

# Barbara Chase-Riboud's works serve as tribute to Malcolm X

**Barbara Chase-Riboud: Bronze, fiber works a tribute to Malcolm X**

David D'Arcy Updated 2:17 pm, Thursday, February 13, 2014

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**IMAGE 1 OF 3**

Barbara Chase-Riboud: Confessions for Myself, 1972; bronze paint, and wool; 120 x 40 x 12 in.; purchased with funds from the H.W. Anderson Charitable Foundation

The sculptures in "**Barbara Chase-Riboud: The Malcolm X Steles**" are interplays of

metal and fabric. Bronze casts are bound and draped with fiber.

Born in Philadelphia in 1939, Chase-Riboud has lived in Europe since the early 1960s. Her first exhibition at the **Berkeley Art Museum** was in 1973, when BAM commissioned her sculpture "Confessions for Myself," also in the current show. Chase-Riboud's 1960s drawings of those sculptures will be on view, as will "Monument Drawings" from 1996 and 1997. **Lucinda Barnes** is the exhibition curator.

Chase-Riboud, also a prolific writer, found controversy with "**Sally Hemings**" (1979), her historical novel about a black woman, born a slave, who was the companion of **Thomas Jefferson**. Attacked when it became an international bestseller, its tale of that liaison is now established as historical fact.

**Q: Why did you name your series of sculptures for Malcolm X?**

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**A:** These steles were a tribute to him, a tribute to his memory. They were not meant to embody his persona, but only as a memorial to who he was and what he had done.

**Q: Why have you spent your adult life in Europe?**

**A:** Why not? I live where I found love, I founded my family, built my house, selected my foundry. There were no foundries in the USA capable of the intricate and dangerous system of casting that I do. The foundries I found were all European. The workers were either French or Italian.

**Q: Is your writing about Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings more controversial than these monuments to Malcolm X?**

**A:** This historical fact was disputed by practically everybody, and it was after 30 years of

argumentative and vicious attacks in this book - and, in a very personal way, on me - that the whole thing was resolved with DNA in 1998.

It was a story that broke in 1803, at the beginning of Jefferson's second term - the kind of scandal, fought tooth and nail by both sides, that you get now on the Internet and in the New York Post.

With my book, the whole South was up in arms because of the position that Jefferson holds in the United States and the position that any black woman holds in the United States.

**Q: What's your current project?**

**A:** A film, I hope, based on my novella about the 28-year relationship between Pannonica Rothschild and **Thelonious Monk**, which started in 1954 - between a muse and a musical genius, between a man and a woman, between the races, between the classes - the opposite of about everything in the world comes together in these two people, who make a life together in a glass house on the shores of the Hudson in New Jersey. It harks back to any story about two opposites meeting each other. These are the big themes of my life and my visual work, this integration of opposites. The working title is "Pannonica and Thelonious."

**This article has been corrected since it appeared in print.**

## If you go

**Barbara Chase-Riboud: **The Malcolm X Steles**:** Through April 27. 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Wednesday-Sunday. \$7-\$10. Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, 2626 Bancroft Way, Berkeley. (510) 642-0808. <http://bampfa.berkeley.edu>.

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