

Emily D. Lewis

Canterbury Program
Prospectus, Budget, and Bibliography
2004

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Canterbury Fellowship
2004 Prospectus

Project Narrative:

The period from 1934-1947 marks a time of prolific and unprecedented artistic creation by black women artists in America. Crossing disciplinary and medium lines, the Harlem Renaissance inspired and empowered men and women of color to give voice to black America and create art that reflected their unique experiences. Author Zora Neale Hurston and printmaker Elizabeth Catlett heeded this call and independently developed works, which affirmed and dignified the African American experience, with concerned attention to the role of black women in American culture.

Often dismissed as a subversive and unsophisticated collective, African American artists participating in the Harlem Renaissance challenged mainstream misconceptions of black life. Working against misrepresentations and more frequently, complete omissions of black culture, most artists during this period produced works of "radical racial protest,"¹ aligned with contemporary activist leaders. While openly political artists generally had greater access to larger audiences, subscribing to Communism, Socialism and the Popular Front put them at risk for a multiplicity of dangers ranging from imprisonment to assassination. Amazingly, for the extent to which Hurston and Catlett were able to produce work, neither artist was *openly* political. My theory is that their political attentiveness to different ideologies guided their work but did not inhibit them from producing. In this sense, their work was more of a response to the benefits of political ideologies for black culture, than a specific means to persuade the political sentiments of their audiences.

Unlike the minimal and generally pictorial texts on the life and work of Catlett, critics such as Gloria Cronin, Alice Walker, and Robert E. Hemenway have written much on Hurston's work. However, there is an overwhelming need for scholarship of this period that crosses disciplinary lines and provides a discourse of how literary and visual artists contributed to this movement of black cultural exploration in the context of political and religious thematics. So monumental is this period of production that it later would be understood as a fundamental step in larger moments of political, social, and cultural change like the Civil Rights Movement. As Hurston and Catlett were addressing two separate audiences, the literate consumers and poverty level mass proletariats, respectively, combined they were able to reach an astonishing amount of people that extended cross-continentially. In my preliminary research of Hurston and Catlett, I have found location to a principle element informing their work, and as such, utilizing the wealth of literature written on Hurston, I will be able to more critically explore the less examined Catlett. In this sense, as both artists are unified by the importance of their locations, the extensive criticisms of Hurston will provide a solid framework in which to explore Catlett and produce a stronger analysis of both artists. Within the canon of Art History, artwork by African Americans has often been superficially examined, biographically based, and dismissed as colloquial until recent years. Thus, this project

¹ Mary Helen Washington, "Zora Neale Hurston: A Woman Half in Shadow," *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing: A Zora Neale Hurston Reader*, ed. Alice Walker (New York: The Feminist Press: 1979).

would be especially progressive and instrumental in expanding this discourse and bridging both disciplines.

The literary and visual images created in Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and Catlett's *Negro Woman* series focus on black history as a means to understand the present of the 30s and 40s, and guide readers and viewers, specifically women, toward an empowered, productive, responsible and valued future. The female characters and figures examine a black experience of rich and complex representations. Further, as I have mentioned in a earlier paper written about Catlett for Dr. Bridget Cooks' *African American Women in the Visual Arts* class, artists such as Catlett and Hurston demarginalize black women by making black female subjects the primary focus.

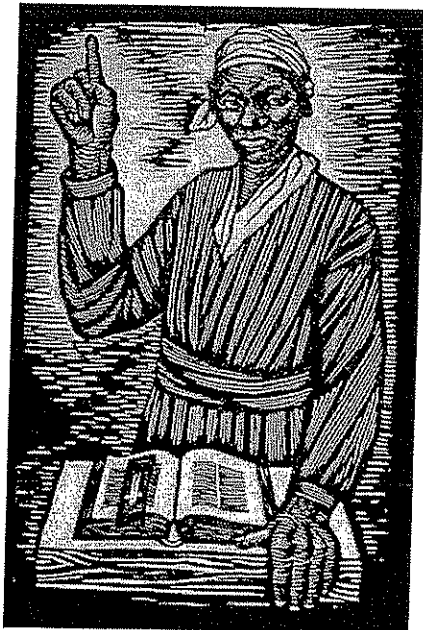
This project seeks to address a set of inter-related questions regarding how Catlett and Hurston's work contributed to and furthered an understanding and appreciation of black culture in America. These questions include:

- How did location and positioning of each artist effect their production and reception?
- How does patronage effect their production and stylistic choices?
- What was the nature of communication amongst artists across disciplinary lines during this period?
- How does the literature and art distinguish itself as new and progressive?

With the guidance of Dr. Elrod and Dr. Edelstein in the English Department and Dr. Cooks in the Art History Department, the support of the Canterbury Fellowship would allow for a thoughtful, well researched, and truly necessary inquiry into this period of revolutionary American history. As I already have read my selected Hurston texts and familiarized myself with the Catlett prints, over the summer I would plan to begin reading some historical background texts from my prepared bibliography in addition to a selection of literary criticisms and critical essays. A further exciting summer possibility would be to travel to Cuernavaca, Mexico with Dr. Cooks with the assistance of an exterior grant, to meet and interview Catlett and conduct research in the Cuernavaca collections. As there is less access to Catlett's work in the United States because she expatriated to Mexico, this is a wonderful opportunity to work with primary source materials that will provide greater quality research for the final paper. Fortunately, I will benefit from the recent travel and scholarship of Alice Walker in understanding Eatonville, the Southern home of Hurston and inspiration for many of her novels. When school resumes in Fall, I will have regular meetings with my mentors in a directed reading independent study to prepare myself for writing in the Winter. By early Winter quarter, likely mid January, I plan to begin writing in order to have a writing sample prepared for the Sigma Tau Delta Conference. The approximate length of the paper should be between 30-40 pages, not inclusive of images. At the completion of the Fellowship, I would submit a likely reduced version for publishing in several scholarly publications including, *Art Bulletin*, *Woman's Art Journal*, *Art in America*, and separately, the Norton Scholar's Prize.

In accordance with my background as an English and Art History double major, I believe that crossing disciplinary lines and investigating literature and visual art of this period will result in a rich body of work important to both fields of study. Looking at both literature in the form of the novel, and artwork in the form of wood block prints, both artistic mediums will compliment each other in an exciting and well-rounded manner not as readily possible within the confines of traditional ten-week courses in

either discipline. Using similar methodologies of close reading and looking to deconstruct the works and analyze their social implications, I will carry on the very mission revered by both Hurston and Catlett: create and sustain dialogue about the marginalized and oppressed as a vehicle for positive and proactive change. As a Portuguese-American woman of color, I can appreciate the negative implications of being misrepresented and often omitted, and I feel passionately about the positive prospects of this project. Reading the dialogue of Hurston and looking at Catlett's images, I began to wonder what it would be like to study representations and intricacies of my own culture, and so I am driven to further investigate the culture so eloquently captured by both artists. Further, as I plan to attend graduate school to attain a doctorate degree in Art History or Visual Culture, and teach at the university level, I wish to communicate the high level of dedication with which I would treat this Fellowship. Since the beginning of my career at Santa Clara University I have involved myself in several long-term projects in an effort to further discern my vocation and be a contributing member of the Santa Clara community. Over the past year and a half, I have worked as the Museum Educator at the de Saisset Museum where I developed the *Explore with Me* Student Docent Program. The program is designed to train SCU students to engage in a peer-to-peer exchange with visitors about the temporary art exhibitions. Further, I've been published in one Museum publication, featured in *The Santa Clara* newspaper twice, and I am looking forward to presenting a panel at the upcoming California Association of Museums in July. Thus, as I am generally involved in the teaching aspect of education, working on a long-term research project like this would be an appropriate and exciting introduction into academic life. Thank you for your kind consideration. Attached please find my proposed budget and bibliography.



In Sojourner Truth I fought for the rights of women as well as Negroes (1946-7)

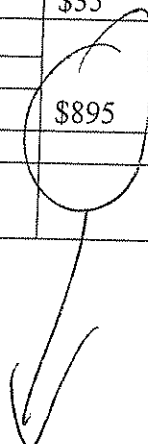
Elizabeth Catlett

"Like the dead-seeming, cold rocks, I have memories within that came out of the material that went to make me. Time and place have had their way."

~ Zora Neale Hurston

Proposed Budget

Item	Estimated Cost	
Copy and Printing Costs		
▪ To include article photocopying, draft printing and final copies.	\$160 (SCU library charges \$0.13 per copy)	
Books		
• Alice Walker, <i>I Love Myself When I am Laughing</i>	\$14.95	
• Gloria Cronin, <i>Critical Essays on Zora Neale Hurston</i>	\$40.00	
• Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and K.A. Appiah, <i>Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives</i>	\$14.36	
• Melanie Anne Herzog, <i>Elizabeth Catlett</i>	\$27.20	
• Valarie Boyd, <i>Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston</i>	\$20.40	
• Carla Kaplan, <i>Zora Neale Hurston, A Life in Letters</i>	\$13.97	
• Cheryl A. Wall, <i>Zora Neale Hurston</i>	\$23.80	
• Robert Hemenway, <i>Zora Neale Hurston, A Literary Biography</i>	\$19.95	
• Harold Bloom, <i>Zora Neale Hurston: Modern Critical Views</i>	\$37.95	
• Dolan Hubbard, <i>Recovered Writers, Recovered Texts: Race, Class and Gender in Black Women's Literature</i>	\$32.00	
• Cary Wintz, <i>Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance</i>	\$21.95	
**Please note that all prices were taken from www.amazon.com and listed before taxes. As such, I have estimated the total book cost with tax.	\$290	
Travel to Stanford Research Library		
▪ To include CalTrain and Bus transportation	\$35	
Sigma Tau Delta Conference		
▪ Flight to Kansas City, MO	\$310.00	
▪ Registration and Hotel	\$585.00	
	\$895	
GRAND TOTAL		\$1380.00



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~~480.00~~
480.00

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