Abigail DeVille (American, b. 1981)
Light of Freedom, 2020
Welded steel, cabling, rusted metal bell, mannequin arms, metal scaffolding, wood
156 x 96 x 96 inches
Collection the artist
Madison Square Park Conservancy, New York
**ARTIST**

Abigail DeVille (American, b. 1981) creates sculpture, installation, and performance often incorporating found materials from her neighborhood and the streets around the exhibition venue. Her work has focused on gentrification, lost regional histories, community transformation, and racism. Her projects pivot from the modernist tradition of collage and assemblage as she gathers found and acquired materials to create objects and environments.

DeVille participated in Madison Square Park Conservancy’s symposium, *Innovating Public Art* in 2019. She has exhibited at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis; the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the New Museum, New York; and the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

DeVille was born in New York and works in the Bronx. She received a BFA from the Fashion Institute of Technology (2007), attended Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture (2007), and received an MFA from Yale University (2011). DeVille has participated in residencies at the International Studio & Curatorial Program in Brooklyn (2012), at the Studio Museum in Harlem (2013-14), The Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study Fellowship (2014-15), with the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation on Captiva Island (2017), and at the American Academy in Rome (Rome Prize; 2017-18). She has received awards from the Joan Mitchell Foundation, the Lotus Fund of New York Community Trust, Creative Capital, United States Artists, and the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation. DeVille teaches in the Interdisciplinary Sculpture Department at Maryland Institute College of Art and at the Yale School of Art (spring 2021).

**MADISON SQUARE PARK CONSERVANCY**

Since 2004, Madison Square Park Conservancy has been a leader in commissioning works of public art, and has curated and presented forty major outdoor exhibitions through Mad. Sq. Art. The program invites distinguished artists to push the boundaries of their practice and create risk-taking new work that experiment with materiality, scale, and theme in response to the Park’s unique environment. The ambition of the commissioning program expands each year alongside the diverse range of innovative artists.

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Madison Square Park Conservancy is a public/private partnership with the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation.

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#MadSqArt #AbigailDeVille #LightOfFreedom
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**SUPPORT**

**LIGHT OF FREEDOM**

In response to history and the present, Abigail DeVille’s *Light of Freedom* reflects the despair and the exaltation of a turbulent period of pandemic and protest. The project is a newly commissioned outdoor sculpture. Madison Square Park Conservancy, as the organization that stewards this historic park, has worked to address the question of how public art can respond in civic space to this critical time. DeVille’s answer, *Light of Freedom*, the program’s fortieth public art project, will be on view through January 31, 2021.

*Light of Freedom* carries many cogent symbols. DeVille has filled a torch — referring to the Statue of Liberty’s hand holding a torch which was on view in Madison Square Park from 1876 to 1882 — with a timeworn bell, a herald of freedom, and with the arms of mannequins, beseeching viewers. The scaffold, which precedes access physically and metaphorically, recalls a work site, an insistent image on the urban landscape. But the scaffold is golden, summoning the glory of labor and the luminosity in the struggle that can lead to change. Formative to *Light of Freedom* are the words of the abolitionist, author, and statesman Frederick Douglass, who proclaimed in an 1857 speech delivered in Canandaigua, New York: “If there is no struggle there is no progress.” The torch refers to the light of democracy and its foundation in ancient systems of government by citizens.

DeVille has described working on this piece: “In my research, I have found that the first Blacks to be brought to New York City were eleven Angolans in 1626. That makes people of African descent the second-oldest group of settlers in New Amsterdam, past, present, and future.”

The artist, who maintains a studio in the Bronx, uses public space to explore overlooked narratives; she mines untold histories for her subject matter. In this project, DeVille conjoints significant crossroads in African-American history in New York to create a sculpture that is inspiring and introspective. She recognizes and hallows the earliest enslaved Africans who were brought to New Amsterdam, critiques the unfulfilled promise of American liberty and justice for all, and summons the current Black Lives Matter movement as a source for the work.

**PHOTO**: Andy Romer Photography