



Rose B. Simpson (b. 1983, Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico)  
*Seed*, 2024

## Artist Statement

Seven eighteen-foot-high steel sentinels assemble in a circular guard, higher faces watching outward, lower faces witnessing the center. Their jagged and expressive forms prickle, as they cluster like the Pleiades. These seven ancestor-protectors, representing the direction and relationship to the stars, stand tall, adult faces looking out, younger faces looking in—seven generations back and seven into the future.

One just-larger-than-life figure immerses herself in the grass. Eyes closed, half submerged in the ground, she lets go. She dissolves into the Mother. She is tender, her skin feeling the weather, the wind, the snow.

Madison Square Park, a moment of manicured nature in the dense architecture of Manhattan, is a place where residents go to be reminded of their connection with something greater than themselves. It is perhaps a respite from the intense anthropocentricity of a massive city.

While I am there with my work, I have the opportunity to guide through reminders. Maybe my work is about the displaced Indigenous residents who had thousands of years of communing with that ground—a heuristic relationship that shaped their culture. Maybe it's about the act of being in that space, gendered. Maybe it's about the feeling of communing in a public space, about safety, about the feeling of anonymity that comes from an immense crowd, the clench of protective identity and the need to exhale.

The single figure is able to dip into this place, to soak herself safely in the ground and the weather, to take a moment to listen to history through her body, to go *there* all the way. She is safe with the ancestors standing guard, though her act of investment can mean she is vulnerable.

The immersion is not just a cleansing; there is a reckoning. The ancestral sentinels are ominous as they stand watch; they behold, they reflect a critical eye at the mannerisms modern humans take for granted, or even choose. The circle of protection provides an example of where values can adjust, and a critical seriousness of the weight of what we have taken for granted. The ancestors demonstrate to the future the work that is yet to be done. 2023