

# Flash Art Volumes

## Crisis Formalism

CAMERON ROWLAND

MICHAEL ABEL

KAI ALTHOFF

CARLO ANTON

ARCHITECTUR

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HUGO BAUSCH

BAYBERRY GR

FRANCESCO E

GRAY BRODER

BEN BROOME

LUIGI ALBERT

CLOCKS

CONVERSE AN

MICHELLE DEN

PHILLIP DENN

DAVID ESKEN/

FREI OTTO ÖK

MICHAELA FRI

CYPRIEN GAIL

NILE GREENBE

GROUP

MATTHEW KEN

REM KOOLHAA

ROBERT LEVIT

REESE LEWIS

ISIDORO MICH

MILLIØNS

MOS

JONATHAN OL

EDGAR RODRI

EWA ROZTOCK

PAUL RUPPERT

PRESTON SCC

MAHFUZ SULTAN

BRUNO TAUT

SIMONE VEIL BRIDGE

SURVIVAL ARCHITECTURE

### DEED OF EASEMENT

This Agreement made this 17<sup>th</sup> day of June, 2024, by DIA CENTER FOR THE ARTS, INC. a nonprofit corporation with offices at 535 West 22<sup>nd</sup> Street, New York, New York 10011, hereinafter referred to as "Grantor"; and PLOT, INC., a corporation having an address for notices at 34-31 82<sup>nd</sup> Street, Apt. 42, Jackson Heights, New York 11372, hereinafter referred to as "Grantee."

WHEREAS, Grantor owns two (2) adjoining parcels totaling 32.82 ± acres located in the City of Beacon, designated on the City of Beacon Tax Parcel ID 130200-5954-41-605699-00 (being 20.5 acres) obtained by Deed recorded in the Dutchess County Clerk's office in Liber 21999 of Deeds at Page 10481, and City of Beacon Tax Parcel ID 130200-5954-49-608543-00 (being 12.32 acres) obtained by Deed recorded in the Dutchess County Clerk's office in Liber 22002 at Page 02138, hereinafter referred to as "THE PROPERTY"; and

WHEREAS, Grantor operates an art institution on THE PROPERTY, which was owned by slave owners and slave traders from 1683 until the abolition of slavery in New York in 1827; and

WHEREAS, Grantee exists as part of a work that would permanently preserve a portion of THE PROPERTY, more particularly described in Schedule A, annexed hereto, being approximately 1.000 acres in size and hereinafter referred to as "THE PREMISES" and described in detail in Schedule A hereto ("PREMISES METES AND BOUNDS"), such premises to be designated as a burial ground to acknowledge slaves buried in unmarked burial grounds and to acknowledge the descendants of slaves killed by anti-black violence who have never been buried; and

WHEREAS, it is the intention of Grantor and Grantee that THE PREMISES will remain designated in perpetuity as set forth above. It refuses the paradigm of the "proper burial." As a collective plot, it is a point of connection to the historical life of the group and the plots of black negations. Like the provisioning ground, THE PREMISES, being the reserved burial ground and the ground of rebellion, will operate outside the bounds of surplus value.

WHEREAS, it being the purpose of Grantor and Grantee that this restriction in easement will degrade THE PREMISES' value, and that once designated for these purposes, THE PREMISES will never be developed in any way and no burials or interments will take place here; and

WHEREAS, Grantor acknowledges the importance of this purpose; and





# Race, Property, Rebellion



Words by **Cameron Rowland**  
**Hugo Bausch Belbachir**



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*They remained oblivious to the worlds within worlds that existed just beyond the edge of their awareness and yet were present in their very midst.*

– Cheryl Harris<sup>1</sup>

Building upon the experience of her grandmother, who worked in a company comprised exclusively of white employees, Cheryl Harris, in *Whiteness as Property*, confronts the systems that sustain life — understood as the recognition of this condition as such — alongside a set of conditions that enable access to material, public, and private privileges. In doing so, she engages with the intertwined concepts of race and property, affirming their relations in contingent systems that are inherently subordinated to our present. Starting from the historical expropriation of Native American lands, followed by the genocide of indigenous peoples and the complete and unconditional appropriation of Black bodies displaced from their homelands to the American colonies, Harris develops a semiotic association between the meanings and practices associated with notions and experiences of property as contingent to race and the valorization of whiteness as a form of assurance to property within a socially organized racial caste structure. In such systems, only Black subjects were subordinated to the condition of slavery, effectively rendered as possessed objects and so interdicted from any potential of *survival*. She writes: “Similarly, the conquest, removal, and extermination of Native American life and culture were ratified by conferring and acknowledging the property rights of whites in Native American land. Only white possession and occupation of land was validated and therefore privileged as a basis for property rights. The distinct forms of exploitation each contributed in varying ways to the construction of whiteness as property.”<sup>2</sup>

Although already embedded in existing social practices, between 1680 and 1682, the various Black Codes radically instituted the complete deprivation of rights for enslaved Black individuals; they were prohibited from traveling or moving independently, owning property, voting, assembling publicly, or possessing weapons; they had no right to education and were thereby deprived of any knowledge that would enable them to understand the condition to which they were subjected. No gatherings among enslaved people were permitted, thus denying them any circumstance of collective consciousness. Black enslaved individuals were rendered interchangeable, a “negro” equating to “money,”<sup>3</sup> and their identity conceived in opposition to the one of “whites” in its contingency with “free.” Harris, returning to the condition of her grandmother, continues: “Whiteness — the right to white identity as embraced by the law — is property if by ‘property’ one means all of a person’s legal rights.”<sup>4</sup>

“Properties” is the title of Cameron Rowland’s exhibition at DiaBeacon. “Properties,” here, is used in the plural form. The exhibition unfolds as follows: the first room, built as an entry vestibule, serves as the context for the distribution of the exhibition pamphlet, written by the artist. At a glance, this room is about one-fifth the size of the room that follows. The pamphlets are stacked in threes on a bench placed on a wall to the left of the viewer. The rest of the room is empty. The adjacent room is used to display four elements: an overturned pot placed to the right of the entrance, against the side wall, followed by the structure of a bed, its head facing away from the viewer, and positioned in the center of the right wall, adjacent to five scythes placed in the middle of the left wall. Slightly to the left of the center of the back wall — offset from the viewer’s path, while on the same trajectory suggested by the entrance to the exhibition from the left, through the vestibule — a series of documents are arranged one after the other in two rows, under glass and framed. This arrangement — moving from the first point to the last — encourages an experience of each element as introducing and following the next; they are interrelated, forming a *whole system*.

1 Cheryl Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement* (New Press, 1995), 276.

2 Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” 278.

Location	Date of Purchase	Seller	Buyer	Purchase Price	Description
3,400 acres, Catron County, NM	11/15/1976	B. Julian and Lucille J. Julian	Dia Art Foundation	\$187,000.00	Purchased for Walter De Maria's <i>The Lightning Field</i> .
Lot 8, Block 5, Quemado, NM	8/12/1977	Robert L. Carler	Dia Art Foundation	\$2,000.00	2-story commercial building 1,850 sq. ft.  Purchased as workshop for Walter De Maria's <i>The Lightning Field</i> . Later transitioned to <i>The Lightning Field</i> administrative office.
2 Kinichi Knoll, Coconino County, AZ	9/30/1977	Mary C. Malmgren, Rita C. Gannon, Helen A. McPherson, Robert L. Chambers	Dia Art Foundation	\$65,000.00	Purchased for James Turnell's <i>Roden Crater</i>
155 Mercer Street, New York, NY	7/25/1978	Pelizzi Foundation	Dia Art Foundation	Granted by Pelizzi Foundation	Former firehouse: 3 floors and basement 16,000 sq. ft.  Acquired for La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela's <i>Dream House</i> .
Lot 7, Block 5, Quemado, NM	9/19/1978	Encarnacion M. Chavez	Dia Art Foundation	\$3,600.00	2-story commercial building 1,850 sq. ft.  Purchased as workshop for Walter De Maria's <i>The Lightning Field</i> . Later transitioned to <i>The Lightning Field</i> administrative office.

Date of Sale	Seller	Buyer	Sale Price	Acreage	Land Identifier
Currently owned by Dia				3.400 acres	Catron County, NM T3N R12W (1,920 acres)  T3N R13W (1,280 acres)  T4N R12W (200 acres)
1/20/2015	Dia Art Foundation	Catron County Historical Society	Granted to Catron County Historical Society	0.04 acre	Catron County, NM Lot 8, Block 5 Parcel: 2093006061406
12/21/1984	Dia Art Foundation	Skystone Foundation	Granted to Skystone Foundation	640 acres	Cocooning County, NM T24N R11E Section 3, except all gas, oil, and mineral rights Parcel: 303-01-001-B
10/21/1996	Dia Art Foundation	Joyce Theater Foundation	\$1,440,000.00	0.11 acre	New York County, NY Section 2 Block 513, Lot 28
1/20/2015	Dia Art Foundation	Catron County Historical Society	Granted to Catron County Historical Society	0.04 acre	Catron County, NM Lot 7, Block 5 Parcel: 2093006061406

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WHEREAS, Grantor operates an art institution on THE PROPERTY, which was owned by slave owners and slave traders from 1683 until the abolition of slavery in New York in 1827; and

WHEREAS, Grantee exists as part of a work that would permanently preserve a portion of THE PROPERTY, more particularly described in Schedule A, annexed hereto, being approximately 1.000 acres in size and hereinafter referred to as "THE PREMISES" and described in detail in Schedule A hereto ("PREMISES METES AND BOUNDS"), such premises to be designated as a burial ground to acknowledge slaves buried in unmarked burial grounds and to acknowledge the descendants of slaves killed by anti-black violence who have never been buried; and

WHEREAS, it is the intention of Grantor and Grantee that THE PREMISES will remain designated in perpetuity as set forth above. It refuses the paradigm of the "proper burial." As a collective plot, it is a point of connection to the historical life of the group and the plots of black negations. Like the provisioning ground, THE PREMISES, being the reserved burial ground and the ground of rebellion, will operate outside the bounds of surplus value.

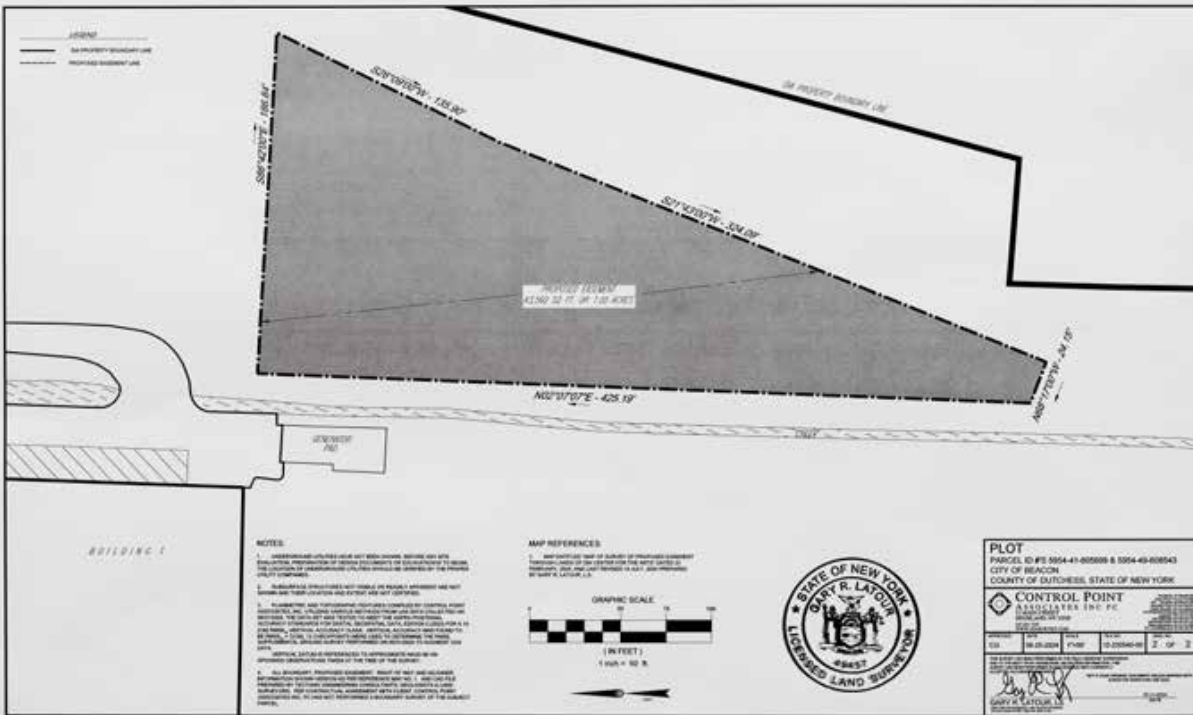
WHEREAS, it being the purpose of Grantor and Grantee that this restriction in easement will degrade THE PREMISES' value, and that once designated for these purposes, THE PREMISES will never be developed in any way and no burials or interments will take place here; and

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5



Cameron Rowland is an artist whose practice is concerned with examining the systems and methods through which institutions benefit from and perpetuate racial injustices. They employ a scope of elements — documents and objects, presented with a consciousness of their formal use and external to the artist's own longevity, and thus forming *territories* — conducive to the complexity of historical racial systems, using both suggestive and referential considerations. These concepts are central to Rowland's work, formally and conceptually engaging with systems and motifs of institutional critique to question not only the forms presented but also the spaces — equally *territories* — in which they exist. As such, "Properties" emerges from an understanding of the terrestrial condition implied on the very site of the Dia Foundation in upstate New York, a location built on land once owned by slave owners and traders from 1683 until the abolition of slavery in 1827. On this land, Black slaves were prohibited from being buried in cemeteries. This prohibition was a practice through which the degradation of Black bodies on the land of their enslavement was institutionalized. Rowland notes: "They were meant to make the degradation of blackness permanent. Black people were buried in unmarked slave plots and unregistered black burial grounds."<sup>5</sup> The seminal work of the exhibition, *Plot* (2024), is thus constituted by the demarcation of one hectare of land occupied by the Foundation and ceded for the protection of potential graves of enslaved black individuals who may have been buried there. This supposition — in the tradition of the artist's suggestive unveilings towards institutional degrees — structures the work by considering each plot of land as *potentially* containing the remains of former slaves. Visitors cannot directly access this specific land; however, they can understand it as a part of *every other* piece of land they traverse. No sign distinguishes the acre from other plots. It is forbidden to use, exploit, divide, or develop any future ambitions upon it; it is now land — thus, owned territory — for the enslaved whose bodies may rest there, and so *are* resting there.

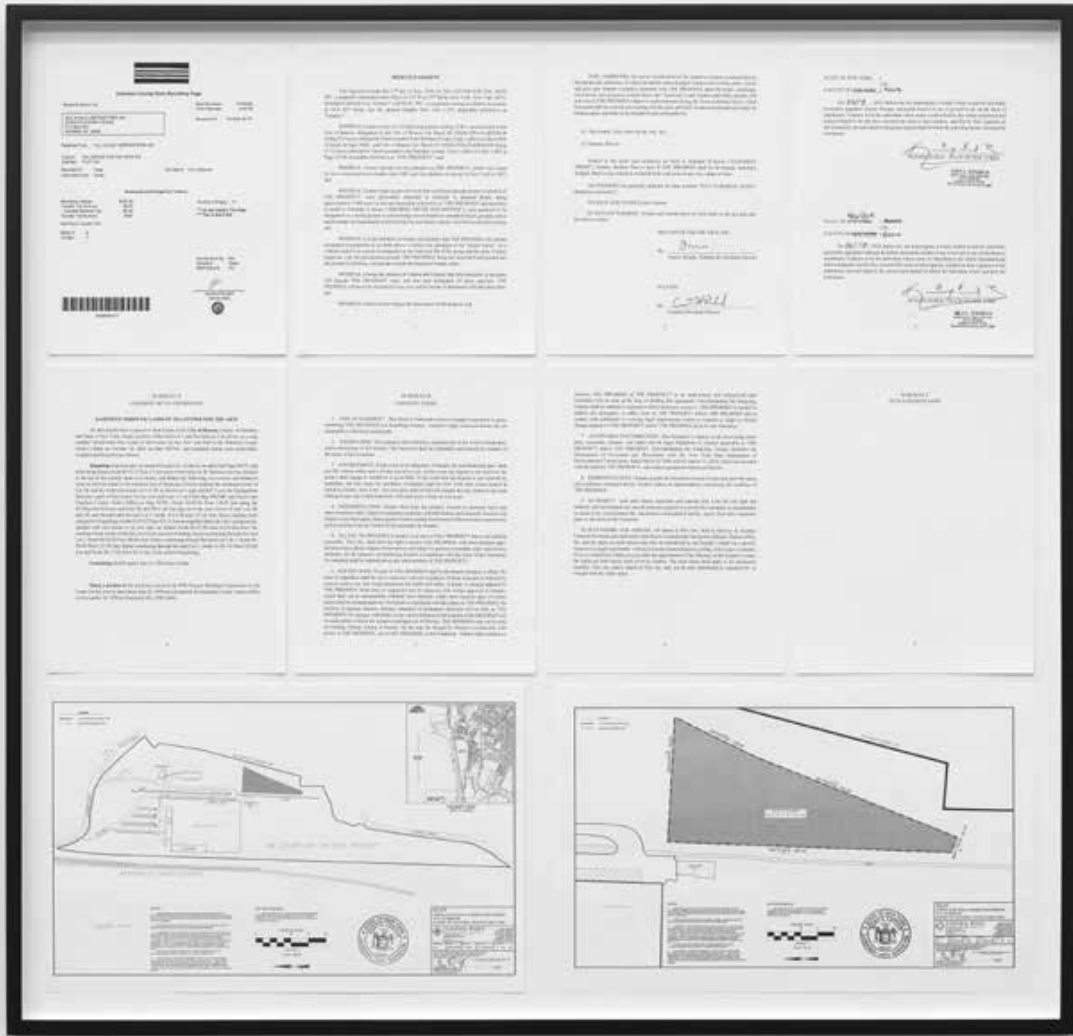
In the context of slavery in the United States, Black enslaved people were regarded as integral elements of the land, and thus property of their masters to a similar degree, reduced to the status of commodities. The land, as a historical prison complex controlled by white masters, saw the Black body as an object akin to the goods it once embodied — commodity and non-subject — perpetuating itself even after the abolition of slavery. This land, within the grounds of DiaBeacon, now retributively marked, signifies a reversal of the system through which the enslaved Black subject lived and died upon it without autonomy or self-determination, their value entirely dependent on their productivity as slaves. In enacting this reversal, Rowland, as an artist, establishes a plan of inversion, aimed at restoring what was once denied.

Concepts of counterproductivity within Black experiences are central to Rowland's work, which locates the collective Black consciousness around the potential embedded in each element of their forced condition as a tool for liberation. Collective refusal, here, and as a practice, is the result of this distinct collective consciousness involving the creation of systems that use every object within the awareness of the negative potential in their counter use. These objects (presented in the exhibition through the suggestion of their previous historical existence, and thus use) are no longer those of the masters, but those specifically tied to the condition of the enslaved. *Underproduction* (2024), a bucket placed upside down against the entrance wall, signifies this negation as a collective logic; the inverted pot blocking the sound emitted by the gathering of enslaved individuals — a collective act that was forbidden (enslaved people, being more numerous than their masters on the plantations, posed a threat if they became aware of their collective strength). Enslaved people were not permitted to leave the plantation, and they were reduced to the constant labor required of them on the land. Conjunctionally, several enslaved people used their scythes — used on the plantations for sharecropping — as tools of

3 Harris, 279.

4 Harris, 280.

5 Cameron Rowland, *Properties* (Dia Art Foundation, 2024), 8.



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01  
"Properties". Exhibition view at Dia Art Foundation, Beacon, 2024.

02, 04, 06, 07  
Cameron Rowland, *Plot*, 2024. Easement, 1 acre in Beacon, New York.

Black people were prohibited from being buried in cemeteries. These prohibitions were applied to both free and enslaved black people, in both the North and the South. They were meant to make the degradation of blackness permanent. Black people were buried in unmarked slave plots and unregistered black burial grounds.

For many black people these black mass graves were extensions of black life. As Sylvia Wynter describes, black mass graves were a point of connection to the "permanent future" and the "historical life of the group."<sup>1</sup> As Wynter writes of the provision grounds where slaves grew their own food, the burial plot was also "an area of experience which reinvented and therefore perpetuated an alternative world view, an alternative consciousness to that of the plantation. This world view was marginalized by the plantation but never destroyed. In relation to the plot, the slave lived in a society partly created as an adjunct to the market, partly as an end in itself."<sup>2</sup>

Black people used funerals and burial grounds to plot escape and rebellion.<sup>3</sup> In response, laws banning slave funerals and grave markers were passed throughout the Caribbean and the North American colonies. As former slave John Bates said, masters who prohibited slave funerals would "jes' bury dem like a cow or a hoss, jes' dig de hole and roll 'em in it and cover 'em up."<sup>4</sup>

Unmarked black burials are frequently disinterred during real estate development. This has been the case for numerous burial grounds in New York State and throughout the country. Construction frequently continues despite these "discoveries."

In 1790, the U.S. Census recorded nearly as many slaves in New York State as in Georgia.<sup>5</sup> The land that Dia Art Foundation currently owns in Beacon, New York, was owned by slave owners and slave traders from 1683 until the abolition of slavery in New York in 1827.<sup>6</sup>

The easement between Dia Art Foundation and Plot Inc. conveys the rights to a one-acre section of the institution's property to Plot Inc. for the purpose of protecting the graves of enslaved people who may have been buried there. This burial ground easement runs with the land and requires Dia and all future owners to relinquish the rights to use, disturb, or develop this section of the property.

The plot will remain unmarked. It will degrade the value of the institution's property. It challenges the assumed absence of black burials on sites of enslavement by assuming their presence.

03  
Cameron Rowland, *Estate*, 2024. Dia Art Foundation Real Estate, 1974–2024 Books \$10 each.

Schlumberger Limited, established in 1926, is the largest oilfield services company in the world. Descendants of founder Conrad Schlumberger used their shares in the company to create the Dia Art Foundation. Schlumberger Limited was the primary source of funds for the first decade of the institution. During this period, Dia purchased the majority of the fifty-nine real estate properties it has owned during the past fifty years.

The properties were purchased for artists, for artworks, for offices, for exhibition spaces, and as rentals. Many of these properties were given away. Many were sold at a high rate of return. A number continue to function as rental properties, which generate over \$1 million of annual income for the institution.

Dia does not retain information on the history of these properties prior to the twentieth century.

05  
Cameron Rowland, *Commissary*, 2024. Scythes. 151.13 × 132.08 × 22.86 cm. Rental.

Sharecropping was debt peonage. It was instituted to replace slave labor. It operated in explicit violation of the Thirteenth Amendment's stated ban on involuntary servitude. Sharecropping contracts were designed to keep black people bound to the land, which their labor made valuable. Violations of the contract included leaving the plantation without permission; being loud, disorderly, drunk, or disobedient; having an "offensive weapon"; and misusing the tools. Violations were grounds for dismissal, eviction, and forfeiture of the share. In addition to cultivating the land, these contracts could include obligations to do the washing "and all other necessary house work" for the landlord's family. Sharecroppers were forced to buy food, clothes, tools, and other necessities on credit from the landlord's general store, also called the commissary. The commissary charged up to 70 percent interest. Debts were deducted from the cropper's share. The contract and the commissary kept sharecroppers in perpetual debt.

W. E. B. Du Bois describes the terms of this labor as "a wage approximating as nearly as possible slavery conditions, in order to restore capital lost in the war." Many sharecroppers were former slaves. Many sharecroppers were the children of former slaves. Slaves used scythes as tools of rebellion in Henrico County, Virginia, in 1800; in Southampton County, Virginia, in 1831; and in Coffeerville, Mississippi, in 1858. In violation of their contracts, croppers armed themselves as well. The tools of perpetual debt were also the tools of black riot.

1 Sylvia Wynter, "Black Metamorphosis" (unpublished manuscript), 57, 87.

2 Wynter, "Black Metamorphosis," 53.

3 Wynter, "Black Metamorphosis," 85, 87.

4 "Interview with John Bates," *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves*, Vol. 16, Texas, Part 1 (Washington, DC: Federal Writers' Project, Works Progress Administration, 1941), 53.

5 *Heads of Families at the First Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1790* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 1908), 8.

6 Correlation of property ownership records for Dutchess County Tax Parcel ID 130200-5954-41-605699-00 and Tax Parcel ID 130200-5954-49-608543-00 with the Northeast Slavery Records Index (<https://nesri.commons.gc.cuny.edu/>).

insurgence in Henrico County, Virginia in 1800; in Southampton County, Virginia in 1831; and in Coffeetown, Mississippi in 1858. As such, *Commissary* (2024), the disposal of five scythes arranged one after the other, undulating from the shape of the one that follows, are bodies conscious of their own counterproductivity potential – instruments of their autonomous and advancing resistance. In 2018, Cameron Rowland implemented an extended loan regarding one acre of land on Edisto Island, South Carolina (*Depreciation*, 2018). Its origin stemmed from General William Tecumseh Sherman's *Special Field Order No. 15*, issued in January 1865, which granted forty acres and a mule as reparations to “negro families now freed,” driven by the fear of a potential uprising by thousands of former enslaved individuals following his army. In 1865, approximately forty thousand former slaves settled on the land, only to be expelled the following year after the death of President Lincoln and the subsequent demand for the restitution of the land to former Confederate owners by President Andrew Johnson. In response, the freed slaves were offered the option to work for their former masters – now referred to as employers – or be forcibly removed. This expulsion exposed them to systematic arrests for “vagrancy,” and by 1870, most of the land was redistributed to former masters.

In 2018, an acre of land within the former Edisto Island plantation was purchased as part of Rowland's project through a company founded by the artist. The land was then registered under a restrictive covenant that prohibited any development on it, rendering it economically valueless. Similarly to *Plot* (2024), *Depreciation* (2018) was detached from the conventional understanding of property as a juridical-economic state associated with whiteness; it was stripped of its economic potential, existing solely as the context for an act of restitution. By refusing to work as laborers on this land in 1867, the former enslaved collectively negated the value of the land and, therefore, its status as property; they established a system in which the complex structures of their subjugation could be transformed into a framework for restitution, manifesting through the land's negative form and counterproductivity potential.

Persistently building upon the collective formation of the Black mass, Cameron Rowland interrogates a consciousness linked to Black collective operations – from the time of slavery, through its abolition, and during each of its tacit attempts at reestablishment in modern societies – that has consistently deconstructed the very notion of property within a context of racial castes. It has nullified it, and continues to nullify it; “It runs below the index of history. It is property in rebellion.”

6 Headquarters, “Military Division of the Mississippi,” *Special Field Orders No. 15*, 1865.

7 Rowland, *Properties*, 5.

**Cameron Rowland** (1988, Philadelphia) lives and works in New York. Rowland's practice is based on re-contextualizing everyday objects in ways to highlight the economic and political forces that influence our immediate surroundings, exposing dynamics that are often overlooked, hiding in plain sight. Recent solo exhibitions include MMK – Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main; Maxwell Graham, New York; ICA London; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Galerie Buchholz, Cologne; and Kunsthalle Freiburg. Their work has been included in group shows at CAPC – Musée d'art Contemporain de Bordeaux; Wesleyan University, Middletown; ETH Zürich; Maxwell Graham, New York; Aishti Foundation, Beirut; The Warehouse, Dallas; Hamburger Kunsthalle; Columbus Museum of Art; Whitney Independent Study Program Exhibition, New York; Glasgow International Festival of Contemporary Art; Établissement d'en face, Brussels; Altman Siegel, San Francisco; Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius; Dallas Museum of Art; Dia Art Foundation, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and Museum Ludwig, Cologne. Rowland's solo exhibition “Properties” is currently on view at DiaBeacon, New York through October 20, 2025.