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Rock Head

RISD Museum

James Montford

Rhode Island College, jmontford@ric.edu

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I'm James Montford. I am an artist. I also am the director of the Bannister Gallery here in Providence, Rhode Island. I have the privilege of standing in front of the David Hammons *Rock Head* piece.

I was first introduced to David Hammons in the 1970s when I was living in New York City. If you fast-forward to the year of this piece in I believe 2000, he's been consumed with those sorts of notions from a sculptural perspective but also from this idea of identity as it relates to the larger picture, in terms of where he's placed in the discourse that we all call art.

When my students look at this piece, they see this hair as I'm looking at it right now, and the label sort of identifies it as one thing. There's the sense of really looking at it and seeing that the hair itself is sort of sculpted, if you will. It's not just randomly placed on the stone, and it obviously has a relationship and looks like a head oddly enough. It's all sculpted? No. It's sort of found, yes. But the placement is one in which you see a preciousness in the piece, and that preciousness I think is derived perhaps in terms of how it is being held or presented. It's in this wonderful little container that is holding it, and it seems that it is almost like its collar that it's sort of placed in. It has a presence about it just in terms of its positioning.

It certainly is evocative in terms of feeling the piece, and then in that sense it qualifies for me as transformative so as a viewer, I become transformed by the piece. I think that's one of the signifiers for a good piece of art.