



EDITED BY ELYSE NELSON AND WENDY S. WALTERS

# FICTIONS OF EMANCIPATION

**CARPEAUX'S *WHY BORN*  
ENSLAVED! RECONSIDERED**

THE  
MET

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Adrienne L. Childs

# THE VANQUISHED UNCHAINED

## ABOLITION AND EMANCIPATION IN SCULPTURE OF THE ATLANTIC WORLD

Embedded in the complexities of a post-emancipation Black Atlantic world, Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux's *Why Born Enslaved!* (pl. 1) is a pivot point for the wide-reaching discussion about slavery, abolition, emancipation, and art explored in this book. While grounded in French sculptural practice of the 1860s, *Why Born Enslaved!* has aesthetic and conceptual roots in a centuries-old European visual tradition of representing the vanquished, the captive, and the enslaved. These restrained figures were a testament to the power and triumph of their captors. By the end of the eighteenth century, in the wake of the brutality and violence of the race-based Atlantic slave trade and its colonial dynamics, a new visual language of captivity and enslavement had emerged in the growing discourse around abolition and emancipation of the Black enslaved. As the objectified, commodified, and abject did not lend themselves easily to representation, the various strategies used to unfetter the Black slave body in sculpture proved to be fraught with opaque intentions, contradictory messages, and open-ended narratives.

The tradition of depicting prisoners in art dates back to antiquity. In the wake of wars and conflicts in the late fifth century B.C., the Greeks bound prisoners to columns in order to display their vanquished enemies. This kind of spectacle of victory led to the development of architectural pillars that feature the vanquished or enslaved bearing the burden. These and similar



**FIG. 5.1 QUATTRO MORI (THE FOUR MOORS), 1621–26**  
Pietro Tacca (Italian, 1577–1640). Bronze. Installed around the base of the marble monument to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Ferdinando I de' Medici (1599), by Giovanni Bandini (Italian, 1540–1599), in Livorno, Italy



**PL. 2. WHY BORN ENSLAVED! (NEGRESSE), MODELED 1868, CAST 1872**  
Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux (French, 1827-1875)  
Terracotta



**PL. 3. NEGRESS, 2017**  
Kara Walker (American, born 1969)  
Plaster



**PL. 10. ANTISLAVERY MEDALLION, CA. 1787**  
 Manufactured by Josiah Wedgwood (British, 1730-1795),  
 after a design by William Hackwood (British, ca. 1753-1836).  
 Jasperware



**PL. 12. DOUBLE-SIDED ANTISLAVERY SEAL  
 SET INTO A FOB, CA. 1830S**  
 After Josiah Wedgwood (British, 1730-1795).  
 Engraved gems; gilded metal setting



**PL. 11. ABOLITIONIST JUG, CA. 1820**  
 Unknown manufacturer (British, probably Staffordshire  
 or Sunderland). Pearlware (glazed earthenware) with  
 transfer-printed and luster decoration



**PL. 13. COLOGNE BOTTLE WITH ENCRUSTED ANTISLAVERY IMAGE, CA. 1830**  
 Attributed to Falcon Glassworks of Apsley Pellatt & Co.  
 (British, 1791-1890)  
 Blown and cut glass



**PL. 21. FOREVER FREE, 1867**  
Edmonia Lewis (American, 1844-1907)  
Marble

**PL. 22. THE FREEDMAN, MODELED 1863, CAST 1891**  
John Quincy Adams Ward (American, 1830-1910)  
Bronze