

New Negro on the Pacific Rim

Sargent Johnson's Afro-Asian Sculptures

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Between 1923 and 1925, Sargent Johnson (1887–1967) created a porcelain portrait of his infant daughter Pearl that alludes to Chinese Buddhist sculpture (Figure 1). When Johnson exhibited *Pearl* and two drawings in the Harmon Foundation’s 1933 “Exhibition of Productions by Negro Artists” in New York, he was awarded the prize for “Most Outstanding Work in [the] Exhibit.”¹ Despite this early attention, *Pearl*—along with his other sculptures incorporating Asian subject matter or stylistic references—has been ignored by art historians, who have privileged those works in Johnson’s oeuvre that resemble African art, such as his hammered-copper masks of the 1930s.²

For much of his lifetime, however, Johnson was best-known for the prize-winning sculptures of children he made between 1923 and 1935 (Figure 2). These works incorporate a diverse array of stylistic references ranging from ancient Egypt, Rome, and Quattrocento Florence to West Africa, China, and India. A decade later, in a 1944 scholarship application to visit Mexico, Johnson emphasized the eclecticism of his art, noting that he was especially interested in the sculpture of “the great cultures of Egypt, Greece, the Orient, the Middle Ages and primitive societies.”³ Despite scholars’ subsequent emphasis on African and African American aspects of Johnson’s sculpture, much of his professional success derived from the genuinely multicultural variety of his art and the different interpretations that this multiculturalism elicited.

Johnson’s success may have depended upon his ability to construct two distinct, but mutually reinforcing, professional identities, comfortably occupying a place among California transnational modernists as well as a role within the national New Negro movement.⁴ His interest in art from around the



1. Sargent Johnson, *Pearl*, 1923–25. Stoneware with glaze. Location unknown. Black-and-white photograph by James Latimer Allen, published as the frontispiece in *Exhibition of Work by Negro Artists* (New York: Harmon Foundation, Inc., 1933).

world, including the arts of Asia, West Africa, modern Mexico, Pre-Columbian Latin America, and ancient Greece and Egypt, provided Johnson with a way to participate in the local San Francisco art scene and its discourse of multicultural modernism without being pigeonholed as a Negro artist. At the same time, Johnson's interest in African art could be singled out as a sign of his solidarity with the anti-racist, anti-colonial, democratic cultural nationalism of Alain Locke, W. E. B. Du Bois, and other African American leaders. This strategy appears to have enabled Johnson to establish a strong reputation in the Bay Area despite the "color line" that sundered America so strikingly in the early twentieth century.

Johnson moved to the Bay Area in 1915, a time when artists and civic leaders alike represented the region as modern America's cultural and economic interface with Asia; this was considered an important part of what made the Bay Area cosmopolitan. Contemporary business and civic leaders touted the Bay Area as the U.S. gateway to the Pacific Basin, book-ending the era with a pair of grandiose world's fairs to assert their claims. The Panama Pacific International Exposition of 1915 commemorated the opening of the Panama Canal and represented San Francisco as a capital city of the Pacific Rim; and the Golden Gate International Exposition of 1939 hailed San Francisco as the western states' gateway to the Pacific with architecture and monumental sculptures—some by Johnson—orchestrated to create the impression of a "Pacific Empire."⁵ Between the fairs, San Francisco sculptors responded to the region's boosters. Finding themselves bound by no single artistic tradition, they sometimes referred to themselves as "California artists"—an identity suggesting distance and independence from art circles on the East Coast and an affinity for the arts of Pacific Rim nations.⁶ Civic leaders regarded San Francisco as a liberal and welcoming city, free from the racism they saw elsewhere. Likewise, the San Francisco Art Association could sometimes point with self-contentment to the active role

Chinese and Japanese artists took in local exhibitions, disregarding the racism and anti-immigrant sentiment they faced regularly in the Bay Area.⁷

It was in this context that Johnson made several sculptures between 1923 and 1935 that articulate a relationship with cultures of the Pacific Rim, giving form to New Negro cosmopolitanism on a local stage that was also already self-consciously transnational. Johnson's Orientalist and Africanist allusions situate him in the Bay Area, looking east to Africa, south to Latin America, and west through the Golden Gate and across the Pacific to Asia.

For *Pearl*, the portrait of his daughter, Johnson incorporated references to traditional Buddhist iconography as well as his own multicultural community in the Bay Area. He sculpted his daughter in porcelain glazed blue-green—a medium that would have been associated with Asian ceramics—and gave her a contemporary hairstyle popular in both Asian and European American communities. He also portrayed her in a relaxed pose that is both childlike and suggestive of the royal ease reserved for only the highest order of Buddhist deities and royalty. He placed Pearl atop a throne, evoking a motif found in representations of the Buddha throughout Asia. Johnson may have thought he was representing the Buddha, but, in fact, the baby Buddha is typically not seated (the *sutras* say he stood up immediately) or chubby. There is, however, a tradition of child deities, particularly of young pilgrims that become deified figures. A lotus-flower motif of the artist's own design ornaments the base, perhaps also referring to Egyptian art, as Aaron Douglas would do with stylized papyrus blossoms in his illustrations of 1926 and later. But the lotus blossoms in *Pearl* might also represent Johnson's Orientalist allusion to a popular and auspicious Buddhist image: pure, newly born souls, represented in the form of babies, each seated on his or her own lotus-flower throne to hear the Buddha preach.⁸

Pearl is not only an intimate portrait of the artist's own baby; it is also an invention, a figure for Johnson's imagined relationship to China, India, and Japan. It



2. Sargent Johnson, *Elizabeth Gee*, 1927. Stoneware with glaze on wood stand, 13 1/8 x 10 3/4 x 7 1/2 in. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Albert M. Bender Collection, Gift of Albert M. Bender.

is not Buddhist but a Buddhist-inspired figure that counters stereotypical representations of African Americans in mainstream culture. In the early decades of the twentieth century, when Johnson was emerging as an active participant in the New Negro renaissance, Locke, Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and other African American political leaders found deep affinities between the fight against racism in the United States and the nationalist, anti-colonial movements in India and China and, even, at times, with Japanese imperialism and self-determination.⁹ Only two years after Johnson first exhibited *Pearl*, Du Bois reimaged racial identification in his novel *Dark Princess* in a strikingly similar way. The book figures the salvation of “the darker peoples of the world” as a baby born to an African American father and a princess from a fictitious kingdom in India.¹⁰ In Du Bois’s novel, transnational solidarity among anti-racist activists, figured literally in terms of race-mixing, threatens to render racial distinctions obsolete while giving birth to a new generation who will continue the struggle for global cultural democracy. Johnson’s sculpture is less polemical but perhaps no less optimistic.

Considered in more local terms, *Pearl* and some of Johnson’s other sculptures, through the metaphor of innocent children, established the artist’s place in a diverse community and provided evidence of a cosmopolitan future. Only one of Johnson’s portraits of children, *Elizabeth Gee* (Figure 2), represents an Asian resident of his multi-ethnic Berkeley neighborhood, but at least two, *Pearl* and *Head of a Boy*, clearly incorporate Asian motifs, as do some of his other sculptures of the 1930s. The tender realism of Johnson’s portraits bespeaks an intimacy between the artist and his subjects in a multicultural neighborhood. When Johnson made these small sculptures, he had moved across the San Francisco Bay with his family to a house he purchased near San Pablo Park, in a Berkeley neighborhood that was attracting many middle-class African American families. The area was already home to a large Japanese community as well as many European immigrants and some ethnic Chinese. Johnson’s home was four blocks from the local Japanese Buddhist temple, and neighborhood children attended fully integrated public schools.¹¹ *Elizabeth Gee*, made between 1925 and 1927, is a portrait of Pearl’s playmate, a Chinese American girl who lived only a block from the Johnsons, who has since described the San Pablo Park neighborhood as “a racial oasis in a desert of discrimination” during the 1920s and 1930s.¹²

Elizabeth Gee, both Asian-inflected and intimate, is a sensitive rendering done in a realist style. But do *Pearl* and *Elizabeth Gee* represent a cosmopolitan New Negro consciousness or merely a fashionable taste for Asian ceramics, symbols, and hairstyles? *Chester* (Figure 3), Johnson’s portrait sculpture of the early 1930s, most often characterized as illustrating the artist’s interest in representing “the pure American

Negro,” provides a helpful model for understanding his clear allusions to Asian art in other sculptures made at approximately the same time.¹³ *Chester* is Africanist in the same way that *Pearl* and *Elizabeth Gee* are Orientalist, evoking a romanticized, idealized, and distant culture in order to reflect critically upon the contemporary moment. The sculpture appears to be a portrait of an African American boy, rendered realistically but with an elegant simplicity betraying Johnson’s modernist archaism. Johnson’s only published statement about *Chester* identifies it simply as being modeled on



3. Sargent Johnson, *Chester*, 1931. Cast terra cotta on wood base, 8 1/2 x 5 1/2 x 7 in. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Albert M. Bender Collection, Bequest of Albert M. Bender.

“That kid [who] used to come to my studio.”¹⁴ Like *Pearl* and *Elizabeth Gee*, *Chester* represents one more child from Johnson’s Berkeley neighborhood through a multicultural amalgamation of hybrid sculptural forms.¹⁵

Seeing *Chester* in 1931, Alain Locke recognized the sculpture’s cosmopolitanism and proclaimed Johnson one of the leading New Negro “Africanists,” or Neo-Primitives. In two articles that year, “The African Legacy and the Negro Artist” and “The American Negro as Artist,” Locke argued for the important lessons “Negro artists” could draw from African art, and he singled out Johnson for praise: compared with the work of other New Negro artists, the “stylistic analogies” Johnson drew in *Chester* were the “most direct of all.”¹⁶ “It is a long stretch from an isolated Negro sculptor living and working in California to the classic antiques of bygone African cultures,” Locke wrote, “but here it is in this captivatingly naïve bust for those to see for whom only seeing is believing.”¹⁷ In Locke’s description, Johnson’s *Chester* figures an imagined identification with Africa at the same time that it marks the distances imposed by history and geography: *Chester* epitomizes the New Negro self-conception.

In the mid- to late 1920s, when Locke first made his case for the New Negro's interest in African art, he characterized the New Negro perspective in a phrase familiar from his description of Johnson's attitude toward Africa: African art, Locke wrote, "may seem a far cry from the conditions and moods of modern New York and Chicago and the Negro's rapid and feverish assimilation of all things American. But art establishes its contacts in strange ways." In this passage, Locke positioned African art in contrast to "assimilation of all things American," providing evidence of a Negro "folk temperament" as a tradition of cultural resistance.¹⁸

As a consequence, Locke characterized New Negro art not through any particular formal concerns but according to a new self-reflexive and critical "point of view" on history, by the clear recognition that "the Negro's situation in the past has forced him to a counter-attitude in life and a spectator's attitude toward himself."¹⁹ The American Negro tradition was a set of strategies for adaptation and accommodation, manifest in cultural pluralism.²⁰ For Locke, Johnson's allusions to African art are significant not because they resurrect a forgotten inheritance but because Johnson's modernist practice poses the New Negro's relationship to Africa as a question of historical distance. In *Chester*, the seemingly natural affinities between what Locke identifies as an African precedent and a New Negro subject articulates a deliberate goal of multicultural solidarity. Most important for Locke is Johnson's engagement in a critical reappropriation of African art—the cultural product of a conventionally marginalized "classic" civilization—with the specific purpose of articulating an alternative perspective on history.²¹ In short, Johnson's portrait sculptures of the 1920s and 1930s measure cultural difference, a core value of Locke's cultural politics, figuring the Negro's new critical role in the culture of the United States and the world.

Johnson's multicultural perspective is characteristic of Locke's New Negro project, but he also shared it with his teachers and colleagues in San Francisco, almost none of whom were African American. The depth of Johnson's interest in African art seems to have been unique among San Francisco artists, although it would most likely not have struck his contemporaries as out of the ordinary. In the spirit of cultural democracy, local artists were respected—if sometimes also marginalized—for articulating their ethnic heritage in their art. For example, when Diego Rivera visited San Francisco from 1930 to 1931, he painted local subjects in a style that was understood to express his perspective as a Mexican artist. During that same visit, when Rivera spoke to a meeting of the Chinese Art Club of California, a group comprising Chinese students at the California School of Fine Arts, he advised them "not to imitate American or European art but to cling to [y]our own Chinese art." Furthermore, during his visit Rivera was a member of the jury that

awarded the Medal of First Award for Sculpture in the San Francisco Art Association's 1931 annual exhibition to Johnson's *Chester*.²² Rivera's impressions of Johnson's work are not recorded, but it is possible he saw in it the same thing Locke had only months earlier: an informed engagement with African art from the perspective of a modern Negro living and working in California. Other members of the San Francisco Art Association may have agreed, but it is notable that in the extensive press coverage of the annual exhibition that year some journalists cited Johnson's local renown—he was clearly accepted among the local community of artists—but not a single author identified Johnson as Negro or commented that *Chester* appeared to be inspired by African art. Scholar Helen Shannon has demonstrated that Johnson must have been familiar with the Egyptian “reserve heads” (life-sized funerary portrait head sculptures from Egypt's fourth dynasty) that likely inspired *Chester*. It is not certain, however, that many people in the San Francisco art community would have recognized these sources. Even Locke does not seem to have noticed the similarity. Instead, local viewers focused on the realism of the work, perhaps thinking of it in terms of the more academic sculptures, such as *Esther* and *Anderson*, that Johnson made between 1929 and 1930.²³

Another possibility is that *Chester*'s simplified yet delicately expressive form is so abstracted that it might have been understood as drawing upon any number of artistic traditions, a quality that simply signified a modern style. For example, Ralph Stackpole, a leading local modernist and Johnson's teacher at the California School of Fine Arts for two years, wrote in 1935 that sculptors might look to the “few places dotted over the globe where sculpture has flourished,” from Asia Minor to “Egypt and Greece, around to India and China and Java, then over to Mexico and up to British Columbia (the nearest point to us) where the Columbian Indians made totem poles, masks, etc., and back to Africa, where Negro art grew, as fine as any.”²⁴

Whichever of these traditions Johnson intended to draw upon, local art critics did not try to discern his sources. Johnson's achievement with *Chester* was its capacity to exemplify different meanings to different audiences. The *San Francisco Examiner*'s art critic, for example, simply described *Chester* as “a strong and moving conception.” She also asserted Johnson's local professional standing without mentioning his race, referring to him as a “well known San Francisco artist.”²⁵ San Franciscans' liberal conception of themselves as opposing racism and welcoming people of all races and ethnicities—despite evidence of discrimination gathered by local civil rights organizations and widespread support for anti-immigration laws—enabled them to support a Negro artist as a cosmopolitan modernist even as others encouraged him to focus on more clearly Negro subjects. While for Alain Locke, *Chester* established Johnson as an Africanist and, therefore, a member of the



4. Sargent Johnson, *Head of a Boy*, 1934. Terra cotta on wood base, 7 1/4 x 6 x 6 in. Formerly in the collection of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, current location unknown. Photo courtesy San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

New Negro interpretive community, in San Francisco the artist's work was absorbed into a more generalized interpretive framework.²⁶

In fact, Locke had more in mind than reductivist, or essential race consciousness. In a 1925 essay, he called on American Negro artists to reach multiracial audiences with a multicultural practice, giving them a choice he framed in terms of a trans-oceanic metaphor: "new Armadas of conflict or argosies of cultural exchange and enlightenment."²⁷ Johnson sets African and Asian traditions into more explicit dialogue in another sculpture of the early 1930s, *Head of a Boy* (Figure 4).

Although nothing is known of the sitter, this sculpture resembles the busts Johnson made of neighborhood children—especially *Chester*, in the sensitive details of eyes and lips carved in the manner of Egyptian "reserve heads"—and, notably, it rises from a base that resembles the sort of Buddhist throne alluded to in *Pearl*. While Johnson seems to have invented the decorative elements on *Pearl*'s base, the wooden base he carved for *Head of a Boy* refers more directly to Buddhist iconography. With a pair of lions reclining symmetrically on either side of a form that may represent the wheel of Dharma or an incense burner, Johnson has replicated the imagery found on thrones supporting many Chinese and Indian sculptures of the Buddha. A solitary head is an image never found in Buddhist art, however; in this respect, Johnson's sculpture of *Pearl* more closely resembles the Buddhist sculptures he must have studied.

Although it is not known precisely which Asian sculptures were available to Johnson, he had many opportunities to study Buddhist art. His greatest patron of the time, Albert Bender, was a major collector of Asian art, donating works to several museums in the Bay Area as well as to the national museum of his native country, Ireland. Johnson's teacher Beniamino Bufano is also reported to have had

a large collection of Chinese sculpture.²⁸ And in Johnson's Berkeley neighborhood, the artist might have seen Buddhist devotional sculpture in the homes of Chinese or Japanese neighbors or, four blocks from his house, in the Japanese Buddhist temple, the Higashi Honganji, on Oregon Street. Finally, *Head of a Boy* is more didactically straightforward in its cultural references than *Pearl*: Johnson pairs the African-inspired terra cotta portrait head with a distinctly Buddhist base in a different medium, wood. Rather than assimilating disparate cultural references, he has kept the Asian and the African elements separate, calling attention to the distinctive qualities of each and to their harmonious relationship within the sculptural whole.

Taken as a group, Johnson's busts create a collective portrait of the Negro middle class, integrated with its Chinese American neighbors in 1920s and 1930s Berkeley. Was Johnson's perspective unique among African Americans or did others feel a similar affinity for Asia, too? I am still researching the attitudes of African Americans toward their Asian neighbors in San Francisco and the East Bay, but I think Du Bois, in his 1913 account of a visit to the West Coast published in the *Crisis* under the title "Colored California," offers a clue. Du Bois observed, "Here I had my first sight of the Pacific and realized how California faces the newest color problem, the problem of the relations of the Orient to the Occident. The colored people of California do not quite realize the bigness of their problem and their own logical position."²⁹ For Du Bois, this "problem" was local as well as national and transnational, a critical matter for California's Negroes to debate and one Du Bois discussed for the sake of his nationwide readership. Johnson's amalgamation of African and Asian art within a local modernist form rooted his work in a view of American history defined not only by the violent disruptions of the Middle Passage and slavery but also aggressive trade policies toward China and Japan, racist exclusion acts and housing discrimination, African American traditions, and the cultural contributions of Asian immigrants. Manifest in portraits of neighborhood children, Johnson invented an optimistic iconography for California's multicultural future.

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If the portrait busts represent a personal, perhaps even romantic, notion of multiculturalism, Johnson's work with the sculptor Beniamino Bufano hints at a more pragmatic and political approach. From the end of 1935 until 1940, Johnson worked as Bufano's assistant on the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA).³⁰ Most accounts of this period describe a one-sided relationship, with Bufano influencing—or even stifling—Johnson. There is evidence, however, that Johnson's role in some of Bufano's best-known public art projects, including his memorial to Sun Yat Sen (Figure 5), the Chinese nationalist leader and first provisional president



5. Beniamino Benvenuto Bufano, *Sun Yat Sen*, St. Mary's Square, San Francisco, 1937. Stainless steel, granite, and mosaic. Photograph dated 13 November 1937. San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

of Republican China, reveals the touch of a politically informed New Negro sculptor.

In a 1964 interview for the Archives of American Art, Johnson explained that as Bufano's assistant he sometimes created small clay sculptures approximately "a foot and a half" tall upon which Bufano would base large projects, including the monument to Sun and another work entitled *Peace*.³¹ Johnson's comments in the interview can help us to understand that his role in some of Bufano's WPA projects was greater than

historians have previously suggested—an uneasy collaboration and an expression of mutually compatible interests.

Although Johnson told the interviewer that the WPA allowed him to make the sort of work he wanted to, he also complained about working for Bufano, saying the senior sculptor kept all the WPA projects for himself, refusing to share with other sculptors. Johnson's charge is borne out by Willis Foster, a WPA supervisor who told one of Bufano's biographers that "Benny was supplied plenty of assistants, though he was always a bit slow to name them or share credit with them."³²

By the time Johnson and Bufano joined the WPA at the end of 1935, Johnson had already made and exhibited *Forever Free* (Figure 6), a sculpture that seems to have established a columnar model for *Sun Yat Sen* and *Peace*.³³ In the interview, Johnson described *Forever Free* as "just a straight log. In relief on the log was a mother and two children." According to Johnson, Bufano was incredulous when he returned to San Francisco and saw the work: "When he came back he said, 'You know that you are not allowed to do that.'" Despite his initial dismissal of *Forever Free*, the columnar form to which Bufano objected subsequently became the central motif of his own monumental work from this period, coinciding with Johnson's work on preliminary models for him.³⁴

During the Archives of American Art interview, Johnson looked at photographs of *Peace* and *Sun Yat Sen* and noted that Bufano, initially dismissive of *Forever Free*, decided to produce both sculptures according to Johnson's innovation. Johnson recalled the history of the making of *Sun Yat Sen* with a mixture of pride, authority, and bemusement. While giving Bufano full credit for the final product, Johnson also described—and takes credit for—part of the process. “He’s gone over those things many times and change[d] them,” Johnson explained.³⁵

Johnson's role in creating the Sun memorial is important, not simply in terms of score-keeping or aesthetic innovation, but because for Johnson, a New Negro sculptor with a demonstrated interest in Asian art and culture who found the subject matter for his work in a multiethnic community, Sun would likely have been a figure of liberation and self-determination. Bufano had met Sun in China, a story told in 1937 as one motivation for his project.³⁶ Johnson might also have considered Sun significant, as many African Americans did, particularly those who felt the affinity of solidarity for Chinese republicanism. Johnson, whose New Negro consciousness was informed by his participation in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, probably read the *Crisis*, where Du Bois described Sun and the Chinese Republic as a model for African American self-determination.³⁷ Finally, Sun played a role in San Francisco's self-conception as a cosmopolitan city. Many San Franciscans had supported Sun's cause during his lifetime and were proud that he had lived among them on three occasions. The Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party) had a significant membership among the local Chinese community and helped finance the project.³⁸ The Sun memorial was considered an important piece of monumental sculpture by many San Franciscans, and its dedication was reported in the city's English-language and Chinese-language newspapers.³⁹



6. Sargent Johnson, *Forever Free*, 1933. Wood, gesso, cloth, and lacquer, 36 x 11 1/2 x 9 1/2 in. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Gift of Mrs. E. D. Lederman.

If Johnson's columnar figure served as the basis for the early maquettes of *Sun Yat Sen*, then the monument might be considered in relationship to *Forever Free*, a sculpture that, E. J. Montgomery reports, Johnson made using a lacquerware technique "of the ancient Egyptians, Orientals, and experienced frame makers."⁴⁰ San Francisco Museum of Modern Art conservator Barbara Schertel supports this claim. Based on her examination of *Forever Free* and a similar sculpture, *Negro Woman* (1935), Schertel concludes that Johnson made them using a frame maker's technique for "Japanning" furniture in emulation of Japanese lacquered furniture.⁴¹ *Sun Yat Sen* is made of different materials: stainless steel, red granite, and concrete. Nevertheless, whether or not Bufano was aware of Sun's importance to African Americans, it strikes me as likely Johnson would have invested himself in the memorial project—if not in Bufano's ideas for it—in ways that lent the figure a measure of its quiet dignity. In the end, *Sun Yat Sen* must have been a key project for both Johnson and Bufano, if for each his own reasons. For Johnson, in this case, the personal also must have been political.



Johnson's sculptures of children and work on *Sun Yat Sen* might indicate a path distinct from those available to African Americans in the South or in other cities across the nation, enabling him as a Bay Area resident to identify himself with California as well as with the Pacific Rim, a localized response to the "color line." Furthermore, the deliberate study of both African and Asian art established a process by which Johnson and other African American artists might engage transnational cultures of modernism as equal participants and, crucially, from a potentially critical perspective. On the one hand, the reevaluation of African and Asian art promised to demonstrate that aesthetic values derived from Europe were not necessarily the best or the most appropriate for an increasingly cosmopolitan world. On the other, the New Negro's unique perspective on modernism promised to demand attention and respect on the international stage. Whether Johnson looked through the Golden Gate and across the Pacific Ocean or down the block to his Chinese neighbors, when he saw himself in relationship to the art and culture of Asia, his resulting sculptures articulated a process of self-reflection expressed through a desire for solidarity.

Notes

1. "57 Negro Artists Presented in Fifth Harmon Foundation Exhibit," *Art Digest* 7, no. 11 (1 March 1933): 18. Edward Alden Jewell, "Sargent Johnson Wins Chief Prize at Exhibition by Negro Artist, Sponsored by Harmon Foundation," *New York Times*, 21 February 1933, 22.

2. For two exceptions, see Tommy L. Lott, "Black Consciousness in the Art of Sargent Johnson," in *Reclaiming San Francisco: History, Politics, Culture, a City Lights Anthology*, ed. James Brook, Chris Carlsson, and Nancy J. Peters (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1998), 196. Angela L. Miller, Janet C. Berlo, Bryan J. Wolf, and Jennifer L. Roberts, *American Encounters: Art, History, and Cultural Identity* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2008), 509–10.

3. Sargent Johnson to the Board of Directors, The Abraham Rosenberg Scholarship, San Francisco Art Association (hereafter SFAA), October 20, 1944; see Rosenberg Traveling Fellowship, 4th Award, Sargent Johnson, 1944–45 file, Anne Bremer Memorial Library, San Francisco Art Institute (hereafter, Bremer Library).
4. Judith Wilson discusses this possibility in her essay, "Sargent Johnson: Afro-California Modernist," in Lizzetta LeFalle-Collins and Wilson, *Sargent Johnson: African American Modernist* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 27–31.
5. See Anthony W. Lee, *Picturing Chinatown: Art and Orientalism in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 167–74. Also see Anne Schnoebelen, *Treasures: Splendid Survivors of the Golden Gate International Exposition* (revised edition; Berkeley: GGIE Research Associates, 2009), and Burton Benedict, ed., *The Anthropology of the World's Fairs: San Francisco's Panama Pacific International Exposition of 1915* (Berkeley: Scholar Press, 1983), 123–24.
6. Lloyd La Page Rollins, "Striking Advance in San Francisco's Art: Exhibition at Palace of the Legion of Honor Shows Progress in Development of Talent in Cultural Affairs," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 10 May 1931, clipping, 1931 SFAA Annual file, Bremer Library. On the gap between the East and West coasts, see the editorial *San Francisco Art Association Bulletin* 1, no. 9 (January 1935): 4. On the value California artists placed on their "isolation" from the East Coast, see Richard Cándida Smith, *Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry, and Politics in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 3–9.
7. Mark Dean Johnson, "Uncovering Asian American Art in San Francisco, 1850–1940," in *Asian American Art: Asian American History, 1850–1970*, ed. Gordon Chang, Mark Dean Johnson, Paul Karlstrom, and Sharon Spain (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 9–16. Chang and Johnson, introduction to *Asian/American/Modern Art: Shifting Currents, 1900–1970*, ed. Daniel Cornell and Johnson (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 2008), 13 n2. Coverage of local exhibitions of traditional Asian art appeared regularly in the SFAA's newsletter; see, for instance, Roi Partridge, "Chinese Art at Mills College," *San Francisco Art Association Bulletin* 1, no. 7 (November 1934): 5; and Marian Hartwell, "A Review of the Chinese Collection—S.F. Museum of Art," *San Francisco Art Association Bulletin* 2, no. 1 (May 1935): 1–5.
8. Caroline Goeser finds an early example of the stylized papyrus blossom in Douglas's *Krigwa Players Poster*, published in the May 1926 issue of the *Crisis*; see Goeser, *Picturing the New Negro: Harlem Renaissance Print Culture and Modern Black Identity* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 29–30. I have been unable to locate *Pearl*, last exhibited in the Harmon Foundation's annual exhibition of 1933, or to determine its exact dimensions.
9. See Bill V. Mullen, *Afro-Orientalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Paul Gordon Lauren, *The Evolution of International Human Rights: Visions Seen*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); and David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919–1963* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000), 388–421. I thank Gordon Chang for sharing information with me about Marcus Garvey's support for Sun Yat-Sen.
10. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Dark Princess* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), 246.
11. I have documented Johnson's employment and residences from 1915, when he arrived in San Francisco, through the 1940s through information in the federal census, local city directories, exhibition catalogues and entry forms, and correspondence. Johnson seems to have moved with his wife, Pearl, and daughter, Pearl Adele, to the house at 2777 Park Street, Berkeley, in 1925; see *Catalogue: 48th Annual Exhibition, 1925* (San Francisco: San Francisco Art Association, 1925), 85. His residence is given as "Berkeley" in *Crocker-Langley San Francisco Directory* (San Francisco: H.S. Crocker Co., 1925), 1012. My characterization of the neighborhood surrounding San Pablo Park is based on a survey of the 1930 census and drawn from the Writers' Program, Works Progress Administration in Northern California, *Berkeley: The First Seventy-Five Years* (Berkeley: Gillick Press, 1941); J. Douglas Allen-Taylor, "South Berkeley Residents Gather in Honor of Berkeley Pioneer," *Berkeley Daily Planet*, 7 February 2006; "San Pablo Park Plans Centennial Bash," *Berkeley Daily Planet*, 24 August 2007; and Preserving California's Japantowns, www.californiajapantowns.org/berkeley.html. Johnson may have moved his family to the East Bay because housing discrimination was less pervasive there than in San Francisco; on discrimination, see Albert S. Broussard, *Black San Francisco: The Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900–1954* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 31–37.

12. Gee's comments on the neighborhood can be found in Allen-Taylor, "San Pablo Park Plans Centennial Bash." According to the 1930 census, Elizabeth Gee's family lived at 2773 Acton Street. Gee confirms this in a "Note to the File," added to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's file on *Elizabeth Gee* on 27 March 1998, composed by Janet Bishop upon a visit to the museum by Gee. I date *Elizabeth Gee* to 1925–27 on the basis of this note. Janet Bishop, "Note to the File," 27 March 1998, Sargent Johnson binders, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.
13. "San Francisco Artists," interview with Sargent Johnson, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 6 October 1935, D3.
14. Mary McChesney, oral history interview with Sargent Johnson, 31 July 1964, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
15. Helen Shannon argued in "From 'African Savages' to 'Ancestral Legacy': Race and Cultural Nationalism in the American Modernist Reception of African Art" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, New York, 1999), 324, that in the cases of *Elizabeth Gee* or *Chester*, Johnson simply chose for each a medium appropriate to the sitter's ethnicity. *Pearl*, a portrait of an African American girl made to resemble the traditionally Chinese medium of porcelain glazed blue-green, complicates this argument. Furthermore, *Chester's* medium, terra cotta, is not specifically African but is also well-known to potters throughout Asia and much of the rest of the world.
16. On the leading "Africanist," see, for example, Alain Locke, "The American Negro as Artist," in "Africa and American Art," edited by Frederic Allen Whiting, *American Magazine of Art* 23, no. 3 (September 1931): 218. Alain Locke, "The African Legacy and the Negro Artist," in *Exhibition of the Work of Negro Artists* (New York: Harmon Foundation, Inc., 1931), 11.
17. Locke, "The African Legacy and the Negro Artist," 10, 11. Months later, Locke rephrased his evaluation of *Chester*, saying Chester "has the qualities of the African antique and recalls an old Baoulé mask. It is a long stretch from an isolated Negro sculptor living and working in California to the classic antiques of bygone Africa, but here it is in this captivating, naïve bust for even the untutored eye to see." Locke, "The American Negro as Artist," 218.
18. Alain Locke, "The Negro and the American Stage," *Theatre Arts Monthly* 10 (February 1926): 119, 120.
19. Alain Locke, "Introduction: The Drama of Negro Life," in *Plays of Negro Life: A Source-Book of Native American Drama*, ed. Locke and Montgomery Gregory (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1927), n.p.
20. Alain Locke, "Internationalism: Friend or Foe of Art?" *The World Tomorrow* 8 (March 1925): 76.
21. See Alain Locke, "African Art: Classic Style," *American Magazine of Art* 28 (May 1935): 271.
22. Chinese Art Association of America Record Book, 1930–1984, Asian American Studies Archives, Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley. Anthony Lee has demonstrated that this is also what members of the Chinese Revolutionary Artists' Club were attempting when they also met with Rivera; Lee, *Picturing Chinatown*, 201–6. Chiura Obata gave similar advice to the Bay Area's *Nissei* artists, according to Bert Winther-Tamaki, "Overtly, Covertly, or Not at All: Putting 'Japan' in Japanese American Painting," in this book. For an analysis of Rivera's reception in San Francisco, see Lee, *Painting of the Left: Diego Rivera, Radical Politics, and San Francisco's Public Murals* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). Notably, this was the first time the jury had included someone from outside the Bay region: *Fifty-Third Annual Exhibition of the San Francisco Art Association* (San Francisco: San Francisco Art Association, 1931), 7.
23. Shannon, "From 'African Savages' to 'Ancestral Legacy,'" 320–21. Johnson's prize was reported in each of San Francisco's important newspapers in accounts dated 24–26 April 1931; see, for example, Nadia Lavrova, "Art Association's Annual Opens," *San Francisco Examiner*, 26 April 1931, E11.
24. Ralph Stackpole, "The Local Sculpture Show," *San Francisco Art Association Bulletin* 2, no. 4 (September 1935): 4. On Johnson's studies with Stackpole, see Montgomery, *Sargent Johnson*, 10.
25. Lavrova, "Art Association's Annual Opens."
26. Tommy L. Lott, "Black Consciousness in the Art of Sargent Johnson," in *Reclaiming San Francisco: History, Politics, Culture, a City Lights Anthology*, ed. James Brook, Chris Carlsson, and Nancy J. Peters (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1998), 184, 197.
27. Quote from Alain Locke, "Enter the New Negro," in "Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro," special issue edited by Locke of *Survey Graphic* 6, no. 6 (March 1925): 634.

- 28.** Bender donated works of Asian art to the San Francisco Museum of Art, the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley, and other Bay-area institutions. See also Audrey Whitty, *A Dubliner's Collection of Asian Art: The Albert Bender Exhibition* (Dublin: National Museum of Ireland, 2009–10). H. Wilkening; and Sonia Brown, *Bufano: An Intimate Biography* (Berkeley: Howell-North Books, 1972).
- 29.** W. E. B. Du Bois, "Colored California," *Crisis* 6, no. 4 (August 1913): 194.
- 30.** Johnson became supervisor for at least two large-scale WPA projects in San Francisco: carved green terrazzo friezes with mosaic fountains and a mosaic mural for the Aquatic Park Bathhouse (1939–40) and a cast-concrete frieze depicting high school athletics for George Washington High School (1940–42). Before 1940, he held several other WPA positions.
- 31.** McChesney, interview with Johnson, 1964. While *Sun Yat Sen* was dedicated in 1937, *Peace* was not displayed publicly until 1957, when it was sited on the entrance road to San Francisco International Airport. *Peace* was removed in 1996; it is pictured in Mary Ann Sullivan, Digital Imaging Project, Bluffton University, www.bluffton.edu/~sullivanm/bufano/peace.html.
- 32.** Rather, *Bufano and the U.S.A.*, 38.
- 33.** *Forever Free* is not mentioned in the press until 1934 but the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art dates the sculpture to 1933. Ralph Stackpole, "Montgomery Street Gossip," *San Francisco Art Association Bulletin* 1, no. 6 (October 1934): 1. *Exhibition of Productions by Negro Artists* (New York: Harmon Foundation, Inc., 1933), 27. "Art: Sculptors' Business," *Time* (22 June 1936): 53. Johnson says in the Archives of American Art interview that he began the sculpture while Bufano was in France, in 1931 or 1932. Johnson exhibited two related drawings, *Defiant* and *Mother and Child*, in the Harmon Foundation exhibition of 1933, two and a half years or more before he began working for Bufano and at least three years before the "preliminary designs" for *Sun Yat Sen* were approved by the Sculpture Project of the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project, the San Francisco Art Association, and the Park Commission.
- 34.** Bufano had made vertically oriented sculptures before the 1930s but none are columnar in the way that *Forever Free*, *Sun Yat Sen*, and *Peace* are. This columnar form becomes characteristic of much of Bufano's work for the rest of his career.
- 35.** On the question of whether Bufano took credit for work done by his assistants, see also Thomas Albright, "The Art World: In the Wake of the Art Festival," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 6 October 1977, 60; and Alfred Frankenstein, "The Gentle Clown—and Man of Steel," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 23 August 1970, Datebook section, 38–39.
- 36.** "San Francisco Monuments: Sun Yat Sen" subject file, San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library. The story of Bufano's encounter with Sun has been repeated many times; see, for example, John Reddy, "Stormy Benny," *Saturday Evening Post* 217, no. 31 (27 January 1945): 23; Valentina Fogher, *Beniamino Bufano: A Retrospective* (San Francisco: Museo ItaloAmericano, 2000), n.p.; and Rather, *Bufano and the U.S.A.*, 15.
- 37.** Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois*, 388–421. Du Bois, *W. E. B. Du Bois on Asia*.
- 38.** William Hoy, manuscript about *Sun Yat Sen*, and [San Francisco Downtown Association?], *Sun Yat Sen*, both in the William Hoy Papers, 1935–49, Chinese Historical Society of America collection, Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley. "Statues," *Time* (22 November 1937): 35.
- 39.** For two photographs of memorial ceremonies, see *Mme. Chiang Kai Shek, along with a crowd of thousands, pays homage to Sun Yat-Sen's statue in St. Mary's Square* of 28 March 1943 (AAA-9598) and *Tse Kiong Sun Placing Flowers at the Foot of Statue Dedicated to His Grandfather Sun Yat Sen* of 12 November 1943 (AAA-9596), San Francisco Historical Photograph Collection, San Francisco Public Library, <http://sfpl.org/index.php?pg=0200000301>.
- 40.** Montgomery, *Sargent Johnson*, 14.
- 41.** Barbara Schertel, personal communication, 13 July 2009. Schertel, examination report for *Negro Woman* and *Forever Free*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 28 April 2009.