

Interview with Barbara Chase-Riboud

by Claudine Armand

Université Nancy 2

C. A.: Good afternoon. It's a great pleasure for me to introduce you to Barbara Chase-Riboud, whose work is in perfect harmony with the "anchorage/passage" theme of our conference as it lies at the crossroads of two heterogenous modes of expression, a plastic language and a verbal one. This dynamic movement is not only related to the passage from one disciplinary field to another but also to her handling of material and the energetic force that underlies her pictorial and literary work. As far as the notion of "anchorage" is concerned, I see it as being associated with the referential context as well as the form of her work.

Barbara Chase-Riboud, you are a sculptor (and a gifted graphic artist), a poet, and a novelist, and when we look at your career, we observe that you constantly switch back and forth from one semiotic code to another, from a three-dimensional to a two-dimensional work.

You began very early (you were seven) to take art classes at the Fletcher Art School in Philadelphia, where you were born (1939) and when you won your first sculpture prize. You also studied dance and music (the piano). In 1950 you started to write poetry and four years later you had your first exhibition of woodcuts in a New York gallery. That was 1954, the year the Museum of Modern Art acquired one of your woodcuts for its permanent collection. After graduation from the Tyler School of Fine Arts in 1957, you were awarded a John Hay Whitney Fellowship to study at the American Academy in Rome.

*After that award, you lived in Italy but you also traveled a lot, to Egypt, where you studied art and to Turkey and Greece. Back in the States, you studied design and architecture at Yale University and among your professors were Josef Albers (the famous professor who taught at the Bauhaus), Louis Kahn, and Philip Johnson. Then you received your first public commission to build the Wheaton Plaza Fountain in Washington, D. C., which became the subject for your master's degree along with a book of engravings illustrating the poems of Arthur Rimbaud, *Une Saison en Enfer*. In 1960 you left the States for London and the following year, you moved to Paris where you met the photojournalist Marc Riboud. From 1962 to 1966 you traveled widely, for example, in Greece, Morocco, Italy, Spain, the Soviet Union, China, and Senegal. During those years, you met various people, artists and writers, like Dali, Henry Miller, James Baldwin, the Russian poet, Anna Akhmatova, and political figures, including members of the Black Panther Movement, such as Huey Newton.*

*In the '70s you contributed to several exhibitions, in the USA (you had two solo shows, one was at the Betty Parsons Gallery in New York), in Europe (in France, in Germany where you exhibited at "Documenta VI" in Kassel), and in Africa. In 1974 your sculptures were exhibited at the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris, an exhibition curated by Françoise Cachin. In 1976, the French Ministry of Culture bought one of your sculptures, *Zanzibar/Gold*. This was a very productive period as it was also the time when your first poems and novels were published. In 1974, your book of poetry, *From Memphis & Peking*, was edited by Toni Morrison. Your first novel, *Sally Hemings*, was published in 1979. The book became a best-seller and won the Janet Heidinger Kafka Prize for best novel written by an American woman.*

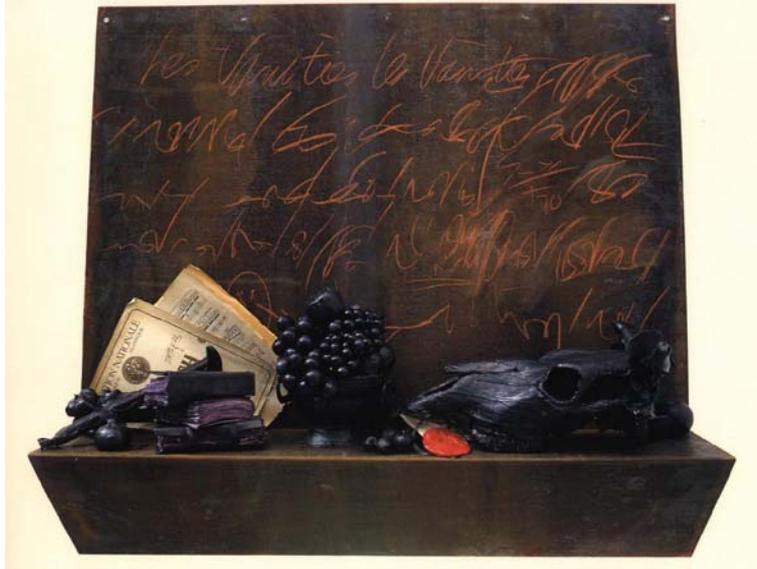
*During the '80s, you continued to work on your sculptures, but at the same time you went on writing poetry and novels – mainly historical narratives. Your second novel, *Validé*, was published in 1986, and another book of poetry, *Portrait of a Nude Woman as Cleopatra* in 1988, for which you were awarded the Carl Sandburg Prize as best American poet. *Echo of Lions*, based on the Amistad rebellion, was released one year later and *The President's Daughter* in*

1994. The following year, you were commissioned to produce a sculpture in New York City, in lower Manhattan, on the site where an eighteenth century African-American burial ground was discovered in 1991. In 1996 you were named Knight of the Order of Arts and Culture by the French Minister of Culture. Your sculpture, Africa Rising, was installed in New York City in 1998. Finally, your latest book, Hottentot Venus, was released last November. You've just come back from Rome, where you've been working on an exhibition which is due to open in March. You have studios in Paris, Rome, and Milan where the foundry is and, if I may say so, you are always on the move, between Europe and the USA.

B. C-R.: Just one thing I want to say is that it's not a matter of switching back and forth between writing and sculpture. You know I don't get up in the morning and run into my studio and chip away at the model piece and then in the afternoon sit down and write a poem. Things don't work that way. I think that the best way to sort of categorize the way I work is that basically I'm an architect and a sculptor and that narrative writing came much later. I could even say a second career – came much later because I found that there were things to express that I could not do with sculpture and that I felt a kind of compulsion to do – certainly the first book – because I really begged Toni Morrison to write *Sally Hemings*, which in French is *La Virginienne*. She was busy and she said “why don't you write it yourself, Barbara? It'll only take three months.” Well, it took three years and, as a result of that, there was this kind of passage between my sculptural life and my narrative life. And I think that the conduit for this passage was the poetry which I had begun to write at an early age, had stopped writing poetry, and then had gone back to it in '74 and had published a collection. So that everything goes in waves. I may spend one or two years on a book and I may spend a year or six months on a new exhibition. It's usually because someone compels me to do something, either they ask me, or they command me, or they commission me. So that everything goes in waves and everything goes in epochs. In the '70s it was mostly sculpture, although I did publish a book of poetry. In the '80s it was mostly narrative writing, although I did do a lot of sculpture and I did also do several important shows. In the '90s it was practically back to sculpture for several reasons which culminated in the exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, which was an exhibition of drawings. And in the 2000s I just don't know what's gonna happen next.

C.A.: So what you present is a bifocal work which is woven from various elements, materials, and sources. Personally, when I look at your sculptures or read your poems and novels, two words

come into my mind: “trace” and “archive”. First of all, I use the word “trace” to refer to the material aspect of your work, namely your sensitive and sensual approach to matter: your handling of metal and fiber (bronze and fiber are your two major mediums), for example, the way the fiber is braided, the bronze folded and crushed, and also the way the hand scratches the metal plate and scribbles notes that are often difficult to decipher, as in your smaller compositions, like *Vanitas* (1994):



Sometimes the metal is punctured with tiny signs, as in *Middle Passage Monument/Harrar* (1994):

(picture)

The material has close associations with memory and is used as a palimpsest, a surface that has been rubbed and scraped to unveil some hidden meaning or truth. Personally, I see a close link between your handling of metal and your handling of words, in particular, the way the hand of the poet (the maker) fills in space and arranges signs on the white page. This idea is suggested in the poem entitled “A White Space”:

A white space
To be filled:
Fat,
Expensive,
White paper
With a faint, elegant
Watermark
Washed into
White again
As storms
Wash blue skies
White.
A white space
To be filled.
The envelope
(Blue-lined of course)
Waiting to one side
Discreetly,
A doorman averting his eyes,
Too much love,
Indecent,

Supercilious
On the sidewalks of New York.
A white space
To be filled.
Should I
Shed
One
Tear
And fold it
Neatly
Into four?

I also have in mind the iconographic arrangement of some poems in the Cleopatra series, such as the following pyramid-like poem:

In
A f r i c a
The strange beasts
Wonder & worry at familiar
Lakes & watch reflections of
Egyptian Gods wade & speak to
Them in a meticulous tongue which is
Not our own nor any we have ever heard
But those who understand it say there is
No sound like their brilliant dialogues
Rustling savanna grass, composing mirages &
Miracles alike with bewildering urgency, as
Urgent as the pressed flesh of our own language
Which might be as beautiful if Caesar were in Africa.

The second word, “archive,” is related to your concern with history, time, and memory. Indeed, like an archivist (or like an archaeologist), you dig into the past, search our collective memory, peel away the different layers of history so as to unearth or unveil what has been erased or left in the dark. This is particularly true of your fiction which is deeply anchored in the history of the African-American people, for example, in novels like Sally Hemings, The President’s Daughter, or Echo of Lions, and in your poems where you examine the concepts of race and color (in “The Albino” or “Marc Rothko”, which is a reflection on color and light).

However, it is to be pointed out right away that we cannot reduce your work to that dimension. Your vision is much broader, pluralistic, and multiethnically-oriented and I would say that it is more appropriate to speak of a “multicultural” anchorage. Your overall production testifies to a desire to give evidence, as is the case with your latest novel, Hottentot Venus, which gives voice to another forgotten figure of history, the South African woman, Sarah Bartman. What is actually interesting about this book is the plurality of voices and the kaleidoscopic vision the reader gets from it.

You often quote Claude Levi-Strauss saying that “Art is the only proof that anything has ever happened in the past.” So art is used as evidence, and, to use your words, as “monument and memorial.” Besides, the word “monument” appears in the titles of some of the sculptures and in the Monument Drawings. For example, Middle Passage Monument (1994), is, as you said, “for the 11 million that have no monument.” Africa Rising (1998), is dedicated to the slaves that were anonymously buried in Manhattan’s Burial Ground. Could you briefly speak about this project and the link between the sculpture and the text, Hottentot Venus?

(picture)

B. C-R.: Well, there is a link and this is the first time actually that the narrative work has sort of crossed over into the sculpture work or vice versa because I used a kind of “personnage” for the memorial, the historical “personnage” of Sarah Bartman. This was a commission from the US government in 1994 to build a memorial to an African burial ground which had been discovered in lower Manhattan when they had done excavations on an FBI building. This created quite a sensation in New York because the black community decided that this was sacred ground and that the FBI building had no business being on the spot. However, the US government sort of made a deal with the communities saying OK we’ll do the archaeological digging and the finding of the bodies. This was a burial ground of about 20,000 people, mostly free blacks, some slaves, some poor blacks, but the interesting thing is that it went under the whole Wall Street area. The whole capital of capitalism in the Western world is built on a black cemetery. This I found poetic and ironic and I was quite happy to accept the commission to do this memorial. And the deal was that the archaeological work would be done, the monument would be built, there would be a museum and a study center for the history of blacks in New York. And then they would be able to build the FBI building. So this was the deal that was made in 1991 when they discovered the burial ground. It was finally dedicated in 2002, ten years later. The building exists and my memorial exists but there’s not much else that has happened. So there’s a kind of melancholy and ironic sort of lesson to be gained by this. But nevertheless I had taken Sarah Bartman, some historical material, and tried to transpose it into something which would represent Africa and Africans rising. And this is the result. What happened later is that I took the same material when the French government decided to send Sarah Bartman back to South Africa in 2000. In 2001 I decided to write *Hottentot Venus* and that is how that came about.

C. A.: *So art is used as a vehicle to reassess, repair, correct the wrongs of history but also to heal the wounds of the past and arouse a new consciousness in the spectator’s mind. Following the tradition of African-American poets like Langston Hughes, Claude McKay or Robert Hayden, to name but a few, you deal with the history of the black diaspora (as, for example, in the poem “Harrar”). The figure of the outcast (“I Awoke in the Shaved and Sullen Heat”), images of mutilation and loss are recurrent in your poems, for example, in “Why Did We Leave Zanzibar?” we can read “our amputated history). In this poem or in others, a whole network of words centred around the radical “member” in its physical meaning, are repeated over and over: “remember,”*

“unremembered,” “dismembered,” etc.

In your sculptures, the cracks, openings, and fissures, are the visual reminders of the wounds of the body. What is so characteristic of your technique is the process of covering and hiding, of juxtaposing and confronting antagonistic elements, and also the process of interdependence (one material needs the other). I think of Confessions for Myself (1972), black bronze and wool, All That Rises Must Converge (1973), polished bronze and silk, Nursery (1989), black bronze and silk, Black Obelisk (1994), black bronze and wool or the Malcolm X series.

(picture)

B. C-R.: This is an important sculpture simply because it's the beginning of my “signature sculptures,” the ones on which I based my reputation. They were the sculptures that began my involvement with combining the soft materials with the bronze and also the inversion of the two materials in that the silk becomes the weighty part of the sculpture and the metal inversely becomes the crushed-in and flowing and soft part of the sculpture. This series has continued through the '90s and the 2000s because the last sculptures that I will be exhibiting in Rome will be a continuation of this particular signature sculpture. I was already working on this piece when Malcolm X was assassinated and I dedicated these sculptures to him. They were not sculptures about Malcolm X, although they were interpreted as such by many critics, who then decided that they were too elegant to have anything to do with him. Nevertheless, you could say that these were my first monument sculptures in that my own work and my own evolution sort of crossed over with a historical monument and I named this series of sculptures *Malcolm X*.

C. A.: *It seems to me that we can speak of another form of anchorage – I would call it spatial anchorage – and this has to do with the tension created by the play between immobility and movement, fluidity and rigidity, looseness and tightness, a tension that is reinforced by the verticality and frontality of the sculptures. In other words, they are never static but constantly moving, not only thanks to your handling of material but also thanks to the effects of light. The fiber streams out of the hard and rigid metal, it flows down and then reaches the floor where it curls and sits irregularly, giving the impression that the material is spilling over onto the ground, growing and growing, expanding, and finally getting hold of space. Do you agree with that?*

B. C-R.: As I said, I continued the *Malcolm X* series with a series of signature sculptures, using the same technique of lifting the bronze up off the floor and up off a base and giving it a base which gives the illusion, at least, of holding up the bronze. The silk gives the illusion of holding up the bronze, and you were right in saying that this is a sculpture which is still but is never still. Because there is always movement in the silk but the silk is solidified so that it gives the impression of metal. And there's always movement in the metal because of the change of light. So

there is this kind of interaction not only between the two materials but between light, air, and action.

C. A.: *Your technique based on a subtle interplay of contradictory elements (bronze or aluminum combined with silk or wool) is also a way of subverting the traditional hierarchy in art, bronze being traditionally associated with the masculine while fiber is generally regarded to have feminine connotations and to be related to craft. I know that you do not like labels, but what do you think of this distinction that some critics make?*

B. C-R.: I think it's rubbish... It's easy to put down a woman's art as being craft or if they do happen to do extremely masculine sculptures, then they have to fall back on politics. Usually if a critic encounters one of my sculptures and doesn't know that I am a woman, what they say about the sculpture is completely different from what they would say about the sculpture if they know, not only my gender but what I look like. I started putting my photograph into my catalogues... and it is very difficult to separate these sculptures because of who made them from political statements such as we have been discussing now. I would say that most of these sculptures are genderless. They could have been done by a male or a female. The combination of the silk and the metal probably could not have been done by a male but it's a matter of the head and not of anything else.

C. A.: *It's true that we cannot categorize your work, which goes beyond labels and frontiers. We can perceive various sources that emerge, overlap, and interact: for example, African and Oceanic art (we are reminded of African masks surrounded by cords, hemp, and raffia fringes), classical Western art, Italian sculptures by Bernini as in Ecstasy of Saint Theresa (1994), traces of Futurism in Africa Rising, Surrealism, as in Plant Lady (1962), and the influence of Germaine Richier in Adam and Eve (1958).*

B. C-R.: *Africa Rising* is actually the first sculpture I ever cast in bronze in Rome in the '60s. The sculpture is about nine feet tall so that the figures are a little less than life size. It was the beginning of my career. I was very influenced by European art, certain Surrealistic artists.

C. A.: *Yes, your work is anchored in the main art movements of the 20th century, French, Italian, American art. Concerning American art, we can see traces of the teachings of Josef Albers (born in Germany and a teacher at the Bauhaus), in the purist and minimal esthetic, the abstract vocabulary, the insistence on the structure and texture of materials. In my view, you are also close to artists like Eva Hesse (who studied at Yale University as well) or the fiber artist, your friend, Sheila Hicks (whom you also met at Yale) who was also deeply interested in binding, connecting, and tying. Eva Hesse, for example, used a variety of impermanent materials (cheesecloth, latex, fiberglass, clay, rubber, etc.) and has produced soft sculptures (sometimes made of cord-wrapped tubes or latex) hanging loose from ceiling to floor. She was interested in*

sculpture for its literalness and physicality but if I compare your sculptures to hers, her has to do with precariousness and is much more fragile.

B. C-R.: I appreciate the power of Hesse's latex and fiberglass sculptures and their fluency in whatever materials she worked in because they evoke the same tension between geometric and organic forms, between absence and presence, between hard and soft, between hanging and tension as the sculptures of the '70s and the more recent *Musica* series. I think there is a link in the flowing juxtaposition of materials which in her case, give the impression of fragility, but in my case, just the opposite: a Narrative sculpture in continuous juxtaposition of idea and material, abstraction and classicism. Almost everyone who has written about Hesse's art and mine evokes as well the poetic tension between contraries: hard and soft, geometric and organic, serial and unique, order and chaos, and the very real feeling of the materials floating, or hanging, sagging, angled, in tension in a way which seems to spark a kind of instant recognition of spirits, "personages", power shamans and icons... Sheila taught me the uses of cord and rope, of knotting and tying to hide the armatures necessary for the heavy bronze elements.

C. A.: *You've traveled widely and you've been particularly fascinated with Egypt. After your first trip to Egypt, you said: "It was the first time I realized there was such a thing as non-European art. For someone exposed only to the Greco-Roman tradition, it was a revelation. I suddenly saw how insular the Western world was vis-à-vis the non-white, non-Christian world. The blast of Egyptian culture was irresistible. The sheer magnificence of it. The elegance and perfection, the timelessness, the depth. After that, Greek and Roman art looked like pastry to me. From an artistic point of view, that trip was historic for me." And you added: "Though I didn't know it at the time, my own transformation was part of the historical transformation of the blacks that began in the '60s." Does place determine and affect your approach to material?*

B. C-R.: If by "place" you mean "history" then, yes, a certain transformation of what has occurred before and the recognition that one cannot escape this recognition. It is in our genes, both the evident and the suppressed. History, after all is only the poetry of the past...

C. A.: *Here are a few sculptures that are part of the Cleopatra series, Cleopatra's Chair (1994), Cleopatra's Bed (1997), Cleopatra's Cape (1973):*

(picture)

B. C-R.: *Cleopatra's Cape* was the first of the series. It was made with tiny plaques of cast

bronze, individually cast bronze which are woven together with bronze or copper, wire, and then put over armatures which are either oak or steel.

C. A.: You've alluded to European influences. We could also mention Giacometti, in particular when we look at the tiny Giacometti-like figures you created in the 1950s or the lean figure of the striding poet in Poet Walking His Dog (1994) made of bronze, paper, Cor-Ten steel, and cord:

(picture)

B. C-R.: These are part of shelf sculptures which I did in the '90s, actually combining all kinds of materials including wax and paper, as well as bronze. They're usually set on steel shelves and are usually narrative, in contrast to the *Malcolm X* series or the *Zanzibar* series. It's sort of retro Chase-Riboud because I'm going back to a way of working which I began in the '60s and then of course it developed into something else. But the combination of the materials and also the automatic writing... there's a kind of "croisement" between the poetry and the sculpture.

C. A.: This little piece (which also reminds me of Joseph Cornell's boxes used as a container or miniature stage) will act as a transition since I would like to focus now on the notion of "passage": first of all, the fusion of visual and textual signs, as in this composition or in your drawings, and secondly the shift from word to image and image to word. To illustrate this, we can have a look at The Monument Drawings which often incorporate words, for example, Monument to Man Ray's The Enigma of Isadore Ducasse, Philadelphia (1997), which we could call a wrapped object:

(picture)

Or the little drawing from the '70s, Triangle-Poem Aperture, 1972, or Poem/Aperture/Column (1973) which combines poetry and automatic writing:

(picture)

B. C-R.: They are imaginary monuments (because I never built any of these monuments) to people who should have monuments but do not. And so there is a series of situations and names of people that I would like to write books about. So the drawings were a way to serve homage to what I call the "invisible people of history." The drawings also cross my narrative work a little bit, because first of all I write in longhand and I draw in longhand, and secondly, because of the nature of the subjects. It's Günter Grass who said: "Why do people fear writers so much? It's

because they voluntarily put themselves on the side of the losers of history and in doing so, they question those that have achieved the victory.” And I think it’s certainly the reason I write.

C. A.: There are close links and explicit echos between your sculptures and your poems, and very often they bear the same title, “Why Did We Leave Zanzibar?” and the Zanzibar series or The Albino (1972) and the poem “Le Lit” or the poem “Bathers” and the sculpture which dates from 1973.

BATHERS

Bathers
In a new and unpolluted sea
Fresh from vision
You and I
You and I
New
New
Emerging
Clinking like metal
Shiny on the sand
As wave-washed copper pennies
Anchored by beach lizards
Weighted in shrouds of
Smooth rose pebbles
Attached to
Slow-rolling flying kites
Separated by a
Gritty breeze
That winds down
The space
Between us
As irrefutable as
The Great Chinese Wall ...
Evaporating sea tears
On you
Sea tears that dry
Leaving small white
Circles of brine
Not like my tears
That remain
Forever
Undried
As I walk back into that
New and unpolluted sea
Fresh from vision
You and I
You and I
Old
Old
Converging
In the ooze of
Radiolarian skeletons
On the bottom
Of the Arabian Sea.

Here is the sculpture made with aluminum and silk, which makes me think of the Minimalist artist, Carl Andre, and his unfixed “rugs” made of metal plaques arranged on the floor in a grid-like structure but so different from your composition which is more sensual, tactile, and saturated with light.

(picture)

B. C-R.: *Bathers* is a floor piece. The last time it was installed, it was in the Walters Gallery in Baltimore, in a gallery where there was a huge Tintoretto at the other end of the gallery which they could not take down because it was too big. So you have this baroque, very colorful and sensual painting of floating nudes looking down on this particular sculpture, which is really a kind of “swimming-pool” sculpture. It is aluminum and the silk is sort of crushed between the aluminum pavés. I wrote the poem before I did the sculpture, which is very rare. The poem was published in 1974.

C. A.: *To conclude, I would like to show another series based on music. This is what you have been doing since the 1990s, La Musica Red and La Musica Black. Both were made in 2000 out of bronze and silk.*

(pictures)

When I look at La Musica series, I wonder if you are not moving towards greater abstraction? It seems to me that there is an attempt to purify the form.

B. C-R.: Well, I think that’s true. I think that the use of the silk has evolved in that I rarely use silk in other forms than what they call “écheveau” in French. I’m using the silk like clay rather than like fiber, which means that the gesture of the silk has become more abstract. If you go back to *La Musica* series, you can see that the silk is no longer woven, it is no longer worked into cords, and braids, and so on, but it’s used in its pure state.

C. A.: *Now, if I draw a comparison between your visual work and your literary work in terms of style, and evolution of style and technique, I detect slight changes. In your latest novel, Hottentot Venus, the syntax is cumulative and the language verges on excess. I have in mind several passages in which you write long sentences, you pile up adjectives, perhaps in a provocative way? In your latest sculptures, in particular in La Musica series, it seems to me that you scrape away material, that there is a greater interplay between volume and void.*

B. C-R.: I think you’re right that *Hottentot Venus* is probably the most dense. It is more dense because it’s probably the most dramatic of all the novels, because it’s one of the most dramatic sort of things that had happened in history, in that it is the beginning of birth of scientific racism – this particular woman’s story. And so there are two reasons why it is so dense. First of all, half of the book is in her voice, which means that I had to imagine a woman going through what she went

through. The other half of the book is in nine different voices, nine different contemporary men and one woman who were her contemporaries and who interacted with her. And so I had to change voices nine times in this novel. And I think that, because the novel was so dramatic in itself, the language I used had to somehow come up to the level of what was going on in the novel. And I didn't invent what was going on in the novel, so I had no control over this. I simply had to tell the story in the best way I could.

C. A.: Thank you very much indeed for talking to us, Barbara.

Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 1958 Festival dei Due Mondi, Spoleto
American Academy in Rome
Galleria l'Obelisco, Rome
- 1970 The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Boston
- 1973 The Berkeley Art Museum, Berkeley, California
The Royal Ontario Art Museum, Montreal
The Detroit Art Institute, Detroit, Michigan
The Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indiana
The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio
- 1974 Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris, Paris
Staatliche Kunsthalle, Baden Baden
Kunstmuseum, Düsseldorf
Merian Gallery, Krefeld, Germany
- 1975 Betty Parsons Gallery, New York
Museum of contemporary Art, Teheran
United States Cultural Center, Dakar
United States Cultural Center, Freetown, Sierra Leone
United States Cultural Center, Accra, Ghana
United States Cultural Center, Bamako
United States Cultural Center, Tunis
- 1976 Musée Reattu, Arles
Kunstverein, Freiburg
- 1977 Documenta VI, Kassel, Germany
- 1980 The Bronx Museum, New York
- 1981 Stampatori gallery, New York
- 1990 Pasadena College Art Gallery and Sculpture Garden, Los Angeles
- 1994 Espace Kiron, Paris
- 1998 St John's Museum, Wilmington, North Carolina
Diggs Museum, Winston Salem,
North Carolina AAMP Museum, Philadelphia
- 1999 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
- 2000 Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland
- 2006-07 Shanghai Museum of Contemporary Art, Shanghai, China; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 1954 New York, ACA Gallery: "Scholastic Art Awards"
- 1958 Pittsburgh, Carnegie Institute: "International Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture Biennale"
- 1959 Philadelphia, The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts: "National Painting and Drawing Exhibition"
- 1961 Paris, Musée National d'Art Moderne
- 1965 Philadelphia, Commercial Museum: "The New York Architectural League Selection"
- 1966 Dakar, Senegal: "Premier Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres, 10 Artists des États-Unis"
- 1967 New York, Galerie Air France : "7 Américains de Paris"
- 1969 Avignon, Festival of Avignon, Musée Réatta: " L'Oeil Écoute"
- 1970 Boston, Museum of Fine Arts: "Afro-American Artists New York/Boston"
- 1971 Paris, Galeries Nationales d'Exposition du Grand Palais: "Salon des Nouvelles Réalités"
Newark, The Newark Museum of Art: "Two Generations"
Paris. Musée National d'Art Moderne: "Salon de la Jeune Sculpture"
Toronto, Ontario, Art Gallery of Ontario: "Contemporary Jewelry"
New York, Whitney Museum of American Art: "Contemporary Black Artists in America"
- 1971-73 Ottawa, Ontario, National Gallery of Canada: "Jewelry as Sculpture as Jewelry" Traveled to Boston, Institute of Contemporary Art.
- 1972 New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art: "Gold." Traveled to Toronto Gallery of Art.
New York, Whitney Museum of American Art: "Whitney Biennial"
- 1974 New York, The Albright Knox Gallery: "Masterworks of the Seventies"
Philadelphia, Museum of the Civic Center: "Woman's Work – American Art '74"
- 1975 Cologne Art Fair: "Merian Gallery Croup Show"
- 1976 Sydney, Australia: "The Sydney Biennial"
- 1977-80 Art Gallery of Ontario: "European Drawings." Traveled to Sydney, Australia, Art Gallery of New South Wales: Adelaide, Australia. The Art Gallery of South Australia
- 1977 Washington. D.C., National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Remwick Gallery: "The Object as Poet." Traveled to New York, American Craft Museum
Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou: "Les Mains Regardant"
- 1979 New York, The Studio Museum in Harlem, April: "Another Generation"
- 1980 Brussels, Miroir d' Encre, April: "Group Show."
- 1980-81 Long Island City. Queens. N.Y., P.S. 1."African-American Abstraction:" Traveled to Syracuse, N.Y., Everson Museum of Art
- 1981-82 Normal, Illinois, Center for Visual Arts Gallery: "Forever Free." Traveled to Montgomery Museum of Fine Art; Indianapolis Museum of Art
- 1983 Paris, F.N.A.P. Rothschild Museum: "Nœuds et Ligatures"
- 1984-85 Los Angeles, California Afro-American Museum: "East/West Contemporary American Art
- 1992 Sari Francisco. Bomini Gallery: "Paris Connections"
- 1995 Hakone, Japan: "The Second Fujisankei Biennale: International Exhibition for Contemporary Sculpture"
- 1995-96 New York. The Studio Museum in Harlem: "The Listening Sky"
- 1996 New York, The Museum of Modern Art: "The Grace Mayer Collection"
- 1996-98 Philadelphia, African-American Historical and Cultural Museum: "Three Generations: A Study in Paradox." Traveled to New York, The Equitable Gallery: Savannah, Georgia, Telfair Museum: Los Angeles. Afro-American Museum. Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution
New York, The Studio Museum in Harlem: "Explorations in the City of Light: African-American Artists in Paris, 1915-1965." Traveled to The Chicago Cultural Center; Fort Worth, Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth; New Orleans Museum of Art; Chicago Cultural Center:

Milwaukee Art Museum. Seattle Art Museum.
1996-99 Atlanta. Spellman College Museum of Art. May: "Bearing Witness. Contemporary African-American Women Artists." Traveled to Tuskegee, Alabama, Tuskegee University Art Gallery; Fort Wayne, Indiana_ Fort Wayne Museum of Art; St. Paul, Minnesota. St. Paul Museum; Fort Worth, Texas, Museum of African-American Culture; Portland, Oregon Portland Museum of Art; Houston. Texas, The Museum of Fine Arts
1999 Portland, Oregon, Portland Museum of Art: "Bearing Witness"
Washington, D.C. Building Museum, Smithsonian Institution: "Design Awards" I.U.S. General Services Administration
Houston, Texas, The Museum of Fine Arts: "Bearing Witness"

Literary Works by the Artist

From Memphis & Peking. New York: Random House, Inc., 1974
Sally Hemings. New York: Viking Press, 1979; New York: Ballantine Press, 1994; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999
Validé. New York: William Morrow, 1986
Portrait of a Nude Woman as Cleopatra. New York: William Morrow, 1988
Echo of Lions. New York: William Morrow, 1989
Roman Egyptien. Paris : Editions Félin, 1994
The President's Daughter. New York : Crown Publishers Inc., 1994
Hottentot Venus. New York: Anchor, 2004

Barbara Chase-Riboud [1] 1939â€” Artist, novelist Worked as Artist, Novelist [2] Faced Controversy Over Hemings Novel [3] Courted Controversy [4] Continued Her Creative Output [5] Selected writings [6] Sources [7] In her massive sculptures, Barbara Chase-Riboud [8] fuses elements from several diffe.Â As she recalled in a 1989 Boston Globe interview with Marian Christy, Chase-Riboud said that it was in Italy, away from the racial tensions of the United States, that she â€œfirst tasted libertyâ€. Thatâ€™s the ultimate liberty: feeling that the space around you is expandable.â€” Worked as Artist, Novelist. Margaret Loke article on discovery that Barbara Chase-Riboud, who accuses Dreamworks of stealing from her novel forÂ Ms. Chase-Riboud admitted in an interview yesterday that she had used material from the earlier book without attribution, but asserted that she had done nothing wrong. During the interview, Ms. Chase-Riboud, speaking of "The Harem," said: "Well, my dear, first of all that book is not a novel. It is a nonfiction book which I used as reference. I have a technique of sort of weaving real documents and real reference materials into my novel and making a kind of seamless narrative using both documents and fiction." Barbara Chase-Riboud's life work is revelatory. While her sculpture does reveal the archetypal power of primordial myth, her poetry possesses the subtle, sensual power of the highly sophisticated artist that she is. Her work is her own, combining the classicism of the European world with the spiritual, yet urbane work of the great African masters -- combining in a vision, scale and Â“uvre which the French would perceive as quintessentially American. Gerald A. Pogach, University of Paris, James van der Zee Award. bcr@chase-riboud.org. Barbara Chase-Riboud (born June 26, 1939) is an American visual artist and sculptor, bestselling novelist, and award-winning poet. After becoming established as a sculptor and poet, Chase-Riboud gained widespread recognition as an author for her novel Sally Hemings (1979). It earned the Janet Heidinger Kafka Prize in Fiction, and became an international success. Because she fully imagined Sally Hemings, the novel generated discussion about the likely relationship between the young enslaved woman and her master, Thomas Jefferson, who became president of the United States. Mainline historians rejected Chase-Riboud's portrayal and persuaded CBS not to produce a planned TV mini-series adapted from the novel. Barbara Chase-Riboudâ€™s historical novels offer a strongly diversified exploration of power relationships as they are shaped by race, gender, and social and political needs.Â Chase-Riboudâ€™s intellectual inquisitiveness, her multilingual and multicultural experience, and her artistic sensibility successfully collaborate in these re-creations of large portions of world history, the visual power of which the author attains through precise and often poetic descriptions of places, events, clothes, and physiognomies.Â Langdonâ€™s interviews with sixth U.S. president John Quincy Adams, Burr, and painter John Trumbull, inserted in the middle of the novel, ensure a definite link between Sally Hemingsâ€™s private life and the representatives of public history and lend her story long-overdue weight and legitimacy.