

PAST EXHIBITION

Abigail DeVille: Light of Freedom

October 27, 2020 – January 31, 2021



A response to history and the present, Abigail DeVille's *Light of Freedom* reflects the despair and the exultation of the pandemic, protests, and political turmoil of 2020. DeVille answers the question of how public art can respond in civic space to this turbulent period. Her work carries cogent symbols. She fills 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, reaching to viewers. A golden scaffold summons the glory of labor and the hope that struggle can lead to change. Formative to *Light of Freedom* are the words of the abolitionist, author, and statesman Frederick Douglass, who proclaimed in 1857: "If there is no struggle there is no progress."

DeVille uses public space to explore overlooked narratives. She mines untold histories for her subject matter. DeVille described her process: "In my research, I have found that the first Blacks to be brought to New York City were eleven Angolans in 1626. ... Unfortunately, history has erased the contributions and victories of this group. I want to make something that could honor their lives and question what it means to be a New Yorker, past, present, and future."