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Land / Lineage

by
Allena Marie Brazier

A thesis presented to the
Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts
Washington University in St. Louis
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

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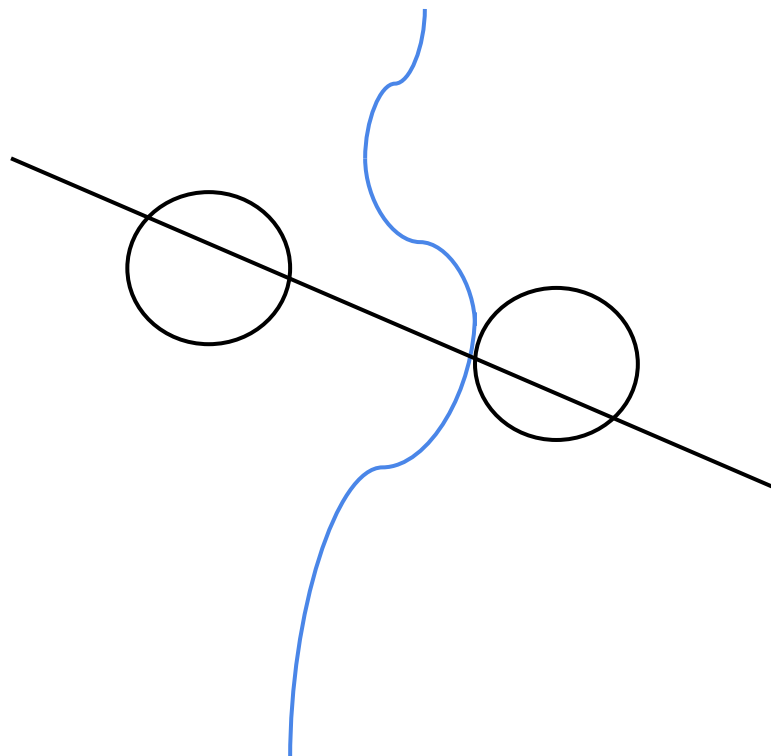
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Contents.....	1
<u>Abstract</u>	2
<u>Introduction</u>	3
<u>Site</u>	5
<u>Memory of Place</u>	9
<u>Memory of Place II</u>	14
<u>Lines Atmospheres and Structures</u>	20
<u>Play Imagination and Safety</u>	26
<u>Family</u>	33
<u>Acts of Honor</u>	37
<u>Conclusion and Tha Future</u>	38
<u>Endnotes</u>	39
<u>Bibliography</u>	42

Abstract

Land / Lineage is an in-depth text of my thoughts and the artistic choices I make within my work. In my thesis I use the concept of Black Ecology to understand art rooted in the relationship between race and geography. Black culture and city spaces in proximity to natural landscapes, or edgelands, reveal the social and physical conditions of a place where these two worlds collide and form distinct characteristics of site, sound, and human interaction. My research also focuses on the theory of place-based works to reconceptualize the lost stories and complexities of city trauma and joy within my hometown of East St. Louis, Illinois. These works offer an alternative perspective of a place that is often misunderstood.



St. Louis, Missouri; East St. Louis, Illinois; and tha Mississippi River.

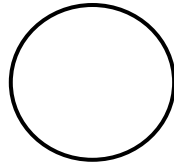
Introduction

I heard tha back door shut. Without hesitation, I grabbed my shoes and rushed to go downstairs. By tha time I reached tha first step, my older brother was already outside bouncing tha basketball on tha pavement.

My hometown of East St. Louis (EStL), Illinois is a place of reference and site in my artwork. It is a city with a troubled history of riots, massacres, the rise and fall of industrialization, and urban plight. To me, history is defined as an environment where opposing forces of creativity and violence intertwine; where nature and manufactured environments collide; where navigating safety can also mean navigating tha¹ unsafe and the tense lived experiences of tha past and present. It is also a city where communities thrive with small businesses, creative outlets, and the promise of urban development. As an artistic direction, I transform these characteristics into imaginative and familiar environments. Using installations, sculpture, sound, and photography, I record my own experiences that challenge tha status quo of urban environments to create works based on site, memory, play, and family (Fig. 1).



Figure 1: Allena Marie Brazier, *East St. Louis & St. Louis*, 2021, photography. Courtesy of the artist.



Site



Figure 2: Allena Marie Brazier, *Building Abandonment Place Marker Series-Land Removal on Wetland*, 2021, hand-built garden box, photography, 16 x 20 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

I developed an interest in working with form and materials such as lines, asphalt, safety fluorescent colors of yellow and orange, and camouflage colors to capture my experience within urban and edgeland environments. Edgelands is a space where nature and wildlife meet or is adjacent to the urban areas of streets and buildings.² In 2022, I began the photography series *Building Abandonment-Place Marker Series* (Fig. 2, 3), which depicts a garden box painted fluorescent orange that I placed in various locations including the EStL Solar Energy Center Construction Site, 46 and State, Marybelle & Kingshighway Wetlands, and Harding Ditch.

Building Abandonment-Place Marker Photo Series is the first series that involves my understanding of the edgelands: areas where nature and urban spaces overlap, creating unique

ecosystems of plants, people, and objects.³ East St. Louis could metaphorically be seen as a giant edgeland city, often forgotten, filled with unused or unidentifiable spaces where nature merges with buildings and infrastructure.

These sites in East St. Louis are areas that are in between states of what was, what is, and what will be. What “was” represents areas that are now covered in natural landscape or wetlands that once were sites of living. What “is,” is my personal acceptance of what the land has come to be whether it is good or bad, that the memory of the past is no longer a point of reference. What “will be” are photos showing future activities such as the EStL Solar Energy Center or the clearing of land, and the recurrence of flooding. The site-specific photography series is a creative way to reimagine and introduce EStL as a non-linear storyline of an “abandoned or rundown” city, terms I have heard describing the city. I work with the process of photography as a medium to slow down and capture these places that are often not seen by outsiders or even acknowledged by local members.



Figure 3: Allena Marie Brazier, *Building Abandonment Place Marker Series- EStL Solar Energy Center Construction Site*, 2021, hand-built garden box, photography, 16 x 20 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Within the *Building Abandonment* series, the fluorescent orange garden box represents a place marker for these spaces in the photograph series. Fluorescent orange and yellow are key colors that I use in my work to express (hyper)visibility and safety. These colors are often worn by construction workers, hunters, and by regular people walking at night to ensure their safety in dangerous locations or situations.

The garden box is a symbol that stands for growth and care. At each site the garden box is placed in a specific area to be photographed. I left the garden box empty as I wanted the land surrounding the garden box to indicate growth and visibility to the larger landscape. The garden box becomes a structure that helps define and revive the interpretation of each site.

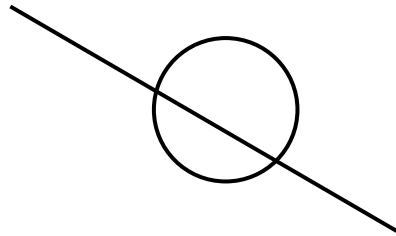
In addition to the growth and possibilities of a site, I show in my video *(Un)Controlled Fire*, 2022 the process of land removal in the wetland areas of East St. Louis (Fig. 4). Controlled fires are set on purpose to manage grasslands and forest areas for the purpose of a healthy growth

cycle.⁴ In my documentation process, I go to tha site and record tha burnings; normally no one is present when tha pile is slowly burning smoke. I am unaware if this area is truly a controlled fire site or if it could be a sitting lot for trucks and shipping containers, like tha sites in tha area.

Natural land and industry are in a constant push and pull, especially in EStL where factories have come and gone leaving a unique ecosystem of endless possibilities for tha preservation of natural environments and pockets of industry for economic growth.



Figure 4: Allena Marie Brazier, *(Un) Controlled Fire*, 2022, photography. Courtesy of the artist.



Memory of Place

Karen E. Till is a professor and author who specializes in the study of space, place, memory, and their connection to social constructs. She writes,

When social groups inscribe their perspectives and stories about the past onto and through a public space, the results are contentious. For example, to make repressed stories more tangible in the built environment, groups and individuals may establish places of memory at historic sites of cultural trauma to reclaim national pasts and imagine more just futures.... More attention therefore needs to be paid to artistic interventions such as Project Prometeo that advance the difficult “work” of memory in wounded cities marked by particularly violent and difficult pasts.⁵

Tha street is my first interaction with life experiences: love, friendship, conflict, and loss. The paved roads, now worn down by traffic and erosion, are a constant background for movement and life. As a saying and concept of *if these walls could talk or the trees hold memory*, I believe that tha streets hold memory.⁶ Streets can physically be observed much like a paleontologist who studies fossils or geologists who studies rocks.⁷ A person would know if it's an old street, freshly renewed street, or street not to take due to potholes. Tha street tracks foot

and car traffic, collecting the footprint of its population. This tracking soon can be used as an example and issue of safety and socio-economic status.

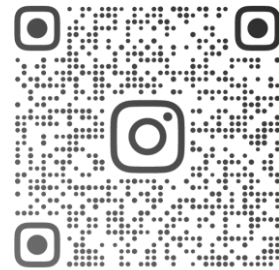


Figure 5: Allena Marie Brazier, *BeSafe_CallBox*, 2021, asphalt, sound loop, 72 x 9 x 9 inches. Courtesy of the artist. To the right is the QR code for a video of the sound piece.

I created a three-dimensional street and sound piece titled, *BeSafe_CallBox*, 2021 (Fig. 5) based on my memory and present-day action of saying *be safe* as an outro in a conversation. I built a six-foot-tall pillar covered in glistening asphalt rock with the inside painted fluorescent yellow and a recording of my voice saying *be safe* on a loop.



Figure 6: Allena Marie Brazier, *Emergency Call Box*. Courtesy of IndiaMart.

Tha pillar is like tha emergency call boxes found in public areas (Fig. 6); it is a way to contact authorities in case of an emergency. However, *BeSafe_CallBox* is different from a typical call box; it is a beacon or call to action for tha person who stumbles across it to be safe. Tha sound is repeated in a soft but robotic manner becoming a mantra filling the space and place it occupies. When I or others say, “be safe,” it is said with a tone of love or urgency, as if there was a hidden prayer in between the letters. In Till’s article “Wounded Cities: Memory-Work and a Place-Based Ethics of Care,” Till discusses how wounded cities go beyond tha physicality of a place and are *wounded by state and dominant social-political practices...and continue to be injured however it is within tha importance and value of memory and place based ethics places and people may be able to find specific long term solutions.*⁸ *BeSafe_CallBox* highlights tha generational saying and even common knowledge to say “be safe.” *Be safe* is a phrase I use to

question tha environment that one feels unsafe in or tha thought that safety is a choice and not granted.



Figure 7: Allena Marie Brazier, *Tha Block is Hot*, 2022, asphalt, sound loop, (5) 72 x 9 x 9 inches. Courtesy of Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts. [Videos | Sculptor](#) (allenabrazier.com)

After creating *BeSafe_CallBox*, I began developing a larger installation of five asphalt pillars titled *Tha Block is Hot*, 2022 (Fig. 7). This larger installation evoked a sense of collectiveness, meditation, and ominous structural figures. A collection of sounds I recorded for two to three years echoed within each pillar creating an atmosphere of urban and edgeland soundscapes. The sounds consist of beauty shop chatter, clippers buzzing, trains screeching, rain, my father telling a joke, my mother reading a poem, my father mowing the grass, cars driving, music, and siren sounds. I wanted tha viewer to be surrounded by these towering three-dimensional streets that sang sounds of tha city and naturescapes but not know exactly where this fictional place is at and to use the familiar sounds to imagine tha places traveled. In addition to

the first layer of sounds, in the second layer, I recorded myself saying, “be safe” in a gentle manner; while all the other sounds were loud, my voice was played as a whisper.



Figure 8: Torkwase Dyson, *1919 Black Water*, 2019, glass and paintings. Courtesy of Torkwase Dyson site and Arthur Ross Architecture Gallery - Columbia University, New York, 2019.

An artist that works along the spectrum of land, memory, and navigation of space within a Black identity and liberation is Torkwase Dyson. Dyson creates paintings and public structures that question how people negotiate and (re)define the space they occupy in relation to historical context. For example, Dyson's *1919 Black Water*, 2019 (Fig. 8)⁹ features paintings and structures that translate the 1919 Chicago murder of seventeen-year-old Eugene Williams. Williams was a young Black boy who was in a raft with friends. As they began to cross an imaginary line of segregation, twenty-four-year-old George Stauber, a white man, began throwing stones at Williams. Williams then fell into the water and drowned; this was a significant event that led up to the massacre of Black people by whites known as Red Summer.¹⁰ Dyson's abstract paintings and structures use formal qualities of color, line, and material as new architectural elements that contest the built environment and imaginary environment that has

been imposed on black bodies in space. Dyson's sculptures are forms that bend light and mass where the viewer must adjust to move around the edges and physicality and sharp edges and lines of her pieces. Every decision is a choice for creating a new spatial experience.

BeSafe_CallBox and *1919 BlackWater* are both abstract structures that have collected a historical and cultural type of data and *wound* as described by Till, which has affected the space and invisible navigation of safety.

Memory of Place II

Black Ecology is the study and concept that the human relationship with the environment (nature) varies in problem solving based upon race and class.¹¹ These challenges can be seen in urbanization, redlining, white flight to suburbs, and basic needs of clean drinking water versus keeping oceans clean.¹² The book *Black Ecologies*¹³ is a collection of writings that recognize black ecologies in several different capacities through storytelling, land use research, history, and science. In the journal writings by Imani Jacqueline Brown titled *A Minor Constellation of Black Ecologies*, she explains how the Louisiana plantation and ancestral sites once called "Plantation Country" are now becoming "Death Alley" where a petrochemical company is building industry. Brown understands that ancestors become the land and descendants are resisting such removal of the site. Brown writes, *We learned that enslaved people were interred at the back of the plantation at the edge of the cypress swamp, darkness of which was feared and deemed "irrational" by planters. Denied headstones to mark graves of their loved ones.*¹⁴

After reading this passage and thinking about my use of fluorescent colors in my earlier work, I turned to camouflage. The opposite of fluorescent colors, camouflage, also called cryptic

coloration, is a color and pattern combination used by animals and humans to blend into their environment.¹⁵ I soon struck inspiration to create a creature that expresses a human spirit moving and (re)understanding tha land on which it has arrived. I named this human spirit *Tha Wanderer / Wonderer*.



Figure 9: Allena Marie Brazier, *Tha Wanderer - I.tha awakening*, 2022, ghillie suit, father as model, photography, 8 x 11 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Tha Wanderer, 2022 (Fig. 9) has been assigned to earth to help its ancestors and descendants (past, present, and future) navigate their new realities as captive people, crossing from one era to another and awaiting an unknown reality. In my photography and performance series, *Cryptic Coloration* 2022, I photographed my father in a ghillie suit, which is a type of yarn garment that is worn in hunting and military operations to resemble the surrounding area to not be seen; it is a type of camouflage tactic. I began to see the ghillie suit as an acting participant in tha protection of *Tha Wanderer* and protection of tha land. Just like *Building Abandonment*, I chose Frank Holten State Park in East St. Louis, IL and Cahokia Mounds State Inheritance Site in

Collinsville, IL as the backdrops because these places represent edgelands and have an established history of belonging.

Tha Wanderer is a documented three-part photography series titled, *1. tha awakening*, *2. lost and searching*, and *3. tha reveal*. My father and mother played an important part in making this series. My father is tha person in tha ghillie suit and posed in each photo, while my mother worked behind tha scenes adjusting tha suit and guiding my father into position.

***They are both my parents and ancestors as they carry their parents
through their existence. I am both my parents and ancestors as I am the carrier
for the next descendants. -Allena Marie Brazier***

***Black futures rely on ancestral memories.*¹⁶ -Danielle Purifoy, "Forests Are
Our Ancestors, and Our Ancestors Are the Future"**

My hope for this series is for the viewer to feel as if they are a part of this journey of physical and emotional movement. To capture the journey of each part of *Tha Wanderer*, the photos are intentionally grouped to read like a storyboard or movie still. The sizes of the photos vary from 2 x 2 inches, 8 x 11 inches, 14 x 17 inches, and 17 x 20 inches.

In *1. tha awakening*, I created the introduction to *Tha Wanderer*, which blends into the mass number of trees and green-scape on a bright sunny day. I positioned the model of *Tha Wanderer* crouched over while slowly moving upright. In thinking of the movement and story the photos would tell, I wanted *Tha Wanderer* to be immersed in the land to watch over the space, yet hard to see by the outsider. I want the viewer to see *Tha Wanderer* as a creature or something new they must speculate and wonder about. So, I made sure to keep the human figure

hidden, hence, the arms were not too far stretched out while the legs were close together within the suit to create more volume.

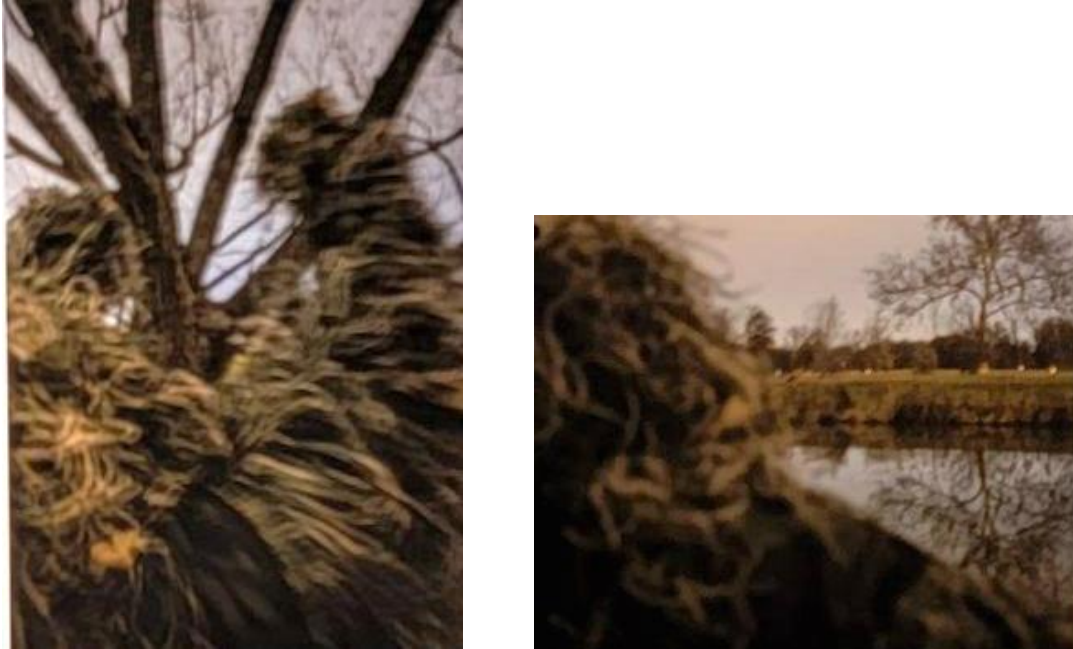


Figure 10: Allena Marie Brazier, *Tha Wanderer - 2. lost and searching*, 2022, ghillie suit, father as model, photography, dimensions vary. Courtesy of the artist.

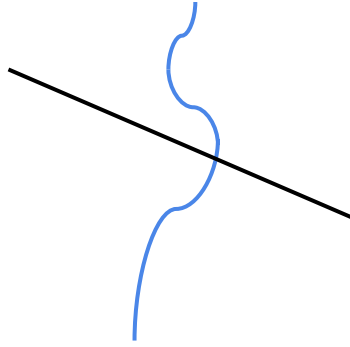
For the photo series *2. lost and searching* (Fig. 10), *Tha Wanderer* expresses the emotion of loss. The photos are taken outside at night to create a gloomy and desolate feeling. In addition to the time of day, I also began to twist and shake the camera when the photos were taken to create a blurry, disoriented effect in the photos. The *lost and searching* series stems from my understanding and interest in my family's history of enslavement to migrating to the United States. I often use movement within my work, whether having the viewer navigate the installation, moving objects and characters in various areas, or the movement of history. I am questioning what is gained from *Tha Wanderer* being dislocated from the protection of land in *1. tha awakening* into an area where being protected by the land is limited and uncertain.



Figure 11: Allena Marie Brazier, *Tha Wanderer - 3.tha reveal*, 2022, ghillie suit, father as model, photography, dimensions vary. Courtesy of the artist.

Finally, in the photography series *3. tha reveal* (Fig. 11), I chose to have *Tha Wanderer* climb the stairs at the Cahokia Mounds State Inheritance Site, a historic site where pre-Columbian Indigenous tribes once lived. I focused on the layers of history, the journey, and how I reckon with my placement and relationship to the land. *Tha Wanderer* has now found its new place and adapted to the stillness and acceptance of the environment. In part 3, I wanted *Tha Wanderer* to be seen as a confident character, anchoring itself to the land with the chosen pose of bracing a solid wind. As discussed earlier, my father is the model for *Tha Wanderer*—a hidden factor that is now revealed in this series.

The photos show him removing the headpiece of the ghillie suit to show that there is a live human being within the fictional character. This reveal now switches the concept of a creature to a person using *Tha Wanderer* as an alternate entity of protection.



Lines Atmospheres and Structures

In geometry, a line is a straight one-dimensional figure that does not have a thickness, and it extends endlessly in both directions...It does not have any endpoint. The two arrows at each end signify that the line extends endlessly and is unending in both directions. The length of a line cannot be measured.¹⁷

Line shows the contrast of “reality” in my installations, sculptures, and paintings; the edge of each piece is the border of what lies between the art and lived experience.

Line is poetic and metaphorical. The imaginary line that Eugene Williams crossed in the water is the same line that started the 1917 East St. Louis, Illinois massacres just two years earlier. The same 1917 massacre in which my grandfather escaped as a child and crossed the bridge and river for safety. In 3 years’ time, they would cross the river once more. Line holds anger, choices, refuge, imagination, oppression, safety, and freedom. The constant push and pull of crossing the line and wondering if it holds safety or destruction is an important symbol within my work, such as *Black in Liminality 001* and *002*, *The Block is Hot*, and *Back Home and Across the River*.

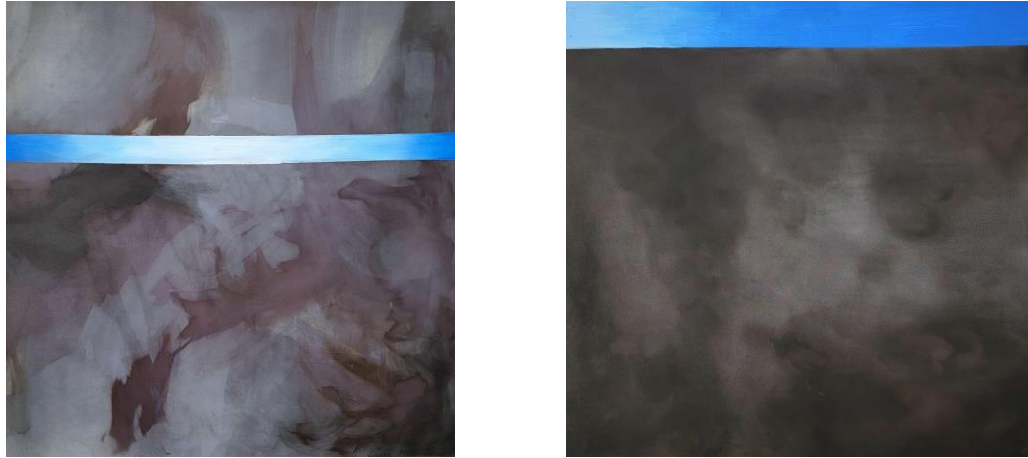


Figure 12: Allena Marie Brazier, *Black in Liminality 001* (right) and *002* (left), 2022, ink, acrylic, 48 x 48 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Black in Liminality 001 and *002*, 2022, (Fig. 12) is a piece where I explored a new perspective on land, memory, and navigation. My inspiration for this piece came from an excerpt in Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, 2017. Sharpe explains, *the weather is the totality of our environments; the weather is the total climate; and that climate is anti-Black*.¹⁸

From this quote, I created my own statement: *Black life is in a constant state of liminality* (Brazier). Liminality is *occupying a position at, or on both sides of, a boundary or threshold and relating to a transitional or initial stage of a process*.¹⁹ With these definitions of liminality and line, I imagined Black life living and ending on an endless line that at any point is always awaiting a transition beyond enslavement and an imagination for a future. In *Black in Liminality 001* and *002*, I used black and brown ink that I poured on the raw canvas; I allowed the ink to spread and stretch thin as it flowed across the canvas. With little manipulation, the ink began to breathe and change colors due to oxidation creating an atmospheric gesture. *001* has a more blue, purple tone while *002* is a black, gray, and rustic color—after the initial pour, I used a

rag and sponge to move that ink even further as I understood how far to stretch tha ink for a specific color. I chose these colors and compositions based on my experience and feeling of looking out tha window of an airplane (Fig. 13). Flying in tha sky, I can see a new perspective on how tha land and sky relate to my everyday point of view. These paintings reference that new way of seeing and feeling.

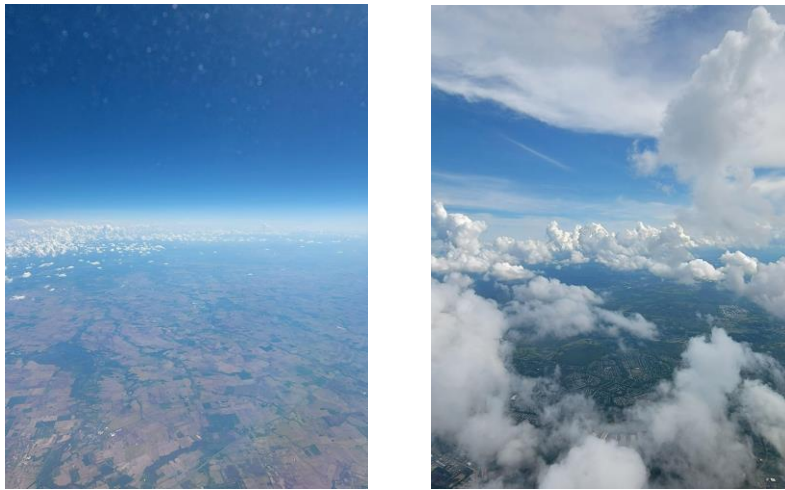


Figure 13: Allena Marie Brazier, Airplane window photo, 2022. Courtesy of the artist.

After creating tha atmospheric gestures, I went back and created a rigid line running from end to end of tha canvas. With 001, I started in tha middle of tha canvas with white and slowly made a gradient of blue on both sides of the line. With 002, I made a line on tha side of tha canvas where dark blue fades into white (the canvas position can change). I paired tha line and atmospheric scene together to show tha contrast of line/structure versus atmosphere and tha unknowing of direction; tha paintings reflect the eyes of tha spirit of Black life moving on all ends.

For my current work that is exhibited in tha Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, *Back Home and Across tha River* (Fig. 14), I applied tha same blue gradient concept into a larger

installation. The blue gradient becomes a symbol of hopefulness and a literal take on *tha sky is tha limit*. I mirrored the arched shaped mural and asphalt court in a vertical and horizontal axis to create a new interaction between land and earth. The idea of edgeland and lines begins to play a key role as the edges of the mural and asphalt meet, creating their own horizon.

I use the arch shape to identify with several elements including the transatlantic slave ships (Fig. 15), portals, and basketball court outlines. The arch shape has struck me as a portal or passage of time where both ancestors and descendants travel through and mirror each other. This concept derived from my invention of *Tha Wonderer*, and its origin story of crossing from one era into another and awaiting an unknown reality. Looking at artist Barkley L. Hendricks' *Lawdy Mama*, 1969²⁰ (Fig. 16), I began to interpret the figure standing within the golden frame as a figure of enlightenment and power emerging from the golden void. Using the same foreground to background method, my basketball goal can be seen as both worn down and a goal of dignity.

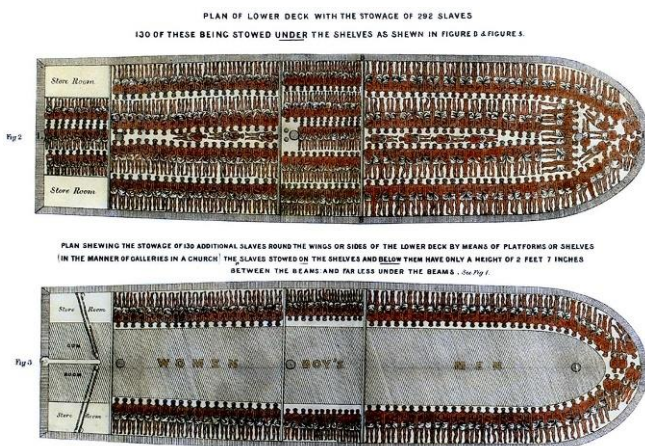


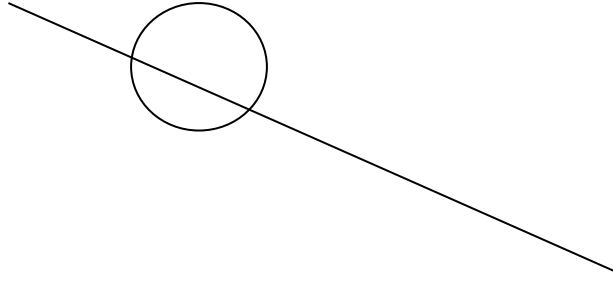
Figure 15: Transatlantic Slave Ship, Drawing Diagram. Courtesy of Encyclopedia Britannica.



Figure 14: Allena Marie Brazier, *Back Home and Across tha River*, 2023, basketball goal (stand included) from home that is thirty-plus years old, railroad ties, asphalt court, blue gradient mural, sandbags used for flooding, family photos, and the word “red line” painted on tha court, 156 x 132 inches. Courtesy of Erin Williams.



Figure 16: Barkley L. Hendricks, *LawdyMama*, 1969, oil and gold leaf on canvas, 53 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 36 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches. Courtesy of The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, Robin Pogrebin.



Play Imagination and Safety

Tha Block is hot, Tha Block is hot, ha, ha-ha

Tha Block is hot, Tha Block is hot, ha, ha-ha

Tha Block is hot, Tha Block is hot, ha, ha-ha - Lil Wayne²¹



Figures 17 and 18: Allena Marie Brazier, Video Still from Lil Wayne song “Tha Block is Hot,” 1999. Courtesy of YouTube.

Tha Block is Hot, as mentioned earlier, is based on the song/video by rapper Lil Wayne, which is a depiction of city life in a predominantly black neighborhood where several types of gatherings are happening. It opens with a young girl playing and drawing on the pavement with chalk, and other clips are of joy and laughter of elderly and young people (Fig. 17). At the same

time, another group of young men have chosen a specific lifestyle to get by while they are, at times, depicted not doing anything. During the video, police are constantly surveilling everyone. Towards the middle of the video, the little girl drawing is depicting a police helicopter chasing a man (Fig. 18).²² This video is like my upbringing as I mentioned the duality and constant shift of joy, socio-political violence/trauma, and police profiling. The little girl is the watcher of all things and even within play she could only draw her circumstances, nothing beyond the imagination. Ytasha Womack²³ is an author, scholar of Afrofuturism, and creative writer who wrote the book *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci Fi & Fantasy Culture*. I heard a video lecture at SONIC ACTS FESTIVAL - THE NOISE OF BEING where Womack explains her discussion with fifth graders on the concepts of Afrofuturism. During her conversation, she asked the students what their ideas about the future were. Expecting topics of space travel, she noticed each student's answer was centered around not having a world of violence or not seeing violence. Womack then began to ask different questions; she asked them what the world looks like without violence, thinking they would open more; they answered that they would be able to play outside. Womack later was able to explain Afrofuturism as a tool to combine past and future imagination and creativity to create an environment that can be used to liberate them from being trapped or oppressed within a system that has harmed and wounded their city of South Side Chicago.



Figure 19: Allena Marie Brazier, *Contemplating Play*, (left) 2022, wood, asphalt, metal chair, and basketball, dimensions vary. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 20: Allena Marie Brazier, *Back Home and Across tha River*, (right) 2023, basketball goal (stand included) from home that is thirty-plus years old, railroad ties, asphalt court, blue gradient mural, sandbags used for flooding, family photos, and the word “red line” painted on tha court, 156 x 132 inches. Courtesy of Jen Colten.

Within my installations of *Contemplating Play*, 2022 (Fig. 19) and *Back Home and Across tha River*, 2023 (Fig. 20), I depict scenes of play, specifically tha basketball court. Tha game of basketball has social contexts within tha Black community. Over tha years it has been a beacon of hope, often expressed as a way of getting out tha hood.²⁴ Aside from a long association with “getting out,” the game of basketball can also be seen as a form of safety, gathering, and freedom of expression. *Contemplating Play* is a simplified de-construction of a basketball court and provokes the questions: what is play? What does play look like during times of adversity, trauma, or grief? How to neutralize space, body, and objects when they are hyper visible? How to implement play into the socio-psychological narrative of adult/hood? How does

abstraction and distilled imagination relate or express the challenges of Black identity? These questions contributed to the visual representation of the psychological approach in creating and initiating a space for play. *Contemplating Play* initiates a one-on-one process of understanding the court scene, inviting the viewer to sit down and meditate on the scene they are participating in. By creating a composition of hard edges and lines, the act of play becomes difficult to imagine due to the lack of rules and goals shown in the game setting; when the audience member sits down or looks at the installation, they become the only player and viewer.

Back Home and Across the River is also a geographical portrait. The only park near my house always floods, making it impossible for anyone to play on the playground or use the basketball court (Fig. 21). Within the installation, I used fluorescent orange sandbags; these bags not only keep the railroad ties and basketball goal in place but also represent how EStL is in a flood zone, causing physical and emotional damage to those affected by rising levels of water.



Figure 21: Allena Marie Brazier, Image of Playground flooded. Courtesy of the artist.

Accessing these areas of play often requires modes of caution because safety and infrastructure follow right under redlining. Redlining was created during the 1930 New Deal Act when housing agencies marked Black neighborhoods as undesirable and would discriminate against Black Americans who sought homeownership and loans.²⁵

These illegal and discriminatory laws also had negative effects in education, the economy, resources, and infrastructure in cities and towns where Black Americans lived. I use redlining as a concept and visual language to identify environmental and social disparities within my work. In 2020 and 2021 (Fig. 22 and 23), I created two mazes based on redlining that represented the process of navigating manmade obstacles and identity within these spaces. In *Back Home and Across the River*, I placed the word “red line” on top of the asphalt where the free throw line in basketball courts exists; I am integrating a systematic issue within the game of play (Fig. 24).



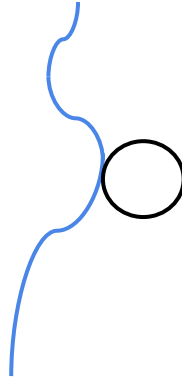
Figure 22: Allena Marie Brazier, *Red Line Maze*, (left) 2020, 8 x 8 x 8 feet, wood, black wood, model Taylor.



Figure 23: Allena Marie Brazier, *Red Line Maze*, (right) 2021, size varies, wood, cement blocks, and soil. Courtesy of artist.



Figure 24: Allena Marie Brazier, *Back Home and Across tha River*, 2023, basketball goal (stand included) from home that is thirty-plus years old, railroad ties, asphalt court, blue gradient mural, sandbags used for flooding, family photos, and the word “red line” painted on tha court, 156 x 132 inches. Courtesy of artists and Cris Grobnic.



Family



Figure 25: Allena Marie Brazier, *Back Home and Across tha River*, 2023, basketball goal (stand included) from home that is thirty-plus years old, railroad ties, asphalt court, blue gradient mural, sandbags used for flooding, family photos, and the word “red line” painted on tha court, 156 x 132 inches. Courtesy of Jessica Hunt.

Back Home and Across tha River, 2023 (Fig. 25) is a hopeful ritual, an invitation to play and wonder despite adversity. A geographical-, family-, and self-portrait, *Back Home and Across tha River* tells a story of an extensive line of choices through adversity that allowed me to be here to tell a place's and family's story. The installation consists of a basketball goal (stand included) from home that is thirty-plus years old, railroad ties, asphalt court, blue gradient mural, sandbags used for flooding, family photos, and the word "red line" painted in red on tha court. My family's historical journey has led me to operate in a place of faith, strength, and genuine love.



Figure 26: Allena Marie Brazier, *Back Home and Across tha River*, 2023, basketball goal (stand included) from home that is thirty-plus years old, railroad ties, asphalt court, blue gradient mural, sandbags used for flooding, family photos, and the word "red line" painted on tha court, 156 x 132 inches. Courtesy of artists and Cris Grobnc.

In my current piece, *Back Home, Across tha River*, 2023 (Fig. 26), I am gathering photos from my mother and father's side of the family and adhering them onto eight-foot railroad ties to convey my admiration of ancestral lineage and its effects on present-day outcomes. I am amazed and curious about how my placement exists due to generational choices. As an artist, I find a balance of showing specific meanings and ambiguity for viewers to speculate. In *Back Home, Across tha River*, I used an eight-foot-tall railroad tie to visualize my house in East St. Louis, Illinois, where rows of railroad ties outline the yard's perimeter. In addition, I wanted to reference the railroad systems and sense of movement and how my father outlined our house with railroad ties in which we (family and friends) all stood and played on.

I saw Larry W. Cook's work in person at the Baltimore Museum of Art. I find inspiration in how he uses the relationship between his landscape and archival family photographs. I am interested in how Cook finds his balance of representing family and land and archival work, especially in his *Let My Testimony Sit Next To Yours*, 2022 series (Fig. 27),²⁶ which includes his paternal family photos, letters, large-scale landscape photographs, and photographs of men and their children within his family. These works are important to mention in the context of my practice because Cook not only references his own family from old photos and letters but actively captures the consequences (good or bad) of his family's paternal behaviors through photography.



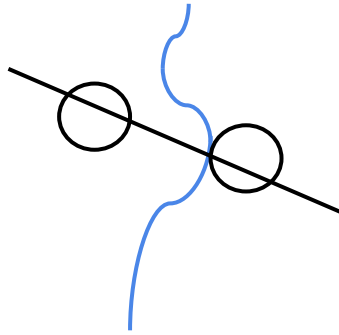
Figure 27: Larry W. Cook, *Let My Testimony Sit Next To Yours*, 2022, photography. Courtesy of Larry W. Cook website.



Acts of Honoring

(thoughts out loud)

1. **To a distant journey.** One wrapped in tha lost memory of the Atlantic Slave Trade, somewhere in the past the fate of captivity began. To my ancestor Lucy Sutton²⁷ and her master John Sutton who freed her and her eight children in his dying will, which later was contested. Going from Louisiana, Florida, and ending up in Pope County, Illinois, two hours away from East St. Louis, Illinois. Where my grandmother on my mother's side, Henrietta Irene Kelly, was one of the first Black students to attend Illinois State University studying art. While on my father's side my grandfather George Leslie Brazier was a traveling musician playing tha upright bass and later guitar bass with big bands in the 1930s. 2. **To a closer bond.** Photos and moments where my grandmother Mamie Allena Brazier (descendant of Lucy Sutton) holds me and is the first and last grandparent I have consciously met. As I am only two months old, my older cousins, mom, aunt, and grandmother crowd our living room in EStL during tha Christmas season. My brother, George L. Brazier, III, who, when I hear bouncing a basketball, makes me run to go outside and play; a stark contrast to one of those cousins who was recently imprisoned and another cousin who was murdered in St. Louis. To tha new generation, my dearest and sweetest lil cousins and niece, aka tha kids, who have always been involved with my art practice. A family that gathers, laughs, and captures tha moments to last. I honor them all.



Conclusion and Tha Future

Tha process of researching and tapping into tha specific site of East St. Louis and my family lineage has led me onto a path of what I might call memory restoration, combining past and present ideas to reimagine tha built world around me and for others. Through this site, I have just begun to learn how to connect my visual arts practice to new theories like Black Ecology. I am interested in expanding upon tha connections of edgelands, line, and play. Tha imagination and new possibilities of tha world around me are recreated through materials and compositions. Tha materials I use are from tha familiar world such as sky, asphalt, and tha game of basketball. However, composing these materials in a new framework pushes me and the viewer to question perceived human interaction within tha environment. I am excited to continue my journey on creating two colliding spaces.

Endnotes

¹ Tha is often used in this text as it is a natural way for me to spell “the.” This is linked to the African American Vernacular. Justine Stephens, “The United States of Accents: African American Vernacular English,” *Babbel Magazine*, February 3, 2020, <https://www.babbel.com/en/magazine/african-american-vernacular-english>.

² Jennifer Jenkins, ed., *Remaking the Landscape: The Changing Face of Britain* (London: Profile Books, 2002).

³ Jennifer Jenkins, “Edgelands,” *The Land Magazine*, 2002, <https://www.thelandmagazine.org.uk/articles/edgelands>; Karen E. Till, “Wounded Cities: Memory-Work and a Place-Based Ethics of Care,” *Political Geography* 31, no. 1 (2012): 7, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2011.10.008>.

⁴ “Controlled Burning,” *National Geographic*, <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/controlled-burning/>.

⁵ Till, “Wounded Cities: Memory-Work and a Place-Based Ethics of Care,” 7.

⁶ Michael Hebbert, “The Street as Locus of Collective Memory,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23, vol. 4 (2005): 581-596. Hebbert writes how the street plays a role in Berlin’s collective memory.

⁷ Daniel J. Peppe and Alan L. Deino, “Dating Rocks and Fossils Using Geologic Methods,” *Nature News*, Nature Publishing Group, 2013, <https://www.nature.com/scitable/knowledge/library/dating-rocks-and-fossils-using-geologic-methods-107924044/>.

⁸ “Narrative Materiality: Dawoud Bey and Torkwase Dyson In Conversation,” Whitney Museum of American Art, September 21, 2021, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQASmdbEAZQ>.

⁹ Jess Zimlich, “The Murder of Eugene Williams and a Racial Reckoning,” Chicago History Museum, July 27, 2020, <https://www.chicagohistory.org/the-murder-of-eugene-williams-and-a-racial-reckoning/>.

¹⁰ Till, “Wounded Cities: Memory-Work and a Place-Based Ethics of Care,” 7.

¹¹ Nathan Hare, “BLACK ECOLOGY,” *The Black Scholar* 1, no. 6 (1970): 2–8, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41163443>.

¹² Hare, “BLACK ECOLOGY,” 2.

¹³ Imani J. Brown, “A Minor Constellation of Black Ecologies,” *March* 2 (2021): 8-17.

¹⁴ Brown, “A Minor Constellation of Black Ecologies,” 13.

¹⁵ “Camouflage Facts,” *National Geographic*, May 3, 2021, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/camouflage-explained>.

¹⁶ Danielle Purifoy, “Forests Are Our Ancestors, and Our Ancestors Are the Future,” *March 2* (2021): 111.

¹⁷ “What Is a Line in Math? Definition, Types, Examples, Facts,” SplashLearn, February 20, 2023, <https://www.splashlearn.com/math-vocabulary/geometry/line#:~:text=In%20geometry%2C%20a%20line%20is%20a%20straight%20one-dimensional,The%20length%20of%20a%20line%20cannot%20be%20measured>.

¹⁸ Christina Sharpe, “The Weather,” *The New Inquiry*, April 18, 2017, <https://thenewinquiry.com/the-weather/>.

¹⁹ “The Home of Language Data,” Oxford Languages, Oxford University Press, accessed 2021, <https://languages.oup.com/.Liminality>.

²⁰ “Transatlantic Slave Trade,” Encyclopædia Britannica, April 25, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/transatlantic-slave-trade#/media/1/1913480/199340>.

²¹ Robin Pogrebin, “Portraits by Barkley L. Hendricks Will Hang with Old Masters at the Frick,” *The New York Times*, July 13, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/13/arts/design/barkley-hendricks-frick-portraiture-black.html>. I learned of Barkley L. Hendricks’s entire catalog late, but his works are very inspiring. Some of his paintings are centered around the shape, lines, and forms of basketball. Sopan Deb, “Basketball and Barkley Hendricks: The Lesser Known Work of an Influential Artist,” *The New York Times*, June 23, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/23/sports/Barkley-Hendricks-jack-shainman-gallery.html>.

²² Lil Wayne, “Lil Wayne – Tha Block Is Hot,” Lil Wayne, November 22, 2019, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3Edt0jMolc>.

²³ “Ytasha Womack - Afrofuturism Imagination and Humanity,” Sonic Acts, June 14, 2017, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xIF90sXVfKk>.

²⁴ Roger Ebert, “Hoop Dreams,” RogerEbert.com, October 21, 1994, <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/hoop-dreams-1994>. Roger Ebert breaks down the plot and background information on a movie called *Hoop Dreams*. *Hoop Dreams* is a documentary based in the Chicago southside area that follows two basketball players from 8th grade all the way up to their 1st year of college. Their journey and story are based on dreams and adversity, dealing with everyday life as young boys whose environment causes turbulence but also safety with the support that surrounds them. Growing up, everybody would play outside, and basketball was the main sport. My brother played on teams and in the park meetups; my childhood friend was very promising at the sport of basketball and it seemed to be one of their favorite things to do. When I went off to college in a white rural area, the one thing I missed was the sound of a basketball hitting the pavement. It was my indicator of play and safety, without that, I felt isolated in a place that was quite different and sometimes judgmental of where I came from.

²⁵ Jackson, Candace, “What Is Redlining?” *The New York Times*, August 17, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/17/realestate/what-is-redlining.html>.

²⁶ Jessica Bell Brown and Ryan N. Dennis, *A Movement in Every Direction: Legacies of the Great Migration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022).

²⁷ Steve McKinnis and Terry Franklin, “Lucy Sutton,” Lucy Sutton,, <https://www.lucysutton.com/>.

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