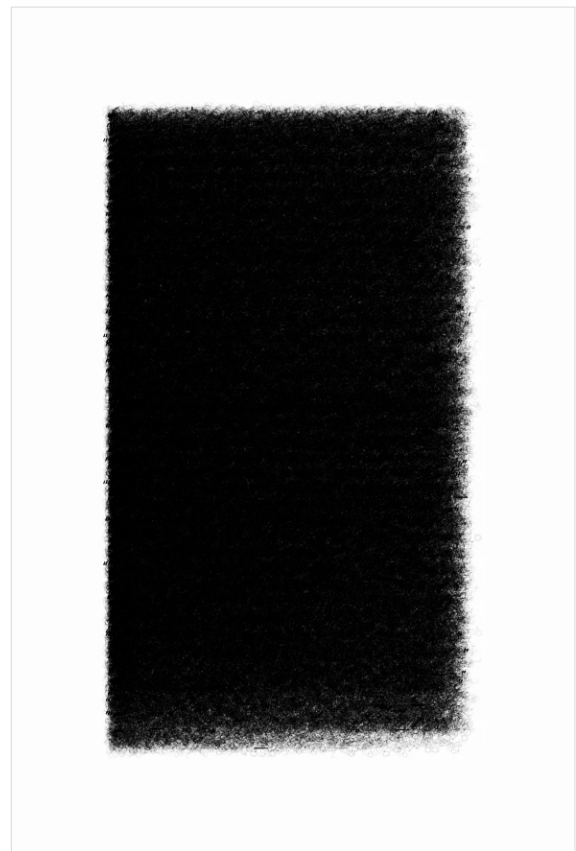
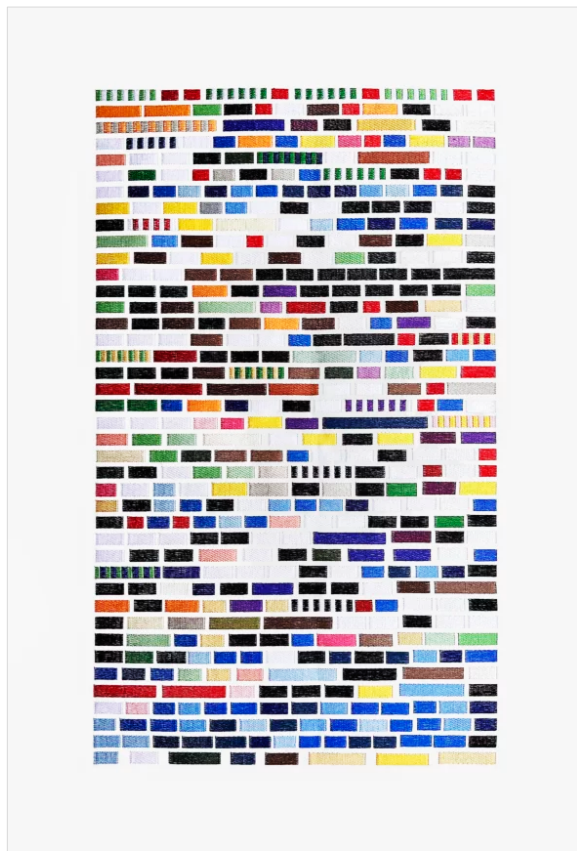




Goya Contemporary's 'Thread Lines' – fiber works with personal as well as social commentary

By Susan Isaacs, February 18, 2025

Susan Isaacs calls the exhibit 'Thread Lines' inspirational and an exhibit elegantly installed and well worth your visit. The group show at Goya Contemporary in Baltimore has works by many well known fiber artists including Joyce J. Scott and Sonya Clark, who use their art for personal as well as social commentary. Up until March 10, hop a train and check it out.



[Left] Sonya Clark, "The Huest Eye," 2023-2024. Embroidered thread on Rives BFK paper, Print: 36 x 24 in. Frame: 38.5 x 26.13 in. Edition 9 of 12. [Right] Sonya Clark, "The Bluest, Twisted," 2023-2024. Lithograph on Rives BFK paper, Print: 36 x 24 in. Frame: 38.5 x 26.13 in. Edition 9 of 30. Published by Goya Contemporary / Goya-Girl Press. Photo courtesy Goya Contemporary Gallery.

Thread Lines at Baltimore's [Goya Contemporary Gallery](#) is an elegantly installed exhibition typical of the gallery's attention to detail and well worth a visit. The exhibit presents work by artists they represent who incorporate sewing techniques and fibers made from a variety of media ranging from textiles to hair and paper. Many of these artists ignore boundaries between craft and fine art, exploring the potential of combined media to seek both personal expression and even serve as a means for cultural commentary.

Several works by Sonya Clark are visually stunning and brilliantly conceived. “The Bluest, Twisted”, and “The Huest Eye,” (both 2023-2024) address issues of race. Clark presents two related and editioned images through which she examines the writer Toni Morrison’s first novel [The Bluest Eye](#) (1970). The artist has read and reread it over thirty times. In the book, Morrison challenges the constructed myths of beauty that privilege Whiteness over Blackness.

Here, Clark employs embroidery and lithography techniques, creating a complex dialogue about Blackness in the United States. The idea of constructed ideals of beauty, especially as they pertain to race, is a topic that Clark has explored in various ways throughout her practice. In “The Huest Eye,” the artist connects her images to the author’s symbolic use of color, noting that there are 473 colors referenced in Morrison’s text. Clark parallels these through blocks of embroidered threads that, according to the artist, follow the order in which they appear in the writing, stating that “The length of each color block corresponds to the length of the word. Red is a short block, whereas purple is longer. I did the green and white together in some places, as this is where Morrison refers to the Dick and Jane stories, which commingle into compressed, unseparated words as the novel progresses.” She also observes that if you were to mix all these colors together, the result would be black.*

“The Bluest, Twisted,” a lithograph, presents visual representations of hair, which Clark considers the fiber that we humans grow. Clark built this image from the overlays of all the pages from *The Bluest Eye*. However, the text she used for this is a transliteration of an alphabet (called Twist) that Clark created using her own hair. The result is a composition of dense, black natural hair. The piece is framed under Plexiglas, and the viewer can see themselves in the glazed plexiglass which acts like a mirror. The two works together are simultaneously exquisite and powerful commentary. The color blocks of “The Huest Eye” set beside the rich, dense blackness of the lithograph present visual and intellectual approaches to engage viewers and encourage discussion.

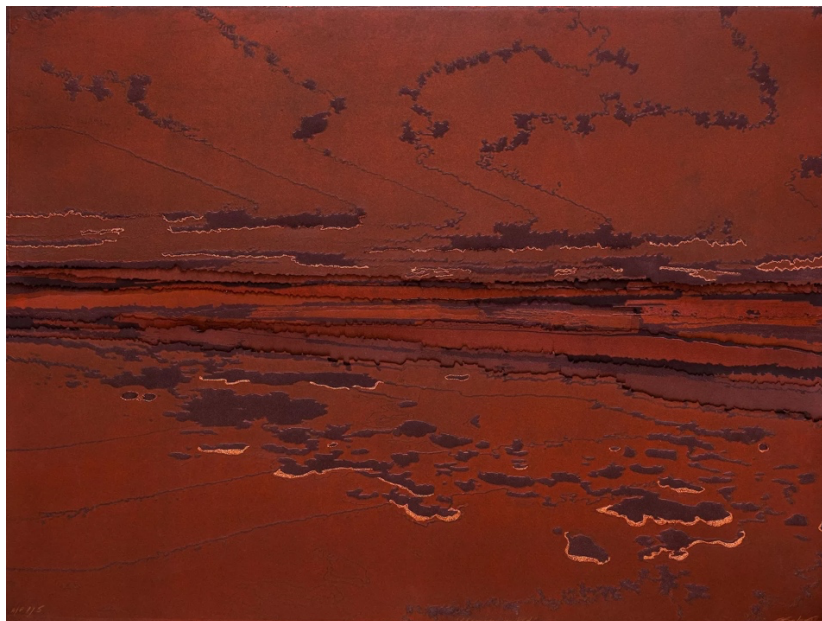
Works by Joyce J. Scott and Elizabeth Talford Scott, her mother – both, the subject of major exhibitions in the past year – are represented by stunning and powerful pieces. Joyce J. Scott’s work shows off the beading for which she is well known and continues her exploration into issues of the human condition, especially regarding the plight of the poor and marginalized. She too examines skin color but links it to the history of slavery and related brutality. Her topics are often difficult and the contrast between decorative bead work and disturbing subject is simultaneously engaging and off-putting, which makes them very powerful. Two prime examples of Elizabeth Talford Scott’s quilts include “Birthday Quilt” (1994), which has to do with her past and growing up in the rural south. It is a stunning piece that demonstrates her observation of nature and her understanding of dramatic compositions and employment of a rich color palette.



Jo Smail, 'Virtuoso Fingers,' 2011. Oil, acrylic, enamel, paper and collage on canvas. 24 x 18 in. Photo courtesy Goya Contemporary Gallery.

Other artists in the exhibition display more abstractly conceived approaches to the theme of thread lines. Jo Smail's "Painting with Topknot" (2009) and "Virtuoso Fingers" (2011) are extremely appealing. Born in South Africa, she has been Baltimore-based since 1985. Smail has an international resume but is perhaps more well known in Baltimore than Philadelphia as she taught at the Maryland Institute College of Art. Her understanding of abstract composition and whimsy is on view.

In Smail's "Virtuoso Fingers", canvas – a woven textile – is shown off with painted and collaged elements sparsely and superbly placed. Loose threads unravel from another strip of partially painted canvas. Collage elements with black and white lines echo thread lines. A pink- and black-painted rectangle creates an asymmetrical balance. Smail creates spaces that are at once teetering and balanced, expansive and intimate.



Soledad Salamé, "Atacama in Red," 2017. Printing, laser cutting, embossing, embroidery on 600 gram Fabriano paper. Paper: 30 x 40 in. Frame: 34 x 44 in. Edition 2 of 5. Photo courtesy Goya Contemporary Gallery.

Expanding the definition of textiles, Claire Campbell Park weaves extremely thin strips of painted paper into exquisite plaids. Her careful attention to color suggests that it is meant to be felt as well as observed. "Meditation: Steadfast" and "Meditation: Wings III" (both 2021) require close viewing and do suggest an opportunity for meditation. Contrasting this is the edition of cut paper works by Soledad Salamé entitled "Atacama in Red" (2017). The subject is the Atacama Desert plateau on the Pacific coast of South America, in the north of Chile the country where the Baltimore-based artist was born. Here she includes embroidery to define the various planes. She says of her work: "My art is a conceptual and visual exploration of the intersection of science, technology, and social justice issues defining the age in which we live...my recent work maps vulnerable marginalized communities suffering the greatest consequences of natural disasters."**

There are many more outstanding examples of works by these and other artists that include threads of various types in *Thread Lines*. For this writer, who also works with textiles and threads, this was an inspirational exhibition.

'Thread Lines,' at [Goya Contemporary](#), to March 10, 2025. Gallery Reception SATURDAY, FEB 22nd from 5-7p.m. Mill Centre Studio 214, 3000 Chestnut Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland 21211 Curated by Amy Raehse, Partner and director of Goya Contemporary. Artists: Sanford Biggers, Claire Campbell Park, Sonya Clark, Liliana Porter, Soledad Salamé, Joyce J. Scott, Elizabeth Talford Scott, Alan Shields, Jo Smail, and Paula Wilson

Notes

* Sonya Clark in "The Huest Eye" print description provided by Goya Contemporary. All quotes for the description were taken from a conversation between Sonya Clark and Amy Raehse, Partner at Goya Contemporary, October 2023.