

## Soundsuits – Nick Cave and Means of Escape

Subject: Visual Arts

Grade Level: Grades 6-12

**Guided Instruction** (To be self-directed, or with teacher, parent, caregiver, older sibling, etc.)

Nick Cave was born in Fulton, Missouri in 1959. He creates “soundsuits”—surreally majestic objects blending fashion and sculpture. These originated as metaphorical suits of armor in response to the Rodney King beatings but evolved into vehicles for empowerment. Fully concealing the body, the “soundsuits” serve as an alien second skin that obscures race, gender, and class, allowing viewers to look without bias towards the wearer’s identity. Cave regularly performs in the sculptures himself, dancing either before the public or for the camera, activating their full potential as costume, musical instrument, and living icon.

View *Soundsuit*, 2015 from the Nasher Museum of Art’s collection on page 2 or online here:

<https://emuseum.nasher.duke.edu/objects/20613/soundsuit>.

### Discuss:

- What is going on in this sculpture?
- What do you see that makes you say that?

If you have access to reliable internet and technology, visit the *Art:21* website and view a short 13-minute documentary about Nick Cave and his work: <https://art21.org/artist/nick-cave/>.

After viewing the documentary, how has your understanding of the work changed? How does movement add to the work of art? Does hearing the artist’s voice and intent change your appreciation of their work? How?

### Practice

Nick Cave has designed hundreds of different soundsuits since the early 1990’s. Imagine you are designing your own soundsuit.

1. Make a list of what materials you would incorporate into the costume and tell us why you would choose these materials.
2. Describe the “sound” these objects would make. What could that communicate to a viewer?
3. Using whatever art materials you have available, create a model or sketch of your finished Soundsuit. Will it look similar to Nick Cave’s work or radically different? Why?



**Nick Cave, *Soundsuit*, 2015.** Mixed media including wire and bugle beads, buttons, sequined appliqués, fabric, metal, and mannequin, 109 × 80 3/4 inches (201.93 × 205.11 cm) Frame: 85 3/4 × 85 3/4 × 3 inches (217.81 × 217.81 × 7.62 cm). Gift of Paula Cooper in honor of Patsy R. and Raymond D. Nasher

**Label Text:**

*Soundsuit* is part of a series by Nick Cave that makes sound when worn and activated, presenting a means of escape from daily existence into a mode of liberating fantasy. Cave's soundsuits, originally conceived in 1992 in response to the Rodney King beating and subsequent Los Angeles riots, also offer a secondary skin, a form of protective armor that transcends identity, place, and time. *Soundsuit's* dazzling sequins, buttons, and bristles, with their accompanying swishing and clinking, challenge both wearers and observers to move beyond human appearances and toward a more productive "dream state." Of his work, Cave has stated: "I was really thinking of getting us back to this dream state, this place where we imagine and think about now and how we exist and function in the world."