SEARCHING FOR AN AFRICAN AMERICAN ARTISTIC IDENTITY… IN MEXICO?: THE ART OF HALE WOODRUFF, ELIZABETH CATLETT, AND SARGENT CLAUDE JOHNSON

A THESIS SUBMITTED ON THE
SEVENTEENTH DAY OF APRIL 2024
TO THE DEPARTMENT OF THE HISTORY OF ART
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
OF THE SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS
OF TULANE UNIVERSITY
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
BY

Daniella Statia

APPROVED: ______________________
Mia Bagneris, Ph.D.
Director

____
Barbara Mundy, Ph.D.

____
Adrian Anagnost, Ph.D.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project initially stemmed from my curiosity about muralism during the 1920’s in the United States. It has transformed into an exploration of three artists who deployed different mediums, styles, and materials. I would like to express my gratitude to the Newcomb Art Department for the wonderful and intellectually stimulating two years I have spent here. I would not change a thing about my two years spent with this department and in New Orleans. This community has allowed me to grow as a person, intellectually and personally. I first would like to give my advisor, Dr. Mia Bagneris, my greatest gratitude for all her support through this journey. Dr. Bagneris introduced me to the complex and intriguing work of the New Negro Movement and all its moving parts. Through her continued kindness, patience, and passion, I was able to create this thesis into more than I had imagined. I will cherish her mentorship for decades to come as pursue a career in museum work. I also want to thank Dr. Barbara Mundy for her continued support and knowledge of Precolonial Indigenous Mexico. Dr. Mundy’s care and knowledge for her students has influenced this thesis and me in many ways. With her help, I was able to organize a month-long research trip to Mexico funded by the Tinker Foundation. For this, I would also like to thank the Stone Center for allowing me access to partial funding and helping to forward my thesis by building a foundation of knowledge about the Public Arts Movement in Mexico City. Through this experience, I was able to visit sites with works not yet digitized, while also experiencing the life of Mexico City and seeing how murals and prints still influence the city today. Without the knowledge and kindness of Dr. Adrian Anagnost, I would not have a knowledge of

modern art in Latin America. Through being her teacher's assistant and taking a seminar with her, Dr. Anagnost taught me modern and contemporary artists and the importance of highlighting Indigenous roots in their work. I am honored to have these three individuals supporting me.

This project was made possible by many unique factors that New Orleans and Tulane University have provided me. Receiving funding from the Newcomb Department of Art allowed me to obtain an internship at the Beauregard-Keyes Historic House in the French Quarter and part of my research trip to Mexico City in the summer of 2023. Through the internship, I gained museum skills such as catalogue programing, curatorial research, and reimagining the space for exhibitions. With the funding given to me by the Newcomb Department of Art and the Stone Center, my research trip to Mexico City furthered my understanding of Mexican muralism and how integral public art is to the city and culture. Without this experience, I would not have had the proper understanding of symbols and aesthetics that Black artists adopted from Mexican artists. At Tulane, I was able to take advantage of the resources in New Orleans such as the Amistad Research Center and the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library. Through the help of Lisa C. Moore of the Amistad Research Center, I was able to look through archive boxes that had extensive files of first-hand accounts from two artists in this thesis. The Amistad Research Center gave me evidence that is not accessible online, allowing me to incorporate this into my thesis. I would also like to express my gratitude to the San Francisco Art Institute Archive + Foundation for all of their help. Unable to go to San Francisco, the institution sent me digitized PDFs of their archival files on Sargent Claude Johnson, one of my artists discussed in the thesis. These files proved to be essential in my formulation of Chapter Three, giving me Johnson's application for his stay in Mexico, along with letters sent about his trip and cataloging information about his works. Without them, Chapter Three would not be.

Finally, I would like to extend my gratitude to my support system for the past two years. To my parents, Kelso and Beverly Statia, and my brother, Dexter Statia, I am forever grateful for the continuous support and love you all give me throughout my life. I would never be where I am now without the three of you by my side every step of the way. To my grandparents, I want to express my gratitude for raising me on the importance of knowledge and encouraging my dreams no matter what. To my extended family, my life is whole knowing that I have all of you cheering alongside me. To my friends, new and old, being loved by you all has been life-changing. I could have never imagined my life at Tulane being filled with this much joy, laughter, tears, and love. I will hold the times we have shared together in my heart forever.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .... **i**

LIST OF FIGURES .... **vi**

INTRODUCTION **1**

I. Thesis Structure
II. Historical Context
III. Defining my Vocabulary

CHAPTER ONE **21**
Africa (and Mexico) as a Pinnacle of Art: African and Mexican Influence in Hale Woodruff's Art of the Negro

I. Introduction
II. Looking to the Ancestors: Hale Woodruff and 1920s Theorists
III. "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts": Locke's Influence on the African Forms in Muses
IV. "The Negro Digs Up His Past," Literally: The *Art of the Negro* and Schomburg
V. The *Art of the Negro* and the Effects of Mexican Art School on African American Artists
VI. Black and Brown: The Effectiveness of Muralism and Solidarity in Mexico and the United States
VII. Conclusion: Work that Speaks to More Than One Audience

CHAPTER TWO **48**
Shared Oppression: The Double Consciousness of Elizabeth Catlett and Civil Rights Congress

I. Introduction
II. Catlett in the U.S.: Howard with Locke and Chicago with White
III. The Double Consciousness of Elizabeth Catlett
IV. For the Mexican Audience: Taller de Gráfica Popular and The Public Arts
V. For the African American Audience: Subject Matter and Symbolism
VI. Conclusion

CHAPTER THREE **71**
The Knot and the Noose: The Importance of Materiality in the Art of Sargent Claude Johnson

I. Introduction
II. Sargent Claude Johnson: A Look Into Identity and Early Work
III. The Harmon Foundation: Johnson and the African American Art Community

IV. Johnson and Mexico: Materiality as an Act of Solidarity
V. African American Subject and Mexican Materiality
VI. Conclusion

CONCLUSION 100

FIGURES.. 103

BIBLIOGRAPHY 131

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure:

1.1. Raphael, *The School of Athens*, 1510-1511, Fresco, Stanze di Raffaello, Vatican City.

1.2. El Greco, *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz*, 1586, oil on canvas, 190 x 140 in., Iglesia de Santo Tomé, Toledo

1.3. Hale Woodruff, Panel 6: *Art of the Negro*: *Muses*, 1952, oil on canvas, 144 x 144 in., Clark Atlanta University Art Collection.

1.4. Dan society, Dean Gle Mask, late 19th-early 20th century, wood, and pigment, 9 3/4 x 6 x 3 in., Brooklyn Museum of Art.

1.5. Hale Woodruff, Panel two, *Art of the Negro*: *Interchange*, oil on canvas, 144 x 144 in., Clark Atlanta University Art Collection.

1.6. Hale Woodruff, Panel four: *Art of the Negro: Parallels*, 1952, oil on Canvas, 144 x 144 in., Clark Atlanta University Art Collection.

1.7. Diego Rivera, "From the Conquest to 1930," *History of Mexico* murals, 1929–30, fresco, Palacio Nacional, Mexico City.

1.8. Diego Rivera, "The Aztec World," *History of Mexico* murals, 1929, fresco, Palacio Nacional, Mexico City.

1.9. Aztec, Maize Goddess (Chicomecoatl), 14th-early 16th century, Basalt, 17 ½ x 7 ½ x 6 11/16 in., Baltimore Museum of Art.

1.10. Hale Woodruff, Panel one: *Art of the Negro: Native Forms*, 1952, oil on canvas, 144 x 144 in., Clark Atlanta University Art Collection.

1.11. Hale Woodruff, Panel three: *Art of the Negro: Dissipation*, 1952, oil on canvas, 144 x 144 in., Clark Atlanta University Art Collection.

1.12. Hale Woodruff, Panel five: *Art of the Negro: Influences*, 1952, oil on canvas, 144 x 144 in., Clark Atlanta University Art Collection.

2.1. Elizabeth Catlett*, Civil Rights Congress,* 1950, linocut, 12 x 7 in., The Art Institute of Chicago.

2.2. Elizabeth Catlett, *Mother and Child*, 1944, lithograph, 12 ½ x 9 in, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

2.3. Elizabeth Catlett, *In Sojourner Truth I Fought for the Rights of Women as Well as Blacks*, from the series *The Negro Woman*, 1946 (this print specifically 1989), linoleum

cut from a series of fourteen linoleum cuts, 8 7/8 x 5 7/8 in., Museum of Modern Art, New York.

2.4. Elizabeth Catlett, *In Phillis Wheatley I Proved Intellectual Equality in the Midst of Slavery* from the series *The Negro Woman*, 1946 (this print specifically 1989), linoleum cut from a series of fourteen linoleum cuts, 9 x 6 in., Museum of Modern Art, New York.

2.5. Arturo García Bustos, "El descontento de los campesinos obtiene su respuesta" ("The discontent of the peasants gets their response"), 1947, 10 5/8 x 15 ¾ in., Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

2.6. Alberto Beltrán, Illustration from a drawing on the cover of Calaveras resurrectas [Resurrected Skulls], 16 years of political skulls of the Taller de Gráfica Popular, 1954, Taller de Gráfica Popular, Mexico.

2.7. Poster, "Free Angela Davis," Elizabeth Catlett files, courtesy of The Amistad Research Center, New Orleans.

3.1. Sargent Claude Johnson, *The Knot and the Noose*, obverse view, 1948, Terracotta mounted on a wooden base, 17 x 9 x 3 in.

3.2. Sargent Claude Johnson, *The Knot and the Noose*, reserve view, 1948, Terracotta mounted on a wooden base, 17 x 9 x 3 in.

3.3. Sargent Claude Johnson, *Elizabeth Gee*, 1927, Stoneware with glaze, 13 1/8 x 10 ¾ x 7 ½ in., San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

3.4. Sargent Claude Johnson, *Pearl*, 1923-25, stoneware with glaze, location unknown.

3.5. Sargent Claude Johnson, *Forever Free*, 1933, paint, and wood, 36 in x 11 ½ in x 9 ½ in., San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

3.6. Sargent Claude Johnson, *Mask*, 1933, copper, 10 7/8 x 7 7/8 x 2 3/8 in., San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

3.7. Unidentified, *Face Mask*, circa 19th-20th century, Wood, Côte d'Ivoire, 16 ¼ x 8 x 3 ½ in, New Orleans Museum of Art.

3.8. Aaron Douglas, Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life, May 1927, Yale University Library.

3.9. Attributed to the Metropolitan Painter, *Vessel with mythological scene*, 7th-8th century, ceramic with pigment, Guatemala or Mexico, Mesoamerica, 5 ½ x 4 x 4 3/16 x 4 ½ in., The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

3.10. José Clemente Orozco, *Zapatistas*, 1931, oil on canvas, 45 x 55 in., Museum of Modern Art, New York.

INTRODUCTION

"There was a blossoming of new promises in the Twenties, went on into the Thirties, and America was just finding its roots, the blacks and the whites as well, here and abroad."
-Hale Woodruff, 1968[1]

As Hale Woodruff observed during an 1968 interview with Al Murray, the 1920s marked a shift in the United States, socially and politically. During the early twentieth century, Black Americans faced "persistent problems of unemployment, disenfranchisement, segregationist policies, and mob violence."[2] With the beginning of the century, Black communities and allies began to formulate ways in which to challenge racist attitudes towards Black people.[3] In their efforts, literature, music, drama, and the visual arts gained more recognition and appreciation as an essential part of this 'strategy' against confronting racism.[4] Urban Black communities, the most well-known being in Harlem, became epicenters for expressions of distinctly Black cultural identity as Black scholars began creating scholarship centered around Black experiences, jazz and blues were recognized as distinct musical genres, new Black visual artists engaged with modernism, and experimented with photography, and new fashions came into Black spaces. This movement became known as the New Negro Movement (c. 1925).[5]

---

[1] Hale Woodruff, "Oral history interview with Hale Woodruff," Interview by Al Murray, (November 18, 1968), 2.

[2] Beryl J. Wright, "The Mental Property of the Nation: Changing Racial Attitudes as a Background to the Harmon Foundation Awards for Distinguished Achievement Among Negroes" in *Against the Odds: African-American Artists and the Harmon Foundation,* (Brill: 1989) 45.

[3] Wright, "The Mental Property of the Nation," 45.

[4] Wright, "The Mental Property of the Nation," 45.

The flowering of African American visual art initiated by the New Negro Movement extended through the 1930s and 1940s as Black artists in the United States continued to consider the intersections of racially conscious politics and artistic expression. What were their responsibilities as Black artists and the possibilities—or limitations—of artmaking bound to specifically Black cultural expression or political commitments? As the scholarship of Lizzette LeFalle-Collins, Karen Cordero Reiman, James Oles, Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, and Melanie Herzog has shown, several Black artists of the period looked to the example of post-Revolution Mexican art for potential answers to these questions. Among them were Hale Woodruff (1900-1980), Elizabeth Catlett (1915-2012), and Sargent Johnson (1888-1967) all of whom traveled to Mexico between 1936 and 1949 to study and work with artists there. But Woodruff, Catlett, and Johnson were not the only African American to do this. Charles Alston (1907-1977), John Biggers (1924), Jacob Lawrence (1917), and John Wilson (1922) went to Mexico around the same time as Woodruff, Catlett, and Johnson, also making work that integrated Mexico and Black subject matter.

Although articles, books, and exhibitions such as LeFalle-Collins' "African-American Modernists and The Mexican Muralist School" and the *South of the Border: Mexico in the American Imagination 1914-1947* exhibition, have explored this phenomenon, most have tended to treat it rather generically as though African American artists who were inspired by and/or traveled to Mexico represented a homogenous group with similar motivations and outcomes. This thesis aims to add specificity, nuance, and texture to this discourse by examining Woodruff's, Catlett's, and Johnson's very different interests in and engagements with Mexican art and artists during this period. Each of these three artists undertook that study with different interests and objectives, and the lessons they learned from their time in Mexico emerges differently in each artist's work in ways that reflect their own intersectional identities and understanding of their artistic and political priorities, responsibilities, and commitments.

---

[5] I use New Negro Movement to refer to the artistic time after the creation of Alain Locke's *The New Negro.* Though people use the terms interchangeably, this thesis will stick to the New Negro Movement as I align my artists with works that are Lockian or associated with Locke values.

Prior to the 1920s and its flowering Black scholarship such as Alain Locke and W.E.B. DuBois, the few Black artists who had an opportunity to follow the traditional path of attending art school were discouraged from using African forms and styles instead of European styles.[6] But as the New Negro Movement formed and spread, scholars and artists pushed for Black visual artists to create profound African American[7] art that addressed their Black experience in the United States. Black scholars such as Alain Locke, Arturo Schomburg, Langston Hughes, and W.E.B. DuBois began to discuss in their work the importance of Black artists in this new art world. But each thinker's concept of capturing the 'Black experience' differed greatly. Locke urged Black artists to look at African art to learn "the lesson of a classical background, the lesson of discipline, of style, of technical control pushed to the limits of technical mastery"[8] and incorporate this into African American art. In contrast, Hughes encouraged artists to embrace distinctly Black American folk ways and to express what it truly means to be 'Black' through spirituality and folk-art styles.[9] With the hope of developing a unique artistic style that spoke to the social and political challenges of Black life in the U.S. and addressing the concerns of Black scholars, many African-American scholars and artists looked towards another country: Mexico.

---

[6] David C Driskell, *Amistad II: Afro-American Art*, (Nashville: Fisk University, 1975), 39.

[7] For the context of this thesis, I use African American as a term only referring to Afro descendant peoples in the United States.

Following visits from Diego Rivera (1886-1957) and David Siqueiros (1896-1974) to the United States during the 1930s and 1940s, Black artists and scholars took interest in Mexico and Mexican artists. In their quest to find new ways to craft their identities, Black artists began to look towards Mexico, whose artists were making political and social art that incorporated their rich Indigenous history and did not solely depict Indigenous Mexican trauma for inspiration. As Black artists, such as Woodruff, Catlett, and Johnson, began to view Mexico as making art that promoted radical egalitarianism during and after the Mexican revolution (1910s-1920s), they began applying for opportunities such as scholarships, to finance travel to visit Mexico, to learn from the artists making "accessible and socially useful art" to help establish a unique Mexican national identity.[10] The Mexican Revolution stemmed from the Mexican citizens' dissatisfaction with the dictatorships of Mexico. The Mexican Revolution introduced new ideas and concepts for art in Mexico. Black artists travelled to Mexico instead of Africa as Mexico was viewed as a liberated country, free from capitalism, whereas Africa became a continent viewed solely as the source of classical art forms. Africa did not serve the same purpose as an inspiration as the continent was actively under colonial rule whereas Mexico had liberated itself from its oppressive government.

---

[8] Alain Locke, "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts", from *The New Negro: An interpretation,* 256.

[9] Alain Locke, "The New Negro" from *The New Negro: An interpretation* and Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain"

[10] Alison Cameron, "Buenos Vecinos: African-American Printmaking and the Taller de Gráfica Popular," *Print Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 4 (1999), 353.

This thesis will explore the relationships that Woodruff, Catlett, and Johnson created with Mexico and Mexican art during the 1930s and 1940s. Their oeuvres are the result of differing experiences in Mexico, but all three oeuvres emphasize the artist's connections to the people and art of Mexico, rooted in formerly colonized Mexicans' and African Americans' analogous experiences of oppression. All three artists won scholarships to support their travel to Mexico for artistic study. With the help of White philanthropists such as William E. Harmon, Albert C. Barnes, and Julius Rosenwald, Black artists received financial support through awards and scholarships while also participating in exhibitions, allowing them to showcase new art forms encouraged by Black intellectuals.

Through the scholarship, Woodruff sought to work with Diego Rivera, a key player in Mexican Muralism, in hopes to improve his story telling through murals in 1936. After Mexico, Woodruff used his gained knowledge of Mexican history and Mexican muralist techniques to craft murals that focused on Black subjects and their history. For Catlett, the scholarship meant the completion of her *Negro Woman* series, including prints and sculptures, through a guest position at the print collective, *Taller de Gráfica Popular* (TGP) in 1945. After her visit to Mexico, Catlett shifted to become more politically engaged with both Black American subject matter and Indigenous Mexican subject matter in both sculptures and prints. While both Woodruff's and Catlett's interest in

Mexico seemed to stem from their interests in politics of Mexico, Johnson's interest developed from materiality. Before travelling to Mexico, Johnson had explored Black subjects through his work, typically using stereotypical features in sculpture while incorporating aesthetics from other cultures. While in Mexico, Johnson sought to work with terracotta and different firing techniques and forms in Oaxaca, recognizing its importance to Indigenous Mexican art traditions and natural attributes such as color. After his visits in 1946 and 1949, Johnson continued to work with Terra cotta and Oaxacan clay through abstraction, along figural subject matter, such as animals and humans, that resembled forms that appear in Mexican muralism.

As Black artists in the U.S. aimed to develop distinct forms of visual artistic expression that presented African Americans as a beautiful people with a history and culture of which to be proud of, they looked to post-Revolution Mexican art as a successful example of visual culture that promoted the development of proud, independent identities while reconstructing Mexico's national image. I argue that through the influence of Mexican artists and their work, Woodruff, Catlett, and Johnson gained the artistic skills to express their own Black experiences as complex, resulting in a combination of different life experiences such as locality, race, education, and gender. Mexican artists and art showed their Black counterparts that being Mexican or Black is not one thing but a combination of life experiences from the past and present. This combination looks different in the work of each artist, as aspects of African art, African American experiences, Western art training, Mexican art styles, and materiality fuse together to create uniquely 'Black' art. These interactions between Mexican and Black artists allow me to express the value of drawing inspiration from artists of color as transformative in artistic style, technique, and identity. I will explore the three artists' different Mexican inspirations and how those manifests differently in the work of Black artists to show the value of art in that utilizes history in crafting identity through visual art.

This concept of Indigenous Mexicans' and African Americans' analogous experiences of oppression and White supremacy that Woodruff, Catlett, and Johnson intentionally create in their work appears in their use of Indigenous Mexican art styles, Mexican muralist styles, African motifs, and African American subject matter. Throughout the three chapters, I investigate the different ways in which these similar experiences with oppression were communicated in the different works that vary in medium, size and time frame. Though investigating three different artists through three different mediums and time frame casts a large net for interpretations, this allows me to show variations of inspiration drawn from Mexico and how each artist and work communicated different experiences. This thesis integrates the artists' personal identities as essential to their choice of Mexico as a point of inspiration. I emphasize the importance of all three artists travelling to Mexico while other Black artists looked to Mexico for inspiration but did not make it to the country. By incorporating each artists' individual life experiences and their connection to Mexico, I explore how their time in the country not only influenced a shift in their art but a shift in how they viewed themselves within the world.

The first chapter focuses on the *Art of the Negro* murals by Hale Woodruff, a Black artist who grew up in the Midwest and later studied in Paris, spent significant parts of his career in Harlem and the U.S. South, and travelled to and took inspiration from Mexico while consistently making art that incorporated natives from African American history and African symbolism. Hale Woodruff travelled to Mexico in 1936.[11] The second chapter focuses on *Civil Rights Congress* print by Elizabeth Catlett, a Black female artist born in Washington, D.C., who like Woodruff, spent time in New York and the U.S. South. Intending to stay only for a year, Catlett initially went to Mexico in 1945 to take to sculpture classes at the Escuela de Pintura y Escultura de la Secretaría de Educación Pública and work as a guest artists at the Taller de Gráfica Popular.[12] However, she eventually became a Mexican citizen and made the country her home until her death in 2012.[13] My third chapter engages *The Knot and the Noose* by Sargent Johnson, a Black artist based in California who in 1946 and 1949, went to Mexico to work with Indigenous artists in Oaxaca and Mexico City.[14] All three artists travelled to Mexico between 1935 to 1950, all working with different Mexican artists under different circumstances. With this thesis, I highlight the intentional choice of Mexico as a source of artistic inspiration, along with Africa, while also showing why these artists' engagement formed the groundwork for what would later emerge as solidarity among people of color in the 1960s and beyond.

Thesis Structure

---

[11] Andrea Barnwell Brownlee, "Leaving Atlanta: Mexico, New York and Hale Woodruff's Departure from the Segregated South" Essay in *Hale Woodruff, Nancy Elizabeth Prophet, and the Academy*, 63.

[12] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett: An American Artist in Mexico,* 49.

[13] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett: An American Artist in Mexico,* 47.

[14] Noma, Object Lesson: *Teapot* by Sargent Johnson

This thesis argues that through the influence of Mexican artists and their work, African American artists gained the artistic skills to express their own Black experiences as complex, resulting in a combination of different life experiences such as locality, race, education, and gender through the incorporation of history, aspects of African art, African American experiences, Western art training, Mexican art styles, and materiality fuse together to create uniquely 'Black' art. Each chapter features one artist and is anchored by one of their works. All three works were created during or after the artists' time spent in Mexico. I use visual analysis—an interpretation developed by bringing together formal, iconographic, and comparative analysis— which is illuminated by historical context (including influential culture criticism and scholarship of the period), primary source material, and secondary source scholarship to make an argument about each anchor object and how it helps in the understanding of the specificities of each artist's interest in Mexican art and how it manifests in their work. These methods allow me to pinpoint each intentional stylistic choice made by the artists in one work, displaying the works as complex and legible to multiple cultures. This approach helps to dig deeper into important but overlooked differences in why African American artists engaged with Mexican art during this period and what they received from these experiences. Through this visual analysis method, I look at three different mediums and attend to the specificity of these, looking to work that might not be an artist's most well-known or representative but that offers something important to understanding the development of their careers or body of work.

This thesis builds upon the contributions of art historians such as Lizzette LeFalle-Collins, Karen Cordero Reiman, James Oles, Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, and

Melanie Herzog who explore the connection between Black artists travelling to Mexico in the 1930s-1940s to immerse themselves in the Mexican art scene. Lizzette LeFalle Collins explores in her essay, “African-American Modernists and The Mexican Muralist School” (1996), Black artists going to Mexico, serving as a preliminary work that surveys all black artists that went to Mexico during the Mexican Muralist movement. The exhibition catalog, *South of the Border: Mexico in the American Imagination 1914-1947* (1993), contains two different essays by Karen Cordero Reiman and James Oles that establish Mexican art during the period and a wide index of Black artists who travelled to Mexico. Both authors help provide context for Black artists’ deep interest in Mexican art and describe how Black artists incorporated these styles into their art. Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw and Melanie Herzog each provide a comprehensive understanding of two of the artists, as DuBois Shaw provides her expertise on the life and career of Johnson in “Creating a new negro art in America” (2012) and Herzog provides an elaborate book, *Elizabeth Catlett: An American Artist in Mexico* (2005) on Catlett’s work and career.

With this investigation, I also incorporate the influence from Black scholars such as Locke to look towards Africa as another source of inspiration and how this gets combined with Mexican art styles. Each chapter will integrate Black scholarship that applies the specific work or oeuvre of the artists. Each scholar’s writings about what it meant to a Black person in the art world differ greatly. Due to this, an understanding of their scholarship is needed for a grasp on the New Negro Movement and these three artists’ choice to travel to Mexico. For Woodruff, Catlett, and Johnson, the writings of Locke, DuBois, Langston Hughes, and Arturo Schomburg contribute greatly to their concepts of what Black art should look like and the artistic inspirations they draw on in the 1930s and

1940s. The work of Black intellectuals shaped each artists' work and their ideas of what it meant to be a Black artist as the scholars "were highly regarded by the whole [Black artistic] community."[15] In this section, I briefly touch on what scholar is mentioned and where in the thesis.

My first chapter focuses on Hale Woodruff and his *Art of the Negro* oil on canvas murals at Clark-Atlanta University. The *Art of the Negro* compresses the past, present and future to depict the importance of African art in the development of art and African American art development. Woodruff crafted this piece almost two decades after Woodruff's initial visit to Mexico in 1952. By the time of the mural's creation, Woodruff created his *Amistad* murals that also incorporate Mexican muralist techniques. After his travels to Paris in the late 1920s due to interest in European impressionism, Woodruff took an increased interest in African arts, inspired by Alain Locke's push for Black artists to draw inspiration from African art and receiving the book, *Afrikanische Plastik* (1921) by Carl Einstein.[16] Woodruff remembered receiving the book from a man named Herman Lieber who ran a gallery in Indianapolis who told him "I want you to take this little book because it records the great work of your great people; African art. You will learn something about it."[17]After this, the focus of Woodruff's work changed, shifting to an incorporation of African art and with this shift, another shift to muralism. This particular shift to muralism brought Woodruff to Mexico, hoping to work with Diego Rivera. The life experiences of Woodruff and his travels include his interactions with *los tres*

---

[15] Woodruff, interview.

[16] Woodruff, Interview.

[17] Woodruff, Interview.

grandes, Diego Rivera (1886-1957), David Siqueiros (1896-1974), and Jose Clemente Orozco (1883-1949), which allows me to integrate their important contributions to art during and after the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920s). *Los tres grandes* appear in all three artists' career as they contributed greatly to Mexico's national iconography during and after the Mexican Revolution.

I argue that Woodruff, while applying the lessons he learned in Mexico, created a work that incorporates multiple art and art styles from different cultures such as Mexican, Polynesian, and West African, to express the importance of non-European art traditions playing a part in the creation of art and important as artistic inspirations. Woodruff's *Art of the Negro* includes West African symbolism while using Mexican art traditions and iconography, providing an opportunity to analyze the artist's choice to combine several different cultures in a mural series that focuses primarily on putting African cultures on a pedestal in the Western world as a valid inspiration for African American artists. Woodruff arguably took the most balanced approach out of the three artists as he directly applied the muralist lessons he learned in Mexico, such as mural composition and historical connections, to make work whose political consciousness manifested in the ideas it conveyed about African American art itself. In this chapter, I include direct quotes from past interviews of Woodruff, in which he explains his goal of the murals and the influence of his time in Mexico, along with the scholarship of Alain Locke, Arturo Schomburg, and José Vasconcelos to exemplify how Woodruff interpreted these works. These accounts strengthen my argument that this interaction between Mexicans and African Americans influenced artistic styles for years to come and why Mexico became the destination for many Black artists, including but not exclusively the three artists mentioned.

The second chapter concentrates on Elizabeth Catlett and her linocut, *Civil Rights Congress*. Catlett first created this print in 1950, five years after she first arrived in Mexico. At this time, Catlett held a guest position at the *TGP,* an art collective in Mexico City that both Catlett and Woodruff worked in, making work that focused on politics, specifically the rights of Mexicans. I argue that *Civil Rights Congress* exemplifies Catlett's merging of her two worlds, Mexican and African American, through artistic style and symbols to communicate African American issues in the United States while attempting to break the harsh African American stereotypes that manifested in Mexico. Catlett's long career and life in Mexico speaks to the concept of Double Consciousness and Catlett's acknowledgement of intended audience. I explore the concept of Double Consciousness and reimagine how it played into Catlett's career as she, African American woman, lived in Mexico for over fifty years after having to renounce her US citizenship due to her public political alignments. W.E.B. DuBois, a scholar that Woodruff worked with for the *Crisis* journal, urged "black artists to focus on black subject-matter and make art that has social and political meaning" during the New Negro Movement.[18] DuBois is most known today for coining the term 'Double Consciousness', "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others…One ever feels his twoness- two souls, two thoughts, two warring ideals in one dark body."[19] Double

---

[18] Sharon F Patton, "Twentieth-Century America and Modern Art 1900-60," Essay In *African-American Art. (Oxford: Oxford University Press,* 1998), 107.

[19] Patton, "Twentieth-Century America," 106.

Conscious is often interpreted as how African Americans live, having to look at themselves through two different lenses, through the view of society and through their own view and knowing that race always comes first in how they are viewed.

While engaging with Catlett and *Civil Rights Congress,* I emphasize the importance of Catlett's politics and her extensive engagement with her audience. Out of the three artists, Catlett prioritized politics and mobilized her artistic skill to advance a leftist political agenda, ultimately adopting the visual techniques and vocabularies of post-revolution political Mexican art to depict subject matter specific to African Americans in the U.S. *Civil Rights Congress* also lends the opportunity to talk about the *Taller de Gráfica Popular* and the collective's distinct printmaking techniques. Catlett spent twelve years at the collective and used their print techniques in *Civil Rights Congress* as a way to connect to her Mexican audience while focusing on an African American issue. In this Chapter, I will use first-hand accounts by Catlett from interviews, essays, and Melanie Herzog's *Elizabeth Catlett: An American Artist in Mexico*, putting focus on Catlett's own views on her work and how *Civil Right Congress* fits into that.

The third chapter examines Sargent Johnson and his terracotta sculpture, *The Knot and The Noose.* In this chapter, I explore his combination of Indigenous Mexican artistic ways of making and African subjects through *The Knot and the Noose*. In this chapter, I observe the shifts in Johnson's explicit and implicit understandings of his responsibility as an artist and the relationship between racially conscious politics and artistic expression throughout his career, specifically through the analysis of *The Knot and the Noose* relative to Johnson's pre-Mexico works of the late 1920s and the 1930s. I consider Johnson's gradual move away from naturalistic figuration to the abstraction of *The Knot* *and the Noose* and how this might have coincided with changes in his views about the political versus aesthetic priorities of artist of African descent. Particularly relevant to this discussion is the career-long deep interest in materiality, materials, and making that informed—particularly his exploration of polychrome sculpture and of ceramics across cultures—Johnson's interest in going to Mexico and how it might have manifested in his work to reflect his ideas about the relationship of art and politics at any given time.

I end with Sargent Johnson as his work and life experiences contrast Woodruff's and Catlett's. He is the only artist out of the three that worked with specifically Indigenous Mexican craftsman, lived on the West Coast, and was of mixed race. For Johnson, the most enigmatic and understudied of the three, the experience in Mexico seems to have coincided with a definitive shift in the trajectory of his artistic practice in which purely artistic concerns, such as the deep interest in materiality and aesthetic experimentation, began to trump direct or explicit engagement with race and politics evident in his most well-known pre-Mexico work. Engaging with Johnson's different experience allows me to emphasize how African Americans' inspiration was not rooted solely in Mexico City or Harlem but also Oaxaca and California. By exploring the work of Johnson, the experiences and concepts discussed in Chapter One and Two that manifest in the work of Woodruff and Catlett become similar but not a monolith. All three artists experience Mexico differently and should be treated as such. *The Knot and the Noose* also shows how Mexican artistic traditions can present in non-figural work, specifically materiality and long indigenous traditions. This piece displays Johnson's diverse oeuvre and engagement with multiple cultures. In this chapter, I argue that Johnson's interest in materiality and importance placed on locality allowed him to create work that seemingly integrates cultures outside of his own with Black sitters. This chapter discusses the importance of the William E. Harmon Foundation on Johnson and the Black artistic community in the 1920s. This chapter draws on archival sources from Sargent Johnson's application for the Rosenberg Travelling fellowship, secondary sources specifically from Johnson's Archival Artist file from the San Francisco Art Institute Legacy Foundation + Archive, and the book, *Sargent Johnson: African American Modernist,* by Lizzetta Lefalle-Collins. Bringing together the observations and connections of three body chapters, my conclusion emphasizes how considering Woodruff, Catlett and Johnson together supports the importance of POC solidarity as a strategy to end White supremacy, pairing it with contemporary examples of solidarity between Mexicans and African Americans.

Through the dissection of the murals using visual and comparative analysis, Woodruff's *Art of the Negro* depicts a work that addresses the artist's acknowledgement of the importance of artistic influences by cultures such as Mexican and Polynesian, along with African, that are often left out of the art historical canon. With iconographical analysis, Catlett's *Civil Rights Congress* addresses both of her worlds, African American and Mexican through symbols such as calaveras and burning crosses. Through framework, Johnson's *The Knot and the Noose* combines Indigenous Mexican material and African imagery to display an abstract approach to an African American societal issue. These methodologies, formal, comparative, iconographic, biographical, and contextual analysis, emphasize the intentions of the artists in adopting techniques and aesthetics used for African and Mexican art. Through the use of the visual analysis approach and image-driven methodology, the works remain the center of my argument without diverging into the artists' entire oeuvre.

Historical Context

As the New Negro Art movement came to fruition, the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920s) drew to a close, introducing new ideas of art. This revolution shifted the artistic focus to public art, specifically art concerned with political and social change. The revolution led to a newfound focus on rights of peasants, whom many were Indigenous and rights for the working-class Mexicans such as land reform. Mexican intellectuals such as Jose Vasconcelos urged artists to look back to Indigenous Mexican histories and incorporate this into crafting a new national identity in hopes to rebuild Mexico's image.[20] Written after the revolution, Vasconcelos's 1925 treatise, *La Raza Cosmica*, emphasizes that Indigenous histories remain important but moving toward the future the dominant race in Mexico will be a mixture of Black, Indigenous people, Asian, and White Spaniards, thus creating a fifth race, the cosmic race.[21] Vasconcelos' and Locke's work shared similar notions on what artists should be working on as Locke emphasized the need to look to African art, while at the same time, Vasconcelos emphasized the need for Mexican artists to look to Indigenous histories and art. Both thought that looking to African and Indigenous culture would establish a firm connection to their ancestry and address their experiences as a African American or Mexican. These similar but differing views allowed Black artists to view Mexican artist as going through a similar change in art as they were.

---

[20] Luis E. Carranza, "Race and Miscegenation in Early Twentieth-Century Mexican Architecture." In *Race and Modern Architecture: A Critical History from the Enlightenment to the Present,* Ed. Irene Cheng, etc, (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020), 157.

[21] Jose Vasconcelos, *La raza cosmica,* 1925.

In this new wave of artistic thought, revolutionary artistic groups such as the *(TGP)* and *los tres grandes*- Diego Rivera, David Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco- later known as the Mexican Muralist Movement, began to center their art on the rights of peasants, many of whom were Indigenous and laborers, who were viewed as the lower class. Prints and murals became the center of this movement as prints were cheap and reproducible, allowing political art to spread with ease, while murals were funded by the Mexican government and had a public nature that could reach broad publics. Black artists in the United States became familiar with the Public Arts Movement happening in Mexico and saw this art as addressing popular culture and "the notion of the artist as cultural worker."[22] The New Deal Art projects in the United States, specifically the Works Progress Administration (1935-1943), cited Mexico as a model for "the Mexican Muralists' creation of public works of art with the economic support of the Mexican government."[23] The WPA funded many public art projects that employed Black artists, one being the Harlem Hospital Murals headed by Charles Alston. But Black artists were interested in the Mexican muralists for their emphasis on an oppressed racial group, which was not as foregrounded in U.S. murals. Artists such as Charles Alston, Robert Blackburn, Hale Woodruff, Elizabeth Catlett, and Sargent Johnson, understood the importance of murals and printmaking in reaching a widespread audience while portraying specific messages about Black life in America. This familiarity with Mexican artists and the importance placed on muralism and prints prompted Black artists to seek support for travel to Mexico on scholarships to study and work with *los tres grandes,* or other artistic groups. In Mexico, Black artists learned techniques and styles that they then incorporated into their art to construct Black identities that did not concentrate on past traumas.

---

[22] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett: An American Artist in Mexico,* 50.

[23] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett: An American Artist in Mexico,* 50.

Black artists looked to the Mexican Art school and muralism, hoping to depict "the role of African Americans in the development of the United States and their distinctive achievements and contributions to the nation."[24] Mexican artists and cultural elites came out of the revolution wanting to portray their country and their identity in a different light than before independence, specifically making art in favor of laborer rights. African Americans wanted to craft an identity that separated them from slavery and anti-Black stereotypes. Woodruff, Catlett, and Johnson represent a small scope of artistic experiences in Mexico that offers different interpretations of how Black identity can be expressed through the influences of other cultures.

Defining my Vocabulary

I would like to reiterate my reasoning behind my word choices. Throughout my thesis, I capitalize Black and Indigenous as a sign of respect.[25] Though American refers to North, South, and Central Americans, I use African American to refer to Black artists that resided in the United States, as African American "refers to people who were born in the United States and have African ancestry."[26] I use both Black and African American interchangeable for the purpose of this thesis. When referring to Mexican artists, I will use Mexican or Indigenous when applicable as Mexican and Indigenous are not synonymous. I use New Negro Movement to refer to the artistic time after the publication of Alain Locke's *The New Negro,* as it encompasses both what is commonly known as the Harlem Renaissance and after, while also referring to different scholarship and artistic identities during the time. This also allows me to chronological place my reader, as only two of my artists, Woodruff and Johnson, participate in the Harlem Renaissance through the Harmon Foundation but all three artists draw from aspects of scholarly writings in their work from the time.

---

[24] Stephanie Mayer Heydt, *Rising up: Hale Woodruff's Murals at Talladega College* (High Museum of Art, 2012), 108.

[25] See ACS Inclusivity Style Guide, https://www.acs.org/about/diversity/inclusivity-style-guide/race-ethnicity-and-nationality.html#when-and-how-to-mention-race-and-ethnicity

---

[26] Nicole Chavez, "Which Is the Correct Terminology: Black, African American or People of Color?," UAH, April 8, 2021, https://www.uah.edu/diversity/news/15567-which-is-the-correct-terminology-black-african-american-or-people-of-color

CHAPTER ONE

Africa as a Pinnacle of Art: African and Mexican influence in Hale Woodruff's *Art of the Negro*

Introduction

In the atrium of Trevor Arnett Hall at Clark Atlanta University, six arched murals tell a story of African influence on the Western art world in *Art of the Negro*.[1] *Art of the Negro* contains six panels: *Native Forms, Interchange, Dissipation, Parallels, Influences, and Muses*. The panels fit snug in alcoves that give the panels their characteristic arched top, reminiscent of renaissance murals such as Raphael's *School of Athens* and El Greco's *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz* (Fig. 1.1 and 1.2). Though *Muses* is the last panel in the series, this panel exemplifies Hale Woodruff's oeuvre and artistic techniques that commonly appear in his murals. Woodruff divided the space into two, the upper half and the lower half (fig. 1.3). In the upper half, two figures sit in the center of abstract space as blue-ish grey and purple 'clouds' engulf the figures. This makes the two figures the only focal point in the upper half of the painting. Woodruff painted the left figure with only shades of white and grey. The figure wears only a cloth draped loosely on their shoulders and bottom half, along with a crown made of leaves that is reminiscent of classical Roman and Greek statues, specifically Apollo.

But the figure is not by itself. Another figure sits, overlapping the Greco-Roman allegorical figure. Woodruff painted this figure with brown and black. This figure holds a more angular facial structure, as the artist used clean, sharp lines to characterize the chin and crown of this figure, using triangular shapes and darker browns and blacks. The high contrast of shading and the face suggest that this figure is drawn from African art and culture. The bottom half of the panel depicts seventeen Black men, all seeming to be intellectuals as they are placed close to art. From the title, *Muses*, and their position above the seventeen Black intellectuals, the two statue motifs seem to be the muses for these men, suggesting that classical Roman and Greek art work together with African art as inspiration for Black intellectuals. The title may also suggest that the Greek and African figure are muses in terms of Greek mythology, as they watch over the seventeen men and reside over their work. *Muses,* along with other panels in the *Art of the Negro*, display Woodruff's thoughts on the role of a Black artist in the twentieth century.

---

[1] M. Auka McDaniel, "Reexamining Hale Woodruff's Talladega College and Atlanta University Murals," in *Hale Woodruff, Nancy Elizabeth Prophet, and the Academy* (Spelman College Museum of Fine art, 2007), 77-85.

Woodruff proposed these murals after the completion of the Amistad mural series at Talladega college in 1939 and conferred with Diego Rivera.[2] Clark Atlanta University did not grant him the opportunity until 1945, after Woodruff had spent time in New York.[3] Woodruff completed the series in 1952 and provided rationale for his creation of the murals, stating that it had to do "with a kind of interpretive treatment of African art" and the mural dealt with "a subject about which little was known—art and also among Negroes, there was little concern about our ancestry".[4] The context in which this mural came to fruition reflects Woodruff's long-running concerns throughout his career about his role as a Black artist in the 1900s as he later, in the mid 1960s, becomes a part of art collective group *Spiral* that concerned themselves the most with the question of "what should be their attitudes and commitments as Negro artists in the present struggle for Civil Rights?"[5] Woodruff approached this question throughout his career, crafting his work using aspects of African art styles and culture, along with Black subject matter since the mid 1930s.

---

[2] "The Art of the Negro Mural Series." The collection. Accessed September 2, 2023. https://www.cau.edu/art-galleries/murals.html.

[3] McDaniel, "Reexamining Hale Woodruff's", 81.

[4] "The Art of the Negro Mural Series."

Throughout this mural series, Woodruff incorporated African art aspects such as characteristics of masks, cave printing, rock engraving, wood relief, and freestanding sculptures to put Africa and African art at the same level as Roman and Greek art.[6] The importance of *Art of the Negro* lies solely on the influence of African art on the African American art scene. While Woodruff created these murals as validation for the increased inspiration drawn from African ancestry and culture by African American artists, Woodruff simultaneously uses Mexican muralism techniques, such as compression of space, earth tones, and Mexican iconography, to depict the influence of Ancient Mexican art in the art world. In *Art of the Negro*, the artist ended up creating a multilingual work that speaks to his experiences as a Black artist seeking to express this identity, drawing inspiration from other cultures, such as Mexican, West African, Pacific Islander, and others. In this chapter, I argue that Woodruff intentionally incorporated non-western art styles and subjects, such as Mexican, Egyptian, Pacific Islander and others, to set them as art traditions of equal value with classical ones such as Greek and Roman, classifying these cultures as being on the same plane as the European art canon. In this, Woodruff made these cultures important as artistic inspirations.

---

[5] Jeanne Siegel, "'Why Spiral?': Norman Lewis, Romare Bearden, and Others on the 'contradictions Facing Them in Modern America' in 1966," (ARTnews) https://www.artnews.com/art-news/retrospective/september-1966-norman-lewis-romare-bearden-5482/.

[6] M. Auka McDaniel, "Reexamining Hale Woodruff's," 82.

Looking to the Ancestors: Hale Woodruff and 1920s theorists

The *Art of the Negro* murals align with Woodruff's oeuvre and his interest in incorporating African forms into his works. Woodruff began his artistic career attending the Herron Art School in Indianapolis and the Art Institute of Chicago.[7] Starting off, his focus was on landscapes, but he soon became interested in Black arts. The artist, later in 1969, shares his first encounter with African art in an interview with Al Murray:

> When I was a student back in art school I used to take my pictures down and try to have them shown in a little gallery in Indianapolis. It was run by a German named Herman Lieber. One day Mr. Lieber gave me a little book on African sculpture. He said, "Woodruff, I want you to have this book." (It was all written in German; I couldn't read it.) He said, "I want you to take this little book because it records the great work of your great people; African art. You will learn something about it." So this struck me. This was my initial introduction to African art. I used to see African art in the galleries and in the shops in Paris. Alain Locke used to come over. He and I were friends and we'd go to the Flea Market together. He was buying African art then and I bought a piece or two.[8]

This book was *Afrikanische Plastik* (1921) by Carl Einstein, the first survey book of African art. Once Woodruff saved up enough money, he travelled to France to learn from Cezanne and Henry O. Tanner.[9] At this point, Woodruff's oeuvre consisted only of landscapes. But his growing interest in African art became amplified by his new friendship with Alain Locke, a Black philosopher, while both of them were in France.[10] But as Woodruff continued to concern himself with landscapes and inspiration of Cezanne, African American intellectuals, such as Locke, concerned themselves with what Black art should look like and the duties of a Black artist.

---

[7] Sharif Bey, "Aaron Douglas and Hale Woodruff: African American Art Education, Gallery Work, and Expanded Pedagogy," *Studies in Art Education* 52, no. 2 (2011), 114.

[8] Hale Woodruff, "Oral history interview with Hale Woodruff," Interview by Al Murray, (November 18, 1968).

[9] Morgan Sumrell, "Hale Woodruff: The Harlem Renaissance in Atlanta", *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 37, no. 2 (2013), 123.

During the New Negro movement, intellectuals such as Alain Locke, Langston Hughes, Arturo Schomburg, and W.E.B. DuBois, were prominent Black scholars, that argued about what the standards for Black art should've been. Woodruff valued both DuBois and Locke, coining them as "great leading minds" and the very few Black scholars that turned their focus on Black art during this time period.[11] Woodruff believed that most Black artists did not meet the call as they were more concerned with aesthetics instead of what their art does socially or politically.[12] With the influence of Black intellectuals and Black artists, many African American artists shifted their artist focus to incorporating African forms in the 1920s and 1930s in order to address what scholars viewed as "the great Negro problem of the racial injustice, past and present."[13] These ideals of Black artists focusing on crafting a unique Black art, whose distinctiveness came from its incorporation of African art forms, influences Woodruff's work for the rest of his career.

---

[10] Sumrell, "Hale Woodruff: The Harlem Renaissance in Atlanta", 123.

[11] Woodruff, Interview.

[12] Woodruff, Interview.

[13] Stephanie Mayer Heydt, *Rising up: Hale Woodruff's Murals at Talladega College* (High Museum of Art, 2012), 58

“The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts”: Locke’s influence on the African forms in *Muses*

Due to scholars such as Locke, Black artists began interacting with African works of art but not their African ‘ancestry,’ an aspect that Locke addressed in his “Legacy of the Ancestral Arts” essay.[14] Black artists partook in “the aura of the New Negro and Pan-Africanist philosophies without locking themselves within primitivist or African oriented aesthetics” and used African art for its “artistic motif and economic opportunities” as drawing on African art for inspiration become popular and a source of patronage in European art circles.[15] Without the background of African culture and practices, many Black artists ended up producing works that was exploitative and exoticized, placing objects into spaces where they typically would not go or for status purposes. Palmer Hayden’s, a Black modern painter, *Fétiche et Fleurs* (1932-33) painting pokes fun at the fault of incorporating art and styles that artists knew nothing about. These artists instead made “beautifully crafted stereotypes” for Black and White consumption.[16] Locke wanted Black artists to paint their histories and the Black experience through what he viewed as their ‘inherent’ right to Africa art, in hopes to get art that was not just historical but held narrative weight. This did not stop artists from depicting historical scenes of freedom and enslavement such as Aaron Douglas’ *Into Bondage,* but Locke’s writings did influence other artists like Woodruff to take a step back and think about their work and how it showed the 'Black experience'.

---

[14] Sonia Delgado-Tall, “The New Negro Movement and the African Heritage in a Pan-Africanist Perspective,” in *Journal of Black Studies* 31, (2001), 290.

[15] Delgado-Tall, “The New Negro Movement and the African Heritage in a Pan-Africanist Perspective,” 293-294.

[16] Delgado-Tall, “The New Negro Movement and the African Heritage in a Pan-Africanist Perspective,” 296.

Muses offers Woodruff's interpretation of Locke's "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts" thought; "there would be little hope of an influence of African art upon the western African descendants if there were not at present a growing influence of African art upon European art in general."[17] Locke acknowledged that due to the growing influence of African art on the European art world, African art slowly became a 'relevant and valid' art tradition to draw influence from. If not for the interest from European artists, African art would hold no validity or substance in the Western art canon as classical art derived from Greek and Roman culture. Through his art, Woodruff's interest seemingly lay in African art, culture, and aesthetics but not without the influence of classical art, which shows through in *Muses* (fig. 1.3).

As the top half of the panel displays the godly realm, representing classical antiquity and African artistic tradition, the bottom half displays the human realm, depicting seventeen Black males, painted in different shades of brown and different time periods, wearing an array of clothing from suits to a loincloth. Some men only wear a piece of cloth wrapped around them to cover their genitals but leave their chest bare. Others wear button-up shirts, slacks, and ties. Others wear nineteenth-century clothing, dressed in three-piece suits with a stiff collar or white cloth wrapped tightly around their neck. Moving from left to right, most figures are identifiable as Woodruff used specific characteristics attributed to the artists, making them recognizable to other Black artists.

---

[17] Alain Locke, "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts," 255.

Starting from the left, the gentleman standing in the red coat with a white high collared button up remains unidentifiable. The man behind him with circular black glasses, a neatly trimmed and pointed bread and goatee, dressed in a white popped-collared shirt with a black ribbon for a tie and gray suit jacket represents Henry Ossawa Tanner, a nineteenth artist who was the first international acclaimed African American artist. Standing in front of Tanner is Jacob Lawrence, a modern American painter, with deep brown skin, shortly cut hair and small low-cut mustache. Next to Lawrence is Edward Bannister, an American landscape artist, dressed in a royal blue bowtie with thick hair on his head and his face. Seated in front of the four men are Charles Alston, a modern American painter and sculptor, looking down at a blueprint page labeled as "GOLDEN GATE EXPOSITION", a self-portrait of Woodruff wearing a mustard yellow button up shirt with a grey tie, holding sculpture, and behind him, Hector Hyppolite[18], a modern Haitian artist, in an orange shirt, holding a gold framed painting that partially shows red, yellow, and blue flora.

In the center, a man sits upon a rock, with his top half uncovered. He wears a belt around his waist that holds four containers of what appears to be pigments. This figure seems to represent the first Black artist, known as Iqueigha, as his painting of war between four figures plays out on the rock below him. [19] Behind this figure, I have speculated to be the African-Brazilian sculptor and architect Antonio Francisco Lisboa, known as Aleijadinho, as Woodruff characterizes him with a long slender face, low cut hair, and a three-piece tan suit.[20] Next to him is Juan de Pareja, identifiable by his unique white lace collar and his thick pushed back afro that he wore for his portrait by Diego Velázquez.

---

[18] Kobena Mercer, "Chapter 2: Afro-Modernism's Musée Imaginaire." In *Alain Locke and the Visual Arts*, (New Haven: Yale University Press and Hutchins Center for African & African American Research, 2022), https://aaeportal-com.libproxy.tulane.edu/?id=-23240.

[19] "The Art of the Negro Mural Series"

To the right side of Pareja, four standing gentlemen remain unidentifiable but contrast each other by their period clothing and hairstyles. One of the standing men wears only a thick gold necklace and a pink cloth that drapes down one shoulder, leaving most of his chest revealed. He holds a gold sculpted mask, letting the viewer know that he is early sculptor, possible thirteenth century.[21] Behind the thirteenth century sculptor is Palmer Hayden, a modern American artist, represented with his short low top afro, full lips and aqua shirt, resembling a janitor's suit or painter's overalls. Moving down to the seated men, next to the 'first' Black artists kneels a Black man in a black and brown three-piece suit with a bowtie, reading a large paper. This man is Robert Scott Duncanson, a nineteenth-century American landscape artist. These two men contrast each other as one sits almost naked with his pigments attached to him and the other fully clothed engaged in a modern version of literature. Behind this kneeled figure is Richmond Barthé, a modern American sculptor, dressed in a blue tank top and at his feet is his Blackberry Woman sculpture. Other figures said to appear in *Muses* but due to lack of visual evidence cannot be identified are Sebastián Gómez, a pupil of Esteban Murillo,[22] and Joshua Johnston, a colonial portraitist.[23]

---

[20] Christian Kravagna, "Painting the Global History of Art: Hale Woodruff's *The Art of the Negro*," *Tate Papers* 30 (Autumn 2018), https://www.tate.org.uk/research/tate-papers/30/painting-global-history-of-art.

[21] "The Art of the Negro Mural Series"

To reiterate, Woodruff included Charles Alston (U.S., 1907-1977), Henry Ossawa (U.S. and Paris, 1859-1937), Hector Hyppolite (Haitian, 1894-1948), Jacob Lawrence (U.S., 1917-2000), Edward Bannister (U.S., 1838-1901), Iqueigha (unknown), Aleijadinho (Brazil, 1738-1814), Juan de Pareja (Spain, 1606-1670), Robert Scott Duncanson (U.S., 1821-1872), Richmond Barthé (U.S., 1901-1989), Joshua Johnston (U.S., 1763-1824), Sebastián Gómez (Spain, 1646-1690), a thirteenth-century sculptor, and himself.

Woodruff included some of his peers and inspirational Black figures that he deemed as creating work that juxtapose each other but had influence on what it meant to be a Black artist in a Western art world. Woodruff assembled a group that varied in period, location and artistic medium. Woodruff included a range of African diaspora, depicting Black artists from Africa, Europe, Latin America, and North America. Woodruff jumbles time and space as he depicted artists from different periods, placing the 'first' Black artist in the center of the mural and has him flanked by peers and others, ranging from thirteenth century to his present. The artist presented in *Muses* different ways in which to be a Black artist, utilizing both western art training and African influence, as he depicted Duncanson, a landscape painter, Barthé, a sculptor, Hyppolite, a folk painter, Aleijadinho, an architect and sculptor, and Joshua Johnston, a colonial artist. By creating a space that defies time and artistic expression, varying in medium and style, Woodruff curated his own Black artistic group that displayed what it meant to be a Black artist. The inclusion of the artist himself further validates this thought as Woodruff viewed his work as incorporating Western art training with inspiration from African art or ancestry.

---

[22] Kravagna, "Painting the Global History of Art"

[23] "The Art of the Negro Mural Series"

As Kobena Mercer states in his second chapter “Afro-Modernism’s Musée Imaginaire" in *Alain Locke and the Visual Arts,* Woodruff in Muses depicted that the role of a Black artist is “not envisioned as a unitary monolith but as an epoch-spanning lineage irrevocably hybridized by multiple forms of cross-cultural contact.”[24] The artist purposefully included Black artists that varied in location, medium and period to show that being a Black artist is expressed differently as there is not one Black ‘experience’. At the same time, Woodruff created an artistic lineage, branching from the first Black artist to contemporaries such as Woodruff himself. The artist created this lineage through all of the men being under the watch of Greek and African tradition seen in the godly realm above the men and crafting the facial features of the artists to resemble African mask traditions.

Though all the men represent Black artists over centuries, Woodruff paid special attention to their faces. Each man’s face holds big lips, defined cheekbones, and eyebrow bones that Woodruff created by applying deeper tones of brown. These similar features create a slimmer facial structure but are also reminiscent of African ceremonial masks that Locke encouraged Black artists to look to in the 1920s. My research reveals that due to Locke’s collection including mostly West African art, Woodruff’s characterization of his figures in the *Art of the Negro* murals take attributes from a West African mask such as the Dean Gle Mask from the Dan society, made between the late 19th-early 20th century (Figure 1.4). These attributes of a slim upside-down almond face with small eye slits and defined bone structure appears above the figures, in the African statue. Reflected in the artists from the Dean Gle Mask are full lips and wide nose. Woodruff combined attributes of the African mask making tradition and African Americans of the time to create a 'true' African American to reflect his connection and thoughts on African Americans' ancestral connection to Africans. Pairing the African sculpture with the Greek sculpture together—representing gods—in the register above the African American men in the bottom half of this panel shows the influence for artists. The African and Greek sculptures assume the position of ancestral or creator figures, keeping a watchful eye on the Black artists. The two gods serve as artistic manifestations that provide inspiration/make the Black artists who they are or muses in which the artists drew inspiration from.

---

[24] Mercer, "Chapter 2: Afro-Modernism’s Musée Imaginaire," 93-151.

Woodruff emphasizes that African art should be an inspiration for African American artists, but not without the help of classical western training. Looking to African art cannot erase the classical tradition previously and continuously taught to African Americans. Woodruff shows that these two inspirations should work together in pieces by the African Diaspora. The artist also integrated these attributes to make a point that even if African Americans thought they had no current roots to Africa, the roots are inherent. It is there even if African Americans do not recognize it. Woodruff made this connection visible for Black artists to see, that these artistic influences from the gods manifest in these seventeen artists.

Woodruff utilized African forms not only in the *Art of the Negro* murals, but throughout his career, far after Black artists stopped incorporating them into their art.

Woodruff himself says that he was always interested in African art and that many people after the Harlem Renaissance no longer concerned themselves with Africa's history.[25] Woodruff looked "at the African artists certainly as one of [his] ancestors", unlike other artists who looked to Africa only for formal inspiration.[26] Using ceremonial mask aspects for the African Diaspora figures in the *Art of the Negro* allowed Woodruff to emphasize African Diasporic connection to their African heritage. Woodruff incorporated his knowledge of African art, showing his interest in African art and culture ran deeper than face value.

"The Negro Digs Up His Past", literally: The *Art of the Negro* and Schomburg

Though Locke influenced much of Woodruff's work, the *Art of the Negro* aligns also to the writings of Arturo Schomburg, specifically "In Quest of Juan de Pareja" and "The Negro Digs Up His Past". In *Muses*, Juan de Pareja stands off centered behind the first Black artist. Juan de Pareja gained recognition as Arturo Schomburg published an article in the 1927 issue of the *Crisis*, "In Quest of Juan de Pareja," about his discovery of Pareja's existence in Spain during his visits to the Archivo de las Indias. In the essay, Schomburg wrote about his time in Spain and his search for paintings by Pareja and about his existence, being the pupil of Velazquez.[27] As this essay remains the only known article about Pareja in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Woodruff acknowledged the importance of Pareja and Schomburg's writing on the Black artistic community. In "The Negro Digs Up His Past", Schomburg declared that Black people throughout centuries have been active "collaborator[s] and often pioneer[s]".[28] Schomburg established that though Black people have been depicted to be passive and followers, they have had a hand in their freedom and identity. Schomburg and Woodruff used Pareja to depict this fact, that in the early fifteenth century, a Black person was creating art, which was attributed to his boss. This idea of Black people being pioneers and active participants in history becomes a running thread through the *Art of the Negro* but specifically shows through in *Interchange* and *Parallels*.

---

[25] Woodruff, Interview.

[26] Woodruff, interview.

[27] Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Jean Blackwell Hutson Research and Reference Division, The New York Public Library, "In quest of Juan de Pareja," New York Public Library Digital Collections, accessed May 6, 2024, https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/35bba8a0-d949-013a-5087-0242ac110003.

Interchange, the second panel in the series, depicts a scene of intercultural exchange (figure 1.5). Eight figures dominate the mural; two figures stand off to the left side of the mural in conversation, three at the lower half, and the other three in conversation on the right side. Each group engage in an artistic interaction, as they all work on one project and are all seemingly in the middle of discussion. The two figures on the left side of the mural, one brown skinned and the other blonde with white cloth draped over his shoulder, stand in conversation as the brown skinned figure holds a stone tablet with linear markings on it. At the bottom of the mural, a dark brown skinned figure sits in between two figures, one olive skinned with orange hair and the other light skinned with long wavy black hair and a beard, as they all hold tools that help them craft geometric shapes that appear in-between them. The last group consists of three figures, two of them olive skinned and dressed in colorful cloth and the other, a black skinned figure, in conversation seemingly about the art between them, a large mask sculpture characterized with orange, white and black. All the figures are surrounded by different aspects of art and culture, such as white Roman or Greek marble columns, hieroglyphics and stone carvings from Egypt, African masks, and sculptures.

---

[28] Arturo Schomburg, "The Negro Digs Up His Past," *Survey Graphic* magazine, (New York: Survey Associates: March 1, 1925).

This combination of different figures, along with different culturally unique art pieces, distinctly makes African art and people a key aspect of art history. Woodruff's grouping of male figures, each engaging in a distinct act of creation, is a direct pull from Raphael's *School of Athens* (fig. 1.1). The brown and black skinned figures are pioneers and active participants in these cultural exchanges, making them a part of the 'founding fathers' of art. The figures interact with each other, leaning in and holding pieces of literature, art, and science as they teach each other their ways of life. The artist drew inspiration of this exchange of knowledge from Raphael's *School of Athens.* The artist's incorporation of lively and creative exchanges among small groups of male figures, derived from the *School of Athens,* enables the viewer to read the scene and pick out the distinct similarities. Woodruff designed these scenes of exchange and crowding of art and people to show his Greco-Roman knowledge and training, showing that classically trained artists can use their skills to construct scenes that address the wants of a Black artist.

As the title insinuates, *Parallels* depicts the parallels of art from different cultures by placing them next to each other, showing the artistic resemblance that occur specifically between non-western cultures (Figure 1.6). Woodruff highlighted different works of art that share similar composition by placing them close together but positioned them in their own pictorial spaces, distorted spaces that are created specifically to fit the pieces. The panel gets divided into fourteen spaces due to these personal artistic bubbles. The artist flattened this pictorial plane, making everything shallow and omitting a depth of space, including sculptures and masks. As there is no distinct foreground or background, some pieces float in space towards the top of the mural while other art pieces have distinct spaces, gathered mostly at the bottom on the mural. But Woodruff distinctly placed each space next to pieces that resemble each other to display their similarities.

At the top half of the mural, three totem poles dominate the center of the space. Each pole contains a differing color scheme and style, each one representing a different culture or purpose. The left most pole contains animal motifs that face the viewer, bearing their large teeth. Beige dominates the pole with hints of blue and orange. This pole uses curved lines but due to its typical depiction being made from wood, the pole is also rectangular, keeping its elongated, log shape. The bottom of this pole depicts a mask motif as a blue and orange face appears with black eyes, nostrils, and a small black mouth. The second pole contains mostly patterns with one central figure and an animal. This pole utilizes mostly black with hints of burgundy and white. The pole holds sharper lines, distinctly making triangles through ‘carving’ and patterns. The central figure has a triangular white nose with white eyes and lips. The figure appears to ride on the animal as each leg sits on the sides of the red and white animal. The third pole contains a fish motif at the top of the pole with two figures composing the bottom half of the pole, characterized with light brown, dark brown, black and a hint of blue. The fish holds sharp features, appearing to be only the bone structure of the large fish. In the middle holds a figure with pointed arms that raise up, an aspect that seems to be due to the limitation of ‘wood’. The figure has a round body that slims down into the next figure. The figure at the bottom is mostly a face whose eyes are shut with its mouth open.

These poles that differ suggest different cultures but similar artistic practices. These poles represent carved poles from Indigenous cultures such as the Native American culture of the Pacific Northwest, Africa, New Zealand or Papua New Guinea. The artist included these poles to show how many traditions have parallel trajectories that lead them to visually similar conclusions. Parallels draws on this idea of cultural similarities through the imagining of objects, such as totem poles and cave paintings paired with Mixtec manuscript drawings. In *Parallels*, Woodruff placed African art with ancient art but instead with non-western art. *Interchange* highlights the direct exchange that occurred during the classical period, making it clear that Africans were a part of this process of knowledge. *Interchange* and *Parallels* cater to the likes of Schomburg and Locke as the panels highlight Africans as pioneers in art and the influence of African art in the classical period. In the same panel, Woodruff highlighted the importance of other cultures in art, paying special attention to Mexico.

The ***Art of the Negro*** and the effects of Mexican Art School on African American artists

This theme of similar art created by different cultures gets repeated at the bottom of the *Parallels* panel as Woodruff painted different ancient sculptures and stone carvings such as African wall paintings, Aztec deity sculptures and Mixtec manuscript figures. At the bottom left of the panel, the artist puts two paintings in conversation. In a gray and black pictorial space, a scene with two figures appears. The main figure stands floating in the designed space with its arms by its side. The figure is depicted with black, white and orange. The other figure is depicted in white and outlined with an ochre. The figure bends as it holds a long tubular form to its head, seemingly playing an instrument but is hard to make out as it possesses no facial features. This figure has hair that is represented with white spikes. Other than the two figures, the space just holds abstractions made by white lines. The stick figure rendering of the figures, along with the earthy tones suggest that this scene represents African cave paintings. Below this space, another created space containing a figure and abstractions contrasts the cave painting as it contains bright orange, yellow, and blue. In this space, a figure reveals its side profile as it faces the right. The figure seems to be in motion by the stance of its legs as one is placed in front of the other. It holds a blank expression, depicted with little details as the eye is rendered with a circle and a small dot and the mouth and nose rendered to two lines. The figure, depicted in yellow, wears a red armor that stops at its wrists and ankles, accompanied with a blue and orange headdress, utility belt, and jewelry. The colors used, along with the static and flattened nature of the figure in the bubble, tells the viewer that this space takes from Mixtec manuscripts. Mixtec manuscripts are examples of the Mixtec writing system, an Indigenous pre-contact community from Mexico. Pairing these two pictorial spaces together, a cave painting and Mixtec manuscript shows Woodruff's intention to bridge these two culturally different art pieces to show the artistic similarity between two different cultures.

Woodruff included imagery from a Mixtec codex, that contrasts African cave paintings right above it, on the right side of the mural. In *Parallels*, Woodruff touched on the importance of ancient art but also non-Europeans' inherent connection to each other through art, as the artist displays their cultural traditions, although separate, can sometimes display the same visual effects. Through comparing and making connections, the artist suggests that drawing inspiration from other cultures allows for creation of unique and good art as cultures in the past have utilized similar techniques and symbols. The panel *Parallels* highlights cultures that are often left out of the westernized art historical canon, one of them being pre-contact art in Latin America, and how art made by Native Americans, Indigenous Mexicans, Polynesians, Americans, and Africans have deep ancestral ties. Through making these connections, Woodruff also expressed his own artistic inspirations and historical knowledge about Mexico.

During the early twentieth century, Black artists looked to the Mexican muralism, hoping to depict "the role of African Americans in the development of the United States and their distinctive achievements and contributions to the nation".[29] Black artists and scholars viewed Mexicans as going through a similar situation as them, crafting a unique identity for themselves. A decade prior to the making of *Art of the Negro*, Woodruff "was awarded $550 to take a course" that required him to travel to Mexico.[30] This allowed Woodruff to assist Diego Rivera, "revered by many activist American painters for his radical politics and public murals".[31] Woodruff knew "that if he was going to seriously pursue mural painting that he needed to go to Mexico and train with seasoned muralists who had been honing their skill for more than a decade".[32] Diego Rivera, along with José

---

[29] Heydt, *Rising up: Hale Woodruff's Murals at Talladega College,* 108.

[30] Andrea Barnwell Brownlee, "Leaving Atlanta: Mexico, New York and Hale Woodruff's Departure from the Segregated South" Essay in *Hale Woodruff, Nancy Elizabeth Prophet, and the Academy*, 64.

[31] Heydt, *Rising up: Hale Woodruff's Murals at Talladega College,* 52.

[32] Brownlee, "Leaving Atlanta: Mexico, New York", 64.

Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros, launched the muralist movement in Mexico, believing that public art such as muralism, brings "the artist into contact with society, allowing [the artist] to confront daily life in [their] art, and encouraging [them] to use art as a weapon" in politics.[33] Black American artists saw these three and saw "the potential for art to effect social change and a model of cultural democracy and communal national experience".[34] Black American artists admired their use of Indigenous Mexican history, looking back to their own 'ancestry' to reflect and challenge the social and political destruction that was happening in their present.[35] Mexican muralism showed African American artists of the Depression era "a new way of thinking about history, democracy, cultural disenfranchisement," and the political and social role of art.[36]

Woodruff employs many of Rivera's characteristic stylistic elements in all of the panels of *Art of the Negro* such as his use of earth tones and black "with the periodic use of red, orange, yellow [and blue] to create visual punctuation," giving the figures "simple, bold modeling to create monumental forms, [and] figures placed one behind the other to suggest overlapping and recession of the picture plane".[37] In *Muses*, the bottom half of the mural depicts a variety of Black artists, overlapped as only the full body of three figures can be seen. He managed to include all the faces of the figures, paying special attention to the highlights of the figures' facial features through muralist skills he learned from Rivera. The collapsing of space and depth is a learned muralist tradition that appears in *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz* (figure 1.2). Similarly, at the bottom of the painting, men gather at the burial, receding in space but also overlapping so that only heads and faces are seen of the men. Woodruff takes this technique of overlapping of figures to give depth to a flattened area from Rivera as this is a characteristic technique of all his murals. This technique also allowed Woodruff to showcase every face, individualizing each figure through his hair, facial features, and manner of dress while allowing him to include more figures.

---

[33] Heydt, *Rising up: Hale Woodruff's Murals at Talladega College,* 108.

[34] Heydt, *Rising up: Hale Woodruff's Murals at Talladega College,* 108.

[35] Heydt, *Rising up: Hale Woodruff's Murals at Talladega College,* 108.

[36] Heydt, *Rising up: Hale Woodruff's Murals at Talladega College,* 108.

[37] Heydt, *Rising up: Hale Woodruff's Murals at Talladega College,* 116.

As the artist incorporated mural techniques from *the School of Athens* and subject matter from *The Burial of Orgaz*, these techniques are also seen in seen in Diego Rivera's *History of Mexico* (1929-30). Both artists drew inspiration from renaissance frescoes, utilizing preparation and visual techniques to emphasize that renaissance training will be integrated into their work due to its recognizable nature and importance in the art world. During his time in Mexico, Woodruff "learned the value of storytelling-to transcend a mere recounting of events and avoid just journalistic kinds of reporting".[38] *History of Mexico*, made before Woodruff's visit, displays "the history of Mexico through pivotal scenes such as the Spanish Conquest, the fight for independence from Spain, the Mexican-American war, the Mexican Revolution and an imagined future Mexico in which a workers' revolution has triumphed" (figure 1.7).[39] Through the chaotic scenes, Rivera managed to highlight the importance of ancestry and the ancient Indigenous community before the Spanish invasion on the north wall through composition and motifs that Woodruff later utilized in *Art of the Negro* (figure 1.8).

---

[38] Heydt, *Rising up: Hale Woodruff's Murals at Talladega College,* 52.

[39] Megan Flattley, "*The History of Mexico*: Diego Rivera's Murals at the National Palace", Smarthistory, https://smarthistory.org/mexico-diego-rivera-murals-national-palace/

The north wall encapsulates a scene from Aztec civilization as many figures with deep brown skin partake in different activities such as creating paintings, sculptures, and leather work, grinding corn to make tortillas, playing music, engaging in conversation with each other, and transporting goods for trade and imperial tribute. In this scene, Rivera overlapped figures to create a sense of recession and space while also employing a limited color palette as all the figures wear white cloth beside the religious figures, who are depicted in highly saturated colors. Rivera also included a figure that represents the deity Quetzalcoatl that "draws on imagery from colonial-era sources, in particular, an image of Quetzalcoatl from the Florentine Codex," a historical motif that Woodruff later used in *Art of the Negro*.[40] Both artists' in the *Art of the Negro* and the *History of Mexico* utilize the structure of their canvas as they used the building arches to shape the narrative.

On the left side of the bottom half of *Parallels,* a statue stands stiff, depicted in hues of blue with its arms bent ninety degrees by its waist so that the viewer only sees its fists. The statue wears an elaborate headdress that comes down to the statue's shoulders. The headdress is formed by circular and rectangular forms that also contain spirals and diagonal lines to create texture and pattern. The elaborate headdress and rectangular form suggest that the figure depicts the Aztec Maize Deity, Chicomecoatl. Traditionally, the statue is made from a stone slab, giving her a characteristic rectangular shape as the figure's arm stay attached to her side (fig. 1.9).[41] Similarly, on the north wall of *History of Mexico*, a man in the foreground sculpts into a white stone. The sculptor utilizes the same features for the sculpture that are seen on the deity in *Parallels* as the work holds a boxy form with a large headdress and arms up against its body. Woodruff drew inspiration directly from Rivera's interests, as he reproduces specific motifs of Aztec art that appears in Rivera's work.

---

[40] Flattley, "T*he History of Mexico*"

On the west wall of *History of Mexico*, where the main and largest mural is situated, the scalloped roofing becomes a part of the story telling as one alcove separates the Porfirian era from the Independence and Mexican Revolution scene and so on. The arches allowed Rivera to differentiate moments in history to make the murals legible. For Woodruff, the arches give the murals a distinct shape while allowing the artist to create different scenes with different artistic styles to execute a cohesive story. The use of arches to tell a secluded story that both Rivera and Woodruff employed resembles renaissance traditions used in murals like *The School of Athens*.

Black and Brown: the Effectiveness of Muralism and Solidarity in Mexico and the United States

In an interview with Al Murray, Woodruff stated that he learned a lot about fresco painting with Rivera that he employed for these murals, along with how Rivera used Fresco techniques in throughout his murals.[42] Rivera and Woodruff had similar artistic roots, studying in Paris with Cezanne and then moved on to social realism.[43] By assisting Rivera, Woodruff learned not only new techniques but how to continue to employ his original artistic training to craft this new 'Negro identity', a skill that Locke encouraged every African American artist to do. By employing these learned muralist skills for this specific subject matter, Woodruff found a way to connect his ideas of African art being critically important to the history of art while demonstrating that Mexican art was as important to the history of art too.

---

[41] "Maize Deity (Chicomecoatl): Aztec." The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Accessed September 7, 2023. https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/307644.

[42] Woodruff, Interview.

Woodruff and Black artists looked to the Mexican muralism due to their use of art as a way to effectively impose their social and political beliefs in public. Woodruff's use of African forms and Mexican muralist artistic focuses makes his murals unique in the portrayal of the African art and African people. With the beginning of the New Negro movement and onwards, Black American artists began using muralism as a form of retelling histories with underlying messages in hopes to shape the future of Black artists. In this case, Woodruff chose to place African art and other non-western art as having the same artistic influence and merit as Greco-Roman and renaissance art to get African American artists to reclaim African art/Ancestral art in order to effectively portray the African American experience. Woodruff and other Black artists viewed these histories and these artistic styles as essential in bringing to life the Black American experience while also differentiating this experience from the White American experience.

Mural paintings, due to their massive and public nature, allows artists an opportunity to present a complex narrative. In the 1930s, Black artists such as Woodruff, Aaron Douglas, Charles W. White, and Charles Alston, used mural painting to effectively

---

[43] McDaniel, "Reexamining Hale Woodruff's", 78.

"define the parameters of Black history, to record important moments in Black history, to show the struggle for freedom, and to celebrate the ways in which African Americans had built themselves a vibrant and vital place in the post-slavery world", using this to educate the public, specifically their own communities.[44] Woodruff used *Art of the Negro* as a way to educate other Black artists on how to depict their present day experiences through non-western imagery, while also showing Black communities the importance of looking to their own ancestral art and culture. The location of the murals must factor into the Woodruff's artistic intentions. Clark Atlanta University is the first Historically Black college or University in the Southern United States.[45] This university reflects the importance of accessibility for Black Americans to obtain higher education. These murals being housed at the university displays Woodruff's intentionality in highlighting not only the importance of African art in the art world but the importance of combining non-western art with prior learned western art styles. The artist emphasized the importance for Black artists and for students who studied at the University to not only look at their ancestry but to embrace the aesthetics of different cultures as cultural exchange has been presence for centuries and allows for new identities to be expressed. With their independence within the art world, artists of color needed to find an effective and unique way to express their experiences, including their political and social opinions. But Woodruff and other Black artists saw the effectiveness of making their works legible to more than just African Americans.

---

[44] Heydt, *Rising up: Hale Woodruff's Murals at Talladega College,* 111.

[45] https://www.cau.edu

Conclusion: Work that speaks to more than one audience

At face value, *Art of the Negro* asserts the importance of African art and culture on tradition of world art. Through analysis, Woodruff's *Art of the Negro* becomes a work that privileges the influence of often left out cultures in the European art canon, such as Mexican, Pacific Islander, and Egyptians. In this chapter, I argued that as Woodruff highlighted the influence of African art on not only the African American art scene but the western art scene, he simultaneously uses Mexican muralism composition and ancient Mexican symbols to depict the influence of ancient Mexican art in the world of art through the *Art of the Negro*. This chapter focuses primarily on the Mexican and African influence in Woodruff's *Art of the Negro* and how this is communicated through techniques and motifs from both Mexican and West African culture. The artist used African forms and subjects, such as mask-like faces and influential Black figures, to highlight the inherent connection that lies between African people and African Americans. Through *Art of the Negro*, Woodruff highlights ideals and history posed by Locke and other Black intellectuals about the role of the Black artist, such as "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts" and "The negro digs up his past".

In the same murals, Woodruff drew on what he learned from Rivera such as attention to history, compression of space, and earth tones. By adopting these elements previously utilized by Mexican muralists to create narrative art that is legible to a large public, Woodruff acknowledged the social and political significance of Mexican murals and suggests that drawing inspiration from other cultures that were previously left out of the classical art canon is effective for Black artists and their political statements.

The artist also emphasized that connecting with ‘ancestral arts’ does not require an artist to abandon their prior western artistic teachings, as these western techniques work together with other cultures to create a unique African American artistic style. Woodruff showed his own interpretation of what it means to be a Black artist as he drew upon aspects of his classically trained background such as influence from Raphael’s *School of Athens* and inclusion of Greek and Roman art throughout each panel. By including classical and renaissance motifs and influence, Woodruff demonstrated how to incorporate classical training or western art training into works, paired with subject matter and influence from other cultures to create unique and new work. Woodruff’s work spoke specifically to Black artists and intellectuals as the murals stay at the Clark Atlanta University, an historically Black university. The artist highlights what he viewed as the formation and creation of the new Black artist.

CHAPTER TWO

A Shared Oppression: The Double Consciousness of Elizabeth Catlett and *Civil Rights Congress*

Introduction

A small boy sits on a wooden chair, looking off to his right, unaware of the chaos happening behind him. The boy wears dark shorts and a white shirt, bold black lines outline the figure, differentiating him from the dark wooden chair he sits on and the skeletal figure behind him. A skeletal figure behind the boy wears a white robe and holds a noose in its left hand close to the boy's feet. The viewer sees what seems to be a violent attempt at the boy's life, but the skeletal figure is restrained by a man wearing glasses and a white sash labelled "CRC" (Figure 2.1). This 1950s print, *Civil Rights Congress*, depicts the protection of Black people and their rights by the Civil Rights Congress. This congress circulated "a petition charging the United States with Genocide against African Americans" in 1950 due to the increase of violence towards African Americans, leading eventually to the Civil Rights Movement.[1]

` For Elizabeth Catlett, the Black female artist who created this print, art was meant to be political. A dedicated social realist, Catlett concerned herself with both the struggles of her people, African Americans and Indigenous Mexicans.[2] While living in Mexico and working at the *Taller de Gráfica Popular* (TGP) from 1946 to 1966, Catlett continued to engage with African American struggles in her work, creating her series *The Negro Woman* and *Civil Rights Congress.* In *Civil Rights Congress*, Catlett focused heavily on her intended audiences[3], incorporating both Mexican symbolism and Black American subject matter, in hopes to break the harsh stereotypes that Mexicans held of African Americans in Mexico by emphasizing their shared oppression. In this chapter, I argue that Catlett wanted Mexicans to be able to identify with the oppression faced by African Americans by relating it back to their own oppressive experiences, allowing them to sympathize with one another.

---

[1] Melanie Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett: An American Artist in Mexico* (University of Washington Press, 2005), 100.

[2] Anita Bateman, "Narrative and Seriality in Elizabeth Catlett's Prints," *Journal of Black Studies* 47, no. 3 (2016): 258.

Catlett in the U.S.: Howard with Locke and Chicago with White

Catlett began her artist career at Howard University during the 1930s, as the Harlem Renaissance drew to a close. Though she attended and taught at multiple institutions, Catlett expressed that her time spent at Howard University influenced her to think about "art as a career, of making a living".[4] Taught and surrounded by Black intellectuals such as Locke, Lois Mailou Jones, a mixed media artist, James Herring, a landscape painter, and James A. Porter, a painter and art historian, Catlett's work reflected her community, Black people. Before her time at Howard, Locke published an anthology with his essay "The New Negro" in 1925, sparking the New Negro Movement.

---

[3] I use 'Intended audience' from Catlett's own words in Herzog's biographical book. I use this to emphasize that Catlett knew that this print would be seen by both her Mexican audience and African American audience, as Catlett by this time had been in Mexico for a decade but still sent art to be featured in US institutions.

[4] Glory Van Scott, *Interview of Elizabeth Catlett by Glory Van Scott,* (New York: 1991), 2.

Catlett's work, including *Civil Rights Congress*, reflects the ideals and wants of scholars during the 1920s to 1930s.

The early work of Catlett emphasized the thoughts of artists and scholars as they brought up the need to create art that expressed African American experiences. During her time at Howard University, Locke taught philosophy, though Catlett never got to interact with him.[5] In Locke's essay, "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts", the scholar theorizes that "Negro Americans still have the African spirit," just interpreted differently.[6] Locke's 'The African spirit' refers to the inherent connection between Black Americans and Africa through ancestry. 'The African spirit' includes aspects of African artistic techniques such as mask making. Throughout the essay, the author talked about the newfound interest in African art by French and German artists, then encouraging Black artists to take the same interest in African art through "a new style, a distinctive fresh technique and some sort of characteristic idiom".[7]

As collectors such as Albert Barnes and Locke brought African art to the Northeast, making them more accessible, artists such as Catlett began drawing influence from African art traditions such as African mask. In an earlier work by Catlett, *Mother and Child* (1944), the artist depicts a mother cradling her child, using a sharp geometric style typically employed in West African mask traditions to create facial features of both figures (figure 2.2). Catlett rendered the mother into basic geometrical shapes as a viewer can make out vertical lines that create the mother's destressed eyebrows and triangular nose. The child possesses more naturalistic features, as Catlett used lights and darks to create a smoother and rounder appearance, but the child still adopts its mother's sharp features. Both figures hold white space in their foreheads, cheek and nose area that create a strong curved form. They possess a dark solid upper lip and a white bottom lip. Catlett's use of lights and darks and strong features reflect her early interest in West African masks and how she learned to craft an African American phenotype.[8]

---

[5] Billops, *Interview of Elizabeth Catlett*.

[6] Alain Locke, "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts" from *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, 1925, 254.

[7] Locke, "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts", 267.

The artist's interest and how she drew inspiration from African art adheres to earlier scholarly notions that African American artists should incorporate African aesthetics. As the journey to a unique identity continued, scholars like Locke urged African American artists to not only look at their African roots and cultural aesthetics, but also look at other cultures outside of the westernized art world who were experiencing "the resurgence of a people" and how they expressed this 'resurgence' in their art.[9] For many African Americans, the Mexican art scene was a perfect place to draw inspiration for politically and socially aware art.

While at Howard and graduate school during the 1930s, Catlett became more politically involved by joining the anti-fascist and anti-war National Student League and participating in protests.[10] At the same time, she furthered her studies in art with Porter and James Wells, a graphic and print artist.[11] During the 1930s, Catlett's earlier work utilized sculptures and prints to explore Black profiles as most of her work is figural. At Howard, the artist encountered the work of Rivera and Miguel Covarrubias through both Wells and Porter but also during her "short-lived participation in the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP)" for six weeks during 1934 or 1935.[12] The Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) was one program out of four art programs created during the New Deal Era (1933-1938) that was government sanctioned to create jobs.

---

[8] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, 100.

[9] Alain Locke, "Foreword" from *The New Negro: An Interpretation,* 1925, xxvi-xxvii.

[10] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, 18.

[11] Billops, *Interview of Elizabeth Catlett*.

After her time at Howard University and during her time at Dillard, Catlett went to Chicago the summer of 1941, where she would meet her first husband, Charles White, a Black artist.[13] While in Chicago, the artist encountered an "active community of artists whose concerns encompassed the social, political, intellectual, and aesthetic".[14] While there, the Black art community experienced what is known as the Chicago Renaissance (1930s-1950s), due to the political and social consciousness of the Black artists, such as Margaret Burroughs, Charles White, Charles Sebree, and Eldzier Cortor in Chicago.[15] Due to this political and social engagement, Catlett began to create works that would be circulated through Black communities, in hopes to spread a political message. Catlett's want for the spread of political and social change through art leads her to Mexico. In hopes to further her artistic knowledge in sculpture to incorporate her political views, the artist applied and received funding from the Rosenwald Fellowship in 1945 to go to

---

[12] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, 16.

[13] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, 25.

[14] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, 26.

[15] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, 29.

Mexico to conduct her *The Negro Woman* series.[16] With the Fellowship, she moved to Mexico and ended up working at the *Taller de Gráfica Popular* for twenty years.[17]

Just before this increased interest in Mexico from African Americans, the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) occurred, marking the beginning of Mexico's search for a new national identity. Though "the motives of the Mexican Revolution are so numerous and conflicting that it is almost impossible to understand them", the revolution stemmed from dissatisfaction with the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz who tried to tame Mexico.[18] Mexico's main problem stemmed from the lasting effects of colonization from not only Spanish but post-colony involvement of France and the U.S., the economic inequality, and the underlying race and class problem in Mexico between Indigenous, Black, White and Mestizo people. The revolution led to a newfound focus on Indigenous rights and rights for working-class Mexicans. Similarly to Locke, Mexican scholars like Jose Vasconcelos urged artists to look to their heritage to guide them in "social transformation and the construction of a national identity."[19] At the same time, Vasconcelos focused his work on the invention of a new hybrid identity. This hybrid identity brought attention to Indigenous histories but not necessarily an investigation of indigenous arts like Locke. Similar to African Americans, Mexicans began to look for representations of the country outside of the Europeanized bounds of art. As Mexican artists and scholars began engaging pre-Hispanic histories, they also started to focus on politics of Mexico, specifically the rights of the working class. Artists that shifted to focusing on Indigenous and working-class Mexicans sought to create a sense of 'Mexicanidad' or 'mexicanness', a unique identity in their work.[20] The public nature of engaging with political and social issues led to an increased use of murals and prints, allowing for the dissemination of ideas.

---

[16] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, 47.

[17] Billops, *Interview of Elizabeth Catlett*.

[18] Luis Cabrera, "The Mexican Revolution: Its Causes, Purposes and Results," in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 69*, (1917), 2.

[19] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, 51.

The Double Consciousness of Elizabeth Catlett

In 1903, W.E.B Du Bois coined the term 'Double Consciousness'; "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others…One ever feels his twoness- two souls, two thoughts, two warring ideals in one dark body."[21] Double Consciousness speaks to the African American experience and the ways in which African Americans view the world, as two. The phrase Double Consciousness has been used for different ideas and thoughts over decades. The term encompasses the way in which African Americans move through the world, aware of themselves and aware of how others perceive them.

For Catlett and *Civil Rights Congress,* Double Consciousness encapsulates Catlett's view of her identity as an African American woman who resided in Mexico for over fifty years. Catlett was aware of her identity as an African American woman and continuously made art that concerned issues that pertained to African Americans in the United States. But Catlett also lived in Mexico for majority of her adult life, working at a workshop as an artist who concerned herself with the politics of Mexico. Catlett was transposing her double consciousness as shaped by time in the U.S. to the experiences of Indigenous and mestizo Mexicans, who would be experiencing their own forms of double consciousness. Catlett participated in two different spaces and experiences, allowing her to learn from both, while being aware of her positionality as a Black female artist that relocated to Mexico. Catlett acknowledged this, as she realized that her intended audience was "the main mass of people, especially the Black people" and shares an experience about when she "did a show for the Modern Art Museum in Mexico," expressing that she was "thinking about explaining Black people to the Mexican people…the Mexican mass of people" in a 1991 interview with Glory Van Scott.[22] Through her knowledge of her audience, Catlett used her double consciousness through her work to craft imagery that would garner sympathy from Mexicans, appealing to their own experience of oppression. This acknowledgement shows through in many of her works but especially in *Civil Rights Congress*.

---

[20] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, 51.

[21] William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," essay in *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, (United States: A. C. McClurg, 1903), 3.

During the creation of *Civil Rights Congress*, Catlett became subject to harassment and barring from the United States due to her political views as a communist. Catlett openly engaged in politics through her art and sent this art to the U.S. for Black audiences. From all her engagement as a teacher, student, and community member in the U.S., Catlett had a strong Black network in which to engage with leftist media, with an emphasis on African American audiences, such as *Masses & Mainstream*. After moving to Mexico, Catlett participated in many exhibitions, showing in New York City, Chicago,

---

[22] Glory Van Scott, Interview of Elizabeth Catlett by Glory Van Scott, (New York), 1991, 3.

Baltimore, Washington, D.C., and Atlanta.[23] Though the artist renounced her United States citizenship and was granted Mexican citizenship in 1962 due to the harassment by the U.S. embassy, she continued to send work to the U.S., participating primarily in an African American art space.[24] *Civil Rights Movement* shows her dedication in engaging with African America subject matter and Black press in the U.S but now with influences from Mexico.

In *Civil Rights Congress*, Catlett depicted an innocent Black boy as a representation of African Americans to make her audience empathize with the thought of innocent children being in danger. Behind the boy are multiple scenes of violence, as skeletal figure stands behind him and another appears in the distance on the boy's right side. She incorporated a skeletal figure with objects and symbols of danger to inform her Mexican audience that of the violence and injustice experienced by African Americans. Catlett's acknowledgement of both of her audiences and her identity as an African American woman in Mexico allows her to create a recognizable visual idiom that incorporates Mexican symbolism to garner awareness of struggles happening to both ethnic groups. Catlett's focus on legibility allows her to successfully craft an image catered towards both African Americans and Mexicans through printmaking styles learned from the TGP and her own experiences as a Black woman.

Catlett's acknowledgment of her identity allows her to create work that establishes a sense of analogous experiences with past oppression. When Catlett first got to Mexico and worked with the TGP, she created *The Negro Woman* series that utilized the linocut technique utilized at the time by the TGP. Catlett utilizes this style and technique to show strong, influential African American women in a pictorial style that would be recognizable for a Mexican audience. This series was the first step in Catlett's crafting a visual idiom of analogous experiences in oppression, bridging the struggles between African Americans and Mexicans. In Melanie Herzog's *Elizabeth Catlett: An American Artist in Mexico,* Catlett recalls her interactions with racism in Mexico while she was teaching English at a school.[25] Catlett had multiple incidents with her employer's tendency to be racist, but what stood out the most was an incident where during a lesson littered with racist ideologies, a student asked "What is a Negro?"[26] Catlett realized that not only did the students not know who African Americans were but that the lessons were teaching them stereotypes of African Americans, giving them misleading information about the group they had never encountered. Catlett began to tweak the lessons and realized that the students could relate their own experiences as Mexicans to the experiences of African Americans.[27]

---

[23] Van Scott, Interview of Elizabeth Catlett, 7.

[24] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, 79.

Catlett created this same visual concept of analogous experiences of oppression in her *Civil Right Congress* print by trying to get both audiences to relate to the violence of youth due to racism. Though this print depicts an African American issue with violence in the U.S. by citizens and the government, Catlett made the image legible for a possible Mexican audience to relate to the struggles of African Americans. Catlett used symbolism, such as *calaveras* that are common in political Mexican art in a scene of African American struggles so that a Mexican audience could understand the scene and sympathize with the racial issue happening the United States.

---

[25] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, 80.

[26] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, 80.

[27] Camille Billops, *Interview of Elizabeth Catlett by Camille Billops*, (New York: Hatch Billops Collection), 1991.

For the Mexican Audience: Taller de Gráfica Popular and The Public Arts

Due to the growing popularity of *los tres grandes* and muralism in the United States throughout the 1930s, the influence of the *Taller de Gráfica Popular* was slow moving and was not present until the mid 1940s in the United States.[28] *El Taller de Gráfica Popular*, founded by Leopoldo Méndez, Luis Arenal and Pablo O'Higgins, formed in 1937 in Mexico City with the goal that the workshop aim "to produce inexpensive, reproducible art for the people of Mexico, deliberately accessible in its graphic legibility, realism, and symbolism."[29] While *los tres grandes* were often backed and funded by the Mexican government, the TGP worked under tight financial restraints. Due to this, prints became their only medium, as prints was cheap and reproducible, allowing their political art to spread with ease. The TGP became more active during the 1940s, "providing posters and pamphlets on behalf of numerous Mexican trade unions and labour groups" and making art in-favor of the political Popular party.[30] Printmaking became an integral part of political art in Mexico and reached the United States, leading Catlett and her then husband, Charles White, to join the TGP as guest artists.

---

[28] Alison Cameron, "Buenos Vecinos: African-American Printmaking and the Taller de Gráfica Popular," *Print Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1999): 356.

[29] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, 85.

[30] Cameron, "Buenos Vecinos," 356-358.

As Catlett joined, the workshop finished up their *estampas de la revolución Mexicana* collection, "a portfolio of 85 linocuts, which invited the audience to identify with the actors and scenes of the prints."[31] Published in the TGP's *estampas de Mexicana* editorial, these 85 linocuts employ the use of linework to create light and dark values to depict scenes of rebellion, its benefits, and its consequences.[32] Due to the TGP artistic style, the later work of Catlett, such as *Civil Rights Congress* and *The Negro Woman* series reflects a move away from the traditions of lithography and African inspiration to traditions that align with linocut and social realism. Catlett made *The Negro Woman* series using a similar print style and text of *estampas* that paid homage to revolutionary African American women.[33] Though *Civil Right Congress* would be created several years later, Catlett continued to use the print style, just without text to guide the viewer. Each print in *The Negro Woman* series possess a written phrase with it such as "In Sojourner Truth I fought for the right of women as well as Negroes" and "In Phillis Wheatley I proved intellectual equality in the midst of slavery" (fig. 2.3. and 2.4.). Catlett wrote the phrases in English, in order to individualize each subject and their importance to African American history specifically. The format of these phrases also insinuate that these important African American figures share a similar activist spirit. She stated their names clearly at the beginning, giving each woman agency. Catlett not only adopted the incorporation of phrases to guide the viewer in this series from the TGP but also how print techniques, specifically linocut techniques.

---

[31] Bateman, "Narrative and Seriality," 260.

[32] *Estampa y Lucha: El Taller De Gráfica Popular, 1937-2017*, (Ciudad de México: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 2018).

[33] Bateman, "Narrative and Seriality," 260.

The nature of linocut allowed the TGP to have distinct artistic style as political printmakers. Linocuts are a type of print that is made carving a design into a sheet of linoleum, linseed oil that was allowed to oxidize.[34] Linoleum allows for easy manipulations, leading to the dislike by many artists as it was seen as not sufficiently demanding of technical skills.[35] More popular and seen as demanding skills was lithography, a process of printmaking where a design is drawn onto a flat stone or prepared metal plate and affixed by means of a chemical reaction.[36] As linocuts were not common used, cheap, and did not require lots of training, the TGP's adoption of linocuts for their political visual prints allowed their prints to have unique artistic characteristics, such as sharp lines, black and white contrast, and use of shading, that differed from lithographs.

The TGP's characteristic print techniques, that Catlett also uses in her prints, show through in Arturo García Bustos' linocut, *El descontento de los campesinos obtiene su respuesta* (The discontent of the peasants gets their response) (figure 2.5.). Bustos uses lights and darks intentionally to depict a haunting scene. The artist utilized a dark tone to characterize both the government officials who wear sombreros and another government official whose only distinguishable features are his cap and tense stance. Bustos uses the darkness to show that these figures do not need identities as this is a generalization of government officials and their violence. Bustos also uses white space to show movement from the blast of the gun. The government officials direct their guns to two individuals, who assumingly peasants from the title, on the left side of the print. From the beginning of the guns to a little behind the two captive individuals, a triangular form of white space engulfs the print, particularly enveloping the two captives. The movement of the white space from right to left in a cloudy form mimics the motion of the bullet and its target. Bustos utilizes sharp line work, created by carving into the linoleum, to create texture and movement as these lines create the bumps in the ground below them and the powerful motion of the gun blast. TGP adopts the linocut and displays the skills that go into crafting a legible print through the use of lines for shading and movement, black and white, and creation of texture.

---

[34] Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "linocut." Encyclopedia Britannica, August 12, 2010. https://www.britannica.com/technology/linocut.
[35] Britannica, "linocut".

[36] "Lithograph." The Metropolitan Museum of Art, December 21, 2018. https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/collection-areas/drawings-and-prints/materials-and-techniques/printmaking/lithograph#:~:text=Lithography%20is%20a%20planographic%20printmaking,means%20of%20a%20chemical%20reaction.

Catlett similarly utilized these techniques or variations in the CRC print. Darkness engulfs the background of the print as black ink gives this scene an eerie feeling due to its lack of setting. To contrast the black background, the artist utilized linework to depict the figures, giving them texture and highlights. The figures possess white and dark values to show a light source and values, such as prominent bone structure, in their facial features. Catlett's visual cues through the use of light and dark values show her inspiration from the TGP's linocut traditions and her intentionally making this image readable to a Mexican audience. This linocut uses lights and darks to create a narrative without using Spanish text to allow the image to speak for itself. Using wavy white lines on a white cross that sits in a black background lets every viewer know that this is not a normal representation of a cross. Catlett used the impactful visual techniques of Mexican muralism to communicate in a visually compelling way that primarily spoke to Black American audiences but incorporated the calavera as a way to try to make the meaning evident for Mexican audiences.

Catlett used the impactful visual techniques of Mexican muralism to communicate in a visually compelling way that primarily spoke to Black American audiences. At the same time, she incorporated the calavera as a way to try to make the general critique of oppression evident for Mexican audiences. The artist not only used the tradition of printmaking that had already been firmly established in Mexico for decades, but also widely known symbols in Mexico.[37] In the *Civil Right Congress* print, a figure stands behind the seated boy with a rope in its left hand and its right hand restrained. The figure's face contains black circles to represent its eyes and nose cavity and teeth down to the bone. The cloak-like garment of the figure reveals the arms of the figure, showing that it's just bones, except for its feet which have on a pair of loafers. This skeletal figure seems to be alive as Catlett places it in the motion of attempting to harm the boy. These dead but alive figures appear in prints all around Mexico, stemming from the Mexican illustrator José Guadalupe Posada (1851-1913). Popular works of Posada often feature *las calaveras*, skeletons, that offered political and satirical criticisms of Mexico.[38] Posada's illustrations appeared in newsletters aimed towards Mexico's lower class and depicted scenes of bourgeois life and the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz.[39] With *las calaveras,*

---

[37] Cameron, "Buenos Vecinos," 356.

[38] Luis Cardoza y Aragón, "Las Calaveras de José Guadalupe Posada," *Artes de México*, no. 67 (2011): 38.

[39] "The Calaveras of José Guadalupe Posada." The Public Domain Review, November 2012. https://publicdomainreview.org/collection/the-calaveras-of-jose-guadalupe-posada

Posada acknowledged the ideas of death in Mexico not as a tragedy but as a cosmic and marvelous concept.[40] *Las calaveras* highlight that "la Muerte es para siempre (Death is forever)" and the life that's created while alive continues into the afterlife.[41] After Posada's lifetime, *las calaveras* became a national Mexican symbol, typically related to *la Calavera Catrina* and the day of the dead as it is viewed as original Mexican popular art.[42]

The skeleton and composition in *Civil Rights Congress* make the general sense of protection against impending harm clear even for people who didn't recognize Patterson or the Klan hood or have the burning cross reference in mind. This tradition of *las calaveras* as political satire continued after Posada, as artists adopted them into their own versions of political art and representations of the afterlife. The TGP worked this symbolism into many of their prints as Alberto Beltrán's illustration highlights the 16th year anniversary of political skeletons of the *Taller de Gráfica Popular* (fig. 2.6). On the lower half of the print, two skeletal figures stand with a smaller skeletal drawing on a stick and a sign that reads "aquí les traigo su rollo de secas y montoneras endiabladas calaveras que se salieron del hoyo (here I bring you your roll of dry and devilish mounds of skeletons that came out of the hole)". On the top half of the print, the 'devilish mound' reveals skeletons dressed as Hitler, one dressed in a shawl covered in money signs, another in a cap with a dollar sign and another skeleton dressed with a full head of hair, a black shirt, a patterned skirt and heels. This highlights the TGP's use of skeletal figures as evil political figures and greedy upper-class Mexicans. As TGP became popular, these political skeletons gained popularity and drew from the familiar symbolism of Posada. Looking to the Catlett print, the artist dressed this skeletal figure in a white cloak that does not meet the ground to reveal that the figure wears black pants and shoes beneath the cloak. Though the white cloak registers more with an African American audience, a skeleton figure in ordinary clothes registers with an Mexican audience as a political satire symbol that is meant to speak on an issue in the African American community. Due to its past in Posada's art and resurgence in TGP prints, the skeletal figure remains a familiar uneasy image in Mexican art. For CRC, Catlett utilizes the common play on light and dark values of the TGP and familiar skeletal tropes, visual aspects popular in Mexican art, when depicting Black subject matter as a reflection of her double consciousness and how, through her own identity, would understand the narrative of the print. Through this skeletal figure, Catlett creates a multilingual print that could be legible to a Mexican audience, as she lived and worked in Mexico for years. Catlett uses these techniques and symbols to demonstrate an issue close to her identity as an African American. Catlett used the impactful visual techniques of Mexican muralism to communicate in a visually compelling way that primarily spoke to Black American audiences. At the same time, she incorporated the calavera as a way to try to make the general critique of oppression evident for Mexican audiences.

---

[40] Cardoza y Aragón, "Las Calaveras," 38.

[41] Cardoza y Aragón, "Las Calaveras, 39.

[42] Cardoza y Aragón, "Las Calaveras, 38.

For the African American audience: Subject matter and symbolism

As WWII ended and Americans returned home, Black Americans continued to push the U.S. government for racial equality as violence against Black people increased during the early 1900s. During the 1940s, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) "won important supreme court victories and mobilized a mass lobby of organizations to press Congress to pass civil rights legislation," but these victories did not slow down the violence against African Americans.[43] As this violence continued, African American artists concerned themselves with current issues that faced the community. Though Catlett was living in Mexico, the artist continued to create art that concerned her community in the United States.

In the print, Catlett includes a multitude of symbols that would have been legible to an African American audience to create a complex composition. In the left side of the image, hiding in the background, a white ghostly figure floats in front of a cross. In the center of the image, a skeletal figure dressed in a white cloak becomes restrained by another figure as the skeletal figure gets caught in the midst of a violent act. These two skeletal figures have been discussed in the previous section on how they are legible to a Mexican audience as symbols of violence, but they are also legible to an African American audience in different ways. Both the ghostly figure and the skeletal figure wear white cloaks with pointed hoods that engulf them to conceal their identities. African Americans recognize these figures as members of the Ku Klux Klan, a white supremacist group that was created in the late 1880s to terrorize and murder African Americans and other minorities in the U.S. The KKK's signature garb is a white pointy-hooded cloak that hides their faces. Their disguises allow them to get away with their horrific crimes. Catlett revealed a small bottom half of the main skeletal figure to show that the figure wears normal clothes underneath the cloak. The normal garb and concealing of identity show that the KKK can be any person, a neighbor, a dentist, a laborer. The class status of African Americans and White Americans is shown through the juxtaposition of the child being barefooted and the skeleton wearing loafers and slacks. But this juxtaposition doubles as a symbol of the White United States and their overall violence against African Americans. Slacks and loafers are often seen as a symbol of wealth, which can equate to white governmental figures and their lack of concern towards Black Americans, therefore inadvertently encouraging the violence.

---

[43] "The Civil Rights Act of 1964: A Long Struggle for Freedom World War II and Post War (1940-1949)." Library of Congress, October 10, 2014, https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/civil-rights-act/world-war-ii-and-post-war.html

Another recognizable symbol lies in the background of the print, the burning cross. The African American audience would recognize this symbol as an act of violence due to its use by the KKK. Cross burning has been used as a source of intimidation against African Americans and other ethnic groups hated by the KKK. Cross burning has a long history and continues even today as a threat against Black Americans. The looped rope at the bottom of print that sits in the hand of the skeletal figure and snakes around by the boy's dangling feet becomes another notable symbol. The loop is recognized as a noose, a mechanism used to hang people. Nooses are used for lynching, "the public killing of an individual who has not received any due process."[44] During the 19th and 20th centuries, "White Americans used lynching to terrorize and control Black people," so much that lynching became a social event for white supremacist gathers where photographs were taken of the murderer victim and sold as postcards.[45] The white pointy-hooded cloaks, a burning cross and a noose all read a tools of violence employed by White Americans to an African American audience.

---

[44] "History of Lynching in America," NAACP, February 11, 2022, https://naacp.org/find-resources/history-explained/history-lynching-america

[45] NAACP, "History of Lynching."

Though this print contains many symbols of violence towards African Americans, there remains one symbol of hope, the man that restrains the skeletal figure. A man from the right side of the print grabs hold of the central skeletal figure, restraining the skeleton from committing any violence against the boy. Catlett characterizes the man with a big nose, plump lips, and glasses. Catlett creates texture and value in the man's face with varied line work. His mostly black face and features tell the African American audience that this man is Black. For Black Americans at the time, this man would have been recognizable as Catlett based him on William Patterson, an African American leader in the Communist Party and head of the International Labor Defense (a legal group).[46] This figure also wears a white sash with the acronym "CRC" written in black. CRC represents the Civil Rights Congress, a civil rights organization founded in Detroit in 1946 by William Patterson.[47] The organization concerned itself mostly with protecting black people from police brutality and injustice in the court system.[48] The Civil Rights Congress concerned itself with cases that dealt with the Smith Act, an act that made it a federal offense to "advocate the violent overthrow of the government or to organize or be a member of any group" doing such advocacy.[49] This act applied to Catlett directly, as through her work and personal life, she participated in political freedom and expressed her political views that did not align with the U.S. government and consequently had to give up her U.S. citizenship. Even if William Patterson's face was not recognizable to some of the African American audience, the acronym and title of the print would have been recognizable. Patterson's action of restraining the skeletal figure also provides insight to the 1950 petition proposed by the CRC to the United Nations. For her African American audience, Catlett utilized both symbols of common violence in the US and a community figure that created a national organization. Catlett utilized multiples symbols in hopes that the print is easily read by both her Mexican and African American audience.

---

[46] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, 100.

[47] "Civil Rights Congress." Encyclopedia Britannica, last modified March 20, 2023. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Civil-Rights-Congress.

[48] Britannica, "Civil Rights Congress."

[49] Britannica, "Civil Rights Congress."

Conclusion

In *Civil Rights Congress*, Catlett focuses heavily on her intended audience, incorporating both Mexican symbolism, such as linocut techniques and *las calaveras*, and Black American subject matter, in hopes to break harsh African American stereotypes in Mexico by garnering empathy, while continuing to engage in the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. Catlett's historical knowledge and upbringing led to her strong identity as an African American, while her extensive residency in Mexico allowed her to acknowledge the "concerns, struggles and aspirations of Mexican people."[50] This fusion of cultural symbols allow Catlett to create art that addressed both of her identities as a Black woman living as a Mexican citizen and cater to both of her audiences. In *Civil Right Congress,* symbolism, style and subject matter all contribute to the understanding of Catlett's double consciousness of being an African American woman that lived in Mexico and worked on often with Mexican subjects. *Civil Right Congress* represents Catlett's hope to diminish the misinformation that had been spread in Mexico about African Americans and replace them with the realities of African American life in the United States. Though it is not known how many prints were made, some CRC prints are housed in institutions such as Art Institute of Chicago, the personal collection of Elizabeth Catlett, Philadelphia Museum of Art, The University of Iowa, and Toledo Museum of Art. All these institutions are places Catlett attended, visited or exhibited or have a collection in African American art. Though it does not seem that any of the prints are housed in Mexico presently, her prints would have been shown around to her colleagues.

---

[50] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, 74-75.

[51] Though she only visited the United States twice after this, Catlett continued to engage in African American issues such as creating political art, representational art of Black women, and participating in the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. In Catlett's archive file at the Amistad Research Center in New Orleans, Louisiana, posters about the freedom of Angela Davis scattered along with records of her art that she made specifically for the U.S. (figure 2.7.). This shows that Catlett continued to think about reaching broad audiences, using multiple languages to make the message clear for diverse communities, across borders. Catlett continued to create art that was legible for both of her audiences, mostly focusing on Black subject matter with Spanish words or symbols enlaced into the work. In a late 1975 article by Catlett, "The Role of the Black Artist", she explains that Black artists must decide if they want to "attempt to enter and establish oneself in the existing U.S. art world" or "participate as artists directly in the movement for black liberation."[52] The same questions that were being asked before Catlett's career

---

[51] Herzog, *Elizabeth Catlett*, 79.

[52] Elizabeth Catlett, "The Role of The Black Artist," *The Black Scholar* 6, no. 9 (1975): 14.

continued to be asked during the middle of her career. Catlett continued to engage what Black art should look like in the late 1900s, as she continued to create works that represent her unique life experience. The work of Catlett continues to be exhibited and studied for the uniqueness of her situation and how this is exemplified in her work. Catlett ultimately left the United States and directed by both political and personal commitments, made Mexico her permanent home, becoming a citizen in 1960. However, she remained engaged in the political concerns of Black Americans in the United States. *Civil Right Congress* showcases Catlett's adoption of the visual aesthetics and symbols of Mexican political art to comment on concerns specifically relevant to African Americans in a U.S. context.

CHAPTER THREE

The Knot and the Noose: The Importance of Materiality in the Art of Sargent Claude Johnson

Introduction

Sargent Claude Johnson's 1948 terracotta sculpture, *The Knot and the Noose*, depicts an abstracted moment in time as rounded organic forms stretch and morph from a more linear rectangular base conveying a sense of movement (fig. 3.1 and 3.2). Although connected through this base, three separate and distinct types of form emerge to comprise the work: the bulb, the loop, and three figures, suggestive of human beings, contained between them. As the terracotta begins to morph from the base, the sculpture becomes elongated, stretching to create a tubular arc-like form that simultaneously comprises and contains the figures and two geometric forms. On one end of this 'arc', the terracotta continues upwards, stretching and thinning out slightly until it raises to form a bulb-like object. The bulb curves slightly inwards towards the rest of the sculpture, raised directly in front of the first humanoid figure. On the other end of the sculpture, another object develops from the base, narrowing as it rises until it separates, becoming a loop that curves slightly inward, sitting behind and framing the last figure. The base, along with the two forms at each end of the sculpture, encase the three figures, 'caging' them in. With their lower limbs effectively one with the arc-like base, the legs of the humanoid figures appear heavy and evince no muscular definition, as though their non-existent feet are mired in the clay from which Johnson has formed them. They seem to trudge through the base with one foot in front of the other. Their legs create triangles of negative space, allowing air and light to show through the separation in their legs, as progress in a linear formation with their short, stubby outstretched arms reaching for the bulb. While their gesture—lunging forward toward the bulb feels urgent—the viewer senses the futility of their action. Fused to the base, they will never make forward progress; their conspicuously hand-less, hopelessly truncated arms will never touch the bulbous target for which they desperately reach. The sculpture depicts an abstract scene of restraint and caging, showcasing aesthetics and subject matter markedly distinct from the better known works of Johnson's oeuvre which, although are primarily non-narrative figures with explicitly racialized facial features.

Johnson earned recognition for his works that focused on Black subjects such as *Chester* (1931) and *Forever Free* (1933). But where does the rest of his work fall when talking about his oeuvre? Though Johnson's figural pieces that overtly depict Black subjects have received the most attention, Johnson's work generally incorporates influence from Black Americans, Africans, East Asians, and Indigenous peoples of Mexico, either through subject matter, materiality, or both. In this chapter, I explore his combination subjects of African descent with ways of making inspired by the practices of Indigenous artists in Mexico evident in *The Knot and the Noose*. I observe the shifts in Johnson's explicit and implicit understandings of his responsibility as an artist and the relationship between racially conscious politics and artistic expression throughout his career, specifically through the analysis of *The Knot and the Noose* relative to Johnson's pre-Mexico works of the late 1920s and the 1930s. I consider Johnson's gradual move away from more naturalistic figuration of these earlier works to the abstraction of *The Knot and the Noose* and how this might have coincided with changes in his views about the political versus aesthetic priorities of artists of African descent. Particularly relevant to this discussion is the career-long deep interest in materiality, materials, and making—particularly his exploration of polychrome sculpture and of ceramics across cultures—that informed Johnson's interest in going to Mexico and how it might have manifested in his work to reflect his ideas about the relationship of art and politics at any given time. For this chapter, location, identity, and materiality play a crucial role in the interpretation of Johnson's work. Though my argument centers around *The Knot and the Noose*, I utilize other pieces by Johnson to support my observations.

Sargent Claude Johnson: a Look Into Identity and Early Work

Johnson was born in Boston on November 7, 1888 to a Swedish-American father and an African American and Cherokee mother, making him a person of mixed race,[1] but he was known have identified as Black (or the period equivalent "Negro") throughout his life.[2] After the death of his parents, one in 1897 and the other in 1902, Johnson and his siblings constantly moved from state to state, switching between staying with his uncle and aunt, William Sherman Jackson and May Howard Jackson, or his grandparents, before eventually being placed in a foster home in Massachusetts.[3] Johnson's aunt, May Howard Jackson, was a sculptor working primarily on classical busts of Black subjects. She contributed greatly to the early stages of the Harlem Renaissance with her work and likely provided contributed to early exposure to sculpture for Johnson as a child, as she maintained a studio in her home when Johnson lived with them.[4] William Sherman Jackson, her husband and Johnson's uncle, taught at M Street High School, "one of America's foremost high schools for Afro-American youth".[5] Before Johnson reached college, his home base changed from Boston, Washington, D.C., Virginia and back to Massachusetts. In Massachusetts, Johnson attended schools, where he initially pursued music.[6] Later, he switched his focus to the visual arts which he began to pursue seriously once he moved San Francisco in 1915.[7] The artist attended the A. W. Best School of Art and then the California School of Fine Arts, where he worked in sculpture.[8]

---

[1] Lizzetta LeFalle-Collins, "Sargent Claude Johnson and Modernism: An Investigation of Context, Representation, and Identity," in *Sargent Johnson: African American Modernist* (San Francisco, Calif: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 10.

[2] Sargent Johnson Archival Artists File, San Francisco Art Institute Legacy Foundation + Archive, 13.

[3] LeFalle-Collins, "Sargent Claude Johnson and Modernism," 10.

Johnson in San Francisco

Investigation some of Johnson's earlier works from his time in San Francisco and the factors that influenced it sheds light on the continuities and changes in the artist's oeuvre represented by *The Knot and the Noose*. At 22, Johnson arrived in San Francisco at the same time as the Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915, which is regarded as California's introduction to modernism.[9] With the completion of the Panama canal, the exposition emphasized San Francisco's position in trade between Asia and the

---

[4] LeFalle-Collins, "Sargent Claude Johnson and Modernism," 10.

[5] Henry S. Robinson, "The M Street High School, 1891-1916." *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, (Washington, D.C.*: 1984), 119, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40067848.

[6] LeFalle-Collins, "Sargent Claude Johnson and Modernism," 10.

[7] LeFalle-Collins, "Sargent Claude Johnson and Modernism," 10.

[8] LeFalle-Collins, "Sargent Claude Johnson and Modernism," 10.

[9] Judith Wilson, "Sargent Johnson: Afro-California Modernist," essay In *Race-Ing Art History: Critical Readings in Race and Art History*, (Routledge) 308.

Americas.[10] When Johnson arrived, the city experienced this exploration of modernism as well as an embracing of the state's diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural demographics within the art world. While Asians still faced racism and anti-immigrant sentiments at this time in San Francisco, the San Francisco Art Association often highlighted "the active role Chinese and Japanese artists took in local exhibitions."[11] Restricted by property buying ordinances, the relatively small population of African Americans in San Francisco had few housing options which led to their settling in neighborhoods with Japanese, Chinese, Filipinos, and poor White Americans.[12] Living in a mixed-race neighborhood in San Francisco at the time allowed Johnson to not only experience modernism but also diverse Asian cultures which he introduced in early works. In both subject matter and form, *Elizabeth Gee* (1927) exemplifies this combination of modernism with Asian cultural influence (fig. 3.3). Johnson emphasized realism and classical sculpture training in the naturalistic portrayal of the subject of *Elizabeth Gee* but also includes modernist aesthetic sensibilities in his choice of material.[13] *Elizabeth Gee* depicts a Chinese child whose family lived next door to the artist.[14] Depicted from the shoulders up, the girl stands straight in a static pose. The artist characterized *Elizabeth Gee* with wide, deep eyes, that pierce the viewers. The subject wears soft collared shirt and has a short bob with bangs that fall just above her eyebrows. Creating a closely observed, intimate portrait of his young neighbor, the artist characterized *Elizabeth Gee* with wide, deep eyes that pierce the viewers. Johnson finished the sculpture by glazing it entirely in bluish green glaze except for the dark wooden base. Johnson highlighted darks and lights in the girl's face and hair with color "that would have been associated with Asian ceramics," [15] such as Chinese, to create a sculpture "in a relatively naturalistic style".[16]

---

[10] Wilson, "Sargent Johnson: Afro-California Modernist," 308.

[11] John P. Bowles, "New Negro on the Pacific Rim: Sargent Johnson's Afro-Asian Sculptures," in *East-West Interchanges in American Art: A Long and Tumultuous Relationship*, ed. Cynthia Mills, Lee Glazer, and Amelia A., Goerlitz, 145.

[12] Wilson, "Sargent Johnson: Afro-California Modernist," 309.

[13] LeFalle-Collins, "Sargent Johnson and Modernism," 9.

[14] Wilson, "Sargent Johnson: Afro-California modernist," 310.

In his choice of materials associated with 'craft', such as Chinese ceramics, rather than so-called 'fine art', this sculpture not only expresses Johnson's different concept of modernism, as European modernism incorporate more impressionist styles, but also the influence of the Bay Area and its Asian community. European modernism brought various art styles including impressionism, surrealism, abstraction, and cubism to San Francisco. For *Elizabeth Gee*, the artist engages in naturalism, displaying a realistic work of the sitter. Ascribing to modernist ideals, *Elizabeth Gee* depicted an aspect of Johnson's everyday life, as the sitter was his neighbor. In this way, Johnson highlights not only his own experience in the Bay Area but the demographic and identity of the Bay Area.

In her "Sargent Johnson: Afro-California Modernist" essay, Judith Wilson observes that through the artist's early work, Johnson brought attention to the "long history of Asian presence and anti-Asian prejudice" in the Bay Area and highlighted how it "ironically facilitated the preservation of Asian culture and identity, thus enabling a politically, socially, and economically marginalized group to exert a pervasive, if widely unrecognized, cultural influence."[17]

---

[15] Bowles, "New Negro on the Pacific Rim," 145.

[16] Wilson, "Sargent Johnson: Afro-California Modernist," 310.

Elizabeth Gee offers one example of how Johnson's locality affected the content of work and his artistic style, but the artist continued to draw on Asian aesthetic influences even when depicting non-Asian subjects. *Pearl*, a 1923-25 sculpture featuring Johnson's own young daughter, borrows from traditional Buddhist iconography in the pose of the figure and used the same ceramic glaze associated with Chinese pottery as *Elizabeth Gee*. *Pearl*, characterized as a stereotypical baby doll, has hair cut into a micro-bob as the bangs stop halfway through the forehead and the length ends just above the ears, which was popular in both Asian and European American communities (fig. 3.4).[18] Posing in a relaxed position, "suggestive of the royal ease reserved for only the highest order of Buddhist deities and royalty," the baby sits with one leg folded and the other one with knee to chest.[19] Her hands come together, closing together flat and pointed out. Although its current location is unknown, photographs document the sculpture's appearance, and records indicate no location known, it originally held a glazed blue-green. *Pearl* showed Johnson's interest of at the time in Asian art traditions, integrating traditional meanings to the techniques while also portraying his daughter, a Black girl, as the fullest deity. As in the later *Knot and the Noose*, in *Pearl,* Johnson depicts a Black subject incorporating forms and materials.

---

[17] Wilson, "Sargent Johnson: Afro-California Modernist," 310.

[18] Bowles, "New Negro on the Pacific Rim," 145.

[19] Bowles, "New Negro on the Pacific Rim," 145.

Discrimination pushed different communities of color into living situations of close proximity. However, the strong presence of these communities managed to influence what was being taught and pushed by the San Francisco Art Association, an organization founded in 1871 that held exhibitions and published a periodical, then eventually established the San Francisco Art Institute and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.[20] Though Johnson sculpted Elizabeth Gee and Pearl early in his career, his acknowledgment of locality and importance of community in art remained a continuous thread in his work. Even beyond his connections to San Francisco, the artist continued to introduce the influence of the cultures and aesthetics that he encountered in daily life into his own practice. For example, he drew inspiration from African art published in editorials, and later he traveled to Mexico City, learning from artists there, and both influences show up in The Knot and the Noose. Significantly, through his participation in the Harmon Foundation art exhibitions during the 1920s and 1940s, Johnson brought the unique aesthetic he developed through this mélange of cultural influences to a wider audience under the banner of "Negro art" while cultivating a reputation for himself as a "Negro artist".

Through his early work, such as *Pearl*, which was included in the 1933 Harmon Foundation exhibitions, the artist introduced Asian culture and aesthetics into spaces in which they would not previously been included. As part of a more comprehensive program, the Harmon Foundation focused a significant portion of their philanthropy on Black visual arts during the 1920s to the 1940s. The Foundation held traveling exhibitions, creating unprecedented opportunities for exposure—both for the artist's showing their work and the audiences who might otherwise not have encountered art by African Americans. With shows in every state in the continental U.S., these traveling exhibitions enabled information and influence to spread not only in New York, the arguable center of Black creativity at the time, but nationwide and to include artists like Johnson who might otherwise be somewhat isolated from concentrated Black arts communities.

---

[20] "San Francisco Art Association and Related Organizational Records," (Washington, D.C.) Archives of American Art.

Despite Johnson's continued exploration of Asian, specifically Chinese art, while depicting Black subjects and the Harmon Foundation's acknowledgement of this early work, the diverse influences of his early works have largely been "ignored by art historians, who have privileged those works in Johnson's oeuvre that resemble African art."[21] And failed to acknowledge how, even these works, showcase the many cultural traditions from which Johnson drew inspiration. This may be due to Johnson's thirteen years long association with the Harmon Foundation or Alain Locke's continuous support of Johnson's work. Sometimes shifting between working with Asian subjects and African American subjects, Johnson's early work remained mostly figural, with sculptures focusing on Black subjects such as *Chester* (1931) and *Forever Free* (1933) and a small exploration of African-inspired masks. These works garnered the attention of Locke, other Black scholars, and Black artists of the time.

The Harmon Foundation: Johnson and the African American Art Community

---

[21] Bowles, "New Negro on the Pacific Rim," 143.

While Johnson began his early artistic career in San Francisco, "the impact of contemporary discourses on the place of African art and the vernacular tradition in the creation of [black] modern art in America"[22] took shape on the east coast through the movement later deemed the Harlem Renaissance.[23] At the time, as works like *Pearl* and *Head of a Boy* (1928) demonstrate, Johnson worked primarily with Asian-influenced materials and often artistic styles even when depicted Black subject matter. Due to the lack of African American artists in San Francisco in the mid-1920s and the lack of "significant scholarly acknowledgment or display of African art on the west coast," Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw surmises that Johnson's interest in African art came "only through travel to New York or through reproductions."[24] This proves true as Johnson's first aesthetic engagements with African art align with the beginning of his long association with the Harmon Foundation.

Established in 1922 by William E. Harmon, a White philanthropist and real estate baron, with the stated purpose of encouraging and stimulating individuals to self-help, [25] the Harmon Foundation's early projects dealt more with finances and urban planning and later projects, with the arts. With the help of the Federal Council of Churches, the Foundation set out to administer the Foundation's initial commitment of $4,000 for

---

[22] Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, "Creating a New Negro Art in America," in *Transition* 108 (2012): 76.

[23] John Hope Franklin first coined the term Harlem Renaissance in *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* in 1947. I use Harlem Renaissance in this instance due to the geographical grounding and emphasize that California was not experiencing the same Black artistic flourishing.

[24] DuBois Shaw, "Creating a New Negro Art in America", 78.

[25] Gary A. Reynolds, "An Experiment in Inductive Service: Looking Back at the Harmon Foundation" in *Against the Odds: African-American Artists and the Harmon Foundation*, (Newark, NJ: 1989) 27.

Awards for Distinguished Achievement Among Negroes in 1929.[26] The Harmon Foundation exhibitions, awards, and related activities have been described as the "earliest effort to recognize the achievements of African Americans and to promote the work of visual artists."[27] Although such distinction ignores the previous Black-led efforst in this arena, such as the multiple publications like *Crisis* and the *Opportunity* that highlighted the achievements of African American artists, the Harmon Foundation's wealth and resources meant that it could bring African American artists to wider, integrated, and more mainstream audiences across the country.

The awards required a jury and judges that consisted of prominent middle class artists of the old African American elite of the time such as May Howard Jackson, Johnson's aunt, Laura Wheeler Waring, and Meta Warrick Fuller, to judge and sift through the applications.[28] After the first year of the awards in 1927, it was suggested that an exhibition accompany the announcement of the awards in 1928.[29] This exhibition not only allowed Black artists to be given a chance to earn revenue through the sale of their art but also exposure, two things that Black artists desperately needed at a time when museums rarely showed their work. For Johnson, this allowed his work to be featured around the continental U.S. as the shows travelled and allowed Johnson to reach his

---

[26] Reynolds, "An Experiment in Inductive Service," 29.

[27] Beryl J. Wight, "The Harmon Foundation in Context: Early Exhibitions and Alain Locke's Concept of a Racial Idiom of Expression" in *Against the Odds: African-American Artists and the Harmon Foundation,* (Newark, NJ: 1989) 13.

[28] Reynolds, "An Experiment in Inductive Service," 30.

[29] Reynolds, "An Experiment in Inductive Service," 32.

Black audiences in the East Bay.[30]. With the help of the Harmon Foundation, Johnson from 1926-1939 participated in exhibitions, won awards, and even had a sponsored exhibition in 1935 with fellow Black sculptor Richmond Barthé in New York.[31] His participation and interaction with other Black artists, their art, and the east coast art scene shows encouraged Johnson's interest in burgeoning ideas of racially conscious artmaking being billed as "Negro art". In addition to the Asian culture that surrounded him in California, the Black arts culture became familiar to him through this exposure and influenced his work. Through the Harmon Foundation exhibitions, the artist reached his Black audiences in the East Bay.[32] Johnson received praise from scholars such as Locke for having work that exemplified "the modernist mode and the African influence" in the 1930s.[33]

Gradually, Johnson began to work with mask-making and incorporated cultural aesthetics outside of the North America: Africa and Mexico. This growing interest suggests that the artist acknowledged the interest and ideals of Black scholarship produced during the 1920s and 1930s. During this time, Locke published *The New Negro Anthology* (1925), making scholarship that expressed what Black art should look like and the artistic inspirations Black artists should look to during the 1920s and 1930s. In a featured essay by Locke, "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts", the scholar advocates that due to "the sensitive artistic mind of the American Negro" African art has a chance to be received as "a profound and galvanizing influence."[34]

---

[30] LeFalle-Collins, "Sargent Johnson and Modernism," 12.

[31] Reynolds, "An Experiment in Inductive Service," 38.

[32] LeFalle-Collins, "Sargent Johnson and Modernism," 12.

[33] William Poundstone, Sargent Claude Johnson at the Huntington, February 29, 2024.

Johnson expressed that in his creation of *Forever Free*, a well-known sculpture, for the artist, was inspired "to use polychrome lacquer over wood by examples of Egyptian art."[35] The work indicates his increased interest in African art as a result of the publicizing of collections by Barnes and Locke (Fig. 3.5). The sculpture depicts a woman standing straight, flanked by two Black children who Johnson rendered as a bas-relief carving, making them two-dimensional such that they are inseparable from the skirt of the woman.

In contrast to his works from the late 1920s, *Forever Free* demonstrates the artist's explicit engagement with politics through his art. He depicted the central mother figure with her hands down by her side extended to protect the two children literally incised into her body such that they cannot be separated. The mother protects the generation of African Americans to come, helping them to grow and stay "forever free" and offers maternal protection that Black mothers could not provide to their children under slavery. Though not as overt as Catlett's *Civil Rights Congress*, *Forever Free* speaks to the politics and rights of African Americans and where they stand in the United States.

Formally, the work also differs significantly from Johnson's previous figural sculptures in a number of ways, but especially in the artist's use of color and its direct connection to racial politics. Johnson incorporated color in his previous sculptures, but often they were monochrome. *Forever Free*, like the brightly glazed ceramic forms of *Elizabeth Gee*, *Pearl*, and *Head of Boy*, show an interest unconventional engagement with material and color for “fine art” sculpture. However, the non-naturalistic use of color in the earlier works feels almost decorative and certainly does not visually convey information about the subject’s racial phenotype. In contrast, in *Forever Free*, Johnson uses color naturalistically to celebrate the subject’s Blackness. Johnson uses his interest in polychrome in sculpture to emphasize and honor characteristically African physical features in the rich brown color of the figures’ skin, their eyes with deep brown irises set against bright white, and their slightly pink lips and pink fingernails. Speaking about his motivation and use of color in works like *Forever Free*, Johnson explained, "It is the pure American Negro I am concerned with, aiming to show the natural beauty and dignity in that characteristic lip and that characteristic hair, bearing, and manner; and I wish to show that beauty not so much to the white man as to the Negro himself.”[36]

---

[34] Alain Locke, "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts" in *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, 256.

[35] LeFalle-Collins, Sargent Claude Johnson and Modernism, 14.

African Influence in The Knot and the Noose

In *The Knot and the Noose*, Johnson reverted to using a singular color, allowing the bright orange inherent to the material, rather than an applied glaze, to create an inviting scene for a sculpture with underlying political messages. The terracotta orange contrasts with the negative space of its display, especially in a conventional museum or gallery setting, such as bright white lighting or dark rooms. Johnson pointed out that the archaeological findings of his contemporary time had “scarcely tapped the expressive resources of polychrome” that had been found in restoring ceramics and sculptures in

---

[36] “San Francisco Artists,” interview with Sargent Johnson, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 6 October 1935.

Egypt and Greece, and he was an early observer of the racial hierarchy reinforced by the perception that classical statuary had been white.[37] *Forever Free* displayed Johnson's early interest in these issues which continued through his creations of copper masks during the 1930s, that "reveal an eye for West African art" that had not been present in Johnson's work before.[38] With the Knot and the Noose, Johnson moved even farther from his early realistic portrait sculptures to styles that incorporated inspiration from Mexican muralism, Indigenous ceramics from Mexico, African art traditions, and cultural aesthetics with modern abstraction.

Johnson's *Mask* (1933) exemplifies the focus of many Black artists during the 1920s and 1930s (fig. 3.6). *Mask* quotes the style of West African masks featured in editorials published in *Crisis*, *the New Negro* and *Opportunity*. These masks, often taken from the personal collection of white philanthropist and supporter of "Negro Art" Dr. Albert Barnes, that became integral to Locke's publications. Johnson's masks show the artist's interest in "the oval shapes, linear patterning, and smooth planar abstraction" of West African masks, which translated into his own mask making as he created an "Art Deco versions of African art."[39] For example, 1933's *Mask* has an almond shaped face, as the main components sit at the bottom of the face, besides the hair created at the top of mask through circular impressions from the back of the mask. The mask is symmetrical, keeping to the Art Deco style of the mask. The impressions create texture to show 'curls' or 'thicknesses' of the hair, differentiating it from the smooth texture of the face. The forehead area remains flat, open space at the top of the mask, allowing the viewer to see Johnson's preparation of the copper. Similar to a mask published in Locke's "Legacy of the Ancestral Arts", *Face Mask* displays aspects that Johnson drew from (fig. 3.7).[40] Both *Mask* and *Face Mask* have oval shaped heads with an elongated forehead as the features lie in the bottom half of the compositions. Before Johnson's investigation in African masks, the artist worked mostly with wood and ceramics. The use of copper contributed to Johnson's knowledge about material. Using copper for this mask allowed the artist to keep a smooth surface but also create impressions to convey particular details, such as the pattern created in the hair and the crafting of the lips and nose. The construction of *Mask* shows that Johnson looked towards African art, as urged to by Locke, for inspiration.

---

[37] Sargent Johnson Rosenberg Scholarship Archives, 2.

[38] DuBois Shaw, "Creating a New Negro Art in America," 76.

[39] DuBois Shaw, "Creating a New Negro Art in America," 83.

The characterization of the figures in *The Knot and the Noose*, specifically their 'hair', communicates Johnson's continued engagement with African art presented by Black press. The hair (or lack thereof) on the three figures employs symbolism and modern photography to show cultural importance of the figures, as Johnson connected them to African culture. The two figures in the front match from their shoulders and up. As the figures have no distinct facial features, the viewer instead is confronted with an elongated head that stretches behind the figure as if wind is blowing, pushing their stiff hair directly behind them. The figure seems to be in motion, showing a possibility that this is a representation of curly, thick hair flowing behind them. The last figure's head holds a rounder shape and is created by a circular form that holds a little swirl at the top to create a peak. This figure seems to have a short 'haircut', differentiating itself from the two figures in front. The long hair on the figures perhaps offers a clue about gender that the abstraction of the rest of the body obscures.

---

[40] Locke, "Legacy of Ancestral Arts", 259.

This elongated head shape of the figures is reminiscent of head wraps and cultural jewelry that appear in West African society. Headwraps and elongated heads in African cultures, specifically among the Mangbetu people, signify status as an aristocrat and an elegant person.[41] Through my investigation and interpretation of the sculpture, I speculate that Johnson's *The Knot and the Noose* mimics a large headwrap, giving them high status and religion specific to African culture. This characterization of the figures reflects the public's look to the Mangbetu people as Western photographers began encountering this community during the first half of the 20th century.[42] These photographs reached Western masses, including Black artists as the May 1927 publication of the journal *Opportunity* features a painting by Aaron Douglas depicting a Mangbetu person (Figure 3.7). The elongated head created on the *Opportunity* cover resembles Johnson's figures in the *Knot and the Noose* as the hair smooths into a tube-like form, holding its shape even through movement. These figures could also resemble Egyptian headdresses, such as the bust of Nefertiti that is housed at the Egyptian Museum of Berlin, as Johnson looked towards Egypt for inspiration in creating *Forever Free*.

This further supports the argument about the headwrap symbolizing status in African culture. Using a very difference visual language to communicate Blackness than he did in *Forever Free*, Johnson created figures that draw on African culture to portray

---

[41] "Africans and Photography: The Mangbetu," The Mangbetu || in and out of focus: Images from Central Africa 1885-1960, Accessed April 10, 2024, https://africa.si.edu/exhibits/focus/mangbetu.html

[42] "Africans and Photography: The Mangbetu"

African Americans instead of rendering Black figures with stereotypical features ascribed to Black physiognomy such as big lips and noses as in *Forever Free* and *Head of a Boy.* Reminiscent of how Locke upholds traditional African sculpture as a classical legacy akin to ancient Greece of Rome for white Europeans and Americans, I would like to suggest that Johnson used African symbolism with an African American subject matter in order to show the connection of African Americans to African culture. This speculation is supported through Johnson's acknowledgement of Locke's work and his interest in African art. *The Knot and the Noose* can be understood as interpretation of the directive to Black artists by Locke in the "Legacy of the Ancestral Arts" to take inspiration from traditional African aesthetics to infuse their own modern art with distinctly racial character. But, moving beyond Locke's mandate and continuing his practice of sourcing inspiration from multiple cultural traditions, Johnson also paid special attention to the importance of materiality through the use of terracotta. The interest in materiality that Johnson demonstrated in *Elizabeth Gee, Mask,* and *Forever Free* encouraged Johnson to seek support to explore artistic traditions in Mexico in 1946 and then again in 1949. For *The Knot and the Noose,* which was created after the artists first journey to Mexico, Johnson used terracotta, a material he wanted to investigate in Mexico both for its color and importance to Indigenous Mexican communities in Oaxaca.[43] Johnson's career-long interest in color and materiality to a culture inspired his desire to travel to Mexico to investigate terracotta and traditional artmaking traditions there. While in Mexico, he also took inspiration from post-Revolution art such as murals.

---

[43] Sargent Johnson Rosenberg Scholarship Archives, San Francisco Art Institute Legacy Foundation + Archive, 1.

Johnson and Mexico: Materiality as an act of Solidarity

Before his travels, Johnson had already begun to shift from his previous naturalism to the abstraction he utilized in *The Knot and the Noose*. This was due to the growing popularity of abstraction amongst the Bay Area contemporaries. Through abstraction, the artist leaned more into his interests in Mexican and African art with his portrayals of animals and humanoid forms. This shift changed Johnson's subject matter and aesthetics; as he portrayed figures, he drew less on the naturalistic or even stylized rendering of characteristic phenotypical features of African American figures that he defined his depiction of Black subject matter in mid-career works like *Forever Free*. In contrast, abstraction allowed the artist to allude to and engage violent and harsh subject matter related to the political situation of African Americans more subtly.

In the 1930s and 1940s, Black artists looked to Mexican artists, primarily for their strong social and political stances depicted in their art. Johnson, instead, looked to Mexican art for its importance placed on materiality and especially the emphasis on the importance of color in ceramics for Indigenous artists from Mexico.[44] Johnson applied to the Abraham Rosenberg Scholarship in 1944, advocating that the "Scholarship would be instrumental to my purpose of developing further the use of ceramics as a medium of sculpture, with particular reference to the formal use of polychrome."[45] Johnson continued his application by emphasizing the lack of color in ceramics after the renaissance and how the "contemporary spirit" takes influence from neo-classical attitudes towards minimal use of color.[46] The assumption that classical sculptures were unpainted has since been revealed as false, but period acceptance of it created a false artificial distinction and hierarchy between ancient classical art and that of other cultures that Johnson recognized. As classical sculpture became understood as the genesis of "high art", polychrome works became associated with "low art", and cultures that embraced color in their aesthetic objects, such as Mexico and China, received less respect for their artmaking traditions or attention as sources of inspiration. As this chapter's review of Johnson's career shows, from early in his career, Johnson rejected the false hierarchy of these distinctions and sought material and aesthetic inspiration from diverse cultural traditions in his artmaking practice. Characteristically burnt orange from the use of terracotta and showing influence from African and Indigenous and modern Mexican visual traditions, *The Knot and the Noose* represents the later-career fruition of this rejection and Johnson's combination of cultural influences as the artist explored balancing abstract aesthetics and political content.

---

[44] Sargent Johnson Rosenberg Scholarship Archives, San Francisco Art Institute Legacy Foundation + Archive, 1.

[45] Sargent Johnson Rosenberg Scholarship Archives, 1.

Johnson concluded his scholarship application by stating that "the field of investigation is wide, and though contemporary sculptors have utilized much of this archaeological material, so far they have scarcely tapped the expressive resources of polychrome."[47] In the United States, Johnson had been working with color as seen in *Elizabeth Gee* and his other sculptures that he created with terracotta and earthenware. While in Mexico, he sought to understand the importance of color and these materials to their local Indigenous communities, adding an investigation of meaning as connected to material to his already deep interest in material explorations in art making across various cultures.

---

[46] Sargent Johnson Rosenberg Scholarship Archives, 2.

[47] Sargent Johnson Rosenberg Scholarship Archives, 2.

Ceramics in Indigenous history in Mexico traces back to ancient civilizations such as the Mayans. Even after conquest, Pre-Hispanic ceramics persisted as traditional "clay recipes, method of forming and firing technology were maintained."[48] After conquest, the Indigenous-style ceramics that persisted were "the Red Wares, the Black-on-Orange wares, and the polychromes", which all intrigued Johnson.[49] Pre-contact ceramics were used for cooking, storing, transporting and serving, but also used for non-quotidian things such as offerings, ritual equipment, means of writing, and divine objects.[50]

Johnson hoped that travelling to would help him develop a clear understanding of Indigenous ceramics traditions in the country. Many ceramic vessels made by Indigenous artists contained pictographic decoration, something that Johnson's *The Knot and the Noose* lacks.[51] *Vessel with mythological scene* (7th-8th CE) displays the use of terracotta in aesthetics and storytelling as the vessel depicts a mythological scene of Chahk, the rain god, in motion (Figure 3.8). In this vessel, the terracotta orange works solely as a border, framing the story. Johnson utilized the terracotta differently, creating the whole sculpture with terracotta, allowing the color to show through without painterly decorations. In this work. Color itself does not communicate politics; the simplicity of color, letting the material speak for itself, works to limit formal distractions, allowing the message of the abstract work to shine through without impediment. By only using that one material, Johnson allows the vibrant orange color of *The Knot and the Noose* to communicate a clear meaning with no painterly distractions. The artist took inspiration from Indigenous clay making in Mexico but tailored it to be his own.

---

[48] Gilda Hernández Sánchez, "Ceramics, Cultural Continuity and Social Change" in *Ceramics and the Spanish Conquest: Response and Continuity of Indigenous Pottery Technology in Central Mexico*, (Brill: 2012), 207.

[49] Sánchez, "Ceramics, Cultural Continuity and Social Change," 208.

[50] Gilda Hernández Sanchez, "Ceramic-Making Before The Conquest," in *Ceramics and the Spanish Conquest: Response and Continuity of Indigenous Pottery Technology in Central Mexico*, (Brill: 2012), 43.

[51] Sánchez, "Ceramics, Cultural Continuity and Social Change," 210.

Johnson's interest in color and abstraction went beyond the scope of ceramics as Johnson wrote in a letter to Miss Sullivan, the secretary of a School of Fine Arts in San Francisco, about his experience seeing the work of Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros. He first wrote about meeting Siqueiros, the artist who's painting I like very much… [whose work was] very powerful and full of color."[52] While in Mexico, Johnson also visited the studios of modern Mexican muralists such as Siqueiros, visited the murals—such as those by Orozco—that were scattered across the country as part of a strategic public art program, and visited museums containing modern Mexican art.[53] Johnson's letter to Miss Sullivan includes a list documenting the museums and cities he had visited such as Palacio de Bellas Artes, where he saw the work of Rivera, Siqueiros and Orozco; Museo Nacional de Antropología; a number of monasteries and churches; and visually rich cities like Vera Cruz, and Cuernavaca.[54]

---

[52] Sargent Johnson Rosenberg Scholarship Archives, 19.

[53] Sargent Johnson Rosenberg Scholarship Archives, 20.

[54] Sargent Johnson Rosenberg Scholarship Archives, 20.

Johnson would have been familiar with the work of Rivera and Siqueiros as both of them worked in the United States before 1945 as visiting artists. Rivera worked with one of Johnson's teachers and colleagues, Ralph Stackpole, to paint the 1930 fresco at the Pacific Stock Exchange.[55] Though Diego Rivera worked in San Francisco during the time Johnson lived there, Johnson did not see Rivera's murals in Mexico until 1945.[56] In Mexico, Johnson familiarized himself with the work of Mexican muralists and used their work as compositional inspiration for *The Knot and the* Noose in constructing the form of the figures in motion, specifically Mexican muralist style.

The abstraction, compression, and tubular forms of the three figures in *The Knot and the Noose* draw inspiration from Mexican muralism. The figure closest to the bulb stands out as its hands seem to have two slits in them to create fingers. This aspect shows the viewer that this form is humanoid. The arm of the figure, depicted as a short rectangular form, stretches out towards the bulb. The reaching of the arms, the leg position and the head position lets the viewer know that figure faces towards the bulb, in motion to grab it. The other two figures share this same posture, one foot in front of the other, arms reaching in front of them with their heads facing the direction of the bulb. The first figure stands slightly shorter than the other two figures and has the biggest gap between the other figures. The head of the first figure separates slightly from its arms as the figure narrows slightly upwards before it turns back towards the other figures. The body of the first figure displays some texture on one side but stops at its head and on the other side, the figure's texture remains solely in its arms.

---

[55] LeFalle-Collins, Sargent Claude Johnson and Modernism, 16.

[56] LeFalle-Collins, Sargent Claude Johnson and Modernism, 16.

The legs of the middle figure are muddled just as the first figure, but the front leg displays a sharp angle, indicating a knee. This angle indicates a bent knee as if the figure is in motion, moving forward as the bulb appears. The figure's textured 'back' contrasts with the belly and first leg which are smooth. On this same smooth side, the front leg of the middle figure forms a small foot as a line lightly separates the leg from the base and creates point, seen at the end of the first figure's back leg. On this side, the leg of the middle figure becomes more apparent, as the artist defines the knee and foot more with sharp cuts.

The last figure shares similar definition as the middle figure. On this figure and side, the foot and leg are more defined, as it is carved away from the back leg of the middle figure. Using the back leg of the middle figure, the artist creates a sharp foot and muddled knee. This figure continues the same position as the other two, arms stretched out and one leg in front of the other. Instead, this figure has a distinct rounded head, and the hair is created by a small swirl, possibly differentiating the gender of this figure from that of the other two figures.

The figures being close to each other and the indistinct nature of their legs echo techniques used by Mexican muralists to compress space in order to include multiple figures in a small plane, but the tubular, abstraction of the bodies specifically resembles the work of Orozco. In *Zapatistas* (1931), for example, Orozco compressed the figures in the foreground, allowing them to recede back to create a sense of space (Fig. 3.9). The revolutionaries in front show no shoes or feet as the viewer can only see from their ankle upwards. They all have one leg positioned in front of them and the other behind, created the movement of walking. These figures create a similar 'v' formation with their legs that replicates in *The Knot and The Noose*. In both *Zapatistas* and *The Knot and the Noose,* the figures have no distinctive musculature or veins, as both artists render them with simple geometric forms.

Though Johnson drew inspiration from Mexican murals, as he wrote in the letters attached to his application file, Johnson's approach and aesthetics in *The Knot and the Noose* also differed significantly from muralist techniques. Johnson utilizes Mexican muralist strategies to show a suppressed motion but leaves the figures far enough apart to create space instead of compressing it. Through the creation of negative space, Johnson invites the viewer to see light through the sculpture, allowing the sculpture to feel light and airy in contrast to the often dark and claustrophobic compositions of Mexican murals. Diverging from the monolithic mass of figures in work like Orozco's *Zapatistas*, Johnson individualized the figures, allowing them their own space and unique characteristics as they different in size, shape, and even hairstyle. *The Knot and the Noose* included inspiration from Indigenous ceramics in Mexico and Mexican muralism, but he used this influence selectively to achieve his own objectives. LeFalle-Collins argues that Johnson's artistic curiosity and exploration of other cultures through his sculptures demonstrated his desire to give "importance to the people who created the art forms and did not separate the forms from their creators, making the art and its origins of utmost importance in helping him to understand himself."[57]

Based on the title of the work, *The Knot and the Noose*, and the knowledge of Johnson's prior engagement in Black politics through his art, the subject matter of Johnson's work remained subtly political as the title and entrapment of the figures related to traumatic related of lynching that terrorized Black communities in the United States in the early decades of the 1900s. All three figures trudge through the base of the sculpture, reaching their arms out in front of them towards the bulb form. As the bulb comes up, blocking the figures, the base anchors them to the point of being stuck. Their legs have no definition and get heavier and thicker where they meet the anchoring base. The figures attempt to stop the bulb, but they are frozen in their urgency and prevented from meeting goal. From the title, Johnson lets the audience know that the bulb and loop relate to each other as *The Knot and the Noose*. As the sculpture depicts figures and forms that encase Black figures, seemingly trying to connect to one another, it can be inferred that the subject of *Knot and Noose* connects back to lynching. As mentioned in Chapter Two, nooses specifically refer to the knot and loop created in the act of hanging or lynching the public killing of an individual, done outside of the legal due process system. During the time of the sculpture's creation, White people used lynching to terrorize and kill Black people, destroying the state of Black communities in order to preserve white political and social power. *The Knot and the Noose* provides a commentary on Black experience through abstraction and color in a way quite distinct from Johnson's earlier works. Displaying a sculpture that at first glance does not seem political, in contrast to his decorative or clearly political use of applied color in sculpture evident in previous works, Johnson embraces the natural color of his terracotta medium in order to offer color without distraction such that the subtle narrative and political meaning of the abstract work could be comprehended without distraction.

---

[57] LeFalle-Collins, Sargent Claude Johnson and Modernism, 21-22.

African American Subject and Mexican Materiality

Through this interpretation of the figures being rooted in African iconography paired with the interpretation of the title referring to lynching, I have concluded that *the Knot and the Noose* depicts African Americans trying to stop the action of lynching. The base, which holds the lynching 'tools' also pulls down the figures, slowing them down by only allowing them to trudge towards the knot. *The Knot and the Noose* compiles aesthetic aspects that shows that Johnson's deliberate combining of West African culture he learned from Black scholars and his participation in the Harmon Foundation.

The bulb and the loop, presumably the knot and the noose, reach upwards, enclosing the three figures in hopes of connecting. Their formation and base captures the legs of the humanoid figures. This sculpture speaks to lynching in the U.S. stopping the progression of African Americans. The artist communicates this through the title, symbolism, and abstraction. Through the title, Johnson used charged language as 'noose' evokes the action of lynching, the public killing of an individual, done outside of the legal due process system. The figures move forward, reaching out to a future and progression but are pulled down by the weight of the base and the formation of the knot and the noose. Johnson's characterization of the figure, such as the hair, communicates that these figures are of African descent. The tubular head is reminiscent of headwraps and cultural jewelry that appear in West African society. Headwraps and elongated heads in African culture, specifically the Mangbetu people, signifies status as an aristocrat and an elegant person.[58] As Western photographers began encountering Mangbetu people during the first half of the 20th century, this hair reference would have been recognizable as distinctly African. Through abstraction, Johnson allowed his figures to distorted and unclear about their actions/movements. This lack of identity allows the figures to be representational instead of individualized. The figures represent African Americans as a whole, the smallest figure being a Black child, the middle figure a Black woman or mother, and the last figure being a Black man. Through abstraction, title, and symbolism, Johnson depicted a commentary on Black issues in the U.S.

---

[58] "Africans and Photography: The Mangbetu," The Mangbetu || in and out of focus: Images from Central Africa 1885-1960, Accessed April 10, 2024, https://africa.si.edu/exhibits/focus/mangbetu.html

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explore Johnson's interest in working with terracotta due to its color and cultural significance to Indigenous communities in Mexico, incorporating this material into portraying African Americans and African American issues in the United States. I argued that Johnson's utilization of this material and abstraction displays his desire to make a unique aesthetic in high art that involves color and materials not commonly seen in neo-classical European art traditions as the west had suppressed this knowledge of the use of Polychrome in Classical sculptures. Commonly, sculptures considered in 'high' art utilize 'classical' aesthetics; emphasized anatomy, dramatic posing, and materials such as bronze, stone, and marble. By using terra cotta and abstraction, Johnson reinforced the importance of color in sculptures in order to bring attention to the benefits of acknowledging materiality when depicting the beauty of Black subjects and Indigenous aesthetics.

John P. Bowles in "New Negro on the Pacific Rim" emphasizes the cultural compass of Johnson as an artist as his artistic endeavors situated him "in the Bay Area, looking east to Africa, south to Latin America, and west through the Golden Gate and across the Pacific to Asia."[59] As seen with his art created in 1920s San Francisco, the work of the artist reflected what he was seeing around him. Johnson incorporated distinct symbols from Asian art, such as blue-green glaze and Buddhist iconography, due to living in a predominantly Asian art space in the Bay Area. He then incorporated West African imagery once given the access through the Harmon Foundation and Black publications. Though it seems that Johnson appropriated these cultures to serve his own objectives, Johnson's work exemplifies conscious decision in combining what he already knew to be new styles in order to create his own unique work that addressed the plight of Black people, while investigating his own interest in materiality.

In *The Knot and The Noose*, the artist uses materiality such as terracotta, paired with tubular abstract figures, to communicate his interest in Mexican artistic culture, specifically Indigenous Mexican ceramic traditions, and Mexican muralist techniques. Johnson paired this with his interest in African art and culture with the characterization of the figures as wearing headdress or having elongated heads with the concept of lynching, an African American experience. The artist intentionally combines these three cultures with integrity and respect as the symbolism holds deep cultural roots that depict the cultures as beautiful and rich with history.

---

[59] Bowles, "New Negro on the Pacific Rim," 185.

CONCLUSION

> *"I cannot speak for the others who are artists first and black when it is convenient to be so. The big question, especially for young artists and students, is how do we develop to serve the black community, what is our role, what form do we use, what content? What are our Priorities?"*
> -Elizabeth Catlett, 1975[60]

The 'big question' that Catlett begins to answer in "The Role of The Black Artist" has remained a long-running source of debate, spanning from before the New Negro Movement to now. What does it mean to be a Black artist and what responsibilities do they have to their Black community? In this thesis, I explore how this question was interpretated in the art of Hale Woodruff, Elizabeth Catlett, and Sargent Claude Johnson. For Woodruff, Catlett, and Johnson, seeking inspiration from other cultures, including but not limited to Mexico, helped them to craft what it meant to be a Black artist and how to express this through symbolism and techniques taught to them through Mexican and African art. Woodruff, Catlett, and Johnson sought out inspiration for their expressions of Blackness in their art. These three artists are just a small sample of the many Black artists that took inspiration from Mexican art and people.

This thesis sought to understand the importance and nuances of the different relationships that Woodruff, Catlett, and Johnson created with Mexico and Mexican art during the 1930s and 1940s. I argued that through the influence of Mexican artists and their work, African American artists gained the artistic skills to express their own Black experiences as complex, resulting in a combination of different life experiences such as geography, race, education, and gender. From their experiences, these three artists drew upon Mexican and Indigenous Mexican history to portray Black subject matter in order to bring attention to both ethnic groups.

---

[60] Elizabeth Catlett, "The Role of The Black Artist." *The Black Scholar* 6, no. 9 (1975), 11.

Throughout the process of writing this thesis, I thought about how the art of these three artists and the relationships they forged with Mexican art reflects on society almost a century later. The uplifting of voices less privileged and allyship of Black and Mexican people continues today in politics and the arts. Zapantera Negra, a project set to bring together "ideological and aesthetic frameworks of the Zapatistas and Black Panthers," demonstrates a more contemporary example of solidarity art.[61] The project "gathered the visual results of four encounters, between 2012 and 2014, between the Black Panthers and Zapatistas."[62] This project shows the significance of two political forces that share similar ideas about civil rights, governmental power and injustice that had occurred in their respective ethnic groups and how the allyship between the two presents in art. Allyship emphasizes the thought of 'power in numbers.' By banning together, the cause becomes stronger in fight against White supremacy.

Woodruff, Catlett, and Johnson all made work that prefigure this notion of legibility and the importance of making work that addressed more than one culture. These three artists made work that is legible for multiple people in different locations and culture, though the artists aim primarily to a upper-middle class, educated Black audience. These artists were drawn to Mexican artists who made public art that advocated for a more equitable society. All three artists in their work brought Mexican symbols into conversation with Black subjects, making an aspect of Mexican history and culture present in African American art and society.

---

[61] Marc James Léger, David Tomas, Emory Douglas, Mia Eve Rollow, and Caleb Duarte Piñon, eds, *Zapantera Negra: An artistic encounter between Black Panthers and Zapatistas*, (Brooklyn, NY: Common Notions, 2017), iii.

[62] Léger, *Zapantera Negra,* 2.

This thesis contributes to a long understanding of the importance behind Black artists taking trips to Mexico as inspiration for establishing a unique Black art. A part of making uniquely Black art was making politic art that addressed the issues of African Americans. Art as a political tool continues to be important today and this thesis touches on the strength of politic art but does not address how this political art can be received or how it spreads and influences a nation. I investigated three artists but there is more scholarship to be done to emphasize the true power and importance behind the precedents of present-day people of color solidarity/allyship and how that translates into the artwork. With this thesis, I hope to continue to contribute to investigations on the relationship forged between African Americans and Mexican during the 1940s and onwards in hope for a better, more just nation.

FIGURES

Chapter One

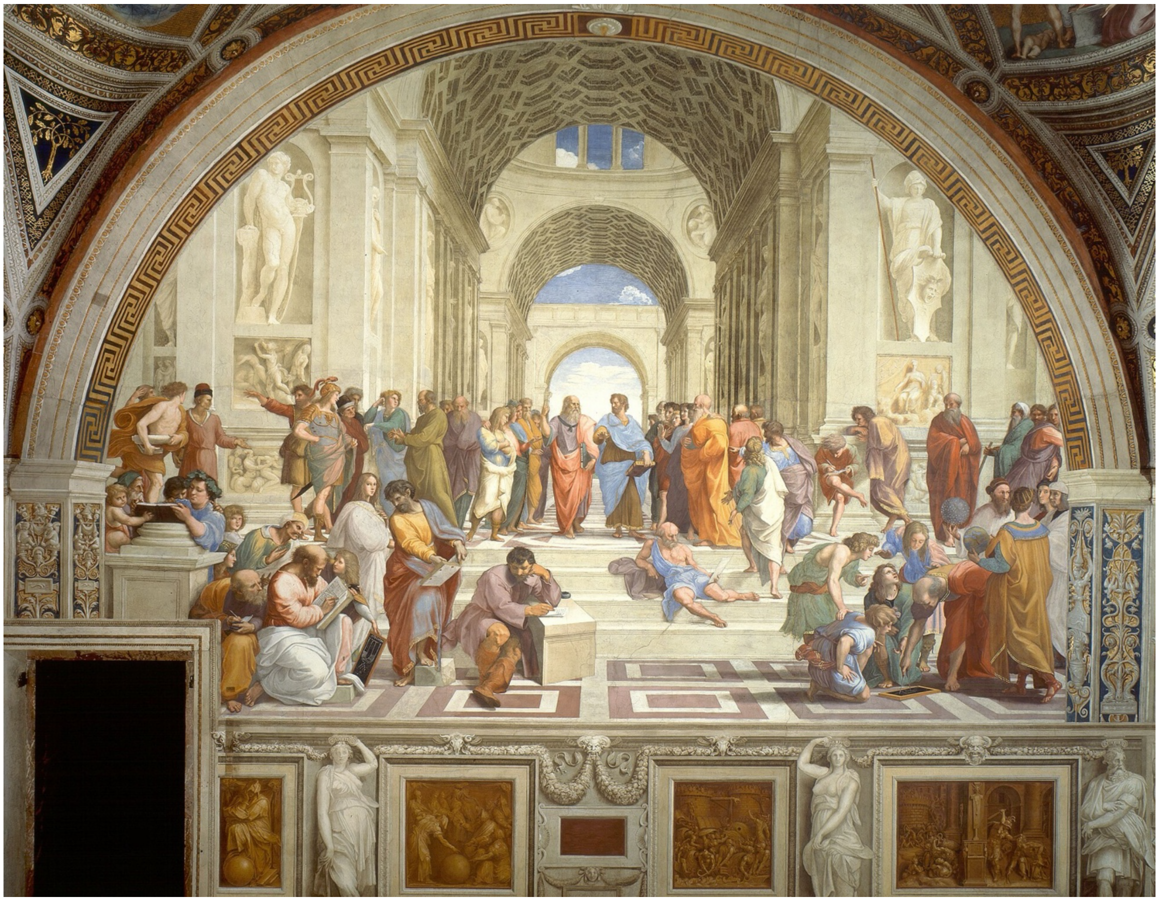

Figure 1.1. Raphael, *The School of Athens*, 1510-1511, Fresco, Stanze di Raffaello, Vatican City.

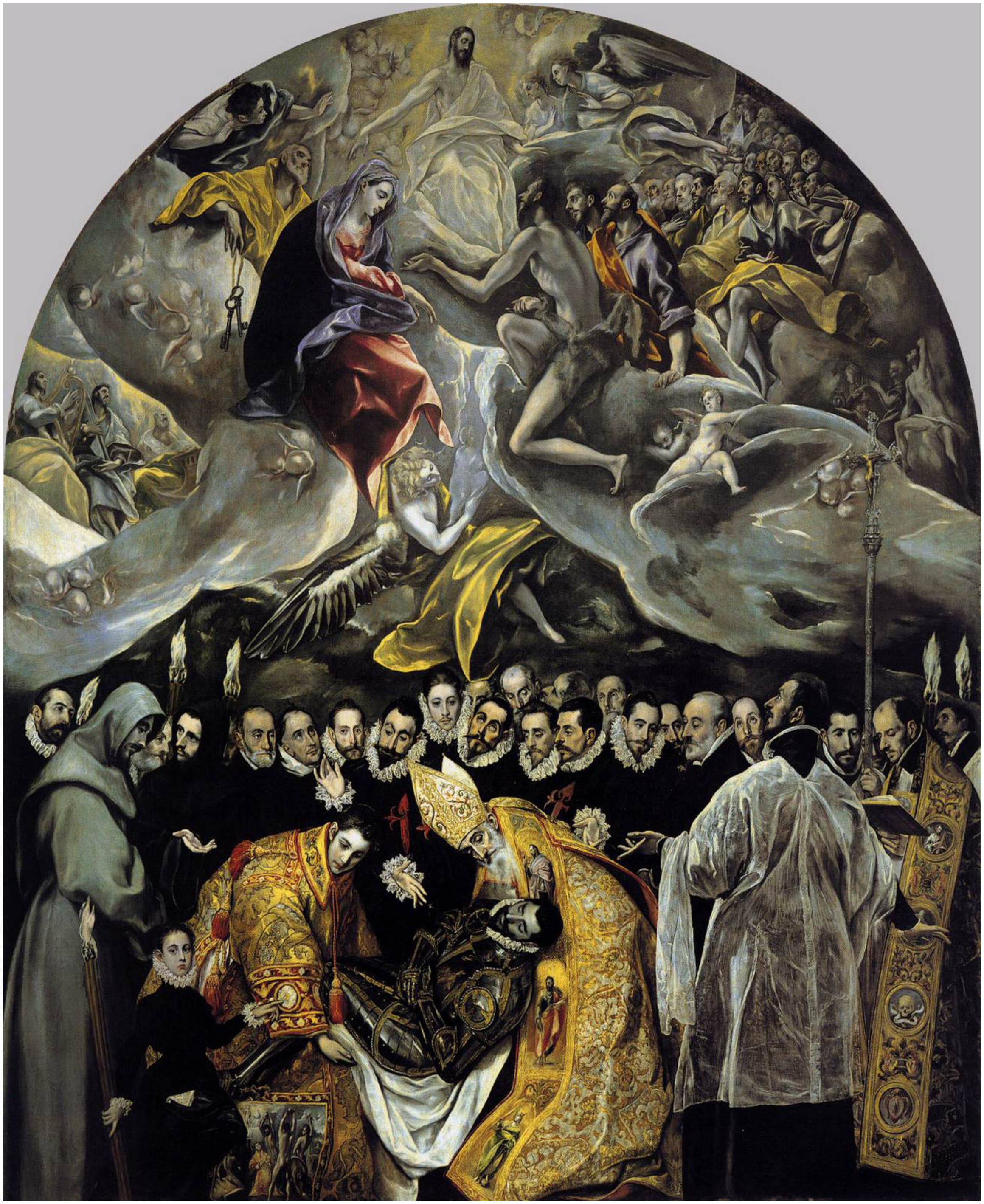

Figure 1.2. El Greco, *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz*, 1586, oil on canvas, 190 x 140 in., Iglesia de Santo Tomé, Toledo

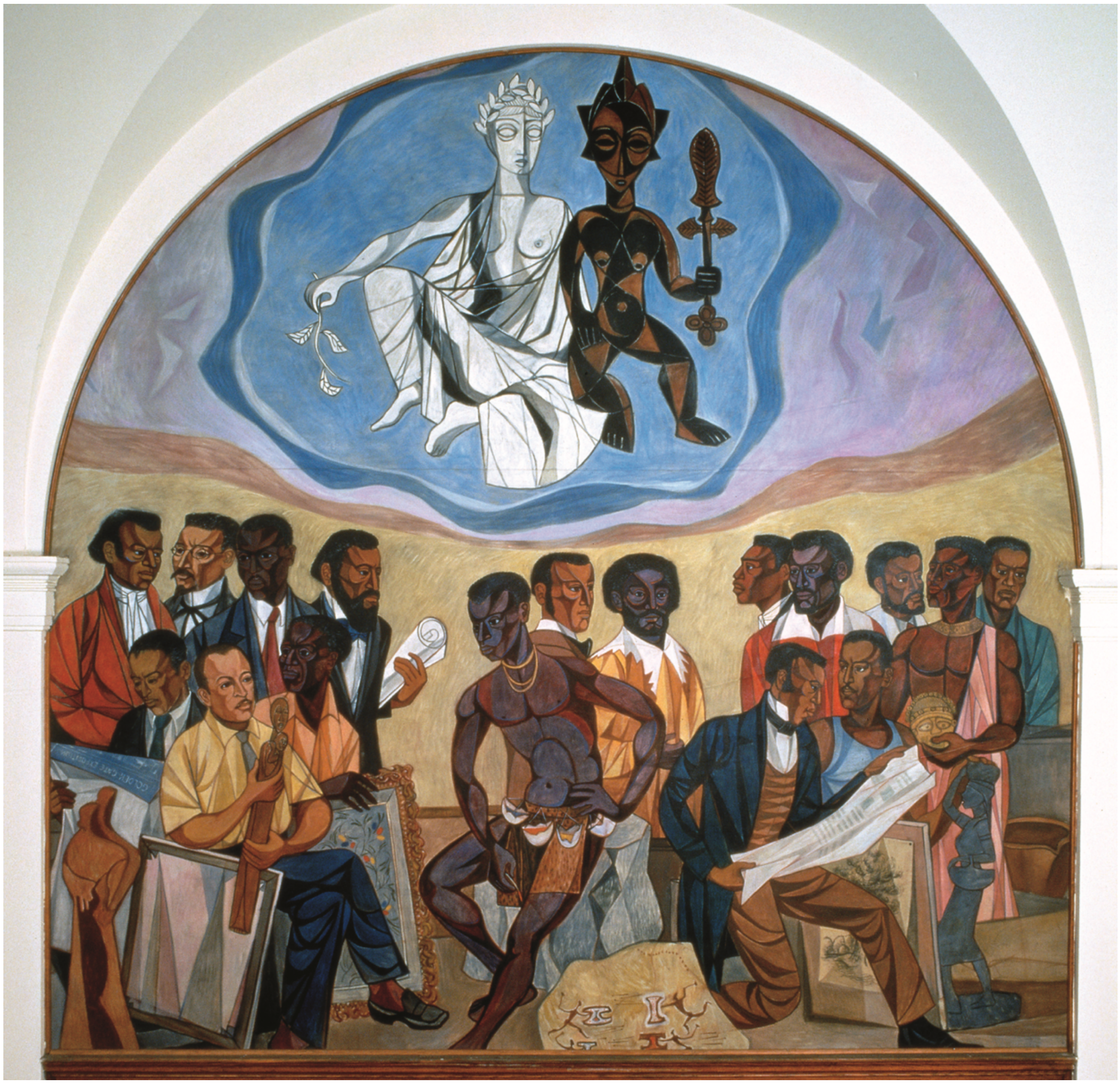

Figure 1.3. Hale Woodruff, Panel 6: *Art of the Negro*: *Muses*, 1952, Oil on canvas, 144 x 144" in., Clark Atlanta University Art Collection

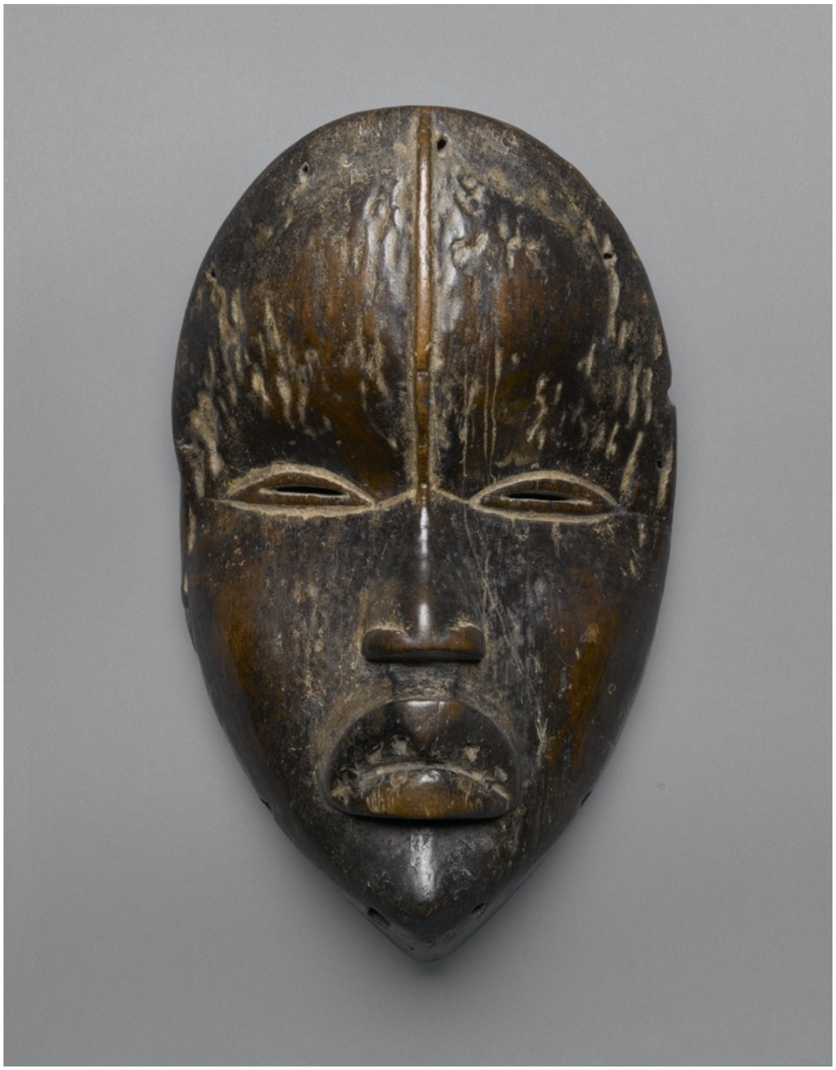

Figure 1.4. Dan society, Dean Gle Mask, late 19th-early 20th century, wood and pigment. 9 3/4 x 6 x 3" in., Brooklyn Museum of Art.

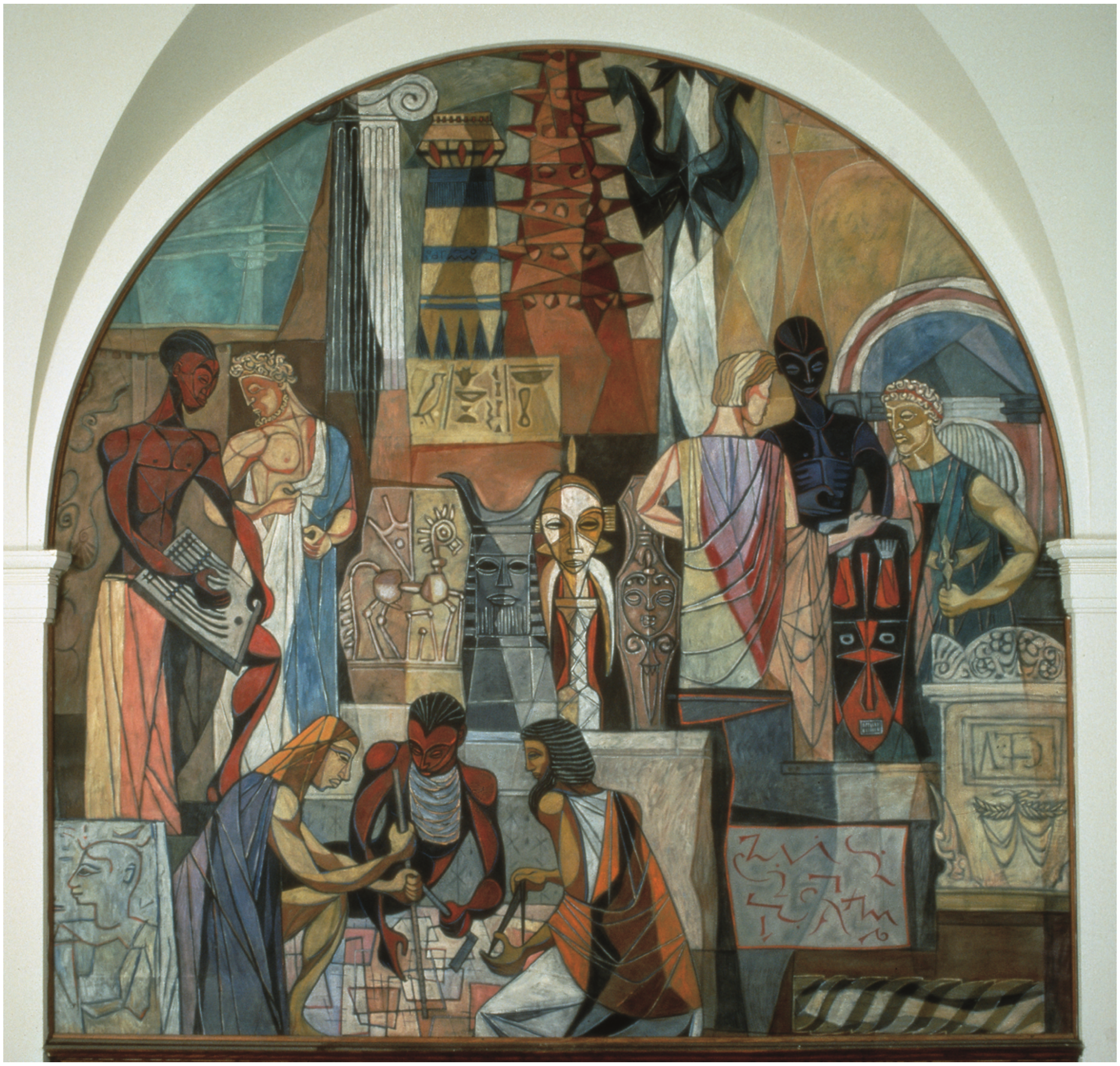

Figure 1.5. Hale Woodruff, Panel two, *Art of the Negro*: *Interchange*, Oil on canvas, 144 x 144" in., Clark Atlanta University Art Collection.

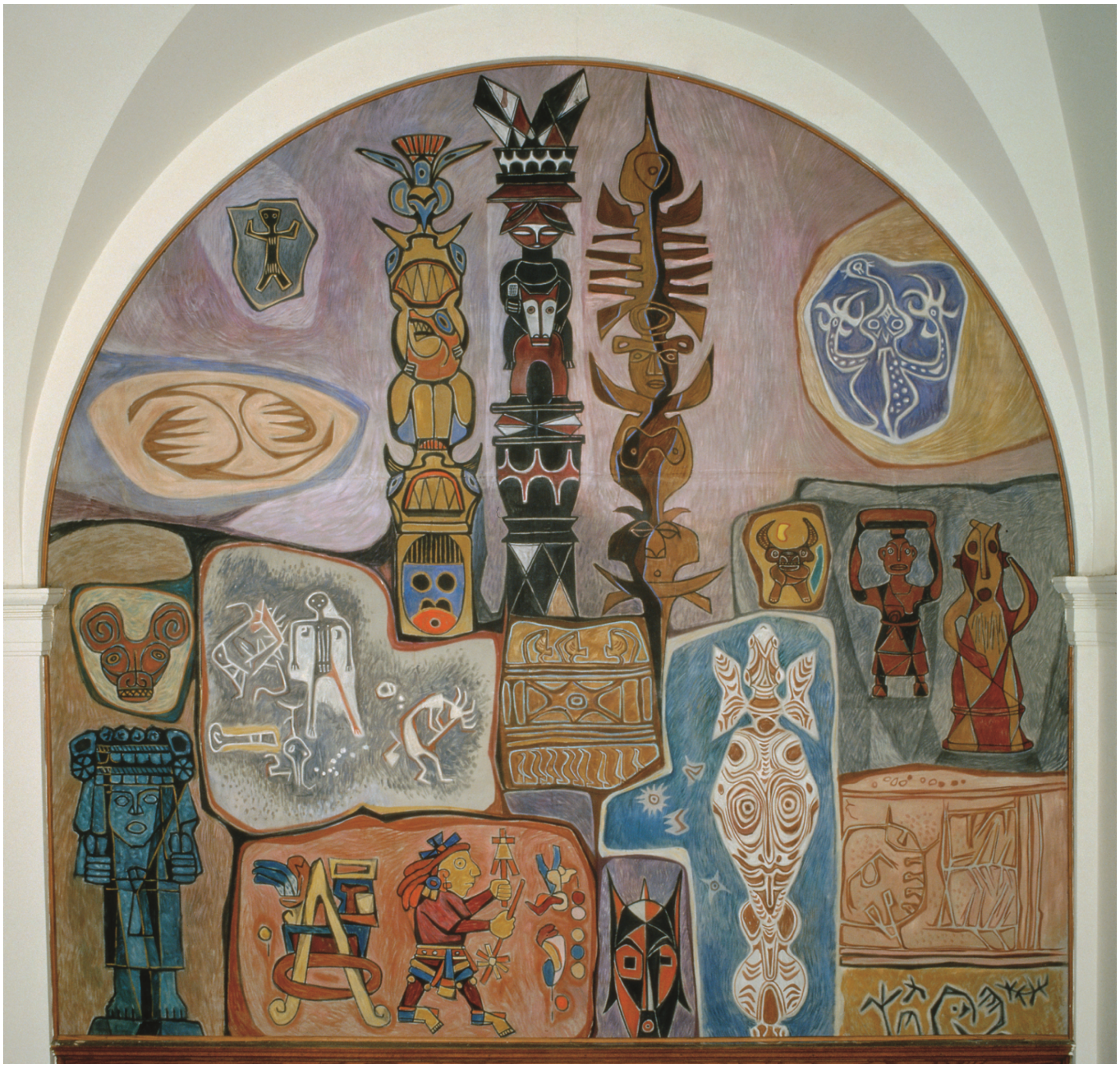

Figure 1.6. Hale Woodruff, Panel four: *Art of the Negro: Parallels*, 1952, Oil on Canvas, 144 x 144” in., Clark Atlanta University Art Collection.

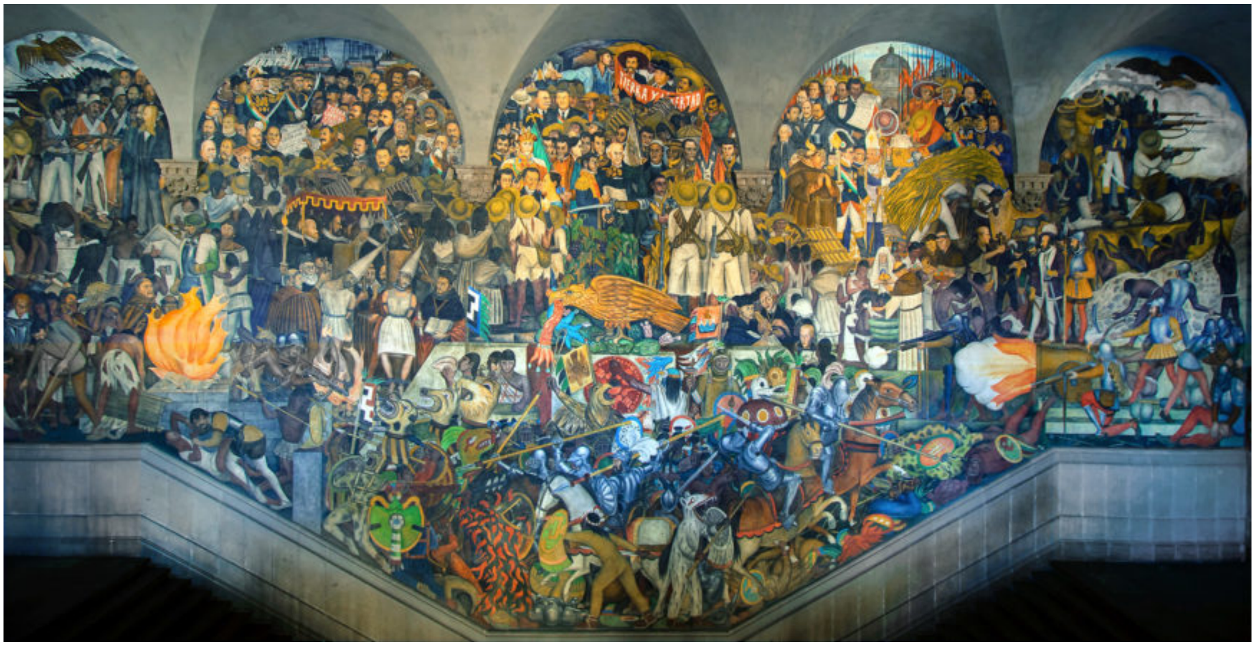
Figure 1.7. Diego Rivera, “From the Conquest to 1930,” *History of Mexico* murals, 1929–30, fresco, Palacio Nacional, Mexico City.

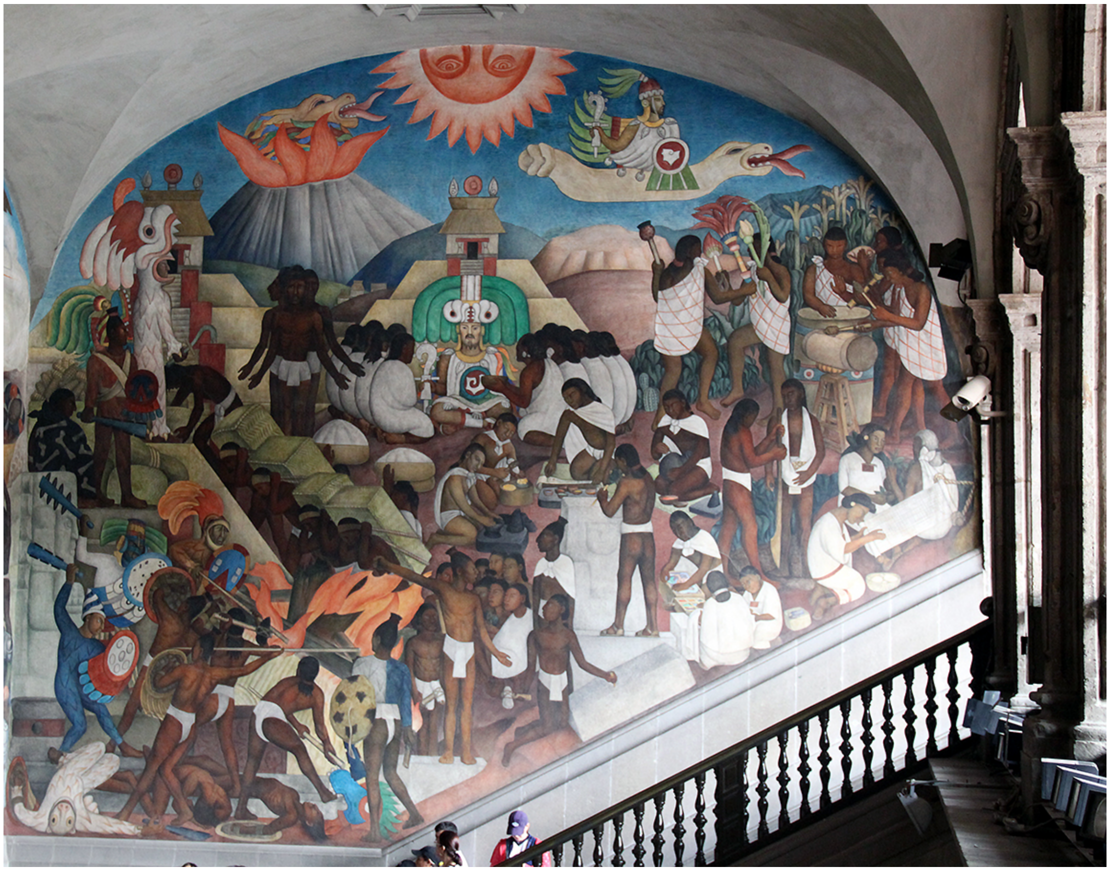
Figure 1.8. Diego Rivera, “The Aztec World,” north wall of *History of Mexico* murals, 1929, fresco, Palacio Nacional, Mexico City.

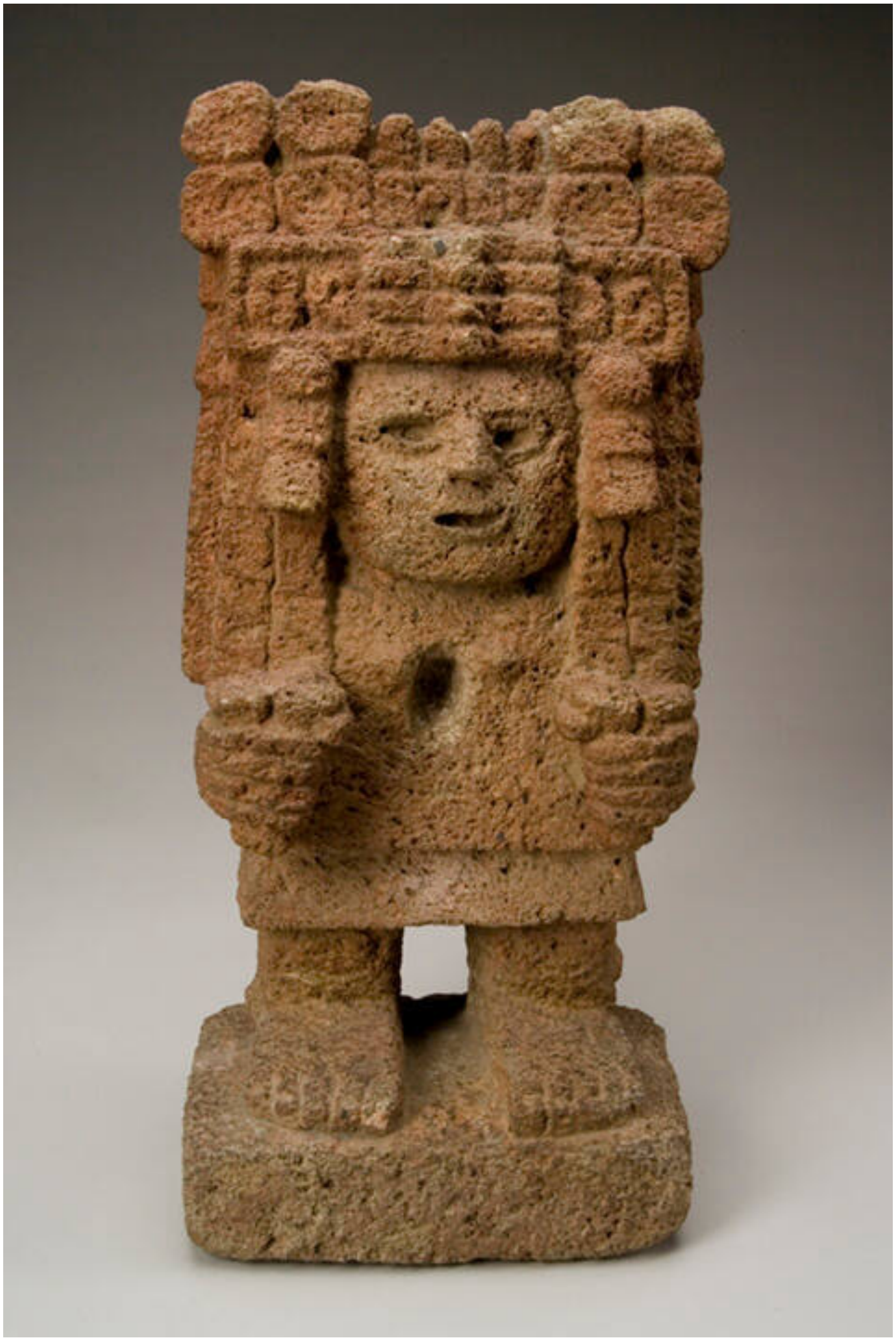

Figure 1.9. Aztec, Maize Goddess (Chicomecoatl), 14th-early 16th century, Basalt, 17 ½ x 7 ½ x 6 11/16 in., Baltimore Museum of Art.

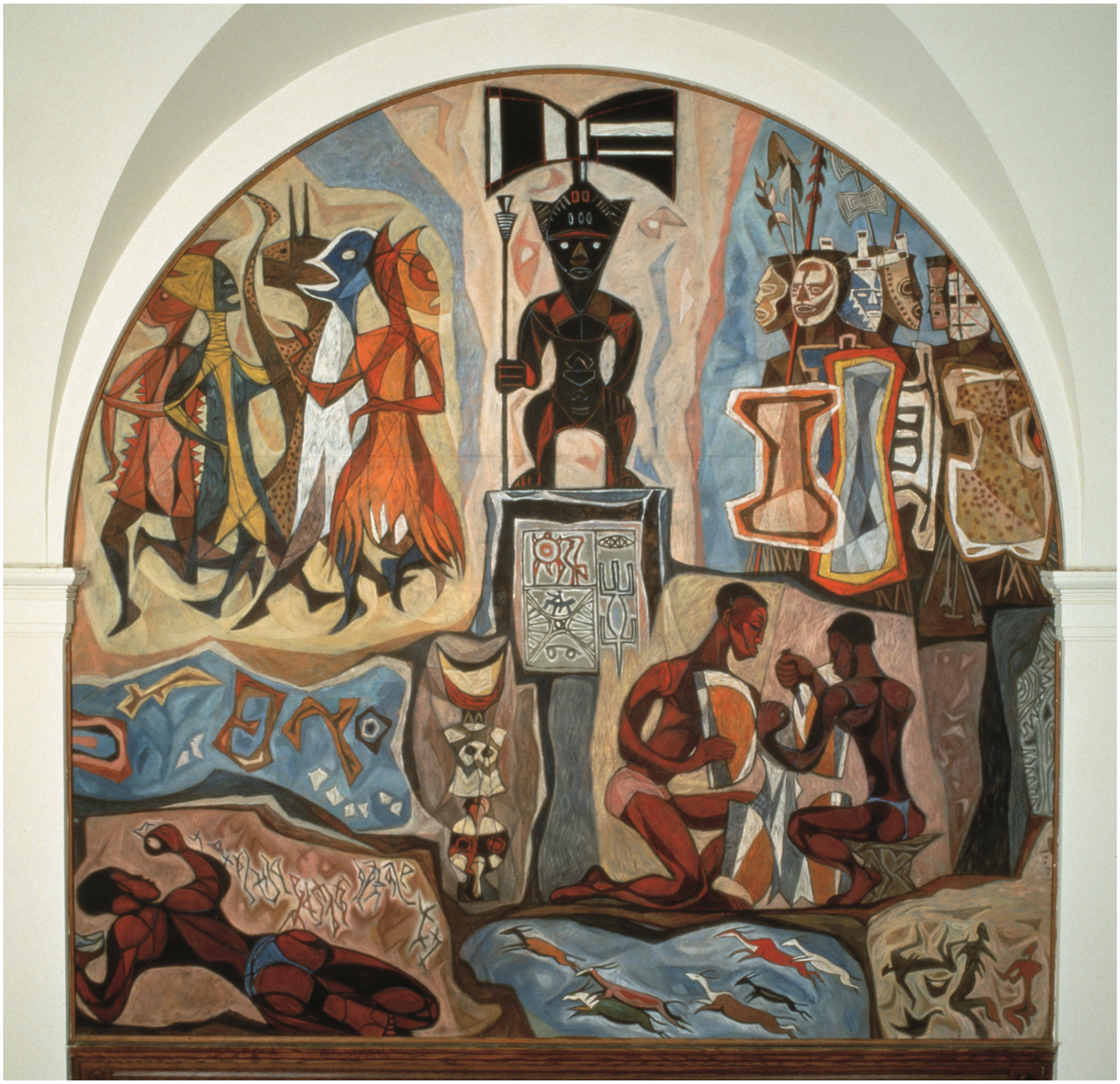

Figure 1.10. Hale Woodruff, Panel one: *Art of the Negro: Native Forms*, 1952, Oil on canvas, 144 x 144” in., Clark Atlanta University Art Collection

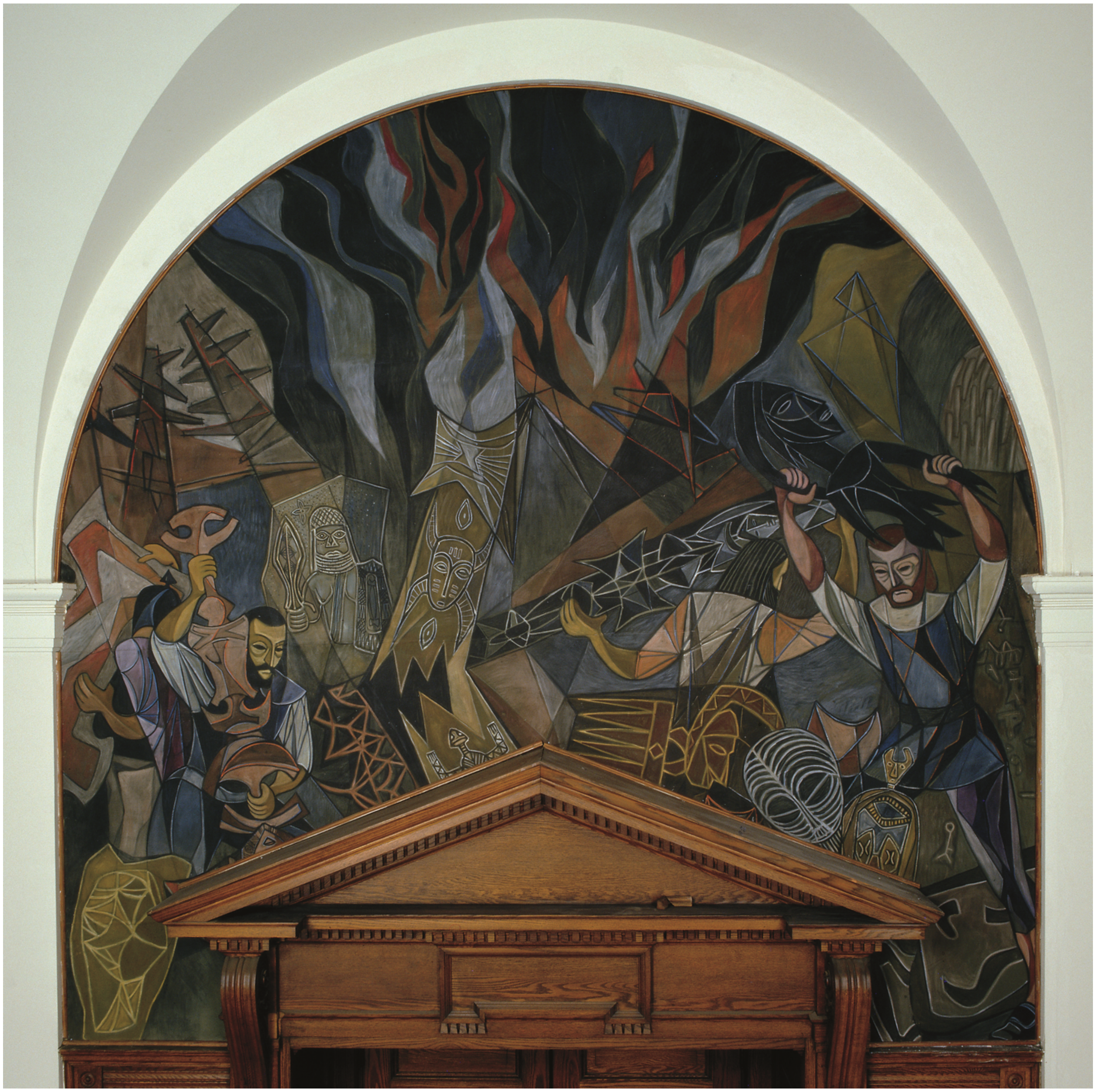

Figure 1.11. Hale Woodruff, Panel three: *Art of the Negro: Dissipation*, 1952, Oil on canvas, 144 x 144" in., Clark Atlanta University Art Collection.

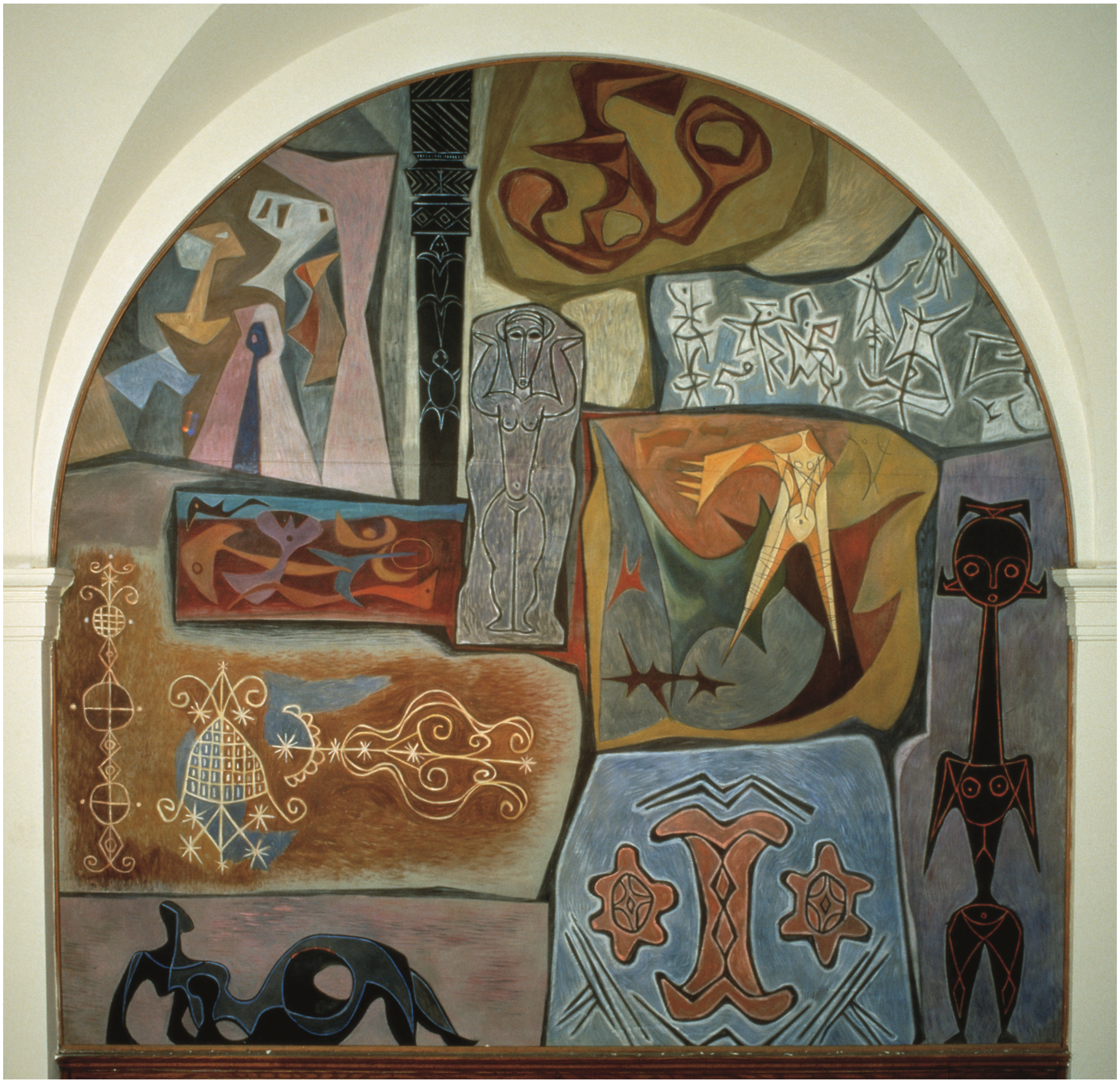

Figure 1.12. Hale Woodruff, Panel five: *Art of the Negro: Influences*, 1952, Oil on canvas, 144 x 144” in., Clark Atlanta University Art Collection.

Chapter Two

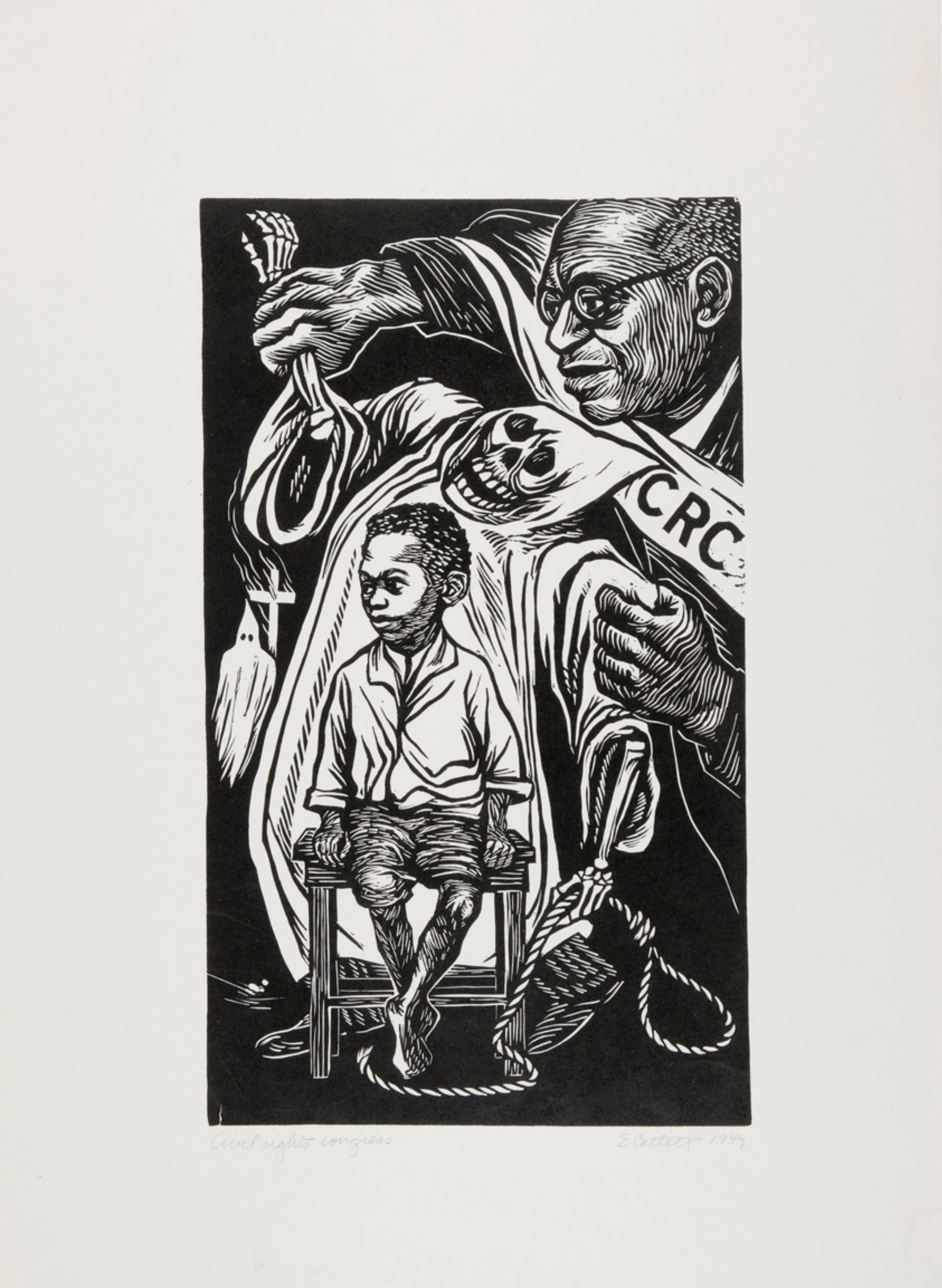
CRC
Civil rights congress
E Catlett 1949

Figure 2.1. Elizabeth Catlett*, Civil Rights Congress,* 1950, Linocut, 12 x 7" in., The Art Institute of Chicago.

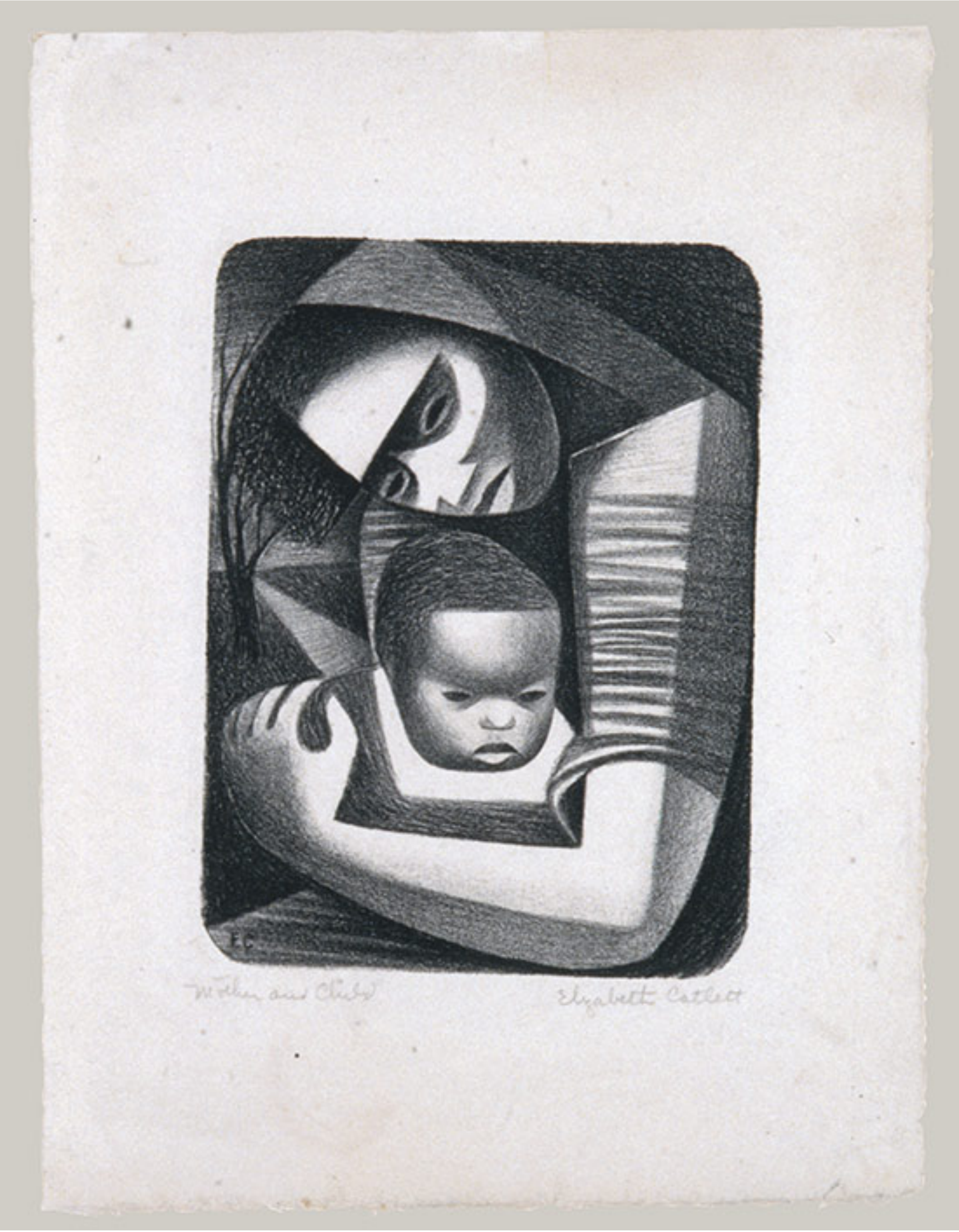
EC
Mother and Child
Elizabeth Catlett

Figure 2.2. Elizabeth Catlett, *Mother and Child*, 1944, Lithograph, 12 ½ x 9" in, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

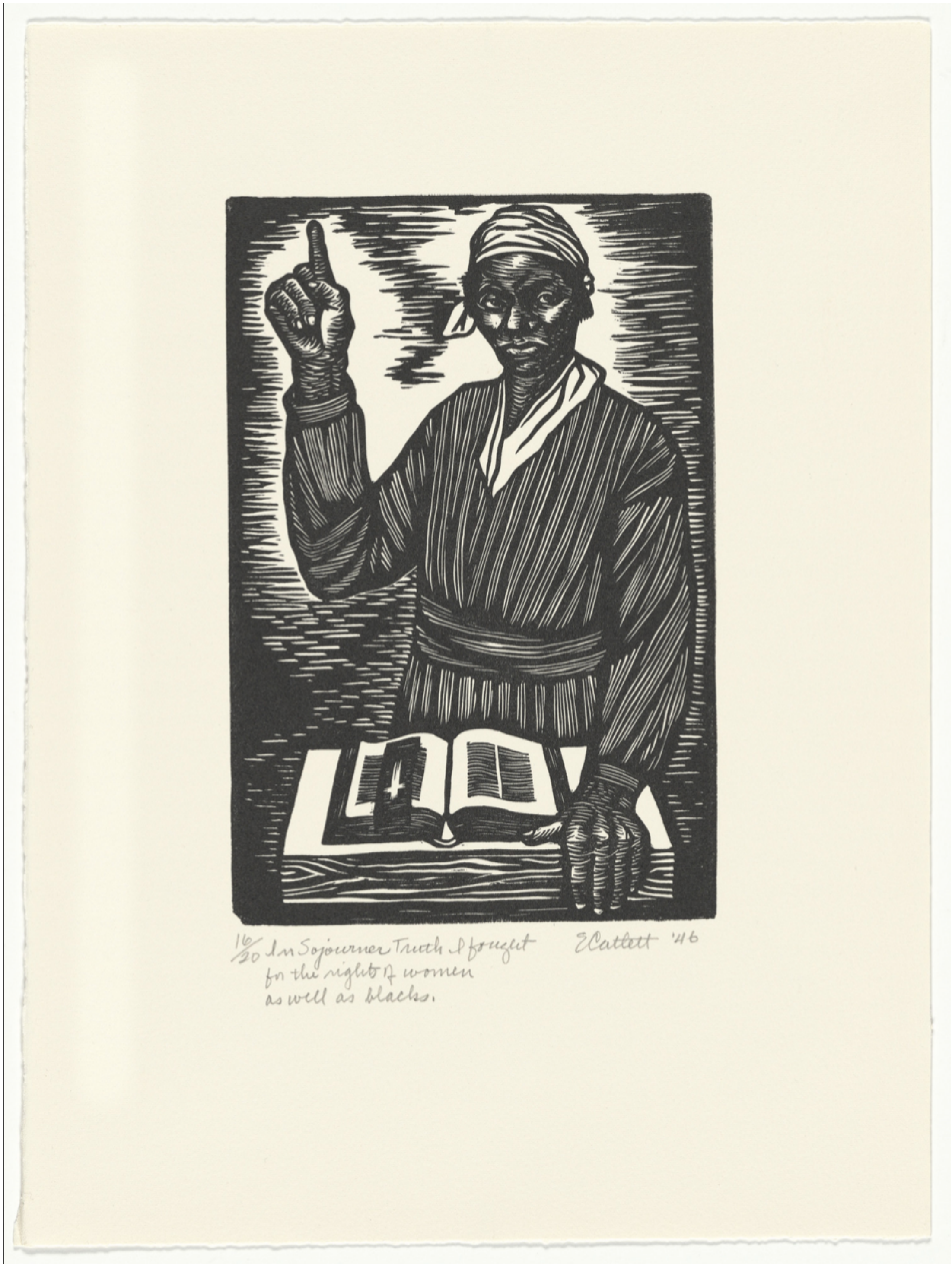
16/20 In Sojourner Truth I fought for the rights of women as well as blacks.
ECatlett '46

Figure 2.3. Elizabeth Catlett, Elizabeth Catlett, *In Sojourner Truth I Fought for the Rights of Women as Well as Blacks*, from the series *The Negro Woman*, 1946 (this print specifically 1989), Linoleum cut from a series of fourteen linoleum cuts, 8 7/8 x 5 7/8" in., Museum of Modern Art.

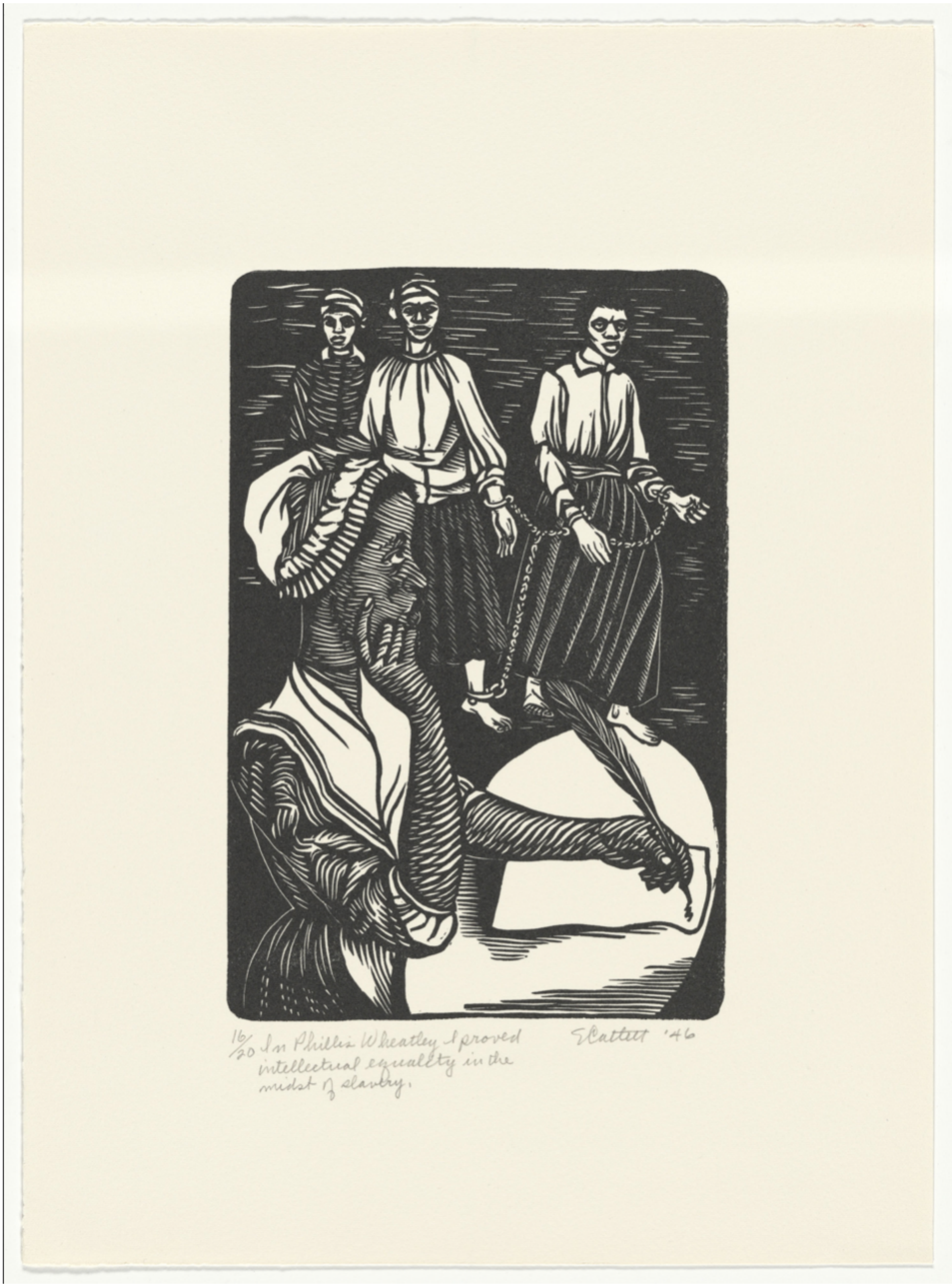
16/20 In Phillis Wheatley I proved
intellectual equality in the
midst of slavery.
ECatlett '46

Figure 2.4. Elizabeth Catlett, *In Phillis Wheatley I Proved Intellectual Equality in the Midst of Slavery* from the series *The Negro Woman*, 1946 (this print specifically 1989), Linoleum cut from a series of fourteen linoleum cuts, 9 x 6” in., Museum of Modern Art.

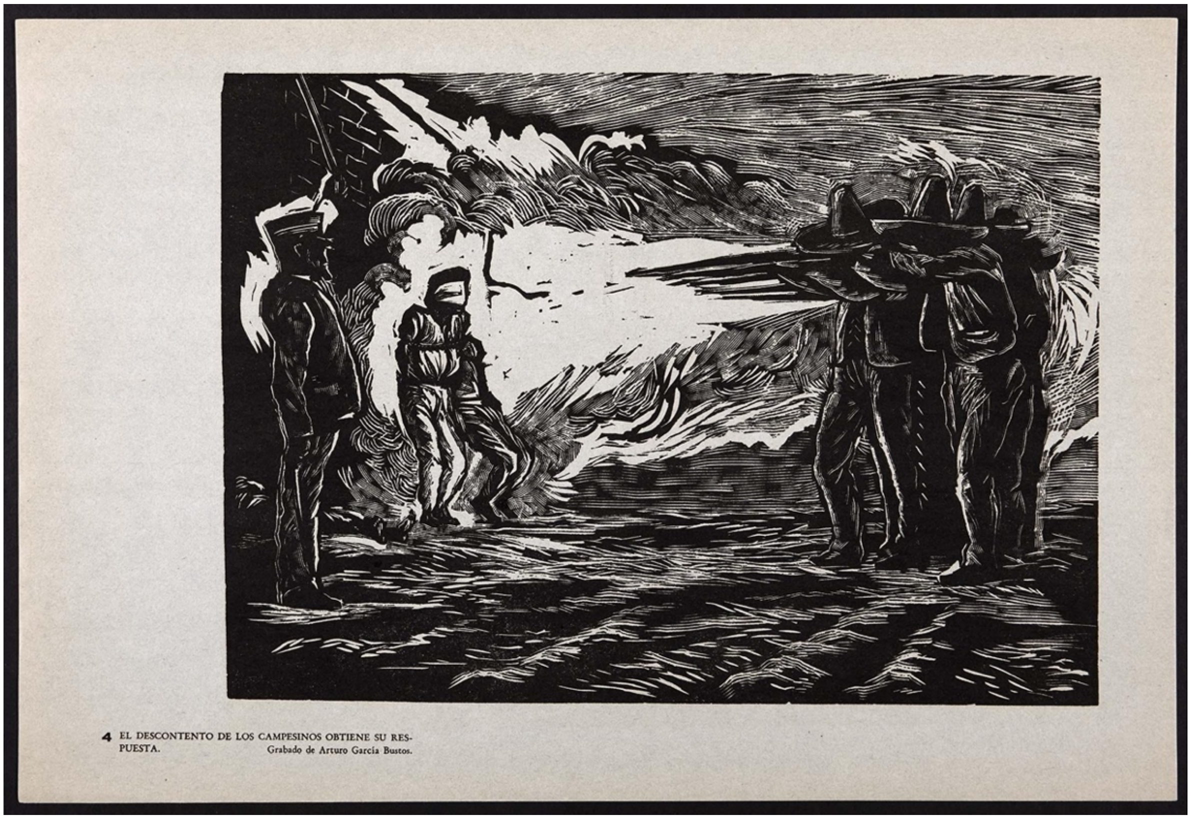
4 EL DESCONTENTO DE LOS CAMPESINOS OBTIENE SU RESPUESTA.
Grabado de Arturo García Bustos.

Figure 2.5. Arturo García Bustos, “El descontento de los campesinos obtiene su respuesta” (“The discontent of the peasants gets their response”), 1947, 10 5/8 x 15 ¾” in., Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

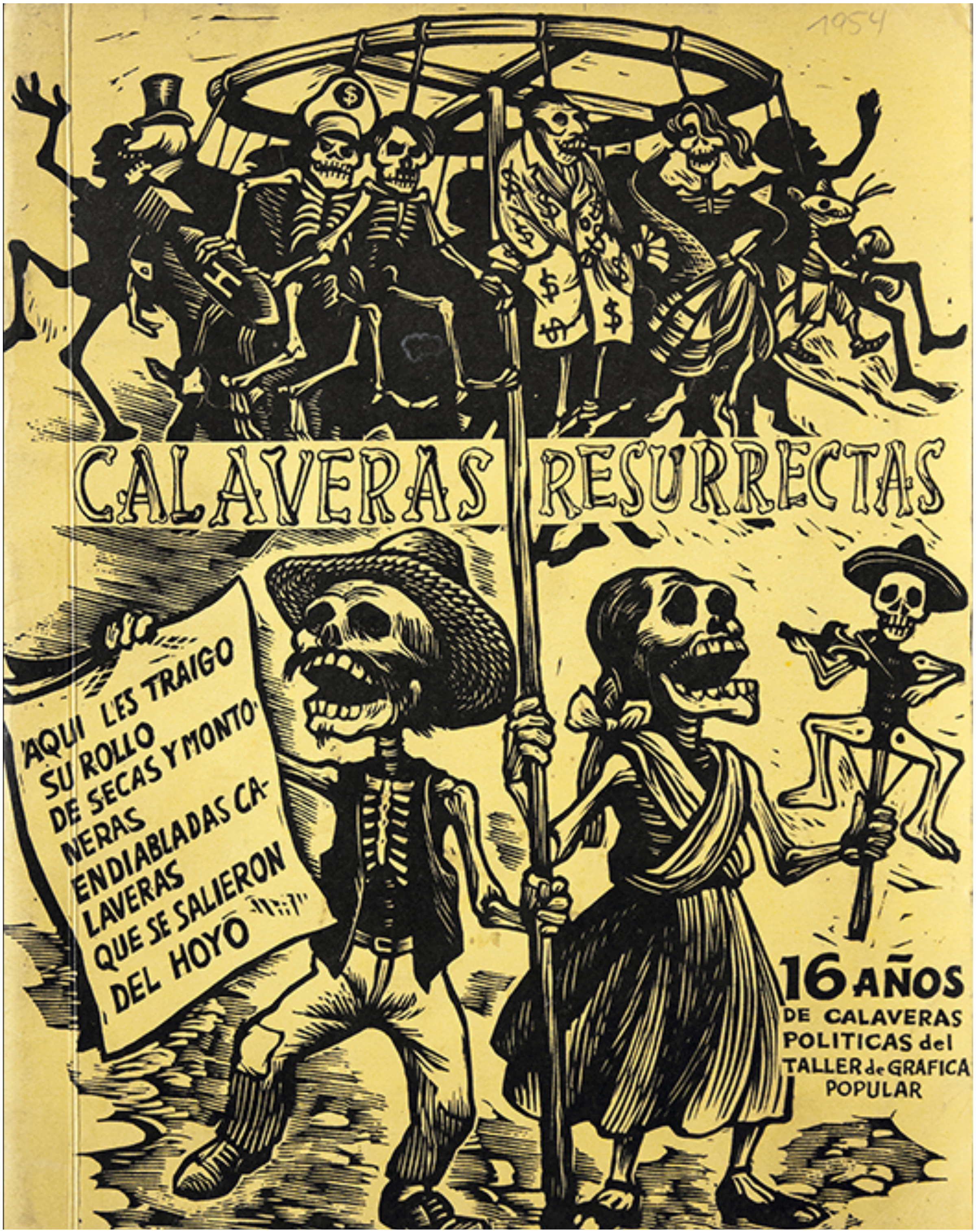
1954
CALAVERAS RESURRECTAS
AQUI LES TRAIGO SU ROLLO DE SECAS Y MONTONERAS ENDIABLADAS CALAVERAS QUE SE SALIERON DEL HOYO
16 AÑOS DE CALAVERAS POLITICAS del TALLER de GRAFICA POPULAR

Figure 2.6. Alberto Beltrán, Illustration from a drawing on the cover of: Calaveras resurrectas (Resurrected Skulls), 16 years of political skeletons of the Taller de Gráfica Popular, Mexico, Taller de Gráfica Popular, 1954.

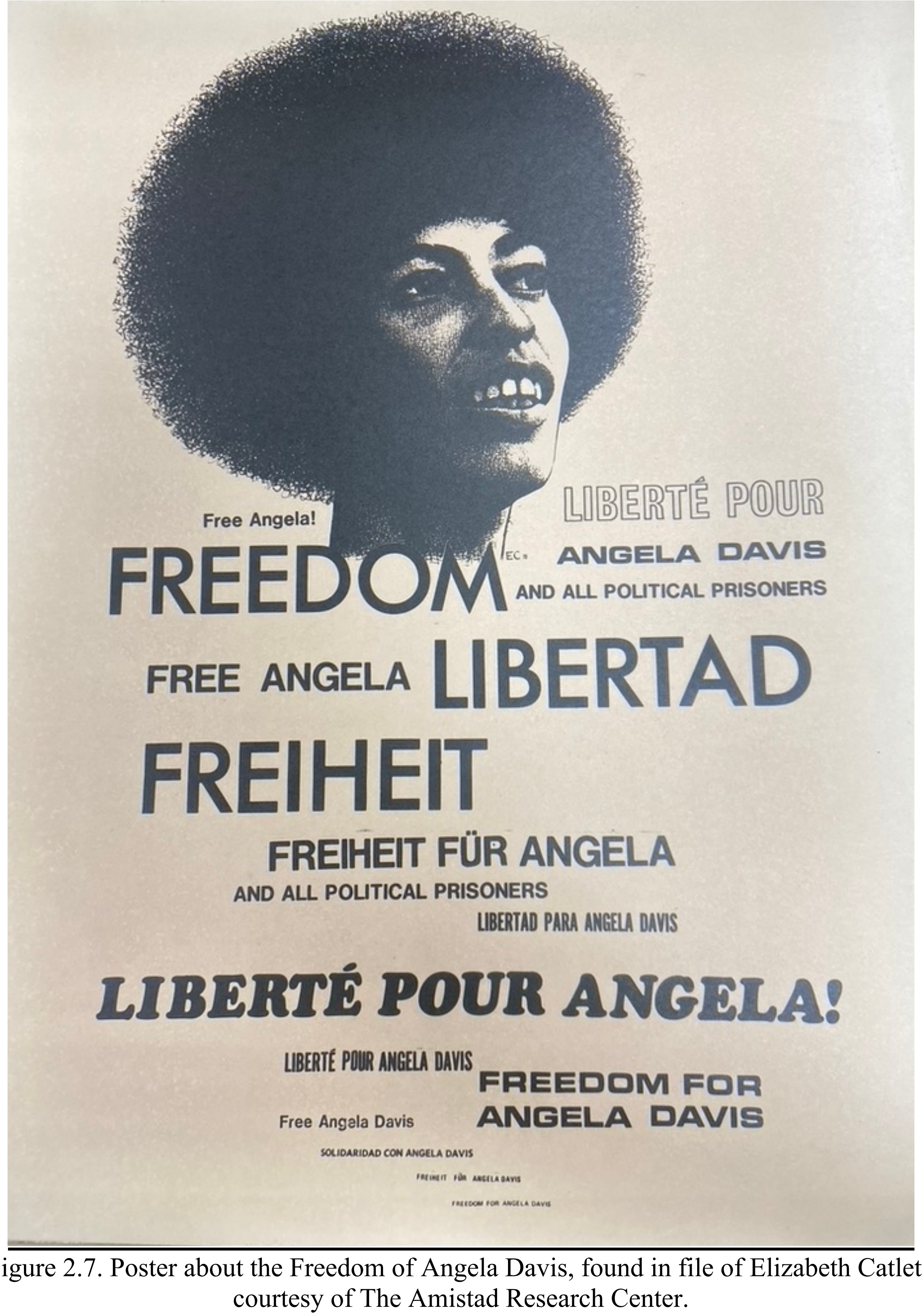
Free Angela!
EC
LIBERTÉ POUR
FREEDOM
ANGELA DAVIS
AND ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS
FREE ANGELA
LIBERTAD
FREIHEIT
FREIHEIT FÜR ANGELA
AND ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS
LIBERTAD PARA ANGELA DAVIS
LIBERTÉ POUR ANGELA!
LIBERTÉ POUR ANGELA DAVIS
FREEDOM FOR
ANGELA DAVIS
Free Angela Davis
SOLIDARIDAD CON ANGELA DAVIS
FREIHEIT FÜR ANGELA DAVIS
FREEDOM FOR ANGELA DAVIS

Figure 2.7. Poster about the Freedom of Angela Davis, found in file of Elizabeth Catlett, courtesy of The Amistad Research Center.

Chapter Three

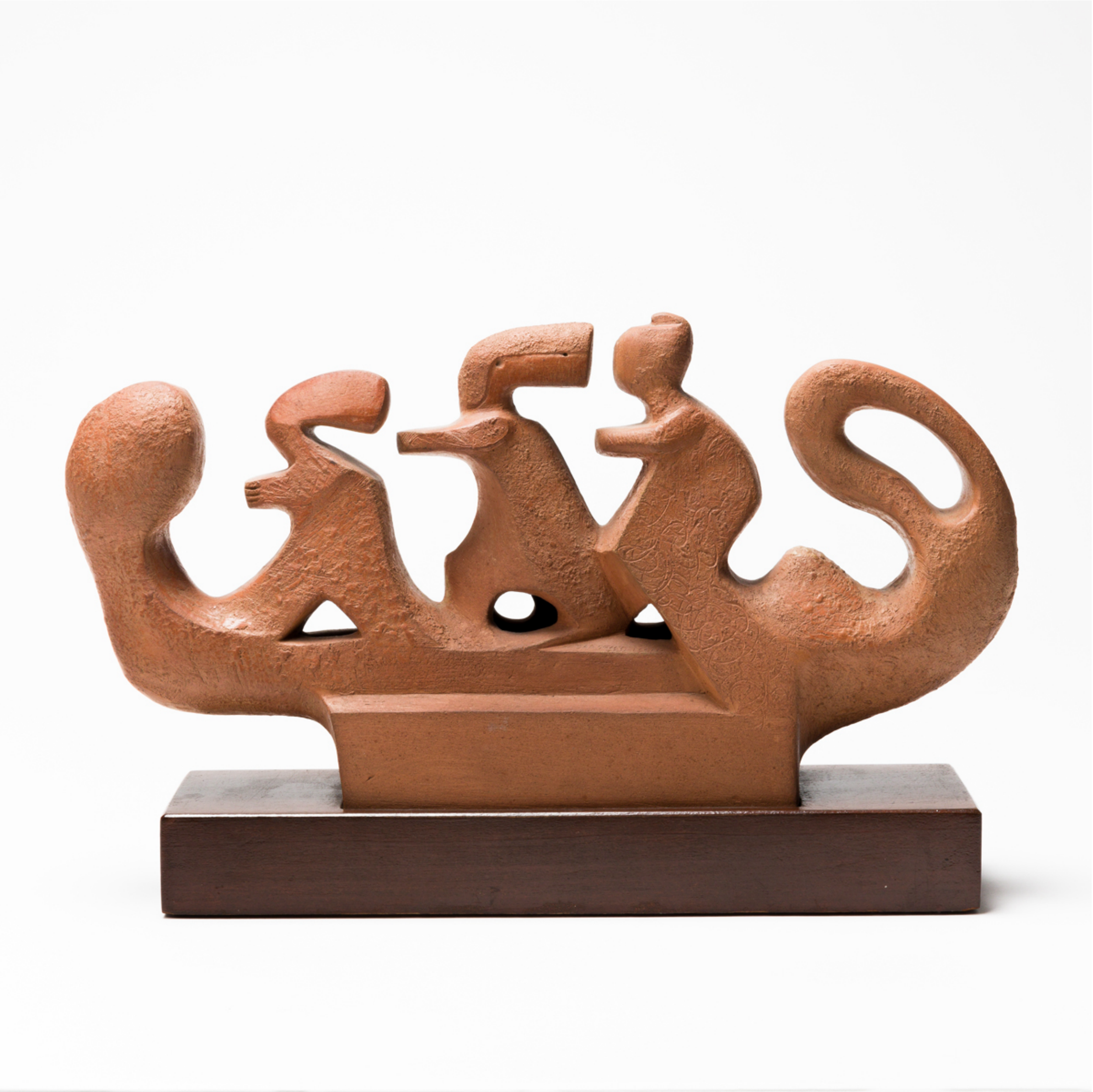

Figure 3.1, Sargent Claude Johnson, *The Knot and the Noose*, 1948, Terracotta mounted on a wooden base, 17 x 9 x 3" in.

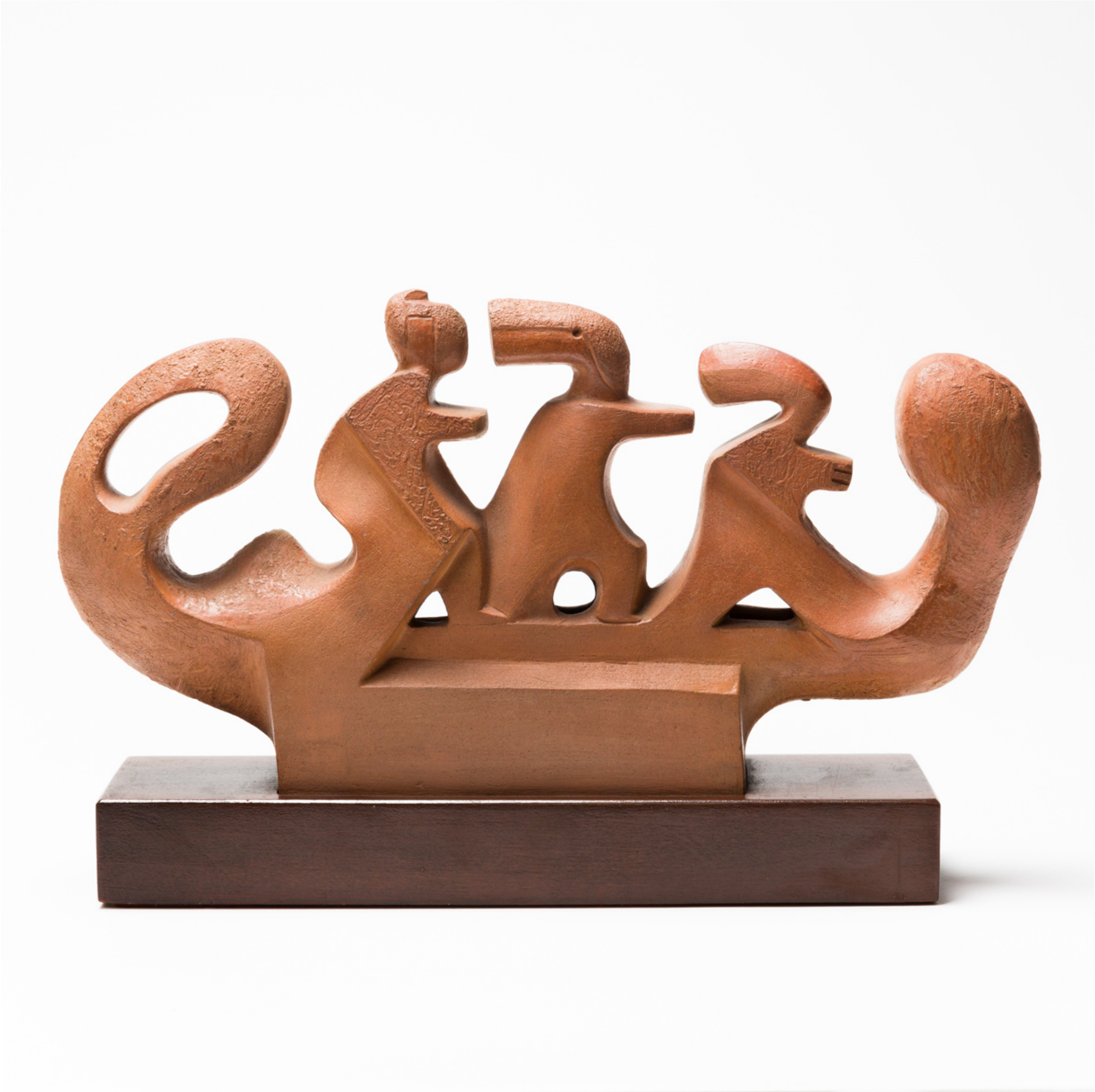

Figure 3.2, Sargent Claude Johnson, *The Knot and the Noose*, 1948, Terracotta mounted on a wooden base, 17 x 9 x 3” in.

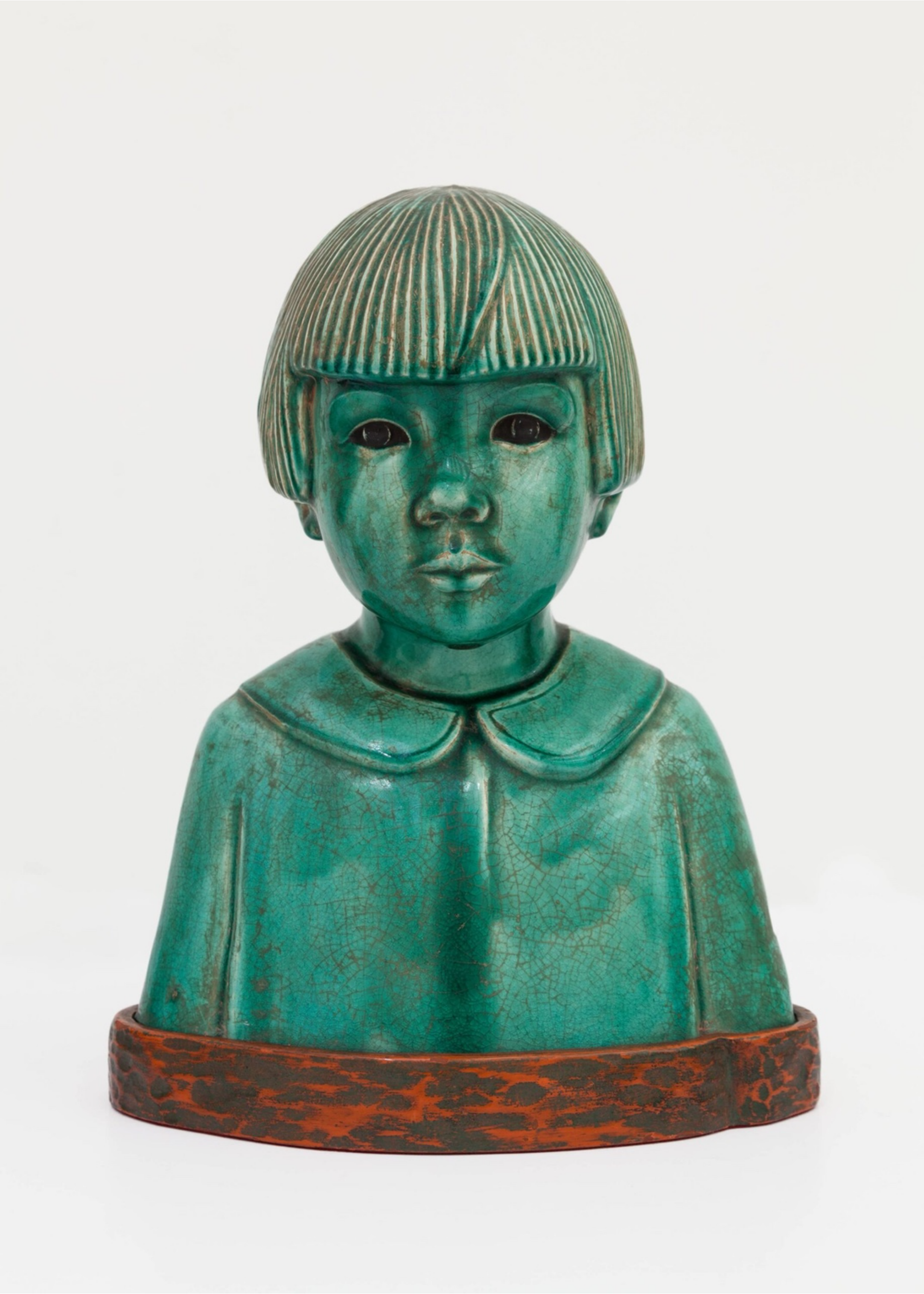

Figure 3.3, Sargent Claude Johnson, *Elizabeth Gee*, 1927, Stoneware with glaze, 13 1/8 x 10 ¾ x 7 ½” in., San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

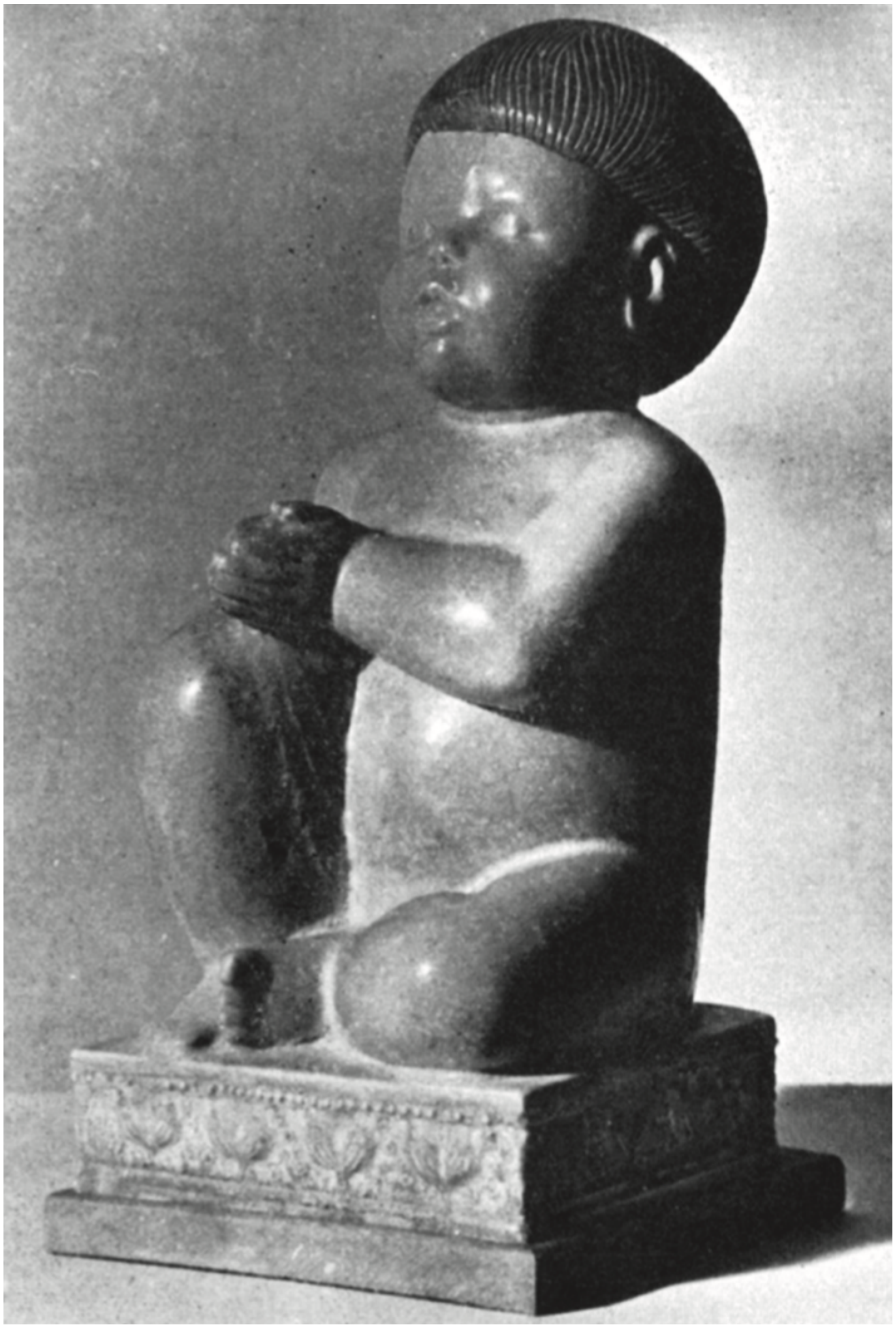

Figure 3.4, Sargent Claude Johnson, *Pearl*, 1923-25, stoneware with glaze, location unknown.

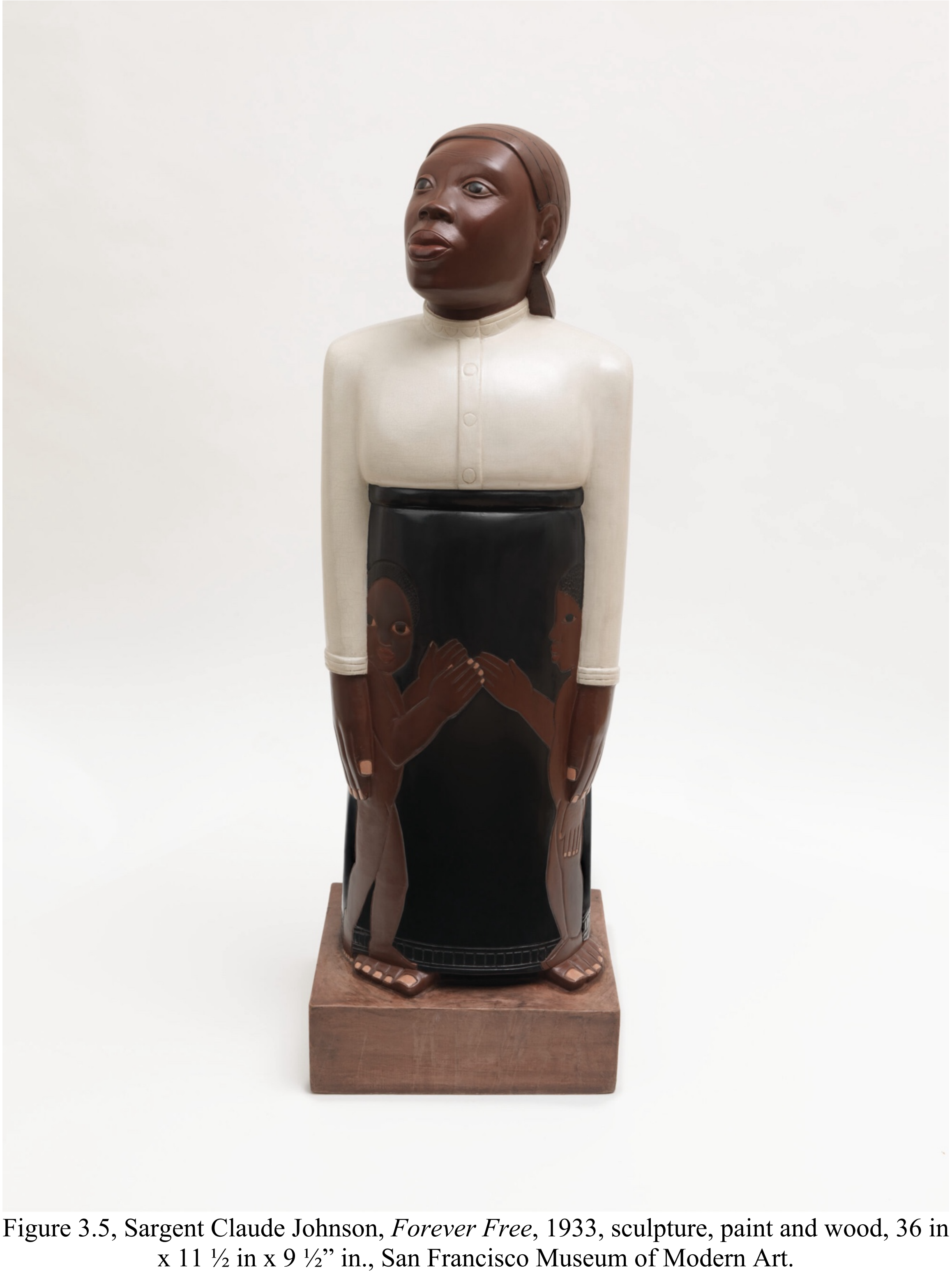

Figure 3.5, Sargent Claude Johnson, *Forever Free*, 1933, sculpture, paint and wood, 36 in x 11 ½ in x 9 ½" in., San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

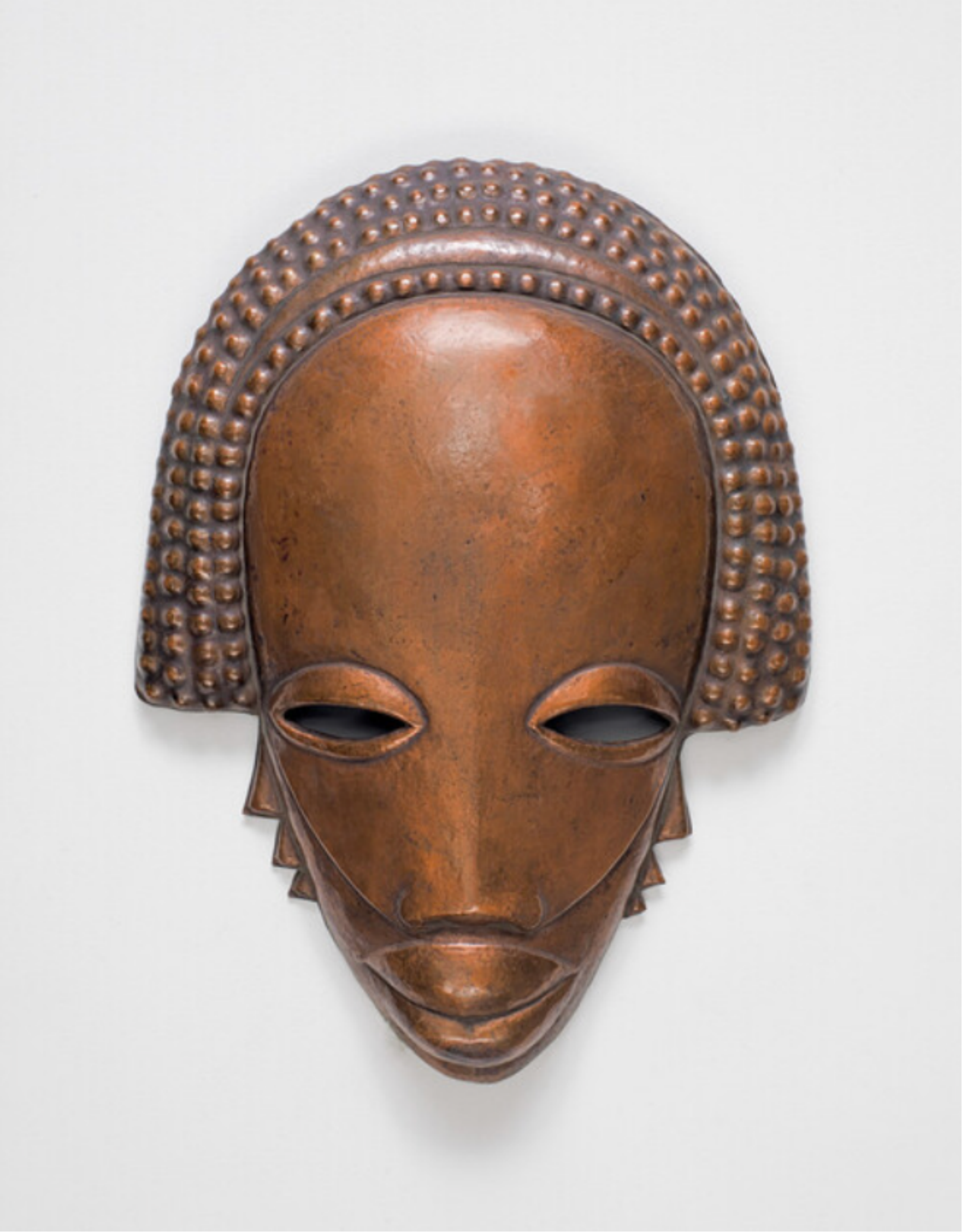

Figure 3.6, Sargent Claude Johnson, *Mask*, 1933, copper, 10 7/8 x 7 7/8 x 2 3/8" in., San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

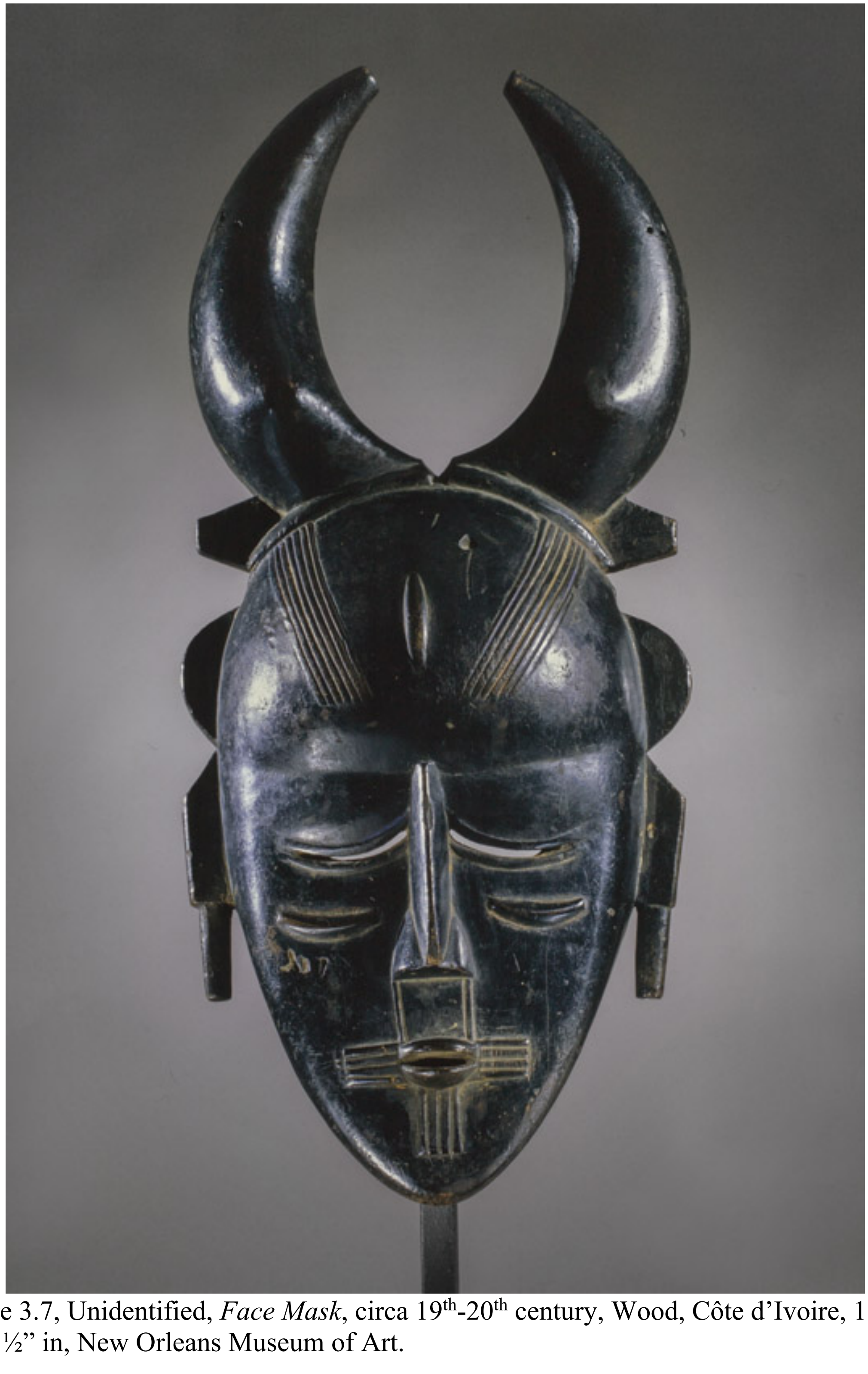

Figure 3.7, Unidentified, *Face Mask*, circa 19th-20th century, Wood, Côte d'Ivoire, 16 ¼ x 8 x 3 ½" in, New Orleans Museum of Art.

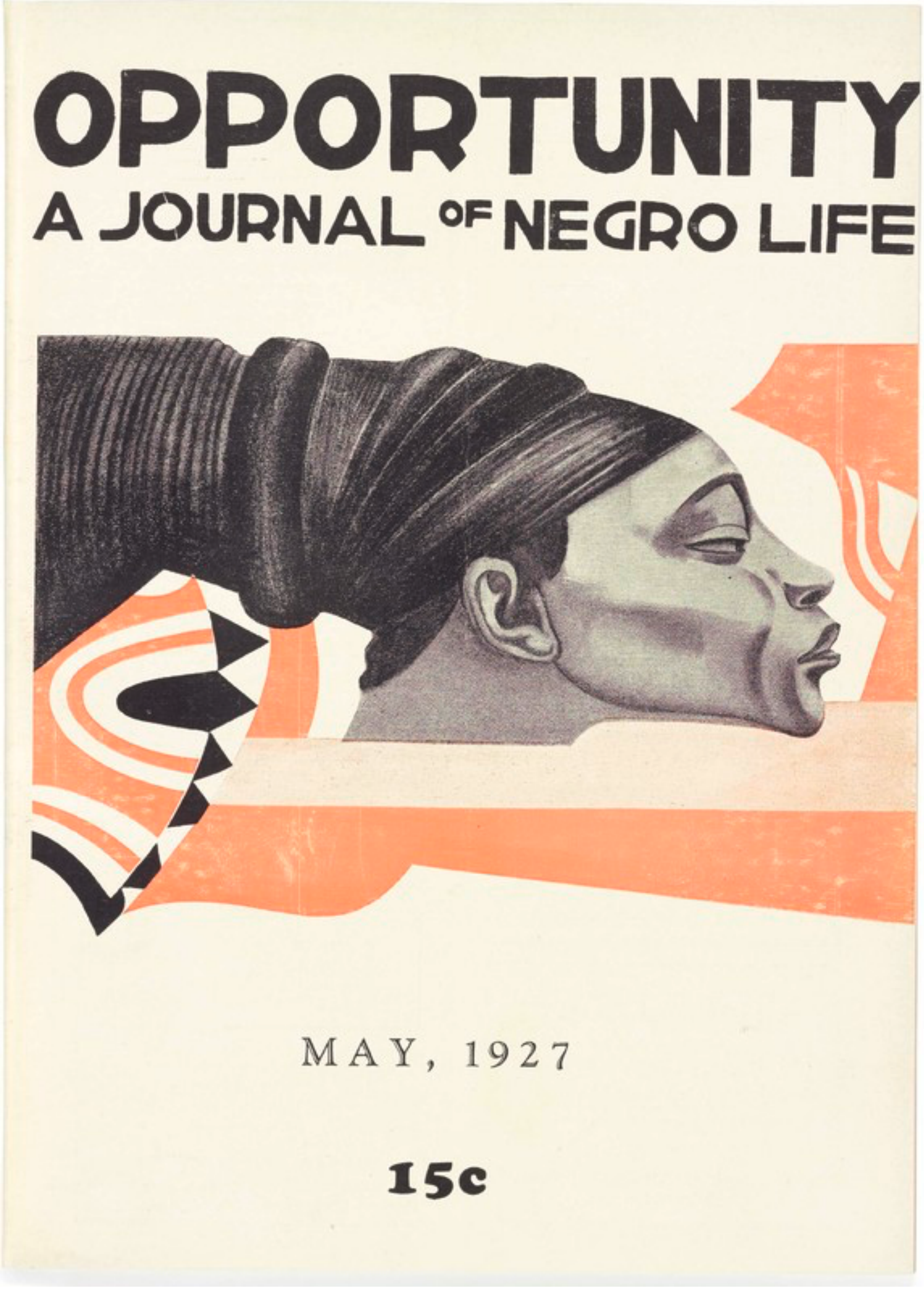
OPPORTUNITY
A JOURNAL OF NEGRO LIFE
MAY, 1927
15c

Figure 3.8, Aaron Douglas, Cover of Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life, May 1927, Yale University Library.

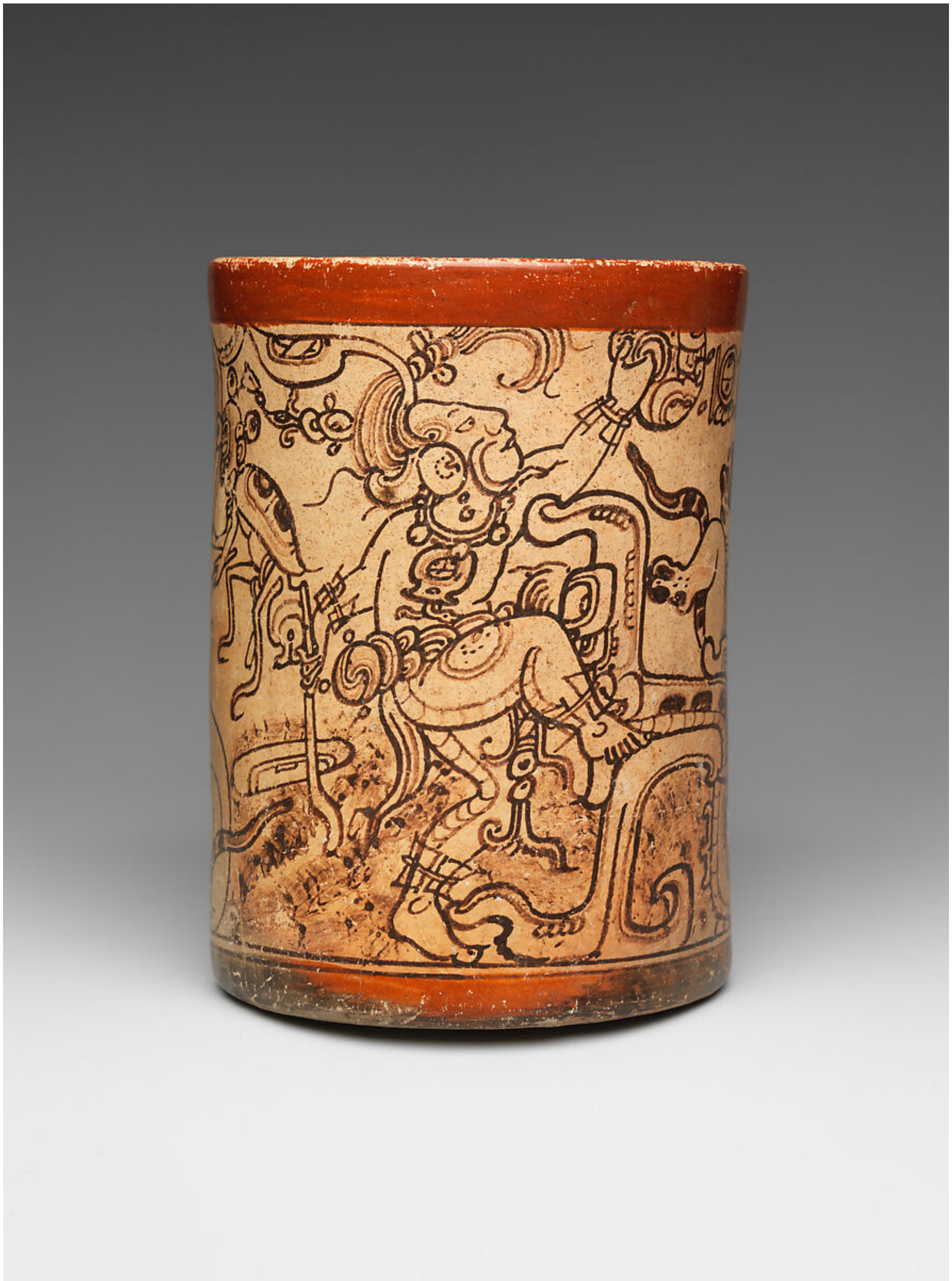

Figure 3.9, Attributed to the Metropolitan Painter, *Vessel with mythological scene*, 7th-8th century, ceramic with pigment, Guatemala or Mexico, Mesoamerica, 5 ½ x 4 x 4 3/16 x 4 ½ inches, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

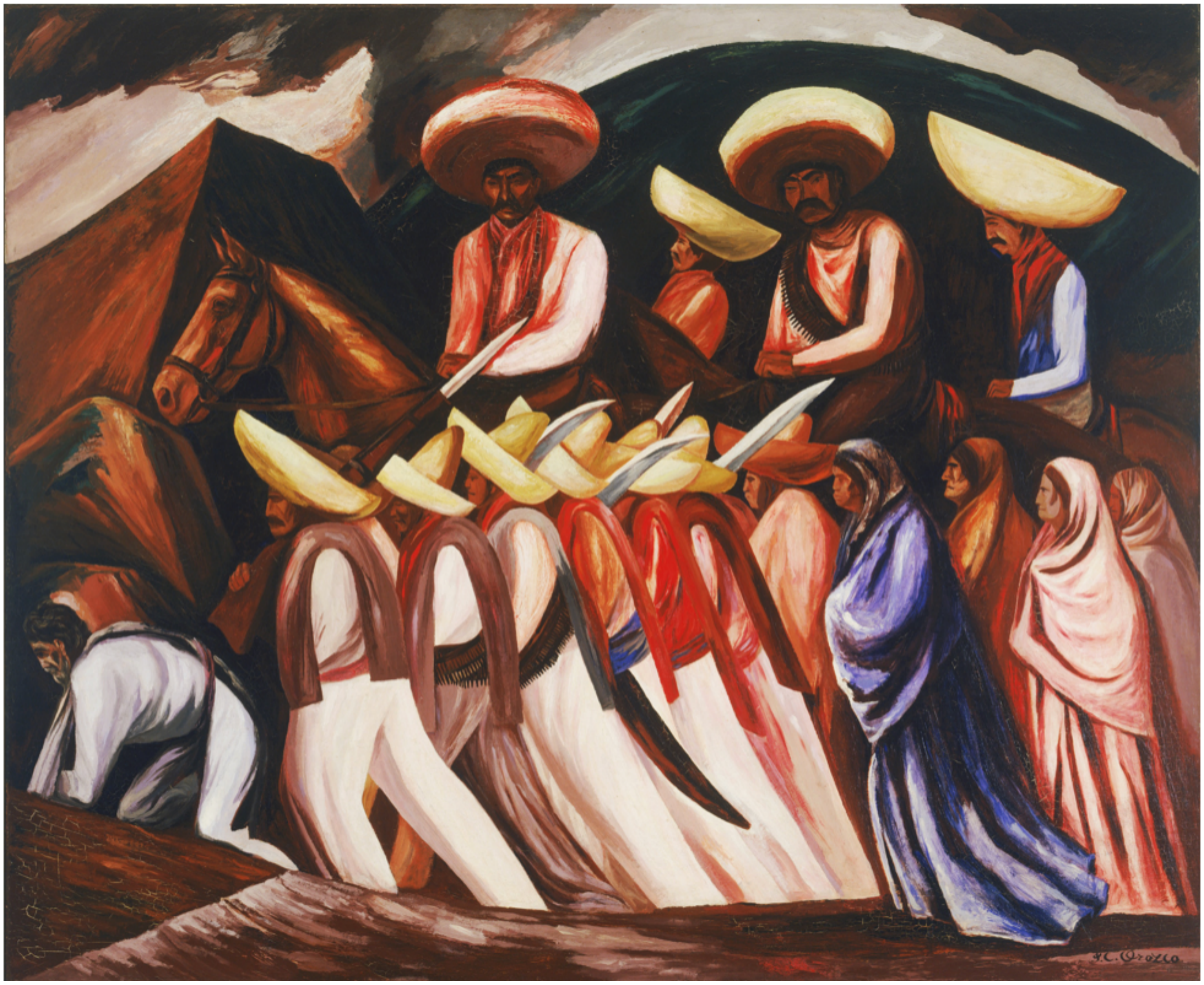

Figure 3.10, José Clemente Orozco, *Zapatistas*, 1931, oil on canvas, 45 x 55" in., Museum of Modern Art.

Bibliography

"Africans and Photography: The Mangbetu." The Mangbetu || in and out of focus: Images from Central Africa 1885-1960. Accessed April 10, 2024. https://africa.si.edu/exhibits/focus/mangbetu.html.

Amaki, Amalia K., Andrea Barnwell Browlee, and M. Auka McDaniel. "Reexamining Hale Woodruff's Talladega College and Atlanta University Murals." Essay. In *Hale Woodruff, Nancy Elizabeth Prophet and the Academy*, 77–85. Spelman College Museum of Fine art, 2007.

Amaki, Amalia K., and Andrea Barnwell Browlee. "Leaving Atlanta: Mexico, New York and Hale Woodruff's Departure from the Segregated South." Essay. In *Hale Woodruff, Nancy Elizabeth Prophet and the Academy*, 63–75. Spelman College Museum of Fine art, 2007.

Ames, Isata. "Exploring the Significance of Headwraps in African Fashion and Traditions." Leone Culture, 2023. https://leoneculture.com/blogs/news/wrapping-up-cultural-identity-exploring-the-significance-of-headwraps-in-african-fashion-and-traditions#:~:text=The%20traditional%20African%20headwrap%2C%20also,social%20status%2C%20and%20religious%20beliefs.

Bateman, Anita. "Narrative and Seriality in Elizabeth Catlett's Prints." *Journal of Black Studies* 47, no. 3 (2016): 258–72. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43926942.

Bey, Sharif. "Aaron Douglas and Hale Woodruff: African American Art Education, Gallery Work, and Expanded Pedagogy." *Studies in Art Education* 52, no. 2 (2011): 112–26. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41407937.

Billops, Camille. 1991. *Interview of Elizabeth Catlett by Camille Billops*. New York:, http://libproxy.tulane.edu:2048/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/books/interview-elizabeth-catlett-camille-billops/docview/2352582624/se-2 (accessed November 2, 2023).

Bowles, John P. 2012. "New Negro on the Pacific Rim: Sargent Johnson's Afro-Asian Sculptures." in *East-West Interchanges in American Art: A Long and Tumultuous Relationship*, edited by Mills, Cynthia, Glazer, Lee, and Goerlitz, Amelia A., 142–157. Smithsonian Contributions Knowledge. https://doi.org/10.5479/si.9781935623083.142

Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Civil Rights Congress." Encyclopedia Britannica, March 20, 2023. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Civil-Rights-Congress.

Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "linocut." Encyclopedia Britannica, August 12, 2010. https://www.britannica.com/technology/linocut.

Cabrera, Luis. "The Mexican Revolution: Its Causes, Purposes and Results." in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 69*, (1917): 2-17.

Cameron, Alison. "Buenos Vecinos: African-American Printmaking and the Taller de Gráfica Popular." *Print Quarterly*16, no. 4 (1999): 353–67. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41824990.

Cardoza y Aragón, Luis. "Las Calaveras de José Guadalupe Posada." *Artes de México*, no. 67 (2011): 36–41. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24315573.

Catlett, Elizabeth. "The Role of The Black Artist." *The Black Scholar* 6, no. 9 (1975): 10–14. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41066392.

Chavez, Nicole "Which Is the Correct Terminology: Black, African American or People of Color?," UAH, April 8, 2021, https://www.uah.edu/diversity/news/15567-which-is-the-correct-terminology-black-african-american-or-people-of-color

Cohen, Ted. "High and Low Art, and High and Low Audiences." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 57, no. 2, 1999, pp. 137–43. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/432308. Accessed 9 Apr. 2024.

Delgado-Tall, Sonia. "The New Negro Movement and the African Heritage in a Pan-Africanist Perspective." *Journal of Black Studies* 31, no. 3 (2001): 288–310. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2668034.

Driskell, David C. *Amistad II: Afro-American Art*. Nashville: Fisk University, 1975.

Du Bois, William Edward Burghardt. *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*. United States: A. C. McClurg, 1909.

Estampa y lucha: el taller de gráfica popular, 1937-2017. Ciudad de México: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, Museo Nacional de la Estampa, 2018.

Flattley, Megan. "The History of Mexico: Diego Rivera's Murals at the National Palace." Smarthistory. Accessed April 10, 2024. https://smarthistory.org/mexico-diego-rivera-murals-national-palace/.

Herzog, Melanie. *Elizabeth Catlett: An American Artist in Mexico*. University of Washington Press, 2005.

Heydt, Stephanie Mayer. *Rising up: Hale Woodruff's Murals at Talladega College*. High Museum of Art, 2012.

"History of Lynching in America." NAACP, February 11, 2022. https://naacp.org/find-resources/history-explained/history-lynching-america

Kravagna, Christian. " Painting the Global History of Art: Hale Woodruff's *The Art of the Negro*." *Tate Papers* 30 (Autumn

2018), https://www.tate.org.uk/research/tate-papers/30/painting-global-history-of-art.

Lawal, Babatunde. "The African Heritage of African American Art and Performance." In *Black Theatre: Ritual Performance In The African Diaspora*, edited by Paul Carter Harrison, Victor Leo Walker, and Gus Edwards, 39–63. Temple University Press, 2002. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt14bs6rh.6.

LeFalle-Collins, Lizzetta, and Judith. Wilson. *Sargent Johnson: African American Modernist*. San Francisco, Calif: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1998.

LeFalle-Collins, Lizzetta. "African-American Modernists and the Mexican Muralist School, Los Modernists Africanoamericanos y La Escuela Muralista Mexican." Essay. In *In the Spirit of Resistance: African-American Modernists and the Mexican Muralist School (En El Espíritu de La Resistencia: Los Modernistas Africanoamericanos y La Escuela Muralista Mexicana)*, 27–89. New York: American Federation of Arts, 1996.

Léger, Marc James, David Tomas, Emory Douglas, Mia Eve Rollow, and Caleb Duarte Piñon, eds. *Zapantera Negra: An artistic encounter between Black Panthers and Zapatistas*. Brooklyn, NY: Common Notions, 2017.

"Lithograph." The Metropolitan Museum of Art, December 21, 2018. https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/collection-areas/drawings-and-prints/materials-and-techniques/printmaking/lithograph#:~:text=Lithography%20is%20a%20planographic%20printmaking,means%20of%20a%20chemical%20reaction.

Locke, Alain, "Foreword," essay in *The New Negro Anthology*, (1925), xxv-xxvii.

Locke, Alain, "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts," essay in *The New Negro Anthology*, Atheneum, 1925, 3-16.

Locke, Alain. "The American Negro As Artist." *The American Magazine of Art* 23, no. 3 (1931): 210–20. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23936618.

"Maize Deity (Chicomecoatl): Aztec." The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Accessed September 7, 2023. https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/307644.

Mercer, Kobena. "Chapter 2: Afro-Modernism's Musée Imaginaire." In *Alain Locke and the Visual Arts*. New Haven: Yale University Press and Hutchins Center for African & African American Research, 2022. Accessed April 24, 2024. https://aaeportal-com.libproxy.tulane.edu/?id=-23240.

Oles, James, and Karen Cordero. *South of the border: Mexico in the American Imagination, 1914-1947*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993.

Ott, John. “Hale Woodruff’s Antiprimitivist History of Abstract Art.” *The Art Bulletin* 100, no. 1 (2018): 124–45. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44973276.

Patton, Sharon F. “Twentieth-Century America and Modern Art 1900-60.” Essay. In *African-American Art. Oxford History of Art. Oxford: Oxford University Press.*, 105–83. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Plescher, Matt. “High and Low Art: The Rapidian.” The Rapidian, October 10, 2023. https://www.therapidian.org/high-and-low-art. Reynolds, Gary A., Beryl J. Wright, and David C. Driskell. *Against the odds: African-American Artists and the Harmon Foundation*. Newark, NJ: Newark Museum, 1989.

Poundstone, William. Sargent Claude Johnson at the Huntington, February 29, 2024. http://lacmaonfire.blogspot.com/2024/02/sargent-claude-johnson-at-huntington.html.

Robinson, Henry S. “The M Street High School, 1891-1916.” *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, D.C.* 51 (1984): 119–43. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40067848.

Rosenwald Fund.” Julius Rosenwald Legacy. Accessed April 10, 2024. https://www.julius-rosenwald-legacy.com/rosenwald-fund.html.

Sánchez, Gilda Hernández. “Ceramic-Making Before The Conquest.” In *Ceramics and the Spanish Conquest: Response and Continuity of Indigenous Pottery Technology in Central Mexico*, 43–90. Brill, 2012. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctt1w8h199.9.

Sánchez, Gilda Hernández. “Ceramics, Cultural Continuity And Social Change.” In *Ceramics and the Spanish Conquest: Response and Continuity of Indigenous Pottery Technology in Central Mexico*, 207–25. Brill, 2012. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctt1w8h199.12.

“San Francisco Artists,” interview with Sargent Johnson, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 6 October 1935.

“San Francisco Art Association and Related Organizational Records.” Washington, D.C.: Archives of American Art.

Sargent Claude Johnson Rosenberg application, San Francisco Art Institute Legacy Foundation + Archive, 1944.

Sargent Claude Johnson Archival file, San Francisco Art Institute Legacy Foundation + Archive, 2003.

Schomburg, Arturo. “The Negro Digs up His Past.” *Survey Graphic* magazine, March 1, 1925.

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Jean Blackwell Hutson Research and Reference Division, The New York Public Library. "In quest of Juan de Pareja" New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed May 6, 2024. https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/35bba8a0-d949-013a-5087-0242ac110003

Shaw, Gwendolyn DuBois. 2012. “Creating a new negro art in America.” *Transition* (108): 74-87, 144.

Siegel, Jeanne. “‘Why Spiral?’: Norman Lewis, Romare Bearden, and Others on the ‘contradictions Facing Them in Modern America,’ in 1966.” ARTnews.com, November 18, 2019. https://www.artnews.com/art-news/retrospective/september-1966-norman-lewis-romare-bearden-5482/.

Sumrell, Morgan. "Hale Woodruff: the Harlem Renaissance in Atlanta." *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 37, no. 2 (2013): 115-153.

“The Art of the Negro Mural Series.” The collection of Clark Atlanta University. Accessed September 2, 2023. https://www.cau.edu/art-galleries/murals.html.

“The Calaveras of José Guadalupe Posada.” The Public Domain Review, November 2012. https://publicdomainreview.org/collection/the-calaveras-of-jose-guadalupe-posada

“The Civil Rights Act of 1964: A Long Struggle for Freedom World War II and Post War (1940- 1949).” Library of Congress, October 10, 2014. https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/civil-rights-act/world-war-ii-and-post-war.html

Van Scott, Glory. *Interview of Elizabeth Catlett by Glory Van Scott.* New York: 1991.

Wilson, Judith. “Sargent Johnson: Afro-California Modernist.” in *Race-Ing Art History: Critical Readings in Race and Art History*. Routledge: 307-319.

Woodruff, Hale. “Oral history interview with Hale Woodruff.” Interview by Al Murray. November 18, 1968. https://www.aaa.si.edu/download_pdf_transcript/ajax?record_id=edanmdm-AAADCD_oh_212755

Wyatt, David. “Voice and Place.” *Western American Literature* 34, no. 2 (1999): 170–73.

BIOGRAPHY

Daniella Statia was born and raised in Germantown, Maryland. She received her B.A. in Art History and Spanish Studies from the University of Delaware. During this time, she collaborated on the creation of an online black archive, “Black Portrait Photograph Collection” and published two essays. At Tulane University, her master’s research focused on Blackness and Indigeneity in Modern art of the Americas, specifically examining the exchange between the two communities. Her master’s thesis investigates an instance where three African American artists travel to Mexico in the 1940s during Mexico’s Public art movement to draw inspiration for portrayal of identity.