

# HYPERALLERGIC

"Rose B. Simpson's Soaring Metal Sentinels Watch Over Madison Square Park"

By Elaine Velie

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Rose B. Simpson's *Seed* in Madison Square Park (photo Lauren Weisberg/*Hyperallergic*)

The artist explained that the sculptures in *Seed* "transform the nature of a hectic and scary city, in a sense, to a place that's really safe."

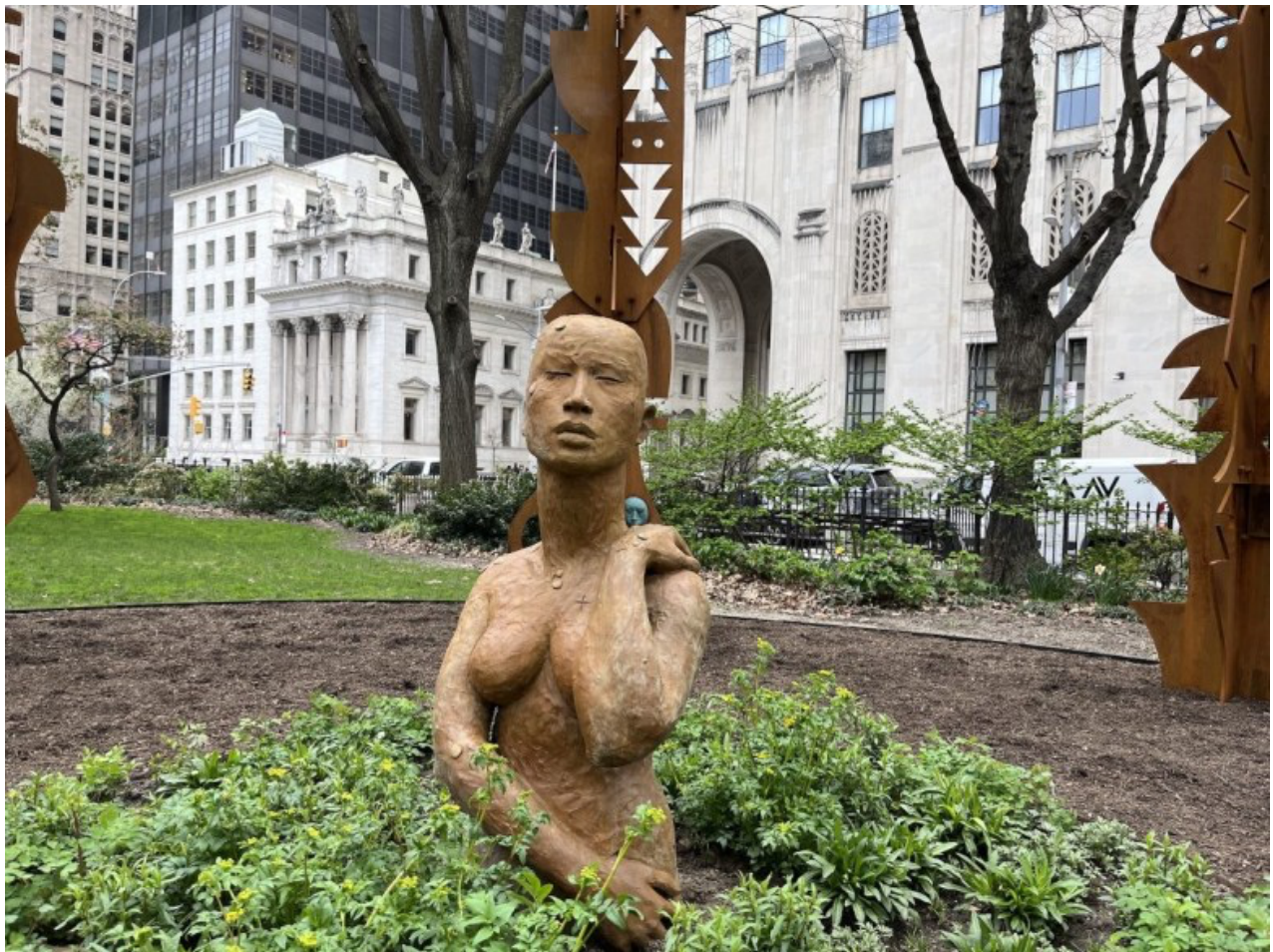
Santa Clara Pueblo artist Rose B. Simpson's first New York City solo public artwork has arrived in Manhattan. Seven 18-foot-tall figures surround a bronze female form in *Seed*, on view in Madison Square Park through September 22. The installation's weathered steel sentinels are the artist's tallest sculptures yet.

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"They transform the nature of a hectic and scary city, in a sense, to a place that's really safe," Simpson said at the work's unveiling today, April 10. She explained that they mimic the energy of the park, a place people go to reconnect with their humanity. "They become these protectors of what they're looking out for, so that [the inner sculpture] can close her eyes. So she doesn't have to be worried or on."

*Seed* stands on Madison Square Park's eastern lawn named for American artist Sol Lewitt in front of the historic whitewashed Appellate Division Courthouse of New York State and Sony headquarter buildings, a stark backdrop for the rusty red protectors and their turquoise bronze masks. Simpson first crafted the latter components in clay before casting them in bronze, as she did the central sculpture, which she adorned with a guiding star and raised dots representing sunlight on the woman's skin. The artist's rippling finger marks are still visible on everything transferred to bronze.



The central female form, surrounded by native plants (all following photos by Elaine Velie/Hyperallergic)

Simpson is familiar with creating large-scale metalwork, but she was surprised at New York's ability to transform *Seed's* scale and nature, noting that the cityscape not only dwarfed her installation but made it appear more organic than she had anticipated.

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"Sometimes the most powerful things can be incredibly intimate," Simpson told *Hyperallergic*. On the morning of the unveiling, commuters beelined through the park below the towering skyscrapers above. "This space is so full. I feel like even though they're massive to me, they're actually quite delicate and small. This is actually an intimate scale in this place."



Simpson in front of *Seed*

The seven sentinels are cut from 10 by four-foot steel sheets. Simpson didn't waste an inch; the works could be disassembled and reattached into perfect rectangles, a sort of massive jigsaw puzzle. She punctured the sheets with ovals and angular shapes, forms she attributed to her unconscious replication of the geometrical Pueblo visual language she grew up with. Chief Curator Brooke Kamin Rapaport of the commissioning Madison Square Park Conservancy explained to *Hyperallergic* that over the next five months, the protectors' weathered steel patina will become more uniform in color, and the columbine, wood mint, wild strawberry, and other native plants surrounding the central form will grow taller and taller. Simpson wanted this effect, which she said will allow the figure to "sink."

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Simpson added turquoise bronze masks to her sculptures.

"We all change with life, you know?" Simpson told *Hyperallergic*. "I live in the desert Southwest. My skin and who I am translate the fact that I live in a dry, hot, sunny environment. Our relationship to place transforms the way we live. I think it'll be really beautiful."

Seed continues in northern Manhattan's Inwood Hill Park, where two eight-foot-tall bronze sentinels look toward the Hudson River and the woods. Madison Square Park Conservancy worked on Simpson's project with the Lenape Center, which Kamin Rapaport said identified Inwood Hill Park as a meaningful site. According to legend, Dutch colonialist Peter Minuit "purchased" what is now known as the island of Manhattan from the Lenape people there for just a few beads and other trade goods, marked by a rock and accompanying plaque. Simpson's two sentinels, gazing out onto the nearby river, are planted into the ground a few feet away.

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