Simone Leigh
American, born 1967

Sentinel IV
2020
Bronze

Subject: Anthropomorphic sculpture
Activity: Creating sculptures that reimagine everyday objects as anthropomorphic
Materials: Clay or similar material (model magic, airdry clay, etc), pencil
Vocabulary: Ceremonial, commemorative, ritual, sentinel, replica, anthropomorphism

Introduction
Simone Leigh’s work is inspired by and honors spiritual and ceremonial objects of West and South Africa. Sentinel IV is modeled after a Zulu spoon often used in wedding ceremonies to signify the joining of two families. The wooden object is meant to signify family integration, or the bride entering into the husband’s home.

Leigh’s practice is informed by her interest in Black feminine subjectivity, and Sentinel IV is a larger-than-life abstract Black female form. It showcases the power and beauty of Black femininity while also questioning the use and creation of ritualized objects and the belief systems they uphold.

Questions
Can you think of any ceremonial or spiritual objects in your life?

When and how do you use them?

Why is it important?

How do these objects reflect your own culture, beliefs, or traditions?

Activity
Think of an object in your life that makes you feel protected and safe. Sculpt the object using clay. Use a pencil to add decorative elements. Try and imagine what your sculpture would look like as a person. Can you make your object an anthropomorphic sculpture?
Simone Leigh, continued

Look Again
How do you think Leigh’s sculpture references her original object, a spoon? How is it similar? How is it different?

Look back at your sculpture. How would you feel if other people could buy plastic replicas of your ritual object?

BTW
Leigh has many other sculptures that are inspired by the Zulu ceremonial spoon. One of these, Sentinel (Mami Wata) (2020–21), is located in New Orleans, and stands at the former site of a confederate monument. Leigh sold 25 miniature versions of this sculpture and donated the proceeds to Color of Change, a nonprofit organization that advocates for racial justice. The artist also exhibited a larger version when she represented the United States at the Venice Biennale in 2022.

Vocabulary
Ceremonial – Something that is a part of or used for a religious or public event
Commemorative – Acting as a memorial or mark of an event or person
Ritual – A repeated activity or movement during a religious or important event
Sentinel – A guard whose job is to keep watch
Replica – Copies of an original work that can be mass produced and are often less expensive and detailed than the original
Anthropomorphism – the attribution of human characteristics or behavior to a god, animal, or object

Artists with Related Works
Magdalena Abakanowicz, Figure on a Trunk, 2000
Marc Quinn, Spiral of the Galaxy, 2013
Michael Ray Charles, (Forever Free) Ideas, Languages and Conversations, 2015