



1970

Polished bronze and silk

Height: 9 feet, 10 inches (299.7 cm)

**BARBARA CHASE-RIBOUD**

American, born 1939

## LOOKING QUESTIONS

Is this sculpture, titled *Malcolm X, No. 3*, realistic or abstract? Why?

What materials did the artist, Barbara Chase-Riboud, use?

What words would you choose to describe the top section?  
The lower section?

Chase-Riboud could have made a recognizable image of Malcolm X. Why do you think she made an abstract sculpture instead?

What does this sculpture tell us about Malcolm X?

## MALCOLM X, NO. 3

Why did African American artist Barbara Chase-Riboud (ree-BOO) depict the famous civil rights activist and Muslim minister Malcolm X with shapes made of bronze and strands of knotted and braided silk? How can soft, hanging pieces of silk support such big, heavy pieces of metal? **Abstract** art typically makes us ask questions like these and encourages us to discover our own answers.

Chase-Riboud formed the upper section of this sculpture from large sheets of wax, which were then **cast** in bronze and carefully polished. The lower section, made of silk, covers a **pedestal** that holds up the bronze, making it appear to hover in midair. What does each section remind you of? How are they similar and different? Although both sections are roughly the same size and color, look for opposite qualities: hard and soft, for example. Which section could swing and sway? Which one looks like melting ice?

Malcolm X was born Malcolm Little in 1925. After a difficult childhood and troubles with the law, Malcolm went to prison, where he joined the Nation of Islam, a Black Nationalist group that follows the teachings of the prophet Muhammad. Later, he became a popular but controversial minister who delivered angry speeches about racial injustice. In 1964, he made a pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia, which changed his outlook completely. He preached universal peace and brotherhood until he was tragically assassinated the following year. In this sculpture, Chase-Riboud pays **homage** to Malcolm X by emphasizing qualities of his charismatic personality and achievements rather than creating a likeness of his physical appearance.