

Cameron Rowland, '3 & 4 Will. IV c. 73'

Guy Mannes-Abbott

ICA, London, UK, 29 January – 12 April 2020

Cameron Rowland has a distinctive way with titles of exhibitions, land and property, which he demonstrates with great impact in his current ICA exhibition. I caught it in February before the pandemic hit, and before George Floyd was lynched and British broadcasters responded to Black Lives Matter protests in London and Bristol by asking what they had to do with events five thousand miles away. And also before I read white, male art critics carping about the work not being legible enough for them, missing its fine detail, crystallised opacities and actual substantiveness but dismissing it as paperwork-about-paperwork anyway. This is the significantly over-entitled worldview that Rowland takes apart in an exhibition that already was – and will re-open as – the most exhilarating show of 2020 in London.

Rowland's '3 & 4 Will. IV c. 73' might have been designed as a final riposte to the 'five thousand miles away' sleight about slavery and its ongoing legacies. However, there is more than that at work in this exhibition of small but not minor objects, and expansively quasi-epistemological works that foreground judgement. '3 & 4 Will. IV c. 73' generates a very particular eschatological arrest. While it delivers on the level of affect, it also addresses a further rhetorical question put by Saidiya Hartman when declaring herself 'agnostic' about one-way struggles over reparation.¹ The answer is that slavery, the transportation of at least twelve million people as chattel from west Africa across the Atlantic Ocean, *was* a Crime Against Humanity, as presently constituted and understood. I have written about Ariella Aisha Azoulay's rigorous problematising of pseudo-humanitarian laws,² and this exhibition entangles itself with legal declarations that were loaded and abused. Yet Atlantic slavery was a crime on the largest conceivable scale, a crime that remains unprosecuted and for

¹ 'It seems to me that there is something innately servile about making an appeal to a deaf ear or praying for relief to an indifferent and hostile court or expecting remedy from a government unwilling even to acknowledge that slavery was a crime against humanity', Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2008, p 166

² Guy Mannes-Abbott, review of Ariella Aisha Azoulay's *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*, *Third Text* Online, 6 March 2020 <http://thirdtext.org/mannesabbott-azoulay>

which only the perpetrators were compensated at ‘abolition’ in ways that continue to accrue benefits.

Rowland brings all of this home to the ICA’s Crown Estate location between 12 Carlton Terrace and The Mall, St James’s, in a capital city built from systems that enabled, developed, profited from and continue to bank on industrialised slavery to a significant, unacknowledged extent. The title of the exhibition, ‘3 & 4 Will. IV c. 73’, is the name of the Act designed to ‘abolish’ slavery in the British Colonies in 1833. However, as Rowland makes clear in a characteristic four thousand word booklet that is part of this exhibition, the first thing to be said is that ‘Abolition preserved the property established by slavery’.³ The remaining exhibition goes on to interrogate what this means, condensing it with objects and juridical-conceptual acts that focus on transforming deeply embedded elements with slam-dunking élan.

I thought I knew what to expect as I dashed across St James’s Square to the ICA via the Duke of York Steps, having noted the significant success of ‘91020000’, Rowland’s earlier show at Artists Space, New York, in 2016, also curated by Richard Birkett under the same institutional Director, Stefan Kalmar (both of whom have since shifted to parallel roles at the ICA). Those expectations were confounded by the clarifying austerity of the lower gallery space which left me scrambling to recognise and engage a forensic emplacement of objects in the somehow spatially dilated building. Those objects included a cluster of hoops and beads on the floor, a rental agreement for a mooring in Liverpool on the wall mounted beside a mahogany writing-box, a large gold coin, and a set of discreet searchlights on the corridor wall.

Pacotille (2020), a pretty gathering of brass manillas (the horseshoe-shaped ‘bracelets’ that were used as tokens of exchange) amongst long strings of opaque glass beads is immediately suggestive. I had not seen these before, but I recognise the species of thing I am looking at. I wonder why those affronted critics felt shut out by this clever nudge of a piece? I can do allure, the artist is saying in part. You’ve seen archival recoverings of resonant objects around the biennial world? I can do that, too. Rowland’s booklet and downloadable pdf (<https://www.ica.art/media/03875.pdf>) acts like the spirit of a complex assemblage piece here, alerting to the origins of this obsolete coinage manufactured in Birmingham (the beads are Venetian) and used as a one-way currency in the slave economy of west Africa. Eric Williams, one of Rowland’s inspired sources, wrote in his mid-20th century classic, *Capitalism and Slavery*, that ‘pacotille is still commonly used in the West Indies today to denote a cheap and tawdry bauble given as compensation for objects of great value’.⁴ Williams

³ Cameron Rowland, ‘3 & 4 Will. IV c. 73’, 2020, unpaginated pamphlet published as part of the ICA exhibition, and downloadable here: <https://www.ica.art/media/03392.pdf>

⁴ Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* [1944], 2nd edition reprinted by The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1994, p 134

illustrates this with the example of ‘thirteen beads of coral, half a string of amber, twenty-eight silver bells, and three pairs of bracelets for his women’ being traded for ‘a fine Negro’.⁵



Cameron Rowland, *Pacotille*, 2020, brass manillas manufactured in Birmingham, 18th century, glass beads manufactured in Venice, 18th century, 103 × 68 × 3 cm (40 ½ × 26 ¾ × 1 ⅛ inches), rental

European goods traded for enslaved people were manufactured specifically for this purpose. Manillas were used as a one-directional currency, which Europeans would offer as payment but would never accept. The Portuguese determined the value of slave life at 12–15 manillas in the early 1500s.¹ Birmingham was the primary producer of brass manillas in Britain, prior to the city’s central role in the Industrial Revolution. The British also used cheap beads acquired throughout Europe to buy slaves. Eric Williams describes the ‘triple stimulus to British industry’ provided through the export of British goods manufactured for the purchasing of slaves, the processing of raw materials grown by slaves, and the formation of new colonial markets for British-made goods.² The production of European goods for the slave trade supported domestic manufacturing markets. British trade in West Africa was understood to be nearly 100% profit.

What renders the Negroe-Trade still more estimable and important is, that near Nine-tenths of those Negroes are paid for in Africa with British Produce and Manufactures only. . . . We send no Specie or Bullion to pay for the Products of Africa, but, ‘tis certain, we bring from thence very large Quantities of Gold; . . . From which Facts, the Trade to Africa may very truly be said to be, as it were, all Profit to the Nation.³

Goods produced for the trade of slaves, which carried nearly no value in Europe, were called *pacotille*. *Pacotille* translates from French to English as ‘rubbish’.⁴

¹ A H M Kirk-Greene, ‘The Major Currencies in Nigerian History’, *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 2, no 1 (December 1960): 146

² Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, 2nd ed (1944; repr Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 52

³ Malachy Postlethwayt, *The National and Private Advantages of the African Trade Considered*, 2nd ed (London: John and Paul Knapton, 1746; London: William Otridge, Bookseller, 1772), 3 Citations refer to the Otridge edition

⁴ Marie-Hélène Corréard, ‘pacotille’, in *Pocket Oxford-Hachette French Dictionary: French-English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 594

Again, like Rowland, I revert to Saidiya Hartman to elaborate the gross cruelty represented here in relation to another form of this currency: cowrie shells. ‘Of the six-million-plus captives

⁵ Ibid, p 133

transported to the Americas in the eighteenth century, anywhere from one-third to one-quarter of them had been exchanged for shells.’⁶ Cowries were introduced, she wrote, in the eleventh century from north Africa, but the British and Dutch sourced them in the Maldives as ballast for their ships and they were ‘passed from white hands to black, but not back again, ensuring that they remained “Negro currency”’.⁷ Hartman writes of the ‘kings, warriors and merchants’⁸ who had hoarded this seemingly vast wealth in underground vaults and shrines without realising they were treasuring non-convertible currency. The devastating consequence is that ‘the enormous losses suffered in Africa were without any lasting gains’.⁹

Pacotille represents that abyssal obsolescence; the brutalisation-transfer-brutalisation of people from their land for nothing but an almost one hundred per cent profit for the European perpetrators, as Rowland details. The manillas exhibited here were manufactured in vast numbers in Birmingham, one of many similar stimuli to British industry and the exchequer that the trade in people-turned-objects generated.¹⁰ Birmingham was the main producer of manillas, and of the guns that were exchanged for men in the eighteenth century: ‘it was a common saying that the price of a Negro was one Birmingham gun. The African musket was an important Birmingham export, reaching a total of 100,000 to 150,000 annually.’¹¹ And the scale of this? Starting with the Restitution of the monarchy in the person of King James II during the seventeenth century, ‘[t]he Royal African Company of England shipped more enslaved African [people] to the Americas than any other single institution during the entire period of the transatlantic slave trade’.¹²

Before climbing to the upper galleries where Rowland’s single most powerful piece dwells, it is essential to linger with *Pacotille* because it is listed as a ‘Rental’, neither already owned nor for sale. This work, and one other in the exhibition, break with the asset-driven circuitry of slavery, and the contemporary artworld in particular, by a unique form of contract that Rowland has been developing. It is crucial to understand it in the context of this work, and the opacities that it crystallises with such exquisite precision (qualities evidently missed by some professional white art critics). Whoever ‘acquires’ this work will have to negotiate a rental price for these obsolete *pacotille* that reflects their ‘value’ (whatever the price Rowland may have paid to obtain them), one of the ways that Rowland’s work ‘actually bores into the legal infrastructure of property’, as Marina

⁶ Hartman, op cit, p 207

⁷ Ibid, p 208

⁸ Ibid, p 205

⁹ Ibid, p 204

¹⁰ See M NourbeSe Philip’s *Zong!* (Wesleyan University Press 2011/Silver Press 2020) for the most hauntingly exact rendering of the story of that ship and its human ‘cargo’, treated as insurable goods and thus expendable by discarding at sea along the Middle Passage

¹¹ Williams, op cit, p 204

¹² Cameron Rowland, ‘3 & 4 Will. IV c. 73’, unpaginated pamphlet, op cit

Vishmidt put it in her excellent review in *Artforum*.¹³ As we will see in relation to previously exhibited products of the carceral system, Rowland's notion of rental value in this instance relocates the work amongst a fascinating set of radical considerations.

Rowland is far from being the first visual artist to wrestle with the property value of their work within renewing systems of production, exhibition and exchange. I would point to Michael Asher, and specifically to his contribution to 'The Museum as Muse' exhibition at New York's MoMA in 1999 which published the Museum's entire de-accession programme of 361 works. Also to Hans Haacke, and in particular his foregrounding of the financial structures, personnel and systems at work at the Guggenheim, as well as Walid Raad's treating of the museological institution in all its guises, personifications and systemic networks, including its coming-into-being as integral to or continuous with the work exhibited.¹⁴ Haacke and Raad are fellow core members of the Gulf Labour Artists Coalition, who have been holding the Guggenheim to account for exploiting south Asian migrants to construct a spectacle seven times the size of its Manhattan base on Saadiyat Island, Abu Dhabi, under conditions of forced labour. At the same time, the Guggenheim and the Louvre have been banking hundreds of millions of dollars for brand rental alone, on top of even more for loans and expertise. Brand rental represents one hundred per cent profit. I have myself often argued that it is no longer tenable for an artist to place a 'radical' artwork within these spaces or systems 'naively' and retain any creative or intellectual credibility.¹⁵

Asher and Haacke also pioneered variations on the use of Seth Siegelaub's artist's contract of 1971 to constrain art market norms of exchange and distribution.¹⁶ Rowland recast these efforts significantly after developing his own contract in 2013, 'motivated by his reading of Cheryl I Harris's *Whiteness as Property*' (1993) with her focus on "“propertized” human life’.¹⁷

¹³ Marina Vishmidt, 'Cameron Rowland, ICA – Institute of Contemporary Arts, London', *Artforum*, April 2020 <https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/202004/cameron-rowland-82464>

¹⁴ Of multiple iterations of this work, the pamphlet accompanying *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow*, Raad's exhibition and walkabout at MoMA in 2015, edited and part-written by Eva Respini, is probably the fullest; https://assets.moma.org/d/pdfs/W1siZiZlsljwMTGvMDYvMTMvMnJrM3o0MGFzaF9Nb01BX1dhbGlkUmFhZm9QUkVWSUVXLnBkZiJdXQ/MoMA_WalidRaad_PREVIEW.pdf?sha=bee6f4dec2b2dd3

¹⁵ See, for example, Guy Mannes-Abbott, 'On Activating the Politics of Art in an Age of Globalised Systems', *Art Review*, May 2016, pp 86–90: 'Making art about a political event of identification, sitting back and watching it embody the politics claimed for it in a gallery, institution of global biennial alone is increasingly fatuous. To place "radical" objects or supposed "political" signs in white cubes, literally or otherwise, is to obey expectations: to be predictable... It is no longer possible, even if it were acceptable, to separate the creativity on display from the organisational infrastructure that hosts the artwork.'

¹⁶ Seth Siegelaub and Robert Projansky, 'Siegelaub / The Artist's Reserved Rights Transfer And Sale Agreement' <https://primaryinformation.org/product/siegelaub-the-artists-reserved-rights-transfer-and-sale-agreement/>

¹⁷ Eric Golo Stone, 'Legal Implications: Cameron Rowland's Rental Contract', *October* 164, Spring 2018, pp 89–112; see Cheryl I Harris, 'Whiteness as Property', *Harvard Law Review*, June 1993, Vol 106, No 8, pp 1710–1791: 'Slavery was distinguished from other forms of labor servitude by its permanency and the total commodification attendant to the status of the slave. Slavery as a legal institution treated slaves as property that could be transferred, assigned, inherited, or posted as collateral... use of Africans as a stand-in for actual currency highlights the degree to which slavery "propertized" human life' (p 1720)

Shortly afterwards, he agreed representation with the Essex Street gallery in New York and held a first solo show there entitled 'Bait, Inc' (2014). Works that made up that exhibition were available to buy conventionally as well as limited to rental contracts. Eric Golo Stone's essay for *October* focused exhaustively on these contracts, detailing their development through Rowland's Artists Space show in 2016, and the subsequent process by which MoMA acquired most of the works in an 'unprecedented'¹⁸ arrangement that included rental contracts with a mutual renewal clause.

The import of this lies in Rowland's approach to what integral values of which works he wishes to control or constrain in this way. The principle works in '91020000' were made by prison inmates paid between \$0.10 to \$1.14 an hour to manufacture government issue furniture for a New York state-owned company called Corcraft.¹⁹ 'Corcraft items can be sold only to New York State governmental entities and registered nonprofits',²⁰ the latter of which includes Artists Space. These works included 'four oak benches built at Greenhaven Correctional Facility and used in New York State courtrooms; a steel-and-laminated-particleboard desk built at Attica Correctional Facility and used in New York State government offices',²¹ man-hole extenders and wildfire suits. MoMA acquired five rental-at-cost works which embody the 'interrelated property histories of slavery, convict leasing, debt servitude, and the contemporary prison industry',²² further locked-in through that additional 'at-cost' clause. This 'pegs the price of the rental period to the total cost of the products constituting the artwork',²³ costs that reflect their production using forced labour.

Pacotille, then. Does it enrich this pretty, poetic, seemingly archival work to know these things about its original, ongoing value, or Rowland's refusal of it? Doesn't this condensing of its opacities restore the hidden, denied, unrepaired life it contains or replaced, and thus reflect the reality of ongoing patterns of slavery in the US, in particular, as well as other beneficiary countries and related colonial legacies? How does it feel to picture a day when such a rental contract would lose its highly purposive edge? What will it require of us all to attain that stage in human or post-Imperial existence as quickly as possible? The work is asking 'you', certainly me, just how indirectly one thinks one directly benefits from this systemically unrecognised history.

¹⁸ Eric Golo Stone, op cit, p 90

¹⁹ '91020000 is the customer number assigned to Artists Space upon registering with Corcraft, the market name for the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, Division of Industries. Corcraft's mission is "to employ inmates in real work situations producing quality goods and services at competitive prices, delivered on time as required by the State of New York and its subsidiaries at no cost to the taxpayer." By law, Corcraft can only sell to government agencies (including other states) at the state and local levels, schools and universities, courts and police departments, and certain nonprofit organizations.' Cameron Rowland, footnote in the booklet that was part of '91020000', 2016, p 4

²⁰ Ibid, p 100

²¹ Ibid, p 100

²² Ibid, p 102

²³ Ibid, p 102

The ICA remains closed at the time of writing, but will re-open with an extension of this show and the works assembled, with the *pacotilles* and Rowland's text in the lower galleries; the two-Guinea gold coin, originating in the seventeenth century to finance James II's independence from Parliament and which established Britain's gold standard system; the kind of mahogany writer's desk on which slave and mortgage contracts were signed; the rental agreement for a mooring on the site of Rathbone's factory in Liverpool South Docks that supplied timber to build slaving ships, alongside Negro Row where slaves were auctioned;²⁴ and even the searchlights for US patrol cars, require the catalysing presence of you or I to activate fully their tangible and intangible qualities. The searchlights seem the weakest element here, until you recognise the indelible association with that big gold coin, and the mahogany wood used by manufacturers Gillows of Lancaster since the mid-eighteenth century and which was felled and milled by slaves in British plantations in Jamaica, Barbados and Honduras.

Speaking of mahogany, you can feel the warmth of it on the handrail as you climb to the Upper Galleries, which are also at grade with the 'rear' entrance to the building on Carlton Terrace itself. Those two large, light-filled rooms wear a similar sparseness as you pass through curiously angled doors to meet a wall of framed documentation; and then in the front gallery a set of objects and tools of the carceral state, including a wall-mounted electronic monitoring device of startling banality used for probation, parole and detention; and a probation order marking the fact that in 2016 there were some four million people on probation in the US, most of whom were paying for their own supervision. Finally, there are cattle brands hanging ominously from the wall – another rental called *Society* (2020). The Barbadian planter, whose books form the Codrington Library at Oxford University, died in 1710 after leaving his plantations to the Church of England. Rowland remarks on the etymological merging of cattle and chattel, before revealing that the Codrington plantations branded their slaves with the word 'society'.

These elements do their quietly disturbing work in the overall assemblage, but also remind of an earlier work, although not part of this exhibition, called *Disgorgement* (2016) – another framed legal document forming the Reparations Purpose Trust, with ninety shares in Aetna Inc, a company that issued slave insurance policies that will remain in place until the US government introduces reparations for slavery – which is ongoing instead in the subsequent regimes of Black oppression that were crystallised so powerfully in the lynching of George Floyd on 25 May 2020. *Disgorgement* was part of '91020000' at Artists Space and is on extended loan to MoMA, neither for sale nor rental, another of Rowland's tricks.

²⁴ 'Rathbone and Sons supplied timber for slave ship builders in Liverpool until at least 1783. These ships carried enslaved black people who were sold in the West Indies and in British North America. Ships built in Liverpool also carried the slaves who were sold on at the Liverpool South Docks ... the company continues to operate as the investment and wealth management firm Rathbone Brothers Plc.' Cameron Rowland, '3 & 4 Will. IV c. 73', unpaginated pamphlet, op cit

I am reminded further of a text piece from Rowland's 'D37' exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2018–2019) that contextualised the ways in which the slave, 'as both person and property ... functioned as a source of labor, chattel, and reproduction for the master as well as the greater economy'.²⁵ Rowland continues: 'Slave owners were taxed for each slave they owned. Every state which allowed slavery taxed the slaves' and financed development across the country. 'In 1860, slaves comprised 20% of all American wealth, including real estate'²⁶ – to once more convey the scale of it.



Cameron Rowland, *Society*, 2020, cattle brands, 90 × 13 × 11 cm (35 3/8 × 5 1/8 × 4 3/8 inches), rental

Christopher Codrington was a Barbadian planter whose book collection formed the Codrington Library at Oxford. Codrington died in 1710, leaving his three plantations in Barbados to the Church of England. The Codrington plantations were operated by the Church to fund the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. Enslaved people on the Codrington plantations were branded with the word 'society'.

The word chattel was derived from 'cattle' as the property relation of livestock was expanded to refer to all moveable property.

²⁵ See Cameron Rowland, 'D 37', *October* 167, Winter 2019, pp 110–147, p 111

²⁶ *Ibid*, p 112

Depreciation (2018), another of Rowland's works, captured these elements in a restrictive covenant covering one acre of land on Edisto Island, South Carolina, owned by the artist's non-profit company '8060 Maxie Road, Inc', which registered the value of that property at \$0. This acre was part of land on Edisto Island – and other coastal territory – granted to slaves freed in 1865 after fighting with General Sherman against the Confederacy during the American Civil War. Ten thousand of the forty thousand people who took up this offer chose to develop land on Edisto Island, but a year later President Andrew Johnson effectively rescinded reparations and the Maxie plantation land was repossessed by its former Confederate owners.

Rather than simply redistributing 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', Rowland writes.²⁷ The regime really refers to the practice of capital abstraction, especially in the form of mortgaging, which used slaves as collateral because they were deemed property across the range referred to above, plus 'services' in the weaselling words of '3 & 4 Will. IV c. 73'.²⁸ The beneficiaries of those mortgages were banks such as Barclays and Barings that formed in profusion in the late eighteenth century, contaminating the taxes they paid directly, and through their workforces, to the British state. There go five thousand miles in one sentence.

The latest in this series of Rowland's reparative disruptions is *Encumbrance* (2020), which is also the most precisely targeted, concentrating all of the above in one exacting piece in a location entangled with the British monarchy and state. Rowland writes: 'Slaves simultaneously functioned as collateral for the debts of their masters, while labouring intergenerationally under the debt of the master. The taxation of plantation products imported to Britain, as well as the taxation of interest paid to plantation lenders, provided revenue for Parliament and income for the monarch.'²⁹ By 1860, plantations were mortgaged to the hilt and therefore enriching the British state. An encumbrance is a term from that signifying economy, referring to a limit or restriction on the mortgage and exchange value of a property. I read that wall of documents in the ICA, including the ICA Director's witnessed signature on the mortgage encumbrance dated 16 January 2020, with fierce pleasure before turning to look again at the tall mahogany doors left peculiarly ajar, revealing the tiled foyer and exterior double doors leading out onto Carlton Terrace itself. The legal restriction represented here has been placed on these mahogany doors and the handrails that slice through a terrace built by George IV between 1827 and 1832 'as a series of elite rental properties to generate revenue for the Crown'.³⁰

²⁷ Ibid, p 141

²⁸ See Rowland, '3 & 4 Will. IV c. 73', unpaginated pamphlet, op cit

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Ibid



Encumbrance, 2020, mortgage; mahogany double doors: 12 Carlton House Terrace, ground floor, front entrance

Encumbrance, 2020, mortgage; mahogany: 12 Carlton House Terrace, ground floor, reception to gallery

Encumbrance, 2020, mortgage; mahogany door: 12 Carlton House Terrace, ground floor, reception to hallway

Encumbrance, 2020, mortgage; mahogany door: 12 Carlton House Terrace, ground floor, hallway to gallery

Encumbrance, 2020, mortgage; mahogany handrail: 12 Carlton House Terrace, stairwell, ground floor to first floor

The property relation of the enslaved included and exceeded that of chattel and real estate. Plantation mortgages exemplify the ways in which the value of people who were enslaved, the land they were forced to labour on, and the houses they were forced to maintain were mutually constitutive. Richard Pares writes that '[mortgages] became commoner and commoner until, by 1800, almost every large plantation debt was a mortgage debt'. Slaves simultaneously functioned as collateral for the debts of their masters, while labouring intergenerationally under the debt of the master. The taxation of plantation products imported to Britain, as well as the taxation of interest paid to plantation lenders, provided revenue for Parliament and income for the monarch.

Mahogany became a valuable British import in the 18th century. It was used for a wide variety of architectural applications and furniture, characterising Georgian and Regency styles. The timbers were felled and milled by slaves in Jamaica, Barbados and Honduras, among other British colonies. It is one of the few commodities of the triangular trade that continues to generate value for those who currently own it.

After taking the throne in 1820, George IV dismantled his residence, Carlton House, and the house of his parents, Buckingham House, combining elements from each to create Buckingham Palace. He built Carlton House Terrace between 1827 and 1832 on the former site of Carlton House as a series of elite rental properties to generate revenue for the Crown. All addresses at Carlton House Terrace are still owned by the Crown Estate, manager of land owned by the Crown since 1760.

12 Carlton House Terrace is leased to the Institute of Contemporary Arts. The building includes four mahogany doors and one mahogany handrail. These five mahogany elements were mortgaged by the Institute of Contemporary Arts to Encumbrance Inc. on January 16th, 2020 for £1000 each. These loans will not be repaid by the ICA. As security for these outstanding debts, Encumbrance Inc. will retain a security interest in these mahogany elements. This interest will constitute an encumbrance on the future transaction of 12 Carlton House Terrace. An encumbrance is a right or interest in real property that does not prohibit its exchange but diminishes its value. The encumbrance will remain on 12 Carlton House Terrace as long as the mahogany elements are part of the building. As reparation, this encumbrance seeks to limit the property's continued accumulation of value for the Crown Estate. The Crown Estate provides 75% of its revenue to the Treasury and 25% directly to the monarch.



Cameron Rowland, *Encumbrance*, 2020, mortgage; mahogany double doors: 12 Carlton House Terrace, ground floor, front entrance

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A number of things are going on in this work. Firstly, let me deal with the infantile notion that documents are troublingly inadequate as artworks. It is a common complaint made against ‘political’ art – unlike all, what, *non*-political art? It presumes on the artistic legibility of all other objects presented as such – from carved nude bodies, to floral paintings or illuminated manuscripts and the twentieth century’s increasingly conceptual and time-based, post-material canon. Secondly, there is the mahogany built into the structure of Carlton Terrace, imported from colonies in and around the Caribbean after being worked by slaves. Mahogany Sheds proliferated in the West India Docks on the Isle of Dogs, beginning in 1805–1806 at Import Dock opposite the site of New Billingsgate Market. These and other timber sheds designed by the dockland architect, John Rennie, stood until the 1980s, while immediately to their east, on cobbled Coldharbour, a ‘sinuous mahogany handrail’³¹ and other fixtures remain in listed seventeenth century properties. The mahogany they share is ‘one of very few commodities of the triangular trade that continues to generate value for those who currently own it’.³² Thirdly, having placed an encumbrance on mahogany elements of the ICA’s building, Rowland’s Encumbrance Inc retains an interest in them which ‘does not prohibit its exchange but diminishes its value’, he writes.³³ The intention is to limit the ongoing accrual of value for the Crown Estate from these slave-generated products, while – and this is the final, killing detail – Crown Estate revenues no longer go exclusively to the monarch, but in fact 75 percent of them go to the British Treasury. The work achieves a small, perhaps gestural no doubt, but actual reparation, which it has forced from the British state, disrupting conceits about distance in space and time. Five thousand miles becomes less than five metres, the dimensions of those cells in which young Black men in Britain have been killed while in police custody for decades. The temporality and tense is right now, the present continuous.

‘3 & 4 Will. IV c. 73’ deserves so much more than wilful bewilderment from cocky white art critics with an obsolete worldview. Rowland’s work is exceptionally generative because it disturbs continuities that run through all of our lives. I returned past the towering statue of a later generation of Duke of York to James I’s brother who governed the Royal African Company through his own reign as James II, to a beloved library replete with mahogany and kitted out with shelving adapted from an ocean-going ship, and I wondered about it again. As a child, during my mother’s short second marriage, we holidayed with step-grandparents who had retired to a large Crown Estate property near Hestercombe in the Quantock Hills in Somerset. I have a mahogany trunk at home

³¹ ‘Southern Blackwall: Coldharbour’, in *Survey of London: Volumes 43 and 44, Poplar, Blackwall and Isle of Dogs*, Hermione Hobhouse, ed, London, 1994, pp 607–624; *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vols43-4/pp607-624> [accessed 30 July 2020]

³² Rowland, ‘3 & 4 Will. IV c. 73’, unpaginated pamphlet, op cit

³³ Ibid

that belonged to my actual grandmother, with her married address labelling its handsome interior: 1 Bath Island Road, Karachi. Rowland's work is sharply disruptive of these registers of comfort, memory and ease, relative or absolute (as it should be), while the scale of what it addresses remains unrecognised, shunned, laundered, and there is no remotely serious engagement with what reparation and the repair of worlds dehumanised and often condemned to obsolescence requires so urgently. The real value of property stolen in this way 'is maintained in the market and the state',³⁴ as Rowland writes here, which denotes the scale of change that is long overdue. How much more do you want from visual art?

Finally, Zarina Muhammad's excellent review of '3 & 4 Will. IV c. 73' for *The White Pube* ended with a note that I can't stop thinking about. It is a 'beautiful, thoughtful, painfully precise' exhibition, she wrote, that 'you go to alone, but not one that you process alone' because, she continues, 'it must be thought about collectively'.³⁵ For myself, it is the most inspiring show I have seen in London for years, linking, seeding and growing into all the physical and intellectual, desiring and imaginary dimensions of life post-2020.

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³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ 'What I mean to say is that this show is a beautiful, thoughtful, painfully precise rendering of all of this incredible thought around blackness and the after-image of slavery, what its conceptual psychic intellectual material economic social holistic legacy contains. All loaded into these points between object and text, aesthetic and thought.' Zarina Muhammad, 'Cameron Rowland, 3 & 4 Will. IV c. 73 @ the ICA', *The White Pube*, 9 February 2020 <https://www.thewhitepube.co.uk/cameronrowland-ica>