



BkM Art Hangouts
Process

Goals

In Art Hangouts, learners will:

- Look closely at a work from the collection
- Explore new artistic processes through close looking, conversation, and art-making
- Reflect on their own art-making processes

In this lesson, learners will:

- Observe Nick Cave's *Soundsuit*
- Experiment with materials to tell a story about ourselves
- Consider how a Soundsuit might relate to identity

Materials

- [Outline](#) of a person on a piece of paper (this can be drawn, printed, or be an actual photograph)
- Scissors
- Glue
- Collage papers (e.g., magazine pages, pattern paper, metallic paper, cardboard)
- Collage materials (e.g., feathers, jewels, leaves)



BkM Art Hangouts are adapted from a series of virtual classes that took place in spring 2021. These thirty-minute lesson plans are designed for teachers and caregivers to engage learners with works from our collection and to explore hands-on, artistic processes. Lessons are created for ages 9–14, but can be adapted for any age group. In each lesson, participants will look closely at a work of art, consider how an artist finds inspiration, and create their own artworks inspired by these approaches. Art Hangouts are open ended, and students are invited to continue working on their projects even after the lesson ends.

Nick Cave

American, born 1959

Since the early 1990s, Nick Cave has been producing inventive sculptures out of scavenged materials, which he often overlays with beadwork, stitching, and other embellishments. One of the first sculptures was crafted from twigs and was made to be worn. Cave called such works “Soundsuits,” because of the rustling sound they created when worn. Cave’s costumes draw from a variety of sources, including both African and Caribbean traditions of masquerade.

In performance, Cave’s work invokes moments of whimsical transcendence—but a very real, grounded, and nuanced understanding of the racialized nature of American society is often just underneath. Overcoming the distinctions between fine art and craft, as well as performance and street art, Cave’s Soundsuits may also serve as a sort of armor, protecting against the violence of racial stereotypes and giving their wearers an outsize, fanciful, and transcendent presence. Cave designed his first Soundsuit in response to the brutal police assault of Rodney King in Los Angeles in 1991.

Cave’s costumes free performers from the constraints of stereotypical categories, and allow them to transform their environment into an otherworldly space.

● Part 1: Look!

Before looking at Cave's work, tell students they'll be viewing a Soundsuit.

→ What do you imagine a Soundsuit might be?

Invite students to look at Nick Cave's [Soundsuit](#).

→ What materials is it made up of?

→ Where might you see materials like this?

Share that the Soundsuit is made up of ornamental metal flowers, like the kind that might be used as outdoor decorations, as well as a sequined bodysuit.

→ What might it feel like to wear this Soundsuit?

→ Can you move your body as if you are wearing it?

Some of Nick Cave's Soundsuits are worn by [performers](#), and others are worn by mannequins. In both cases, Cave creates something that obscures the identity of the wearer. All aspects of their identity, gender, age, and race are hidden. The wearer of a Soundsuit is both hypervisible and anonymous.

→ Imagine again that you are wearing this Soundsuit. Would you feel seen or hidden? Why?

Nick Cave's Soundsuits focus on simultaneously being seen and unseen while using items that might otherwise be discarded. When Cave made his first Soundsuit, he was thinking of these ideas as they relate to identity, specifically as a Black man. These reflections were prompted by an incident of police brutality against a Black man named Rodney King in Los Angeles in 1991. King's attackers were taken to trial but were not convicted, prompting large-scale protests in the city.

Cave said about this process:

"The first Soundsuit came out in response to the Rodney King incident in '91. And it was in outrage around the verdict of this individual that was violated by LA police. It was me asking myself what does it feel like to be discarded, viewed less than, dismissed as a Black male?

I happened to be in the park one day and looked down on the ground and there was this twig. And I proceeded to collect all of these twigs. For some reason, I found myself going back to my studio, building a sculpture. The moment I put it on and started to move, it made sound, and so that's how Soundsuit came about. And sound at that moment was my call for protest. It was a way of being heard."

Source: <https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/50/763>

Cave speaks about being both targeted and dismissed as a Black man. We discussed earlier how the Soundsuit makes the wearer both visible and invisible.

→ Can you think of a time when you felt both seen and hidden?

● Part 2: Explore!

Nick Cave made Soundsuits out of everyday objects. His suits, inspired by [African masks](#), concealed the wearer, making the person underneath both anonymous and very noticeable. How will you design your own Soundsuit? What will your material choices say about you?

Step 1: Brainstorm. Your Soundsuit will represent you through the materials you choose and the way you arrange them. What do you want to share about yourself through your Soundsuit? Write down some words that describe you.

→ Example: I am fun, creative, adaptable, and strong.

Step 2: Gather Materials. Collect your collage materials. Consider how you might use these materials to reflect some of the adjectives from Step 1.

→ Example: I found iridescent paper that changes in the light. I used this paper to represent the adjective “adaptable.” I found brightly colored papers to represent the word “fun.”

Step 3: Collage Your Soundsuit. Use your collage materials to build a Soundsuit on top of your outline.

→ Tip: You can glue things flat, or bend, twist, and fold papers so that your suit pops off the page.

● Part 3: Reflect!

What does your Soundsuit say about you? How does it relate to your identity?

Would wearing your Soundsuit make you feel seen, hidden, or both? Why?

A Finished Project! ↓



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