

**BARBARA CHASE-RIBOUD'S MULTIMEDIA RECEPTIONS OF CLEOPATRA**

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**ABSTRACT**

Barbara Chase-Riboud is an African American artist, poet and novelist, who was raised and educated in Philadelphia and now divides her time between Paris and Rome. Her long time fascination with Cleopatra VII of Egypt has resulted in six large scale sculptures, three mixed media wall pieces of a projected dozen, her poetry and several allusions in her novels. The result is not only a very personal reception of the historical Cleopatra, but also an intelligent and informed contribution to the ongoing dialogue about Cleopatra's race, gender and sexuality.

These roughly twenty works can all be approached as individual works of art, but taken as a body of work extending over forty years they raise compelling questions. The Egyptian queen has inspired many artists but rarely so prolifically. What has triggered and sustained this fascination? Often receptions of Cleopatra bear little resemblance to the verifiable realities of her life. How much of this reception of Cleopatra can be characterized as historical? Ultimately we cannot hope to escape from the legends and calumnies that have built up around her because her reception has had a life of its own. How has Barbara Chase-Riboud conformed to or altered this process? She has succeeded in drawing together a rich and multifaceted array of influences into a portrait which is quite as "real" to her and her audience as any vain attempt to resurrect the historical queen of Egypt.

To see most of the art works referenced in this article see the following web page:

[http://faculty.rmc.edu/gdaugherty/public\\_html/BCRCleopatra.html](http://faculty.rmc.edu/gdaugherty/public_html/BCRCleopatra.html)