

Carolyn Lazard
Cameron Rowland
Sable Elyse Smith

Colored People Time
MUNDANE FUTURES
QUOTIDIAN PASTS
BANAL PRESENTS

Chapter III
September 13–December 22
Project Space

“The now is present, is past, is future. The past is now, as is the future, and all we have is meaning, our fear of, flight from, or embrace of it, in its fragile and fractally fragmented multiplicity.”

–M. NourbeSe Philip, email to the curator,
June 25, 2019.

BANAL PRESENTS

Banal Presents is the third and final chapter in the exhibition series Colored People Time and stages a conversation between the artists Carolyn Lazard, Cameron Rowland, and Sable Elyse Smith. Through varying approaches, these artists examine the ongoing repercussions of chattel slavery with a focus on property, reparations, and the medical-industrial and prison-industrial complexes. Across these themes, all three artists utilize the everyday as the site for continuing interrogation of systemic oppression. In Banal Presents the present serves as the grounds for critical intervention.

As this exhibition series has unfolded over the past year, I have at times attempted to distinguish the boundaries between past, present, and future—all the while knowing that they are inseparable and continuous. “Colored People Time” has always been about our entanglement with capitalism’s imposition and enforcement of punctuality and efficiency. Simultaneously, “Colored People Time” is also our collective performance of refusal: A refusal to disavow our embodied sense of time, beyond capital’s demands. A refusal to accept that history occurs, and remains, in the past. A refusal to adhere to Western time as the only time.

The artists in this exhibition—and we, as viewers—occupy a current moment haunted by what scholar Saidiya Hartman has termed the “afterlife” of slavery. This “afterlife” names the enduring presence of slavery’s racialized violence that permeates every aspect of our society. Banal Presents locates the present as the space where we bend the relationship between the past and the future. “The now,” in all of its fleetingness, is where we act.

—Meg Onli, Assistant Curator

COLORED PEOPLE TIME

“The challenge continues to be how to reconcile an ‘in time’ philosophy with the ‘on time’ demands of mainstream America.”

—Geneva Smitherman, Word from the Mother: Language and African Americans (2006)

“The first object that engaged my attention was a watch which hung on the chimney, and was going. I was quite surprised at the noise it made, and was afraid it would tell the gentleman anything I might do amiss.”

—Olaudah Equiano, The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano (1789)

In his 1972 article “Some Notes on the Blues, Style and Space,” Ronald Walcott wrote “time is the very condition of Western civilization which oppresses so brutally.” Published under the Johnson Publishing Company’s imprint Black World, Walcott’s essay examined the works of three prominent black cultural producers—author Ralph Ellison, playwright Charles Gordone, and poet Melvin B. Tolson—through their shared depictions of “Colored People’s Time” (aka CPT or CP Time.) As Walcott observes, black people occupy and deploy CPT as a political performance to “evade, frustrate, and ridicule” the enforcement of punctuality and productivity, key disciplinary structures of capitalism.¹ For many, CPT is the time-space of the struggle.² It emerges from conditions of ongoing oppression that stretch back to the beginning of Transatlantic slavery. CPT challenges and disavows the predominant opinion that being “on time” is the only way of being “in time.”

I began thinking about CPT while developing an exhibition that examined how a group of artists, activists, and writers have considered how white supremacy and the legacy of chattel slavery have existed so insidiously in our current moment(s).

I was drawn to CPT as both a living and liberatory phrase. It has provided a linguistic tool for black people to navigate their own temporality, within and against the construct of Western time. Not surprisingly, white supremacist logics have attempted to distort and co-opt CPT, constructing a dual meaning through racial stereotype. In spite of this, CPT has remained part of the vernacular of racially marginalized groups, to think and act differently in time.

Colored People Time, structured as an experimental exhibition in three chapters—Mundane Futures, Quotidian Pasts, and Banal Presents—unfolds over the course of 2019. Within the exhibition, I want to explore the plural and malleable nature of the term. CPT connects to the tradition of black expressions grounded in counter-language, ones performed as part of “resistance discourse, created as a communication system unintelligible to speakers of the dominant master class.”³ Like the constructs of race and gender, time is an experience and subject that escapes the limitations of language.

The artists represented within this exhibition include: Aria Dean, Kevin Jerome Everson, Matthew Angelo Harrison, Carolyn Lazard, Dave McKenzie, Cameron Rowland, Sable Elyse Smith, and Martine Syms; accompanied by historical objects from the Black Panther Party, Sutton E. Griggs, the National Institutes of Health/Getty Images, and the African Collection at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. It is through these works that we are invited to reconsider the singularity of Western time and bear witness to the everyday disruptions that restructure and reorganize black being in the past, present, and future.

—Meg Onli, Assistant Curator

1—Walcott, Ronald, “Ellison, Gordone and Tolson: Some Notes on the Blues, Style and Space.” Black World, December 1972, pp. 4–29.

2—John Streamas, “Closure And ‘Colored Peoples Time’” in Time: Limits and Constraints, ed. Jo Alyson Packer, et al. (Boston: Brill Publishing, 2010).

3—Geneva, Smitherman, Word from the Mother: Language and African Americans (New York: Routledge, 2006), 5.

EXHIBITION WORKS

Sable Elyse Smith
Coloring Book 33
2019
Screen printing ink and
oil stick on paper
Courtesy of the artist,
Cal Siegel, and JTT,
New York

Sable Elyse Smith
Pivot
2019
Powder coated aluminum
Courtesy of the artist
and JTT, New York

Carolyn Lazard
Pre-Existing Condition
2019
Digital Video
15 min.
Courtesy of the artist
and ESSEX STREET,
New York

Cameron Rowland
Depreciation
2018
Restrictive covenant;
1 acre on Edisto Island,
South Carolina

40 acres and a mule as
reparations for slavery
originates in General William
Tecumseh Sherman's Special
Field Orders No. 15, issued on
January 16, 1865. Sherman's
Field Order 15 was issued out
of concern for a potential
uprising of the thousands of
ex-slaves who were follow-
ing his army by the time it
arrived in Savannah.¹

The field order stipulated
that "The islands from
Charleston south, the
abandoned rice fields along
the rivers for thirty miles
back from the sea, and the
country bordering the Saint
Johns River, Florida, are
reserved and set apart for the
settlement of the negroes
now made free by the acts of

1—Eric Foner, Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877, updated ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2014), 71.

2—Headquarters Military Division of the Mississippi, Special Field Orders No. 15 (1865).

war and the proclamation of the President of the United States. Each family shall have a plot of not more than forty acres of tillable ground.”²

This was followed by the formation of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands in March 1865. In the months immediately following the issue of the field orders, approximately 40,000 former slaves settled in the area designated by Sherman on the basis of possessory title.³ 10,000 of these former slaves were settled on Edisto Island, South Carolina.⁴

In 1866, following Lincoln’s assassination, President Andrew Johnson effectively rescinded Field Order 15 by ordering these lands be returned to their previous Confederate owners.

Former slaves were given the option to work for their former masters as sharecroppers or be evicted. If evicted, former slaves could be arrested for homelessness under vagrancy clauses of the Black Codes. Those who refused to leave and refused to sign sharecrop contracts were threatened with arrest.

Although restoration of the land to the previous Confederate owners was slowed in some cases by court challenges filed by ex-slaves, nearly all the land settled was returned by the 1870s. As Eric Foner writes, “Johnson had in effect abrogated the Confiscation Act and unilaterally amended the law creating the [Freedmen’s] Bureau. The idea of a Freedmen’s Bureau actively promoting black landownership had come to an abrupt end.”⁵ The Freedmen’s Bureau agents became primary proponents of labor contracts inducting former slaves into the sharecropping system.⁶

Among the lands that were repossessed in 1866 by former Confederate owners was the Maxcy Place plantation. “A group of freed people were at Maxcy Place in January 1866. ... The people contracted to work

for the proprietor, but no contract or list of names has been found.”⁷

The one-acre piece of land at 8060 Maxie Road, Edisto Island, South Carolina, was part of the Maxcy Place plantation. This land was purchased at market value on August 6, 2018, by 8060 Maxie Road, Inc., a nonprofit company formed for the sole purpose of buying this land and recording a restrictive covenant on its use. This covenant has as its explicit purpose the restriction of all development and use of the property by the owner.

The property is now appraised at \$0. By rendering it legally unusable, this restrictive covenant eliminates the market value of the land. These restrictions run with the land, regardless of the owner. As such, they will last indefinitely.

As reparation, this covenant asks how land might exist outside of the legal-economic regime of property that was instituted by slavery and colonization. Rather than redistributing the property, the restriction imposed on 8060 Maxie Road’s status as valuable and transactable real estate asserts antagonism to the regime of property as a means of reparation.

Courtesy of the artist and ESSEX STREET, New York

3—Foner, *Reconstruction*, 71.

4—Charles Spencer, *Edisto Island, 1861 to 2006: Ruin, Recovery and Rebirth* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2008), 87.

5—Foner, *Reconstruction*, 161.

6—Foner, 161.

7—Spencer, 95.

SUGGESTED READING

- Alexander, Michelle. The New Jim Crow. New York: The New Press, 2010.
- Cimbala, Paul A. The Freedmen's Bureau and Reconstruction, New York: Fordham University Press, 1999.
- Forman, James. Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018.
- Foner, Eric. Reconstruction Updated Edition: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2014.
- Hartman, Saidiya V. Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-making in Nineteenth-century America. Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Jameson, Fredric. "The End of Temporality." Critical Inquiry 29, no. 4 (Summer 2003), The University of Chicago Press.
- Oubre, Claude F. Forty Acres and a Mule: The Freedmen's Bureau and Black Land Ownership. Louisiana State University Press, 2012.
- Pardlo, Gregory. "Colored People's Time." Callaloo 39, no. 2 (2016): pp. 361-71.
- Puleo, Risa. Walls Turned Sideways: Artists Confront the Justice System. Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 2019.
- Sharpe, Christina Elizabeth. In the Wake: On Blackness and Being. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.
- Streamas, John. "Closure And 'Colored People's Time.'" Time: Limits and Constraints, The Study of Time, 13 (July 14, 2010): pp. 219-40.
- Walcott, Ronald. "Ellison, Gordone and Tolson: Some Notes on the Blues, Style and Space." Black World, December 1972, 4-29.
- Washington, Harriet A. Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present. New York City: Penguin Random House, 2008.

Related Programs

Friday, September 13
Members Preview, 5PM
Public Opening Celebration,
6:30PM

Saturday, October 12, 12PM
Transcribez Writing Group

Thursday, October 17–
Saturday, October 19
The Legacy of 1619: The 2019
Annual Callaloo Conference*

Thursday, October 24th, 7–9PM
Performance by SCRAAATCH
Holy Apostles and the Mediator
Episcopal Church
260 South 51st Street
Philadelphia, PA 19139

Wednesday, November 13, 6PM
Curator-Led Tour with Meg Onli

*Please visit icaphila.org/calendar for
further details and more upcoming
events.

#banalpresents

Credits

Colored People Time: Banal Presents is organized by Meg Onli, Assistant Curator. A fully illustrated catalog will be published in early 2020.

Major support for Colored People Time: Banal Presents has been provided by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage. Additional support has been provided by Dorothy & Martin Bandier, Arthur Cohen & Daryl Otte, Cheri & Steven Friedman, and Brett & Daniel Sundheim.



Institute of
Contemporary
University ^{Art}
of Pennsylvania

118 S. 36th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104
(215) 898-7108, icaphila.org