

Joyce J. Scott

Biography

MacArthur Fellow Dr. Joyce J. Scott (b. 1948, Baltimore, Maryland) is a multidisciplinary artist whose practice spans sculpture, beadwork, textiles, printmaking, performance, and installation. Working across media with virtuosic technical command and conceptual clarity, Scott confronts urgent social realities—including racism, sexism, violence, inequality, and systemic oppression—while also engaging beauty, spirituality, nature, and healing. Her work seeks to illuminate shared human experience through narratives that engage the complexity of history, identity, and collective memory.

Scott is best known for her mastery of the off-loom peyote stitch, a free-form glass bead-weaving technique through which she integrates glass beads, blown glass, and found materials into densely layered compositions informed by autobiographical, sociopolitical, and historical themes. Born in Baltimore to parents from North Carolina—descendants of enslaved people—she was raised within a family lineage of skilled artisans working in quilting, basketry, pottery, metalwork, knitting, and oral storytelling. This early environment deeply shaped her material intelligence and her commitment to transforming inherited craft traditions into a vehicle for critical contemporary discourse.

She began her career working in fiber arts, producing clothing, jewelry, quilts, and sculptural textiles, and experimenting with loom-based structures. In the late 1970s, Scott turned to beads, drawn to their optical and chromatic possibilities beyond traditional painting. She learned the peyote stitch from a Native American bead artist, a technique that became foundational to her practice. Over time, she expanded her visual language to include multicultural found objects, printmaking, performance, vocalization, and comedy, approaching artistic production as inherently interdisciplinary and unrestricted by medium or category.

In the early 1990s, Scott began collaborating with glass artists to incorporate blown, pressed, and cast glass into her beadwork, significantly expanding the scale and spatial presence of her sculptural practice. Her 1992 invitation to the Pilchuck Glass School in Washington State marked a pivotal moment in this development. Years later, she subsequently worked with glass artisans in Baltimore, as well as with Paul Stankard and other noted fabricators, further advancing her materially hybrid approach.

By the late 1990s, Scott expanded into printmaking, producing extensive bodies of work in collaboration with ateliers including Goya-Girl Press, Pyramid Atlantic, Sol Print Studios, and Goya Contemporary. In 1999, she presented a landmark solo exhibition at the Baltimore Museum of Art, becoming the first Black woman artist to receive a solo presentation at the institution.

Her practice continued to evolve in the 2010s through major international projects. In 2011, she traveled with her primary gallery, Goya Contemporary, to work at Inferno Glass Studio in New Orleans for *Prospect.2* (curated by Dan Cameron). Following the death of her mother in 2012, she traveled to Murano, Italy, to work at Adriano Berengo's glass studio, producing works for *Glasstress* at the Venice Biennale, returning in 2013 for additional projects that entered significant collections and traveled internationally for *Glasstress* interactions from New York to Beirut.

From 2014 to 2015, Scott's Baltimore and Boston galleries worked with curator Lowery Stokes Sims to organize *Maryland to Murano: The Neckpieces & Sculpture of Joyce J. Scott* at the Museum of Arts and Design, New York. This was followed by *Joyce J. Scott: Truths and Visions*, curated by Patterson Sims at the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland.

In 2016, working with Gary Garrido Schneider and Amy Raehse, Scott began developing her largest exhibition at that time at *Grounds For Sculpture* in New Jersey, co-curated by Lowery Stokes Sims and Patterson Sims. That same year, she was awarded a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship. The exhibition opened in 2017 and

featured both historical and recent works, including large-scale site-specific sculptures addressing the life of Harriet Tubman, developed at the Johnson Atelier.

Her work has been widely discussed in critical discourse; Nancy Princenthal, writing in *The New York Times*, noted, “you can’t make out what these sculptures are about without coming closer than you feel you should—and seeing things you won’t soon forget.” Reflecting on her practice, Scott has stated: “I’d like my art to induce people to stop raping, torturing, and shooting each other. I don’t have the ability to end violence, racism, and sexism. But my art can help them look and think.”

Scott’s major exhibitions and projects continue into the 2020s, including *Araminta with Rifle and VèVè*, shown at Open Spaces Kansas City (2018) and the Banneker-Douglass Museum, Annapolis (2022). In 2023, she launched a traveling jewelry exhibition called *Messages*. In 2024, she opened the major traveling museum retrospective *Joyce J. Scott: Walk a Mile in My Dreams*, co-organized by the Baltimore Museum of Art and the Seattle Art Museum and co-curated by Catharina Manchanda and Cecilia Wichmann. That same year, *Bearing Witness: A History of Prints by Joyce J. Scott* opened at Goya Contemporary Gallery.

Scott is the recipient of numerous awards, grants, and fellowships, including honors from the MacArthur Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, Anonymous Was a Woman, and the American Craft Council, among others. She holds a BFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art and an MFA from the Instituto Allende in Mexico, and has received multiple honorary doctorates, including from California College of the Arts, MICA, NYU, Johns Hopkins University, and the University of Baltimore.

Her work is held in major public and private collections worldwide, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the Detroit Institute of Arts, Baltimore Art Museum, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, the Seattle Art Museum, the Chrysler Museum, Toledo Museum, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the National Gallery of Art, among many others.

Scott’s practice continues to challenge formal and conceptual boundaries, affirming art’s capacity to provoke critical reflection, confront injustice, and expand forms of human understanding. Her jewelry is represented by Mobilia Gallery; her sculpture, fiber works, and works on paper are represented internationally by Goya Contemporary Gallery in Baltimore, where she lives and works.

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