

Philadelphia native Barbara Chase-Riboud is an African American who has lived in Paris since the 1960's. She was at the American Academy in Rome around 1958 and is well acquainted with the classical tradition. She is a prolific novelist best known for *Sally Hemmings* (1979), the slave mistress of Thomas Jefferson, a highly regarded sculptor of *Africa Rising* commissioned for the slave trade memorial in NYC and the winner of the Carl Sandburg prize for poetry for *Portrait of a Nude Woman as Cleopatra* (1988). The last was inspired by a drawing by Rembrandt. She did a series of abstract sculptures entitled *Cleopatra's Robe* (1973), *Marriage Contract* (1973), *Door* (1984), *Chair* (1994), *Bed* (1997) and *Will* (c.1994) which are powerful receptions of her experiences in Italy, Egypt and China and her readings of Plutarch's description of Cleopatra's arrival in Tarsus and her death. Many of the sculptures were produced while living in Rome, and the *Chair* evokes Edmonia Lewis' *Death of Cleopatra* (1876) also wrought in the Eternal city. Her latest novel *Hottentot Venus* (2003) reflects many of these same themes. Her work demonstrates the reception of Cleopatra in the unique form of a 35 year multimedia interdisciplinary dialogue.

Since Chase-Riboud is both a writer and a sculptor, this paper and the accompanying PowerPoint presentation will discuss the antecedents of her work in the context of classical and later traditions about Cleopatra in both art and literature. It will explore her very personal and long running relationship with the Cleopatra story. Finally it will examine her contributions to contemporary receptions of the race, gender and sexuality of Cleopatra, in the spirit of studies by Joyce Green MacDonald, *Women and Race in Early Modern Texts* (Cambridge 2002), Francesca T. Royster, *Becoming Cleopatra: The Shifting Image of an Icon* (Palgrave 2003), and Scott Trafton, *Egypt Land: Race and Nineteenth Century American Egyptomania* (Duke 2004).