



ART

IN

GRACE ABOUNDING

Edmonia Lewis LOUIS DELSARTE  
 Rex Goreleigh EDWARD MITCHELL BANMISTER  
 Aaron Douglas Hale Woodruff  
 AUGUSTA SAVAGE James VanDerZee  
 Sargent Claude Charles Sallee  
 Hilda Wilkinson Brown Sam Gilliam  
 Jacob Lawrence Lois Mailou Jones  
 GORDON PARKS William E. Smith William Artis  
 James A. Porter Horace Pippin  
 Hughie Lee-Smith James Hampton  
 RICHARD DEMPSEY JOHN BIGGERS  
 LEV T. MILLS Charles Alston  
 Alma Thomas Elizabeth Catlett  
 Romare Bearden Frank Bowling  
 DEREK WALCOTT Rex Goreleigh  
 David Driskell Frederick Brown  
 Franklin White IRENE CLARK  
 AUGUSTA SAVAGE Richard Mayhew  
 Charles White Hilda Wilkinson Brown  
 Henry O. Tanner George Wilson



Unit 5  
 Gallery of  
 African-  
 American Art

“Thus it is the bounden  
 duty of black America to  
 begin this great work of the  
 creation of Beauty, of the  
 preservation of Beauty, of the  
 realization of Beauty.”

—W. E. B. Du Bois

## *Hagar*, 1875

Edmonia Lewis

Marble

Smithsonian American Art Museum

### Edmonia Lewis, (circa 1843–circa 1909)

Edmonia Lewis's father was a free African American, and her mother was a Chippewa Indian. Both died when she was nine, and she was raised mainly by her mother's tribe. As a young woman at Oberlin College, she was attacked by a racist mob who falsely accused her of poisoning two white people. She was acquitted in court and soon after, with encouragement from Abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, she moved to Boston. There she studied sculpture and came into contact with many of the most prominent writers and artists of her day. Later, she moved to Italy and set up a sculpture studio there. Her sculptures were often politically charged and provocative, especially for a black woman in her place and time. Her 1867 sculpture *Forever Free*, for instance, depicted a black man holding a broken chain with a white man kneeling at his feet. The sensitively carved sculpture *Hagar* (also called *Hagar in the Wilderness*) depicts a Biblical character, the Egyptian handmaiden of Abraham's wife, Sarah. In Islamic tradition, Hagar and her son by Abraham, Ishmael, were the founders of the lineage of Arab peoples. Hagar and Ishmael were also traditionally believed to be ancestors of a number of African kings.

### Thinking about the Art

1. Critics and art fans like to discuss Lewis's somewhat ironic choice of white marble as her primary medium. What is ironic about this choice? Why might Lewis have chosen white marble as her medium, given her subject?
2. Edmonia Lewis's *Hagar* is in the **neoclassical** style. It shares many similarities with Greek and Roman sculpture of the Classical Age. Look at some Greek and Roman sculpture online or in the library. What similarities can you find between Hagar's work and ancient Greek and Roman antecedents?



## *Woman Walking Down Path*, 1882

Edward Mitchell Bannister

Oil on Canvas

Smithsonian American Art Museum

### Edward Mitchell Bannister, (1828–1901)

The first African-American painter to achieve national recognition, Edward Mitchell Bannister expressed in his work a his deep, spiritual love of nature. He was born in Canada and moved to Boston in 1848, where he learned to paint. He later moved to Rhode Island and joined a growing community of landscape artists influenced by the rustic, serene styles developed by painters of France's **Barbizon School**. Bannister's work has both Romantic and Realistic elements. **Romantic** works tend to idealize and glorify the natural and to express the emotions experienced by an individual. **Realistic** works attempt to show external realities as they are, in precise, accurate detail. Bannister won the first-place medal at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876. His *Woman Walking Down the Path* is one of the great masterworks of American painting. Few artists have so evocatively captured a moment and a mood.

### Thinking about the Art

1. What time of day is depicted in this work? What elements of the painting suggest the time of day and season of the year?
2. What aspects of this painting are Realistic? What aspects are Romantic? Why do you think the artist chose to make the figure so small and ill defined? What does this fact suggest about the relationship between the individual and nature? What mood does the painting suggest to you?
3. Bannister's style is sometimes described as “**painterly**” because the medium in which he worked is quite evident. What qualities of this painting make it “painterly”?

