African-American Sculpture Around 1900 (online, 25–31 Jan 27)

Online / Berlin, Georg Kolbe Museum, Jul 20–Aug 24, 2026
Deadline: Aug 24, 2026

Georg Kolbe Museum, Berlin

African-American Sculpture Around 1900.
January 2027 / Digital Symposium

For scholars, researchers, cultural workers, artists and curators.

This digital symposium invites scholars, artists, curators, and cultural workers to explore the legacy of African-American figurative sculpture from the early 20th century, with a special focus on transatlantic journeys, networks and exchanges. The aim is to address gaps in global art history and foster new research dialogues between North America and Europe. The digital gathering focuses on figurative art and sculpture in particular by African-American artists active in the first half of the 20th century such as Edmonia Lewis (1844-1907), Augusta Savage (1892-1962), Selma Burke (1900-1995), Richmond Barthé (1901-1989), Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller (1877-1968), Nancy Elisabeth Prophet (1890-1960) and others.The symposium serves as a research and network space and prequels a planned exhibition on the topic at the Georg Kolbe Museum Berlin. The symposium is supported by the Terra Foundation for American Art.
Art history is interwoven with global narratives through diverse modes of connection and exchange. By situating Black figurative sculptors of the late 19th century and early 20th century within broader artistic and intellectual networks throughout Europe, their journeys are recontextualized as acts of self-determination and creative agency beyond previously marginalized narratives. A central question guiding the symposium is the evolution and transformation of Black image-making in early twentieth-century sculpture. Although primarily exposed to European artistic models, Augusta Savage, for instance, created self-representations in response to the absence of self-recognition within those traditions. Edmonia Lewis ran a successful sculpture studio in her second home Rome from the late 1860s onwards. By examining conservative-modernist aesthetics, the project offers new frameworks for understanding the artists' roles as mediators of formal innovation. Their realist works redress art-historical omissions, serving as visual protests and demanding representation of beauty beyond the visual and actual confines of degradation. Their professional networks and friendships testify to their active role in the artworld of their time. The project also aims at addressing the tensions between universalist European ideals, colonial realities and the appropriation of African influences. Artists' biographies, the journeys they undertook and the networks they were active in are central points of departure.

Requirements and Timeline:

Dates:
Submission Deadline: 24 August 2026
Announcement of Speakers: September 2026
Preparation Time: October 2026 to January 2027
Symposium: week of 25 January 2027

Submissions:
• Provide a short CV (up to 2 pages)
• Submit a proposal (max 500 words) outlining your intended presentation and the questions you like to pose
• Clearly indicate any accessibility needs or adjustments required
• All application materials must be submitted in English (or German), while all presentations must be done in English.

If translation or accessibility support is required, please indicate this in your application. Please compile all documents in one pdf file. Please ensure all files are under 10MB.

Invited speakers will receive a participation honorarium of 500,- EUR.

Eligibility criteria:
Open to scholars, researchers, artists, curators, and cultural workers worldwide. We strongly encourage applications from members of underrepresented groups and those at early career stages.
All applications will be reviewed by a diverse selection committee comprising curators, scholars, and practitioners with expertise in African-American and transatlantic art histories. Evaluation criteria will include relevance to the symposium theme, originality, clarity, and potential impact. Applicants will be notified of decisions by late September 2026.

Contact
Organizers: Paulina Alvarez, Dagmawit Abebaw Hunz, Kathleen Reinhardt
For questions please contact Aline Bosche, curatorial trainee at the Georg Kolbe Museum:
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Find out more about the Georg Kolbe Museum

The symposium is supported by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Keywords and subjects
Harlem Renaissance, African-American Art, Black Figuration, Black Art Networks, Black Atlantic Art, Transatlantic Networks, Networks of Modernity, Sculpture, Figurative Sculpture in the first part of the 20th century, Conservative Modernism, Female Artists, Figurative Art, 20th century sculpture, 19th century sculpture, Portraiture.

Reference:
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