



EDITED BY ELYSE NELSON AND WENDY S. WALTERS

FICTIONS OF EMANCIPATION

***CARPEAUX'S WHY BORN
ENSLAVED! RECONSIDERED***

**THE
MET**

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Adrienne L. Childs

THE VANQUISHED UNCHAINED

ABOLITION AND EMANCIPATION IN SCULPTURE OF THE ATLANTIC WORLD

Embedded in the complexities of a post-emancipation Black Atlantic world, Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux's *Why Born Enslaved!* (pl. 1) is a pivot point for the wide-reaching discussion about slavery, abolition, emancipation, and art explored in this book. While grounded in French sculptural practice of the 1860s, *Why Born Enslaved!* has aesthetic and conceptual roots in a centuries-old European visual tradition of representing the vanquished, the captive, and the enslaved. These restrained figures were a testament to the power and triumph of their captors. By the end of the eighteenth century, in the wake of the brutality and violence of the race-based Atlantic slave trade and its colonial dynamics, a new visual language of captivity and enslavement had emerged in the growing discourse around abolition and the emancipation of the Black enslaved. As the objectified, commodified, and abject did not lend themselves easily to representation, the various strategies used to unfetter the Black slave body in sculpture proved to be fraught with opaque intentions, contradictory messages, and open-ended narratives.

The tradition of depicting prisoners in art dates back to antiquity. In the wake of wars and conflicts in the late fifth century B.C., the Greeks bound prisoners to columns in order to display their vanquished enemies. This kind of spectacle of victory led to the development of architectural pillars that feature the vanquished or enslaved bearing the burden. These and similar

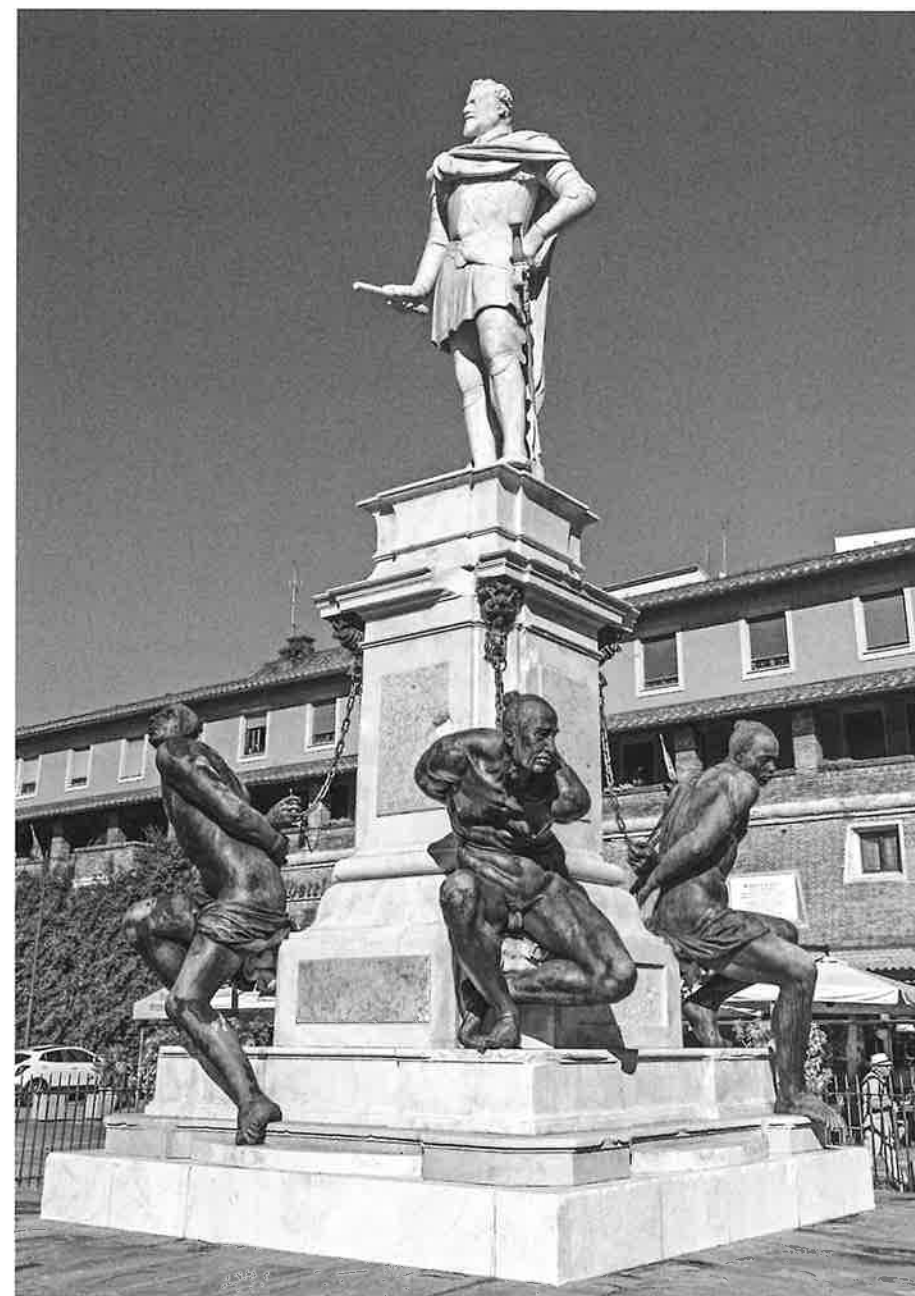


FIG. 5. I QUATTRO MORI (THE FOUR MOORS), 1621–26
Pietro Tacca (Italian, 1577–1640). Bronze. Installed around the
base of the marble monument to the Grand Duke of Tuscany,
Ferdinando I de' Medici (1599), by Giovanni Bandini (Italian, 1540–1599),
in Livorno, Italy



FIG. 6. FIGURE OF AN ENSLAVED AFRICAN MAN, LATE 18TH CENTURY
Doccia Manufactory (Italian, 1737-1896), possibly after a model by Giuseppe Piamontini
(Italian, 1664-1742). Hard-paste porcelain, H. 9 1/4 in. (24.4 cm), W. 4 1/4 in. (10.8 cm),
D. 4 1/4 in. (11.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Purchase, Larry and Ann Burns Gift,
in honor of Austin B. Chinn, 2021 (2021.138)

antique architectural conventions were born of a punitive expression and retained that connotation through the centuries.¹ As civilizations and cultures collided, the imagery changed, but the tone and tenor remained the same. By the seventeenth century Black slaves had begun to appear as vanquished prisoners in European visual culture. One of the most important and influential seventeenth-century monuments depicting captives was Pietro Tacca's *I Quattro Mori* (*The Four Moors*) of 1621-26 (fig. 5). Tacca's slaves were chained to the pedestal of the 1599 monument by Giovanni Bandini to Grand Duke Ferdinando I de' Medici in Livorno, Italy. The Black and Turkish figures represented were referred to indeterminately as "Moors" and reflect the Christian conquest of the Ottomans in the sixteenth century.² Their hands behind their backs, these colossal bronze galley slaves crouch, twist, and turn under the restraint of heavy chains. They were executed with great naturalism and with individualized treatments of both physiognomy and expression. *I Quattro Mori* has been called the first major work of monumental sculpture to depict modern slavery and one of the most influential depictions of the slave body.³

Into the nineteenth century Tacca's captives inspired replication and influenced reduced-scale bronzes as well as copies in porcelain and majolica.⁴ A singularly dramatic late eighteenth-century porcelain figure by the Italian manufactory Doccia demonstrates the currency of the Tacca forms as they were adapted through the centuries (fig. 6).⁵ The tension between the captive's anguished expression and emaciated face, and his assertively muscular body acknowledges anxieties about the slave experience that were bold and unusual for the time. Although the Tacca source material depicts Ottoman captives, by the middle of the eighteenth century Doccia's bound Black slave would have reflected the plight of Africans in the Black Atlantic world. Fashioning slaves in porcelain tended to popularize, ornamentize, and domesticate this epic human drama into diminutive decorative appointments.⁶ Yet, although it is unlikely that the Doccia porcelain captive was intended as an antislavery statement, its emotional pull anticipates abolitionist attempts to elicit empathy for the slave through representations of bondage.

By the eighteenth century, as the culture of slavery in the Black Atlantic world expanded, the vanquished captive body had become associated with the New World persona of the Black slave. The historian Robin Blackburn

describes the shifts in the nature of slavery during this period: "Slavery in the New World was not based on an Old World prototype. Its bonds were woven from a variety of materials—ethnic identities, legal codifications, technical resources, economic impulses, and so forth—and all these together comprised something quite new."⁷ In the age of race-based Atlantic slavery, Black figures that appeared in European art and material culture were framed by this experience. Black slaves and servants who populated eighteenth-century art were not pictured in chains or restrained, although many wore slave collars that alluded to their bondage. In portraiture, they were fashioned as appointments of luxury and domination playing foil to the white aristocracy. Even though they are pictured in the act of serving, the accoutrements of colonial chattel slavery were distanced or erased in favor of exotic costumes and luxurious settings. Interestingly, shackled Black figures did appear in decorative arts, adorning "blackamoor" stands, candlesticks, and more.⁸ However, explicit depictions of the abject slave body were not prevalent in eighteenth-century European painting and sculpture until the development of the visual rhetoric of the abolitionist movement.

IMAGINING ABOLITION

In the introduction to the exhibition catalogue *Art and Emancipation in Jamaica: Isaac Mendes Belisario and His Worlds*, the curators Tim Barringer and Gillian Forrester argue that images played a significant role in the campaign against slavery. They point to icons such as Josiah Wedgwood's anti-slavery medallion (pl. 10) and James Phillips's *Description of a Slave Ship* (1788), caricatures of decadent planter life, and images of cruelty to the enslaved as all having played a role in dismantling the broad-reaching system of Atlantic slavery.⁹ As European sensibilities regarding the moral and religious dilemmas around slavery grew, an alternative framework for the vanquished Black slave body emerged in visual culture—one that drew upon the chained captive but operated to elicit sympathy for the enslaved and called for the abolition of the practice.

Perhaps the most noted image of the slave body in the service of abolition is Wedgwood's medallion, known by its inscription, "Am I not a man and a brother?" The design was originally created as a seal for the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, of which Wedgwood was a member.¹⁰ Wedgwood, the entrepreneurial potter, fashioned the image of

the kneeling Black slave into a jasperware porcelain medallion or cameo that enjoyed widespread circulation in multiple forms. On a stark white background, the kneeling figure is bound with chains. His hands, rather than restrained behind his back like the captives in Tacca's *I Quattro Mori*, are clasped together in front of his body in a prayerlike gesture. Further diverting from the Tacca precedent, the slave does not resist or contort. Rather, he submissively entreats his captor or his God for freedom.

The figure's kneeling pose provides full exposure of the chain from both wrists to both ankles. This chain is the unmistakable symbol of captivity, the troubling garniture of slavery that links the Old World and New World embodiments of the defeated. Not just a symbol, it is the tool of restraint without which the institution of slavery could not have flourished as it did. The historian James Walvin describes the importance of the chain:

But above all else, chains were ubiquitous. From the loading of the slave ships at the European and American dockside, to the African coast, in mid-Atlantic, and finally on the plantations of the Americas, chains were inescapable in the world of Atlantic slavery. Yard upon jangling yard of chains were loaded onto every slave ship bound for the African coast, alongside a vicious array of other metal items: handcuffs, leg irons, speculums for forced feeding—right down to the simple, excruciating thumb-screws, used to force confession from potentially rebellious Africans.

Walvin goes on to make a fascinating claim that the necessity of the physical restraints was evidence of the power that Africans could wield collectively.¹¹ As opposed to the collars that mark the status of enslaved youths in European painting and sculpture, the chains that restrict enslaved adults in European painting, sculpture, and decorative arts import the vicious garniture of slavery into the spaces of luxury aesthetics in order to restrain the perceived menace of the Black body.¹²

Perhaps the frank evocation of the chain had an impact on the response to the Wedgwood image, as the medallion became highly influential in the visual rhetoric of abolition on an international scale. It was adopted by other sculptors and repeated and rehearsed in both quotidian and luxury decorative arts and in print (pls. 11–13). The widespread circulation of the image achieved the goal of evangelizing on behalf of the cause of abolition and undoubtedly contributed to the 1807 abolition of the trade in slaves in the British Empire

and the subsequent abolition of the practice of slavery in 1833. Although the anonymity and passivity of the image have been widely discussed, it is worth repeating that the supplicant Black male is rendered prominently shackled in an atrophied state of servility, completely dependent on white largesse.¹³

HOUDON'S FRAGMENT

The abolition of slavery in the Atlantic world was a rolling phenomenon. The French Republic decreed the slaves in its colonies free in 1794 after the successful slave revolt that had begun in 1791 in Saint-Domingue. That period of abolition was short-lived, as Napoleon Bonaparte reintroduced colonial slavery and the slave trade in 1802.¹⁴ In this era, representing newly freed slave bodies proved to be an ambivalent enterprise, perhaps anticipating the instability of that very freedom. In a pragmatic, if shallow, acknowledgment of this first iteration of abolition in the French colonies, Jean Antoine Houdon, the premier French sculptor of the Enlightenment, repurposed a sculpture fragment of a Black servant woman to represent the liberated.

Houdon's painted plaster head of a Black woman (pl. 19), modeled in about 1781, was refashioned into an emblem of freedom when thirteen years later, in 1794, the artist inscribed the sculpture's base with "Restored to Freedom and Equality by the National Convention 16 Pluviôse, year two of the French Republic, One and Indivisible." In its original state the bust was a study or model for the Black servant woman



FIG. 7. BATHER (FROM A FOUNTAIN GROUP), MODELED CA. 1781, CARVED 1782

Jean Antoine Houdon (French, 1741–1828). Marble, H. 47 in. (119.4 cm), W. 43 in. (109.2 cm), D. 28 in. (71.1 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Bequest of Benjamin Altman, 1913 (14.40.673)



FIG. 8. STUDY OF A FOUNTAIN WITH BATHER AND ATTENDANT, 1782–95

Pierre Antoine Mongin (French, 1761/62–1827). Graphite on cream laid paper, 5 1/4 x 4 1/4 in. (14.6 x 11.1 cm). Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, Gift of Richard P. Townsend in memory of his grandparents Harry and Joan R. Renek (2011.2)

in Houdon's 1781–82 polychrome fountain *The Bather*, a work destined for Louis Philippe Joseph d'Orléans's English garden at Monceau. The fountain group featured a seated nude in white marble and her Black attendant, made out of lead, who showered water over the back of her mistress from a gilded ewer.¹⁵ The scene reflected the fashion for the white nude and Black servant, a titillating pair that had become a conventional signifier of slavery, sexuality, and exoticism in the eighteenth century. The combination of Black and white, servant and served, often pointed to a Turkish or Moorish bath, or to the interior of a harem. This exemplifies the eighteenth-century propensity to reroute images of slavery through an imagined, often Orientalized space. Houdon's original fountain was partially destroyed in the Revolution. The damaged white marble female was restored and is in the collection of The Metropolitan

Museum of Art (fig. 7). Yet the only remaining references for the lead sculpture of the Black woman are the plaster study, a painted terracotta reduction with the commemorative inscription (pl. 20), and a drawing by Pierre Antoine Mongin (fig. 8).¹⁶ They are fragments of a servant freed by Houdon's tepid gesture recognizing the abolition of slavery in France.

The art historian James Smalls has pointed out that Houdon's decision to repurpose the head of the Black servant from *The Bather* and transform her into a symbol of freedom was a political response to the fact that the sculptor had not exhibited sufficient loyalty to the revolutionary cause.¹⁷ This kind of expression of Black freedom, rooted in alterity and the subjugation of Blackness, was emblematic of the larger discourse of antislavery imagery that promoted French abolitionists as the upholders of liberty for a victimized population.¹⁸ Indeed, in aligning with the cause, one could boost one's political profile and moral standing. Even as European artists ostensibly

celebrated freedom and the possibility of equality, the imagery did not adequately represent the radical act of abolition but continued to further tropes of benign servitude, the anonymity of the enslaved, and their dependency on the enslavers to bestow freedom and equality.

AMERICAN EXPRESSIONS

As abolitionism spread across Europe and America, and artists attempted to commemorate emancipation and represent Black liberty, the chained figure that was essential to the aesthetic of the vanquished and to abolitionist tropes remained central to visualizing freedom. As the historian and literary scholar Saidiya Hartman has eloquently stated, "The texture of freedom is laden with the vestiges of slavery. . . ."¹⁹ I see chains as the symbolic vestige of slavery that literally linked Black people to an essentialized state of servitude and that would anticipate their subjugation into an uncertain future. The initiation of American abolition did not occur until two years into the devastation of the Civil War. On January 1, 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation freeing America's enslaved population came into effect. That same year, the American sculptor John Quincy Adams Ward exhibited the plaster statuette *The Freedman* at the National Academy of Design in New York.²⁰ Remarkably, the bronze version of *The Freedman* was the first representation of a fully realized Black man in that medium in American art (pl. 22).²¹ The powerful statuette depicts a Black man seated on a tree stump, nude save for a loincloth. Looking upward, he places one hand on the stump, readying himself to stand. The man's chains are broken: he holds several links in his right hand while his left hand remains shackled. The moniker "freedman" and the broken chains are the ultimate indicators of his emancipation yet keep him tethered to enslavement. In 1916 the Black historian Freeman Murray described the paradox of Ward's sculpture with clarity: "The freeman's shackles are broken it is true, but still he is partially fettered; still un-clothed with the rights and prerogatives which freedom is supposed to connote—a 'freedman' but not a free-man."²²

The chained nude male in a loincloth was a leitmotif of the enslaved in European art that was notoriously articulated in the Tacca monument and its progeny. He was also the central character in the "Am I not a man and a brother?" iconography that enjoyed international circulation in the currents of nineteenth-century abolitionist campaigns. Here, Ward moves beyond

the flat, schematized symbol of the Wedgwood design in favor of the three-dimensional, individualized rendering that recalls the spirit of the Tacca slaves. The art historian Steven F. Ostrow has asserted that Ward's *Freedman* is the most eloquent successor and counterpart to Tacca's *Moors* and claims that both sculptors subverted stereotypical imagery and cultural attitudes toward Black people.²³ Although Ward's rendering of the figure's body language does not reflect the passion and struggle of Tacca's *Moors*, the artist does reveal human emotion in his upward gaze. The warm brown hues of Ward's bronze version approximate natural tones of Black skin in ways that the undifferentiated, nonnaturalistic black of Houdon's head of a Black woman and the Wedgwood medallion do not. Ward's sensitive rendering of the emergence of the enslaved Black man met with acclaim. The art historian Kirk Savage notes that the sculpture's classicism, combined with the contemporary subject of Black emancipation, seemed to promise a new sculptural order that could accommodate a classicized Black subject.²⁴ Yet the liminality of the work—falling between slavery and freedom—ultimately renders it inconclusive. In fact, the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation that this work commemorates was not the ultimate act of abolition, as it was limited in its scope and dependent on an uncertain Union victory. Meanwhile, the Civil War still raged on, and slavery would not be abolished until the ratification, two years later, of the Thirteenth Amendment to the US Constitution. This uncertainty permeates Ward's *Freedman*. As Savage states, "*The Freedman* remains somewhere between the two sculptural poles of abjection and triumph."²⁵

The entry of Edmonia Lewis, a mixed-race African American and Native American woman, into the visual discourse surrounding emancipation in Western art was a seismic shift indeed.²⁶ In nineteenth-century America, professional Black artists were few and far between. Enslavement and lack of training and opportunity had created an environment that largely denied Black participation in the so-called fine arts. The costs and training associated with sculpture in particular left little room for the socially marginalized to engage in it. In spite of such obstacles, Lewis proved an exception and forged a successful career as a sculptor. She even moved to Rome in 1865 to study and live in an American expatriate colony of white male and female sculptors.

Lewis was supported by a network of abolitionist patrons and gravitated toward subjects that demonstrated her solidarity with antislavery causes and individuals. *Forever Free*, Lewis's tribute to the emancipated in America,

was completed in Rome in 1867 (pl. 21). The title, a quotation from the Emancipation Proclamation, was inscribed on the base. The circumstances surrounding the sculpture vary greatly from those of the other works considered in this book. Created by a woman of color to commemorate emancipation and executed after the Thirteenth Amendment unequivocally eradicated slavery in the United States, it was dedicated in a public ceremony to the Reverend Leonard A. Grimes, a prominent Black abolitionist minister. *Forever Free* is an early and important case of Black self-representation and was fueled by a network of Black activist stakeholders including Lewis, Grimes, and others who were vested in the struggle for freedom in profound ways.²⁷

The art historian Kirsten Pai Buick observes that *Forever Free* represents a “reconstructed image of the African American family after slavery and becomes a subtle commentary on the hopes for the newly liberated population.”²⁸ Indeed, it features a standing male and a kneeling woman, a family unit, giving thanks for their liberation. The man holds up broken chains in a gesture of strength and empowerment, implying that *he* broke them. His agency is even more apparent when compared to that of Ward’s *Freedman*, who remains seated. Like that of Ward’s bronze, his muscular body suggests the labor and supposed brute physicality of the Black male. Ward assuages any suggestion of aggression, however, with his seated, contemplative figure whose liminal status remains nonthreatening. However, Lewis’s standing man with head held high repudiates the submissive male slave of abolitionist visual culture. Yet the classicizing style and white marble medium drain Lewis’s figure of his skin color, equivocating and mediating the potentially transgressive subject of the muscular, assertive, free, and chromatically Black male.²⁹

The female figure in Lewis’s *Forever Free* has garnered much attention due to her subjugated echo of the “Am I not a man and a brother?” genuflection as well as to her racial indeterminacy.³⁰ Yet as Buick points out, the group adheres to typical Victorian gender ideals, and the woman’s posture of submission and piety show her to be virtuous.³¹ Still, questions do linger as to why Lewis made her freedwoman racially mixed, potentially alluding to the taboo subject of the sexual domination of enslaved women by white men. Why did Lewis choose not to depict an identifiably Black woman? In fact, the sculptural vocabulary for making Black women visible in nineteenth-century neoclassical sculpture was limited at best. The art historian

Charmaine A. Nelson points out that the difficulties that sculptors had in racing the Black female body related to the belief that women of African descent were sexually degenerate, compounded by the irreconcilability of Blackness and beauty.³² Lewis opted for European standards of beauty and a traditional family unit to characterize her freedman and freedwoman. In light of the impossibilities of reanimating slavery and freedom, Lewis’s insistence on beauty and family in *Forever Free* might respond to Hartman’s question, “Can beauty provide an antidote to dishonor, and love a way to ‘exhume buried cries’ and reanimate the dead?”³³

In spite of their different trajectories, Ward, Lewis, and Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux came to a fascinating crossroads in 1867 at the Universal Exhibition in Paris. Just two years after the United States ratified the Thirteenth Amendment, both Lewis and Carpeaux visited the Universal Exhibition and subsequently completed their sculptures dedicated to the question of slavery and abolition—inarguably one of the most important social issues of the nineteenth century.³⁴ Ward’s *Freedman* was displayed at the Universal Exhibition, where it was almost certainly encountered by Lewis and Carpeaux.³⁵ Could Ward’s moving depiction of *The Freedman* have influenced Lewis or Carpeaux? As the first sculpture of a Black man in American art, it was likely to have made an impression. In addition to Ward’s meditation on the possibilities of freedom were other works by American artists, such as Eastman Johnson’s *Negro Life at the South* (1859) and Edwin White’s *Thoughts of the Future (Thoughts of Liberia, Emancipation)* (1861), that spoke to sentimental notions of Black lives under enslavement and to the dream of freedom.³⁶ Although these works would have been received very differently by Lewis and Carpeaux, they expand an international dialogue about slavery and freedom at work in the aftermath of the American Civil War and abolition.

The triumphs as well as the inadequacies and shortcomings that plague these international conceptions of emancipation are all the more apparent under our twenty-first-century scrutiny. Euro-American standards of beauty as well as the processes, themes, styles, and technologies of art-making left little room for accurately representing the abjection of slavery and its aftermath. Yet in their time, the works discussed above revealed bold and moving attempts to depict the fraught transition of enslaved Black people into the social fabric of freedom.

POSTSCRIPT

In 1867, while Edmonia Lewis celebrated emancipation by sculpting *Forever Free* with her own hands in her Rome studio, another Black woman was *being* sculpted while performing slavery in Carpeaux's Paris studio. The as yet unidentified Black model posed for numerous studies for Carpeaux's Fountain of the Observatory, a major commission for the city of Paris featuring allegories of the four continents (see fig. 1). In addition to representing Africa in the fountain, she modeled for a new composition depicting a bound captive. A terracotta sketch by Carpeaux from about 1867 of this model, shown kneeling (pl. 8), recalls the dramatic contortions characteristic of the sculptural tradition of the vanquished discussed above. In the end, Carpeaux did not realize the crouching figure but settled on the striking and disturbing bust in which the rope-bound model portrays a struggling, enslaved Black woman. Modeled in 1868, the work known initially as *Négresse* is now commonly referred to as *Why Born Enslaved!* after the inscription he added to its socle.

While questioning the state of slavery, Carpeaux's bust problematically eroticizes the bound woman, who is in fact not liberated but remains captive. However, her naturalistic features and evocatively pained expression speak to conditions of slavery in ways that Lewis's racially indeterminate, grateful freedwoman elide. Carpeaux's figure is the embodiment of contradictions. Born vanquished, she has been patently and gratuitously sexualized, yet her emerging agency through resistance is palpable. Ironically, Carpeaux captured both the physiognomy and the defiance of the Black model, while Lewis could not, or dared not. Taking on the fragile theme of Black freedom at this moment would lead to divergent ends for both women. Lewis went on to become the most important Black American sculptor of the nineteenth century; *Forever Free* would be her most significant work. Carpeaux's Black model remained anonymous but served as the face for a problematic sculpture that has become one of the most important and influential images of an enslaved person in Western art. Both Lewis and the anonymous model were Black women dispersed in the currents of the Black Atlantic world and in this moment came to embody the complexities of slavery, abolition, and representation in nineteenth-century art.

WHITE FRAGILITY

ABOLITIONIST PORCELAIN IN REVOLUTIONARY FRANCE

This essay explores three abolitionist works made at the Sèvres porcelain manufactory in revolutionary France in order to draw attention to the complicated geopolitical realities that shaped the purportedly universalizing, humanitarian message of abolition across the Atlantic. Scholarly attention has tended to focus on the ceramic antislavery medallion (pl. 10) made by Josiah Wedgwood for the London-based abolitionist movement without taking into consideration the ways in which the medium of porcelain was briefly mobilized in France in the name of racial equality. The three works made in biscuit, an unglazed porcelain, under the supervision of the sculptor Louis Simon Boizot at Sèvres that are explored here show how the revolutionary tradition that began in 1789 redeployed an ancien régime material associated with sweetness and pleasure to new ideological ends. Intended as abstract allegories advocating or celebrating racial equality and freedom, they nonetheless called to mind the violence through which the enslaved freed themselves from their oppressors in the French colony of Saint-Domingue between 1791 and 1804. This earlier history of revolutionary violence haunts all later figurations of Black emancipation, including Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux's sculpture *Why Born Enslaved!* (pl. 1).

In the spring of 1789, the Sèvres manufactory made a biscuit medallion with the image of a kneeling enslaved African man in chains (fig. 9). Executed under the direction of Boizot, then head of the Sèvres sculpture workshop, the figure is turned to the right in a three-quarter profile bas-relief and accompanied by the words, "Ne suis-je pas un homme? Un frère?" (Am I not a man? A brother?). The inscription and the pose of the figure imitate the



FIG. 9. ANTISLAVERY MEDALLION, 1789
Sèvres Manufactory (French, 1756-present).
Hard-paste porcelain biscuit with gilding, 3 3/4 x 1/4 in.
(8.6 x 0.6 cm). Princeton University Art Museum,
Trumbull-Prime Collection (y931)

medallion that the English entrepreneur Wedgwood had produced two years earlier on behalf of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade.¹ However, the Sèvres medallion is not a direct copy: it has a round format and is larger in scale, and its figure has been reworked. In a curious form of punctuation, a period has been added after the final question mark. It is the only known example of porcelain made at the royal manufactory that incorporated an unglazed black ceramic body set against biscuit, the durable, white clay with a matte appearance and texture that Sèvres had perfected first in imitation of

sugar and later as a sculptural medium in its own right.

Neither widely circulated nor celebrated, the Sèvres medallion's aesthetic and commercial failure directly contrasted with the success of the British version, which was enthusiastically donned by fashionable women and admired by abolitionist sympathizers such as Benjamin Franklin.² The French government immediately recognized its insurrectionary potential. In April 1789, after eighteen examples had already been fired, Charles Claude de Flahaut, comte d'Angiviller, the last director of the Bâtiments du Roi, who oversaw Sèvres, abruptly halted its production.³ A letter of April 8, 1789, addressed to Antoine Régnier, the director of the manufactory, expressed d'Angiviller's surprise that

someone had executed at the Manufactory medallions in a white ground representing an enchained and kneeling black man, with the words, "Am I not a man and a brother?" Without a doubt, the motif is good, it is dictated by humanity, but such medallions taken to the colonies could, seen by the blacks, stir them to action. Monsieur le Comte has tasked me with underscoring to you that it is expressly forbidden to go further with this object and if the medallion is already made, to absolutely not deliver it to anyone.⁴

D'Angiviller sought to maintain strict surveillance over the royal manufactories, viewing porcelain as a vital instrument in bolstering the fragile image of monarchy. What is most surprising is the missive's expression of fear: d'Angiviller imagines the biscuit medallion not in the hands of paternalistic white Christian abolitionists, often assumed to be the sole audience for the Wedgwood medallion, but instead cupped in the palms of the enslaved Black viewers who had made France's profits and tropical luxuries in the colonies possible. The emphatic contrast that d'Angiviller establishes between the "white ground" of the unglazed porcelain that uncharacteristically supports a "black man" suggests that he saw the object in starkly racialized terms. What made white biscuit seen by the enslaved appear so incendiary, with the potential to ignite Black action? These anxieties certainly lend credence to the historian Julius S. Scott's description of a "masterless Caribbean," an archipelago of opposition where "local rulers were no more able to control the rapid spread of information than they were able to control the ships or the masterless people with which this information traveled."⁵ For d'Angiviller, the Black figure on the fragile white biscuit called forth the disquieting image of the colonies in revolt.

The imagined Black audience of the Sèvres medallion, as suggested by d'Angiviller's letter, allows us to contemplate the ways that the specter of colonial violence haunted and "stained" the innocuous sweetness of biscuit. D'Angiviller undoubtedly had Saint-Domingue, France's largest and most important colonial territory in the Americas, in mind. In August 1791, slave revolts would spread across Saint-Domingue as the French fought to combat Spanish and British troops who were working with armies of the formerly enslaved led by General Toussaint Louverture. As the situation escalated, France fought to regain control by offering emancipation to the enslaved through the passage of the Law of 16 Pluviôse, Year II (February 4, 1794), which abolished slavery in France and the colonies. It was in this charged context that Boizot created two biscuit sculptures commemorating the abolition of slavery, the only depictions of Black figures other than the medallion to be rendered in biscuit by Sèvres. Boizot's biscuits did not find a wide audience.⁶ Their aesthetic and commercial failures as works could be tied to a fundamental problem of the Revolution: the ephemeral nature of racial equality. Less than a decade after Boizot's sculptures commemorated the Law of 16 Pluviôse, Napoleon Bonaparte sought to reinstate slavery, which he achieved on May 20, 1802.⁷

"The slave-trade and slavery were the economic basis of the French Revolution."⁸ So wrote the historian C. L. R. James in *The Black Jacobins*, the riveting story of how the revolution in the French colony of Saint-Domingue, not the one in France, was "the first revolution in the third world" that gave birth to a myriad of postcolonial futures.⁹ For politicians in the Paris of 1789, economic interests in the island's lucrative plantations played a determining role in bourgeois politics, fomenting the internecine racial violence that ultimately led the formerly enslaved to declare Haiti's independence from France in 1804.¹⁰ A century earlier, France had established plantations dependent on enslaved African labor in Guadeloupe, Martinique, Saint-Domingue, and Guiana that supplied the metropole with tobacco, cocoa, coffee, indigo, cochineal, and, most importantly, sugar. By the late eighteenth century, Saint-Domingue supplied nearly half of all the sugar consumed by Europe and the Americas.¹¹

The lofty moral claims adopted by the transatlantic abolitionist movement tend to mask the stark differences between the French and British historical contexts. In France, abolitionist art was deeply mired in the trenchant politics of a country on the verge of a revolution. The commercial interests of powerful merchants and planters, along with a lack of the support found in England from dissenting religious groups, made the abolitionist activities of the Société des Amis des Noirs (Society of the Friends of the Blacks) particularly challenging in the French context. Established on February 19, 1788, by Jacques Pierre Brissot de Warville, the group maintained an active connection with abolitionists in London; Honoré Gabriel Riqueti, comte de Mirabeau, and Thomas Clarkson, founder of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, were particularly active correspondents. Due to censorship laws, the Société was forced to publish translations of English pamphlets rather than issue their own reports as the London-based abolitionists did. Moreover, the Société was reformist in nature, hoping only for a more gradual "softening" and humane treatment of the enslaved, rather than for a complete end to the institution of slavery and total emancipation, goals that would only be achieved in France in 1848.¹² Few of the members of the Société could have imagined the chain of events that would occur in France during the summer of 1789, which quickly escalated from the extraordinary calling of the Estates-General in May to the storming of the Bastille on July 14. The Revolution, in any case, turned in the abolitionists' favor after the Declaration of the Rights of Man on

August 26, 1789, which famously proclaimed that "all men are born free and remain free in equal rights." Nonetheless, powerful vested interests continued to oppose abolition. When Brissot gained power in the Legislative Assembly, he and members of the Société became silent on the colonial question, for the Assembly's bourgeois leaders would "not touch property, and the slaves were property."¹³ Neither Mirabeau nor Brissot in fact lived to see the passage of the law abolishing slavery under the Jacobin faction in 1794.¹⁴

The Société des Amis des Noirs' adoption on its political pamphlets of the antislavery medallion used by London organizers undoubtedly spurred Sèvres to manufacture its own version, though we do not know for sure if Boizot directly oversaw its production. Although the level of Boizot's involvement in the radical politics that made abolition possible is unclear, at the very least we know that his work at Sèvres responded to the new aesthetic ideals of the Revolution. In spite of his training in sculpture at the royal academy during the ancien régime and his employment at Sèvres since 1773, Boizot eagerly participated in newly formed patriotic arts clubs. He briefly left the manufactory in the fall of 1792 due to difficulties over pay but returned at the height of the Terror in 1793 when Dominique Garat, the interior minister, reinstated him to his old post, where he remained until 1800.¹⁵ Failing to win any of the major sculptural prizes in the public competitions of Year II, Boizot nonetheless proved a prolific supplier of designs for revolutionary prints, including profile portraits of the figures who would appear in his biscuit sculpture *Les noirs libres / La liberté des nègres* (*The Free Blacks / The Negroes' Freedom*; pls. 17, 18).¹⁶ His blunt renderings led the print historian Jules Renouvier to declare him "the most fecund and crudest inventor and designer of allegorical figures relating to the new spirit."¹⁷ Evidently the sculptor had no issues with turning from modeling biscuits of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette to allegorical figures of Reason and Force.¹⁸ As chief sculptor at Sèvres, he provided models and oversaw the production of medallions, sculptural groups, and busts that catered to the radical political ideology espoused by the revolutionary government, which had assumed control over the former royal porcelain manufactory. Revolutionary heroes such as Jean Paul Marat; Louis Michel le Peletier, marquis de Saint-Fargeau; and Mirabeau appeared in the kilns of Sèvres, replacing the Great Men (Grands Hommes) biscuit sculptures that had been fired as part of d'Angiviller's last project before he went into exile in 1791, never to return to France.¹⁹

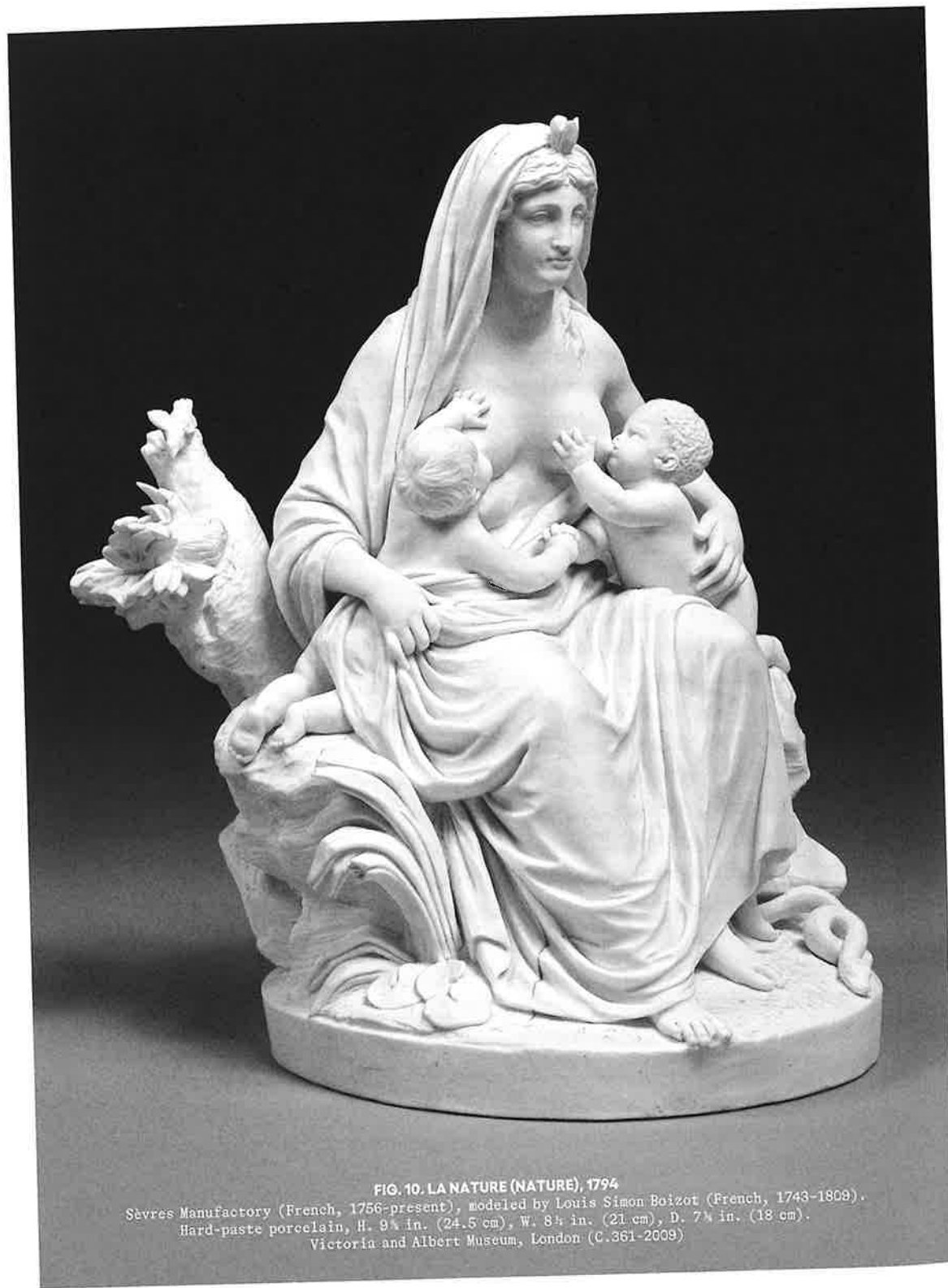


FIG. 10. LA NATURE (NATURE), 1794
 Sèvres Manufactory (French, 1756-present), modeled by Louis Simon Boizot (French, 1743-1809).
 Hard-paste porcelain, H. 9 1/4 in. (24.5 cm), W. 8 1/4 in. (21 cm), D. 7 1/4 in. (18 cm).
 Victoria and Albert Museum, London (C.361-2009)

Far from starting out as a heroic sculptural medium, biscuit had rather modest origins in the ancien régime as a form of decorative sculpture for the tables of wealthy French consumers, whose enjoyment of global pleasures depended upon the transatlantic slave trade. The unglazed ceramic was produced as early as 1752, when the manufactory began selling models based on works of the painter François Boucher that mimicked molded sugar sculptures for the table.²⁰ The appearance of these porcelain sculptures, imitating sugar, coincided with the rise of sugar as a readily available commodity for French consumers, produced on colonial plantations in Saint-Domingue and Martinique that fed the voracious demand through the labor of enslaved Africans whose own lives were considered as nothing more than “fungible commodities.”²¹ European porcelain manufactories that catered to the courtly elite used Black figures to ornament objects meant to hold sugar and sweets. Prior to the creation of Wedgwood’s medallion, gestures of Black servitude, far from being troubling, were merely accompaniments to the pleasures of luxury consumption.²²

Although revolutionaries otherwise castigated the French court and aristocracy for their love of luxury, viewed as a sign of political corruption, the consumption of colonial commodities, especially sugar, continued unabated. Sugar and coffee had become such necessary staples of the French diet that Maximilien Robespierre (who was addicted to both) excluded them from the list of price-regulated foodstuffs issued in accordance with the Law of the General Maximum, arguing that the French were simply too dependent on both to survive without their unregulated consumption.²³ Notwithstanding Robespierre’s and the Jacobins’ principled support for abolition, metropolitan Paris’s addiction to coffee and sugar depended upon the continuation of the slave trade.

Even as the colonies supplied the material sustenance of coffee and sugar to radicals burning the midnight oil in order to write laws and publish pamphlets, Sèvres replaced the busts of the king and the queen, who were guillotined in 1793, with allegories of Mother Nature replenishing and regenerating the nation. She appears in Boizot’s *La nature* (*Nature*), recorded in the kiln registers in June 1794, four months after the passage of the law abolishing slavery. A female allegory of nature seated upon rocks stares into the distance as a European and an African child nurse at each breast (fig. 10). At her bare feet is a coiled serpent, a symbol of the aristocracy. Boizot probably based the



FIG. 11. LA NATURE (NATURE), 1794
Probably after Louis Simon Boizot (French, 1743-1809), engraved by
Duchemin (French, active 18th century). Stipple engraving, 6 1/4 x 5 in.
(16.2 x 12.7 cm). Musée Carnavalet-Histoire de Paris (G.23472)

model on his earlier color print, which articulates the difference in skin tones of the two infants who are nursed by Mother Nature on an equal footing (fig. 11). Boizot's porcelain exploited the gleaming whiteness of biscuit to heighten its associations with both the nourishment of Mother Nature and the notion of purity that was espoused by radical Jacobins as a crucial part of the ideology of the Terror. About ten examples of the sculpture were issued between June 20 and September 7, 1794. A single example was documented

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as being sold, on June 27, 1795, to citoyen Jean Barthélémy Le Couteulx de Canteleu, an aristocratic politician and banker from Rouen, less than a year after he had been released from prison during the Terror.²⁴ This suggests that there were indeed few buyers for this unusual subject, in contrast to Boizot's more "trivial" genre scenes made by the manufactory such as *Insomnia*, or *the Flea Hunter*.²⁵

La nature was produced during the same month that the Festival of the Supreme Being marked Robespierre's consolidation of power, shortly before he was denounced and guillotined. The abolition of slavery had directly depended upon the rise of the radical faction in Paris and its policies.²⁶ Thus, soon after the fall of Robespierre and the denunciation of terrorists during the Thermidorian Reaction, attempts were already being made to overturn the antislavery law. Given the strong ties of the allegory with radical Jacobin politics, one pauses to consider why the banker and aristocrat Canteleu, who would later enjoy considerable success as a financial administrator under Napoleon, purchased such a work. After all, a similar allegorical figure had earlier featured at the Festival of Unity and Indivisibility, an event orchestrated by Jacques Louis David in 1793 to mark the first anniversary of the founding of the Republic. Revolutionary men quenched their thirst for fraternity before the Fountain of Regeneration, a plaster statue of the Egyptian goddess Hathor, whose breasts provided equal nourishment for all (fig. 12). Boizot had earlier



FIG. 12. FOUNTAIN OF REGENERATION, 1796
Isidore Stanislas Helman (French, 1743-1806/09). Engraving and etching,
12 1/4 x 17 1/4 in. (31.6 x 45 cm). Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris,
Département des Estampes et Photographie (RESERVE FOL-QB-201 [132])

participated in what the historian Madelyn Gutwirth has described as the "politics of the breast," famously designing a cup in the shape of a breast for Marie Antoinette's dairy at Rambouillet in 1787, at a time when breastfeeding had become a popular topic of public debate following Rousseau's calls for natural forms of child-rearing (fig. 13). Although the cup may

have contained cow's milk, the form and naturalistic glazing of the vessel would make it appear as if its contents came directly from the human breast. In many ways, the earlier Sèvres Breast Bowl forms a direct contrast with the sculpture made by Boizot. Whereas his print had pictured Mother Nature in human form, the biscuit sculpture transformed her into the ancient, monstrous, multiple-breasted figure of Diana of Ephesus.²⁷ Maternal figures remained unsettling within the masculine discourse of revolutionary politics. As Gutwirth explains, "Overthrow of the French monarch called up a more sentient icon as substitute for the inadequate father: the body of a kindly mother, ultimately too disbelieved in to be viable, was nevertheless proposed, for a time, as a figure capable of conveying ideas of clemency and unity."²⁸

Paternalism, rather than a maternal nurturing, seems implicitly to structure the reading of *Les noirs libres*, recorded in the Sèvres firing books on September 7, 1794 (pl. 16). By the time the sculpture was issued later that month, the political atmosphere had changed considerably from just a few months earlier, when *La nature* had appeared. Boizot chose to depict the children of equality as "grown-up": a seated adolescent African boy and girl wearing revolutionary attributes are accompanied by the phrase, allegedly



FIG. 13. BREAST BOWL, 1787
Sèvres Manufactory (French, 1756-present),
designed by Louis Simon Boizot (French, 1743-1809)
and Jean Jacques Lagrenée (French, 1739-1821).
Soft- and hard-paste porcelain with enamel.
H. 4 1/2 in. (12.5 cm), W. 4 1/2 (12.2 cm), D. 5 1/2 in.
(13.3 cm). Cité de la Céramique, Sèvres and
Limoges (MNC 23399)

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written in Petit-Nègre (putatively a simplified form of French), "Moi libre aussi" (Me also free).²⁹ The girl wears a head-wrap reminiscent of the tignon worn by African and Creole women in the colonies and a large necklace in the shape of a level, a revolutionary symbol of equality. The boy is shown in classicizing drapery and points to his Phrygian bonnet as the symbol of his liberty. We do not know if Boizot based the figures on real individuals, but a child was among the deputation of citizens of color from Saint-Domingue who had visited the Jacobin club in June 1793 to plead for equality.³⁰ Fired between September 7, 1794, and February 17, 1796, examples were delivered to the government on February 20,

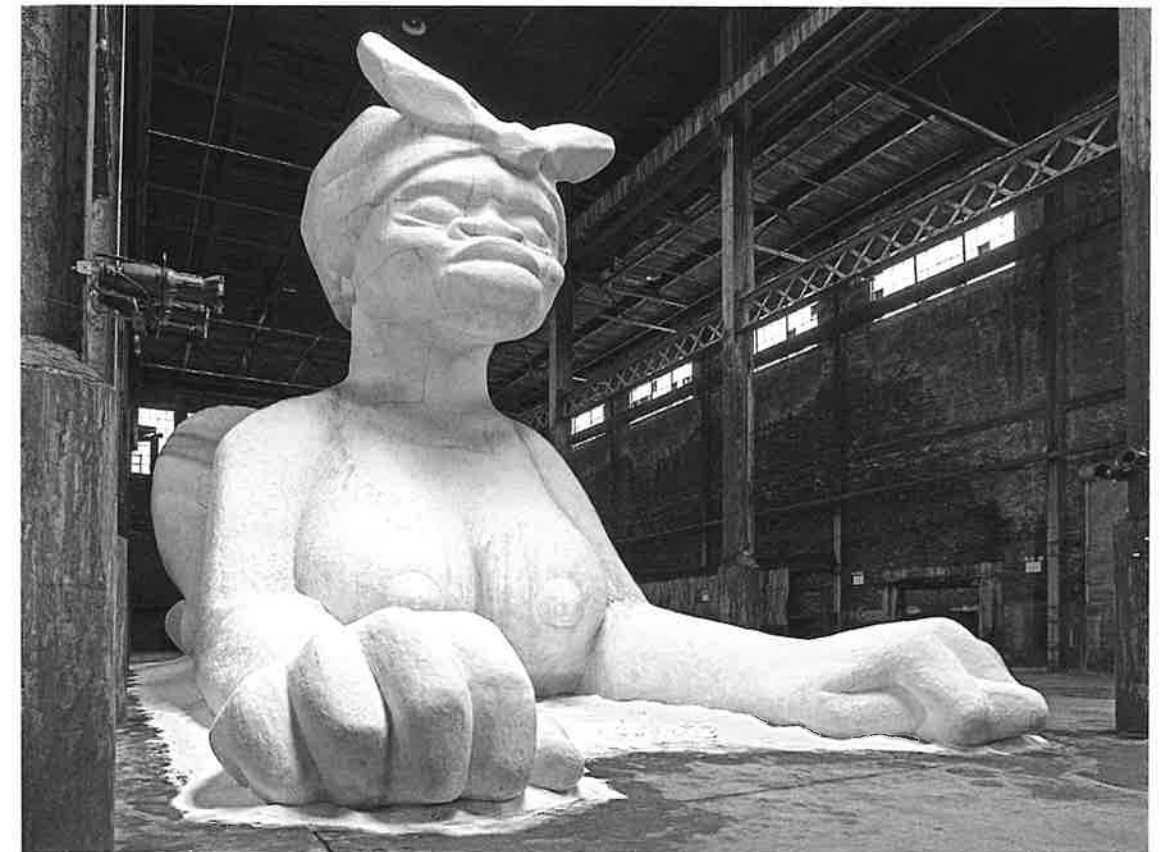


FIG. 14. A SUBTLETY, OR THE MARVELOUS SUGAR BABY, 2014
an Homage to the unpaid and overworked Artisans who have refined our Sweet tastes from the cane fields to the
Kitchens of the New World on the Occasion of the demolition of the Domino Sugar Refining Plant.
Kara Walker (American, b. 1969). Polystyrene foam, sugar, H. 35 1/2 ft. (10.8 m), W. 26 ft. (7.9 m), D. 75 1/2 ft. (23 m).
Domino Sugar Refinery, A project of Creative Time, Brooklyn, NY, 2014

1796. The famed abolitionist Victor Schoelcher, whose father had headed a successful porcelain manufactory in Paris, later purchased an example to commemorate the definitive end of slavery in France and its colonies on April 27, 1848, during the Second Republic.³¹

Infantilized, bleached, and turned into petrified imitations of sugar, these two figures of "liberty" feel small. The political dimensions of their diminutive scale become more obvious when one reads these figures against the monumental sugar sphinx constructed by Kara Walker in *A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby*, a figure of revenge come to remind us that we still live paralyzed in the time of slavery's racial terror (fig. 14). The biscuit

figures can be seen to rehearse the same paternalist rhetoric of the Wedgwood medallion, which spawned an indelible repertoire of kneeling, captive figures in an array of media that made it impossible to picture the liberation of Blackness without seeing simultaneous scenes of subjection.³² It haunts, for example, in hallucinogenic form a drawing by Nicolas André Monsiaux (fig. 15). Ostensibly a heroic composition mimicking David's *Tennis Court Oath, June 20, 1789*, the drawing, possibly a preparatory sketch for a painting, fantasizes the colonized and the enslaved on bended knee imploring the Convention to abolish slavery.³³ Rather than picturing equality, the image is, as the art historian Anne Lafont has pointed out, "decidedly emblematic of the paternalist option, charitable, deferential to the abolitionist cause, of which the project was compassion for infantile and victimized populations, more so than equality (imperceptible in the entire image), leaving no place for the unleashing of rage [*déchaînement*] in the proper sense."³⁴

In revolutionary France, fragile emancipation proved impossible to commemorate without the accompanying images of dissent, revolt, and decolonization. Although the figures of *Les noirs libres* are seated rather than kneeling, there is something deeply perverse in the decision to use biscuit, virtually synonymous with the aesthetic tyranny of whiteness in the eighteenth century, to figure the freedom of Black people in sculptural form. Nonetheless,

beyond the common tropes of paternalist white subjugation that shaped the abolitionist discourse of the past, might it be possible to see the whiteness of Boizot's biscuits in another way: as embodying the double-sided potential for violence, used by the colonizers to subjugate enslaved Africans with racial terror but also wielded by the leaders of the Haitian Revolution to claim independence?³⁵ Indeed, to return to d'Angiviller's letter, biscuit figurations of Blackness, already haunted by the specter



FIG. 15. 16 PLUVIÔSE YEAR II: THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY PROCLAIMED AT THE CONVENTION, AFTER 1795
Nicolas André Monsiaux (French, 1754/55–1837).
Graphite, wash, and gouache, 10½ × 13½ in. (26.1 × 33.2 cm).
Musée Carnavalet-Histoire de Paris (D.6008)

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FIG. 16. DESSALINES RIPPING THE WHITE FROM THE FLAG, 1995
Madsen Mompremier (Haitian, b. 1952).
Oil on canvas, 30½ × 36 in. (77.2 × 91.4 cm).
Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles, Purchase (X95.22.5)

of violence, had the potential to provoke action. We can imagine how this medium of white fragility, no longer about an untouched innocence, became inextricably bound not only to the language of colonial violence and the realities of enslavement, but also to the powers of negation. For after all, Jean Jacques Dessalines, leader of the Haitian Revolution, slashed the white stripe out of the blue, white, and red of the French Republican flag, as he anticipated establishing a newly independent nation, on May 18, 1803. In the contemporary artist Madsen Mompremier's reimagining of this moment (fig. 16), not only has the white been torn from Haiti's new identity, but the breasts formerly representing the fecundity of Mother Nature have been dismembered and grafted onto a tree with exposed roots that bears fruit.

Elyse Nelson

SCULPTING ABOUT SLAVERY IN THE SECOND EMPIRE

Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux's *Why Born Enslaved!* holds a prominent place in the canon of European art. As perhaps the best-known nineteenth-century representation of an enslaved woman of African descent sculpted fully in the round, the bust has been discussed in terms of the artist's virtuosic portrayal of his marginalized subject; his straddling of classical ideals, Romantic exuberance, and ethnographic realism; and the presumed antislavery sentiments that seemingly inspired the work's conception. Until recently, however, what has remained missing from its interpretation is a socially engaged art history—one that accounts for issues of race, gender, and empire, and the power dynamics that play out when a white male sculptor produces a bust of a woman of African descent denuded and bound by rope for a European audience's viewing pleasure.¹ The art historians James Smalls, Hugh Honour, and Denise Murrell have begun to address this lacuna by considering the implications of *Why Born Enslaved!*'s creation and popular success in the context of broader studies of the post-emancipation period.² In this essay, I consider especially the politics of race and imperial patronage in order to reframe an understanding of the work.

Unlike Charles-Henri-Joseph Cordier, who left behind memoirs with carefully crafted statements linking his ethnographic busts to antislavery discourse, Carpeaux during his brief but meteoric career professed no personal sentiments regarding slavery's abolition in the French Atlantic; nor did

he position his creative practice in line with the progressive social causes espoused by the short-lived revolutionary government of the Second Republic (1848–52).³ On the contrary, the facts of Carpeaux's career underscore his clear investments in, on the one hand, catering to the mainstream values and tastes of the Second Empire (1852–70) bourgeoisie and, on the other, securing his reputation as the favorite sculptor of Emperor Napoléon III and Empress Eugénie. Carpeaux's *Why Born Enslaved!* was first and foremost a product of these investments.

Soon after *Why Born Enslaved!* debuted before the viewing public at the 1869 Paris Salon, a version of the bust was purchased for Empress Eugénie's apartments at the Château de Saint-Cloud (fig. 3). While it is thought that the sculpture was acquired using the emperor's personal allowances, by all accounts Napoléon III did not have a particular affinity for the arts and left most decisions regarding imperial commissions and the acquisition of paintings and sculptures to his trusted advisors.⁴ Eugénie, on the other hand, was known to have a keen interest in the fine and decorative arts.⁵ She chose *Why Born Enslaved!* from the vast array of artworks on view at the Salon during a visit on June 12, and was sufficiently invested in its appearance to have the marble that was delivered to Saint-Cloud exchanged for the bronze version she had seen.⁶ The precise motivations behind the acquisition are undocumented; however, the empress probably understood the sculpture as contemporary critics did, as a work that depicts and condemns the conditions of slavery. One such critic, Théophile Gautier, vividly described the bust as a “grim protest” and “piece of rare vigor, where ethnographic exactitude is dramatized through a profound sense of suffering.”⁷ In laying emphasis on the immediacy and emotional tenor of the piece, Gautier underlines how Carpeaux departed from the conventions of neoclassical statuary to depict a sentient subject in a dramatic state of active resistance.

Indeed, its evocation of a Black woman's defiant struggle made Carpeaux's bust unusual for its time.⁸ *Why Born*



FIG. 17. AMERICAN SLAVE
(A DAUGHTER OF EVE—A SCENE ON
THE SHORE OF THE ATLANTIC),
AFTER CA. 1862

Cast by Elkington and Company
(British, 1861–1963), after
original plaster model of
ca. 1853 by John Bell (British,
1811–1895). Bronze patinated
copper electrotypes,
H. 62 in. (157.5 cm).
Present location unknown

Enslaved! found precedent to some degree in John Bell's *American Slave*, a full-length bronze statue of a Black woman bearing the burden of her chains with a downcast gaze and weary expression (fig. 17).⁹ However, in nineteenth-century France, where three-dimensional representations of enslaved and captive figures were largely confined to decorative caryatids or ornamental tableware, independent sculptures depicting the expressive likenesses of either enslaved or free Black figures were rare. What predominated instead were fashionable ethnographic portrayals of subjects of African descent, figured as racialized types and notably devoid of feeling. Cordier's naturalistic busts, for instance, featured ennobled Black figures, often draped in elaborate costumes, wearing tranquil half-smiles (pls. 29, 30, 32). Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi likewise conceived of a personification of Africa for the base of a fountain in Colmar, France, as a muscular male figure, reclined and dispassionate, in the manner of a classical river god (pl. 25, see fig. 22). Conversely, the woman depicted in *Why Born Enslaved!* grimaces, her brow furrowed and her gaze defiant. Her twisting pose, recalling that of Michelangelo's *Rebellious Slave* (fig. 18), a famous Renaissance marble, registers a painful struggle as she endeavors to escape the ropes pulled taut around her flesh. The words on the socle beneath the figure give voice to her anguish: "Pourquoi naître esclave!"



FIG. 18. REBELLIOUS SLAVE, 1513–15
Michelangelo Buonarroti (Italian, 1475–1564).
Marble, H. 84 1/4 in. (215 cm), W. 19 1/2 in. (49 cm),
D. 29 1/2 in. (75.5 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris (MR 1589)

Had *Why Born Enslaved!* been created in the period leading up to the French abolition of slavery in 1848, it would have been considered a timely antislavery appeal. By the time Carpeaux conceived of the bust in 1868, however, slavery had been outlawed in the French Atlantic for twenty years. *Why Born Enslaved!* thus did not contribute to the urgent political issue of abolition. Rather, it profited from the resurgence of antislavery sentiment in abolition's wake, three years after emancipation had finally been achieved in the United States.¹⁰ The sculpture therefore functioned, on one level, as a token of humanitarianism for those who wished to promote their association with the moral cause of abolition after it had been achieved.

Eugénie stood to benefit from the political posturing that *Why Born Enslaved!* enabled. For the empress, art collecting transcended aesthetic concerns: it provided a crucial medium through which to establish her public identity and assert her social values.¹¹ As we shall see, the contingency of those values made such an acquisition a critical tool. For the duration of the American Civil War (1861–65), Napoléon III and Empress Eugénie maintained economic interests in the slaveholding South. But for fear of Union trade embargoes and a loss of support among large pro-abolition segments of the French population, France would have foregone its official position of neutrality in the conflict and sided with the Confederacy.¹² The Union victory came as a major blow to Napoléon III, whose grand ambitions for further imperial expansion into Latin America—a term he coined to unite the French, Spanish, and Portuguese-speaking countries against the English-speaking United States—were subsequently thwarted by the US government's refusal to sanction his project, leading to the total withdrawal of French troops from Mexico in 1866. At the same time, support for the emperor's conservative government was waning at home. In France, he introduced a series of limited social reforms in an effort to curb political discontent, but it proved insufficient to stem the rising tide of republican sentiment. In the face of diminishing public approval, Eugénie may have purchased *Why Born Enslaved!* in a bid to distance herself from the unpopular position of moral ambivalence she had previously assumed with respect to slavery and to protect her reputation as a virtuous empress devoted to charitable causes. The display of Carpeaux's bust was almost certainly intended to impart an image of the sovereign's enlightened compassion and morality in one of the primary imperial residences where she received visitors, including foreign diplomats and members of the court, within her private apartments.¹³

Yet *Why Born Enslaved!* was both a sympathetic representation of an enslaved woman's anguish and an eroticized object for visual consumption. As James Smalls has argued, the sculpture gives form to colonialist fantasies about the physical possession and containment of Black women's bodies.¹⁴ The belated popularity of images of enslaved women in European art during the post-emancipation period strongly suggests that abolition functioned as a pretext for artists and their audiences to indulge in a long-popular subject in Western art: the theme of female captivity.¹⁵ *Why Born Enslaved!* was conceived of by Carpeaux as part of this continuum of captive beauties. A drawing on the back of a letter dated to 1868 shows a cursory sketch for the sculpture positioned next to a standing nude—seemingly drawn from the same model—that recalls the image of a mythological Andromeda, with arms bound before the body (pl. 7).¹⁶ The repetition of the figure in different formats (bust and full-length) and demarcated by various methods of constraint (binding of the torso and the arms) indicates a certain pleasure taken by the artist in his exploration of the creative possibilities provided by his subject.

This sense of pleasure is no less apparent in the final composition, where the representation of the moral issue of bondage also becomes a point of departure for the sensuous play between rope and body. Carpeaux's subject is, in Smalls's words, a "focus of simultaneous indignation against slavery and titillation for it."¹⁷ This oscillation between outrage and arousal brings to mind what Saidiya Hartman has described as the spectacularization of Black pain. She asks, "Can the moral embrace of pain extricate itself from the pleasures borne by subjection? . . . Is the act of 'witnessing' a kind of looking no less entangled with the wielding of power and the extraction of enjoyment?"¹⁸

The fact that *Why Born Enslaved!* was designed to meet consumer desire further complicates this matter. At the time the sculpture was created, Carpeaux was on the brink of financial ruin. The enormous sums invested by the sculptor in the production of *The Dance* (1869), his monumental group for the Paris Opera facade, had left him nearly penniless.¹⁹ As a result, he expanded the commercial arm of his creative practice by producing reduced-scale editions of figures extracted and altered from his public sculptures. Exemplifying this commercial endeavor, *Why Born Enslaved!* was developed out of preparatory studies for the allegorical figure of Africa on the sculptor's bronze fountain group *The Four Parts of the World Supporting the Celestial Sphere* (see fig. 1). With the transposition of the figure from monument to bust, Carpeaux

capitalized on the consumer demand for ethnographic likenesses of Black figures first popularized by Cordier (pls. 27, 29, 30, 32). Hardly impartially conceived paeans to Black beauty or portraits of individuals accompanied by their distinctive cultural attributes, ethnographic sculptures were rendered meaningful to their European audience through their distillation of the perceived essences of foreign cultures into generalized symbols of the nations and people subjugated by the French empire. With *Why Born Enslaved!*, Carpeaux catered to bourgeois French art buyers who enjoyed gazing at and possessing Orientalizing depictions of people they viewed as "other."

The bust thus spoke the humanitarian language of empathy while simultaneously giving powerful visual form to the desire for domination over non-Europeans. And yet its creation twenty years after emancipation undoubtedly said more about the sculptor's investments in empire than it did about his abolitionist sympathies. From early in his career, Carpeaux had endeavored to profit from the creation of propaganda that would support the image and interests of the new ruling family, whose coup d'état in 1851 he had witnessed in Paris. In the following year, Carpeaux began a relief commemorating Napoléon III's reception of the Algerian military leader Emir Abdelkader, whom the emperor had freed after years of confinement for his



FIG. 19. THE EMPEROR RECEIVING ABDELKADER AT THE CHATEAU DE SAINT-CLOUD, 1852–96
Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux (French, 1827–1875). Marble, 5 × 9 ft. ¾ in. (155 × 298 cm).
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Valenciennes (S.92.1)

role in leading the resistance against French colonial infiltration in Algeria (fig. 19). The relief shows the North African hero kneeling before his liberator in a pose that echoes that of the beseeching Black man depicted on the Wedgwood medallion (pl. 10), preparing to kiss the emperor's hand in deferential gratitude. Carpeaux's European audiences would have understood the patronizing gesture of the emperor's extended arm as an indication of the benevolent qualities they were meant to assign to him.²⁰ Not long afterward, Carpeaux began another sculpture, *The Empress Eugénie as Protectress of Orphans and the Arts* (fig. 20), meant to capitalize on the public image of the young empress as a pious and protective benefactress of the poor.²¹ This work did not result in the desired patronage of the empress, and Carpeaux would spend the next years of his career pining for an imperial commission. He would finally receive one in 1864, when Carpeaux was invited to take up residence at the court of Compiègne. There he lived in privileged lodgings just above the apartments of the prince impérial and his mother, the empress, whose portraits he produced in 1865 and 1866, respectively.²²

A year later, in 1867, Carpeaux began preparations for a bronze sculpture to top a fountain that would be situated along the Paris meridian line on the southernmost tip of the Luxembourg Gardens. The commission came from Gabriel Davioud, the city architect responsible for implementing Napoléon III's plans to reconstruct the gardens as part of the sovereign's vast renovations of the city of Paris. After months of sketching in clay in search of a composition and theme suitable for its symbolic location between the Luxembourg Palace and the Paris Observatory, Carpeaux arrived at his chosen subject and began the work that would result in *The Four Parts of the World Supporting the Celestial Sphere* (pl. 9, fig. 21) and also in the creation of *Why Born Enslaved!*²³ The fountain sculpture, completed in 1872 and unveiled in situ two years later,



FIG. 20. THE EMPRESS EUGÉNIE AS PROTECTRESS OF ORPHANS AND THE ARTS, CA. 1855

Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux (French, 1827-1875).
Original terracotta, H. 7½ in. (19.5 cm),
W. 4½ in. (11 cm), D. 5½ in. (15 cm).
Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris (5252)



FIG. 21. THE FOUR PARTS OF THE WORLD SUPPORTING THE CELESTIAL SPHERE, CA. 1872

Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux (French, 1827-1875).
Varnished plaster, H. 9 ft. 2½ in. (2.8 m), W. 69½ in. (1.77 m), D. 57½ in. (1.45 m).
Musée d'Orsay, Paris (RF 817)

depicts the allegorical figures of Europe, Asia, America, and Africa holding up the sky as they move in harmony to the rhythms of eternal time (see fig. 1).

Carpeaux's choice of allegory was grounded in a visual tradition that from the sixteenth century onward was used by Europeans to impart the global reach and supremacy of Christian-dominant Europe over people and places that they deemed less civilized.²⁴ Eighteenth-century engravings and porcelain figurines demonstrate the continuity of this imagery, which was first broadly circulated in graphic media and later translated into ornamental trappings for genteel interiors (pls. 23, 24). The iconography was standardized following Cesare Ripa's 1603 *Iconologia*: a chaste Europe wearing a crown and flowing robes reminiscent of an ancient deity and accompanied by a domesticated horse appears as the putative embodiment of civilization (pl. 23A). In stark contrast, Africa's attributes—her bare chest, an elephant headdress, jewelry, and a lion—distinguish her as “exotic” to European audiences who coveted the precious goods and natural resources indicated by her cornucopia (pl. 23B).²⁵

In the nineteenth century, allegorizations of the continents became an increasingly advantageous and visible expression of dominion on a monu-



FIG. 22. THE BRUAT MONUMENT, 1856–64
Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi (French, 1834–1904).
Bronze and sandstone. Formerly Colmar, France
(destroyed 1940)

mental scale as European nations sought to expand their imperial authority through exploitative trade agreements and the violent annexation of new territories. In 1864, the sculptor Bartholdi completed a fountain (fig. 22, pl. 25) commemorating Admiral Armand Joseph Bruat, who had commanded a naval warship during the French conquest of Algeria in 1830 and later oversaw plantation labor regimes as the governor-general of the French Antilles (1852–55). The fountain depicts Bruat as the personification of an all-powerful Europe standing atop the reclining figures representing each part of the world—Asia, Africa, Oceania, and America—in which the admiral had advanced French colonialism.²⁶ Carpeaux's fountain group, *The Four Parts of the World*, also functioned as

a celebration of France's global supremacy. Placed along the axis connecting one of the most significant seats of imperial governance to the symbolic site of scientific discovery (by sea, land, and sky), it situates Paris as the capital of a vast colonial empire that stretched from territories in the Antilles and Algeria to Vietnam and New Caledonia, with footholds in India and China. Yet, going against earlier allegorical traditions, Carpeaux chose to represent the four parts of the world standing on equal footing, with no one figure presiding over the other. He minimized the presence of props and costumes used to connote cultural difference. Each of the continents is instead represented largely unclothed and as racially distinct; at one point Carpeaux even submitted a request to the fountain's commissioners for permission to apply different patinas to the figures in order to legibly index the “coloring of the races.”²⁷

Charmaine A. Nelson has argued that by rejecting a visual hierarchy of the races and instead highlighting the physiognomic differences between the figures, Carpeaux transgressed colonialist expectations for the representation of European supremacy over Africa and the other continents.²⁸ By 1867, when Carpeaux conceived of the fountain, however, racial differencing was established as the very means of imposing a social order. Europeans had since the eighteenth century constructed the fiction that people could be organized by their appearances into a racial taxonomy.²⁹ According to this new invention—which later comprised the field of ethnography—physiognomy, skin color, and other physical attributes formed the criteria by which a person's internal character and placement within a hierarchy of humankind could be determined. Undergirding this system of observation and categorization was a pernicious attitude of prejudice in which Black Africans were viewed as pathologically opposite and inferior to Europeans who, in the words of Ta-Nehisi Coates, “believed that they were white.”³⁰ The development of such racial hierarchies in the long eighteenth century overlaid the accelerating enslavement of sub-Saharan Africans in the French Antilles. While it is difficult to determine the direction of causality between the two, by the middle of the eighteenth century, Blackness was indistinguishable from enslavement.³¹

In his fountain sculpture, Carpeaux makes this connection explicit. According to the logic of ethnography, the allegorical symbols previously located outside the body that had been used to signal Africa's perceived inferi-

ority and primitivism were no longer needed: the racialized body itself made these internal traits visible. Nonetheless, Carpeaux took pains to introduce a novel attribute to the figure of Africa—chains. By removing the conventional array of exoticizing symbols (but for the lion's pelt that nominally conceals her nakedness), Carpeaux defines the figure of Africa primarily by the racialized representation of her physiognomy and by the presence around her ankle of a broken shackle, the universal signifier of slavery and subjection.

The sculptor undoubtedly drew inspiration for the work from the Universal Exhibition, staged in Paris from April to November 1867.³² One of a series of world's fairs held in the nineteenth century, the exhibition hosted exhibitors from forty-nine countries, mainly France, Great Britain and Ireland, the United States, and Canada, but also other European nations, China, Japan, Egypt, and Turkey, all displaying their products in a positivist demonstration of industrial and capitalist achievement. One correspondent wrote:

The Paris Exhibition will hold up for a little while a mirror to mankind. . . . Men and women from all quarters of the globe will look into each other's faces, see at a glance each other's peculiarities, and meet with frequent opportunities of showing courtesy to each other. . . . There is room for the correction of narrow ideas and national prejudices in every people under heaven.³³

The promise of an edifying experience through the intimate encounter and sympathetic observation of foreigners was central to the exhibition's appeal for its eleven million visitors. Yet far from an egalitarian exercise in cross-cultural contact, the Universal Exhibition aimed to justify colonial domination, as a robust display of Algerian products within the section dedicated to the French Empire made evident.

Staging the event was an occasion for Napoléon III—whose interest in its planning was “known to be intense”—to engage in intra-European competition and flaunt his imperial and colonial authority in public.³⁴ Such opportunities extended to state occasions that similarly demonstrated the nexus of art and empire. On June 11, the imperial couple hosted a luncheon for ninety guests—including the emperor of Russia and the king of Prussia—at the Château de Fontainebleau, where visitors encountered Cordier's *Arab Woman*, a lifesize polychrome lamp stand in the form of a female figure who evokes the exoticized likeness of a subject of French-occupied Algeria, and

Eugénie's so-called musée chinois, or Chinese museum, a vast collection of Asian art whose nucleus consisted of a group of extraordinary Chinese objects that had been seized during a recent expedition.³⁵ Mitigating Napoléon's triumph (and undercutting his authority) was the news, received in Paris soon after the opening of the Universal Exhibition, of Emperor Maximilian's execution at the hands of Mexican republican forces, putting a sober end to France's ambitions in the Americas.

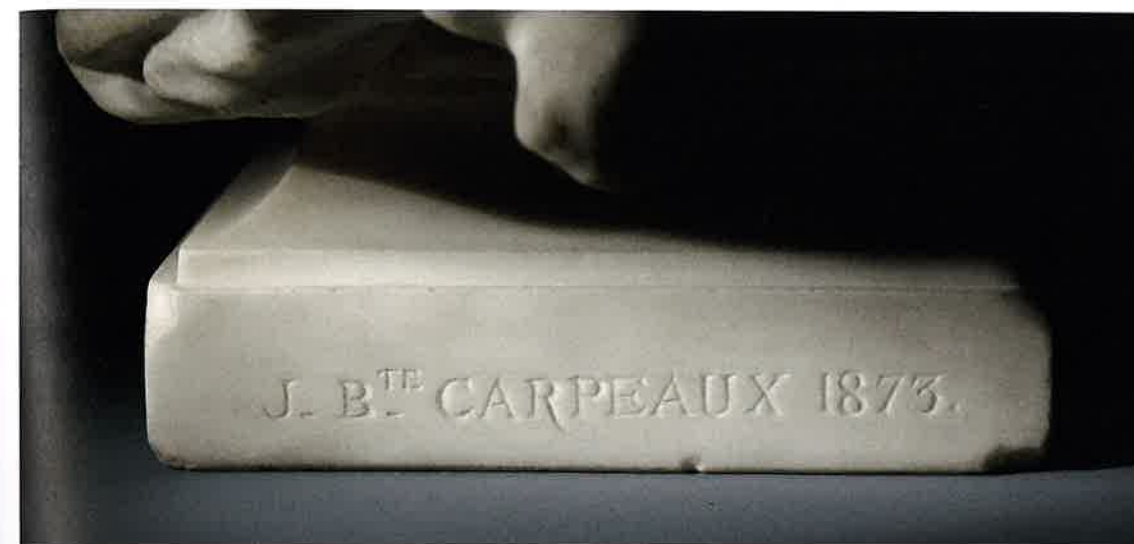
Indeed, the exhibition and the pomp surrounding it laid bare the emperor's ideological vision of France as the epicenter of the civilized world and an expanding empire into which all non-Western “others” might be subsumed—a worldview contiguous with that expressed in Carpeaux's *Four Parts of the World. Why Born Enslaved!*, created in tandem with the fountain's figure of Africa, its shackles transformed into rope, must be seen as stemming from the same impulses and bearing the same accreted and conflicting meanings: the iconographic and racialized implications of the fountain; the imperial ambitions of its commissioners; and Carpeaux's desires, professional and otherwise. As we view this work and its iterations in the spaces of the museum, how does our bearing witness to Black pain also implicate us in the dynamics of pleasure and power intrinsic to its creation?



PL. 1A. WHY BORN ENSLAVED! (NEGRESSE), MODELED 1868, CARVED 1873
Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux (French, 1827-1875)
Marble



PL. 1B. WHY BORN ENSLAVED! (NEGRESSE), MODELED 1868, CARVED 1873
Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux (French, 1827-1875)
Marble



PLS. 1C, 1D. WHY BORN ENSLAVED! (NEGRESSE), MODELED 1868, CARVED 1873
Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux (French, 1827-1875)
Marble