

Press Release, Monday 1 August 2022

## BARBARA CHASE-RIBOUD: INFINITE FOLDS

Serpentine presents the first UK solo exhibition of American visual artist, sculptor, novelist and poet Barbara Chase-Riboud

Serpentine North

Tuesday 11 October 2022 – Sunday 29 January 2023

Press View, Tuesday 11 October 2022, 9.30am – 12pm



From left to right: (1) Barbara Chase-Riboud. *Malcolm X #6*, 2003. Bronze and silk on metal. Mott-Warsh Collection, Flint, Michigan. © Barbara Chase-Riboud (2) Barbara Chase-Riboud (b. 1939), *Middle Passage Monument*, Washington, 1997. Charcoal, charcoal pencil, and ink with engraving and aquatint on paper. 80 x 60.6cm. © Barbara Chase-Riboud.



Serpentine is honoured to present *Infinite Folds*, an exhibition featuring over 30 works by American-born visual artist, sculptor, novelist and poet Barbara Chase-Riboud. On display at Serpentine North from 11 October 2022 to 29 January 2023, this is the artist's first institutional solo presentation in the UK.

With a career spanning over seven decades, Chase-Riboud's innovation in sculptural technique and materiality is characterised by the interplay between folds of cast bronze and aluminium and coils of wool and silk which are knotted, braided, looped and woven. By combining materials with different qualities, such as hard versus soft, light against heavy, and tactile versus rigid, Chase-Riboud's works lend an aesthetic consideration to the sculptural base and speak to the artist's interest in creating forms that unify opposing forces.

**Barbara Chase-Riboud says:** "The use of bronze and textile, playing against each other, establishes the heart of my work, a questioning of perception similar to that offered by Baroque sculpture as the conjuncture of folds and pleats of matter which seems a perfect description of my sculpture except that, contrary to the architectural layering, here it is the material that rests in these folds of the soul. Due to the play of materials, my works not only relate to an art of the oxymoron, skillfully combining opposites, but reversing and upsetting the established order and hierarchy of parts as only a true revolutionary does. My art does not cease making folds. There are all kinds of creases, pleats and folds coming from the East, the Greek, Roman, Romanesque, Gothic, Classical, Orient and Africa yet it is truly the Baroque folds and twists and turns that are those pushing movement into infinity: fold upon fold, over fold, under fold, all pushing into the infinity of the fold. These are the unfurled folds of infinity. A double retrospective on two continents is astounding. I am thrilled to see my seminal bodies of work presented together here in the UK at Serpentine where Louise Bourgeois, Frank Bowling and Zaha Hadid have had important exhibitions."

The exhibition features a focused selection of large-scale sculptures alongside works on paper from the 1960s to the present day. The earliest piece in the show, *Walking Angel* (1962), depicts a hybrid being replete with wings that resemble leaves or an oyster shell. This work is emblematic of the artist's experimental approach to casting techniques, which in the early years of her practice involved casting figurative sculptures in bronze from an assemblage of found animal bones and vegetable matter. *Walking Angel* also draws on the artist's interest in ancient myths and surrealist influences that would occupy her later pieces which progressively moved towards abstraction. Also on display are Chase-Riboud's early pieces *Sejanus* (1966) and *Meta Mondrian* (1967), a scale-model



of the artist's first public sculpture commission *Wheaton Plaza Fountain* (1960, now destroyed) constructed from polished aluminum and cascading silk that emulates water.

Chase-Riboud's most celebrated sculptures from her series *The Malcolm X Steles*, dedicated to the legacy of the African American Muslim minister and human rights activist who was assassinated in 1965, takes centre stage in the exhibition. *Infinite Folds* offers visitors the opportunity to not only experience the ways in which Chase-Riboud grappled with the materiality of the 20 'Malcolm's' cast over the course of forty-eight years, but how her continued return to Malcolm X as a subject indicates his profound importance and legacy. Further highlights from this period include the three-metre-tall sculpture *Confessions for Myself* (1972). Comparable to *The Malcolm X Steles*, the dark spectral form constructed from strips and ribbons of black patina'd bronze and braided wool suggests a self-portrait and seemingly marks a return to figuration.

Works on view in the exhibition exemplifies Chase-Riboud's mastery at assembling disparate materials and sculptural techniques to honour historical and cultural figures. These include a selection of sculptures dedicated to the queen of the Ptolemaic Kingdom of Egypt Cleopatra that the artist began in the 1980s following her experience of discovering a Han Dynasty burial in China that contained the emperor's body encased in a traditional ceremonial suit constructed from pieces of jade. The series of 5 works, collectively titled *Cleopatra*, employs similar techniques in which bronze tiles are intricately sewn together with red thread. The resulting five large-scale works, two of which are on display at Serpentine, allude to the memory of the Egyptian Queen and the ways in which the 'concept of women ruling the earth and shaping society in immutable ways continues to be a revolutionary idea'.

Further exploring the artist's fascination with 'power as wielded by women throughout the ages,' the exhibition premieres one of Chase-Riboud's latest sculptures, *La Musica Josephine Red/Black* (2021), a three-metre-tall monument dedicated to the American-born dancer, artist and Civil Rights activist Josephine Baker (1905 – 1976), the first Black woman to star in a major motion picture and to enter the French Panthéon.

**Bettina Korek, CEO, Serpentine, and Hans Ulrich Obrist, Artistic Director, Serpentine, say:** "Barbara Chase-Riboud is a pioneer whose multi-faceted practice explores the timely themes of identity, power and memory. A sculptor, novelist and poet, Chase-Riboud's career spans more than seven decades and over this time she has been a great inspiration to other artists around the world.



Aligned with Serpentine’s goal of spotlighting groundbreaking innovators whose work deserves greater attention. We couldn’t be prouder to present the first UK exhibition by Chase-Riboud.”

Chase-Riboud’s practice centres on a commitment to foregrounding transnational histories and cultures, drawing inspiration from the artist’s experience living, working and travelling across the globe, including Western and Eastern Europe, West Asia and North Africa and South-East Asia. Throughout this trajectory, Chase-Riboud’s encounters with classical architecture and sculpture, alongside historical artefacts from Western and non-Western traditions, evolved into a recurring fascination with the public monument.

Underscoring the artist’s advocacy for those luminary figures who continue to shape our society today but who remain underacknowledged, the exhibition also marks the largest European presentation of the artist’s major series *The Monument Drawings* since their debut at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, in 1999. In them Chase-Riboud has rendered imaginary monuments to unsung political, artistic and literary figures, events and spaces. These include tributes to Shaka Zulu, Alfred Musil, Anna Akhmatova and Lady Macbeth, among many others.

Taken together, these works consider notions of memory, legacy and power, prompting a consideration of who or what event, may be commemorated, and for whom. On view at Serpentine, at the heart of Kensington Gardens where public statuary frames the landscape, Chase-Riboud highlights the often-unacknowledged figures that continue to shape our impressions and understanding of the past and present.

Parallel to her sculptural practice, Chase-Riboud is a distinguished poet and writer of historical fiction. In October 2022, Princeton University Press releases *I Always Knew: A Memoir*, an intimate and vivid portrait of Chase-Riboud’s life as told through the letters she wrote to her mother, Vivian Mae Chase, between 1957 and 1991. The Pulitzer Arts Foundation, in Saint Louis, Missouri, USA, features *Barbara Chase-Riboud Monumentale: The Bronzes* from 16 September 2022 to 5 February 2023. The International Sculpture Center (ISC) will award Chase-Riboud with the 2022 Lifetime Achievement Award for her exemplary contributions to the field of sculpture.

Barbara Chase-Riboud: *Infinite Folds* is curated by Yesomi Umolu, Director of Curatorial Affairs and Public Practice, Serpentine, with Chris Bayley, Assistant Curator, Serpentine.



The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue, co-published with Koenig and available early 2023.

## NOTES TO EDITORS

Barbara Chase-Riboud (b. 1939, Philadelphia, based in Paris since 1960s) began taking art classes at the Philadelphia Art Museum and the Samuel S. Fleisher Art Memorial at the age of eight, before studying at Temple University's Tyler School of Art, where she received training in painting, drawing and sculptural technique. In 1954, at the age of sixteen, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, acquired one of her first woodcut prints and by 1957, she had won a John Hay Whitney Fellowship to study at the American Academy in Rome where she began developing her own unique and distinctive approach to the centuries-long lost-wax casting technique that would occupy her sculptural practice thereafter. Her artistic practice blossomed when she crossed the Atlantic to spend a year as a fellow at the American Academy in Rome in 1957. In 1958, Chase-Riboud returned to the USA with a fellowship to study at the Yale University School of Design and Architecture. She graduated from Yale's School of Architecture in 1960. There she pursued an independent track, gaining training in a variety of sculpture-making skills. Following her studies, Chase-Riboud moved first to London, and a year later settled in Paris.

Her life has included decades of travel and experiences at the centre of artistic, literary and political circles that also included luminaries ranging from Henri Cartier-Bresson, Salvador Dalí, Alexander Calder, James Baldwin and Mao Zedong to Toni Morrison, Pierre Cardin and Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. Chase-Riboud is the recipient of numerous awards, including a Knighthood of the French Légion d'Honneur, the Grand Prix Artistique from the Simone and Cino Del Duca Foundation, the AWARE Prix d'Honneur, the Tannie Award in the Visual Arts in Paris, and the Women's Caucus for Art Lifetime Achievement Award from the College Art Association.

Recent exhibitions from Chase-Riboud include *Alberto Giacometti / Barbara Chase-Riboud: Standing Women of Venice – Standing Black Woman of Venice*, Institut Giacometti, Paris (2021); *Barbara Chase-Riboud: Avatars, La Verrière, Fondation d'entreprise, Hermès*, Brussels (2020); *Barbara Chase-Riboud: The Malcolm X Steles*, Philadelphia Museum of Art; and Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (2013), among many others. Her work is in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Smithsonian Museum of American Art, Yale University Art Museum and the National Ministry of France, among other museums.



In 1974, the artist published her first book of poetry *From Memphis & Peking*, edited by Toni Morrison, and in 1979 she published her first novel *Sally Hemings*. Her poetry collections include *Portrait of a Nude Woman as Cleopatra* (1987) and *Everytime a Knot is Undone, a God is Released* (2014) and her widely translated novels include *Valide: A Novel of the Harem* (1986); *Echo of Lions* (1989); *The President's Daughter* (1994); *Hottentot Venus: A Novel* (2003); and *The Great Mrs. Elias: A Novel* (2022).

### **About Serpentine**

Championing new ideas in contemporary art since 1970, Serpentine has presented pioneering exhibitions for half a century from a wide range of emerging practitioners to the most internationally recognised artists of our time.

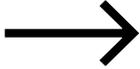
Across two sites only 5 minutes apart, in London's Kensington Gardens, Serpentine presents a year-round, free programme of exhibitions, architecture, education, live events and technological innovation, in the park and beyond.

Proud to maintain free access for all visitors, thanks to its unique location Serpentine also reaches an exceptionally broad audience and maintains a deep connection with its local community.

**Press images available at [serpentinegalleries.org/press](https://serpentinegalleries.org/press)**

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Serpentine North, London

11 October 2022 – 29 January 2023

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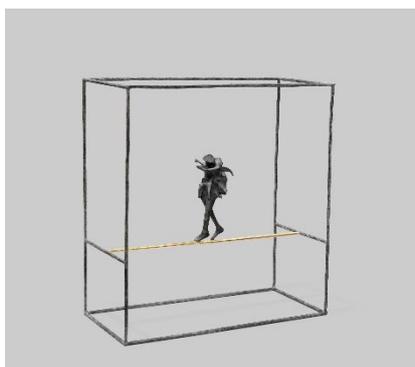
### Checklist of works



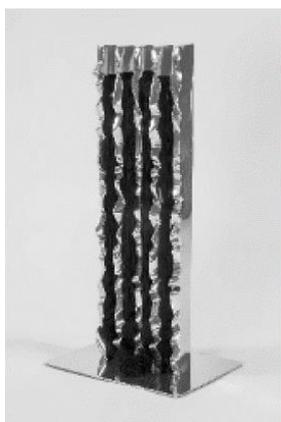
Barbara Chase-Riboud  
*Adam and Eve*, 1958  
Bronze, traces of gold leaf restored on interior canopy  
230 x 150 x 75 cm  
Private Collection



Barbara Chase-Riboud  
*Walking Angel*, 1962  
Bronze  
90 x 20 x 40 cm  
Private Collection



Barbara Chase-Riboud  
*Sejanus*  
Bronze  
80 x 80 x 30 cm  
Private Collection



Barbara Chase-Riboud  
*Meta Mondrian*, 1967  
Aluminium and silk  
217 x 65 x 70 cm  
Private Collection



Barbara Chase-Riboud  
*Bathers*, 1967  
Aluminium and silk  
300 x 300 x 12 cm  
Centre national des arts plastiques, Paris, France



Barbara Chase-Riboud  
*Time Womb (with cord)*, 1967  
Polished aluminium and silk  
180.3 x 81.3 x 43.2 cm  
Private Collection



Barbara Chase-Riboud  
*Malcolm X #2*, 1969  
Black bronze and wool  
233.7 x 108 x 61 cm  
Newark Museum of Art, USA



Barbara Chase-Riboud  
*Time Womb (2)*, 1970  
Aluminium and silk  
160 x 50 x 17 cm  
Private Collection



Barbara Chase-Riboud  
*Time Womb (3)*, 1970  
Aluminium and silk  
154 x 47 x 17.1 cm  
Private Collection



Barbara Chase-Riboud  
*Zanzibar Gold*, 1970  
Polished bronze and silk  
270 x 81 x 49 cm  
Centre national des arts plastiques, Paris, France



Barbara Chase-Riboud  
*Confessions for Myself*, 1972  
Black patina'd bronze and wool  
304.8 x 101.6 x 30.5 cm  
University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive



Barbara Chase-Riboud  
*She Number One*, 1972  
Polished bronze and silk  
19.1 x 52.1 x 44.5 cm  
Birmingham Museum of Art, USA



Barbara Chase-Riboud  
*Standing Black Woman / Black Tower*, 1973  
Cast bronze, wool and marine cord  
280 x 70 x 50 cm  
Private Collection



Barbara Chase-Riboud  
*Zanzibar (Red Element)*, 1974–75  
Polished bronze with black patina, silk, wool and synthetic fibres with steel support  
275 x 88 cm  
Private Collection



Barbara Chase-Riboud  
*Pushkin*, 1985  
Polished bronze and silk  
198.1 x 66 x 38.1 cm  
Private Collection



Barbara Chase-Riboud  
*Cleopatra's Bed*, 1997  
Multicoloured cast bronze plaques over steel armature and silk mattress  
60 x 120 x 60 cm  
Private Collection



Barbara Chase-Riboud  
*Tantra #2*, 1997  
Polished bronze and silk  
200 x 129.9 x 40 cm  
Private Collection



Barbara Chase-Riboud  
*Cleopatra's Wedding Dress*, 2003  
Multicoloured cast bronze plaques and silk on wood base  
250 x 187.3 x 74.9 cm  
Private Collection



Barbara Chase-Riboud  
*Black Obelisk 3*, 2007  
Bronze and wool  
216 x 73 x 73 cm  
Private Collection



Barbara Chase-Riboud  
*Malcolm X #6*, 2003  
Bronze, silk, plaster, wax and metal  
174 x 48 x 48 cm  
Mott-Warsh Collection, Flint, Michigan, USA



Barbara Chase-Riboud

*Malcolm X #20, 2017*

Polished bronze with black patina, wool, polished cotton and synthetic fibres, silk,  
with steel support

248.9 x 101.6 x 55.9 cm

Private Collection



Barbara Chase-Riboud

*Black Standing Woman of Venice, 2021*

Black bronze

246 x 46 x 69 cm

Private Collection



Barbara Chase-Riboud

*Numero Rouge, 2021*

Bronze with black patina, silk, wool and synthetic fibres with steel support

212 x 60 cm

Private Collection



Barbara Chase-Riboud

*La Musica Josephine Red/Black, 2021*

Black patina bronze with red cord

150 x 130 x 190 cm

Private Collection



Barbara Chase-Riboud  
*Untitled*, 1973  
Charcoal on paper  
73.7 x 52.1 cm  
Private Collection



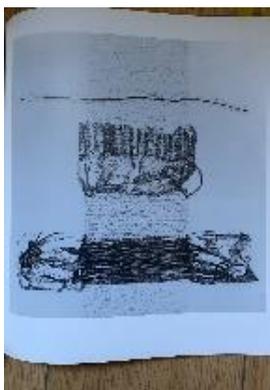
Barbara Chase-Riboud  
*Landscape and Cords*, 1972  
Charcoal, ink and pencil on arches  
55 x 75 cm  
Private Collection



Barbara Chase-Riboud  
*Middle Passage Monument*, Washington, 1997  
Charcoal, charcoal pencil and ink with engraving and aquatint on paper  
80 x 60.4 cm  
Private Collection



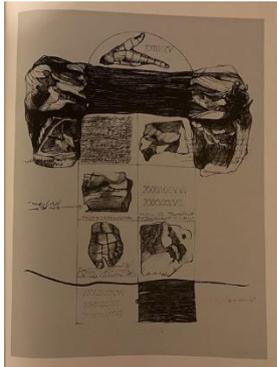
Barbara Chase-Riboud  
*Cardinal Ricci's Monument*, Florence, 1997  
Charcoal, charcoal pencil and ink with engraving and aquatint on paper  
80 x 60.4 cm  
Private Collection



Barbara Chase-Riboud  
*The New Concubine Pearl Monument*, Beijing, 1997  
Charcoal, charcoal pencil and ink with engraving and aquatint on paper  
80 x 60.4 cm  
Private Collection



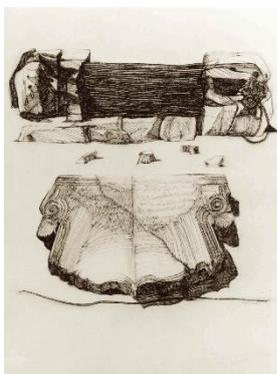
Barbara Chase-Riboud  
*Marquis de Sade Monument*, Paris, 1997  
Charcoal, charcoal pencil and ink with engraving and aquatint on paper  
80 x 60.4 cm  
Private Collection



Barbara Chase-Riboud  
*Nelson Mandela Monument*, Capetown, 1996  
Charcoal, charcoal pencil and ink with engraving and aquatint on paper  
80 x 60.4 cm  
Private Collection



Barbara Chase-Riboud  
*Alfred Musil Monument*, Vienna, 1996  
Charcoal, charcoal pencil and ink with engraving and aquatint on paper  
80 x 60.4 cm  
Private Collection



Barbara Chase-Riboud  
*Queen of Sheba Monument*, Jerusalem, 1997  
Charcoal, charcoal pencil and ink with engraving and aquatint on paper  
80 x 60.4 cm  
Private Collection



**BARBARA  
CHASE-RIBOUD**

**INFINITE FOLDS**

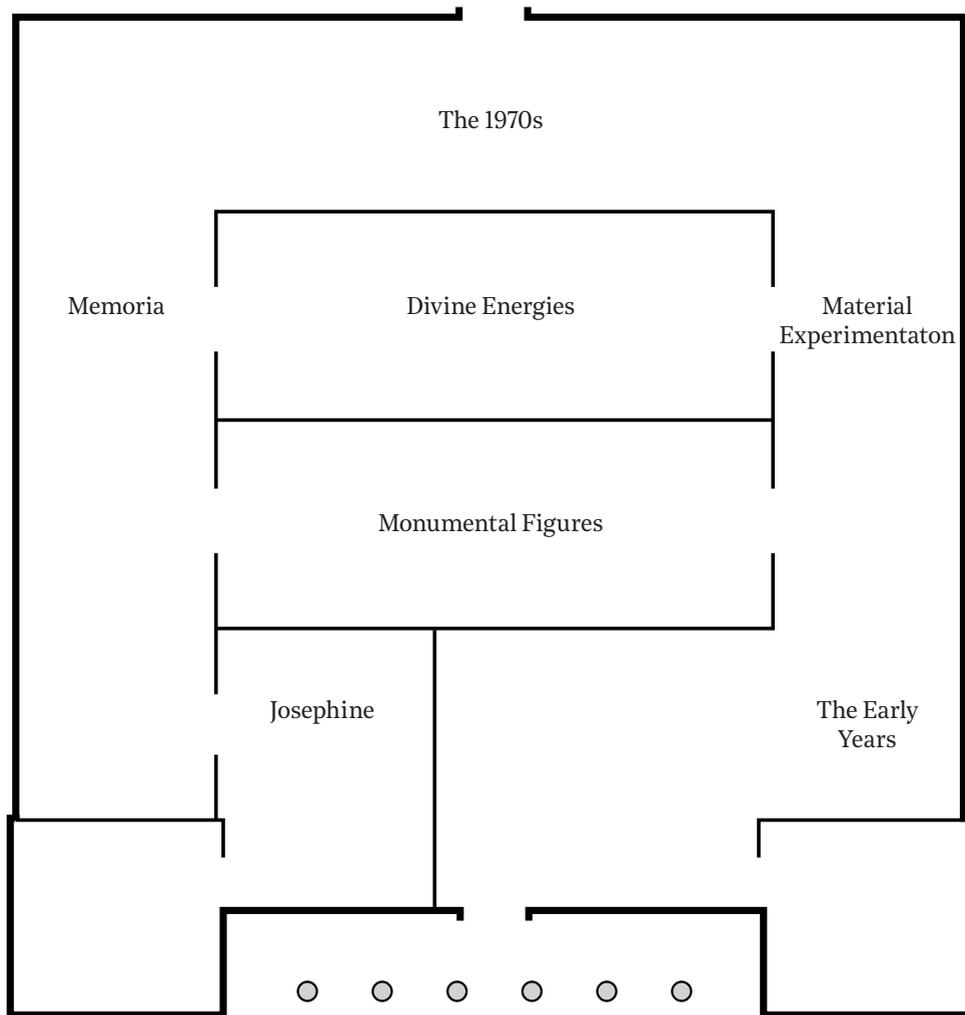
→ 11 OCTOBER 2022 – 29 JANUARY 2023

**SERPENTINE**

# INTRODUCTION

Artist, novelist and poet Barbara Chase-Riboud (b. 1939, Philadelphia, USA, works in Paris, FR and Milan, IT) has innovated across sculptural and literary forms throughout her seven-decade career. Chase-Riboud's exploration of sculptural technique and materiality are defined by the interplay between folds of cast bronze or aluminium and coils of wool and silk which are knotted, braided, looped, and woven. Through the recurring motif of the fold, and by combining materials with opposing qualities such as hard and soft, light and heavy, and tactile and rigid, Chase-Riboud creates forms that, in her own words: "not only relate to an art of the oxymoron, skilfully combining opposites, but reversing and upsetting the established order and hierarchy of parts as only a true revolutionary does."

Featuring a focussed selection of large-scale sculptures alongside works on paper dating from the 1950s to 2021, *Barbara Chase-Riboud: Infinite Folds* marks the first UK presentation of some of her most celebrated works, along with several never-before-



seen pieces. These include the artist's early figurative bronzes cast with found materials; geometric sculptures in aluminium; and grand yet materially fluid fibre totems and obelisks that allude to real and mythical figures in her signature colours of red, black and gold. The newest works in the exhibition, completed in the past year, reveal Chase-Riboud's enduring interest in examining the idea of monumentality.

Committed to foregrounding transnational histories and cultures, Chase-Riboud draws inspiration from her experiences of living, working and travelling across Western and Eastern Europe, West Asia, Africa, and South-East Asia. The artist's encounters with classical architecture, sculpture, and historical artefacts from global traditions, have informed her ongoing fascination with the public monument. In her major series, *The Monument Drawings* (1996–97) – and across a selection of sculptures dating from the late 1960s, on view in this exhibition – Chase-Riboud imagines edifices and memorials that

honour various historical, cultural, artistic, and literary figures. These include, among others, Malcolm X, Josephine Baker, Cleopatra, Marquis de Sade, Nelson Mandela, and the Queen of Sheba. These works consider notions of memory, legacy and power, prompting a consideration of which people and events are commemorated, and for whom. Set within the context of Kensington Gardens, where public statues frame the landscape, these works highlight the seminal yet often-unacknowledged figures or events that continue to shape our impressions of the past and present.



## ***CONFESSIONS FOR MYSELF, 1972***

*Confessions for Myself* was made following Chase-Riboud's travels to China, India and Egypt between 1957 and 1965, a period that informed a "big creative change in [her] work." During this time, she developed a unique process of sculpting with sheets of pliable wax and casting objects directly in the foundry. Marking an important touchstone within Chase-Riboud's oeuvre, *Confessions for Myself* marries abstract and architectural sensibilities. Folded strips and ribbons of bronze intersect around a triangular form, and then unfurl to meet woollen cords that hang towards the ground creating a pyramid. The work incorporates intricately knotted and braided fibres that are emblematic of the artist's sculptures, indicating the influence of cultural objects that bring together hard and soft materials such as African performance masks carved in wood that combine raffia and reed.

# THE EARLY YEARS

On view here are a selection of works made during the late 1950s through to the mid-1960s, a period defined by Chase-Riboud's relocation from the United States to Europe, and her subsequent experimentation with form, material and subject matter. Arriving in Paris in 1960, Chase-Riboud found herself among a diverse community of socio-politically engaged writers, artists and thinkers including James Baldwin, Alexander Calder, Max Ernst, Dorothea Tanning, Lee Miller, and Man Ray. Moreover, through extensive travels to Egypt, Turkey and Sudan, she deepened her knowledge and appreciation of global art and architecture, which continued to shape her artistic production from this point onwards.

*Adam and Eve* (1958), shown publicly here for the first time, depicts two figures intertwined underneath a tree canopy and was created whilst Chase-Riboud completed a fellowship at the American Academy in Rome. This work, alongside *Walking Angel* (1962) and *Sejanus* (1966),

demonstrates the artist's experimental approach to the centuries-old lost-wax casting process. In her use of the technique at the time these works were made, Chase-Riboud would forge figures in bronze from an assemblage of found animal bones and vegetable matter. Chase-Riboud's ethereal figures recall the otherworldly and dream-like scenes that defined surrealist artworks in the early 1960s. Similarly, they share a formal language with the accentuated forms and expressive surfaces of fellow sculptor and writer Alberto Giacometti (1901–1966), whom Chase-Riboud met twice, first in 1962 at his studio in Paris with the photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson, and a few months later in Milan.

# *UNTITLED, 1973*

In the preface to her first published collection of poetry, *From Memphis and Peking* (1974), Chase-Riboud said that poetry is “very close to a discipline both familiar and dear to me: drawing. Both are dangerous searches for perfection...drawings prepared me for the demands of poetry.” In tandem with her work in bronze, Chase-Riboud has produced an extraordinary body of work on paper.

This drawing depicts an illusionary space composed of architectural fragments, rock formations and carved stonework. Emerging from an expanse of black charcoal, the drawing recalls the ruins or archaeological sites of ancient civilisations that the artist encountered throughout her travels. Engaging with the continuous presence of relics of the past in contemporary spaces, this drawing highlights Chase-Riboud’s interest in public memory and commemorative forms. It can be seen as a pre-

cursor to *The Monument Drawings* – on view in the exhibition – in which the artist depicts imaginary monuments to both seminal and underrecognised figures and events throughout history.

# MATERIAL EXPERIMENTATION

Following her travels to the People's Republic of China, Shanghai, Inner Mongolia, India, and Cambodia, Chase-Riboud developed a new attitude towards not only her sculpture – which progressively moved towards abstraction – but also her literary practice, as she authored a number of poems which would later be published in the collection *From Memphis and Peking* (1974). In 1966, Chase-Riboud represented the United States in the first World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar, Senegal, and in 1969, she returned to the continent for the Pan-African Cultural Festival of Algiers. These visits, alongside experiencing a plurality of artistic production from across the continent, made a significant impact on her artistic development which would see the artist begin to challenge the hierarchies of material.

In this period, she also began to work with aluminium, initially with her first public commission for the Wheaton Plaza Shopping Center in Rockville, Maryland, and later, with

works such as *Time Womb* (1967 and 1970) and *Bathers* (1969). By the end of the decade, Chase-Riboud began to challenge what she described as “the tyranny of the base” by fashioning elaborate ‘skirts’ that would hide the sculpture’s armature and seemingly defy gravity. According to Chase-Riboud, the fibre skirt “disassociates [the sculpture] from the ground and its surroundings [in which it becomes] an object of ritual and magic.”



## ***META MONDRIAN MONUMENTALE, 1967***

*Meta Mondrian Monumentale* is a scale model of the artist's first public sculpture – a fountain commissioned for the now-demolished Wheaton Plaza Shopping Center in Rockville, Maryland (built in 1960). *Meta Mondrian Monumentale* is constructed from polished aluminium with silk cords that cascade between the narrow steles to emulate water. Chase-Riboud constructed the fountain at Wheaton Plaza to exist outside, where running water filtered between the stamped aluminium and produced music as it fell between the two panels. Chase-Riboud continued to create public works throughout her career, in 1995 she was commissioned by the US General Services Administration to realise *Africa Rising* (1998), a large-scale bronze memorial dedicated to the free and enslaved Africans interred in the African Burial Site in Lower Manhattan, New York City. The sculpture is now installed permanently in the lobby of the Ted Weiss Federal Building, adjacent to the burial site.

# THE 1970s

“In the early pieces, I had used bronze in a fluid, liquid way, while the wool was static. So, there was this paradoxical transfer of power from the bronze to the silk or wool. It really looked as if the wool was holding up the bronze. The fibre became a column that literally seemed to hold up the bronze. So, the wool became the strong element – let’s call it, for argument’s sake, the male element. And the bronze became the soft, or female, element. I liked the impossibility, the contradiction of that.”

This gallery brings together a selection of works made in the 1970s which highlight the artist’s skilfulness in combining and playing with opposites. In the series *Zanzibar*, inspired by the artist’s poem *Why Did We Leave Zanzibar?* (1969–70), the totem-like forms, constructed from strips and ribbons of bronze with cascades of wool and silk, draw on the artist’s travels to East Africa. Both the poem and the sculptures consider the history of violence, subjugation and resistance on

the island of Zanzibar, which was the centre of the Indian Ocean Slave Trade between the 17th and 19th centuries. Chase-Riboud mirrors this interest in colonial histories in her writing, which developed in the late 1970s to shed light on the history of slavery and unearth the lost narratives of women of African descent.

Also on view here are works that showcase the artist’s continued fascination with monumentality, such as *Pushkin* (1985), which is dedicated to the poet and writer Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837): considered to be the greatest Russian poet and founder of modern Russian literature.

# MONUMENTAL FIGURES

Defined by their verticality, the three works on view here bear a striking resemblance to obelisks. These tall, tapered structures are often found in classical architecture, such as those that are erected outside the entrances to ancient Egyptian temples to commemorate the dead. Chase-Riboud's adeptness at weaving and juxtaposing materials in such a way that the soft fibres become rigid enough to support bronze elements is evident in *Standing Black Woman / Black Tower* (1973). Elsewhere, *Standing Black Woman of Venice* (2021) is an artistic response to Alberto Giacometti's *Women of Venice*, a series of standing female figures he made for the French Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1956. In the 2021 exhibition *Standing Woman of Venice/ Standing Black Woman of Venice* on view at Fondation-Giacometti, Paris, Giacometti's works were displayed alongside Chase-Riboud's, highlighting the dialogue or confrontation of styles between the artists – where the former's works are figurative and employ a

minimum of means, Chase-Riboud's are abstract and expressive.

Taken together, the works on view here highlight the evolution of Chase-Riboud's sculpted creases, pleats and folds, which become more intricately detailed and stylised over time, expressing her exploration of touchstones of the Baroque: grandeur, dynamism, contrast and deep colour.

# DIVINE ENERGIES

Chase-Riboud drew on her fascination with Egyptian art and Chinese antiquities, both encountered during her travels in North Africa and Asia. In the 1980s, she returned to her experience of viewing the Han Dynasty burial tomb which contained the bodies of Prince Liu Sheng and Princess Dou Wan. Both were encased in traditional ceremonial suits constructed from delicate jade plaques and sewn together with gold wire. *Cleopatra's Wedding Dress* (2003) and *Cleopatra's Bed* (1997), both on view here, employ similar techniques by composing objects from thousands of bronze squares, each intricately sewn together with red thread. In these works – part of a discreet series dedicated to the queen of the Ptolemaic Kingdom of Egypt (c. 69–30 BCE) – Chase-Riboud evokes the power, energy and desire associated with Cleopatra through objects that seemingly could be found either in her long-lost tomb, or within the contents of her home.

Chase-Riboud's interest in exploring “power as wielded by women” can also be found in works within her *Tantra* series from the 1990s, an example of which is on display here. These works allude to the goddess Shakti, the female consort to the god of Shiva, who is said to represent cosmic energy, fertility and female creativity, alongside exploring the interconnectedness of the spiritual, poetic and sexual experience.



# MEMORIA

Despite the artist's physical distance from the US, Chase-Riboud has remained deeply engaged with the politics of her home country since the 1960s, when she expressed her solidarity with the civil rights movement as well as the African independence movements. In 1965, the African American Muslim minister and human rights activist Malcolm X (1925–1965) was assassinated. Deeply affected by his loss, four years later Chase-Riboud decided to dedicate a series of sculptures to his remembrance, stating that “it was a matter of memory, of doing a monument – not to his philosophy, but in the Latin sense of *memoria*.” It was during this series, to which she would later return in 2003, 2008 and 2017, that Chase-Riboud described using “silk like you would clay, sculpting it.” The three ‘Malcolms’ on display here not only show how Chase-Riboud grappled with physically manifesting his memory, but how by returning to him over the course of 48 years, she expressed his profound significance to herself and the transformation of society at large.

The subject of remembrance is also the focus of Chase-Riboud's series of works on paper – made in the late 1990s and titled *The Monument Drawings* – which, through imagined monuments, commemorate political, cultural and artistic figures and places with legacies that have transcended the ages. Executed in ink and charcoal, the delicate cross-hatching and marks depicting ropes or cords that emerge from organic matter find echoes in the artist's sculptures. On view here, several drawings from the series include tributes to the French nobleman, politician, philosopher, and writer best known for his erotic work, Marquis de Sade (1740–1841); the Italian Roman Catholic bishop and cardinal, Giovanni Ricci (1498–1574); the father of Austrian philosophical writer Robert Musil, Alfred Musil (1846–1924); anti-apartheid activist and the first president of a democratic South Africa, Nelson Mandela (c.1994–1999); Consort Zhen (1876–1900) concubine of the Guangxu Emperor

of the Qing Dynasty in China; and the Queen of Sheba (c. 10th century BCE), a figure first mentioned in the Hebrew bible.

# *NUMERO ROUGE, 2021*

According to the artist, red in three-dimensional form is the most seductive colour in the spectrum. It evokes a powerful emotional response in the viewer and inevitably the eye is drawn to this luscious hue. Chase-Riboud was captivated by the use of the colour in the art and architecture of Beijing's Forbidden City where architectural features such as roofs and columns are constructed of red tiles or lacquered in red respectively.

In the *La Musica series* (1990–ongoing), *Malcolm X #16* (2016), *All That Rises Must Converge* (2008) and *Numero Rouge* (2021), the bronze is stained through a patination technique that involves applying a thin layer of chemical compounds (patina), resulting in red, crimson and scarlet hues across the sculpture's surface. In *Mao's Organ* (2007), red cords occupy crevices of gilded bronze, and red stretches from edge to edge in a discreet series of three drawings titled *Africa Rising*, *Sarah Baartman Red Drawing #2* and *Sarah Baartman Red*



*Drawing #3* (all 1997). These works on paper relate to Chase-Riboud's public sculpture *Africa Rising* (1998), which commemorates Sarah Baartman, the Khoikoi woman from Southern Africa who was put on display in London and Paris in the 19th century under the name 'Hottentot Venus'.



# *LA MUSICA JOSEPHINE RED/ BLACK, 2021*



Continuing Chase-Riboud's exploration of "the concept of women ruling the earth and shaping society in immutable ways", *La Musica Josephine Red/Black* (2021), which towers at two-metres, honours the American-born dancer, singer, actress, civil rights activist and World War II agent Josephine Baker (1905–1975). She is the first Black woman to star in a major motion picture and to enter the French Panthéon. Chase-Riboud has said that she feels she has a parallel existence to Baker – both American women who made Paris their home and contributed significantly to its creative and cultural milieu. In 1975, Chase-Riboud attended Baker's last performance at The Bobino, the most famous music hall in Paris. The sculpture's articulated black bronze is punctuated by undulating red cords which embodies the grandeur, energy and dynamism of Baker, whom Chase-Riboud vividly remembers as being "transformed before my very eyes into a celestial being towering ten feet tall crowned in a beaded feathered headdress as she glided on stage."

Image credits (in order of appearance):

*Barbara Chase-Riboud with Confessions for Myself at her foundry*, Fonderia Bonvicini, Verona, 1972. Courtesy the artist. Photo: Massimo Vitali.

*Wheaton Plaza Fountain*, 1960. Courtesy the artist.  
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Barbara Chase-Riboud, *Malcolm X #2*, 1969. Bronze and wool, 233.7 × 108 × 61 cm. Purchase 1971 Anonymous Gift Fund Collection of The Newark Museum of Art 71.143. © Barbara Chase-Riboud

Barbara Chase-Riboud, *Numero Rouge*, 2021. Bronze with red patina, silk, wool and synthetic fibres with steel support. 212 × 60 cm. © Barbara Chase-Riboud

*Barbara Chase-Riboud in China*, 1965.

Barbara Chase-Riboud, *La Musica Josephine Red/Black*, 2021. Black patina bronze with red cord. 150 × 130 × 190 cm. © Barbara Chase-Riboud

*Barbara Chase-Riboud: Infinite Folds* is curated by Yesomi Umolu, Director of Curatorial Affairs and Public Practice, Serpentine, with Chris Bayley, Assistant Curator, Serpentine

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