

# SURFACE

"Rose B. Simpson's Sentinels Are Standing Guard"

By Ryan Waddoups

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"Seed" at Madison Square Park. Photography by Elisabeth Bernstein, courtesy of the artist and Madison Square Park Conservancy

**The Santa Clara Pueblo sculptor brings her sentinel figurines to two parks in Manhattan.**

Madison Square Park is coming under a watchful eye. Yesterday, the Santa Clara Pueblo sculptor Rose B. Simpson unveiled "Seed," a group of seven 18-foot-tall sentinel figurines standing guard in circular formation around a much smaller bronze bust of a female form bearing the rippling fingerprints of an artist's touch. "They transform the nature of a hectic and scary city, in a sense, to a place that's really safe," Simpson said at the installation's unveiling, as reported by *Hyperallergic*. "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." They also spark reflection by invoking the Lenape, an Indigenous people of the Northeastern Woodlands who were the first settlers of Manhattan before European settlers arrived in the 1800s.

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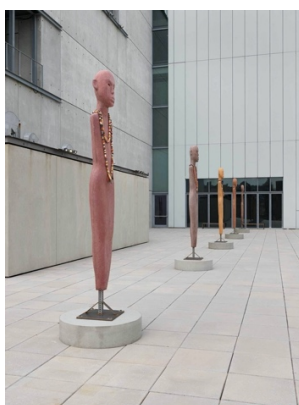
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It's not the first time that Simpson, who once performed in Native American punk bands before earning her MFA at the Rhode Island School of Design, has spread awareness about the Lenape. Five of her other sentinels, which she cast in concrete but in colors reminiscent of her work in clay, starred in a 2023 exhibition on the Whitney Museum's terrace, overlooking the land they once inhabited. At Madison Square, though, she traded concrete for steel. To make each sentinel, she cut elliptical and angular patterns out of large metal sheets inspired by Pueblo visual language. They might seem like a giant undertaking for a sculptor who has long worked from a secluded adobe studio built by her great-uncle, but Flatiron's towering skyscrapers almost make them feel like endearing miniatures.

"Seed" not only marks Simpson's largest New York City commission to date, but also arrives at a celebratory time for the Madison Square Park Conservancy, which is celebrating its public art program's milestone 20th anniversary with a coffee table book and amped-up programming. For the first time, the conservancy is mounting art beyond Madison Square Park, bringing two additional Simpson sentinels to Inwood Hill Park in the borough's upper reaches. Gazing toward the woods and the Hudson River with hollow eyes, they hold special significance. As the story goes, Dutch colonialist Peter Minuit purchased the entire island of Manhattan from the Lenape there in 1626 for what amounts to around \$1,000 today.



Rose B. Simpson. Photography by Minesh Bacrania, courtesy of the artist



"Counterculture" at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Photograph by Ron Amstutz, courtesy of the Whitney Museum of American Art

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