



Woody De Othello: "Three enormous totems have been erected in Brooklyn Bridge Park by the water. Here's what they mean."

By Gerrish Lopez
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Photograph: Courtesy Public Art Fund, NY/Nicholas Knight

You may have noticed an unusual transformation along the Brooklyn waterfront this week with the unveiling *Guardian Spirit*, a new exhibition by artist Woody De Othello. Presented by the Public Art Fund, this collection of seven monumental works marks De Othello's first solo public exhibition in New York City, turning the scenic expanse of Brooklyn Bridge Park into a sanctuary for reflection and healing.

The exhibition, located across Pier 1 and the Dumbo intersection of Washington and Plymouth Streets, features four large-scale bronze sculptures and three towering redwood totems. Standing between 20 and 22 feet tall, the totems—"Reverence," "Awareness" and "Listening"—were hand-carved by De Othello using chainsaws and grinders. They are etched with symbolic reliefs: outstretched hands signifying compassion, kneeling figures for reverence, ears for listening and birds representing freedom. Designed to weather alongside the environment, these totems will physically evolve with the passage of time and the salt air of the harbor.

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At the heart of the exhibition is De Othello's exploration of *nkisi*—ritual objects from Western and Central Africa believed to embody spiritual presences and channel protective forces. By drawing on this tradition, the artist elevates the mundane into the miraculous. De Othello is known for manipulating everyday objects like clocks and phones, warping them into "uncanny repositories of psychic significance." In *Guardian Spirit*, this manifests in works like "thought in mind," where an oversized bronze phone and comb suggest the immense weight of a single conversation or a daily grooming ritual.



Photograph: Courtesy Public Art Fund, NY/Nicholas Knight

Other bronze works, such as "Capacity," "inner knowing" and "Involution," feature trumpet horn-shaped appendages that merge into human ears and hands. These surreal fusions suggest a profound connection between physical sensation and internal emotion, mirroring the way *nkisi* unify the physical and spiritual realms.

By placing these sculptures and totems in a public park, De Othello invites New Yorkers to reconsider the objects that shape their lives. The sculptures serve as a reminder that even the most fleeting daily actions—a phone call, a moment of listening or a gesture of touch—can be a source of strength. *Guardian Spirit* will remain on view through March 8, 2027, offering a long-term space for the city to find protection and peace within the art of the everyday. Find out more at the Public Art Fund.

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