

# The Artist as Ethnographer: Charles Cordier and Race in Mid-Nineteenth-Century France

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The Artist as Ethnographer: Charles Cordier and Race in Mid-Nineteenth-Century France Facing the Other: Charles Cordier, Ethnographic Sculptor Dahesh Museum of Art, New York, October 12, 2004-January 13, 2005 Laure de Margerie and Edouard Papet, with contributions by Christine Barthe and Maria Vigli, Facing the Other: Charles Cordier (1827-1905); Ethnographic Sculptor, trans. Lenora Ammon, Laurel Hirsch, and Clare Palmieri, exh. cat. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2004. \$65.00

The recent exhibition at the Dahesh Museum of the work of the French ethnographic sculptor Charles Cordier, who came to prominence in the middle of the nineteenth century, demonstrated some of the challenges art museums face at a time when interdisciplinarity has transformed installation practices as the aesthetic arrangement of objects, even if in a fairly didactic manner. It also showed how reevaluations of nineteenth-century notions of the Other can reveal more about the active ingredient of contemporary biases than new insights about representations of non-Western people.

Cordier's career is justly revived by the exhibition and its accompanying catalog, which originated at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris. He was an innovator of nineteenth-century polychrome sculpture; his sumptuous combinations of foreign colored marbles with patinated bronzes and occasional use of enamel along with the new process of galvanoplasty (metal plating) caused controversy at a time when sculpture was still based on the Neoclassical legacy of whiteness. The decorative and exotic appeal of his materials, his interest in peoples of the Orient, and his attempt to create lifelike figurative work place him in the later realist phase of Orientalism.<sup>1</sup> The didactic materials in the exhibition and the catalog itself play down the Orientalist framework, instead casting a wider and more scientific net. Cordier is credited with sculpting Asians (he created only two such busts, and these pendants were commissioned), sub-Saharan Africans (very few, if any, examples, since the models lack any specific sub-Saharan place of origin), and Europeans (for the most part these are from the Mediterranean basin-Greeks and Italians-and could equally fall under the designation Orientalist), but mainly his ethnographic busts are of North Africans. The claim that his work was scientific, even in the nineteenth-century sense, is difficult to sustain, as is the assertion made in the catalog, "It is clear that the artist Cordier did not entertain any belief in the hierarchy of race."<sup>2</sup> This notion would be a near anomaly in the Western world of the nineteenth century, when race was deeply embedded in the widely held concept of the forward march of progress in all its physical and cultural manifestations. Rather, it addresses the current moment, with the exhibition organizers maintaining, as if the artist were precocious enough to accomplish this, "More than a record of ethnographic types, Cordier's work is a memorial to [those] people whose differences form the foundation of rich cultural diversity in the France, Canada, and United States of today-the three countries that host this exhibition."<sup>3</sup> A quotation of Cordier, "Beauty is not the attribute of a privileged race; I conveyed to the world of art the idea of the ubiquity of beauty," is used in exhibition materials and in the catalog to connote equality of the races. However, "beauty" and "racial equality" are not equivalent concepts.

The exhibition was divided into six sections: an introduction to the artist's ethnographic work; contemporary ethnographic photographs; busts by Cordier; reproductions of certain of those busts in various media and sizes; polychromy; and examples of nonethnographic sculptures. In the first

room, three pieces by Cordier were brought together with works by several other artists in a nexus that sought to present the artist's ethnographic interests in an abolitionist and democratic context. Cordier's would-be origins as a freethinking sculptor are established through the fortuitous timing of his Salon debut in 1848, the year slavery was abolished in France, with the bronze bust of the African Said Abdallah (Fig. 1). The placement nearby of a much later fulllength allegorical bronze called *Love One Another*, of 1867, in which a black child and a white child with different-colored patinas embrace, reinforces that impression. Said Abdallah carries the carefully noted affiliation Mayac Tribe, Kingdom of Darfur (an area of Sudan at the southernmost part of the Sahara). Beside it stood the bust of a black woman entitled *African Venus*, done two years later. Both works were modeled on freed slaves living in Paris, although the subjects lack Western garb and are denied a modern, Western history. We learned that Sa'id Abdallah had already been touted in anthropological circles as a splendid type, having been cast from life by the Ethnological Society in 1847 and held up for his beauty by none other than Victor Schoelcher, who played a major role in the abolition of slavery. The painted plaster cast in question was at the Dahesh as well. While all this seems to make a convincing argument for Cordier's sense of racial equality and belief in universal beauty, we were never told that Schoelcher was racist, believing that blacks had smaller craniums than whites, although he qualified this with the explanation that it was due to "lack of intellectual exercise."<sup>4</sup> Whether Cordier knew about Schoelcher's theories or his model's involvement with the Ethnological Society or not, he seemed to share a concern about Sa'id Abdallah's cranium. Edouard Papet, one of the exhibition's French curators, notes in the Cordier catalog "subtle alterations that the artist made to the young man's physiognomy, primarily with regard to the shape of the nose and the curvature of the forehead."<sup>5</sup> The model was given a more prominent forehead, a signifier of intelligence in nineteenth-century France. Phrenology, the study of the shape of the skull, whose bumps were thought to reveal aptitudes, intelligence, and character, was the forerunner to mid-nineteenth-century anthropological craniometry (a science dealing with the measurement of the skull), and in its more popular forms was well known to the general public.<sup>6</sup>

The allegorical sculpture *Love One Another* does not necessarily signal desire for true racial equality, either. For example, the abolitionist Gustave d'Eichtal, secretary of the Ethnological Society, saw the black man and the white man as a kind of couple, the former the female of the pair and the latter the male.<sup>7</sup> This kind of racial gendering could explain the gentle embrace of Cordier's figures.

We know little about the background of the bronze *African Venus*, conceived as the pendant of Said Abdallah. No tribe or geographic locale is given in the title, nor any specific name, although we are told that the subject had passed through the slave market and ended up in Guadeloupe before being freed several years later. Despite the fact that the bust is modestly draped, the nipples are polished, giving the effect of having been rubbed by many an admirer. Breasts, we will shortly see, figure prominently in Cordier's ethnographic sculptures of women, although they are hardly alluded to in his portraits of wealthy white female patrons, another aspect of his oeuvre. The very assignation "Venus" is a reminder of that other famous black Venus, the hottentot Venus, whose painted plaster cast was kept in the Halls of Anthropology at Paris's Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle since 1815. The hottentot Venus, an African Bushwoman paraded around London and Paris for several years beginning in 1810, then dissected after her death in 1815 by the naturalist Baron Georges Cuvier, was thought to embody hypersexuality, demonstrated by elongated labia and large buttocks. As Sandor oilman has shown, the hottentot Venus was central to the nineteenth-century discourse that conflated African women, as animalistic, sexual beings, with white prostitutes.<sup>8</sup> The portrait Charles Cordier *Sculpting African Venus* by Jacques Leman, included in the Dahesh exhibition, confirms that Cordier's Venus was perceived in light of the sexualized black woman. In Leman's picture the triumphal and virile figure of Cordier points a phallic sculptor's tool in the direction of Venus's parted lips, whose head he holds near his lap in a possessive grip. This painting appeared in the Salon of 1863, infamous among other things for the many erotic Venuses exhibited in that year.<sup>9</sup>

The life cast of Said Abdallah introduced the anthropological context given to Cordier's pieces at the Dahesh exhibition, for the sculptor counted among his most important projects the creation of his Anthropological and Ethnographic Gallery, a collection of forty-nine of his ethnographic busts exhibited in 1860. He contributed reproductions of fifteen of those same pieces to the

Anthropology Galleries at the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle between 1851 and 1867, where they were put on view along with life casts, including that of the hottentot Venus, and various skulls, the famous phrenological collection of the founder of phrenology, Franz Joseph Gall, and ethnographic photographs.<sup>10</sup> Cordier never made life casts, but he would go on to claim scientific measurement of his models and attention to physiognomic peculiarities of a given people as reason enough for his works to be thought of as scientific records." He explained his method in this way:

I examine and compare many individuals. I study the form of their head, the traits of the faces, the expression of their physiognomy; I examine the common characteristics of a race that I wish to represent, I appreciate them as a whole as well as in their details ... I arrive at an ideal type or rather the ideal type of their characteristics ... then ... I reconstruct ... an ensemble in which I reunite all the special beauty of a given race. ... I search among the individuals that I have studied and compared for the one that presents to the highest degree the reunion of the special beauties of an entire population.<sup>12</sup>

The "beau idéal," even if different from the classical canon, is never entirely gone from Cordier's ethnographic work. With his Western eye Cordier sought just the right representative of an entire population. He gives away some of his hierarchical thinking when he goes on to maintain that this most beautiful of individuals (according to the standards Cordier claims are of the population itself) always happens to be "of a superior class." Cordier thought of his busts as portraits, yet most were never quite that. Armand de Quatrefages, chair of anthropology at the museum beginning in 1855, described the collections in the Anthropology Galleries in 1867 as including "beautiful bronze busts by M. Cordier, that reproduce characteristics of various races idealized by the talent of the artist" (emphasis mine).<sup>13</sup> Science and art meet in a field of inquiry, but they are not the same thing. In the natural history museum context Cordier's ethnographic busts may have occupied that terrain of display later given over to didactic installations, a three-dimensional assemblage of information gleaned by the viewer who sees skulls and drawings next to photographs of various peoples along with life casts, then reunites the scientific information in the lifelike sculptures of Cordier.

At the Musée d'Orsay, ethnographic photographs from the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle provided a sense of how some of Cordier's busts had been seen in that context. Because of their fragile state, these photographs could not travel, and the Dahesh instead presented a slide show of the same images in the second room of the exhibition. This was perplexing given the fact that only three of Cordier's works were exhibited thus far; placing photographic materials from the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle to furnish context toward the end of the exhibition, when we had a better sense of the artist's ethnographic sculpture, would have worked better. Past this, in a back corner gallery, the viewer came upon some twelve busts and two small full-scale figures crowded together. According to the curator of the Dahesh venue, this arrangement attempted to re-create the effect of the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle's Anthropology Galleries.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps some reference as to why we had difficulty navigating this space would have helped, because the intended effect was lost. Moreover, the texts accompanying the busts did not explain clearly which of these pieces had been exhibited at the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle or whether all fifteen could be seen at the Dahesh. As it turned out, all were on view, but not in the same room.

Bringing the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle busts together in one space would have helped clarify the collecting emphasis of Cordier's works at that institution. Of the fifteen busts that went to the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, nine were of Algerians based on studies done from life during the artist's travels in 1856. Of these, two were Kabyle (identified by the artist as "Caucasian, Atlantic Race"), one was Coulougli (of Turkish and Moorish parentage), two were Arabs identified as Caucasian (one from Biscara of a "Syro-Arab family" and the other from Laghouat, in southern Algeria), two were Moors, one was a mulatto, and one was a "Jewess." An additional bust, that of a Maltese fisherman, was based on a model Cordier met at the port of Algiers. One more bust, the Negro of the Sudan, was of a drummer whom Cordier met at a religious celebration in Algiers. Significantly, the Algerian busts represent the area of most intensive investigation by early ethnographers and anthropologists at a time when France searched for alliances within the population of its colony. The Coulougli, Berbers, Arabs, Turks, Moors, and Jews were identified as the five main races of Algeria.<sup>15</sup>

Neither exhibition nor catalog engaged the issues of politics and the colonial present and ways in which these interconnect with anthropological institutions (and Cordier). Patricia Lorcin's work on the French practice of ethnography in Algeria at midcentury and attempts at racial classification among its subjugated peoples include an investigation of the "Kabyle myth."<sup>16</sup> The Kabyles, a group of Berbers who lived in the Atlas Mountains of Kabylia, were an indigenous population separate from the Arabs and often described as tall and blond. They received much coverage in the French press, which extolled them for their courage and noble ways and likened them to the mountains in which they lived because of their supposed strength and endurance. In a final room of the exhibition is a bust of a Kabyle child from the collection at the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle. Rendered in white marble from an Algerian quarry in the Filiation Mountains, it stands out against Cordier's bronze and polychrome pieces and brings to mind classical busts.

Cordier treated his own works as "types," having nineteen of them photographed by Charles Marville in 1857, then noting parentage and race in the resulting album. He categorized his racial types beneath the headings Caucasian, Mongolian, and Ethiopian, followed by the designation "MixedRace."<sup>17</sup> One of the latter is Mulatto Girl (also from the collection of the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle), annotated "Halfcast, Moorish Father, Negro Mother." Given the many populations that had immigrated into North Africa, including Europeans, racial hybridity was also a hotbed of anthropological and political discourse. Cordier seemed fascinated by the range of skin colors and physiognomic variation to be found among the Moors of Algeria. His Black Moorish Girl, in bronze with a deep black patina, has Caucasian features and tight curls, while his Moonsh Girl Singing, rendered in painted and gilt white marble, has long straight tresses (both are from the collection of the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle). Paul Broca, who founded the Anthropological Society of Paris in 1859, believed racial mixing eventually led to sterility in the third or fourth generation. His perspective implied doom for mixed populations. William Edwards, who had established the Ethnological Society, maintained that the essential type of one or the other parent always returned to form in subsequent generations. Others believed racial mixing was an inevitable part of the future.<sup>18</sup>

We learned in the back gallery of the artist's involvement in the Anthropological Society of Paris. He became a member in 1860 and gave a lecture there on his busts in 1862. What we did not learn, from the exhibition or the catalog, was how the society's position on race differed from that of the museum. In fact, these were two quite separate institutions with oppositional viewpoints on anthropology; accordingly, Cordier's works would have played different roles within these contexts.<sup>19</sup> Both institutions emphasized the physical, osteological characteristics of humans, especially the shape of the head, and both supported racial inequality, but from differing perspectives. The Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle was a monogenist institution; that is, Quatrefages and many other scientists at the museum believed that all humans had one set of progenitors (usually conceptualized as Adam and Eve), but groups of people had degenerated to a greater or lesser extent from the perfection that existed in Eden. The cause of degeneration was environmental, creating differences in intellectual and moral faculties. Blacks were the most degenerate and whites the least. Quatrefages's Anthropology Galleries represented stages of decline. The scientist did not support the idea of evolution; the future for degenerate populations was bleak.

Cordier's beliefs regarding race is suggested by his membership in the Anthropological Society of Paris. When he lectured there on his ethnographic busts in 1862 he showed three bronzes that represented "the three principal types of humans: Negro or Ethiopian, Mongolian, and Caucasian." The Anthropological Society was a polygenist institution; that is, it supported the idea of races-separate, but not equal-as different species with multiple points of origin. Broca contended that races had separate histories, but he did support Lamarckian evolutionary theory. Races, therefore, had the possibility of improvement.

Had the exhibition and its catalog aspired to get to the heart of Cordier's true position on racial equality-or lack thereof-it would have incorporated more information from his 1860 catalog (the year he joined the Anthropological Society), written in collaboration with the philosopher Marc Trapadoux on the occasion of the exhibition of his Anthropological and Ethnographic Gallery. However, to do so would have undermined the Musée d'Orsay's project of making Cordier a

prescient advocate of nonracist thinking. In the 1860 catalog Cordier discusses the characteristics of the formation of the head, which Broca used as his most powerful weapon to demonstrate not only racial variation but also the inferiority of nonwhites. Cordier also addressed morals and passions, a survival of phrenology (and William Edwards's short-lived Ethnological Society, 1839-48), which moved into anthropological terrain in the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup>

Of a mulatto woman, Cordier wrote in the 1860 catalog, "one sees on her otherwise intelligent forehead the profound reckoning of despotic passions."<sup>21</sup> The Arab from Laghouat, whom Cordier designated Caucasian, had a "privileged nature" with "nobility of lines and a harmonious ensemble. This kind maintains the perfection and majesty of his primordial type" (Fig. 2).<sup>22</sup> A trip to Greece in the late 1850s seemed to confirm his mission to see if the modern Greek was akin to antique representations. His medallion Greek Woman (Musée de Cambrai) from this excursion reproduces a profile that "echos those that remain in the Temple of Theseus." On the other hand, Greek Acarnanian mountain dwellers were "brigands, with savage morals and violent passions."<sup>23</sup>

Many of Cordier's ethnographic busts of females are voluptuous. Some, like his Young Harem Woman, whose nipples protrude through the sheer fabric of her bodice, follow Orientalist tropes. A number of them have on garments with plunging necklines. Although the catalog authors maintain that Cordier was quite true to detail in costume, one wonders how so many of the women represented wear the ethnographic equivalent of a French bustier. Edouard Papet and Maria Vigli rather innocently write of a "mistake" made by Cordier in his Young Greek Woman: "[The] xoulia (cap with small coins)... conflicts with the bare décolletage of the young woman, who is not wearing a poukamiso (blouse), the basic article of all women's attire."<sup>24</sup> Despite the prolific literature establishing a collusion between empire building and sexual control, there is virtually no discussion of this in the catalog or exhibition text.<sup>25</sup>

Cordier made multiples and reductions of his works in a variety of media. The Dahesh offered a number of examples, in addition to a display of several of the more colorful sculptures, in sections four and five of the exhibition. The juxtaposition of several versions of Cordier's Negro of the Sudan proved to be a revelation (Fig. 3). Regrettably, the most spectacular example of all, the Orsay's own copy (reproduced on the cover of the catalog), did not travel, but two other copies, made of bronze and onyx marble from Algeria like that used in the Orsay version, came from Compiègne and Minneapolis. Both of these make use of the Algerian marble's pattern of colored strata to create decorative costume effects. The Dahesh's own Negro of the Sudan, entirely of bronze, was made visually complex through the use of silvered bronze for the costume set against dark skin created with a partially oxidized patina (cover image).

The exhibition ends oddly, with a few scattered examples of the "official career," generally studies of other works in the artist's oeuvre. There is, for example, a small replica of a Christopher Columbus installed in Mexico and a medallion with a bas-relief bust of Giuseppe Garibaldi. The exhibition would have been stronger without these, but a spectacular torchère in the figure of an Arab woman in an onyx marble gown served as a reminder that the artist was first and foremost a second Empire sculptor whose luxurious decorative pieces included the ethnographic busts rather than developing alongside them, the position taken by the curators (Fig. 4).

The exhibition, if conceived as truly monographic, could have been of an entirely different character. Had Cordier and his ethnographic busts been positioned within the commercial and political strategies of the second Empire, an artist of less altruistic intentions might have emerged. In many ways, Cordier's busts, the most interesting of which were created between 1848 and 1860, work in concert with French proto-imperial intentions. Said Abdallah was sculpted one year after the surrender of Emir Abd-el-Kader (1847), which marked the end of the Holy War led against the French in North Africa (although skirmishes would continue for another ten years). In 1856, during his first trip to Algeria, Cordier conceived of a project for a monument showing "France, depicted as Minerva, goddess of wisdom, war, and the arts, disembarking in Algeria."<sup>26</sup> He would have represented Africa as a prostrate lion and decorated the entablature beneath Minerva's feet with Algerian racial types. Cordier had originally shown sketches for the project to Maréchal Randon, governor of Algiers (later, minister of war), who passed them along to the secretary of war, who in turn recommended the project to the Beaux-Arts administration. Although the project was never

realized, Cordier did receive the commission. Cordier worked on the plaster in Paris in 1857 and exhibited it in his studio early in 1858. Randon was aggressively involved in exploiting the natural resources of Algeria, including its marble. Cordier had quickly established a friendship with Randon, even sculpting busts of him and his wife. Among the marble quarries under Randon's jurisdiction was that of Fifiya, the source of marble for Kalrylt? Child. It was on that same trip that Cordier found the onyx marble he would use for many of his most impressive Algerian busts. The onyx marble was located in an ancient quarry, once used by the Romans, and recently rediscovered by a marble mason from Carrara. By 1858 this marble became an official part of the busy industry of French marble products from quarries in Algeria.<sup>27</sup> When Cordier exhibited his Anthropological and Ethnographic Gallery at the Palace of Industry in Paris in 1860, representatives of Alphonse Fallu et Compagnie, the newly established Algerian Onyx Marble Company, were also present, displaying samples of the marble.<sup>28</sup>

While Cordier is credited with reviving polychrome in sculpture, second Empire interiors and decorative objects already made use of colored marbles. In the 1867 Exposition Universelle in Paris, the artist exhibited his work in the "Luxury Furniture" section at a booth entitled "Charles Cordier, Sculpture ethnographique et decorative," and the display included busts as well as mantelpieces and torchères. Another Cordier booth was located in the "Furniture and Other Household Objects" area. Only two of his sculptures, Jewess of Algiers and Young Fellaah Woman, were exhibited in the "Works of Art" section. The Exposition Universelle of 1867 provided France with the opportunity to show its material gains from its North African colony. Among the products on view was the onyx marble Cordier preferred. The illustrated guide to the exposition emphasized a link via the quarry in Oran between the Roman Empire and the modern French Empire.<sup>29</sup>

Cordier was not above reconceptualizing his ethnographic busts as pure decoration. In one case, reduced busts of African Venus and Said Abdallah were made into a clock and barometer. The exhibition gave us no sense of what I see as a bigger project of Cordier's: ethnographic busts as display objects in a second Empire home. Mass production and industry had been emphasized by the second Empire since 1851. In that year Cordier exhibited his original bronze busts African Venus and Said Abdallah at the Great Exhibition, Crystal Palace, London, where they were purchased by Queen Victoria (this is the pair located in the first room of the Dahesh exhibition). France had a reputation as the leading nation in bronze work, due to advances in technology beginning in the early nineteenth century, and a section of the exposition was devoted to French bronzes.<sup>30</sup> It may have been here that Cordier first became familiar with the recent French invention of galvanoplasty, a relatively inexpensive technique used in mass manufacture to create objects in materials resembling gold or silver through metal plating, a technology the artist exploited in his polychrome sculptures beginning in 1853.

For original busts Cordier often used materials associated with the figures he sculpted—the Kabyle Child, for example, made of white marble from Algeria, or certain North Africans reconstituted of onyx marble. Combining regional products with the people who are associated with them demonstrates a strategy of consumption that would have appealed to a second Empire invested in colonization and its rewards. When Cordier first exhibited his bronze and onyx marble North Africans at the Salon of 1857, Napoléon III purchased two works, the Arab of El Aghoual (Fig. 2) and Negro of the Sudan (the version now at the Musée d'Orsay), a "Caucasian" and "Negro" type respectively.<sup>31</sup> Cordier's busts, with their racial classifications, function as a spectacle of racial typologies that are at once concrete objects of possession and products of refinement. As Anne Maxwell has noted of colonial photographs—which, like the Cordier busts, are forms of visual anthropology with strategies of Western intervention—when people are in a state of abjection they pose no real threat and can be inscribed with a romantic nobility; the focus can be on "beauty," which obfuscates unpleasant aspects of imperial control.<sup>32</sup> Surface realism collapses the boundaries of what we might now call "personal space" and creates an intimate relationship between the viewer and work of art. Cordier's polychrome busts are so visually compelling in their detail and sensual blend of materials that they invite the touch. There is little about Cordier's sculptures that suggests sordid aspects of repression.

The showstopping Chinese Man, of gilt, silvered bronze, red patination, and enameling, whose original bronze cast was commissioned by the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, was an early

merchant, associates himself with dynastic power through his elaborate dress and long fingernails (a sign of leisure). More than any other ethnographic bust, Chinese Man turns away from the sculptor or viewer. The "inscrutable look" of a Chinese man who refuses to meet the gaze of the Western man signified elevated class in the nineteenth century.<sup>33</sup> Chinese Man was reproduced in porcelain reductions, not only because they would be less expensive for a middle-class clientele, but also because porcelain products from the contemporary Qing dynasty were familiar to the French public (Fig. 6). The exhibition organizers treat the fact that "these were the only Cordier busts reproduced in porcelain bisque" as a mere curiosity, making no further connection with second Empire consumerism and the vulgarization of "top-end" decorative wares.<sup>34</sup>

Cordier identified with the spirit of Orientalism to such a degree that he had the architect Jacques Drevet remake sections of an Egyptian pavilion created for the 1867 Exposition Universelle into his own "Moorish Villa" in Orsay, near Paris. He also had a studio on the Boulevard St-Michel done in Moorish style, as well as a third home in Nice in 1870. In 1890 Cordier moved to Algiers permanently, where he founded the Society of Algerian Artists (later the Society of Algerian and Orientalist Artists) in 1897. The exhibition and catalog give little sense of these last years, leaving one in the dark about the artist's development and life in Algiers.<sup>35</sup>

The exhibition catalog is divided into three main chapters, interspersed with brief essays on ethnographic life casts, Cordier's trip to Greece in 1858, and technical aspects of the artist's polychromy. A chronology, exhibition history, catalogue raisonné, and bibliography follow. The first chapter, by Orsay archivist Laure de Margerie, one of the exhibition's curators, attempts to establish the sculptor's interest in ethnography in terms of an enlightened view of diversity. The writing (or translation from the French) has an ambiguous quality that leaves points unclear. The second paragraph begins with the statement, "The question of the French public's familiarity with foreign people arose from the huge success of Cordier's four African busts ... in 1850, a time when the Other was rarely represented in European sculpture."<sup>36</sup> Does this mean they were familiar with the "Other" (perhaps through government propaganda and visitors from the colony of Algeria, already in France's possession for twenty years) or does this mean that, on the contrary, they were not at all familiar with non-Western peoples and therefore enchanted by the exhibition of these four heads? Margerie makes much of the paucity of black models in the second half of the nineteenth century, going so far as to state this as the reason for the success of cheap reproductions in plaster of the heads of African Venus and Said Abdallah sold in the United States through catalogs in the 1890s.<sup>37</sup> Is the case of the United States, with its enormous African-American population, really the same as that of France? Margerie lists ethnographic displays of living peoples in Paris after midcentury as a backdrop for Cordier's interest in ethnography, but exhibitions of Africans date mainly after 1877, when France began to build its imperial strength by making further incursions into Africa.<sup>38</sup> If Cordier had no specific political agenda in the creation of his ethnographic busts, it is surprising that he did not sculpt the Native Americans and Aztecs that came through Paris between 1843 and 1854. Margerie offers the explanation, "By character ... Cordier always preferred individual contact and eschewed the crowd," as if arrangements could not be made to sculpt individuals. She gives evidence of this by pointing to the wealthy tea merchant and his family, whom, she says, the sculptor "chose as models." We learn only later, in Christine Barthe's essay, that the artist was commissioned to do these busts by the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, which had originally wanted to make life casts of the merchant and his family.

Margerie notes the importance of the physical aspect of mankind to the field of anthropology but makes little mention of Broca's Anthropological Society. Broca is mentioned as "a Frenchman who based his method on the weight of the brain" in a sentence separate from that noting Cordier's involvement with the Anthropological Society. In fact, Broca used many forms of cranial measurement, especially those that dealt with facial angles. Margerie brings up the terms brachycephalites and dolichocephalites in regard to skull measurements by the Swedish anatomist Anders Retzius without explaining what the terms mean or why we might be concerned with them in Cordier's place and time in history. (Broca and other French anthropologists made use of



To avoid the issue of hierarchy in Cordier's ethnographic work, Margerie quotes the artist on his disdain for life casting, leaving out a crucial phrase regarding class: "[My model] would not consent to the humiliation of a mold-casting weakens the flesh and makes the body look dull. . . ."39 rather than "The 'type,' chosen among many, always turns out to be of a superior class, who would never consent to the humiliation of being cast-casting weakens the flesh and makes the body look dull."40 As evidence that Cordier was an egalitarian of class as well as of race, Margerie points out that he lived in the old Casbah district in Algiers during his visit of 1856 instead of the Westernized, modern section. Does that mean he is any more nonethnocentric or less tied into empire than Paul Gauguin, for example, some thirty-five years later? Or, for that matter, does a visit of several months really carry the same weight as settling somewhere? What are we then to make of the fact that Cordier spent the last fifteen years of his life on Algiers's much Westernized Rue de Tivoli?

Édouard Papet, curator at the Orsay, examines Cordier in terms of second Empire sculpture. His essay is mainly a rehashing of material in Andreas Blühm's catalog *The Colour of Sculpture, 1840-1910* (Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, 1996) and includes many of the same illustrations. Papet establishes Cordier's interest in polychromy through debates surrounding the recent discovery that color had been used in antique sculpture and architecture as well as the artist's interest in sixteenth-century Italian polychromy. Papet parts company with Blühm's interpretation of Cordier over the subject of Orientalism. He finds Blühm's description of Cordier as "an Orientalist sculptor, par excellence," "too much of an understatement," revealing a lack of understanding of the importance of the scientific bent of his work. The erotic aspect of "a few generously fleshy busts" Papet attributes to "a post-1860 decorative reconversion," ostensibly after the exhibition of the artist's Anthropological and Ethnographic Gallery. Yet he did not discuss Cordier as a decorator, let alone one who could "reconvert." Moreover, some of the artist's most voluptuous figures, such as *Black Moorish Woman* (1856), are from the earlier period. In regard to Cordier as decorator, there is no consideration of his background as an apprentice in a jewelry shop or his work at a studio of ornamental sculpture for architectural decoration on his arrival in Paris at the age of seventeen, nor his subsequent work at the *Petite École* (*École Royale Spéciale de Dessin*), where he was awarded a silver medal for ornamental sculpture." Papet gives no sense at all of the artist before he sculpted Saïd Abdallah. While Albert-Ernest Carrier-Belleuse and Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux are mentioned, little is made of the similar interests these artists shared in architectural sculpture, second Empire decoration, and racial types.

The third major essay, by Christine Barthe, is a welcome, if brief, study, making use of archival research, on collections and practices at the *Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle* at midcentury. She discusses dates and ways in which life casts came into the collection and explains how Cordier was given the commission to sculpt the Chinese tea merchant and his wife as the result of their unwillingness to be cast or have their photographs taken. And it is Barthe who discovered Saïd Abdallah's presence (and life cast) at the Ethnological Society in 1847. Much of the essay is devoted to an attempt to reconstruct the exhibitions in the Anthropology Galleries, a project that leads to disappointment, since no photographs of the galleries exist and the museum's scientists provided little information. Barthe uses visitor's guides and the few available publications to give some idea of the way Cordier's busts were displayed.

The main contribution of the exhibition's catalog is its *catalogue raisonné*, a detailed record of more than six hundred works by Cordier, many of them illustrated, some in color. This is largely the fruit of the efforts of Cordier scholar Jeannine Durand-Révillon (1929-1999), whose archive on the artist was recently donated to the *Musée d'Orsay*. Some reproductions come from details in old photographs that are so blurry that we need to take a leap of faith that a given work has even been identified, but such uncertainties are few. The *catalogue raisonné* will be a major tool for scholars of nineteenth-century French sculpture; it is worth adding to the bookshelves for this alone.

The exhibition and its catalog leave one with the impression that Cordier was the first artist in France to create ethnographic sculptures. Margerie notes a mere handful of sculptures of Africans in France before the Saïd Abdallah. However, if we think of ethnography in terms of the world's peoples, then we find other sculptors, like Dantan jeune, who made realistic ethnographic busts in the 1820s and the 1840s; P. Law, whose ethnographic sculptures of New Zealanders were cast by



Alexandre Dumontier in Hobart Town in the 1830s; and Auguste Pr eault, who sculpted an American Indian in 1845. Other artists whose sculpted ethnographic busts found their way to the Mus eum d' Histoire Naturelle produced works nearly contemporaneous with Cordier: Nicolas Guillemin sculpted *Last of the Mohicans* (1855) and *The Young Negress* (1864), which entered the museum's collections by 1866. A marble bust of a Chippewa Indian of 1861 by Fran ois Vincent also entered the collection in the 1860s.<sup>42</sup>

The Cordier exhibition is not the first attempt by the Orsay to fit the artist's work into the broader context of ethnography. Ten years ago the exhibition *La sculpture ethnographique de la V enus hottentote   la Tehura de Gauguin* featured thirteen busts by Cordier and a catalog essay by Durand-R evillon exclusively on the artist. In that exhibition, life casts and ethnographic photographs were exhibited along with sculptures by Charles Lemarquier, Louis Rochet, and Herbert Ward, among others. Presenting Cordier in a monographic exhibition where he remains cast within a scientific framework but is elevated above the hierarchical and political aspects that intersected with science at the time positions the artist on unstable terrain; in the end, the perspective cannot be maintained. Since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, connections between colonial interventions and aesthetic production are difficult to ignore. While Said's monolithic notion of Orientalist discourse, wherein France assumes full intellectual authority over its Orient, has been recently challenged as too strident and blind to hybridity (used here in the sense of a mediated relationship of the self to the Other), his ideas regarding control through ordering and classification can be applied to Cordier, with his many reproductions and reductions of racial types. Yet as James Clifford has reminded us, there is also a humanitarian aspect to Orientalism; the Arabist strain that existed concurrently with the Algerian colonial project can also be applied to Cordier.<sup>43</sup> The "beauty" Cordier sought in Others and the sense of intimacy apparent in his works are not just about power; certainly, we do not find in Cordier the distancing sensed in other Orientalist works, like those by Jean-L eon G r me. Furthermore, his ambivalent relationship with his models, whom he perceived as both racial types and representatives of elevated social classes, with which the artist may have identified to some degree, demonstrates the position of "mixed feelings" that Homi Bhabha, among others, has recently explored between self and the Other.<sup>44</sup> Cordier's work occupies both poles-colonist (with racial control and product control) and sympathetic mediator.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

1 Charles Cordier, Saïd Abdallah, of the Mayac Tribe, Kingdom of Darfur, bronze, 1848. East Cowes, Isle of Wight, England, Osborne House (artwork in the public domain; photograph   2005, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II)

2 Cordier, Arab of El Aghouat, bronze, patinated bronze, and onyx marble, 1856. Paris, Mus e d'Orsay (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the R union des Mus es Nationaux/Art Resource, NY)

3 Cordier, Negro of the Sudan, silvered bronze and onyx marble, 1856. The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, The William Hood Dunwoody Fund (artwork in the public domain)

4 Cordier, Arab Woman, torch re, silvered bronze and onyx marble, 1862. Fontainebleau, Mus e National du Ch teau (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the R union des Mus es Nationaux/Art Resource, NY)

5 Cordier, Chinese Man, bronze with multiple patinas, gilding, and enameling, 1853. Art Gallery of Hamilton, Canada, The Joey and Toby Tanenbaum Collection, 2002 (artwork in the public domain)

6 Cordier, Chinese Man, 2nd version, hard porcelain, 1869. Limoges, Mus e National Adrien-Dubouch  (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the R union des Mus es Nationaux/ Art Resource, NY)

## FOOTNOTE

Notes 1. For a brief introduction to ethnographic art during this phase of Orientalism, see Christine Peltre, *Orientalism in Art*, trans. John Goodman (New York: Abbeville Press, 1998), 154-67. 2. Laure de Margerie, "The Most Beautiful Negro Is Not the One Who Looks Most Like Us," in Margerie et al., *Facing the Other*, 28. 3. Serge Lemoine, John Porter, and Peter Trippi, foreword to Margerie et al., *Facing the Other*, 11. 4. William Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530-1880* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 198. 5. Edouard Papet, "Ethnographic Life Casts in the Nineteenth Century," in Margerie et al., *Facing the Other*, 127. 6. see Philippe Sorel, "La phr?nologie et l'art," in *L'homme au corps: Arts et sciences: 1793-1993*, ? d. G?rard R?gnier and Jean-Pierre Changeux (Paris: R?union des Mus?es Nationaux, 2003), 266-79; and G. Lanteri-Laura, *Histoire de la phr?nologie: L'homme et son cerveau selon F.-J. Call* (Paris: Masson, 1978). 7. Cohen, *French Encounter with Africans*, 236. 8. Sandor Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine and Literature," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985): 204-42. 9. On the "Venuses" at the Salon of 1863, see Jennifer Shaw, "The Figure of Venus: Rhetoric of the Ideal and the Salon of 1863," *Art History* 14, no. 1 (1991): 540-70. 10. On the Anthropological and Ethnographic Gallery, see Jeannine Durand-Revillon, "La galerie anthropologique du Mus?um d'histoire naturelle et Charles-Henri-Joseph Cordier," in *La sculpture ethnographique de la Venus hotlentote ? la Tehura de Gauguin*, by Antoinette Le Normand-Romain, Anne Roquebert, et al. (Paris: R?union des Mus?es Nationaux, 1994), 51-64. 11. Charles Cordier, "Rapport de Charles Cordier: Types ethniques repr?sents par la sculpture," *Bulletin de la Soci?t? d'Anthropologie de Paris*, 1862: 66-67. Cordier described his methods as follows: "To set up my measurements, I start from some central point-for example, the center of the ear-to determine the slant of the medial line from the chin to the occipital bone; then I trace the arc of a circle, beneath which I determine the position of each feature, each depression, every landmark, and so on for all the lines, for all the contours, down to the most delicate crevice and protrusion." 12. *Ibid.*, 66. 13. Armand de Quatrefages, *Rapport sur les progr?s de l'anthropologie* (Paris: Hachette, 1867), 6667. 14. Stephen Edidin, telephone conversation with author, December 21, 2004. 15. Race was a shifting term in nineteenth-century France. Monogenists like Quatrefages preferred the term varieties; others used species. Race could refer to major designationsCaucasian, Mongol, Negro-or subgroups within main categories. 16. On early ethnography in Algeria, see Patricia Lorcin, *Imperial Identities: Stereotypes, Prejudice and Race in Colonial Algiers* (London: I. B. Taurus, 1995). 17. Laure de Margerie, chronology, in Margerie et al., *Facing the Other*, 132. 18. On concepts of miscegenation, see Werner Sellers, *Neither Black nor White Yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). For a discussion of racial hybridity in the nineteenth century and its relation to the current term hybridity used as a concept within culture theory to denote that "I and the Other" is best understood as a complex synthesis of particular interactions, see Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995). 19. For a detailed analysis of anthropological institutions and race in nineteenth-century France, see Elizabeth Williams, "The Science of Man: Anthropological Thought and Institutions in Nineteenth-Century France" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1983). 20. On the juxtaposition of moral and anthropological concerns, see Elizabeth Williams, *The Physical and the Moral: Anthropology, Physiology and Philosophical Medicine in France, 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Edwards believed that races were fixed types, with cranial features established at their origin, but he added to craniology a study of morals and history. The study of morals ultimately derived from the phrenology of Johann Lavater, Charles Le Brun, and especially Franz Joseph Gall. Morals were unchanging traits, Edwards believed, and a study of history could demonstrate the character of races. Races were inalterable physiomoral entities. Thus, in the character of a people (written in their physiognomy) one could read destinies and even outcomes of historical struggles. For further information on Edwards, see Claude Blanckaert, "On the Origins of French Ethnology: William Edwards and the Doctrine of Race," in *Rones, Bodies, Behavior: Essays on Biological Behavior*, ed. George Stocking (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 18-55. On the establishment of ethnology as a discipline and its relation to anthropology, including the case of France, see Han F. Vermeulen, "Origins and Institutionalization of Ethnography and Ethnology in Europe and the U.S.A., 1771-1845," in *Fieldwork and Footnotes: Studies in the History of European Anthropology*, ed. Han Vermeulen and Arturo Alvarez Rold?n (London: Routledge, 1995), 39-59. 21. Charles Cordier, quoted in Marc Trapadoux, *L'Oeuvre de M. Cordier, galerie anthropologique et ethnographique pour servir ? l'histoire des races* (Paris, 1860), 9. 22. *Ibid.*, 11. 23. *Ibid.*, 17. 24. ? douard Papet and Maria Vigli, "The Trip to Greece, April to November 1858," in Margerie et al.,

Facing the Other, 90. 25. On gender, sexuality, and the colonial Other, see, for example, Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London: Routledge, 1996); and Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York: Routledge, 1995). 26. Noted in Margerie, *chronology*, 132. 27. Édouard Papet, "The Polychromy Techniques of Charles Cordier," in Margerie et al., *Facing the Other*, 83. 28. Ibid. As Papet notes, the marble was most often used for luxury items like bathtubs and pedestals. 29. "Exposition d'Algérie: Matières premières," in *l'Exposition Universelle de 1867 illustrée*, ed. Fr. Ducuing (Paris: Administration, [1868]), 184, quoted in Andreas Blühm et al., *The Colour of Sculpture: 1840-1910*, exh. cat., Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, 1996, 77 n. 22. 30. On French bronzes at the Great Exhibition, see Whitney Wallon, *France at the Crystal Palace: Bourgeois Taste and Artisan Manufacture in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). 31. Margerie, *chronology*, 132. 32. Anne Maxwell, *Colonial Photography and Exhibition: Representations of the "Native" and the Making of European Identities* (London: Leicester University Press, 1999), 21. 33. Ibid., 38-72. 34. Papet, "To Have the Courage of His Polychromy," in Margerie et al., *Facing the Other*, 73. 35. Roger Benjamin's focus on institutions and practices in Algeria in *Orientalist Aesthetics: Art, Colonialism, and French North Africa, 1880-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003) would provide a helpful model. 36. Margerie, "The Most Beautiful Negro," 13. 37. Ibid., 15. 38. see Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, et al., eds., *Zoos humaines XIXe et XXe siècles* (Paris: Éditions la Découverte, 2002); Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851-1939* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1988); and William Schneider, *An Empire for the Masses: The French Popular Image of Africa, 1870-1900* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982). 39. Margerie, "The Most Beautiful Negro," 27. 40. Cordier, "Rapport de Charles Cordier," 66. 41. These facts are listed in the *chronology*, in Margerie et al., *Facing the Other*, 129. 42. see Antoinette Le Normand-Romain, "Sculpture et ethnographie," in Le Normand-Romain et al., *La sculpture ethnographique*, 33-50. 43. see James Clifford, *The* **AUTHOR AFFILIATION**

BARBARA LARSON is associate professor of art at the University of West Florida [Department of Art, University of West Florida, 11000 University Parkway, Pensacola, Fla. 32514].

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