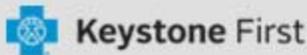




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Lifestyles

'Malcolm X Steles' exhibit brings international artist home

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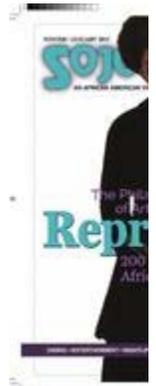
"Barbara Chase-Riboud: The Malcolm X Steles" is on exhibition from Sept. 14 to Jan. 20, 2014 in the Modern and Contemporary Galleries, at the Philadelphia Museum of Art on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway at 26th Street.— PHOTO/ABDUL R. SULAYMAN/TRIBUNE CHIEF PHOTOGRAPHER

For nearly five decades, Barbara Chase-Riboud has integrated mediums and materials in uniquely expressive ways to create a remarkable body of literary and visual arts. The Philadelphia native has been hailed all week long, including celebrating a day in her honor, in preparation of the Philadelphia Museum of Art opening of "Barbara Chase-Riboud: The Malcolm X Steles." The exhibition is the first comprehensive survey of her iconic Malcolm X steles focusing on five sculptures, as well as related sculptures and drawings made between 1966 and 2008. More than 40 works from the United States and Europe comprise the artist's first solo museum exhibition in more than 10 years.

"Of course, I am very pleased with the installation," noted Chase-Riboud. "This is the first time that I have all of these stills together because they have been scattered over three continents. Between Paris, Rome, New York, Philadelphia, you name it, so I am very happy — impressed, really — to see them all together. People always say, 'How do you feel to see your old sculptures?'

To see my old sculptures is like seeing your grown children, as matter-of-fact. You think of them as one thing and they have evolved into something else. They all have their own histories; they all have their own persona, somehow.

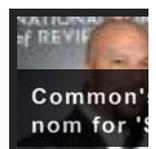
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They've gone to different places and seen different things and have been in different exhibitions and have even been in different countries. They have really taken on the cultures of wherever they have existed and been exhibited from Tehran to China to Japan to Turkey to wherever, and so it is kind of like an international convention. And I hope that they talk and speak one language and they speak a language between themselves, if they can talk between themselves. That is what my goal is really, and of course, that they speak to you and tell you all kinds of wonderful things."

Cast from cut and folded sheets of wax, the sculptures combine bronze, manipulated into undulating folds and crevices, with knotted and braided silk and wool fiber. This expressive melding of forms and materials is evident in the Museum's own "Malcolm X #3 (1969)," which matches the golden hue of polished bronze with cascades of glossy silk thread — a combination that conveys a subtle tension and unity among opposites.

"I don't start with sketches for the sculptures," explained the artist of her process. "The sculptures begin with an image in my head and then I go directly to the sheets of wax and I begin to cut [it] into form and I begin to make what is in my head. So, there is a lot of what you could say is writing in the way of ... In the way that I work and in how I work the way because each of these elements is really formed independently and then gathered together in a kind of image. And, that is the way you write poetry: you have a thought and then a word which begins the problem and then from your own kind of vocabulary you have to pick and choose what you want to use and then assemble and gather it all together and make one seamless object."

The artist developed the first four sculptures in this series in 1969, inspired by the Civil Rights Movement and her political and personal experiences living in France and traveling to North Africa, China and the Soviet Union. Chase-Riboud returned to the series in 2003 and again in 2007–2008, creating a total of nine additional works. Reconciling vertical and horizontal, mineral and organic, light and dark, the artist has forged in the Malcolm X steles powerful beacons dedicated to the possibility of cultural integration.

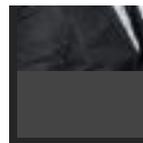
"The reason why I did the Malcolm Steles was simply because of his assassination and what the steles has to do with historical memory. Martin Luther King, for example, was still alive when I began these steles, so when asked why didn't I dedicate these stills to Martin Luther King, well, Martin Luther King was still alive," said the artist.

Born in Philadelphia and educated at the Philadelphia High School for Girls, Temple University's Tyler School of Art and the Yale University School of Design and Architecture, Chase-Riboud has lived in Paris since 1961. She is an internationally acclaimed visual artist whose widely exhibited work has been seen in solo exhibitions at the Musée d'art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; group exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; and the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; and in major arts festivals, including Documenta VI. Her towering public sculpture "Africa Rising" (1998) stands in the African Burial Ground National Monument in Lower Manhattan. Chase-Riboud is also an award-winning poet and writer, known for her books of poetry "From Memphis and Peking" (1974) and "Portrait of a Nude Woman as Cleopatra" (1988) and the historical novels "Sally Hemings" (1979), "Echo of Lions" (1989), and "Hottentot Venus" (2003). In 1996, she was knighted as Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres.

Chase-Riboud's sculptures dedicated to Malcolm X have been likened to contemporary interpretations of the steles erected in various parts of the ancient world to commemorate important people and events. "You can find all kinds of cultural expediency in [the Malcolm X Steles]," said Chase-Riboud. "As Picasso once said, a bad artist copies and a good artist steals, and so I've taken from all kinds of places and all kinds of culture. I have been indiscriminate in away because I don't feel that any kind of attitude which is parochial, which is based on race or gender or whatever has the kind of universality that I'm looking for — and that I am praying for every day."

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Contact Tribune Staff Writer Bobbi Booker at (215) 893-5749 or bbooker@phillytrib.com.



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