THE SCULPTOR Edmonia Lewis

Transcript of *What'sHerName* Episode 32

00:00:00 - 00:05:06

[possible ad]

Katie Nelson: Hi Olivia!

Olivia Meikle: Hi Katie!

KN: Here's a question for you: If money were no object, what would you pursue in life?

OM: Oh man, this is the question we ask ourselves at our house all the time. [laughter] I think the honest answer is… I would go live on a beach in Spain and not really pursue anything. [laughter]

KN: Similar to my answer. Why don't you do that? Why don't you just go live on a beach in Spain?

OM: Because I have children who need to go to college. [laughter] But why don't *they* just go live on a beach in Spain?

KN: Yeah, why don't you take them with you?

OM: Because… we live in reality? [laughter] Because food, and somewhere to live, and…

KN: That's the problem.

OM: Yeah.

KN: I feel like that's where everybody ends up. "Because money, because reality" - it seems like everybody is faced with this. There's your dreams, and then there's a good hard reality check. It seems like life is navigating between these two poles. What you could dream of, what's possible - and what is realistic. Today, I wanna tell you about a woman who went full-on Follow Your Dreams. Her dream was so big, so impossible, that everyone around her, *everyone* around her,

was saying, “That’s never going to happen. I think you’d better scale back your vision. Like, it's truly impossible.”

OM: [whispers] But did she do it?

KN: [laughs] She did it! She did it! Spoiler alert.

OM: Yay! A happy one! [laughter]

KN: Okay to start us off though, I want you to describe for me: a sculptor.

OM: Ooh. They have long hair, and they're all renaissance-y, and they wear a lot of velvet. [laughter] And he has a whole bunch of, like - minions, that are probably teenage children, running around fetching tools and stuff. And he's staring at a block of marble saying “What's in there?”

KN: Yeah, like - chisel in hand.

OM: And he drinks a lot of wine.

KN: Right! He does. Red wine. Red wine, straight out of the bottle probably.

OM: He probably doesn't wear shoes very often.

KN: Yeah. And I guess he lives in Italy.

OM: Yeah. Obviously.

KN: So, right. So we're talking Michelangelo here, or Donatello or Leonardo, or any of the ninja turtles.

OM: [laughs] Right, exactly.

KN: Yeah. That is ‘quintessential sculptor.’
The sculptor I'm going to tell you about today is Edmonia Lewis - half Native American, half African American, born in antebellum America, where people of her race were literally enslaved. She went on to become a great classical sculptor in Rome, Italy. That was her life.

OM: Yeah, that's an impossible dream.

KN: Yeah, I mean - she's one of those people where if I hadn't seen the actual evidence, and someone like, say… wrote a historical novel about this Native American Black woman in the 1800s who goes on to be a classical sculptor in Rome, I'd be like, "Not real. I mean, that did not happen." But it *did* happen. She's amazing.

[theme music]

KN: I'm Katie Nelson.

OM: And I'm Olivia Meikle.

KN: And this is *What'sHerName*.

OM: Fascinating women you've never heard of.

KN: So, at Harvard University a few months ago I visited Charmaine Nelson, who was finishing up a fellowship there.

Charmaine Nelson: So I'm Dr. Charmaine Nelson, a professor of art history at McGill University in Montreal, Canada.

KN: Okay, let Professor Nelson and I paint you a scene. 1970s Rome: There's a lively community of expats, English speakers from America, Canada, England, living an artistic life there. There's writers, painters, poets. All of them are wealthy. All of them are the type of person who can say, "I'm just going to move my family to Rome for five years."

00:05:06 - 00:10:00

KN: You know, akin to, *I'll just move to the beach in Spain and just live there.* You know, they are people who can afford to do that. They have the money, and they go, "I shall move to Rome. I will rent a large house on the banks of the Tiber River, and I will live The Life."

Charmaine Nelson: Novelists like Nathaniel Hawthorne is there, Henry James is there. The famous actor Charlotte Cushman is there. Other sculptors like Anne Whitney, Harriet Hosmer, they all, they live there.

KN: Mark Twain, Oscar Wilde, Edith Wharton, George Eliot, giants of literature.

OM: I want to go there.

KN: [laughter] Italy is the place to be. That's where art is found. That's where art is lived. Universally, almost, these are wealthy white people. Imagine you're walking around this English quarter of Rome in the 1870s. There is a particular area where all these sculptors live, and these sculptors are working at their mad art, you know, red wine in hand, living the life. But here too, even among them, they are all wealthy and they're all white.

But look here! People looked in sometimes to this particular sculptor's studio, and they found a brown, mixed race woman, you know, cleaning a piece of marble. "Excuse me, washerwoman, where is the great sculptor who resides here? Who is he?" They say. And the woman glances at them, y'know, maybe she kind of looks at them sideways, rolls her eyes. *Here we go again.* "This," she says, "is all my own work. This is *my* studio. I am the sculptor." This woman, this astonishing woman, she was way outside the social norms. She wasn't a man, and that's shocking enough. She wasn't wealthy, and she wasn't white.

How did she get here? Where did she come from? Well, her story is as unique and interesting as you might expect.

Charmaine Nelson: So we don't have a firm date of birth. So what we know, of what she told people, was that she was born someplace in upstate New York in around 1844. She was of mixed race ancestry. So on the mother's side, she was indigenous. And on the father's side, she had some African ancestry. We think it was Caribbean, African Caribbean. She gets orphaned at a very young age and she ends up with her mother's side of the family. So she's raised amongst indigenous people.

[music]

Charmaine Nelson: The closest relative, besides her mother's family, which we know very little, is a brother, who really gets behind her education and deems it necessary to support her in that regard. So he sends her to Oberlin College in the early 1860s. And Oberlin, at the time, we believe is the only college in the USA that's letting in women and letting in People of Color.

KN: Wow.

Charmaine Nelson: Yes, so it's basically the only place she can go. So she goes to Oberlin. Oberlin, Ohio was considered an abolitionist setting.

KN: So, pretty great, a school that admits women. You'd think if she's going to be treated with respect, if she has any chance at equity, this is going to be it, it's going to be here. But no. [sad laughter]

Charmaine Nelson: She's accused of poisoning two of her roommates with Spanish Fly, which is an aphrodisiac. So it's a really bizarre scenario. And then she's brought to trial. She's defended by a man who becomes a really famous Black attorney and politician, John Mercer Langston, I believe his name was, and she gets acquitted. But during the trial, she's actually attacked by white mob in the dead of winter. She's stripped, and she's left for dead outside. And she survives that.

00:10:00 - 00:15:02

Charmaine Nelson: And of course, you know, we have to think about what might have transpired to her really besides a physical assault, she might have been actually sexually violated as well. But that's something in the nineteenth century no one would have spoken about, right.

So she recuperates from that, she's acquitted, she tries to re-enroll at Oberlin, and they effectively push her out of the school by refusing to allow her to enroll in her classes in the next semester. So they're not brave enough to say *we're expelling you*, right? But they just basically force her out by refusing to let her enroll.

KN: And this is where we see the artist emerge.

Charmaine Nelson: That's the moment when we start to see that she's interested in art making, because her earliest work that we know of is actually not a sculpture, it's a sketch, a pencil sketch that she made supposedly as a wedding gift for a friend, for a classmate, of an ancient Greek figure Urania. So that's the earliest art work we have from Edmonia Lewis.

KN: So there's no future for her here, clearly.

Charmaine Nelson: Where do you go after this, right? And we have to remember, 1860 too, the Civil War has started.

KN: She's eighteen years old, about, and she makes her first very bold move. She takes herself to the hub of the abolitionist movement. She moves to Boston, Massachusetts.

Charmaine Nelson: So in Boston, actually, it seems like she's quite welcomed and embraced. She is befriended by people like Lydia Maria Child, who's a wonderful, you know, very strong

abolitionist, and also the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison. And apparently people like this give her - you know, back then it was quite formal, so you need letters of introduction from people. So they presented her with those letters of introduction. She establishes a studio, a sculpting studio on 89 Tremont Street, which is a very famous set of studio buildings on Tremont street in Boston.

KN: 89 Tremont Street is an amazing address, a crazy place for her to set herself up when she's just this nobody from nowhere, eighteen years old, moving to Boston. It's right on the Freedom Trail, the Freedom Trail as we know it today, on the corner of Boston Common, right at the site of the Park Street Church - which is on the Freedom Trail today because it's the site from which William Lloyd Garrison, the famous abolitionist, gave all of his famous speeches and sermons. On the steps of the Park Street Church is, the place where "My Country 'Tis of Thee, Sweet Land of Liberty," was first sung. And right next to the Park Street Church is the Granary Burying Ground, where the likes of John Hancock, Sam Adams, James Otis, Robert Treat Paine, and the victims of the Boston Massacre - all those people are buried right there. So it's like the center of liberty in America. And when she moved there, it was the height of the abolitionist movement. And she just plops herself in, right there, *I'm here*!

["My Country Tis of Thee" plays]

Charmaine Nelson: And we understand that a white male sculptor named Edward Brackett actually gives her some degree of tutelage and encouragement, and some maybe secondhand sculptural tools. So it seems like she doesn't have, like, rigorous formal training in an art educational setting like most of the white men would be getting, but that she's learning them through people who are sympathetic to her.

KN: Somehow against all odds, she learns to sculpt. Of all things - a sculptor! And to become a sculptor you need a specific set of resources.

Charmaine Nelson: Sculpture was an arduous practice, because you make the clay, then you have to transfer it to plaster, and the plaster to marble, and then you've got to get the chisel out. It was like, hard physical labor. Sculpture was deemed to be a male art form, because *it's just too physically arduous for you young ladies to take this on blah, blah, blah.* Like *go and paint flowers down the hallway,* that kind of stuff.

And also, you need to know human anatomy, which for proper women was deemed to be inappropriate, to study from the nude model, and from the cadaver. So how Edmonia inserted herself and became a professionalized artist in this moment when everything was stacked against

her, and when really the world of neoclassical sculpture was for rich, straight, white men. That's who they thought it was for.

So she's making this art and becoming professionalized at a moment when people like her, meaning people who are of African ancestry, are literally still enslaved in the United States.

So she ended up in my dissertation, which became my first single-authored book, *The Color of Stone*.

00:15:13 - 00:20:03

KN: In those years of the Civil War in America, interesting things were happening racially. The first company of Black soldiers was formed for the Union Army, immortalized in the movie *Glory* - you remember that movie?

OM: Oh yes!

KN: Starring Denzel Washington, Morgan Freeman… It's an amazing story. And their commanding officer Robert Gould Shaw, who's played by Matthew Broderick in the movie, he was from Boston. And he died heroically alongside many of his men in battle, and collectively they were lionized by the people of the North. They were epic heroes. And Edmonis Lewis is at the center of that abolitionist movement. She's in Boston where Robert Gould Shaw came from. She must have been deeply affected by this. So, she sculpted a bust of Robert Gould Shaw, and that, it turned out, changed the course of her life.

Charmaine Nelson: This is such an important moment for Lewis, because she sells enough copies of this that she raises enough money to buy her boat fare to travel to Italy.

KN: And at age 21 she boarded a ship to Italy, bound for new horizons.

Charmaine Nelson: So, here's a tremendous thing about Lewis too - she becomes, to our knowledge, one of the first People of Color to undertake the "Grand Tour," not as a servant or enslaved person, but as a tourist. It's so tremendous. So she goes, I think, to London, Liverpool, a couple of places there. And then she crosses over - I think she goes to Paris, and then she works the way down into Florence. By the winter of 1866 we know she's in Rome, and she's established a studio. Because journalists, who were their art critics, are reporting on her already at that point, because she so stands out. It's like, right, because all the other Black people, People

of Color, would have been there as, you know, a servant of a rich, white household - not as someone dared established a studio on their own.

Fast-forward ten years. She's a tremendous success on both sides of the Atlantic. She has European patrons who are the famous, the wealthy, nobility, aristocracy. So at that point, she comes back to the Philadelphia Exposition, she's invited back to show two of her works that become some of her most famous works. And she's actually preparing, she's installing her sculpture - and someone asks her if she's cleaning it. So can you imagine? She must have been just barraged with that her whole life. Like, what do people see when they look at her? Even in the midst of preparing her sculpture, *she couldn't possibly be the artist. She has to be the cleaner.*

So it's like the impossibility of her body in the role was multiplied, even than that which her white female peers obviously would've experienced.

[ad break]

KN: Even ten years on, when she proved she could do it, the people around her, they're not a supportive community. This isn't, like, a happy artists' commune, where they're supporting each other. Even her friends, they're really…

OM: Frenemies.

KN: Yeah. Condescending frenemies.

Charmaine Nelson: But Edmonia was deemed to be one of this group of about ten female, mainly sculptors, a few painters, who had studios and practices based at Rome, who came to be known as the White Marmorean Flock - which a was really dubious and insulting label attached to them by the novelist Henry James. So that's what people call this group of women, The Flock, as if they were a group. They weren't a group. Henry imposed this label on them to minimize them, White Marmorean Flock.

Marmorean means marble - so the joke was "marble birds can't fly." If you're a bird made of stone you fall from the sky. So this was a *joke's on them,* right. But to say that they were a group is also totally false, what they were was like, this loose network of women, some of whom were friends, some of them were not, who get lumped together. It's not like they shared an aesthetic and decided, "Let's sculpt this way together, ladies, let's paint the…" No.

00:20:16 - 00:25:04

Charmaine Nelson: They get lumped together by him. And this is the thing too - they were very arrogant, a lot of them. People like Story and that, they would be very dismissive of people like Lewis - first of all, because they were racist, let's put it blunt - even those of them who thought themselves to be abolitionists still had a lot of racist antagonism towards People of Color.

And the other part was that they thought they were better than those who had to sell their art, because, like, well *look at me. I'm just governed by inspiration*! "Oh, you're 'governed by inspiration' because your daddy is a judge who's funding you, so you make what you want, you don't have to sell it. But there's other people amongst you who actually have to sell to eat." But they looked down upon that, right.

So the classism of that, and of course since racism is inflected with classism, right? Because there's an assumption that the indigenous person, the Black person, the Person of Color is always in the lower class, which is not always true. But then you're held in that position by those who don't want you to be able to aspire to other class positions.

So she was constantly confronted by that. And we know that actually, when you have a dream, often then you have someone you can look to go, "Well *that* person did that, I'm going to pattern myself on this person." She has no one. She has people who completely don't look like her, who don't share her experience of the world, many of whom are telling her not to do it.

Even her so-called friends, like Lydia Maria Child, who - before I wrote about her, often people would write about friends like Lydia Maria Child as if there was no complexity in that relationship. Because, "oh, of course Lydia Maria Child's an abolitionist, so of course, everything would have been hunky-dory between them." And when I dig into the correspondence… and there's a lot, because Lydia was really good friends, for instance, with Robert Gould Shaw's parents.

So here's a scenario: Robert Gould Shaw is martyred, he dies in a battle. Edmonia wants to sculpt him. She goes to Lydia and tells her. Lydia discourages her and says, "No, you're not a good enough artist to do this." So *don't wreck him*, right, is basically the thing. And so Edmonia says, "No, I'm going to do this."

So she goes for it anyway. She does it. And then when she's successful, she sells all these busts, she makes enough money, she goes to Lydia's house to say goodbye. And she sees that Lydia has photos of Robert. And she says, "Why did you never lend those to me?"

And it was deliberate, because then you see Lydia's correspondence was Shaw's mother, and she's actually saying that she's discouraging Edmonia from doing this, and that she shouldn't do it. So this is all going on behind the scenes, where in public they're just like, "Edomonia's great, and we're supporting her and she has great potential!" But behind the scenes there's all this stuff going on. And then when Edmonia gets to Europe, Lydia's writing to people saying, "I told her not to think that she can be an original artist. But what she should focus on is just making copies and selling them to tourists." So she thought she had no, as they'd say in the day, 'original genius.'

So if Edmonia had listened to these people who are supposedly her greatest friends and advocates, we wouldn't have had this great art from her. Because she dared to think that she was good enough to be, you know, an original artist - and she was! So this is the kind of thing. So thank goodness for these archives or we'd never know all the kind of, you know, behind-the-scenes that was going on.

And I have to say, this world of the expats, those who stayed behind in America, they were so gossipy and backbiting and in-fighting. It was not a pleasant world. They were like - on the surface, I guess, pretended to be friendly, and behind the scenes they were really at each other. And just like, *you don't quite have the potential to be like us. So then be **your** best - which is lower than, like, less than us*, kind of thing. So thankfully, she just was like, "Nope!" She just had such a powerful sense of self and what she was capable of, that she didn't allow people to deter her.

[music]

Charmaine Nelson: There was no one in front of her who was the ideal or the paradigm that she could say, "I'm gonna do this like *that* person." Like, she was the first male or female of Color to become a professional sculptor. And then, you know, become successful, have an international reputation, the first so there was nobody in front of her to look at as a role model.

OM: Okay, so - neoclassical sculpture. Just making sure that I'm thinking about this right, this is carving out of marble…

KN: Right, out of marble, huge sculptures, sometimes larger than life.

OM: And these are like, Greek gods, and idealized people, and stuff, right?

KN: Yeah, yeah, exactly. They're reviving ancient Greek and Roman sculpture. They're looking back at Michelangelo who also revived ancient Greek and Roman sculpture, and they're doing that kind of thing.

00:25:10 - 00:30:00

KN: Yeah, the process of creating the final product, which is marble, is long, arduous, difficult, and it requires great strength, which is one of the reasons why people said women can't do that. You know, *you gotta have biceps to be able to do that.*

Charmaine Nelson: Neoclassicism was not an individual process of production. So why you'd go to Rome and set up a studio is because it was deemed necessary to have a team of artisans. Because, again, the whole process was about four or five different stages. So first, usually, you make a sketch, then you do the clay maquette, then you transfer it to plaster, then you transfer it to marble, and then you chisel. So you needed artisans, needed - right, to be working on, like, you do the first two stages, you hand it over to them, and they'd finish the work, and then you put the finishing touches. So someone really professional, you're working multiple things at once, your studio artisans are finishing things for all your different patrons. So you could have teams of people working for you.

The thing is that we know for sure that people like Lewis and Emma Stebbins in the 1850s, they heard that Harriet Hosmer was accused of fraud. Harriet and all women did the practice just like the men, which is usually - you work the hardest on the sketch and on the maquette, and then you hand it off to the artisans and you put the finishing touches on your sculpture. But they accused her of letting her artisans finish the work too much. Which is something, probably, that *all of them* were doing too, meaning all them the white male artists. But of course, you're gonna level that attack at the woman, because she can't possibly make art that is that good.

So we know then from correspondence, that Emma Stebbins and Lewis, they just, like - fire everybody or don't hire anybody, and they start doing the whole process themselves, because they're so terrified of being accused of fraud. So then Lewis's output is way less than her white male contemporaries. But she did that to protect herself, because who are you going to accuse? The Person of Color, and the woman, and she's both.

KN: The good news is, by 1876, despite all of this - she has come into her own. She is a master.

Charmaine Nelson: For the Neoclassisists, what's at the center is the human body. And what's even better is the unclothed human body, because that's how you show your chops as an artist. *I*

know human anatomy. And again, that's what the women are left out of, and that's what the People of Color are left out of. “We won't let you train from the nude,” right? You can't get - literally *can't get into* life drawing classes in this part of the nineteenth century. So if the white man has a cast of the entire human body, it’s just normal, you're a sculptor. What you should know is the body. But if a woman does it, it's inappropriate and *sexually* inappropriate.

And the other way to get this training was from the cadavers in a med school, again - who's getting into med school in the nineteenth century? So what the white women do, like we know for sure Harriet Hosmer and Emma Stebbins accessed training through med school, through their family connections, because they're wealthy. So Harriet Hosmer literally would go to the campus of the college and study at night after-hours with the professor. But how’s Edmonia going to get this? So literally, she had to learn human anatomy on her own, which - how does she teach herself that? Absent all those that the normative training that was extended to her peers, or even the, the clandestine training that was extended to white women? It's remarkable.

Here's the thing, Neoclassical sculpture was *art for morality’s sake*. All these people are invested in: *I'm telling a narrative that has to have a moral.* It’s not art for art’s sake. That's the modernized - this is art for morality sake. So then the narrative was everything. And so you had failed with your sculpture if you did not give enough detail - in the rendering, in the materiality, in the aesthetic - to allow your viewers access to the correct narrative.

Sculpture is very different from a painting, right, because painting allows you to create the narrative within a two-dimensional world that you might simulate to be three dimensional. With a sculpture, what's different is if you're relying mainly on one human body. That human figure, and what they're wearing, and where they are, has to tell this whole story. But you don't have this whole context that you can create, you just have the body. So how do you tell a story? So, for instance, if they're in the forest, you might show a tree stump at the foot, or a flower at their foot, right. Or if they're still enslaved you show a shackle on their hand. If they're newly freed, you break the shackle, right?

00:30:00 - 00:35:12

So all these little things are telling the audience, ‘This is a moment of the narrative.’ So for instance - Eve. The difference between Eve before the Fall and after, right… So is she looking at the apple, contemplating it? Is she unclothed, and is she ashamed of being unclothed? Right? So just those little things can tell you what moment in the biblical narrative it is. So, same thing with Cleopatra: Is she dead? Is she thinking about killing herself? Is the snake actually on her body already? Right, so where is it in the narrative of her killing herself? So all of that has to be just

through a very limited register of contextual markers, that are *really* restrictive compared to what you can do in a painting.

KN: She sculpts her two greatest and most famous pieces, two larger-than-life marble sculptures, one of Hagar and one of Cleopatra. Two famous figures from antiquity, two women of color. She's commenting on race in the 1870s, using these figures from the deep past.

Charmaine Nelson: Sculpting Cleopatra had become a Thing. So William Wetmore Story, a bunch of other Neoclassisists sculpted Cleopatra. Why? Cleopatra in the period was a stand-in for the Black diaspora, because she was taking this Egyptian queen, meaning an African queen - her body can stand symbolically for Black people. Okay. So to show her dying too is to show the tragedy of the oppression of slavery. So she became a stand-in, right? So whereas a lot of other people, like Story, sculpted Cleopatra contemplating suicide - so she'd have the snake nearby, or she'd be brooding, like, you know... What Lewis does is she sculpts her already dead. And she sculpts her in the period of what's called Reconstruction, which for Black people and abolitionists was a failure. You know, the Civil War is won by the North, the enslaved people are freed and they're not fully citizens. Because again, the state rises up with all these segregationist tactics: can't vote, can't be in public office. And then white mob rules too, start to, you know, terrorize people with things like lynching. So it's a mess. The promise of freedom and emancipation didn't look like what it was supposed to look like.

So here, if you can tell the Black queen - Reconstruction as a Black woman and Indigenous woman, she's not contemplating death, she's just *dead*, right? So she's like… when she's sitting in the throne, her head is like thrown back to the side and her arm over the side of the throne, and - for the people of that moment, they thought this was graphic, a *graphic* portrayal of death. So people aesthetically, like, there's actually really good writing of the time, art criticism where they're saying, "This woman is innovating on the aesthetic level." Like, "This is no longer Neoclassicism." Because Neoclassicism was very stoic and very stiff, but everybody was, like, you know, this was not that. So that is something too, that I think a lot of people overlook, that she did something really innovative with those later works.

OM: Wow.

KN: Yeah.

OM: That's… ooh, cool.

KN: Yeah, that's awesome.

[music]

OM: Do these still exist? Like can I see that?

KN: Yup, we'll post pictures on the website and on our social media accounts.

OM: Cool.

KN: After this, after 1876, she produced her two great works - our records go completely dark. Her life is completely unknown. We don't have the sources because… because, well, nobody kept them. Nobody saved them. Other sculptors who lived in Rome at the time had somebody in their life that was actively preserving all their letters, all their stuff, like, getting ready to write the biography. But she didn't have anybody.

Charmaine Nelson: There is that gap then between the last most famous sculptures in 1876 and her death, and then, so scholars were thinking, "How much more work did she produce that we haven't found yet?" There's a bunch of people who probably have her work, who maybe know or maybe don't know. So I think there might be more out there that's really, again, in that vein, very innovative.

KN: Professor Nelson had searched all over Italy for her grave thinking, she's got to be in Rome, she's got to be there somewhere, but she found her nowhere. But another scholar located her, found her buried in London. So we know she ended up in London and died in 1907. But, that's all we know.

OM: Wow.

KN: What were the final three decades of her life like? Did she keep making art? Maybe she made lots of stuff and it has yet to be discovered. Maybe it's in people's attics, you know, or in people's private collections, and they don't know actually what they have. Or maybe she stopped sculpting altogether, because Neoclassical style fell deeply out of fashion.

Charmaine Nelson: So Neolassicism becomes passé, here comes Rodin and the Modernists, and everything shifts from Rome to Paris.

[music]

00:35:17 - 00:38:47

KN: One other tidbit that professor Nelson has discovered was that she converted to Catholicism. She's buried in the Catholic cemetery in London. And to me, that's just that so fitting with what we know of the rest of her life - you can't put her in any box. She doesn't fit anywhere. Becaus,e if she were deeply rooted in the abolitionist community of Boston, you know, they are like, hardcore Protestant. And, off she goes to Catholic Rome, and converts to Roman Catholicism of all things.

OM: Well, and coming out of a Native American upbringing…

KN: Yeah. She defies all categorization.

Charmaine Nelson: Brilliant, tenacious, stubborn. I think this is a power of Edmonia too. How do you have a vision of yourself that precedes a vision of *someone like you*, whoever existed in the world? Because most of us can't do it, most of us are like, "I need the role model. Give me the role model, and then I can try to follow the role model." And even that we'll fail at. But she, like, projects out ahead of anything, like she's the *first of the first of the first.*

[music]

Charmaine Nelson: No one thought she was supposed to make it in this world, you know. She wasn't supposed to be possible.

[music]

KN: If you'd like to learn more about Edmonia Lewis or see pictures of her sculptures, head to our website whatshernamepodcast.com. Special thanks to Charmaine Nelson, whose book, *The Color of Stone*, and other works you can also find on our website. Music for this episode was recorded by the brilliant Dana Boulé, and antique recordings of "Motherless Child" and "My Country 'Tis Of The" can be found at the Library of Congress Folk Music Collection. Our theme song was composed and performed by Daniel Foster Smith. You can follow us on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook where we post lots of pictures each week. We are so grateful for the support of all of our sponsors. You can become one for as little as a buck a month and help make more episodes happen. Special shout out to Chawntelle Oliver, Katherine McKay and Dorothy Merrill. Thanks for donating. Thanks for listening.