

Joyce J Scott: Biography

““I’d like my art to inspire people to stop raping, torturing, and shooting each other. While I don’t have the ability to end violence, racism, and sexism, my art can encourage people to look and think.”

– Joyce J. Scott

MacArthur Fellow Dr. Joyce J. Scott (b. 1948, Baltimore, MD) works across a spectrum of media, confronting urgent issues such as racism, sexism, violence, inequality, oppression, and injustice, while also embracing beauty, spirituality, nature, and healing. Through her work, she unearths universal truths while exploring the complex tapestry of our collective history.

Scott is best known for her mastery of the off-loom peyote stitch, a free-form glass bead-weaving technique she uses to merge beads, blown glass, and repurposed objects with autobiographical, sociological, and political themes. Born to sharecroppers from North Carolina—descendants of enslaved people—Scott was raised in Baltimore, where her parents settled. Coming from a lineage of skilled artisans in pottery, knitting, metalwork, basketry, storytelling, and quilting, she was deeply influenced by her family’s craftsmanship. Within this environment, she honed the remarkable skills that define her artistic career, as well as her ability to repurpose materials—transforming craft into a powerful platform for social commentary and activism.

Early in her career, Scott worked with fibers to create clothing, jewelry, shoes, and quilts, while also experimenting with loom-constructed textiles. In the late 1970s, she began exploring beads, drawn to their ability to capture light and blend color beyond the limits of traditional painting. During this period, she learned the peyote stitch from a Native American bead artisan—a technique that would come to define much of her work. Over time, Scott expanded her practice by incorporating multicultural found objects into her beadwork and exploring printmaking, performance, vocals, and comedy. For Scott, the creative process knows no boundaries.

In the early 1990s, Scott collaborated with glass artisans to create blown, pressed, and cast glass elements for her beaded sculptures. This shift allowed her to expand the scale of her work while fulfilling her desire to collaborate. In 1992, she was invited to the Pilchuck Glass School in Washington State. She later worked with Baltimore-based glassblowers, as well as Paul Stankard and other celebrated fabricators.

By 1997, Scott turned her focus to printmaking, producing hundreds of works in collaboration with ateliers including Goya-Girl Press and Pyramid Atlantic, and later Sol Print Studios and Goya Contemporary. In 1999, she held a landmark solo exhibition at the Baltimore Museum of Art, becoming the first Black female artist to receive such an honor in the institution’s history.

In 2011, Scott traveled with her primary gallery, Goya Contemporary, to work at Inferno Glass Studio in New Orleans, creating new work for Prospect.2 (2011–2012), curated by Dan Cameron. In 2012, following the death of her mother, Goya Contemporary arranged for Scott to travel to Murano, Italy, to work at Adriano Berengo’s glass studio, producing works for Glasstress at the Venice Biennale. She returned in 2013 to continue creating works that entered major public and private collections, as well as Glasstress iterations around the world from New York to Beirut.

From 2014 to 2015, Scott’s Baltimore and Boston galleries supported curator Lowery Stokes Sims in organizing *Maryland to Murano: The Neckpieces & Sculpture of Joyce J. Scott* at the Museum of Arts and Design, New York. Later that year, *Joyce J. Scott: Truths and Visions*, curated by Patterson Sims, opened at the Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland.

In 2016, working with Gary Garrido Schneider and Amy Raehse, Scott began developing her largest exhibition to date at Grounds For Sculpture in New Jersey, co-curated by Lowery Stokes Sims and Patterson Sims. During this period, she was awarded a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship (2016). The exhibition opened in 2017, featuring historic and recent works, as well as two large-scale, site-specific sculptures focused on Harriet Tubman, created at the Johnson Atelier.

Hailed as a major success, the exhibition also informed curriculum at nearby institutions, including Princeton University. As Nancy Princenthal noted in her review for *The New York Times*, “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 work, Scott has said: “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 exhibitions and contributions have continued into the 2020s, including significant retrospectives and solo presentations. *Araminta with Rifle and VèVè* traveled to venues including Open Spaces Kansas City (2018) and the Banneker-Douglass Museum in Annapolis, MD (2022), where it currently remains on view. In 2023, she launched a traveling jewelry exhibition with Mobilia Gallery, Boston.

In March 2024, Scott opened a major 50-year traveling 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 has been the subject of numerous scholarly publications and is the recipient of many commissions, grants, residencies, and honors, including awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, Anonymous Was a Woman, the American Craft Council, and MacArthur Foundation. (among many others).

A graduate of the Maryland Institute College of Art (BFA) and the Instituto Allende, Mexico (MFA), Scott has also received numerous honorary degrees, 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 Baltimore Museum of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Seattle Art Museum, Chrysler Museum, LACMA, Toledo Museum, MFA Boston, National Gallery of Art, and many others.

Scott’s work continues to challenge and inspire, affirming the power of art to provoke thought, confront injustice, and spark meaningful change. Scott’s jewelry is represented by Mobile Gallery; and her sculpture, fiber works and works on paper are represented globally by Goya Contemporary Gallery in Baltimore, where she lives and works.

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