

**Nick Cave, American, 1959-
Soundsuit, 2010**

**Sculpture: metal, wood, plastic, pigments, cotton and acrylic fibers
97 x 48 x 42 in.**

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Theme:

The Soundsuits that Nick Cave creates transcend the word sculpture that is so often used to describe them. These suits touch on costuming and masquerading. While they are sculpture and can be stationary pieces in a gallery, put them on a body and watch them move around and the suits come alive with sound and movement, blurring the line between art object and performance. What makes the duality of the pieces so fascinating is that they are equally successful standing alone in the gallery, as they are performance piece.

Biography:

Nick Cave was born and raised in Missouri by a single mother from humble means. He has 6 brothers and attributes his interest in found objects and assemblage to his childhood circumstances. He graduated from the Kansas City Art Institute in 1982, where he first learned how to sew. Also during this time he began studying dance through the Alvin Ailey program in Kansas City and in New York City. Cave went on to get his masters from Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan in 1989. Cave currently resides in Chicago as the director of the graduate fashion program at The School of Art Institute Chicago.

Soundsuits:

Cave's first Soundsuit was born right after the Rodney King beating when Cave "started thinking about myself more and more as a black man- as someone who was discarded, devalued, viewed as less than." He was sitting in Chicago's Grant Park and saw twigs lying on the ground that, like him, looked forsaken. He gathered them up and cut them into three-inch sticks and drilled holes in them so he could wire them to an undergarment, completely covering the fabric. At this point it was just a sculpture, it wasn't until he realized he could wear the garment as a second skin that the idea of the Soundsuit was born. "I put it on and jumped around and was just amazed. It made this fabulous rustling sound. And because it was so heavy, I had to stand very erect, and that alone brought the idea of dance back into my head."

Rodney King Beating / Riots:

Rodney King is one of America's best-known police victims. On March 3, 1991 King was pulled over by the LAPD after a high-speed chase. After officers coerced King out of his car they noted he was "acting erratically" they then started using a taser and began to beat him with their batons and kicking him while he was on the ground. A bystander began videotaping this scene and the clip was aired on several media outlets causing outrage in LA and putting the tension between the African American community and the LAPD center stage. It is reported King was struck 56 times with the baton, and was kicked six times by four police officers. The four LAPD police officers were tried in a state court for the beating and three were acquitted sparking the 1992 Los Angeles riots. A later federal trial for civil rights violations ended with two of the officers found guilty and sent to prison and the other two acquitted.

Reference to Tribal Cultures:

The extravagant colors, textures and ornamentation, as well as the community surrounding the creation of the suits, connect the Soundsuits to tribal cultures. Cave does not reference one specific culture allowing his artistic vision to be so grandiose the suits take on the role of costume or masquerade allowing one to lose their own identity. Cave has said "When I was inside the suit, you couldn't tell if I was a man or woman; if I was black, red, green, orange; from Haiti or South Africa... I was no longer Nick. I was a Shaman of sorts."

Technique:

The suits are made from found or reused objects like dyed human hair, sticks, sisal, plastic buttons, beads, sequins and feathers. Cave never glues pieces together, everything is sewn or crocheted or put together by using embroidery and rug hooking. Multigenerational, multicultural volunteers in Cave's Chicago neighborhood often help assemble the Soundsuits.