

NOBILIS

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“Ever Not Quite”: *Empathy, Experience, and William Edmondson*

Look at this work of art (fig. 1). Carved by hand by the American sculptor William Edmondson (1874–1951) and known simply as *Two Doves* (ca. 1934), the piece presents two mourning doves, conjoined by a shared base, heads dipped lower than their bodies. The work is made of limestone. It measures ten inches long by five inches high and weighs approximately twelve and a half pounds. Chisel marks and incisions are clearly visible on its surface. From this visual record, the viewer learns something about the decisions a stone carver makes: putting force to the alternating tasks of descriptive line, subtly expanded volume, or tapped-and-pounded texture and shade. In this case, Edmondson used descriptive line to produce birds that are somewhat schematic and stylized in effect—almost cartoonish. Tight, round circles mark the eyes and the seams of the beaks are equally graphic in character. While he has used line similarly in the description of the wings (which look almost like saddles), Edmondson made the birds’ bodies so that they swell into subtler shapes and volumes, deviating a bit from the iconic registration of mere bird. The backs spread long and smooth, head to tail, and settle into a slightly rectangular shape from shoulder to shoulder, somewhat in the manner of balustrades. Then, on the birds’ backs and undersides, thanks to Edmondson’s use of texture and shade, figurative description and volumetric modeling recede (fig. 2). The result is a kind of representational indecision. The slip of a few broad chisel marks at one glance

Louise Dahl-Wolfe,
*Sculpture, William
Edmondson* (detail,
see fig. 12).



suggests feathers settling from flight (fig. 3). At another, those same lines suggest an artist grown impatient. At still another, the lines reveal the resistance of the stone itself: the material that brokers these perceived transitions.

Edmondson began his work as an artist making gravestones and funerary markers. Mourning doves became a popular subject for him in this vein, and *Two Doves* is a member of this larger series. This context gives meaning to the formal observations just ventured. Those bowed heads now evoke sorrow. The balustrade backs now appear broadened to support the hands of grieving graveside mourners. Form dialectically combines with context to yield meaning.

But this is not the only dialectical engine on offer. Let's return to those chiseled feathers, the place where representational form and nonrepresentational matter meet. Here we come also to the intersection that Alois Riegl (1858–1905) taught us to call “haptic,” a place where the viewer's sense of touch is aroused through his or her practice of looking. Edmondson consistently engaged this synesthesia effect across his oeuvre. It's gloriously on display in *Angel with Cape*

1
William Edmondson,
Untitled (Two Doves),
ca. 1934. Carved
limestone, 10 × 6¼ ×
5 in. (25.4 × 15.9 ×
12.7 cm). Fleisher-Ollman
Gallery, Philadelphia.





2–3
Details of Edmondson,
Untitled (Two Doves)
(see fig. 1).

Surround (ca. 1940), for instance, where, again, rough and smooth surfaces combine to activate the tactile mode of vision so central to Riegl's thought (fig. 4). Edmondson's rough working of the wings, cape, hair, and crown yields a repetitive series of finger-sized ridges and divots, inviting the viewer to imagine what it feels like to run his or her hand across these grooves. The angel's facial features, although smoothly modeled, work to similar effect. Edmondson worked the limestone here almost like clay, producing a plastically pudgy face, with pinched nose and thumbprint depressions for eyes. The visual experience of tactility afforded by *Angel with Cape Surround* thus works to conjure not only a sense of what the object feels like in its present state, but also a sense of what it feels like to make a sculpture in the first place—even out of clay, which was not a medium Edmondson used. These many dialectical tensions (figure/stone, rough/smooth, carved/modeled) veritably envelope *Angel*, her cape serving as a material metaphor of sculpture's prime romance: the disrobing of form from matter. That this is understood to be a creatively sensitive, even coaxing act on the part of the artist is signaled by the angel's arms, clutched to her chest and torso in a last-minute gesture of modesty. As for the hands, those body parts associated so definitively with touch (and the ones that may tingle in the viewer's experience of the work), Edmondson has not yet released the angel's at all. Tactility and stone remain completely coincident.

I maintain that the many haptic effects of Edmondson's sculptures work in the way Riegl supposed, engendering an acutely embodied experience of spectatorship for Edmondson's work. Because these sculptures reveal their processes of making, leaving the dialectic between representational content and material medium exposed, viewers are encouraged to their own dialectical experience (of the work and its physicality) and re-experience (of its making and history).

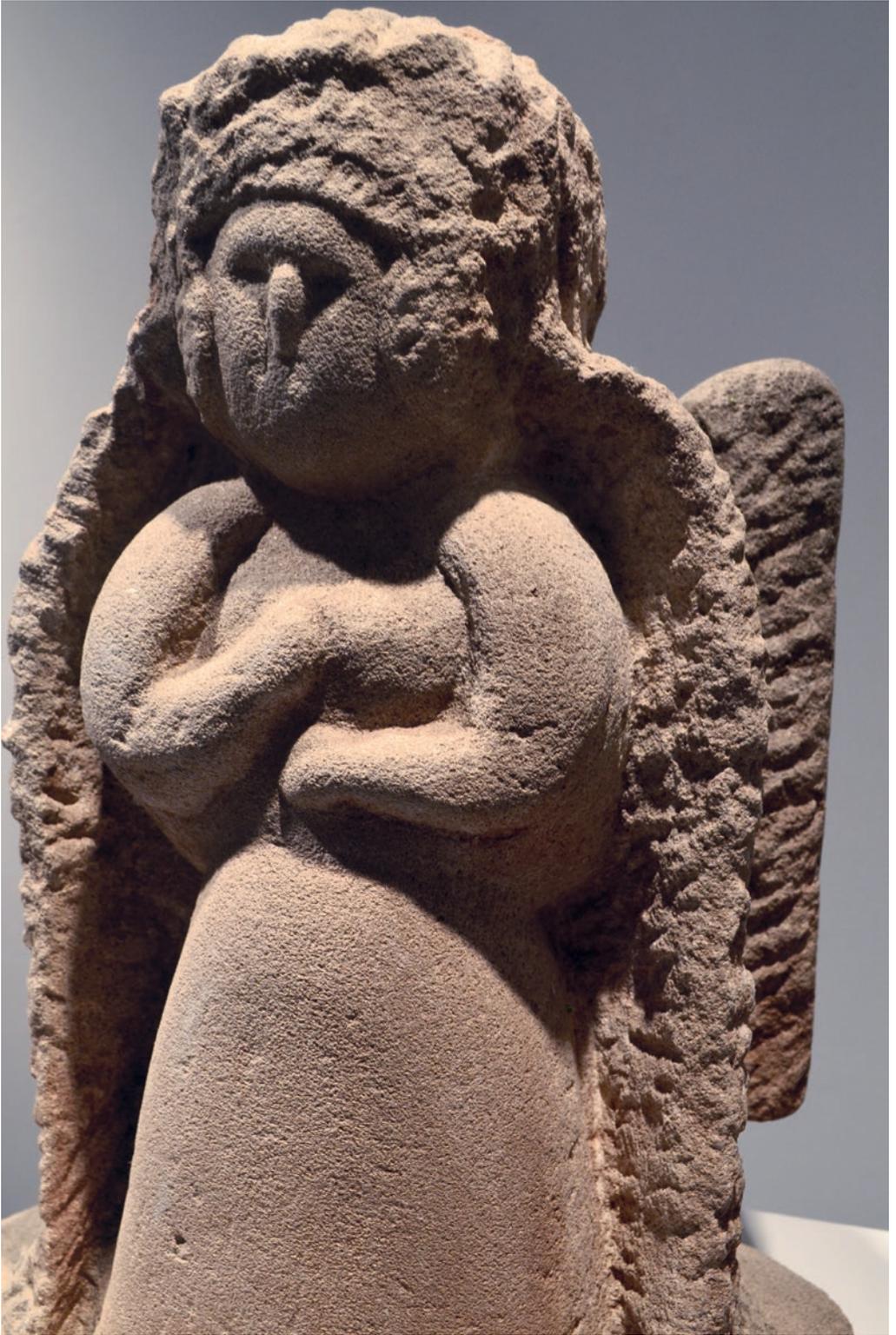
My discussion here centers on the empathetic nature of these aesthetic experiences, investigating how Edmondson's work incites the imaginative, creative efforts of "feeling like" — encouraging viewers to *feel like* they know what it's like to touch the works, and to *feel like* they know what it's like to make them.

Look again at *Two Doves* (see fig. 1). Now does your hand not curl? Does your skin not awaken to limestone's composite chill? Do your shoulders not hunch over those percussive hammer strikes? Don't you feel the chisel slip?

In what follows, I maintain that empathy grounded the historical reception of William Edmondson's work during the height of his artistic activity in the 1930s and 1940s.¹ I explore how the works themselves invited this aesthetic response, formally and materially, and I also consider how this practice of aesthetic empathy coincided with and extended interwar ideas about race and difference in American life more broadly. The interracial dynamics of Edmondson's reception beg this further context. That Edmondson was black and so many of his patrons and promoters were white seemed to present yet another opportunity for the aesthetic experience of empathetic projection. In effect, the racial divide between Edmondson and his white audience served to dramatize, at least for the latter, the many other divides bridged by the appreciation of his art: form/matter, vision/touch, process/product. Because of this, this essay attends to historically specific ideas about aesthetic empathy alongside historically specific ideas about interracial empathy: tracking the intellectual career of these ideas from nineteenth-century, transatlantic debates in psychology, phenomenology, and pragmatism, to interwar American debates about feel-good cultural pluralism. Many of these ideas may appear quaint or dated to contemporary readers; they sometimes will also testify to the latent racism that so often lies behind cultural and aesthetic celebrations of difference. In other words, even when white viewers understood their empathetic inclination toward Edmondson and his works to be racially progressive, this politically motivated effort did nothing to disturb the racist belief in irreducible black otherness. In fact, it took it for granted and deepened it, aestheticizing empathetic projection as a site of political pleasure and centering whiteness as the de facto subject position from which to enjoy it. This aspect of empathy is problematic and ongoing; I take it seriously and hold it here in full view.

I still want to insist on empathy's creative potential, if only because this is the promise extended by Edmondson's sculptures to

4
William Edmondson,
*Angel with Cape
Surround*, ca. 1940.
Carved limestone,
19½ × 15 × 9¼ in.
(49.5 × 38.1 × 23.5 cm).
Private collection.



begin with. The process of carving, especially as it was aestheticized in the interwar years, resonates strongly with empathy's intellectual history. When Edmondson carved works directly from stone, he made a record of his own searching attempts to find self and its expression in the given world, and he modeled how this effort might also be transformative. I believe there is still political potential in this tradition of empathy, precisely because it takes difference as its starting point and, crucially, because it models a way to revalue that difference as necessary, radical, and endlessly manifold. In other words, empathy theorizes difference as the fundamental grounds for all relations: the "ever not quite," in the phrasing of William James (1842–1910), that obtains endlessly everywhere, between all individuals and between all individuals and the world. The potential in this difference for James, and for others in the tradition I here chart—from Franz Brentano (1838–1917) to Alain Locke (1885–1954), from Robert Vischer (1847–1933) to Horace Kallen (1882–1974)—lies in its inducement to constant seeking. For these thinkers, as for Edmondson, empathy is not only necessary to cognition or to social peace; it describes and demands a fundamentally creative posture toward the world: directed not just outside the individual but also toward the future. It is this network of feelings and ideas I seek here to revive. So let's begin.

Empathy, or *Einfühlung* in the German, is an old aesthetic concept, and it involves the appreciation of an artwork by dint of projecting oneself fully into it, submitting wholly to the foreign experiences it models and suggests. The term originated in the nineteenth century in the field of psychological aesthetics in which theorists drew from experimental physiology in order to account for how individuals are able to understand and appreciate conditions beyond their own.² In this context, the concept of *Einfühlung* essentially reimaged the human sensorium as a kind of divining rod for external states. "Not only do I see gravity and modesty and pride and courtesy and stateliness," wrote psychologist Edward Titchener (1867–1927) in 1909, unspooling a list of different human moods, "but I feel or act them in the mind's muscle."³ "To enjoy aesthetically," wrote art historian Wilhelm Worringer (1881–1965) in 1907 (drawing not only from psychology but also from Riegl), "means to enjoy myself in a sensuous object diverse from myself, to empathise myself into it."⁴ *Einfühlung* is empathy, then, feeling with or as another; but it is empathy registered specifically as an experience, equal parts visceral and mental—in the *mind's muscle*. You feel it in your bones, in other words. Or imagine that you do.

When asked about his art, Edmondson unerringly invoked something similar, positioning himself as a conduit for empathetic experience, in his case with the divine. Professing in the Southern Baptist tradition of witness and conversion (rather than in the academic tradition of appealing to Germans), Edmondson recounted visions of carved stones, hung “in the sky” by God, for him to see and fashion. “It’s [the] word in Jesus speakin[g] His mind in my mind,” he is reported to have said.⁵ As one art writer from the period observed, this conception of the artist and the artwork expressly as *mediums*—as conduits and meeting spots for experiences outside oneself—was a tidy way of summing up “the whole philosophy of art.”⁶ Likewise, I suggest that Edmondson’s “mind in my mind” conception of artistic experience may be viewed as a point of agreement between the artist’s Christian philosophy and earlier, nineteenth-century researches into the operations of empathy.⁷

When Viennese philosopher Robert Vischer coined the term *Einführung* in 1873, he summed up what he meant by it: “I project my own life into the lifeless form [of the artwork], just as I quite justifiably do with another living person. . . . I am mysteriously transplanted and magically transformed into this Other.”⁸ Though brief, this gloss is profound. It demonstrates how, from its very beginning, the discourse on empathy described both interpersonal relations between people and aesthetic relations between people and artworks. The case of Edmondson interleaves these concerns just as closely. Just as his works compel empathetic projections, allowing the viewer to make imaginative contact with stone and its “lifeless form,” so also did the personal figure of Edmondson solicit an empathetic encounter with otherness, especially among urban, white viewers in the 1930s and 1940s for whom the comparison between unknowable rock and unknowable black artist may have been an aesthetically moving analogy. If empathy is the theorization of transforming oneself via an encounter with difference, Edmondson offered this chance (at least) doubly: through the objecthood of his sculptures and through the racial and regional difference marked by his social identity. From this perspective, Edmondson and his work appeared in the mainstream art world simultaneously as figures of difference and as opportunities for its contravening. A brief introduction to his life story, especially as it was told in the white press during his life, indicates the social-historical reasons why ideas about empathy and difference were such crucial factors in Edmondson’s career and reception.

Active during the interwar years, William Edmondson likely never traveled more than fifty miles from Nashville, Tennessee, where

he lived and worked.⁹ His parents had been enslaved on the Compton Plantation in Davidson County and were employed there as sharecroppers when William was born. He was the second of six children; the first, his older sister, Ellen, had been born into slavery.¹⁰ In adulthood, he was working class, but comfortably so. After an injury in 1907 cut his employment with the railroads short, Edmondson sustained himself through custodial and general service employment in affluent, white institutions around Nashville, principally at the woman's hospital downtown. He was forcibly retired from formal employment around 1930 (when the hospital dissolved), only to settle into the more physically taxing work of art making, which he attended to daily in the outdoor studio space of a house he owned himself.¹¹

He began with tombstones, but progressed, over a period of just a few years, to animal figures, abstract architectural monuments, and free-standing figures, most conceived fully in the round. His angel monuments are eloquent testament to the drama of spirit's entanglement with matter: wings that lift, even as they weigh; chests that rise, heaving up from rock. While he was able to sell and give away many of these pieces to neighbors and friends, sculpture accumulated in his outdoor workspace. He held on to his most dear works, positioning them around his yard in casual but pleasing relationships (fig. 5).¹² These brilliant limestone forms—rams, seated women, preachers, and angels—made for a striking spectacle on 14th Avenue South, in the mostly black neighborhood of Edgehill, a mile or so east of Vanderbilt University.

Retellings of Edmondson's biography vary a bit on the particulars, but they all emphasize his momentous discovery by the white art world sometime between 1932 and 1935. As my brief account of his life should already make clear, "discovery" is a misleading description, since Edmondson's sculptures were numerous and he had them on semipublic display. He already enjoyed a healthy audience of patrons and admirers, whose support contributed to the furtherance of his work. They adopted works for their homes, gardens, and plots, and oral histories support the contention that neighbors who worked in construction supplied Edmondson with salvaged limestone blocks.¹³ So when he began to entertain a growing stream of white visitors in the later 1930s and early 1940s—and when several of them colluded to give him a one-man show at New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)—this constituted a considerable expansion of Edmondson's audience. But it did not present a paradigm shift in how he related to his stonecutting activities, which he always undertook as a creative



5
Edward Weston, *Stone Sculpture*, William Edmondson, 1941.
Gelatin silver print, $7\frac{1}{2} \times 9\frac{1}{2}$ in. (19.1 × 24.2 cm).
The Center for Creative Photography, Tucson, Arizona. Edward Weston Archive, 81.110.104.

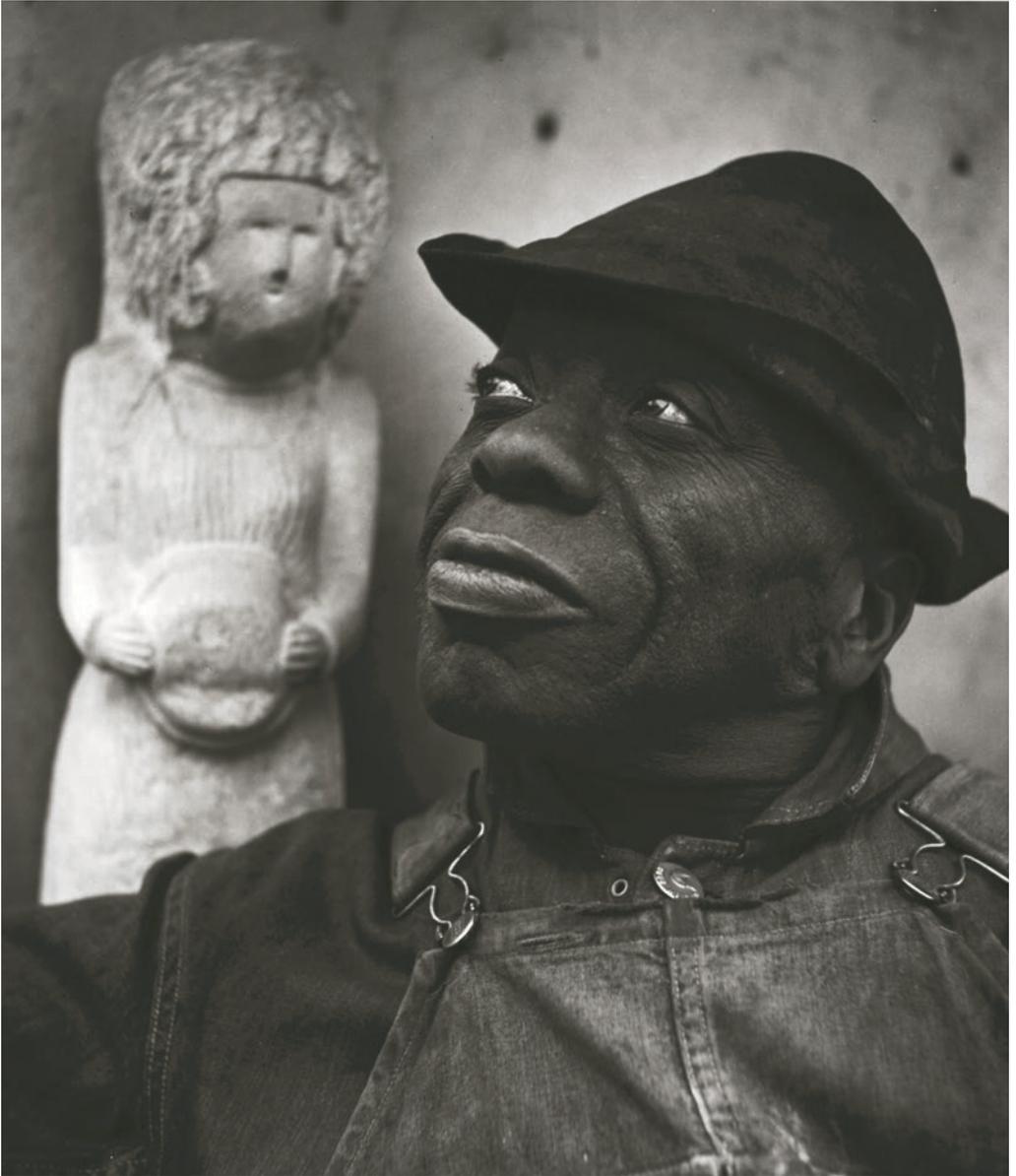
practice, for an audience, and as a means of sensuous communication: between God and man, the animal world and the human world, stone and art.

Edmondson's white enthusiasts were an interesting bunch. Sidney Hirsch (1883–1962), a Jewish mystic and self-styled dandy, lived nearby and could not have been better prepared to appreciate Edmondson's work. A great collector of curiosities from Africa, the Near East, and Asia—objets d'art, but also a smattering of dead languages, numerologies, and myths—Hirsch had a compelling résumé. He bragged about having modeled for Rodin; he staged elaborate lyric pageants at the Nashville's concrete Parthenon; and around 1922, he established the Fugitives, the salon that would become one of the most important poetic brotherhoods in American literary history, yielding in turn the Southern Agrarians and the New Criticism in the 1930s and later 1940s, respectively.¹⁴ While Hirsch occupied an increasingly marginal position relative to this group (owing to its increasing cultural conservatism), the aesthetic tradition that issued from his salon is consistent

with Edmondson's. The Fugitives prized the poem as a kind of object: minimally achieved and autonomous. Edmondson, who explained his artistry as "stingily" achieved, advanced much the same aesthetic in his own works: just barely released from the stone and standing compactly unto themselves.¹⁵ Even the movement's recurring obsession with graveyards and monuments echoes in the sculptor's early work as a mortuary artist.¹⁶

At some point, Hirsch introduced Edmondson to his friend, Alfred Starr (1898–1956), the white owner of Nashville's black entertainment mecca, the Bijou Theatre. Starr was a childhood friend of the Hirsch family, a Vanderbilt alumnus, and an erstwhile member of the Fugitive poets. He and his wife Elizabeth would become Edmondson's most important supporters: buying works, promoting his art to other moneyed, progressive Nashvillians, providing a stipend when needed, and introducing him to prominent art world types, including the photographers Louise Dahl-Wolfe (1895–1989) and Edward Weston (1886–1958).

Of all the connections to the white intelligentsia that Starr provided, his introduction of Edmondson to Dahl-Wolfe would be the most historically fortuitous, at least as far as the sculptor's art-historical legacy is concerned. When she visited the sculptor, she took portraits of him, of his work, and of him at work (figs. 6–7). Excited by Edmondson, Dahl-Wolfe submitted a portfolio of her photographs to *Harper's Bazaar*, where she was on staff. Editor Carmel Snow was enthusiastic, but the feature was scuttled.¹⁷ In the midst of this disappointment, Dahl-Wolfe's photos ended up floating across the desks at the MoMA, probably through her friend Thomas Mabry, a Tennessean then serving as executive director of the museum. Mabry was also friendly with Liz and Alfred Starr, who helped ship a selection of Edmondson's works to Manhattan. Of the thirty-one sent, twelve were exhibited, installed in a small gallery of MoMA's temporary quarters on West Forty-Ninth Street during the construction of its new building. Curator Dorothy Miller, an influential champion of living American artists (and the wife of folk art expert Holger Cahill), installed the show, likely with the assistance of Alfred H. Barr Jr., who was still a dominant force at the museum. Pathé documented it in a newsreel. In the film, a woman with hat and pumps strides forward to inspect Edmondson's *Woman with Bustle* (ca. 1930–1937); two women, apparently strangers, arrange themselves chattily around Edmondson's double figure, *Mary and Martha* (ca. 1930–1937) (fig. 8).



6

Louise Dahl-Wolfe, *William Edmondson, Sculptor, Nashville, Tennessee, 1933/1937*. Gelatin silver print, 9¹³/₁₆ × 9⁷/₁₆ in. (24.9 × 24 cm). The Center for Creative Photography, Tucson, Arizona. Louise Dahl-Wolfe Archive/Gift of the Louise Dahl-Wolfe Trust, 85.102.1.



7
Louise Dahl-Wolfe, *William Edmondson*, 1937.
Gelatin silver print, $8\frac{3}{4} \times 7\frac{5}{8}$ in. (22.2 x 19.4 cm).
The Center for Creative Photography, Tucson,
Arizona. Louise Dahl-Wolfe Archive, 93.72.71.

8

Film still from
"Negro Artist Hailed,"
Pathé News, vol. 9,
no. 31, November 1937.



MoMA, a newsreel feature: it's no wonder that the exhibition garnered Edmondson national press. The write-ups generally affirmed the artist's talents, but in terms that frequently reasserted his race — and all the assumed limitations that came with it. Riffing off language provided by MoMA's own press releases, newspapers referred to Edmondson as a "good-natured, middle-aged Negro," a "simple, almost illiterate Negro," a "primitive who works with a song in his heart," a "Negro of Nashville" who was "pleased by praise," but "entirely unspoiled," and an important addition to "our not inconsiderable gallery of American 'folk' expression."¹⁸ White tastemakers, readers learned, had found Edmondson "completely isolated," making art "as though he lived on a desert island and had never seen an automobile or known the modern mystery of electricity."¹⁹

This last idea — this trumped-up notion that Edmondson was "completely isolated" — drove much of the reportage. It was a concept with no factual backing. Even though MoMA's publicity ballyhooed the artist as a marvel who had "probably never seen a piece of sculpture except his own," Edmondson had surely watched the construction of the Nashville Parthenon (many of his own figures overtly reference its pediment forms), he had certainly been inside Nashville's Union Station, with its elaborate Romanesque revival motifs (he'd worked for the railroad, after all), and he counted among his friends a number of important cultural arbiters (including Hirsch, an art collector, and



9-10
Sequential film stills
from "Negro Artist
Hailed," *Pathé News*,
vol. 9, no. 31,
November 1937.

Starr, a theater owner).²⁰ Isolation, then, was a rhetorical concept, not a practical fact, and it served as powerful shorthand for all the many cultural gulfs Edmondson was made to represent: those various economic, racial, and regional divides seemingly transgressed by a Negro at the Modern. The Pathé newsreel made the point succinctly. Opening with footage of Edmondson jovially working away in his Nashville workshop, chatting up a friend while filing down a figure, the film jump-cuts to a stream of white men and women, tendering their tickets, entering the all-white space of the gallery, in the background of which an unrelated African statue oversees the scene (figs. 9–10).

The fiction of Edmondson's isolation was consistent across coverage of the show. It was an unsubtle way of emphasizing his difference, his otherness. Certainly, difference was inscribed in the very impetus for the exhibition: those Dahl-Wolfe photographs. This series ventured what the exhibition also ostensibly achieved: meaningful aesthetic contact with the other. An examination of Dahl-Wolfe's images reveals the degree to which Edmondson himself (and not just his work) appeared as an object of aesthetic fascination: a figure of difference, and so also a starting point for empathy. But these visual documents may record something besides top-down efforts at interracial racial empathy (as between Dahl-Wolfe and Edmondson, and, later, MoMA and Edmondson). We may also discern within them the imaginative, dialectical work of artistic empathy (as between Edmondson and his works). This latter dimension is an important addition to the present discussion. In its original conception, *Einfühlung* described an aesthetic relationship not just between the viewer and the artwork but also between the artist and the work: a relationship Worringer once equated to the search for God.²¹ Expanding the view of empathy here to include Edmondson's own acts of creative pursuit—which he also regarded as religious—allows us to position the sculptor as an agentive practitioner of empathy, not just its direct object.

But first, the bad news. There are several features of these images that contribute to an excessively racialized, even racist portrayal of Edmondson (see figs. 6–7). Dahl-Wolfe composed her shots around a high-contrast tension between light and dark, an approach that consistently reinforces Edmondson's body as the site of darkness. He thus often appears as a unified zone of dark skin, dark hat, and dark dungarees, contrapuntally offsetting brilliant zones of white: white stone sculptures and white, blown-out sky. This tonal reinforcement of Edmondson's darkness comes combined with a series of social markers, which work together to ensure that his darkness reads also

in the American sense as “Negro.” Shown seated in a yard that appears overgrown, Edmondson recalls the stereotype of the idle Negro. Shown with his eyes cast heavenward, he recalls the stereotype of the Negro irrationally attuned to miracle. These elements also combine pictorially to limit Edmondson’s motion (he’s sitting down) and his ability to meet the viewer’s gaze (he looks up and away). They are thus consistent with long-standing representational idioms of objectification. Noting these and other elements, art historian Bridget Cooks interprets these portraits as visual reinforcement to Edmondson’s degraded “status as racially, economically, and geographically outside of the modern art world.”²²

However, while Cooks rightly indicts the photographs’ visual operations of racist objectification, this is only one possible reading of how the photographs engage aesthetically with difference. First, there are grounds for viewing the portraits as collaborative works of art, rather than exploitative orchestrations at the hands of Dahl-Wolfe. Without dismissing the very real historical pressures that limited Edmondson’s autonomy in view of a white woman (especially in matters related to the appearance and positioning of his body), it may also be productive to explore the images as the fruits of a cooperative experiment in interracial creativity. Moreover, and perhaps more persuasively, it is possible to see such cooperative creativity as the focus of these works in another, more straightforward way: not between Dahl-Wolfe and Edmondson, but between Edmondson and the stone. After all, most of Dahl-Wolfe’s photographs are images of the artist at work. Again and again, we see Edmondson cooperatively engaging his material in the sensitive evocation of form.

In its attention to process, the portfolio is consonant with period obsessions with carving, specifically those related to the modernist ethos of the “carve direct” school. Gaining its name from the French term *taille directe*, this international movement counted Henri Gaudier-Bzreska (1891–1915), Barbara Hepworth (1903–1975), Robert Laurent (1890–1970), Henry Moore (1898–1986), and William Zorach (1887–1966) loosely as members, and it prized carving as the most elemental means of achieving sculptural form. While employing a primitivist discourse of ancient authenticity, the direct carving movement also laid claim to vanguard status—its modernism secured by the formal simplicity and abstraction of the works, and by their truth-to-materials revelation of wood or stone. Notably, even while practitioners cautioned against making a “fetish of technique,” critics routinely praised carving for what it offered as a process, consulting

the works themselves mainly as indexes of these efforts.²³ Also notably, in the accolades thusly accorded, carving consistently appeared as an artistic exercise in empathetic cooperation. In describing Zorach's process to readers of the *New York Times* in 1931, art critic Elisabeth Luther Cary resurrected an old trope: he "searches the block for the form it holds."²⁴ Similarly, in the British context and also in 1931, critic Herbert Read praised Moore's modernist carvings through recourse to a description of technique. The sculptor was guided by an "imaginative" process of "intuition," which led him to find "form . . . situated at the center . . . of the block before him."²⁵ Hepworth, Moore's compatriot, would agree. She described carving as a way "to find a personal accord with the stones" and a means of "achieving personal harmony with the material."²⁶ The discourse of direct carving, in other words, mobilized empathetic concepts in its elaboration. It imagined carving itself to be a practice built, first, on the artist's sensitive empathy for his or her materials and, second, on an embodied, dialectical practice of creative cooperation.

As it was implicitly conceived in the discourse of direct carving, empathy was not just an action ventured in the interest of understanding, but an action bent on both transformation (of the artist and the materials) and, from this, the production of a new and novel good: the work of art. Dahl-Wolfe's photographs operate under a similar optimism. Because they are contrived, her portraits manage to figure both the processes of carving and their artistic results. Thus, while these photographs in many respects repeat the othering rhetoric of racism, they may also be viewed as tributes to the benefits of empathetic striving—including those accrued both to artistry (works of art) and to interracial empathy (democratic pluralism). What is on offer, in other words, is the effort "to discover some 'harmony in contrariety,' some commonality in divergence."²⁷

The quotation there dates from 1947 and comes from philosopher Alain Locke's hopeful essay "Pluralism and Ideological Peace." With Locke, I'm afforded a number of important overlaps and pivot points. First, because of his centrality to the development of the New Negro movement in the 1920s (often remembered as the Harlem Renaissance), Locke's writings on black art from the interwar decades are key to a historical theorization of art as a means of twentieth-century race politics.²⁸ Second, and less well-acknowledged, Locke's activities in this vein were an extension—even an application—of his work as a philosopher in the pragmatist mode.²⁹ As a pragmatist, Locke engaged deeply with William James's ideas about radical empiricism and the

ontological irreducibility of difference. As a race theorist, Locke adapted these theories into a politics. Moreover, and like all pragmatists of his time (indeed, like all philosophers), Locke attended keenly to Continental studies in empirical psychology, phenomenology, and aesthetics: the very milieus from which our concept of *Einfühlung* hails.³⁰ I turn to these intellectual contiguities now.

In a commemorative speech given in honor of Locke in 1955, pragmatist philosopher Horace Kallen summed up the role that difference had played in his colleague's writings. Perhaps advantageously, he did so in terms that also furthered his own signature theory, that of cultural pluralism: "Difference is no mere appearance, but *the* valid, vital force in human communication and in human creation." For Locke (and for Kallen), it was difference, not sameness, that enabled "free and fruitful intercommunication"; and it was difference, not sameness, on which "free cooperation," "orchestration," and "team-play" depended.³¹ The insight of Locke's work, Kallen submitted, was to see these cooperative engagements with difference as the essence of human freedom and creativity.

In his ode to difference, Kallen invoked the American pragmatist tradition of which he and Locke were both a part, and in which difference is viewed not only as an unequivocal fact of life but as its primary source of meaning and value. "*Primâ facie* the world is a pluralism," William James wrote in 1896, giving voice to the idea. He went on. The philosophical attempt to force the world into an "absolute unity . . . still remains a *Grenzbegriff*," he wrote, an "ever not quite."³² "Ever not quite!" James liked the refrain and nominated it some fourteen years later to serve as pluralism's motto, a rallying cry for all who believed that "there is no complete generalisation, no complete point of view, no all-pervasive unity, but everywhere some residual resistance to verbalization . . . some genius of reality."³³ For James, the fact of difference was a primary ontological condition and, just as crucially, it was the source of the world's endless variety and novelty. James again: "Not unfortunately the universe is wild, the same returns not, save to bring the different."³⁴

Kallen held this radically "wild" difference similarly in esteem. He was a friend, supporter, and interpreter of James; he'd served as the professor's teaching assistant at Harvard in 1905, which is how he met Locke, then an undergraduate enrolled in the course.³⁵ Kallen and Locke crossed paths recurrently in subsequent years; and they both worked to update James's pragmatism for the twentieth century, mainly by applying it to the century's many social challenges—especially the challenge of ethnic and racial difference in the context of democracy.³⁶

Kallen's contribution came in his advocacy for "cultural pluralism," a term he coined in 1924.³⁷ In this effort, Kallen sought to extend pragmatism's radical ontology of difference as such into a political theory of difference as a valuable dimension of social life. He wrote vehemently against the American metaphor of the "melting pot," for example, and urged a nonassimilationist vision for nationalism, thus presaging later twentieth-century models of multiculturalism.³⁸

In his commemorative address, given fifty years after he and Locke first met, Kallen invoked difference mostly as a philosophical abstraction. But, speaking as he was of Locke, he could not help but conjure difference as it had been so dramatically allegorized by the history of American race.³⁹ While Locke, himself African American, seems to have pursued his academic career in philosophy somewhat to the side of his work as a black arts advocate, Kallen insinuated that it was Locke's race that had forced him to the philosophical conclusion of pluralism in the first place. Recalling the various indignities Locke had experienced in the mostly white world of academe, Kallen put it bluntly: "Pluralism and particularism imposed their reality upon him by the exigent harshnesses of experience." Locke could not have done other than to accede to the existence of difference, and he should not have done other than to defend the "unalienable right to his difference": "The Negro, Locke held, is not a problem. The Negro is a fact."⁴⁰

Edmondson's life and works were facts, too, harshly and inalienably so, and in ways that offered a form of aesthetic tension for white viewers of his sculpture. He was a Negro incompletely released from the Old South, just as the figures of his works remain bound to the weight of their stone. Birds can be seen in *Two Doves*, but roughed-up rock appears just as insistently. In the case of *Two Doves*, form's dialectic with materiality appears as an aesthetic triumph: the stone incompletely worked over into representation. But, in the historical life of Edmondson himself, the unavoidable fact of his social-material conditions—the facts of American racism so often left unspoken in white records—offered a second form of aestheticized intransigence: another side to James's "genius of reality."

James's idea might productively be seen as kindred to Riegl's concept of the haptic. Both ideas, after all, center on an excess that proliferates at the meeting point of ideation and fact, form and matter. I'd like to force this parallel so as to better see the "genius of reality" in Edmondson's works as simultaneously the starting point for those empathetic experiences of touching and making discussed at the start



11
William Edmondson,
Ram, ca. 1935–1937, as
pictured in Louise
Dahl-Wolfe, *William
Edmondson's Sculpture*,
1937 (detail). Gelatin
silver print, 6 $\frac{1}{16}$ x 5 $\frac{3}{8}$ in.
(16.3 x 13.6 cm).
The Center for Creative
Photography, Tucson,
Arizona. Louise
Dahl-Wolfe Archive,
93.72.67.

of this essay. And I'd like to revisit these experiences now, because they will route us back to the creative possibilities embedded at the heart of Kallen's and Locke's pragmatist pluralisms.

To this end, I turn to another example from the Edmondson oeuvre. Like *Two Doves*, *Ram* (ca. 1935–1937) is part of a series (fig. 11). It is one of many ram forms that the sculptor made. But unlike most of his others, this ram sits, relaxed into its own pedestal, even as a cautious ear seems tuned to the viewer's approach. The ram lifts its muzzle to the heat of the sky, sun at its back. Its horn sweeps proudly into a melancholic swirl, raised to the eye, almost as though to dry a tear. In this gesture, the horn points back again to the rear of the



animal: the haunch, which Edmondson has described with a series of forward-curving marks, which both repeat and recall the horn's whorl. *Ram* occupies the length and width of its pedestal, its sturdy compactness allowing the viewer to clasp the animal visually at both ends, as though in preparation for hoisting.

This last suggestion is provocative, given the work's patent reference to Old Testament stories of animal sacrifice. (Biblical themes were an ongoing concern for the artist.) In the oft-told story from Genesis, Isaac is spared sacrifice at the hands of his father, Abraham, by the Lord's miraculous (and last-minute) provision of a ram: "Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son."⁴¹ In the Bible, it's an angel who alerts Abraham to the Lord's pardon and the ram's presence. Given the population of Edmondson's backyard—both miraculous and manifest—an angel might plausibly have pointed toward this *Ram*, too. And, like the Bible's ram, this one is also caught, not in a thicket, but fixed for the viewer as sculpture, stuck to that plinth. Tension mounts in the material, then, as in the narrative. That haunch: it's made forever to be poised at bounding.

The haptic experiences of *Ram* feed on both the figurative and material elements of the piece, both of which court not only an embodied viewer but also, crucially, an embodied viewer whose actions vis-à-vis the object are decisive. Chiefly, I've considered how haptic qualities encourage an appreciation for the making of these sculptures, but we may also consider the violence of those many chisel strikes on *Ram*. Louise Dahl-Wolfe punned on that suggestion in a photograph she took of Edmondson posed as though in the process of making the figure (see fig. 7). That this view of the artist at work is contrived is apparent by the way Edmondson holds his tools: too many of them in his right hand (hammer and chisel), and implausibly positioned in his left (he ought to aim that sharpened railroad tie away from his body). Dahl-Wolfe has taken some poetic license with this portrayal of artistic work so as to accommodate the narrative associations with the sculpture's sacrificial subject. Edmondson looks pityingly at the diminutive ram, just as he positions a spike menacingly between its eyes. Another tension thusly mounts: creativity joins to destruction, just as form joined to matter, rough joined to smooth, and sight joined to touch.

While I have made much of the tactile qualities of Edmondson's sculpture, I have illustrated these solely through reference to

photographs: that is, through a mostly visual, rather than fully physical, mode of engagement. But, in the empathetic tradition from which I've taken my cues, this is not at all a qualification of the haptic, but its very definition. The visually given experience of tactility in these photographs (what Riegl termed *nahsicht*, or near-vision) compels the viewer's skin, muscles, tendons, and bones *creatively*. In other words, vision combines with imagination to produce an aesthetic sensation. Significantly, Robert Vischer himself, from whom Riegl adopted so many of his ideas about empathy, considered imagination to be vital to the act of aesthetic appreciation. He positioned it as the highest form of vision in his tripartite schema, surpassing both the physiological optics of sight and the contemplative action of visual scanning. Imagination, per Vischer, was what precipitated the inventive, transformative effects of empathy. Through the imaginative work of *Einführung*, "even a lifeless form—the contour of a rock, for instance—may awaken and guide the transformation of feelings."⁴² Certainly, this is at issue in Dahl-Wolfe's photograph of Edmondson and his *Ram*: a lifeless rock transformed. Indeed, because it is a photograph, the image pushes even more strongly to elicit the pathos of empathy's "ever not quite." It compels the hands to reach toward contact that can never come—a mournful idea, when told this way, and a sentimental one that may have motivated Dahl-Wolfe in her interracial collaborations with Edmondson.

At any rate, both the sculpture and its photographic dramatization accord pride of place to touch and its evocation. As such, they prioritize that sense most associated with feeling, and the one most associated with a phenomenological model of selfhood that cannot be other than thoroughly entangled with a world of proliferating difference. Aristotle considered touch to be the root of human intelligence, because it involves itself in all the other senses; eyes, tongue, nose, and ears are all touched by their stimulants. On this point, German psychologist Franz Brentano wrote: "It is erroneous to think of touch as a single sense faculty"—an observation meant as a summary of Aristotle, but ventured in terms that also summon the intrasensual confusions central to Riegl's idea of the haptic.⁴³ In this line of thinking, touch is so foundational to experience as to be the only sense on which the "sensible life," and so also the self, absolutely depends.⁴⁴ Contemporary thinkers have thus more recently referred to the skin as the place "where the ego is decided" (Michel Serres), or concluded that "'I' is . . . a touch" (Jean-Luc Nancy).⁴⁵ But if touch grounds self, experience, and intelligence, it complicates all these things, too,

precisely because of the reversibility of its particular sensations: the thickness of the “inside” and “outside” that it binds.

Here again, we meet up with Alain Locke. As a doctoral student in Berlin in 1910–1911, Locke dedicated himself to the study of the works of Brentano. The interpreter of Aristotle was a psychologically inclined philosopher and a theologian (one of the few divinely inclined psychologists of his milieu), and he was also a value theorist in whose likeness Locke ventured his own professional career.⁴⁶ Through Brentano, Locke understood sensation to be of paramount importance to philosophy; feeling, accordingly, was an important term in the American’s twentieth-century writings. Though he used it more as a synonym for emotion than for touch, his long-standing admiration for Brentano ensures that he was aware of the pun and its many philosophical consequences. Feeling, for Locke, was expressly feeling *of the world* and explicitly an operation through which individuals might relate more freely to the many differences it contained. That this philosophical abstraction could have political applications—perhaps yielding an authentically democratic “team-play” between races (in Kallen’s phrasing)—was surely not lost on Locke.

Here is Brentano, again, from his *The Psychology of Aristotle* of 1867: “We sense by being moved by the sensed object, hence by being affected. Hence, if we ask whether the sensing entity is similar to the sensed, the answer follows from the general law that before the affection, the affected is dissimilar to the agent, but after the affection it is similar.”⁴⁷ Reading all of this through Locke’s eyes, it’s possible to see how these lessons in empathy were also preparations in politics. To be moved sensuously by external stimuli and so grow more alike with them: *this* would be the philosophical grounds of Locke’s pluralist, art-based politics—an effectively empathetic movement by which the artwork served not just as the representational face of the race but as an affective instrument through which a new interracial community might be formed.

Of all the empathetic projections that Edmondson’s sculpture evokes, however, perhaps none is more powerful than the imagined re-experience of making—the community gathered around the site (and sight) of creativity. As you may have noticed, in all the lively conversations between American pragmatists conjured above, creativity recurs as a kind of drumbeat to the proceedings. You’ll remember that, in Kallen’s tribute to Locke, he situated difference as *the* starting point, not just for intersubjective empathy and communication, but—somewhat inexplicably—for “human creation.” In an earlier



12

Louise Dahl-Wolfe, *Sculpture, William Edmondson*, 1933–1937. Gelatin silver print, 10 ¼ × 9 in. (26.1 × 22.8 cm). The Center for Creative Photography, Tucson, Arizona. Louise Dahl-Wolfe Archive, 93.72.58.

essay of 1947, Locke had described Kallen as a “creative advocate of pluralism.” In that same essay, Locke also thusly honored James, calling him an “ardent and creative” proponent of pluralism.⁴⁸ What accounts for these soft-pedaled paeans to creativity? And why should creativity appear so frequently as the handmaiden to pluralism?

In point of fact, there’s perhaps no better figure than the artist to personify the ideals of pragmatism and pluralism: philosophies bent on difference and novelty. Pragmatism seeks to understand the world not as given (in perpetual sameness), but as created anew (prized open along its differences and proliferating ever more). Creativity, imagination, artistry, experiment: these are actions routinely associated with artists, but which pragmatists would accord to all human activities, since it is from these that the world—with all its multiplying meanings and values—arises afresh each day. As we’ve seen in the case of Alain Locke, this potential for novelty was also necessarily political and also potentially hopeful. As Everett H. Akam observed about Locke, his race politics was intrinsically creative, ventured on the possibility of “a ‘transfiguring imagination,’ a capacity to see the world not only as it was, but also as it could be . . . a consciousness, long identified . . . with what William Blake termed poetic vision.”⁴⁹

On that note, let’s look at one final image: a Dahl-Wolfe photograph of Edmondson’s left hand in which his thumb and fingers press actively against the neck and body of a mourning dove (fig. 12). This photograph serves powerfully as a visual mnemonic of tactility—another pointed illustration of the crossing of these senses. It reminds us also to pay attention to touch as creativity’s strange but guiding sense. Notice, in fact, that the only bird shown in clear, photographic focus is the bird that Edmondson touches. It is a grip that reads alternately as caring caress and as choking, pinching stranglehold, returning us to the sacrificial tensions that adhere to *Ram*, even as these now come intermingled with associations with creation. Indeed, on the latter point, Edmondson’s fingers here spread in the same measuring, meting way as God the creator as imagined by William Blake (1757–1827) in his famous *Ancient of Days* (1794). This motif of divine creativity may reasonably have been on Dahl-Wolfe’s mind. It had just been reprised by Lee Lawrie (1877–1963) in his bas-relief *Wisdom*, installed in 1933 at Rockefeller Center: kitty-corner, as it happens, from the building where Edmondson would shortly have his New York debut.⁵⁰ In these ways, the photograph flirts with biblical discourses of creation

and its sacrifices, showing the bird's vitality to be decided by the touch of the artist's hand.

This photograph narrates rather baldly what I have maintained to be a feature of Edmondson's oeuvre as a whole: it draws attention to the exceedingly tactile nature of his sculpture. Summoning an embodied, imaginative, and empathetic sense of touch, Edmondson's work depends on the viewer's skin. But, crucially, it thickens it, too, strengthening a sense of that organ as a double-sided site of infolding experience: reliant on vision, dependent on imagination, and not at all reducible to a superficial sign of phenotypic difference—that more frankly representational deployment of skin on which the discourse of race so desperately depends.

In his 2007 book *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness*, art historian Darby English explores how the treatment of racial difference in art history has served to limit, not expand, the kinds of questions that scholars ask of artworks made by black artists. Critics and historians have focused solely on “what these artists have to say about blackness,” English argues, thus pigeonholing them into the role of race representative: an operation that Paula Backscheider has termed “conscripted” representation in her discussion of black biography.⁵¹ The case of William Edmondson would largely confirm this trend. He appears in museums and textbooks as a representative black artist, a representative outsider. English has tough words to describe this routine submission of black art, again and again, to the political bottom line of representation. It amounts, he says, to “a repressive regime targeting the work's right to difference.”⁵² By “difference,” I wager that English has something similar in mind to what I've here pursued. I understand English to mean *radical* difference in this passage: difference that far exceeds the essentialism of race and its politics. I also take him to mean *creative* difference: the inventive provocations and theorizations of the artworks themselves, an explicit investment of his book. As I hope I have demonstrated here, the long intellectual history of empathy courts precisely *these* kinds of differences, pointedly at variance with racism's dependence on fixed social categories and biological taxa. Difference—the inexhaustible “ever not quite” between all people, ideas, and things—emerges in this history both as a fact and as a creative, political means: the very grounds for experience and change. As such, this essay has aimed less at an investigation of what Edmondson represented in his art world debut as the “Negro from Nashville,” and more at an interpretation of the phenomenological,

even nonrepresentational experiences of difference that I believe his artwork affords.

Edmondson's forms repeat across his oeuvre: bird after bird, ram after ram. But, recall James: "The same returns not, save to bring the different." So it is with the "ever not quite" of Edmondson. Each work—and each, iterative re-experience of it—appears only to announce its own uniqueness, to prove its own particularity, to insist the sufficiency of its own individual fact, and to supply its own damning remainder to representation. This is the work's right to difference. It is its genius. And it is its invitation to the ongoing work of empathetic imagination.

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1 Because of this essay's emphasis on empathy as a tradition, and—to some extent—its use of empathy as a method, it's worth acknowledging that there is a well-known precedent for this approach in the field of American art history. Outlining his interpretive approach in 1980, art historian Jules Prown advocated for a sense-based attempt to re-experience artifacts that would allow interpreters to put themselves, "figuratively speaking, inside the skins of individuals who commissioned, made, used, or enjoyed these objects, to see with their eyes and touch with their hands, to identify with them *empathetically*." This approach is not at all orthodoxy in the field. Instead, the so-called Prown method has long attracted controversy: healthy skepticism mostly grounded in objections to the "objectivity" that Prown claimed for the approach. However, I'd like to revisit—if not exactly rehearse—Prown's experience-based method. I'd like to do so, first, because a historiographic method based on the re-experience of the historical artifact seems an appropriate topic for a volume on experience and American art and visual culture; and, second, because I believe this method of empathetic re-experience is especially well suited to the apprehension of Edmondson's works, but not at all in ways that would deliver us at Prown's destination of historical objectivity, as will quickly become evident. Jules David Prown, "Style as Evidence," *Winterthur Portfolio* 15 (Autumn 1980): 208 (emphasis mine); for Prown on empathy as a means toward objectivity, see Prown, "Style as Evidence," 208; Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," *Winterthur Portfolio* 17 (Spring 1982): 5.

2 Robert Vischer coined the term *Einfühlung* (literally: "in-feeling") in the early 1870s in the

development of his dissertation, which centered on the aesthetic issue of appreciation through emotional projection. Edward Titchener appears to have been the first to import this concept into the English-speaking world, giving it its current translation of "empathy" in his *A Text Book of Psychology* in 1909. See Henry Francis Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikononou, introduction to *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873–1893*, ed. and trans. Mallgrave and Ikononou (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Arts and the Humanities, 1994), 21, 71n64.

3 Edward Bradford Titchener, *Experimental Psychology of the Thought-Processes* (New York: MacMillan, 1909), 21.

4 Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style*, trans. Michael Bullock (New York: International Universities Press, 1953), 5. Worringer explicitly credited Riegl as the foundation for his work. See Ernest K. Mundt, "Three Aspects of German Aesthetic Theory," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 17 (Mar. 1959): 287–310.

5 I have altered the quotation slightly; the original was written in racialized dialect. Museum of Modern Art, "William Edmondson" [press release], Oct. 18, 1937, Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Edward M. Puchner productively situates Edmondson's religious statements in the social history and theology of black southern Christianity. See Puchner, "Godly Fruit in the Modern Era: The Evangelical Church, the African American Experience, and a Redefinition of American Folk Art" (PhD diss., University of Indiana, 2012).

6 "Speakin' His Mind," *Holyoke Transcript*, Nov. 11, 1937.

7 This point of agreement may not be as farfetched as it seems. Many nineteenth-century theorists of *Einfühlung* freely incorporated mysticism and spirituality into their discussions. To wit, Robert Vischer once chalked empathy up to "the pantheist desire toward a union with the world." Vischer, quoted in Mundt, "Three Aspects," 292.

8 Robert Vischer, "On the Optical Sense of Form: A Contribution to Aesthetics," in Mallgrave and Ikononou, *Empathy, Form, and Space*, 104.

9 This likelihood was offered in an oral history interview with Edmondson's friend the journalist Bill Woolsey in 1995. Thomas King Atwood, "William Edmondson: The Inside Outsider" (master's thesis, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1995).

10 Bobby L. Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville, Tennessee, 1780–1930* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999), 64. Edmondson's father had originally been enslaved by H. William Compton's neighbor William Edmondson (*ibid.*).

11 Bobby L. Lovett, "From Plantation to the City: William Edmondson and the African-American Community," in *The Art of William Edmondson*, ed. Rusty Freeman (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, in association with the Cheekwood Museum of Art, Nashville, Tennessee, 1999), 22.

12 The primary documentation for Edmondson's yard arrangements comes in a portfolio of photographs made in 1941 by the modernist art photographer Edward Weston. Weston, visiting Edmondson through an introduction made by Alfred Starr, took a few photographs of the artist; but he took many more of his artworks, which appear in the images as stark-white proliferations sprouting from tall grass. For discussions of Edmondson's outdoor studio and display spaces as an example of the African American folk art tradition of front yard ornamentation, see Tessa DeCarlo, "The Innocent Negro: William Edmondson and the Guilty Politics of Folk/Outsider Art," *Oxford American* 39 (May/June 2001): 42–52; and Grey Gundaker, "William Edmondson's Yard," in Freeman, *Art of William Edmondson*, 61–70.

13 DeCarlo, "The Innocent Negro," 46.

14 The relationship between Edmondson and Hirsch, underexamined in the literature on both individuals, is a focal point of my larger study, which is ongoing.

15 Judith McWillie, "William Edmondson with Edward Weston and Louise Dahl-Wolfe, 1934–1941," in Freeman, *Art of William Edmondson*, 53.

16 Death and commemoration, especially of the Old South and its defiantly claimed martyrs, play a major role in the poetry published by members of the Fugitives. This theme is apparent across several works published in the little magazine *Fugitive: A Journal*

of Poetry (1922); it achieves its canonical apotheosis in Allen Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead" (1925) and is revamped as a rather more universal meditation in the titular essay of Cleanth Brooks's classic *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1947).

17 Many accounts cite editorial racism as the reason for the scuttling. Tessa DeCarlo reports that Dahl-Wolfe's memory of the events centered on William Randolph Hearst as the one who forbid printing images of Edmondson in the magazine. The magazine's owner, according to the photographer, "had this terrible prejudice about black people, and wouldn't allow them to be shown as anything but servants." DeCarlo, "The Innocent Negro," 48. See also Lovett, "From Plantation to the City," 24.

18 "Negro Sculptor's Work Acclaimed by Art Museum," *Birmingham News*, Oct. 9, 1937; "Song in His Heart," [unknown newspaper source], Oct. 23, 1937; "N.Y. Museum Shows Negro Sculpture," *Rochester Democrat-Chronicle*, Oct. 31, 1937; "Negro Art at Modern Museum," *Lewiston [ME] Sun*, Oct. 19, 1937; "Negro News," *Winston-Salem Sentinel*, Oct. 25, 1937; Edward Alden Jewell, "Tennessee Negro Shows Sculpture," *New York Times*, Oct. 20, 1937. All quotations derived from the Museum of Modern Art, Public Information Scrapbooks, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

19 "Negro Sculptor with God-Given Genius to Have Work Displayed in New York," *Nashville Banner*, Oct. 9, 1937, Museum of Modern Art, Public Information Scrapbooks, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

20 Museum of Modern Art, "Exhibit of Sculptures by William Edmondson" [press release], Oct. 5, 1937, Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Based both on the location of Edmondson's prior employment with the Nashville-Chattanooga & St. Louis Railroad and on the formal qualities of some of his figures, including *Seated Girl with Legs Folded* (ca. 1934–1941, Newark Museum), several scholars have surmised that Edmondson watched the construction of the permanent concrete Parthenon, ongoing in Nashville's Centennial Park from about 1920 to 1931. See "Catalog," in Freeman, *Art of William Edmondson*, 130, 140; Puchner, "Godly Fruit," 100–101.

21 Mundt, "Three Aspects," 306.

- 22 Bridget R. Cooks, *Exhibiting Blackness: African Americans and the American Art Museum* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 27.
- 23 William Zorach, introduction to *Contemporary American Sculpture*, ed. C. Ludwig Brummé (New York: Crown Publishers, 1948), 10.
- 24 Elisabeth Luther Cary, "Of Line and Substance," *New York Times*, Nov. 8, 1931.
- 25 Herbert Read, *The Meaning of Art* (London: Faber and Faber, 1931), 153.
- 26 Barbara Hepworth, quoted in Sophie Bowness, "An Anthology of Sculptors' Writings on Stone Carving," in *Carving Mountains: Modern Stone Sculpture in England, 1907–1937*, ed. Michael Harrison (Cambridge, UK: Kettle's Yard, 1998), 20.
- 27 Alain Locke, "Pluralism and Ideological Peace," in *Freedom and Experience: Essays Presented to Horace M. Kallen*, ed. Sidney Hook and Milton R. Konvitz (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1947), 64.
- 28 Despite his prolific activity in this milieu, Locke never appraised William Edmondson's work in print, although he included reproductions of two of his sculptures in his pictorial compendium *A Pictorial Record of the Negro Artist and of the Negro Theme in Art* (Washington, DC: Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1940).
- 29 For more on Locke's philosophical activities in the development of pragmatism, see for examples Leonard Harris, *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader of Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999); Mark Helbling, "Feeling Universality and Thinking Particularistically: Alain Locke, Franz Boas, Melville Herskovits and the Harlem Renaissance," *Prospects* 19 (1994): 289–314; and Johnny Washington, *Alain Locke and Philosophy: A Quest for Cultural Pluralism* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986).
- 30 The later nineteenth century saw a rise in philosophical interest in empirical study of the mind and its experience, investigations that were coming to be defined under the more scientifically inclined rubric of the New Psychology. It would be wrong to say that in these decades philosophers borrowed from psychology; rather this was a historical period in which the two academic disciplines were only beginning to be formally defined and, as such, were still yoked together in their mutual pursuit of knowledge about the human mind. For a discussion of this in the American context, see Louis Menand, *The Meta-physical Club* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), esp. 260.
- 31 H. M. Kallen, "Alain Locke and Cultural Pluralism," *Journal of Philosophy* 54 (Feb. 28, 1957): 123 (emphasis in original), 124, 125.
- 32 William James, "The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy," in *William James: Writings, 1878–1899*, ed. Gerald E. Myers (New York: Library of America, 1992), 447.
- 33 William James, "A Pluralistic Mystic," *Hibbert Journal* 8 (July 1910): 758.
- 34 James, "Will to Believe," 448.
- 35 Ross Posnock, "The Influence of William James on American Culture," in *The Cambridge Companion to William James*, ed. Ruth Anna Putnam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 335.
- 36 Although they shared this political-philosophical quandary in common and knew each other fairly well, the relationship between Kallen and Locke does not quite rise to the level of friendship. Daniel Greene has confronted the curious fact of Kallen's failure to collaborate with Locke more closely on their dual efforts at pluralistic cultural nationalism, or even to credit the influence of Locke on his thinking: an acknowledgement that did not come until the middle of the 1950s, after Locke had died. Greene also notes that Kallen's effective dismissal of Locke finds parallel in Kallen's ongoing deferral of the question of race in his theory of pluralism. Greene writes: "Since the 1910s, Kallen had promised a separate analysis of African Americans' cultural impact on the United States, but he never kept his promise." This failure is what distinguishes Kallen's early twentieth-century cultural pluralism from later twentieth-century multiculturalism; it is also the liability that has limited Kallen's reputation in this tradition. Greene, *The Jewish Origins of Cultural Pluralism: The Menorah Association and American Diversity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 228n14.

- 37 Greene, *Jewish Origins of Cultural Pluralism*, 1, 8–9.
- 38 It must be admitted that many of these views demonstrate how Kallen's appropriation of James amounted also to misinterpretation. If James decreed that the world was necessarily "a pluralism," he viewed this difference not statically, as a series of distinct essences, but dynamically, as ever-present difference and ongoing differentiation. By contrast, Kallen's pluralism resembled more a collection of atomistic, essentialist distinctions; he seems, in the words of intellectual historian Ross Posnock, to have "largely ignored James's renunciation of the logic of identity." For Posnock, Locke was the better Jamesian: the thinker who better perceived that the world's many differences, whether ontological or racial, were forged continually in "an open process of reciprocal influence." Greene notes that Kallen later softened his earlier essentialism, significantly in the period of the 1950s and 1960s, coincident with his public appreciations for the contributions of Locke. Posnock, "Influence of William," 336 and 338; Greene, *Jewish Origins of Cultural Pluralism*, 183. See also H. M. Kallen, "Democracy versus the Melting Pot," *The Nation* 100 (Feb. 18 and 25, 1915): 190–94, 217–20; and Menand, *Metaphysical Club*, 388–99.
- 39 In his intellectual history of Kallen's trajectory, Greene offers a similar personal-historical rationale for Kallen's pluralism, turning to the "lived experience" of Jewish intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century as a practical basis for this political philosophy. Greene, *Jewish Origins of Cultural Pluralism*, 2.
- 40 Kallen, "Alain Locke and Cultural Pluralism," 23–24.
- 41 Genesis 22:13 (Revised Standard Version).
- 42 Vischer, quoted in Mundt, "Three Aspects," 292. See also Mallgrave and Ikononou, introduction to *Empathy, Form, and Space*; and Vischer, "On the Optical Sense of Form," 104.
- 43 Franz Brentano, *The Psychology of Aristotle: In Particular His Doctrine of the Active Intellect*, trans. Rolf George (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 57.
- 44 See Daniel Heller-Roazen, *The Inner Touch: Archaeology of a Sensation* (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 27–30.
- 45 Michel Serres, quoted in Claudia Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border between Self and the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 1; Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 2008), 131. The full quotation from Nancy is as follows: "I' is nothing other than the singularity of a touch, of a touch that is always at once active and passive."
- 46 Washington, *Alaine Locke and Philosophy*, 25.
- 47 Brentano, *Psychology of Aristotle*, 54.
- 48 Locke, "Pluralism and Ideological Peace," 69, 63.
- 49 Everett H. Akam, "Community and Cultural Crisis: The 'Transfiguring Imagination' of Alain Locke," *American Literary History* 3 (Summer 1991): 263.
- 50 Since Edmondson understood his creative will to be an extension of God's own—that artistic creativity was simply the experience of God's indwelling in man—the comparison to Blake seems apt enough. Indeed, art critic Henry McBride discerned Christian Romanticism at work in Edmondson's efforts, writing in response to the MoMA show: "He is as convinced as William Blake ever was that he works 'at God's command.'" Henry McBride, "Modern Decorative Art: Whitney Museum Shows Ceramics; Modern Museum Quaint Tombstones," *New York Sun*, Oct. 23, 1937, Museum of Modern Art, Public Information Scrapbooks, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.
- 51 Darby English, *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness* (2007; paperback ed., Boston, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 14; Paula R. Backscheider, *Reflections on Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 204.
- 52 English, *How to See a Work of Art*, 9.