [inaudible]?

MARK BRADFORD: I wanted to have a relationship. I wanted them to see me. I wanted—I'm a little bit different and maybe not so traditional, but I'm Black and I'm just this type of Black. And I wanted them to see me. I'm—I've styled their hair in the beauty shop and I wanted—and they saw me. And I saw them and we got along. They said, "Baby, you a little bit different, but you all right." And that was good. That was good. I loved it.

We don't all have to be the same. We just have to make room for everybody. That was all. And that's all. Lord have mercy. One little boy, he said, "I have something to say. I have—" I knew what he was going say. "I have some—mama." He stood up. I said, "Oh, Lord have mercy."

"Mama, I'm gay." [Laughs.]

NYSSA CHOW: [Laughs.] Oh no, he said it!

MARK BRADFORD: I said, "Well, we'll talk about it later." Well, but you know what? The space was so comfortable for him.

NYSSA CHOW: Right, yeah.

MARK BRADFORD: And he recognized me and I recognized—you know here's the thing, sustainability should be inside of the culture. We don't have to leave our—you're West Indian, right?

NYSSA CHOW: Yeah, you got it. Trini. [Laughs.]

MARK BRADFORD: You don't—we shouldn't have to leave our cultures to be different or to be weird. Unh-uh. We can stay right within our culture. And they have to make room, make room. I make room for the church lady, and the hat lady, and Cardi B., and—I'm here too. I'm here. I'm here. I'm not running out. I'm not going nowhere. I'm here too. I'm here, too.

[00:55:27]

And that's the whole thing. I think so many times we think we have to leave. No we don't got to leave nothing.

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: Let me tell you, I—whenever I walk into a room, I feel like I belong. I didn't say that the room felt like I belonged. But I feel like I belong.

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: So wherever I choose to go, I belong, the room—I'm not going to change for the room. I'm a make the room change for me. Wherever I go, I belong. I don't care where it is. I can go to Thailand. I can go to China. I can go to West Indies. I can go—I belong. I don't care where I go.

They ask. "Well, you're not from here." No, I'm not from here. But I belong. What are you all doing? What's this? That's cute. Show me what—"Oh, that's what you guys do." And I'm always me. I'm not going to try to be more down. I'm not going to try—nothing. Nothing. But we belong. I think oftentimes that is, that's what makes the culture sustainable—

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: It's when we have all these voices collectively inside of it. That's what makes us sustainable. That's what makes us sustainable. We both belong. But the thing that hurts my heart is when people more like ourselves, more free thinking and open, and what—"Oh, I had to leave. My people didn't understand me. I had—"Oh, I hate that. I said then go back and make them see you go back and make them see you. We oftentimes as creative people, we become silent and we go to the family reunions and we're silent. And we go in the neighborhood and we're silent. Because we don't want to be called out as being weird or being white or being that—shit.

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: I don't do none of that. I don't do none of that. I ain't white. I ain't nothing. I'm me. I'm here. I'm comfortable. Let me—no, I don't do any of that, because while I'm letting you

be you, I'm going to be me. I'm going to give you the freedom to be you. But I'm going to be— I'm going to be me.

I did a, um, you know, I was on *60 Minutes* and, um, there was, I had a segment on *60 Minutes*. And you know what I loved the best was my four friends, my four friends—baby, my four [laughs] and one of them said, "Oh, no, I don't know about Mark's art. Oh, no, I don't know. I've—" I mean, and you know what? I loved it because they asked me, "Well, who do you—" and all these different, I said, "No, no, no, I just, I got, you know, I just invite a few my friends and they'll just do—."

It wasn't like—And they were who they were. Oh, they were who they were. I can't tell you how much feedback I got from that segment. Because, and we were all same color. And Mark was Mark Bradford on *60 Minutes*. And do you think it mattered to them women? Not at all. Not at all. But that is the beauty of what we can be if we come the right way to it.

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: Oh, and by the way, I just found out today that that segment on *60 Minutes* was nominated for an Emmy.

NYSSA CHOW: Is that right?

MARK BRADFORD: That's crazy. But that's crazy. But that's good.

NYSSA CHOW: It is good.

MARK BRADFORD: Because I don't know regular [ph/inaudible], but that is what I'm saying is—and I always tell—and this is the thing that I always tell creatives because there may be creatives that are going to listen to this tape. I will acknowledge that they're, creative people are probably a little more sensitive. And I will kind of acknowledge that we learn to be quiet early just to get along. Because a lot of times the alpha voices in the rooms are always the ones that—I will acknowledge that.

And we go on our creative roads and we find places that are a little bit more gentle. But, in order to make whoever you're, where you're from, and where I'm from, in order to make it sustainable, they need to hear you and you need to raise your voice. Because what happens is you take that silence with you out into the world. You take a way of being out into the world that way because you learned it at home. You have to go back and tell them, the next person that says something about your hair or the no—or how—you say, "You know, I don't say anything about you, but you're going to stop talking about me because that hurts me. Stop. I said stop."

"Oh, I didn't know you were so sense—" "No, it's not about me. No, no, no, no, no. No, no, no. No, no, no. It's not about that because you have no problem talking about me. But I'm telling you, I'm letting you know now that I don't like this. Now, if I've told you I don't like it, and you continue to do it, well me and you are going to have a problem."

[01:00:18]

"Because you got your lace front wig, and you good with your lace front and that's fine. You do lace front. You do you. But let me do me. Let me do me. And I don't need that."

But what we do is we don't do that. We stay quiet. And judging and angry. Go back. Get it—if there's not a table at the chair. Bring the folding chair. Squeeze on in. And when they say things you don't like, say "Stop. I'm not a white girl. I don't speak like a white girl. Stop. Stop that. Stop, stop." Because I tell them, "Who? You talking to me? You talking, me?"

No, no. Not me. No. Because that's very important. Because I think people of color and creatives, we get silent and we get smaller and then we go away and we get loud.

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: No. You got to go back and say, "Well, listen. I was always here. I belong here. Whenever I decide to be here and if I want to bring all vegetarian, all kale, vegan, then that's me. I'm going to do that. And you can eat whatever you want, but let me eat what I want. And these are my friends. These are my people. Some of them are Black, and some of them may not be Black. Your husband, I don't know what your husband is. It doesn't matter. None of it matters. None of it matters." You have a—and you need to tell them when things hurt. Because

a lot of times they don't know. Because we learn to be quiet. We learn to be quiet. But all them creatives and I hope there's a creative that picks up this tape somewhere and pops it in and that little boy or that little girl with his little I don't know what color hair they'll have by then, but he will say, "That's me he's talking about. That is me."

Because you—that is not sustainable. It's not sustainable. Running is not sustainable. I'll be Black until the day I die. But, what that translates to is nobody's business but me. If I go to Tibet and sit on the top of a mountain for the rest of my life, I'm still Black baby. I'm doing Black my way. That's, that's me.

That's how I—so it really is about—I guess I swerved and started talking about young creative people because I'm a creative people and I love young creative people and artistic people and sensitive people. And I love—that's my community and people of color. And so I understand that.

But I do understand that we do carry a lot of early traumas from the neighborhood. Sometimes from our family not understanding. I understand that. But you do have to go back and lift your voice. They need to hear it, because they're going to say, "Oh, honey, I didn't even know. I didn't even know that bothered you." Because we get so used to just, "Oh, that's okay. That's just my sister. That's just how she is. That's just how he is." No.

NYSSA CHOW: [Laughs.]

MARK BRADFORD: That is not. They say "Oh, Mark that's fine, that's fine." But no, it's not.

You know, that's so funny because one of the girls on the stage with me was Lanette [ph]. And, um, I lost Lanette's number. I couldn't find it, and I lost track with her for about a year. And I found out that her daughter went to a school of mine. Her daughter went to a private school where my friend was the, um, teacher. So I got the number—[video goes to black screen] oh, sorry. So I got the number for her.

NYSSA CHOW: I think you. There you go. Yeah.

MARK BRADFORD: I got the number from her. When I picked up the phone. She had an attitude. "Hey, Mark." I said, "First of all, let me clear it up right now. I lost your number. I've been looking for you for a year, and gurl, I— I'm sorry. I was looking for your ass for a year."

"Oh, that's all right. Okay, Mark that—you cleared it up! That's right, Mark. You've got me right. Because I was having an attitude. I was starting to think, you know, you should—oh Mark." I said, "No, no, no. No, no, no."

But we had to have that moment. And I think sometimes creatives need to go back and have that moment with their families to kind of level set it again. Like, this is me, and I have the right to my opinion, and they're are going to be a difference than yours. I let you have yours. But when you critique mine so strongly, it does hurt my feelings. And I need for you to stop hurting my feelings. And I know that you love me. So you're going to stop hurting my feelings. Now, if you're not going to stop hurting my feelings, we're going to have a different relationship because I've already told you, you have your foot on my neck.

So, are we good? Are we good? And you and you put them on notice. You put them on notice. That's what I believe young creatives have to do. You put people on notice. You tell them the problem. And the people that love you, they hear you and they adjust their behavior. The ones that don't. Well, you know what? I believe in making a different, um, relationship.

[01:05:11]

NYSSA CHOW: [Laughs.]

MARK BRADFORD: I do. I do. I believe in making a different relationship with anybody that hurt you. Once you have told them. The one thing I can tell you—another thing that I learned. Most of my life, I've heard people say, "you know, Mark you ain't shit." I would hear that at school, I would hear that in the neighborhood. But you know what? I always found me some—Mark would walk into a room and I find me somebody like me. I said, well, let me you know, like, if 14 people over here didn't like me I was never one of those people begging people to love me. You ain't know—I used to tell my girlfriends, "Gurl, stop begging that man a [inaudible]. Find you somebody that loves you. Begging somebody to love you, you don't beg nobody love you gurl."

But I found people that love me. I wasn't going to spend two minutes with people that said, "Well Mark I don't like you." I said "Well I'm good. Bye. Bye." Unh-uh, I've never wasted my time on people that didn't—love me.

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: Because I'm too gentle, and I'm not unh-uh, unh-uh. You know? Unh-uh. Rejection? Baby, I'm out the door. "Oh, you don't feel me? Let—you know what? Let me get my car keys and get up from here."

NYSSA CHOW: [Laughs.]

MARK BRADFORD: I don't sit nowhere. I don't break no bread. "Y'all don't feel me?" Let me go. Let me get up from here. I'm good. No problem. Because it tears your soul down. The young ladies begging people to love them. Begging this man to love them. Unh-uh, don't do that. Find you somebody that just loves you. Find you some friends that just love you. Find people that think you are amazing. I'm not saying you have to live in a bubble, but you know what? You need people around you to think you are amazing.

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: Not people that every time the phone rings, your stomach knots up. And that is something that I feel so strongly about when I'm dealing with young artists. I know they're carrying trauma. And I'd like to talk about it. Usually they get emotional, you know, but I want to give them that strength to be able to, um, so that people can hear them. And not just the art world, I'm talking about you're walking down the street in your neighborhood. I'm talking when we put the key in the door and your mother and father are there, and your brothers and sisters. I'm talking about the family reunions.

I'm talking about all that. They need to hear you.

I did a project once with some young people, you know, young high school kids, and they were just so filled and they were like, well, you know, "How can I tell? How can I get it across to my mother, my father, my brothers. How can I?" I said, "You know what? Let's do a poster project. And they all did posters. They did these amazing posters. And they put them on their door.

NYSSA CHOW: Wow.

MARK BRADFORD: It's like, they put them on the door, who they were. And it changed. The mothers were calling me, "I had no idea." I said, "Well, you know, you do now. You know you do now." You know, I think that those kind of things, you know, you can—you can do. I take a—I bring them all in. I take their favorite song by the, rapper or whoever, and we take out everything that degrades and put in something else. So it's their song. I said, "Well, let's just take out everything that makes you uncomfortable."

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: They take it out and put something else. So I've always—I love young, creative, and I love young creative people of color. And I know that their sustainability, it's not as supported as when you're becoming a doctor, a lawyer, a sports figure. You know, ours is more. Well, if it—if they do it, they do it, and if they don't, they don't. I really, really focus on them. I really, really focus on that group. That's the group—even at, um, I want to even work more with young, I just call them young creatives, young, just kind of a different path.

People of color we struggle with identity issues of, "Well, how can I just be me? When the pressure of being Black is—? How can I—?" Just be you. Just try to find the space that's you. And mold that into something. I think young, creatives oftentimes, especially men, especially young Black men. If they're not gay they don't have that space where they can be vulnerable and silly and cry and not be called a faggot.

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: It's so interesting is, one of the things that I've— and I'll tell you, one of the things that I kind of understood when I was very, very early, early, earliest. They're like "Okay Mark. You're a sissy." That was the tag put on me. Now what—now the good news is you can be super emotional, very creative, um, have lots of friends, be the funny, be the class clown—but,

the one thing you can't have is power.

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[01:10:11]

MARK BRADFORD: That is given to the heterosexual man. Now the heterosexual man, good news is you can have all the power. But you ain't going to be very emotional. You're going to be kind of fucked up emotionally. So it's always this thing—so for me, I'm always saying we need to create spaces where heterosexual men can feel vulnerable, can feel emotional, can feel silly, can feel—in those spaces. And I'm okay with—

Gay men can be powerful, God damn it.

NYSSA CHOW: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARK BRADFORD: I'm not into RuPaul. I don't care about no fucking RuPaul. That's what they give us. You know, they give us that "Go, gurl. I know that—" No, no, no, no. I'm like, you know. So it's all these things I've always been interested in sharing what we, what was not allowed. What was, sort of given to men. You are this and you are that. No, I don't believe in that.

I don't believe—I don't believe that that's the way forward. And I don't believe that that is sustainable. Um.

NYSSA CHOW: I hate to do this to you, but we've been talking for an hour and a half.

MARK BRADFORD: Really?

NYSSA CHOW: Hour and fifteen minutes, yeah.

MARK BRADFORD: Well I gave you a—

NYSSA CHOW: [Laughs.]

MARK BRADFORD: It was great though. You know what it was—

NYSSA CHOW: I don't want to stop.

MARK BRADFORD: Because, you know, in my mind, I kept thinking, if that young little girl from—what country, what country are you from?

NYSSA CHOW: Trinidad.

MARK BRADFORD: I was—you know what? I was just getting ready to say Trinidad. I was going to say, that little girl from Trinidad or that little boy, if he hears this and he's just like, "Oh, he is talk—he's dead now. But he's talking to me. He's—" 30 minutes, an hour, it's fine.

NYSSA CHOW: But you know it's [inaudible], well we can wrap this. Let's wrap up and I'll tell you afterwards. But this is—I'm so annoyed that we have to stop. But you just talked about keeping your job. So, I got to stop. [Laughs.]

MARK BRADFORD: Keep your job gurl! Keep your job gurl!

[They laugh.]

Lord have mercy! Keep your job! Keep your job honey. Wrap it up, gurl, wrap it up.

NYSSA CHOW: Thank you. Don't go anywhere. Don't go anywhere. Thank you.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]