

Rethinking

Enigmatic conceptualist Cameron Rowland takes financial systems as a medium, exposing institutions that continue to profit from slavery.

by Zoé Samudzi

In the tower of Frankfurt's Museum für Moderne Kunst (MMK), where Cameron Rowland's newest exhibition, "Amt 45 i," is currently on display, there is an enormous cast-iron sugar kettle, five feet in diameter. In an essay accompanying the exhibition, Rowland writes that such kettles "operated through systematic torture," the persistence of which "kept the sugar mill in near-constant production," more than 16 hours a day. Quoting C.L.R.

James's landmark *Black Jacobins: Toussaint l'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938), Rowland writes that the unceasing whip served as "the incentive to work and the guardian of discipline" for the enslaved Black people forced to sustain colonial sugar production. Today, kettles like the one in Frankfurt circulate in antiques sales, and are a popular staple in lawn decoration in the American South, used as firepits or basins for water

fountains. Rowland acquired their kettle from a dealer who purchases them from former plantations and retrofits them for contemporary use.

Much can be lost in the oversimplification of brevity, but Rowland's agile artistic experiments with reparations can be summarized in one sentence from Saidiya Hartman's 1997 book, *Scenes of Subjection*: "Emancipation instituted indebtedness." Or, as Rowland

puts it in one of the lengthy, rigorously researched pamphlets that accompany their artworks, "abolition preserved the property established by slavery ... this property is maintained in the market and the state." Further, as with the sugar kettle, Rowland's approach to reparations involves interventions that illuminate how our entire economic system, from financial institutions to supply chains and markets – including antiques – continues to profit

Reparations



Cameron Rowland
Deputies, Maxwell Graham/Essex Street, New York, 2021
Installation view



Cameron Rowland
Ingenio, 2023
 19th-century sugar kettle, made in England, used in Louisiana
 72 7/8 × 72 7/8 × 26 3/4 inches (185.10 × 185.10 × 67.95 cm)

In Spanish the colonial sugar mill was called the *ingenio*, which meant “the engine.” The mill was a necessary component of the sugar plantation. Harvested cane had to be milled quickly to keep it from rotting. The mill operated 16–18 hours a day. Enslaved black people grew the cane, harvested the cane, crushed the cane, and boiled the juice. The mill consisted of a series of open kettles that were made in Europe, exported to the colonies, and used by slaves to reduce cane juice into syrup and raw crystals.

The ingenio operated through systematic torture. The regularity of punishment kept the sugar mill in near-constant production. “The slaves received the whip with more certainty and regularity than they received their food. It was the incentive to work and the guardian of discipline.” Sugar was made this way for 400 years.

¹ C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint l’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 12.

from the institution of Black chattel slavery; their artistic treatments of reparations imagine revolutionary market subversions, and model ways to undermine capitalism’s very notion of value, which is buttressed by the fetishization, commodification, and literal sale of Black life.

Despite Rowland’s prolific writing about their orchestrated interventions or the horrifying histories of slavery’s violence indexed by historical and contemporary quotidian objects, when it comes to Cameron Rowland the person, the artist keeps the details of their life deliberately opaque. They refuse to publicly share biographical information – just their year

and city of birth, and their alma mater: 1988, Philadelphia, Wesleyan University. There are few photographs of them online, and they were clear that I was not to quote our recorded conversation directly when I visited their Queens studio: everything that could and should be quoted about their work, they said, can be found in the pamphlets.

This is not because they are in any way unfriendly, standoffish, or even performing a persona of mystery. Rowland is chatty, vulnerable, and exceptionally knowledgeable – a dream conversationalist. But they stressed that their aversion to biography is a result of the art

world’s tendency to cast works by Black artists as necessarily and reductively a product of their background and biography. This veritable ghettoization leads non-Black audiences to look to Black art to learn about lived experiences that are unlike their own – Black work is too often presumed to be primarily an aesthetic translation of the course of the artist’s life rather than, for instance, an illustration of their conceptual and political interests. In this way, Black art is framed as representational or somehow autobiographical even when it is not. Anonymity allows Rowland’s primary concern – reparations – to take center stage.

At first glance, Rowland’s 2016 breakthrough exhibition at Artists Space in New York simply comprises readymade pieces, like a desk and a pair of work uniforms. But the show was titled “91020000” after the Artists Space’s customer account number with Corcraft, also known as the Division of Correctional Industries. Rowland purchased objects – such as oak courtroom benches, manhole leveler rings, and an office desk – from Corcraft, which operates inside the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, and conscripts incarcerated people to perform manufacturing labor. Corcraft claims on its website that their intention is to cultivate “skill development, work ethic, respect and responsibility” that inmates can use upon release. But the compensation those inmates receive is so staggeringly low – often less than \$1 per hour – that critics, including Rowland, have referred to and historicized it as modern-day slavery. In fact, the 13th Amendment’s abolition of slavery makes a notable exception for carceral punishment, clarifying that abolition is upheld “except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted.” The amendment ushered in an era of post-Emancipation labor practices

that included chain gangs and convict leasing – the provision of prison labor to private companies.

“91020000” coupled symbolic and material intervention: an integral part of the show was the creation of a trust, the Reparations Purpose Trust, for a 2016 piece called *Disgorgement*. The Reparations Purpose Trust purchased 90 shares of the Aetna insurance company, and will hold them until the United States Government pays financial reparations, either per the recommendations cited in research pertaining to Congressional Bill H.R. 40, which would create a commission to study reparation proposals, or some other arrangement.

Rowland took aim specifically at Aetna because, as they detail in their essay for the exhibition, the insurance company was one of many that sold insurance to slaveowners and continues to profit from interest accumulating on those policies today. Slave insurance became an especially crucial part of the labor market after the 1803 prohibition on importing new slaves. By then, the labor market had become so dependent on slave labor that slaveowners began leasing their slaves to business owners, and also sought insurance against loss, should their property die or be injured. Rowland found that “the profits incurred by these policies are still intact within Aetna.” Their essay goes on to describe how, in 2002, lawyer Deadria Farmer-Paellmann filed the first ever corporate reparations lawsuit seeking disgorgement – the repayment of dishonestly or unethically acquired funds – from 17 different slavery-profiteering financial institutions, including Aetna. She argued unsuccessfully that the companies should allocate these profits to the descendants of enslaved people such as herself.

Presented in the exhibition as a series of framed legal contracts on bright white paper, Rowland’s trust materializes as both art object and evidence of



Cameron Rowland
Disgorgement, 2016
 Reparations Purpose Trust, Aetna Shares

Aetna, amongst other insurance companies, issued slave insurance policies, which combined property and life insurance. These policies were taken out by slave masters on the lives of slaves, and provided partial payments for damage to the slave and full payment for the death of the slave. Death or damage inflicted by the master could not be claimed. The profits incurred by these policies are still intact within Aetna.

In 1989 Congressman John Conyers of Michigan first introduced Congressional Bill H.R. 40, which would “Establish the Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African Americans to examine slavery and discrimination in the colonies and the United States from 1619 to the present and recommend appropriate remedies.” The bill would convene a research commission, that would, among other responsibilities, make a recommendation as to whether a formal apology for slavery is owed, whether reparations are owed, what form reparations would then take and who would receive them. The bill has been reintroduced to every session of Congress since 1989. This bill acquired 48 cosponsors in 1999–2000. As of 2016 it has no cosponsors.

In 2000 the state of California passed the bill SB 2199, which required all insurance companies conducting business in the state of California to publish documentation of slave insurance policies that they or their parent companies had issued previously. In 2002 a lawyer named Deadria Farmer-Paellmann filed the first corporate reparations class-action lawsuit seeking disgorgement from 17 contemporary financial institutions including Aetna, Inc., which had profited from slavery. Farmer-Paellmann pursued property law claims on the basis that these institutions had been enriched unjustly by slaves who were neither compensated nor agreed to be uncompensated. Farmer-Paellmann called for these profits and gains to be disgorged from these institutions to descendants of slaves.

The Reparations Purpose Trust forms a conditionality between the time of deferral and continued corporate growth. The general purpose of this trust is “to acquire and administer shares in Aetna, Inc. and to hold such shares until the effective date of any official action by any branch of the United States government to make financial reparations for slavery, including but not limited to the enactment and subsequent adoption of any recommendations pursuant to H.R. 40—Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act.” As a purpose trust registered in the state of Delaware this trust can last indefinitely and has no named beneficiaries.

The initial holdings of Reparations Purpose Trust consists of 90 Aetna shares. In the event that federal financial reparations are paid, the trust will terminate and its shares will be liquidated and granted to the federal agency charged with distributions as a corporate addendum to these payments. The grantor of the Reparations Purpose Trust is Artists Space, its trustee is Michael M. Gordon, and its enforcer is Cameron Rowland. The Reparations Purpose Trust gains tax-exemption from its grantor’s nonprofit status.

MoMA has agreed to continue the trust if Artists Space is no longer able to serve as the grantor.

legal and financial transactions that preserve profits from the institution of slavery. And their treatment of carefully purchased objects is a thoughtful interpretation of Marcel Duchamp’s readymade: the reorientation of a quotidian item into a sculptural, historical index of anti-Blackness. Operating simultaneously in the registers of the material and the symbolic, Rowland’s reparative gesture intervenes in the continued generation of profits from slavery.

Disgorgement, notably, engages both financial and affective value – reparations must exist in multiple registers beyond mathematical calculations of compensatory obligation. Rowland noted to me that trusts are a primary means of transferring intergenerational



wealth, and a purpose trust, specifically, is a noncharitable trust the wealthy often use to stow money away in offshore accounts. Through this trust, we can more easily see the *longue durée* of profiteering in the ongoing afterlife of slavery: the trust's exponential growth since 2016 mirrors and exposes corporations' ability to continue deriving profits from an institution nearly 160 years after its purported abolition. That the government has yet to act on reparations lends an incompleteness to Rowland's gesture: the trust, with Rowland as the enforcer, becomes a material representation of the United States' anti-Black political imaginary. Its continued existence is predicated on a restitution for slavery deferred and foreclosed.

Rowland's next major intervention, *Depreciation* (2018), sought to strip a land asset of its value to prevent further profiteering. The piece engages General William T. Sherman's 1865 promise of "forty acres and

a mule" to former slaves that has since become a prototype with which subsequent reparations efforts have to contend. While many Americans believe the promise was never fulfilled, Rowland told me that, in a sense, the first part did come to fruition. Sherman's wartime Special Field Order No. 15 issued instructions to settle former slaves displaced by the Union campaign on the Sea Islands, a chain of islands off the coast of South Carolina and Georgia. There, tens of thousands of newly freed Black people were resettled on some 435,000 acres. But, the artist clarified, the Order did not specify whether this exchange of land was meant to be permanent. It was exchanged on the basis of a possessory title, which involves the transfer of property in an instance where the owner is unable to provide documentary evidence of true ownership; therefore, such titles could be rescinded. Indeed, after Abraham Lincoln's assassination, President Andrew Johnson promptly revoked the Order,

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 following his army by the time it arrived in Savannah.

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 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."

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. 10,000 of these former slaves were settled on Edisto Island, South Carolina.

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." The Freedmen's Bureau agents became primary proponents of labor contracts inducing former slaves into the sharecropping system.

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."

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.

¹ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877*, updated ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1988; New York: HarperCollins, 2014), 71.

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

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.

Rowland refuses to allow their work to become the property of an institution.

returning the land to its previous planter owners.

It was on one of these Sea Islands that Rowland's next legal venture proceeded. In 1866, the previous owners of Maxcy Place, a plantation on Edisto Island, repossessed it, and while there were freed Black people living and working there, neither those Black people's names nor the contractual conditions of their labor have been found. Rowland made a market rate purchase of a single acre of land, and, through the nonprofit 8060 Maxie Road, Inc., imposed a restrictive covenant that legally prevents development and use of the land; this effectively deprives the land of the value derived from forced labor by *excising* it from the antagonistic real estate market enforcing this anti-Black property relation. In so doing, they stripped the land of its monetary value: it was officially appraised at \$0 after being rendered legally unusable. This financial condition persists as long as does the nonprofit's restrictions; as does Rowland's purpose trust, the covenant endures indefinitely.

Depreciation is on extended loan to the Dia Art Foundation, which will steward the inaccessible land as it does other iconic works of Land art, from Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* to Walter De Maria's *Lightning Field*. Dia does not own the piece,

as Rowland refuses to allow it to become the property of an institution. Currently, documents related to the covenant are on display at Dia's exhibition space in New York. Meanwhile, *Disgorgement* is on extended loan to the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and the museum has agreed to serve as grantor in the event Artists Space, a smaller nonprofit, is unable to continue.

Over time, Rowland's targets have grown increasingly ambitious: in a show coinciding with the global upsurge of the ongoing Covid pandemic, they trained their attention on the British Crown. Where *Depreciation* engages undeveloped land, Rowland's exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) London, considers the global market circulation of valuable products whose raw material was a result of forced labor. The show's title, "3 & 4 Will. IV c. 73," references the official parliamentary citation of the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act, which both criminalized the purchase and ownership of slaves throughout much of the British Empire, and compensated slaveowners – not formerly enslaved people – for their loss of property and inevitable profit. Rowland notes in their exhibition essay that the government's "taxation of plantation products imported to

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

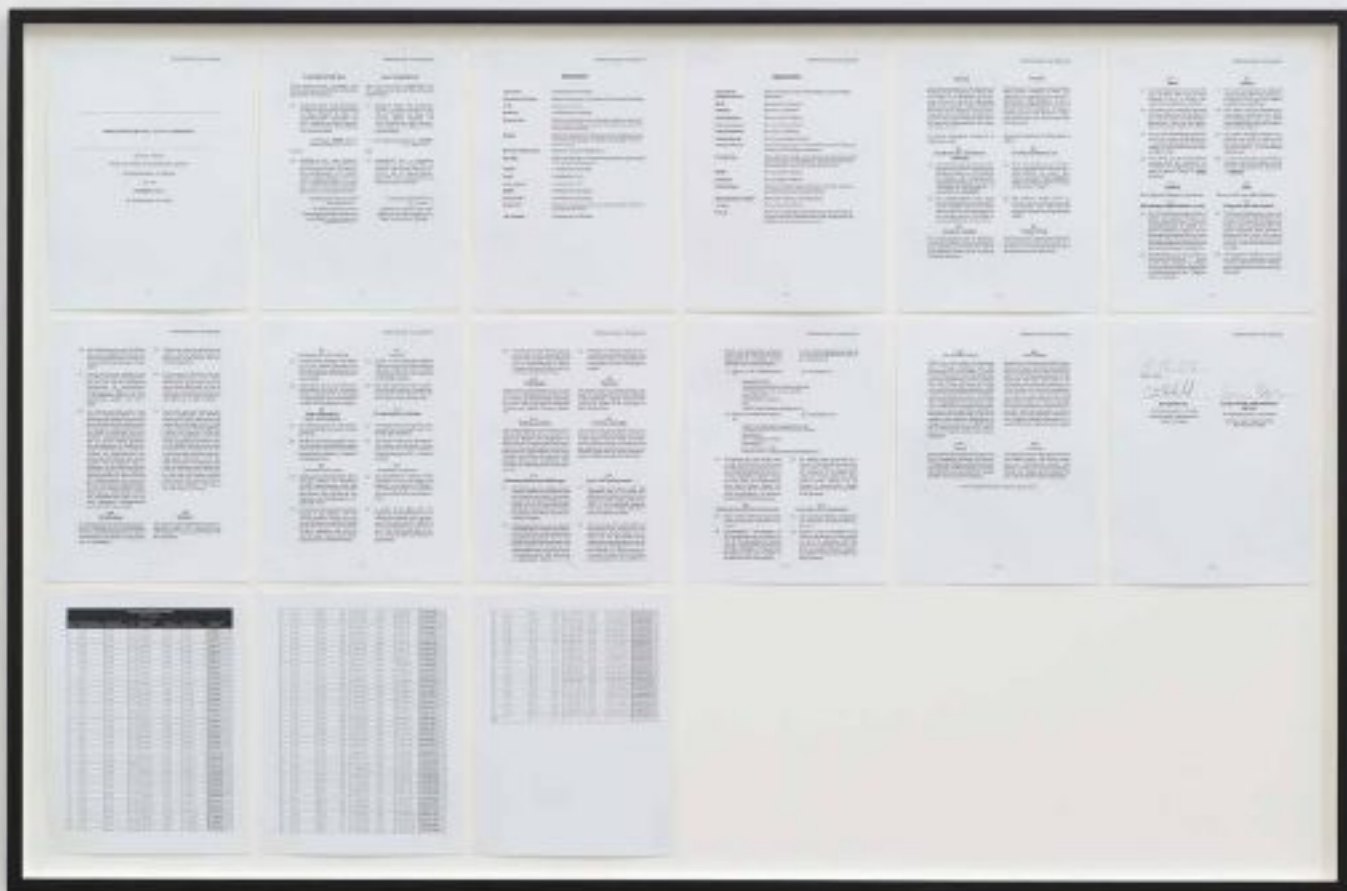
The property relation of the enslaved included and exceeded that of chattel and real estate. Plantation mortgages exemplify the ways in which the value of people who were enslaved, the land they were forced to labor on, and the houses they were forced to maintain were mutually constitutive. Richard Pares 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 laboring 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, characterizing 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.





Britain, as well as the taxation of interest paid to plantation lenders, provided revenue for Parliament and income for the monarch.”

The Crown Estate still owns 12 Carlton House Terrace, the address of the property leased to the ICA. Rowland’s show addresses the building’s history, and illustrates the institution’s continuing profit from slavery, pointing specifically to the mahogany doors and handrails added by King George IV in the 19th century. In our studio visit, they specifically described how few people realize that enslaved people in British colonies in the Caribbean and Central America cultivated much of the mahogany

Cameron Rowland
Bankrott, 2023
Indefinite debt

Reparations were paid to slave owners. Compensated emancipation allowed slave owners to retain the value they had assigned to the lives of slaves in addition to the profits they had extracted from slaves’ labor. Compensated emancipation in Haiti, Brazil, Cuba, Washington D.C., the British colonies, the Danish colonies, the Dutch colonies, and German East Africa paid slave owners for their loss of enslaved property. Slave owners and their financiers were provided monetary compensation, high-interest debt obligations, and indentured servitude as repayment.

British compensation payments fueled the growth of British financial institutions that held outstanding plantation mortgages including Barclays, Lloyds Bank, and the Royal Bank of Scotland. The Haitian compensation debt, originally paid by formerly enslaved people to French slave owners, has been bought and sold by numerous banks including Crédit Industriel et Commercial, Crédit du Nord, Citibank, and ODDO BHF. These compensation payments continue to grow within European banks alongside the profits of the slave economy. The value of slave life, labor, and reproductive capacity remains integral to European financial institutions, corporations, universities, museums, and governments.

Frankfurt am Main is the monetary center of the eurozone and houses offices of nearly every major European financial firm. The concentration of financial firms in Frankfurt am Main has enriched the city since the 17th century.

A loan of 20,000 euros was issued to the Museum MMK für Moderne Kunst from Bankrott Inc., a company created for the purpose of holding an indefinite debt. Because it is a demand loan, no payments can be made until the lender demands repayment. Bankrott Inc. will never demand repayment. The debt will accrue interest indefinitely. It will increase at a rate of 1.8 percent each year, the highest rate legally allowable. The Museum MMK für Moderne Kunst is a city government department, Amt 45 i. For this reason this debt is owed by the city of Frankfurt am Main.

As reparation, this debt is a restriction on the continued accumulation derived from slavery. As a negation of value, it does not seek to redistribute the wealth derived from slave life but seeks to burden its inheritors.

used in Regency architecture. They attributed this to the fact that so much scholarship about Caribbean slavery has been deliberately suppressed by British academia, including the watershed 1944 text *Capitalism and Slavery* by Trinidadian and Tobagonian historian Eric Williams. It was only in 1964 that the book found a publisher in the United Kingdom.

Drawing attention to the

transactions of 12 Carlton House Terrace.” The name *Encumbrance* refers to a mortgage on assets that does not prevent the property from being exchanged but depreciates its value. Their essay further explains that “plantation mortgages exemplify the ways in which the value of people who were enslaved, the land they were forced to labor on, and the houses they were forced to maintain were

because the recognition of colonial anti-Blackness these days can be perceived as displacing the centrality of the Holocaust, which currently exists within a zero-sum landscape of public memory.

Their show “Amt 45 i” materially implicates German institutions in the slave trade, just as their prior shows did British and American ones. In our conversation, they noted that in the 19th century, Germany

Bankrott Inc., through which they issued a €20,000 loan (about US\$22,000) to the MMK. It is a demand loan, one with no fixed duration or repayment schedule, and it can be recalled by the lender at any time. Rowland explained that, as an artist, they have no incentive to call the loan, since continuously accumulating debt is the foundation of the piece’s existence. The loan is currently accruing indefinite interest at 18 percent.

This ever-increasing debt, were it ever to be called, is owed to Bankrott Inc. by the city of Frankfurt itself, since MMK is a government department: the titular “Amt 45 i.” In 2043 the value of the loan will be an estimated €647,827.64; by 2063, it will have ballooned to €17,783,078.20; and by 2122, it will approximate the city’s entire operating budget, growing to €311,591,692,053.27. *Unpayable Debt*, as described by Brazilian scholar Denise Ferreira da Silva in her eponymous 2022 book, is “an obligation that one owns but is not one’s to pay.” Rowland writes that this intervention “does not seek to redistribute the wealth derived from slave life but seeks to burden its inheritors.” Though this particular unpayable debt is quantified and has a calculated projection, its astronomical value is analogous to the overwhelming grandness of the value of reparations owed.

Reparations and restitution have become buzzwords in art, and especially in museums, which are mired in debate about institutional ability and ethical responsibility to return stolen art objects to communities of origin. But Rowland’s reparative gestures refuse to be fixed in this framework. Rather than pretending that object restitution or even paying reparations can sufficiently right these deep moral and material wrongs, they confront the financial systems that continue to derive and reproduce profit, meaning, and value from racial slavery, plying that system’s very logic against itself. ●

Despite a deep intellectual commitment to the far-reaching financial dimensions of racial slavery, Rowland is delightfully irreverent.

atmospheric omnipresence of slavery’s afterlife, Rowland also targeted the financial holdings of the British Crown with *Encumbrance*, an artwork that seeks to disrupt – as another form of reparations – the slavery-derived accumulated worth of one of the world’s wealthiest political entities. They laughed as they described this process to me, recalling the refusal of British legal practitioners to undermine or even challenge the royal estate. Rowland established a company called Encumbrance, Inc., to which the ICA mortgaged five mahogany elements for £1,000 apiece. While Rowland will not collect payments on the mortgage loan to Encumbrance, Inc., the company retains security interest – i.e., a legal right to debtor’s property as collateral in the event that they default – and this interest will, as Rowland writes, “constitute an encumbrance on the future

mutually constitutive.” Rowland’s pamphlet notes that mahogany “is one of the few commodities of the triangular trade that continues to generate value for those who currently own it.” Though Britain’s self-congratulatory myth positions it as the first imperial power to abolish slavery, the British Crown’s staggering wealth continues to grow as a result of their colonial holdings and participation in transatlantic slavery.

Despite a deep intellectual commitment to the far-reaching financial dimensions of racial slavery, Rowland is delightfully irreverent. Their current show at Frankfurt’s Museum für Moderne Kunst (MMK) is among the most extraordinary ways in which they’ve conscripted an institution to participate in their experiments with reparations. They shared that bringing this slavery-centered political narrative to Germany, however, met with some difficulty

attempted to circumvent the cotton monopoly held by British colonies in the Caribbean. In an effort to enter the international market as a cotton exporter, Germany began an agricultural campaign in its German East Africa colony (present-day Burundi, Rwanda, and Tanzania) to force natives to grow cotton. Local communities rebelled in 1905, then war broke out, and up to 300,000 people died from a combination of drought-induced famine and a brutal German scorched-earth campaign. Slavery was never legally abolished in the colony.

The show’s primary intervention, titled *Bankrott*, German for “bankruptcy,” is an experiment in indefinite debt, designed to contrast with the colonial endeavor to extract and produce seemingly infinite wealth. In Frankfurt – financial center of both Germany and Europe – Rowland established