I KNOW THIS RUNS SOMEWHAT COUNTER TO WHAT YOU’RE THINKING,

BUT CAN WE SAY THAT THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS THE PRESENT, OR THAT THE PRESENT CAN BE SEEN TO BE BUT ONE ASPECT OF THE PAST?

Colored People Time
MUNDANE FUTURES
QUOTIDIAN PASTS
BANAL PRESENTS

An exhibit in three chapters
September 13–December 22

Sable Elyse Smith

Coloring Book 33

Screen printing, ink, and oil stick on paper

Courtesy of the artist, Cal Siegel, and JTT, New York

Cameron Rowland

Depreciation

2018

Restrictive covenant: 1 acre on Edisto Island, South Carolina

40 acres and a mule as reparations for slavery
originate 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 following 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 John’s River,
Florida, are reserved and set apart for the settlement
of the negroes now made free by the acts of
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 for-
er 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Andrew Johnson effectively rescinded Field Order 15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 home-
lessness under vagrancy clauses of the Black Codes.
Those who refused to leave and refused to sign share-
crop contracts were threatened with arrest.

Although restoration of the land to the previous
Confederate owners was slow 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 uni-
laterally amended the law
creating the ‘Freedmen’s
Bureau. The idea of a
Freedmen’s Bureau actively
promoting black landowner-
ship had come to an abrupt
end.”⁵ The Freedmen’s Bureau agents became primary
proponents of labor con-
tracts inducting former
slaves into the sharecrop-
ing system.⁶

Among the lands that were
repossessed in 1866 by
former Confederate owners
was the Maxcy Place plant-
tation. “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 render-
ing it legally unusable, this
restrictive covenant elim-
nitates the market value of
the land. These restrictions
run with the land, regard-
less 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 prop-
erty that was instituted by
slavery and colonization.
Rather than redistributing
the property, the restric-
tion imposed on 8060 Maxie
Road’s status as valu-
able and transactable real
estate asserts antagonism
to the regime of property as
a means of reparation.

² Cameron Rowland, Depreciation, 2018
³ Restrictive covenant on 8060 Maxie Road, Edisto Island, South Carolina.
⁴ Cameron Rowland, Depreciation, 2018
⁵ Cameron Rowland, Depreciation, 2018
⁶ Cameron Rowland, Depreciation, 2018
⁷ Cameron Rowland, Depreciation, 2018
⁸ Cameron Rowland, Depreciation, 2018
Colored People Time
MUNDANE FUTURES
QUOTIDIAN PASTS
BANAL PRESENTS

An exhibit in three chapters
September 13–December 22

Carolyn Lazard
Cameron Rowland
Sable Elyse Smith

“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.

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. For many, CPT is the time-space of the struggle. 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 insistently 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.” 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 American Historical Museum.

Colored People Time’s project Space is organized by Meg Onli, Assistant Curator. The artists—Carolyn Lazard, Cameron Rowland, and Sable Elyse Smith. The artists in this exhibition—and we, as viewers—occupy a current moment haunted by what the Professor 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. Colored People’s Time: Banal Presents locates the present as the space where we bend the relationship between the past and the future. The present, in all of its fleetness, is where we act.

#banalpresents

Related Programs
Friday, September 13, 5PM
Members Preview
Public Opening Celebration, 6:30PM
Saturday, October 12, 12PM
Transcribe 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.

Meg Onli, Assistant Curator