



# ABOUT THE ART

*Soundsuit*

## ARTIST

Nick Cave (born 1959)

## TITLE

*Soundsuit*

## YEAR

2010

## MEDIA/MATERIALS

Appliquéd found knitted and crocheted fabric, metal armature, and painted metal and wood toys

## DIMENSIONS

97 x 48 x 42 in.  
(246.4 x 121.9 x 106.7 cm)



This large, colorful sculpture, called a *Soundsuit*, was created by the artist Nick Cave. The work stands eight feet tall and is covered in an assortment of buttons secured with plastic fasteners, which are most commonly used to attach price tags to clothing. Beneath the hundreds and hundreds of buttons are red, yellow, and white crocheted doilies. The buttons, plastic tags, and doilies sit on top of a mesh-like material that one can slightly see through when standing close. At the bottom of the sculpture, two feet wearing brown and white socks jut out.

Cave's background in dance, performance art, and sewing, as well as influences that include African ceremonial masks, inspired him to create this fantastic

work of art. Cave and his seven brothers were raised by their mother, Sharon, in Fulton, Missouri. After graduating high school in 1977, Cave attended the Kansas City Art Institute. While in college, Cave trained in the summers with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre in New York City. He also earned a master's degree of fine art from Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1988.<sup>i</sup>

Although this particular *Soundsuit* is mostly covered in buttons, Cave has created other Soundsuits from materials such as faux (fake) fur, twigs, feathers, antique metal toys, and other everyday objects found at flea markets and thrift stores. In addition, while the *Soundsuit* at Crystal Bridges is presented like a sculpture, Cave often wears his Soundsuits in dance performances, as when one moves around in them they make interesting sounds. For instance, one of Cave's Soundsuits is made from raffia, a rough ribbon-like material, which makes a swooshing sound when worn.

Cave feels that his Soundsuits are "a kind of second skin, something to protect him spiritually and emotionally." He created his first Soundsuit in response to the Rodney King incident. King, an African American male, was brutally beaten by Los Angeles police officers following a high-speed car chase in 1991.<sup>ii</sup> The incident was caught on camera and replayed on nearly every media outlet for weeks. After the officers involved in the beating were acquitted a year later, the announcement triggered rioting in the greater Los Angeles area. As an African American man, Cave was outraged. He said it was "so traumatic...it flipped everything upside down."<sup>iii</sup> Shortly after the incident, Cave felt that he, too, needed protection from discrimination, racial profiling, and police brutality. One day while sitting in a park, he began gathering twigs, which he attached to a garment and used to create a "symbolic body of armor."<sup>iv</sup> He later remarked: "When I built this thing, I didn't even know I could wear it until it was done. And I was like, 'I can put this on.' And then once I put it on, that's when I moved and it made sound and that's how the whole thing got started."<sup>v</sup> Cave has created more than 500 Soundsuits and often performs in them with other dancers. Currently, Cave is the director of the fashion graduate program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

## REFERENCES

<sup>i</sup> Lacayo, Richard. "The Noisemaker." *Style.Time.com*. TIME, 26 March 2012. Web. 14 Feb. 2014.

<sup>ii</sup> McMillan, Kyle, and William Morrow. *Nick Cave: Sojourn*. Denver: Denver Art Museum, 2013. 68

<sup>iii</sup> Lacayo

<sup>iv</sup> McMillan and Morrow, 68.



Nick Cave, *Soundsuit*, 2010, Appliquéd found knitted and crocheted fabric, metal armature, and painted metal and wood toys. Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas.