



‘Joyce J. Scott: Walk A Mile in My Dreams,’ exhibit continues at Baltimore Museum of Art

By Jannette J. Witmyer | June 15, 2024



Joyce J. Scott sits within the large-scale commission “The Threads That Unite My Seat to Knowledge.” Credit: Photos courtesy of Linda Day Clark

Baltimore born-and-bred, artist Joyce Jane Scott is a master at interweaving life and art and making you look. From delicate pinky rings made with tiny seed beads to larger-than-life wall hangings and thought-provoking mixed media sculptures, Scott’s work is created one bead at a time— a marvel in and of itself.

It’s something that one should keep in mind while viewing works she created, shown in her 50-year retrospective, “Joyce J. Scott: Walk A Mile in My Dreams,” currently at the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA). Co-organized with the Seattle Art Museum, the exhibition will continue to show as a ticketed exhibition at the BMA through July 14. The free day to see the exhibit at the BMA is June 23. The exhibit will move to Seattle and show there from Oct. 17 to Jan. 20, 2025.

Scott is a marvel. The exhibition features 140 of her works and includes a new large-scale commission. Its presentation spans 10 themed galleries, with two areas for “Rest and Reflection.”

A mastermind at marrying issues to art and consummating the union with thought-provoking works whose meanings are as intricate as their construction, Scott is a trickster with many talents. The exhibition displays the vast enormity of her ability to create beautiful art while addressing ugly issues, at times with an intentional nod and a wink, through the creation of sculptures, jewelry, performances pieces, clothing apparel and much more.

“I like to challenge myself when doing work. When people ask me, ‘What do you want to be Joyce?’ it really is a 365 degree choice. It is someone who is always on a quest like that. It is somebody who is always looking for stuff and always challenging myself to do something different with what exists. Because I think that’s what progress is, and why not me? I’m doing it. And I’m failing (almost never), but that doesn’t stop me from trying. And you see that consistently in my art,” she explains and adds, “I want you to know how bodacious I am.”

Given that Scott is now enjoying her second major retrospective at the BMA, there is no question of her “bodaciousness.” The first, “Joyce J. Scott: Kickin’ It with the Old Masters,” celebrated her then 30-year career and was presented in partnership with Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), in 2000. In the years since, Scott’s work has been shown in a multitude of exhibitions throughout the U.S. and internationally, including the Venice Biennale, and she has earned numerous awards and honors, including a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship and honorary doctorates from MICA, the California College of the Arts, and Johns Hopkins University.

Amy Eva Raehse, Executive Director and Partner at Goya Contemporary, who has represented Scott for over 25 years and manages her art trust says proudly, “An exhibition of this magnitude doesn’t happen overnight. Rather, it is the culmination of Joyce’s many years of hard work, building upon the insightful scholarship of others, and hundreds of exhibitions that preceded this moment. We started planning this exhibition over three years ago, and it has taken until now to fully realize it.”

Asma Naeem, the BMA’s Dorothy Wagner Wallis director, describes the exhibition as a journey through time and emotional registers, and, in summation, declares, “It is a journey through what a heart that doesn’t have borders can do.”

Borders set limits and boundaries, neither of which is present in Scott’s art, whether you’re considering one of her creations’ topics or techniques. She is fearless in her resolve to take on society’s ugliest problems like racism, sexism, colorism, and the lot, or as she says it, “all the ‘isms’ society offers,” and render them defenseless through the beauty of her work.

Anyone familiar with the art of Scott’s mother and first teacher, the late Elizabeth Talford Scott, understands the origins of her audacity. A retrospective of her work, “Eyewinkers, Tumbleturds, and Candlebugs: The Art of Elizabeth Talford Scott,” which was on exhibit at the BMA. Scott says that the one-time sharecropper and lifelong quilter passed on the tradition of quilting and began teaching her to embroider beads at the age of five.

Using what she describes as the “passport” provided by her mother, a needle, thread, and beads, and the peyote stitch, taught to her by Sandy Fife Wilson, a Muscogee (Creek) Native American, Scott feels invincible applying her skills, and says, “From that I could be

autonomous as the bead-worker. I could be as improvisational as possible. There's no limit to it."

Despite having received international acclaim, Scott remains a self-described "Baltimore around the way girl," who continues to live in her hometown, maintaining deep and meaningful friendships and community ties. She is almost as well known for her generous spirit as she is for her many talents, and she would not have it any other way.

"My skill allows me to do things in a very easy way. It takes so little to help somebody. It takes so little to make someone feel well, when you have the skill to do it. You just have to have the will to do. It takes so little," she says.

Reflecting on the moment, she says, "Baltimore loves its people, and they really love me. I say that because of the support, the respect, and the warmth I receive every time I do an event. This exhibition represents 50 years of my producing artwork that started right here in Baltimore, from an around the way girl. I am celebrated because I am one of you. So, thank you all."