

Monumental Embodiments

Lesson Plan

Recommended for all ages



Thomas J Price (b. 1981) is a British sculptor and photographer. Influenced by his upbringing in Brixton, a predominantly Black neighborhood in London, Price’s sculptural works excavate the marvelous in the everyday through monumentalization and representation. Price’s large-scale works depict imagined subjects inspired by the people in his everyday life as a way of interrogating the weight of assumptions, projected identities, and notions of necropolitics in public space.

Thomas J Price, *The Distance Within*, 2021

Thomas J Price: Witness is a nine-foot bronze sculpture on view from October 2, 2021 through October 1, 2022 in Marcus Garvey Park in Harlem, New York City. Depicted is a figure standing while casually looking down at his phone. He wears a hooded sweat suit and low-rise Nike Air Force 1 sneakers, a shoe popularized by Black North American streetwear and basketball culture.

“I want to interrogate [notions of] presence, movement, and freedom,” says Price in an [artist statement](#). “Who do these spaces belong to? And what bodies are provided more or less autonomy to move with liberty through public [space]?”

Feel free to take your time with this lesson. It can happen over the course of one day or several days.

Objective

Participants will create a living monument of themselves or a loved one using movement and photography inspired by the work of Thomas J Price.

Essential Questions

How do monuments of people contribute to public space? How might you represent yourself or a loved one in a monument?

Materials

Camera or phone
Pencil
Paper

Preparation

1. If you are able to visit Marcus Garvey Park, look closely at *The Distance Within* while considering the following questions. You may also call Art Phone (+1-888-411-1250), a museum resource that shares information about public commissions in audio format for ease and accessibility.
 - i. What do you notice about *The Distance Within*?
 - ii. How would you describe the pose and body language of the figure?
 - iii. How does this differ from other bronze monuments you've seen?
 - iv. What do you think the title(s), *Witness* and *The Distance Within*, means?
2. Consider Price's Brixton upbringing and interest in depicting the "everyday person" in Harlem. Consider the site specificity of placing this work in a public space in Harlem.
3. Take photos of monuments you encounter and notice the body language, gestures, and histories being told through the sculptures.
4. Make a list of activities you participate in regularly and the types of movement you do in a normal day (i.e., your daily routine, hobbies, sports, dance, interacting with friends). How do you experience movement in public space?

Vocabulary

Monument

Statements of power and presence in public; lasting evidence, reminder, or example of someone or something notable

Public Space

Streets, parks, recreation areas, plazas, and other publicly-owned and -managed outdoor spaces

Site Specificity

The intentional placement of something to be in conversation with its environment

Necropolitics

Defined by Cameroonian scholar Achille Mbembe as the use of social and political power to dictate how people may live and navigate space based on their identities

Witness

A person who sees an event, accident, or a crime take place; evidence or proof

Embody

To express or give tangible, visual form to a concept

Methods

1. Choose one of your activities that is meaningful and/or routine and find a pose that resonates with you from that activity. Be intentional with the clothes you wear and objects you hold, like the figure in *Witness*. You also have the option of asking a loved one to pose as a monument and be photographed.
2. Pick a location in your community where you see the need for a monument.
3. Take photos of yourself or your subject posing in that location wearing the clothes and props of your choice.

Written Reflection

1. If you had to give your monument a title, what would it be and why? How might your title connect to the title(s) *Witness* and *The Distance Within*?
2. How did it feel to stand in your pose in public? What feelings did it evoke? If you photographed someone else, ask them what their experience was posing in public.
3. What would you hope the public would gain from your monument? What message or story do you want your monument to share?

Thomas J Price, *The Distance Within*, 2021

