



LEFT

UPRIGHT PORT



*The Cartographer
Tries to Map a
Way to Heaven*

**CAMERON A.
GRANGER**

Contemporary Arts Center

KAPLAN HALL LOBBY

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INTRODUCTION

The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Heaven

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CAMERON A. GRANGER (b. 1993, Cleveland, OH; lives and works in Columbus, OH) is an artist and filmmaker whose works offer poignant meditations on Black history and culture. He highlights not only the systems of racial inequity that target and police Blackness, but the communities that continue to thrive, persist, and most importantly, demonstrate love. "There are so many painful images that you see of us every day, and not even just on your TV, but on your phone, on your apps, on your feeds," said Granger. "So I really want to make things that have love in them. I want to show us smiling. I want to show us loving."

As a Black man raised by his mother and grandmother in Ohio, Granger often uses local communities in his home state as a backdrop in his works. In *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Heaven*, Granger adapted his 2021 video *The Line* to create a new multimedia iteration for the Contemporary Arts Center. Through a multi-channel video, wallpaper, and roving reading room, the exhibition features the Near East Side neighborhood of Columbus, Ohio, focusing on the site's history of Black migration and urban development. Granger specifically shines a light on Poindexter Village, a complex of buildings in Columbus that was one of the country's first public housing developments. While this historic site provided a vibrant home for its predominantly Black community, in 2013, the Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority ordered its demolition to make room for new redevelopment projects. In *The Line*,

Granger pulls from various sources that describe the Near East Side landmark. A news anchor uses adjectives like "desolate" and "abandoned." Conversely, Aminah Robinson, a fixture of the Columbus community who was a previous resident of Poindexter Village, lovingly describes it as "the best," a place where "every child was cherished and loved." By juxtaposing a collection of found archival materials with his own personal images and texts, Granger weaves stories that complicate accepted interpretations of the past and present.

The exhibition alludes to Jamaican author Kei Miller's collection of poetry, *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion*, which investigates what happens when one system of knowledge brushes up against and challenges another. In Miller's writing, a cartographer, whose understanding of place, territory, and history is based around scientific methods of mapmaking, is forced to reevaluate his perception of the world as he attempts to map a path to Zion, a utopian city of freedom that was adopted by the Afrocentric Rastafari movement. In his work, Granger contests the perceptions of place that have led to redlining, gentrification, policing, and other public policies that disproportionately target Black people. By documenting his friends and family, his work presents the spirit of love and hope that manifests within his community.

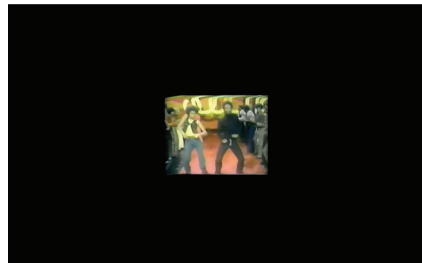
**BY DR. STEPHANIE KANG,
GUEST CURATOR**

PAVING A ROAD HOME

In Cameron A. Granger's *The Line*

BY DR. DEJA BEAMON

Audio from the 1978 film *The Wiz* is the first sound you hear as Cameron A. Granger's *The Line* opens. Horns blast as the Wiz's voice declares that green is dead, and the color of power is now red. *The Wiz* reappears later in the video in the form of a *Soul Train* clip, which shows Michael Jackson and Diana Ross singing "Ease on Down the Road," a song from the movie. By citing *The Wiz* in both this introductory scene and later through the *Soul Train* clips, Granger infuses his work with a sense of nostalgia and Black joy. The parallels between *The Wiz* and *The Line* reinforce Granger's mission to take moments in a Black American experience and explore them through different modes and metaphors, adding layers of meaning and emotion, where certain renderings would instead flatten the experience.



Cameron A. Granger, still from *The Line*, 2021. Color video, with sound. 7 min. Courtesy of the artist.

Opening at the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati, Ohio, Cameron A. Granger's *The Line* appears within the exhibition entitled *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Heaven*. This exhibition situates *The Line* as not only a study of a place but also a map towards a destination—heaven. In homage to Kei Miller's poetry book, *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion*, both artists explore how

histories of colonization and racism impact how places are mapped. The people who reside in the place, who call it home, are the ones equipped with the true map-making tools that insist on the futurity of place and people. As explored in other work by Granger, most recently the exhibition *Heavy as Heaven* at No Place Gallery in Columbus, OH, heaven and home often overlap as the artist connects his ancestry and childhood to the homes he constructs and finds outside of it.



Installation view: Cameron A. Granger, *Heavy as Heaven*, No Place Gallery, Columbus, OH, May 14 – July 9, 2022. Courtesy of No Place Gallery, Columbus, OH.

In *The Line*, Granger creates an audio visual experience that continuously dislodges the viewer as it reconstructs images of Black life in anticipation of perception. Through its sonic and visual texture, *The Line*'s citational practice brings together seemingly incompatible historical moments to re-present the East Side of Columbus. The title, *The Line*, highlights Granger's focus on what makes a community. Is it simply a matter of boundaries and throughlines on a map? What parts of the Black experience get washed away by these flattened understandings of demarcation, by these lines drawn? Granger makes art

for Black folks, attempting to hold the multitude of our experiences with care, while also excavating the specific histories of the Ohio communities he calls home. Each time I watched the video, I noted how its components acted as the map's legend, symbols that I saw replicated through different but similar places I called home.

Granger's work deploys what Tina M. Camp refers to as "a Black gaze,"¹ which responds to how the gaze is informed by the devaluation of Black life and the violence of the everyday. Camp locates a Black gaze as working through this anxiety, this reality. "Watching [it] requires us to cycle through discomfort in order to appreciate its moments of sublime reverie—reverie in Black love, in Black survival, and in a future we were never promised, yet claim and cling to vigorously and vociferously. It's a discomfoting, aspirational, defiant gaze."² I identified the same cycle of emotions, the same intent, in *The Line* and other works by Granger.

Granger does not shy away from the discomfort of the Black experience. Pulling from news archives, he connects the histories of the Great Migration to zoning ordinances and the birth of public housing. *The Line* brings the people of the East Side to life, contrasting the flattening of maps with the multi-dimensional Black lives that claim spaces and make them home. This is demonstrated in his use of audio from an interview with the late Columbus artist Aminah Robinson (b. 1940, Columbus, OH; d. 2015, Columbus, OH). Robinson recalls how the people in the community called Poindexter Village, one of the first public housing complexes in the nation, the Blackberry Patch in homage to the berries that could be found there. Granger overlays this audio with a clip of the complex's brick buildings before they were demolished in 2021, subtly directing the audience to imagine the fruit that exists perhaps right outside of the frame, to connect this space to blooming and

sweetness, despite the shift in public housing's function as a space meant to enclose and surveil.

As quickly as the viewer bites into Robinson's memory, Granger changes perspective again, highlighting another key aspect to the video's representation of a Black gaze—movement. Twice within *The Line*, Granger begins to rotate the image on screen 180 degrees, visually demarcating that he is not satisfied with the historical record; a perspective shift is needed. While he presents the violence of our existence, he quickly works to reconstruct paths towards life.

These perspective shifts also engage a conversation between the local and national in Granger's constructed map. While *The Line* is undeniably about the Ohio places that raised Granger, he works to universalize this experience by highlighting how the spaces of Black life and resilience often look similar. Granger uses audio from a Chris Rock sketch to demonstrate preconceived notions that Black neighborhoods are violent and MLK Jr. Blvds act as their lines of demarcation. He then includes an image of a Black man in a gold shirt that he begins to rotate. This gold contrasts the violence Rock cites, as well as the Wiz's proclamation that red is now the color of regality, a color often associated with gang culture. The scene transitions, now displaying the intersection of MLK Jr. Blvd and Mayme Moore Place in Columbus, a street corner that houses Mayme Moore Park, where many Black community gatherings occur in the city.



Cameron A. Granger, still from *The Line*, 2021. Color video, with sound. 7 min. Courtesy of the artist.

The second time Granger deploys a 180-degree turn is in the latter part of the video. Following a series of clips that oscillate between images of life and death, Granger flips the script. As the history of the Great Migration is told through audio, an image of a car begins to turn on its axis, again ending upside down. *Soul Train* clips exist on the other side of this portal, as Michael Jackson and Diana Ross perform "Ease on Down the Road" on the program. Granger infuses this moment of escape from violence, this Great Migration, with a sense of Black joy, of Black imagination. "Ease on Down the Road" is reconfigured as a salve within the video, existing to dislodge your furrowed brow, to ease into the joyful practices that emerged despite the circumstances of this flight.

The video ends with Kendrick Lamar's "Sing about Me, I'm Dying of Thirst" playing in the background, as Granger shows the faces of the people behind the place he has lovingly recontextualized through the video. Close-ups of mother and son, of Black community members and business owners, of friends, of family, act as the final imagery Granger leaves us with. The lyrics "promise that you'll sing about me" infuse the scene with a melancholic feeling, which is fitting considering the weight of the world Granger just constructed for us. The video perhaps is his song, to these people and places, that exceed beyond just lines on a map.



Cameron A. Granger, still from *The Line*, 2021. Color video, with sound. 7 min. Courtesy of the artist.

What is the road home actually paved with? In a country that is founded on dispossession, displacement, and erasure, Cameron Granger's *The Line* acts as a map for Black Americans in search of a grounding place. Part meditation on racist politics that created Black neighborhoods, part letter home, Granger embodies the cartographer, assembling a landscape of the East Side of Columbus. Each scene in this video provides another tool, adds another symbol to the map's legend, and brings Black life into motion.

¹Tina M. Campt, *A Black Gaze: Artists Changing How We See* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2021).

² *Ibid.*, 17.



Cameron A. Granger
Stills from *The Line*, 2021
Color video, with sound, 7 minutes
Courtesy of the artist



Cameron A. Granger
Still from *The Line*, 2021
Color video, with sound, 7 minutes
Courtesy of the artist

ARTIST STATEMENT

I wanna think about the histories that my ancestors and I share in the same way that writer Hanif Abdurraqib describes the *Soul Train* line: a narrow, writhing, seemingly endless tunnel of Black folks smiling and clapping. Where, in the center, partners are brought together, sometimes by intention, many times by fate, and using whatever knowledge they have of themselves and of their bodies, must make their way out to the other side, urged on by the booming claps all around them.

I guess I'm saying that the margins might be narrow, but there's a freedom to be reached here, and I think it's love that will push us to it.

As a video artist, my work deals with images, both the capacity they have to influence the public imagination of our society, and how, through maintaining control of images in the mainstream, the powerful have effectively privatized that imagination, distorting entire histories and suppressing our possible futures. The work is a means to, like Ms. Toni Morrison said, "carve away at the accretions of deceit, ignorance, and sheer malevolence" embedded in the images and language of the powerful, of the Empire, so that new ways of imagining, and thus new futures, are "not only available, but inevitable."

BY CAMERON A. GRANGER

ASK YOURSELF

1. What does "community" mean to you? How are communities formed? What role do they play in our lives?
2. Black communities have consistently been on the receiving end of redlining, eminent domain, gentrification, and residential segregation. How do these practices impact community?
3. Maps, which are alluded to in the title of the installation, are tools for exploration and promise, but also have connotations of colonization, borders, and divisions. How does Granger address these opposing ideas in his work?



Cameron A. Granger
Still from *This Must Be the Place*, 2018
Color video, with sound, 4 minutes, 30 seconds
Courtesy of the artist

BIOGRAPHIES

CAMERON A. GRANGER is a video artist who uses the images and tools of mass media as a means of racial critique, reformulating the established histories they generate towards alternative forms of remembrance. He received his BFA from Columbus College of Art & Design (2016) and is currently based in Columbus, OH. His work has been featured in solo exhibitions at Vox Populi, Philadelphia, PA (2018); Ortega y Gasset, Brooklyn, NY (2019); and No Place Gallery, Columbus, OH (2022). Some recent group exhibitions include *Greater Columbus 2019*, Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, OH; *Videos In America: the cold mornings edge of the old viaduct*, Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, NY; and *Soft Scrub*, The Luminary, St. Louis, MO (all 2019). He also organized "The Get Free Telethon," a 24-hour livestream community fundraiser sponsored by Red Bull Arts, New York, NY (2020). Other recent national and international projects include *A library, for you*, a traveling community library most recently housed at ikattha project space, Bombay, India (2019) and *Pearl*, a body of collaborative works with his mother at Ctrl+Shft, Oakland, CA (2018). He is a 2017 alumnus of the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture and a 2021-22 artist-in-residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem.

DR. STEPHANIE KANG is an art historian, artist, and curator who specializes in contemporary art with a focus on new media art and theory. She received an MFA in Visual Art from Washington University in St. Louis and a PhD in the History of Art from the Ohio State University. Her writings have been published in *Flash Art*, *Runner Magazine*, and the peer reviewed journal *Media-N*. Throughout her career, she has curated solo and group exhibitions with artists like Lyndon Barrois Jr., Cole Lu, Ann Hirsch, and Kang Seung Lee, among others, and she was most recently the assistant curator at the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati. She is currently an assistant professor of art history at Rocky Mountain College of Art and Design.

DR. DEJA BEAMON is an assistant professor of Black Studies at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Her research insists on Black futurity by highlighting legacy building that occurs through communal care. She is invested in education as a practice of freedom, to borrow from bell hooks' language, and sees her classroom as another route towards Black legacy and futurity. Dr. Beamon's writing has been featured in *Womanly Magazine*, *Food for Thought Zine*, and The Get Free Telethon. She was the inaugural Digital Artist in Residency with *Womanly Magazine* in late 2020 and served on the Program Committee for Black Feminist Kitchen's 2020 Black Feminist Summer School. She is invested in building bridges between academia, art, and the public in her teaching, writing, and facilitating.



Cameron A. Granger: The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Heaven is part of the 2022 FotoFocus Biennial. Now in its sixth iteration, the Biennial activates over 100 museums, galleries, universities, and public spaces throughout Greater Cincinnati, Northern Kentucky, Dayton, and Columbus, Ohio in October 2022. General operating support for the CAC is provided by ArtsWave, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Ohio Arts Council.

