



SEPTEMBER 2020

# MONUMENTAL GRACE

*Grace Stands Beside* | Shinique Smith



Shinique Smith. *Grace Stands Beside*. 2020.  
Courtesy of the Artist. © Shinique Smith

What comes to your mind when you think of a monument? Perhaps you think of the Statue of Liberty in New York or the monument to Martin Luther King, Jr. in Washington, D.C. Or perhaps there are local monuments you have noticed in your own community. Frequently, monuments are outdoors, crafted of metal or stone, honoring someone no longer living or an event long past, sometimes massive in scale, and come with inscriptions that tell us what the monument is commemorating. Think of some monuments that you know, look around your community for ones you see there, or research monuments at different locations around the U.S.

*Grace Stands Beside* is a powerful departure from the typical monument. The figure is made of a variety of fabrics in a cosmic palette of blues, purples, pinks, and white. Looking more closely, you notice that there are pockets, ruffles, and other elements revealing that the fabric wrapping the figure contains some pre-made garments. You may notice string and ribbon throughout the artwork, creating a web-like effect on the head of the figure where the string is most densely bound and connected. Braided ropes of fabric hang loosely around the neck of the figure. Initially it may seem that the figure's face is veiled in a shroud, as if to suggest death and mourning; closer examination reveals a richness and visual energy—patterns that suggest star clusters, bejeweled adornments, and streaming light—that communicate a state of living dignity.

The artist, Shinique Smith, has thought deeply about monuments and their meanings. Growing up in Baltimore and attending the Maryland Institute College of Art, she often sketched the sculptures found throughout Baltimore as part of her artistic training. However, she came to find that many monuments glorified racist ideas and the history of human enslavement in the U.S. In fact, it was one of these monuments—the Confederate Soldiers and Sailors Monument that once occupied a space on Mount Royal Avenue (the monument was removed by Baltimore City in 2017)—that bore the inscription “Glory Stands Beside Our Grief” from which she derived the title of this work, *Glory Stands Beside*.

As she often does in her work, the artist used fabrics and garments that were given to her by friends, family, and other Baltimore residents, imbuing the work with a powerful connection to people and place. Smith describes this artwork as a monument to “grace,” which she defines as “a complex state of being that Black people and others who have endured tragic prejudice have embodied to survive and to rise beyond.”

## RELATED ACTIVITY

Ask students to research monuments related to any social studies/history curriculum they may be studying. What do the visual elements and inscriptions of the monuments convey to the viewer? Who created these monuments? What do students think is the purpose of the messages of these monuments? Research may be done online, but, if possible, encourage students to identify and examine local monuments as well. Ask students what people or events they think should be commemorated in monuments. Students can then design their own monuments and inscriptions and, if possible, make the monuments on a small-scale using available art materials.



To comment or register for Art-To-Go,  
email [lwilson@artbma.org](mailto:lwilson@artbma.org)

For visitor information, visit [artbma.org](http://artbma.org)

Generous support for Art-To-Go  
is provided by Art Bridges and  
Wilmington Trust.





***Grace Stands Beside*, Shinique Smith**

Shinique Smith. *Grace Stands Beside*. 2020. Courtesy of the Artist. © Shinique Smith