



## Chrysler exhibition shows 'humor and horror' through artist's beadwork

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*Image credit: Picasa, "Joyce J. Scott: Messages," "War What is It Good For, Absolutely Nothin, Say it Again." Scott's exhibition of intricate, hand-beaded art is at the Chrysler Museum of Art in Norfolk through August 17.*

**Joyce Scott has a trailblazing career that includes textile work, beading and sculpting. Her traveling exhibition at the Norfolk museum conveys sexism, racism, violence.**

Joyce J. Scott's large and provocative hand-beaded necklaces at the Chrysler Museum of Art carry a social commentary you wouldn't expect in jewelry. Racism, sexism and violence arise in uncomfortably explicit ways. The show "Joyce J. Scott: Messages," runs through Aug. 17.

"Caught Peeping" is a modern twist on sexual harassment based on the Bible story of Susanna and the Elders. In the tale, two men peer at Susanna as she bathes and try to blackmail her for sex. In Scott's version, Susanna is a Black woman and the peeper is white.

Another, "Blutz," in twilight blues and browns, evokes an urban night, with outlines of guns in the hands of a Black and a white person. It's a reminder that all races commit murder.

Page Ogden of Virginia Beach walked into the gallery recently, lured by the colors — lollipop red, chocolate brown, crime-scene-ribbon yellow. As he studied the objects and labels, the meanings gave way.

Of one piece that lampoons the political climate, he said, "If it was any more on the nose, I'd sneeze." Scott often snags viewers with a yummy gumdrop of bright, big fun, then pulls her trigger of truth. The bright hues and the sparkle draw you in, "and that's when you might see the figures," said Carolyn Swan Needell, the museum's Barry curator of glass. While there's a lot of humor, she also sees horror in the situations.

Swan Needell chose Scott's touring show because the works are mostly made of glass beads and The Chrysler boasts one of the nation's top glass art collections. Scott was born in Baltimore in 1948 and her most recent retrospective was at the Baltimore Museum of Art last year. The show looked at her creative range, which has included painting, printmaking, performance art, singing and storytelling.



*Image credit: Will Kirk/Johns Hopkins University,* Portrait of the artist Joyce J. Scott. The Baltimore artist has a decades-long career as a quilter, performance artist, painter, writer and bead artist. A collection of her hand-beaded work, "Joyce J. Scott: Messages," is on view at Norfolk's Chrysler Museum of Art through August 17.

Staying in her hometown has fed Scott's art. In 2015, her neighborhood became a center for unrest following the death while in police custody of Freddie Gray, who lived a few blocks from her.

She watched the marches and prayer circles. Her response, she told The New York Times last year, was to set up a table and pull in people to process the events through beading. That is her way of seeking social change.

Meanwhile, accolades piled up. She was awarded a MacArthur Foundation "genius" grant in 2016; a Smithsonian Visionary Award from the Smithsonian Institution in 2019; and the Gold Medal for Consummate Craftsmanship from the American Craft Council in 2020. All of this acclaimed work gets done in her old row house with the purple front door. She started beading early in her career then in 1976 met an artist from the Creek tribe who taught Scott the peyote stitch. The technique enabled her to create freeform shapes that undulate and rise into sculptural forms.

"I'm so in awe of her skill and her vision," said Jennifer Urquhart of Norfolk, a volunteer docent. Urquhart learned peyote stitch in Girl Scouts, but Scott's inventive use, she said, "blows me away." Peyote stitch has long been associated with Native American beaded regalia but one of the earliest known examples was found in King Tutankhamun's tomb. It was found on a footstool with figures of an Asian and African man on top; the pharaoh would sit with his feet on his enemy. It was colonialism and slave culture in another era but connects to American racism.

The curator pointed out a Scott piece, "Lazy Girl," made of brown beads. The subject is contorted to "conform to the wearer's neck," the label reads. She is "reduced to an anonymous, dark-skinned woman in an uncomfortable pose designed to please someone else."

Swan Needell said, "It has so much symbolic power. It's beautiful. It draws you in. And then you see the imagery and you understand what you are seeing: the atrocity."