Collection Spotlight

Mary Edmonia Lewis
(American, about July 4, 1844-September 17, 1907)

*Hiawatha’s Marriage (a.k.a. The Marriage of Hiawatha)*
Marble
Modeled 1866, carved 1868
29 ½ x 13 1/8 x 11 5/8 inches on 1 5/8 x 12 5/8 inches diameter base
Inscribed “Edmonia Lewis/ Fecit a Rome 1868” on proper left side of integral plinth; “Hiawatha’s Marriage” inscribed on front of grey marble base.
Gift of the Ida Belle Young Art Acquisition Fund, 2012.1.1-.2
Mary Edmonia Lewis was born in Greenbush (now Rensselaer, across the Hudson River from Albany), New York, on or about July 4, 1844, the child of a Native American mother and an African-American father. Her parents died when she was about nine, and two of her mother’s sisters raised her among the Mississauga band of Chippewa (also known as Ojibwa) around Niagara Falls, on either side of the border between Canada and the United States. Her older brother, who became a successful gold miner in California, financed her early boarding school education at the short-lived Baptist abolitionist New York Central College in McGrawville. After it closed in 1858, she returned to her aunts and with her brother's support in 1859 enrolled in the preparatory department of Oberlin College, the first American institution of higher education to admit women of all races.

Lewis studied a variety of subjects, including drawing, but only one signed drawing from this period survives. Her studies went well, although she was challenged by English, having been raised speaking Chippewa, which lacks several consonants that are in the English language. The 15-year-old orphan was also challenged by dominant culture social expectations for young ladies of her day, having grown up in a Native American community unburdened by the Victorian-era decorum of polite white society. Her direct expressions of thoughts and feelings were sometimes considered brusque or indiscrete.

Lewis boarded with twelve other girls, all white, in the home of the retired Rev. John Keep, the Oberlin trustee who had cast the deciding vote to admit women and African Americans. Oberlin was a hotbed of abolitionist activity on the eve of the Civil War, and when John Brown’s raid on the U.S. arsenal at Harpers Ferry in October 1859 was suppressed and Brown and his co-conspirators, two of whom were from Oberlin, were condemned to death, the town responded with protest meetings. When Brown was hanged, the chapel bell tolled for an hour. A Christmas Day memorial service for the two Oberlin men who were executed was attended by their bereaved parents, Lewis, faculty and students, indeed most of Oberlin—about a quarter of whom were free African Americans. Surely the experience was seared into the memory of the young woman of mixed-race heritage whose features captured in a photograph made around 1870 (fig. 1) appear more African than Native American.

Race relations in Oberlin were progressive by American nineteenth-century standards, but the town and countryside around it were not free from prejudice, as Lewis soon learned the hard way. The orphan remained in the Keep’s home over Christmas break in 1861, and when two of her housemates returned from their homes in nearby towns for a sleigh-ride date with two young men, the girls accused her of poisoning them with cantharides, or “Spanish fly,” then considered an aphrodisiac, in hot mulled wine Lewis supposedly served them before the ride. How wine got into the collegiate community that required complete abstinence from alcohol was never explained, but the two girls fell ill on the sleigh ride and were reportedly “at death’s door” for days before recovering. Lewis convinced Rev. Keep and the head of Oberlin’s Ladies Department, Mrs. Marianne Dascomb, of her innocence, but the afflicted girls’ parents brought legal charges. Prior to her indictment hearing, Lewis was abducted in the dark outside her
home, brutally beaten, and left for dead in the snow. Once her absence was noticed, a search party was hastily formed—threats to her safety being well known—and she was soon found. She recovered, but could not identify her assailants. At her trial, she was successfully defended pro bono by John Mercer Langston, a black Oberlin attorney who later founded Howard Law School and served as a congressman and U.S. consul to Haiti.

The whole ugly incident had negative ramifications for Lewis, Keep, Dascomb, the college, and the community. Moreover, the sexual aspects of the case reverberated in the puritanical religious climate of the college, raising questions about the judgment of Keep and Dascomb. Lewis was subsequently ostracized, accused of petty thievery, and denied the opportunity to register for her final school term by Dascomb, the ultimate authority for women in the school. Lewis left Oberlin in early 1863 without a degree, but with a letter of introduction from Keep to Boston abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison.

In Boston, Lewis sought to study sculpture, so Garrison secured a place for her in the studio of sculptor Edward Brackett (1818-1908), who permitted Lewis to make medallions from the bust of John Brown he had modeled based on his visit to Brown’s cell prior to his execution.8 She soon modeled a posthumous portrait bust of the white Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, the commander of the first infantry regiment of African Americans, the 54th Massachusetts Volunteers (which included 21 men from Oberlin), that Lewis had seen marching off to war in May 1863.9 The popular portrait sold a hundred plaster copies, and the proceeds enabled Lewis to sail for Florence, Italy in August 1865 and in 1866 to establish her studio in Rome, where a sizeable community of American expatriate Neoclassic sculptors lived and worked close to the source of marble, local marble artisans, and antique sculptures that served as inspiration and design sources.

Americans on the Grand Tour frequented the studios of Horatio Greenough (1805-1852), Hiram Powers (1805-1873), and William Wetmore Story (1819-1895), the best known American Neoclassic sculptors of the day, as well as those of Lewis, Harriet Hosmer (1830-1908), Anne Whitney (1821-1915), Margaret Foley (1820-1877), Louisa Lander (1826-1923), and Emma Stebbins (1815-1882)—“that strange sisterhood of American ‘lady sculptors’” who Henry James wrote in his biography of Story had “at one time settled on the seven hills [of Rome] in a white marmorean flock.”10 Immediately upon her arrival in Rome, Hosmer welcomed Lewis and introduced her to Charlotte Cushman, a successful American actress whose residence in Rome harbored several female artists. Cushman favored women who challenged restrictive attitudes, and for a while she made Lewis her protégé. Hosmer ensconced Lewis in her former studio, which had previously been the atelier of Antonio Canova (Italian, 1757-1822) and thus had historical and fashionable significance.11

The short, dark, exotic Lewis appeared cheerfully naïve and quickly became the topic of greatest interest in the most important international art colony in the world at that time. Like the other expatriate American women sculptors in Rome—who collectively constituted an unprecedented group of prominent women artists—Lewis was strong-willed and independent.12 Her friend, the Boston writer Lydia Maria Child noted her “indomitable spirit of energy and perseverance.”13 She also described her as brown and slight, “with that quickness and brusqueness of voice and motion which indicates a want of drill in conventional rules of society, but [with] a degree of natural modesty and frankness far more agreeable to me than the uniform smoothness of fashionable manners.”14 The fledgling artist also impressed Child with her Chippewa indifference to material possessions and her persistence despite impoverished circumstances. The sculptor confided in Child that she had “always wanted to make the form of things. My mother was famous for inventing new patterns for embroidery, and perhaps the same thing is coming out in me.”15
Indeed, marvelous things were coming out of Edmonia Lewis. She followed her early portrait medallions and busts of abolitionists with statuary related to her African-American heritage.\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Forever Free} (1867-1868), the first sculpture by an African American to celebrate emancipation, featured a freed male slave with broken shackles and a kneeling African-American woman, her hands clasped in a prayer of deliverance.\textsuperscript{17} An earlier work, \textit{The Freedwoman and her Child}, is now lost, but \textit{Hagar} (1869) survives.\textsuperscript{18} It is a nearly life-size figure representing a biblical Egyptian slave who had been freed by Abraham, who then married her, fathered a child with her, and later drove her and their child into the wilderness. Nineteenth-century audiences equated “Egyptian” with “African,” so the reference to the cruel system of slavery was clear to the artist’s contemporaries.\textsuperscript{19} Less evident were the personal connotations for Lewis, who had been persecuted and expelled from Oberlin, but who kept those experiences to herself.\textsuperscript{20}

During her first years in Rome, Lewis also produced several sculptures related to her Native American heritage that were inspired by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s popular epic poem, \textit{The Song of Hiawatha}, published in 1855.\textsuperscript{21} The protagonist of the poem, which was based on Ojibwa and other Native American mythology, was Hiawatha, son of Mudjekeewis, the West Wind, and Wenonah, the daughter of Nokomis, who had fallen from the full moon. Hiawatha lived “on the shores of Gitche Gu’me, by the Big Sea, shinning water,” along the southern shore of Lake Superior in what is now the upper peninsula of Michigan. En route to do battle with his father, who had abandoned his mother and caused her death, Hiawatha had obtained arrows from “the Ancient Arrow-maker” of the Dacotah tribe and had admired his daughter, Minnehaha, or Laughing Water. Returning home from his combat with the West Wind, he stopped again at their wigwam to ask for Minnehaha’s hand in marriage.

It was this scene in chapter 10, “Hiawatha’s Wooing,” that Lewis depicted in a small sculpture she first titled \textit{The Wooing of Hiawatha} (fig. 2).\textsuperscript{22} In the marble, which is inscribed “Edmonia Lewis. Roma. 1866,” Minnehaha is seated by her father, “Plaiting mats of flags and rushes.” A roebuck, or small deer, lies dead at their feet, a gift from Hiawatha who had just appeared from the woodlands. In the poem, Minnehaha heard Hiawatha say to her father:

\begin{verbatim}
After many years of warfare,
Many years of strife and bloodshed,
There is peace between Ojibways
And the tribe of the Dacotahs.”
Thus continued Hiawatha,
And then added, speaking slowly,
“That this peace may last forever,
And our hands be clasped more closely,
And our hearts be more united,
Give me as my wife this maiden,
Minnehaha, Laughing Water,
Loveliest of Dacotah women!\textsuperscript{23}
\end{verbatim}

The old man, to his credit, “Paused a moment ere he answered…and made answer very gravely: ‘Yes, if Minnehaha wishes; Let your heart speak, Minnehaha!’” Minnehaha merely “went to Hiawatha, Softly took the seat beside him” and said, “‘I will follow you, my husband!’ This was Hiawatha’s wooing!” Four lines later, without ceremony, “From the wigwam he departed, Leading with him Laughing Water; Hand in hand they went together….“

\textit{The Wooing of Hiawatha} proved popular. By 1875, Lewis had produced at least four copies of the sculpture, two of which are in the Smithsonian American Art Museum, one in Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, and one at Tuskegee University.\textsuperscript{24} Lewis retitled them \textit{The Old Arrow-}
maker and His Daughter, perhaps because the Wooing title in the absence of any physical representation of Hiawatha (other than the roebuck) was confusing to viewers. Indeed, a reviewer in 1871 described The Wooing as representing Minnehaha with Hiawatha rather than her father by her side, and this led Sotheby’s to state that the subject matter of a version of The Wooing it sold in 1994 did not match the 1871 description.  

Lewis soon created a companion piece to The Wooing, The Marriage of Hiawatha, which depicts the Indian couple striding from the wigwam hand in hand. The earliest dated version of this sculpture, a marble in the collection of Bill Cosby, is engraved 1866. As with The Wooing, Lewis soon carved multiple copies of this sculpture, either in response to client demand or in anticipation of it. The MMFA version, which is inscribed “Edmonia Lewis/ Fecit a [made it in] Rome 1868” on the proper left side of the integral plinth, is one of the earliest extant copies. The marble currently in the collection of Walter O. Evans is also dated circa 1868, and there are three known versions from the 1870s in public collections in Cincinnati (1871), Kalamazoo (1872), and Orange, Texas (1874), as well as an undated version that was destroyed by fire in 1945. In response to the popularity of these sculptures, or to the popularity of Longfellow’s Song of Hiawatha, or possibly on speculation of her sculpture’s popularity, Lewis also carved multiple versions of less expensive busts of Hiawatha and Minnehaha that are dated 1868 and are now in public collections.

The six known extant versions of The Marriage of Hiawatha are very similar but not identical. In these sculptures, Hiawatha and his bride step forward, right foot first, each assuming the stride of the Apollo Belvedere (ca. 120-140, The Vatican Museums), one of the most popular ancient compositional models for American Neoclassic sculpture. They clasp their right hands and Hiawatha wraps his left arm around Minnehaha’s back, placing his left hand on her left shoulder. In the two early versions in private collections—Cosby (1866), and Evans (1868)—Minnehaha holds her left hand and arm across her waist. In the MMFA (fig. 3) and later versions (figs. 4 and 5) her left arm is bent more at the elbow and her left hand rests on her chest. The hands of all four of the later versions lack anatomical accuracy. The hands of the MMFA version (fig. 6) are much larger and more fleshy than reality would dictate. They appear distinctly out of character with the slender proportions of the figures’ arms and legs.

Since hands and faces are the most difficult parts of the human figure to depict in painting and sculpture, the disproportionate size and rotund shape of the hands in the later versions may indicate a different “hand” in their carving. In Rome during the third quarter of the nineteenth century it was common practice for Neoclassic sculptors to employ Italian artisans to carve some or all of their statuary from original models the artists modeled in clay and had cast in plaster by studio assistants. Lewis may have followed that practice for her earliest works in Rome when she had little marble-carving experience, but she and other American expatriate women sculptors encountered criticism—in some cases disbelief—that they were capable of the heavy work of making statuary, especially the effort required to carve and polish marble. Lewis was subject to additional prejudice due to her race. Some clients insisted on watching her carve to assure themselves of her ability. In response to these concerns, as well as financial difficulties during her early years in Rome, she appears to have made as much of her own sculpture as possible. Indeed, in February 1868 (the same year she signed and dated the MMFA version), Lewis’s friend, the American sculptor Anne Whitney, wrote her sister that Lewis was “haunted by the bugbear of a fear that people will say she doesn’t do her own work.” In short, the inaccurate anatomy, disproportionate size, and swollen shape of the hands in the MMFA and later versions of the Marriage of Hiawatha may be evidence of the sculptor’s hand in the final execution of these marbles.
Other evidence of the sculptor’s fledgling expertise is seen in Hiawatha’s unrealistically short, stout quiver and the rigidly regular arrangement of the large and square butt ends of the arrows projecting from the quiver (fig. 7). All four of the later versions feature this treatment, which is less demanding to execute than the irregular arrangement of narrow-shafted arrows seen in the Cosby Collection version of 1866. In that version the arrows are arrayed around the inside perimeter of the quiver and there is a cavity in the middle that would be challenging and time-consuming to drill out of the solid marble.35

Also, the marble plinth of the MMFA version (fig. 3) is decidedly plainer than those the more experienced Lewis carved in the 1870s, each of which features two or three small flower blossoms on the ground around the figures’ feet (figs. 5 and 8). The 1866 version in the Cosby Collection has a single flower with five distinct petals. Such floral details could be executed quickly by facile stone carvers to customize sculptures in response to design criteria or client requests. Their absence from the MMFA version and presence on the later versions may indicate that Lewis either improved her skills or accepted the assistance of talented local stone carvers. The irregularly shaped bevel on the integral base of the 1874 version (fig. 9) and the coarsely carved inscriptions and dates of all four later versions manifest the artist’s on-going challenge to shape and space letters and numbers consistently. The inscription on the integral plinth of the MMFA version (fig. 10) is a bit more regular than the others, but it is much smaller in scale and consequently the carving is more shallow.

The carving of the surface decoration of Minnehaha’s dress in the MMFA version also differs from the two versions (1872 and 1874) for which photographs are adequate to document those textures. In the area below the belt on the front of Minnehaha’s dress, the MMFA version (fig. 11) features an elaborate floral pattern made by drilling shallow indentions into the marble. The 1872 and 1874 versions do not have this floral pattern and the surface is smoother than it is in the MMFA version. On the 1872 and 1874 versions, the border of Minnehaha’s cloak is decorated with an incised counter-curve pattern between coarsely cut lines that run roughly parallel to the edge of the cloak (fig. 12). In contrast, the cloak of the MMFA version (fig. 11) features diamond-shaped medallions with interior drill-work that is similar to the row of shallow indentions along the fringed hem of Hiawatha’s tunic. The textural treatment of marble surfaces was an important feature of American Neoclassic sculpture that was created for stylish residential settings featuring heavy upholstery fabrics with bold brocades, tufts, and tassels, as well as contrasting shiny silks and delicately patterned laces. The furry V-neck bodice of Minnehaha’s vestments represents another concession to consumer taste as much as an effort to represent her Dacotah costume realistically.36

Realism and idealism are blended in The Marriage of Hiawatha, much as the two stylistic treatments are merged in other American Neoclassic statuary. Realistic aspects of The Marriage include the Native American clothing, hairstyles, headdresses, and other accouterment (inaccurate arrows and quiver notwithstanding), but it is Hiawatha’s ponytail cinched at the top of his head in Ojibwa fashion with fulsome eagle feathers that most distinguishes this Native American chieftain from any ancient Greek or Roman warrior. Idealism is evident in the generalized treatment of both sets of facial features, although Hiawatha’s high forehead and prominent brow besow more Native American character to his portrayal than is evident in his bride’s, whose face is less ethnically distinct. Her large curved nose could be seen as a characteristic Native American feature or as an attempt to individualize her appearance. Still, the blank stares resulting from the uncut pupils of the eyes cause them to appear isolated from the reality of their surroundings. Moreover, the absence of incised pupils, plus the fact that the heads are inclined in such a way that the lovers’ eyes do not quite meet, leave viewers sensing a separation between the newlyweds despite their physical contact and the compositional devices of their arms that link their figures into a close figural group.
Very different results were achieved by the young Augustus Saint-Gaudens (American, 1848-1907) when he carved his *Hiawatha* (modeled 1871-1872, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) in Rome in 1874 after arriving in 1870 from a couple of years of study in Paris. Saint-Gaudens’s design features a single, nearly nude figure seated on a boulder with his arrow-filled quiver and bow leaning against a birch tree with twining ivy on its side and an assortment of native plants growing at its base. The realism of the detailed foliage, the accuracy of the anatomy, and the successful composition of the muscular, twisting figure whose head is bowed, chin resting on his left hand (in a design motif that predates Rodin’s *The Thinker* by at least a decade) combine to make Saint-Gaudens’s noble savage one of the most timeless representations of Longfellow’s hero.

During the last half of the nineteenth century, *The Song of Hiawatha* inspired numerous portrayals of the Ojibwa chief in paintings, prints, and sculpture. Currier and Ives were the first to picture Hiawatha’s adventures beyond the bindings of the print publication, followed by Lewis’s statuary, Saint-Gaudens’s sculpture, and paintings by Albert Bierstadt (*The Departure of Hiawatha*, ca. 1868, Longfellow House, Cambridge, Massachusetts), Thomas Moran (Spirit of the Indian, 1869, Philbrook Art Center, Tulsa, Oklahoma), Ralph Blakelock (*Hiawatha Shooting the Arrow*, 1875-1899, Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, Massachusetts), and Thomas Eakins (*Hiawatha* ca. 1874, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.). The perspectives of most of the white male artists echo that of Longfellow, who personified in Hiawatha the acceptance of Eurocentric Caucasian culture’s triumph over the Native American race which was forced westward and onto reservations by the doctrine of Manifest Destiny of the United States. It has also been suggested that Hiawatha and Minnehaha, representatives of the once-warring Ojibwa and Dacotah tribes who wed, “After many years of warfare, Many years of strife and bloodshed…That this peace may last forever,” may reference the nascent reconciliation between North and South in the wake of the Civil War.

Deciphering the content of Edmonia Lewis’s sculptures inspired by Longfellow’s *The Song of Hiawatha* is complicated by her gender and her Native American heritage. Did she choose the subject popularized by Longfellow to capitalize commercially on the poem, to associate herself with the poem’s protagonist or his bride, to champion her mother’s race, to strengthen her Native American identity (and thus perhaps to marginalize her African-American heritage), or some combination of those and/or other factors? She left no verbal or written commentary on those topics.

Did contemporary audiences read her sculptures as political statements regarding Native Americans’ acquiescence to the Manifest Destiny of the United States, as personal statements about the artist’s identification with her Native American heritage, or as just another sculptural interpretation of a contemporary literary theme? Literary themes were common subjects for American Neoclassic sculptors. It is easy to see how the enterprising artist who had earlier capitalized on her African-American heritage by creating portraits of abolitionist heroes, *The Freed Woman and Her Child* (1866, location unknown), and *Forever Free* (1867, Howard University Art Gallery, Washington, D.C.)—an ideal group heralding emancipation—might select a subject from *The Song of Hiawatha* that lends agency both to her Native American heritage and to her gender. Indeed, by picturing Minnehaha beside her father in *The Wooing*, Lewis manifests the Native American woman’s role in making her own decision regarding Hiawatha’s proposal of marriage. By showing Minnehaha taking Hiawatha’s hand in marriage, and by arranging the two figures so that Minnehaha is positioned slightly ahead of her husband, Lewis may assert the woman’s role in the marital contract. Alas, the elusive Lewis left no explicit explanations for her motivations, leaving viewers to determine for themselves the meaning of these sculptures.
Henry Tuckerman, one of the most respected historians writing about American art immediately after the Civil War, commented on no specific sculptures made by the artist in her early years in Rome when he published *The Book of the Artists* in 1870, but dwelt instead on her racial identity and her artistic potential, finding:

“in her face the characteristic types of her origin…. [while] grasping in her tiny hand the chisel with which she does not disdain—perhaps with which she is obliged—to work, and with her large, black, sympathetic eyes brimful of simple, unaffected enthusiasm, Miss Lewis is unquestionably the most interesting representative of our country in Europe. Interesting not alone because she belongs to a contemned [sic, i.e., condemned?] and hitherto oppressed race, which labors under the imputation of artistic incapacity…. Miss Lewis is by no means a prodigy; she has great natural genius, originality, earnestness, and a simple, genuine taste. Her works are yet those of a girl. She has read Evangeline, and some others of Longfellow’s poems, and has caught from them a girlish sentimentality, but has rather improved upon her author’s conceptions in the process of giving them shape and reality. By and by, when the horizon of her knowledge becomes more expanded, and her grasp on it firmer, she will leave the prettiness of poems, and give us Pocahontas, Logan, Pontiac, Tecumseh, Red Jacket, and, it may be, Black Hawk and Osceola…or behind them all the great dramatic characters, Montezuma, Guatimozin, Huascar, and Atahualpa….42

Clearly, Tuckerman expected the multi-racial artist to create portraits of famous Native Americans in the Grand Manner—in effect, to acquit her race and to promote its heroes—much as he expected American expatriate sculptors to uphold the nation’s artistic reputation within the international community of Rome.43

Soon, Tuckerman’s “dusky maiden” had an opportunity to take center stage before an international audience back home in America. She submitted marbles of *The Wooing* and *The Marriage*, as well as terra cotta busts of Longfellow and abolitionists John Brown and Senator Charles Sumner, plus small marbles of plump children entitled *Awake* and *Asleep* (both 1874, San Jose Public Library, San Jose, California) for display in the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876. Those works were accepted, but it was her life-size marble *The Death of Cleopatra* (1875, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.) that claimed headlines. Unlike William Wetmore Story’s *Cleopatra* (modeled 1858, carved 1860 and later, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.), in which the conquered African queen stoically contemplates her subsequent suicide, Lewis depicted the Egyptian royal in realistic death throes caused by the bite of a venomous asp still held in her right hand. Some modern viewers may see the realism of the African queen’s death as a contrast to the cerebral idealism of the white, male, elder statesman of American Neoclassic sculpture, an autobiographical reference to Lewis, or a reflection of the hurt heaped on the female mulatto artist by prejudicial audiences for more than a decade. A contemporary critic, J. S. Ingram, wrote in *Centennial Exposition*,

The most remarkable piece of sculpture in the American section [which included 162 of the 673 sculptures on display] was perhaps that in marble of *The Death of Cleopatra* by Edmonia Lewis…. The great queen was seated in a chair, her head drooping over her left shoulder…. The face was full of pain, for some reason—perhaps to intensify the expression—the classic [i.e., neoclassic] standard had been departed from….44

W. J. Clark commented in *Great American Sculptures* that “This is not a beautiful work, but it is a very original and striking one, and it deserve[s] particular comment, as its ideals [are] so
radically different from those adopted by Story…. The effects of death are represented with such skill as to be absolutely repellent…."45 Unfortunately for Lewis, the portion of Clark’s commentary most often repeated was the “repellent” part. The sculpture did not sell at the Centennial so Lewis shipped it to Chicago for the Chicago Interstate Exhibition in 1878. It was eventually acquired by a prominent Chicago gambler who placed it over the grave of his favorite racehorse, “Cleopatra,” before the grandstand of his racetrack where it stood until nature and vandals deteriorated the soft marble almost beyond recognition. Recently rediscovered and restored, it is now in the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, reflecting in microcosm the death and resurrection of Edmonia Lewis’s fame.46

Shortly after the Centennial Exhibition, the artist disappeared from the international art scene. Although she made six trips from Rome to the U.S. between 1868 and 1878 to promote her art, traveling as far as San Francisco in 1873 with the additional, unsuccessful, goal of finding her brother, she ceased to travel to the U.S except for one trip to New York in 1898.47 She apparently continued to make sculpture in Rome for many years, but her later artwork is not as well documented as her earlier work.48 In 1887, Frederick Douglass spent some time with the artist in her Rome studio and she accompanied him and his wife on a trip to Naples.49 Lewis subsequently relocated to England, where she died from Bright’s Disease (a kidney ailment) on September 17, 1907 at Brook Green, Hammersmith, an agricultural area west of Kensington on London’s outskirts.50 According to edmonialewis.com (accessed 25 June 2012), “Her will specified a Catholic funeral and burial at Kensal Green, London. It named a Catholic priest as her executor and main beneficiary. At the time of her death her estate was worth about sixty thousand of today's dollars.”

In recent years, Edmonia Lewis and her art have become the subject of much scholarly research which has revealed valuable information about the first African American and the first Native American artist to achieve an international reputation. As more of her sculpture is found and scrutinized, new revelations may illuminate her formidable achievements, but the popular Hiawatha’s Marriage, in all its beauty and complexity, is likely to stand among her master works for a long time.

Michael W. Panhorst
Curator of Art, MMFA
Fig. 2. *The Wooing of Hiawatha*, 1866, marble, 24 x 15 x 15 inches, SCAD Museum of Art permanent collection, Savannah, GA, Gift of Dr. Walter O. Evans and Mrs. Linda J. Evans

Fig. 3. *Hiawatha’s Marriage*, MMFA
Fig. 4. *The Marriage of Hiawatha*, 1872, marble, Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, Kalamazoo, MI, Acquired through the generosity of an anonymous donor, 2010.1. Photo courtesy KIA.

Fig. 5. *Marriage of Hiawatha*, 1874, white marble, 32.25 x 15 x 10.5 inches, Stark Museum of Art, Orange, Texas (2009.3.1). Photo courtesy Stark Museum of Art.
Fig. 6. Detail of disproportionate size and rotund shape of the hands in the MMFA version.

Fig. 7. Detail of the short, stout quiver and the rigidly regular arrangement of the large and square butt ends of the arrows projecting from the quiver of the MMFA version.
Fig. 8. Detail of base of 1872 version at Kalamazoo Institute of Art, photo courtesy KIA.

Fig. 9. Detail of irregularly shaped bevel and inscriptions on the integral base of the 1874 version at the Stark Museum of Art; photo courtesy of Stark Museum of Art
Fig. 10. The inscription on the integral plinth of the MMFA version.

Fig. 11. Detail of surface decoration on Minnehaha’s dress, the border of her cloak, and the tassels and drill-work along the fringed hem of Hiawatha’s tunic on the MMFA version.
Fig. 12. Detail of 1872 version at Kalamazoo Institute of Art showing hem of Minnehaha’s skirt with counter-curved decorative motif and hem of Hiawatha’s tunic with drilled indentions; photo courtesy KIA

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16 Bearden and Henderson, *African American Artists*, 62, illustrates a marble bust of Colonel Shaw now in the Museum of African American History, Boston and Nantucket, a commission from Shaw’s sister which was cut in marble in Rome in 1866-67. This may have been her first marble carved in Italy. It is notable that the pupils of Shaw’s eyes are carved in the marble—a realistic feature that may have been second nature to Lewis, although most Neoclassic marble portraits do not have the pupils cut because it was not known then that such details in antique Greek statuary (the primary design source for Neoclassic sculpture) had been painted. She also carried to Rome a commission for a marble copy of her portrait of Diocletian Lewis, a prominent homeopathic healer and physical education advocate for women.


19 When Lewis exhibited the sculpture in Chicago in 1870, she advertised it as the work of “the young and gifted colored sculptor, of Rome, Italy.” Bearden and Henderson, *African-American Artists*, 69, point out that this may be the first instance of a black artist promoting themselves as a black artist.


21 Her marble bust of Longfellow (1869) is in the Schlesinger Library of the History of Women, Radcliffe College. It is illustrated and discussed by Bearden and Henderson, 67 and 70, which indicates that Lewis started the bust based on her observation of the subject on the street in Rome and asked him to sit for her to complete the finishing touches. Like her bust of Colonel Shaw, the sculpture depicts the shoulder blades and part of his nude chest, but not the shoulders, as was typical of Neoclassic portrait busts. Unlike Shaw, the pupils are not cut.


25 Buick, *Child of the Fire*, 238, note 96 discusses the Sotheby’s snafu and cites Laura Curtis Bullard’s description of Minnehaha and Hiawatha seated side by side in *Revolution* (1871). It is not certain whether the version Sotheby’s sold in 1994 is the object that Walter O. Evans donated to the SCAD Museum (which is likely) or an additional version not otherwise known or discussed in this analysis.
Bearden and Henderson, 64, discuss *Marriage* as a companion piece to *Wooing*. It was apparently modeled in 1866 and offered to the Boston YMCA for purchase in conjunction with Charlotte Cushman’s gift to the Y of *Wooing*.


Buick, *Child of the Fire*, 95, pictures *Bust of Hiawatha*, 1868, marble, 11 x 6 x 3 ½ inches, Detroit Institute of Arts, on loan from the Manoogian Collection; and *Bust of Minnehaha*, 1868, marble, 11 x 6 x 3 ½ inches, Detroit Institute of Arts, 1986.33. Another pair (*Hiawatha*, marble, 11 x 8 ¾ x 4 inches, 1868 and *Minnehaha*, marble, 9 x 7 x 5 inches, 1868) is in the Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Founders Library, Howard University.

Buick, *Child of the Fire*, 69, noted, “the rounded, cylindrical modeling so characteristic of Lewis’s style. There is a plumpness of limb that is consistent with most of her figural groups.”

Margaret Farrand Thorp, *The Literary Sculptors* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1965), 87, documents Hosmer’s response to slanderous claims that “the good points” of her statuary were due to “the skill of her Italian workmen.”


The quiver of the Walter O. Evans Collection version of 1868 is not visible in the only photo currently available (Buick, *Child of the Fire*, fig. 14).

An anachronistic design feature in the earliest version of the *Marriage* (Cosby Collection, 1866) is a Greek key design along the hem of Minnehaha’s skirt.


Buick, *Child of the Fire*, is replete with analyses of Lewis’s race and gender and their impact on her sculpture and what that all means to various critics and historians who have studied the artist and her art over the past half century when social history and women’s history have grown into academic subcultures deserving their own histories and criticism.


For more on the Grand Manner, see *American Portraiture in the Grand Manner, 1720-1920* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1981).


Stephen J. May, “The Object at Hand: The circuitous route of Edmonia Lewis' masterwork, a controversial portrayal of Cleopatra at the moment of death, included stints as decor in a Chicago saloon and as a grave marker for a racehorse,” *Smithsonian*, Sept. 1996 (accessed online 27 June 2012 at http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/object_sep96.html#ixzz1z0K7JgjV)

Lewis was in New York around Niagara in 1868 (Bearden and Henderson, *African-American Artists*, 70-71); in Chicago in August 1870 (ibid., 69); in Boston in 1871 (ibid., 71); in San Francisco in 1873 (ibid., 71); at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876, and in the U.S. in the summer of 1878. The September 1898 trip to New York is mentioned at http://www.edmonialewis.com/chronology.htm (accessed 9 July 2012).

See the chronology at EdmoniaLewis.com (accessed 9 July 2012).
