



## Celebrating Women Artists

I am very excited to present this issue of the Research and Scholars Center newsletter, which highlights three amazing women artists: Theresa Bernstein, Selma Burke, and Edmonia Lewis. Photo archivist Emily Moazami writes about the recent completion of the cataloging and digitizing of photographs of works by Theresa Bernstein in the Peter A. Juley & Son Collection. Next, permanent collection database assistant Brittany Beadle tells the fascinating story of Selma Burke. In fact, the photograph at right of Burke in her studio is one of the most requested images in the Juley Collection. Intern Holly Solano writes about discovering a photograph of a lost work by Edmonia Lewis. Solano first contacted me because she wanted to list the work in the Inventory of American Sculpture. She was eager to tell the story of her discovery, and it works perfectly in this woman-themed issue. Finally, reference librarian Alida Pask offers us a selected bibliography of publications highlighting African American women artists. These studies have contributed greatly to our understanding of these often overlooked artists. Finally, editor Cynthia Mills gives us a heads up to what we'll find in the summer issue of *American Art* journal.



**Pictured:** Selma Burke in her studio, photographed by Peter A. Juley & Son, J0100404.

## Theresa Bernstein in the Peter A. Juley & Son Collection

By Emily Moazami



We've been busy in the Photograph Archives researching, cataloging, and digitizing photographs from the Peter A. Juley & Son Collection. Now available online are forty-one images of Theresa Bernstein's artworks.

Painter and printmaker Theresa Bernstein (about 1890–2002) studied art at the Philadelphia School of Design for Women (now Moore College of Art & Design), but spent most of her life and career in New York City and Gloucester, Massachusetts.

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**Pictured, left to right:** Theresa Bernstein in 1930 and in 1970, photographed by Peter A. Juley & Son, J0063638, J0105687.

The Research and Scholars Center Newsletter is a biannual e-newsletter. Our goal is to keep you up-to-date on the Museum's American art research resources and scholarly events. Visit us online at <http://americanart.si.edu/research/>. For suggestions, comments, or questions, e-mail Nicole Semenchuk, newsletter editor, at [SemenchukN@si.edu](mailto:SemenchukN@si.edu)

Considered to be one of the first women to work in the realistic style of that time period, she was described early in her career as a “woman painter who paints like a man.” Bernstein herself often masked the fact that she was a woman by signing her canvases with “T. Bernstein.” In most of her early works, she used vigorous brushstrokes to record scenes of everyday life—the hustle and bustle of streets, a quiet stroll along a lane, a nap at the beach, the energy of music concerts and dancing. Her paintings of important social and historical events, including World War I patriotic parades and suffrage meetings, show Bernstein's political concerns.



Women's rights remained an important subject both in Bernstein's life and in her paintings. At first glance, the 1916 painting *In the Elevated* seems like an ordinary commuter scene of passengers on a train car: a woman sits with an umbrella, a man reads a newspaper. However, considering the painting within the social and political context of the time, the woman depicted sitting alone is a courageous statement. As Patricia Burnham wrote in *Woman's Art Journal* in 1989, “[Bernstein] show[s] a woman, who by attire and demeanor appears middle class, traveling alone, a significant advance in the emancipation of the female.” Bernstein stayed active in social and political causes throughout her life, attending rallies, marching in parades, and upon gaining suffrage, casting her vote.

In 1919, Bernstein married fellow artist William Meyerowitz, and although her artistic endeavors were overshadowed by his work, she was his greatest supporter. Together they played an integral role in the New York and Gloucester art scenes with the likes of Edward Hopper, Georgia O'Keeffe, John Sloan, John Marin, Robert Henri, and Marcel Duchamp to name a few. With more than forty solo exhibitions and artwork in many permanent collections, including the Smithsonian, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Chicago Art Institute, Bernstein held her own among a generation of talented artists. “Her determination was legendary,” reported the *New York Times* upon her death at 111 years old. “When she broke her right hand, she painted with her left. When she could no longer hold a brush, she painted by squirting paint from tubes.”



The photographs of Bernstein and her work capture this unrelenting commitment. The Juleys maintained friendships with many artists and would regularly return to artists' studios to photograph them over the years. In the images of Bernstein, taken forty years apart, you can see how she had aged. Yet, as evinced by her paintings, over those same years her talent kept growing.

Read about the Juley Collection at <http://americanart.si.edu/research/programs/archive/#aboutjuley>

To learn more about Theresa Bernstein, consult the following titles:

Burnham, Patricia M. “Theresa Bernstein.” *Woman's Art Journal* 9, no. 2 (Autumn 1988–Winter 1989): 22–27.

Martin, Douglas. “Theresa Bernstein, an Ash Can School Artist, Dies at 111.” *New York Times*, February 16, 2002.

*Theresa Bernstein: An Early Modernist*. New York: Joan Whalen Fine Art, 2000.

*Theresa Bernstein: Expressions of Cape Ann & New York, 1914–1972: A Centennial Exhibition*. Stamford, CT: Smith-Girard, 1989.

**Pictured, top to bottom:** Theresa Bernstein's *In the Elevated*, 1916, Smith-Girard Collection, and *Tango*, photographed by Peter A. Juley & Son, J0063598, J0063617.

## Selma Burke

By Brittany Beadle

*“I have known African art all of my life. At a time when this sculpture was misunderstood and laughed at, my family had the attitude that these were beautiful objects.” –Selma Burke, 1970\**



As part of my job, I research a lot of artists’ biographies. One of the most fascinating lives I’ve come across is Selma Hortense Burke (1900–1995), an African American artist who achieved more in her life than seems imaginable. In fact, you can find one of Burke’s works in your pocket. But let’s start at the beginning.

Her amazing career had humble beginnings in Mooresville, North Carolina. Her sculpting talent was ignited by playing in the clay from the river near the family farm. She attended college for nursing in Philadelphia. As an adult she lived in New York City and worked as a nurse. Her employer became her benefactor, which permitted Ms. Burke to fully immerse herself in the Harlem Renaissance movement. She studied art in New York and Europe, even mentoring under notable artists Aristide Maillol and Henri Matisse. In 1940, she founded the Selma Burke School of Sculpture in New York City and in 1968 established the Selma Burke Art Center in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

In 1943, Burke won a national competition to sculpt a portrait of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, which he sat for twice. Her bronze plaque of Roosevelt, inscribed with the Four Freedoms, was unveiled in 1945 in the Recorder of Deeds Building in Washington, DC, and still hangs there to this day. It is this profile portrait that appears on the dime you carry in your pocket today. Attribution of the image on the Roosevelt dime has caused controversy as it was first engraved in 1946 by the U.S. Mint’s John Ray Sinnock and may have been based on Burke’s image.

Burke produced a full-length portrait of Martin Luther King Jr., which stands in Marshall Park in Charlotte, North Carolina, her home state. A statue called *Uplift* of an African American woman holding one child while another stands at her leg is at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia. Her smaller works include bronze busts of King and educator Mary McLeod Bethune, as well as the painted red oak *Untitled (Woman and Child)* in American Art’s collection.

Several portraits of Burke are in the Peter A. Juley & Son Collection. In one she stands beside a clay head of a man. This is one of the most frequently requested images from the Juley Collection. In two other photographs, she is shown sculpting a bust portrait of an unidentified man who is seated posing for the portrait. In a fourth photograph, she is shown sculpting a clay larger-than-life nude female figure. Seven photographs of her artworks are also in the Juley Collection.

It is amazing to read about her achievements, but to see her at work is even more rewarding. I hope you’ve found her story as interesting as I have.

\*Quote from Lisa Farrington, *Creating Their Own Image: The History of African-American Women Artists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 107.



**Pictured, top to bottom:** Selma Burke at work in her studio, photographed by Peter A. Juley & Son, J0100405; Selma Burke, *Uplift*, dedicated October 17, 1993, Spelman College, Atlanta, GA, Inventory of American Sculpture, GA000284.

## Edmonia Lewis: Discovering a Photograph of a Lost Sculpture

By Holly Solano

During my research for the National Portrait Gallery's public programs in fall 2010, I came across the African American and Native American artist Mary Edmonia Lewis (1844–1907) while researching nineteenth-century Americans in an African American newspaper database. I was fascinated by the artist and began reading everything I could find about her. Lewis pursued her chosen vocation with tenacity, skill, and originality. Many details of her life are not known and many others, including her birth date, place of birth, and mixed African and Ojibwa ancestry, are debated. One of her best-known works, *The Death of Cleopatra*, was exhibited at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition in 1876. Later presumed lost, the marble *Cleopatra* came into American Art's collection in 1994 and underwent extensive conservation and restoration efforts. It is currently on view at the Museum.

Many of Lewis's works are presumed lost, and finding evidence of them became part of my search. *Adoration of the Magi* was one of those works. It had been a commission for a Baltimore church, and its current location was unknown.

After reading biographies and sifting through files about Lewis in both the Smithsonian Institution Libraries and Library of Congress, I hadn't yet found the name of the church that commissioned the sculpture. I postulated that the African American community might have had more information than the mainstream papers. A search through the Smithsonian's trial ProQuest subscription to the African American newspaper database yielded many articles with details about Lewis's later career, including the name of *Magi*'s location: the Chapel of St. Mary's in Baltimore, Maryland.



The Chapel of St. Mary's was founded in 1873 on Orchard Street, Baltimore, as a mission of Mount Calvary Church. In 1947, a fire completely destroyed the church (and thus Lewis's sculpture). A new church was built on the Orchard Street site but was later demolished due to the construction of a highway. The congregation moved to its current address on Walbrook Avenue in July 1959 and became an independent parish called the Episcopal Church of Saint Mary the Virgin.

Because of the fire, the rebuild, the demolition and move to a new building, I assumed that little to no information about Lewis's sculpture would have survived. But I was still compelled to go visit the church. Parish administrator Leatrice Curtis kindly offered to show me some old photos she thought I might find interesting. One of those photographs was of the original Orchard Street church interior.

Leatrice mentioned that some of the sculptures shown in the photographs were made of marble and came from famous sculptors in Rome, Italy. When I commented that the sculptor Edmonia Lewis had her studio in Rome and worked in marble, Leatrice showed me a framed copy of a 1932 article from the *Afro-American* (Baltimore) hanging on the wall. The piece not only describes the church's history, but also mentions the missing sculpture and the artist. And there it was. In the photograph accompanying the article, shown hanging over the altar, was Lewis's *Adoration of the Magi*.

*Adoration of the Magi* was a large, semicircular bas-relief marble altarpiece about five feet wide. Its style was similar to the other Lewis works, including her 1874 panels of *Hygieia*. The three wise men were on the left, facing baby Jesus, who appeared on the right with Mary and Joseph. The wise men were depicted as Caucasian, Asian, and African, with the African man most prominent.

It is fortunate for the art community that photographic evidence and other documents about the sculpture survive and are maintained by the church. Now that the *Magi*'s former location has been confirmed, additional evidence is being sought from family photos and photos of church events.

Of note in the new church is a stained glass window that features a multicultural *Adoration of the Magi*.

**Pictured:** Edmonia Lewis, *Adoration of the Magi*, destroyed. Photograph courtesy Episcopal Church of Saint Mary the Virgin, Baltimore/ Holly Solano

## In This Issue *Ask Joan of Art*® Spotlights African American Women Artists



Many (although not all) of the artists included in the following publications can be found listed in reference books that focus on African American artists or women artists, but the authors of these exhibition catalogues, historical surveys, and biographical dictionaries sought to bring a greater general awareness to African American women artists. By gathering these books together, I noticed the themes of identity, history, community, and creativity. However, the artists profiled in these publications are diverse in their backgrounds, ideas, and artworks. The diversity of these artists reflects the diversity of American art as a whole. As David Driskell wrote in the exhibition catalogue *Forever Free: Art by African-American Women, 1862-1980*, “This historical exhibition of the work of black women artists moves us closer to achieving the goal of a broader recognition of the many directions and roads the arts of this nation have taken.”

Publications that highlight African American women artists include:

**Farrington, Lisa E.** *Creating Their Own Image: The History of African-American Women Artists*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Farrington provides a historical survey of African American women artists from the period of slavery through the twentieth century. Many color images and detailed readings of artworks place the artists in context within art history and African American history.

**Bontemps, Arna Alexander, ed.** *Forever Free: Art by African-American Women, 1862–1980*. Exhibition catalogue. Alexandria, VA: Stephenson, 1980.

The first exhibition to focus on African American women artists, it was shown in six locations in 1981 and 1982. The exhibition and catalogue examined the work of forty-nine artists, including Edmonia Lewis, Augusta Savage, Selma Burke, and Betye Saar.

**Moutoussamy-Ashe, Jeanne.** *Viewfinders: Black Women Photographers*. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1986.

Frustrated by the lack of information about her predecessors, photographer Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe began to research and interview black women photographers. This book provides biographical details and images of the work of more than one hundred photographers from 1860 through 1980.

Additional titles include:

Bobo, Jacqueline, ed. *Black Women Film and Video Artists*. New York: Routledge, 1998.

*Coast to Coast: A Women of Color National Artists' Book Project*. Radford, VA: Flossie Martin Gallery, 1990.

Collins, Lisa Gail. *The Art of History: African American Women Artists Engage the Past*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002.

Hall, Robert L. *Gathered Visions: Selected Works by African American Women Artists*. Exhibition catalogue. Washington, DC: Anacostia Museum, Smithsonian Institution, 1992.

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**Pictured:** Minnie Evans, *Design Made at Airlie Gardens*, 1967, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the artist, 1972.44

Henkes, Robert. *The Art of Black American Women: Works of Twenty-Four Artists of the Twentieth Century*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1993.

King-Hammond, Leslie. *Gumbo Ya Ya: Anthology of Contemporary African-American Women Artists*. New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 1995.

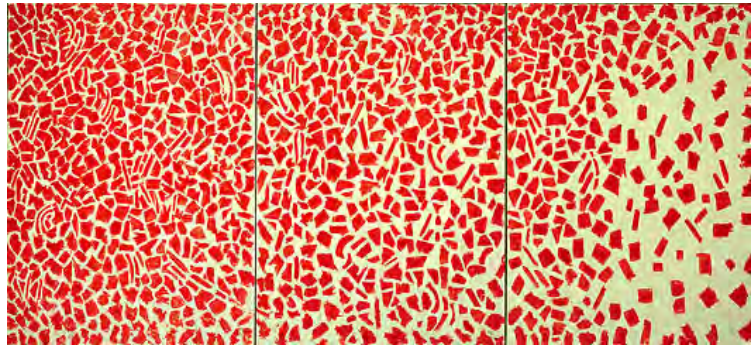
King-Hammond, Leslie, and Tritobia Hayes Benjamin. *Three Generations of African*

*American Women Sculptors: A Study in Paradox*. Exhibition catalogue. Philadelphia: Afro-American Historical and Cultural Museum, 1996.

Robinson, Jontyle Theresa. *Bearing Witness: Contemporary Works by African American Women Artists*. Exhibition catalogue. New York: Spelman College and Rizzoli International Publications, 1996.

*Through Sisters' Eyes: Children's Books Illustrated by African American Women Artists*. Exhibition catalogue. Washington, DC: National Museum of Women in the Arts, 1992.

**Pictured:** Alma Thomas, *Red Azaleas Singing and Dancing Rock and Roll Music*, 1976, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Bequest of the artist, 1980.36.2



The Smithsonian American Art Museum's Ask Joan of Art® reference librarians help track down answers to questions about American art, artists, techniques, and themes. Do you have a question about American art and don't know how to find the answer? Post a question to Ask Joan of Art® at [http://americanart.si.edu/search/search\\_ajoa.cfm](http://americanart.si.edu/search/search_ajoa.cfm).

## American Art Journal

### American Utopias / Dystopias

Eight authors describe utopias of the imagination, the pen, the brush, the built environment, and the garden in the upcoming Summer 2011 issue of *American Art*. Curator Vivien Greene introduces this group of commentaries, explaining that “utopia” is a malleable and elastic concept of an ideal society, sought at times by artists as well as governments. Prudence Ahrens demonstrates how John La Farge’s art manifested his hopes of finding a paradise in distant Tahiti, rather than the realities he discovered when he arrived there in the nineteenth century. Scott Bukatman and Nicholas Yablon, respectively, write about Americans’ turns to fantasy and desire in comic strips and urban rooftops in the early twentieth century. Diane Harris analyzes Julius Shulman’s famous photograph of a glass-walled home that depicts the promise of postwar California lifestyles, and Anthony Alofsin explores the debate over Frank Lloyd Wright’s concept for a visionary though functional settlement in his Broadacre City model. Christina Cogdell investigates and questions the future for bioart and biodesign, while curator Susan Cross describes four new contemporary undertakings in which artists bend rules and traditions to create “revolutionary gardens” and foster sustainable communities. Together, these different voices and essays offer a multidisciplinary cross section of some of the many projects that can constitute utopia, its failures and its creative successes.

The summer issue of the journal also includes an interview with artist Hung Liu, whose work plumbs themes related to her experience living through China’s Cultural Revolution. Mark Whalan writes about “The Majesty of the Moment: Sociality and Privacy in the Young American Photography of Paul Strand,” and Robert Slifkin explores “Donald Judd’s Credibility Gap.” Melissa Trafton writes about John Frederick Kensett’s drawings created for the 1852 book *Lotus-Eating*, and Samantha Baskind remembers artist Jack Levine (1915–2010).

For more information about *American Art*, including how to submit a manuscript or subscribe, please visit [www.americanart.si.edu/research/journal](http://www.americanart.si.edu/research/journal).