A World ∞

The hearse carries second from left —

Abstract expressionist painter Mark Bradford will curate a show of Clifford Still paintings at the Still Museum and, at the same time, exhibit recent works at the Denver Art Museum. Image provided by Clifford Still Museum.

Mark Bradford’s “Butch Queen” from 2016. Photograph by Joshua White, provided by the Clifford Still Museum.

Bradford gets a pair of shows at DAM, Still

By Ray Mark Rinaldi

The Denver Art Museum and the Clifford Still Museum are teaming up for a pair of shows centered on the work of prominent abstract expressionist Mark Bradford.

Bradford is among the most in-demand painters in the contemporary art field and has exhibited in top-tier galleries, such as the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston. He recently was selected for the high-profile job of representing the U.S. at the prestigious Venice Biennale, which opens in May 2023.

But a month before that, Bradford will be feted by the tide-by-side.

BRADFORD = 3C

museums in Denver. He will curate a show of Clifford Still paintings at the Still Museum while, at the same time, DAM will present “Shade: Clifford Still/MARK Bradford,” an exhibition of Bradford’s recent works organized by the Albright-Knox Gallery in Buffalo, NY.

The Denver events “will very much be part of the wave” expected to surround Bradford next year,” said Sean Sobel, who directs the Still museum.

Bradford has talked repeatedly of his admiration for the work of Still, who died in 1960, and there are similarities in their work, among them a tendency to paint on large canvases and to create multiple surface variations in two-dimensional work.

But they also share a fondness for using shades of black, which Still pioneered in an era of colorful, modern painting and which Bradford uses as a way of sparking a dialogue about race.

“Shade,” which continues in Buffalo through October, features six new paintings Bradford made directly in response to Clifford Still’s work. In an adjacent room, the museum has placed 20 of Still’s paintings that Bradford himself culled from that museum’s collection of the artist’s work.

The Albright-Knox could not show the paintings in the same room because of restrictions on how Still’s works can be presented, the museum agreed to years ago when it accepted the objects into its holdings. DAM, which owns none of Still’s plans to mitigate that distance by borrowing two Still paintings from private collections and showing them in proximity to Bradford’s work.

“This will be the first time we’re able to have Clifford Still and Mark Bradford canvases within a single view frame,” said Rebecca Hart, DAM’s curator of modern and contemporary art. Ironically, restrictions on the Clifford Still Museum’s own holdings prevent it from lending any Still paintings to DAM right across the alley in the Golden Triangle neighborhood. The Still museum owns about 90 Still paintings.

But CSM will provide a depth of context for DAM’s event by exhibiting the works curated by Bradford.

The show is the third installment of CSM’s “Artist Select” series, which featured a show curated by Devor founder Mark Mothersbaugh in 2013 and continues with a show chosen by artist Julian Schnabel in January 2017. Bradford’s picks will cover several decades of Still’s career, although, not surprisingly, the color black will be prominent.

“They’re both artists who want to make art that has meaning, that isn’t just about art and has a larger statement to make,” Sobel said.

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