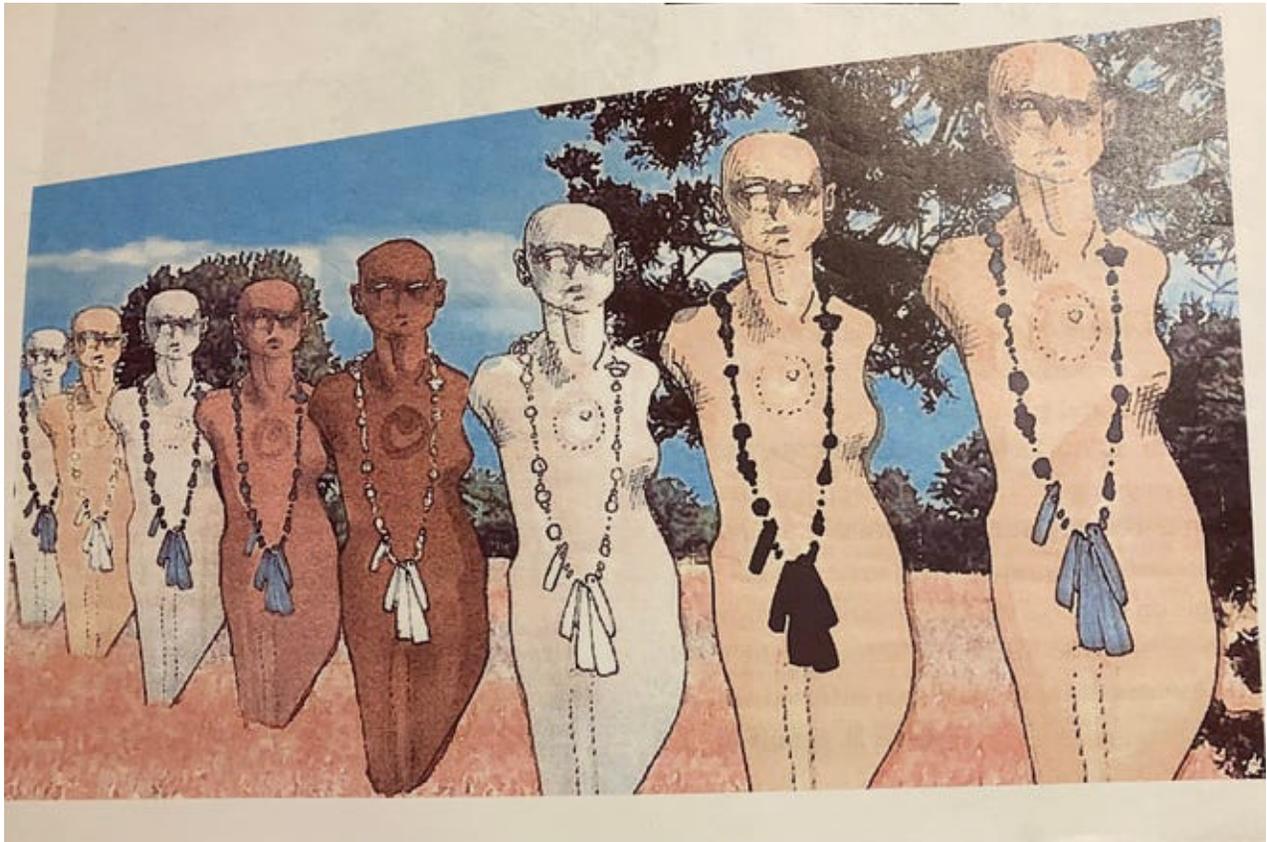


WICKED LOCAL[®]

Rose B. Simpson: "Planned art exhibit at Holmes Reservation in Plymouth to feature 9-foot concrete figures"

By Rich Harbert

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Artist Rose B. Simpson will install her latest art project, Counter Culture, at Holmes Reservation in North Plymouth next spring. Courtesy photo/The Trustees

PLYMOUTH - Mother Nature will be watching when [The Trustees](#) unveil the latest in its series of public art displays at [Holmes Reservation](#) in North Plymouth next year.

Counter Culture, a new large-scale art installation by mixed-media artist Rose B. Simpson, will feature a dozen concrete figures standing tall to honor the Native American perspectives on the site overlooking Plymouth Harbor.

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The 9-foot tall figures will form a ribbon through the property off Route 3A and be positioned to catch the morning sun. Hollow eyes of the feminine figures will give the illusion that Mother Nature is watching. The art project, part of The Trustees' [Art and the Landscape](#) series, will be installed in the spring and remain on exhibit through the fall of 2022.

"I hope that it reminds us of our responsibility and the way that we're always visitors and should act as such. The pieces represent the inanimate things that are always watching and holding us accountable for the way that we move through the world," Simpson said Friday at a gathering at The Trustees' deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum in Lincoln to announce the project.

The Trustees have been commissioning annual public art exhibits on selected properties around the state since 2016. A traveling exhibit by artist Doug Aitken called New Horizon that featured a reflective hot air balloon visited Holmes Reservation in 2019.

Simpson's sculpture is part of a larger program called From Here to Now: Contemporary Native Artists Respond to Holmes Reservation, which is being organized for the Plymouth site by Jamilee Lacy, a guest curator for The Trustees.



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From left, Rose B. Simpson, artist; Jamilee Lacy, curator; and Jessica May, managing director of art and exhibitions for The Trustees; pose last week at de Cordova Sculpture Park and Museum in Lincoln. Wicked Local Photo/Rich Harbert

In addition to Simpson's art, the program will include a book that includes reflections and essays by several Wampanoag writers and a film that is currently in production. Both will be released next year after the sculpture is installed.

About Holmes Reservation

The 26-acre Holmes Reservation on Court Street, donated to the Trustees of Reservations in 1944, mostly has been known as the site where colonists mustered to fight for the American Revolution. But Lacy said it obviously was Wampanoag land first and is significant for its proximity to Plymouth Rock and the start of European colonization of North America.



Artist Rose B. Simpson discusses her plans for a public art exhibit at Holmes Reservation during a gathering last week at deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum. Wicked Local Photo/Rich Harbert

Simpson, who is a member of the Pueblo of Santa Clara, New Mexico, tribe, said she felt suffocating pressure when she was invited to participate in the project.

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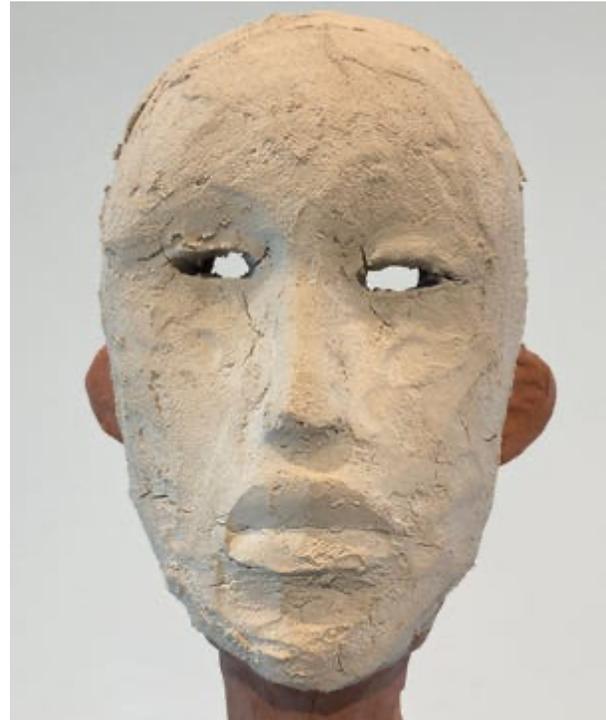
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She said she knew that many Native Americans and members of her own tribe would love to have the opportunity to scream something at the landing site of the Pilgrims. She also felt a need for a tactful response and realized she ultimately could only speak for herself, not other Native Americans, through her exhibit.

Message through art

But her message, a lifetime in the making, is deep. The large feminine figures represent Mother Earth-like beings that, especially in morning light, will demand accountability. But the ceramic necklaces she will make for each will show they are welcoming and not in any way confrontational.

"They're watching," Simpson said. "I was struggling with whether they are creepy, but I think that they have to be intimidating. And they're serious; they're not messing around. Just the fact that they're at Plymouth makes it so they're commenting on history, but we can learn from the past and apply it to the future."



A model of the figures in Rose B. Simpson's Counterculture exhibit is on display at the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum in Lincoln. Wicked Local Photo/Rich Harbert

Simpson said children learn about Plymouth Rock as a place that was key to the continent, but, in fact, it was the start of a period of colonial entitlement that was the beginning of a huge genocide.

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"This whole continent is rampant with entitlement and with the really adverse effects of unconscious entitlements and value systems that didn't consider others. We indigenous people are still navigating genocide. We're living in a post-apocalyptic environment and most people don't know that and indigenous people have to swallow that pill every single day," Simpson said.

"I'm not saying migration is a bad thing, that movement and hope and following dreams is a bad thing. It's how we do it and when we're held accountable and know mom is watching, you better behave. You can't have a bunch of 2-year-olds running around and doing whatever they want."

Simpson carved the beings out of massive blocks of wood using a chain saw. She made three models that are being cast into concrete forms on Long Island. Over the winter, she will experiment with various oxides to tint the color, and finally will produce four versions of each. The beings will be placed in a meandering line on footings in the northeast corner of the property, where it borders Seaside Trail.

Simpson will also be busy creating the necklaces for the beings. She estimates that she will need about 50,000 ceramic links to adorn all nine beings.

She said she was excited to be working with concrete as it will allow her art to degrade in a manner that is responsible to the site. It will be installed next April, and The Trustees plan to keep it at Holmes Reservation at least through next November.

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