

BROOKLYN RAIL

WEBEXCLUSIVE IN CONVERSATION

JOYCE J. SCOTT with Lowery Stokes Sims

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Joyce J. Scott, *Harriet As Buddha*, 2017. Glass beads, plastic beads, thread, and stone.
Courtesy the artist and Peter Blum Gallery, New York.

On the occasion of her exhibition, *What Next and Why Not*, at Peter Blum Gallery, Lowery Stokes Sims sat down with Joyce Scott to discuss her work with beads and glass, early performance art, and her deep and abiding affection for Baltimore, where she was born, raised, and continues to live.

Lowery Stokes Sims (Rail): To start, Joyce, why don't you just talk about what attracted you to glass.

Joyce J. Scott: Well I—like everyone else who was raised in the seventies—was a hippie, and I was looking for personal translucency. I was also a weaver, which meant either the light was absorbed or bounced off the surface but wasn't transluded—I don't know if that is a word. So I was looking for a way to play with light differently. After I came back from graduate school in Mexico, I went for the second time to Haystack Mountain School of Craft where I worked with Native Americans and learned the Peyote Stitch, which allowed me to work as improvisational as possible.

Rail: Because you could build on it?

Scott: It is sewing a needle and thread into a bead and you can make any shape you want. It can be stiff, it can be serpentine, it's all up to you and how maniacal you are, and I am very maniacal.

[*Laughter*] It allowed me to deal with light, to deal with sculptural forms in a different way—meaning not fabric—and it was something that I could actually afford to do. I am also continuing my mother's technique, which is sewing with needle and thread. My mother was Elizabeth Talford Scott, a nationally heralded fiber artist.

Rail: So it was the glass beads that got you transluced. How did you move into actual blown, caste, or otherwise manipulated glass?



Portrait of Joyce J. Scott, pencil on paper by Phong Bui.

Scott: Well I worked with commercial glass, mayonnaise jars, and everything. I would have to submit to whatever existed. I started being a teacher at these residencies in Penland and Haystack, and I'd go into the glass studios and say, "Hey, what are you guys doing." At Penland, my mom and I taught together. She'd sit there with one cigarette hanging out watching people twirl glass with the fire jumping. Nope! So I was looking for a way to be as verbal as possible, with as many materials as possible that would allow me to deal with translucency. Glass is wonderful because it really isn't very toxic, and if you can have a relationship with a gaffer or glass blower, then that's wonderful! They can burn themselves and do everything they need to do to make your ideas come into play. It's not like working with resins and other things that not only do not have the same feel but are toxic for you.

It is also about using an ancient form. If you go to tombs you will see glass beads or perfume bottles or an amphora or something that's made out of glass. So I am continuing this tradition, and that is the craftswoman of me. You once asked me a question about the difference between fine arts and crafts, and I think that is some kind of artificial division made up by folks who want to make more money than someone else, who wanted men's work to be better than women's work, painters are better than potters, etcetera. Why is it better to paint a pot instead of make the pot? I will not submit to that. The great thing about the arts is you do what you want to do, so when somebody denigrates craftwork they are stepping on my parents' and grandparents' feet and head and everything else because that's what *they* did, and I am here because of them, so no.



Joyce J. Scott, from the *Day After Rape Series: Congo III*, 2008. Seedbeads and thread, 3 3/4 x 9 x 12 1/2 inches.
Courtesy the artist and Peter Blum Gallery, New York.

Rail: You know, I did a glass workshop with Urban Glass when it was on Mulberry Street. The instructor's name was Richard Horton and he told us we were not going to burn our hands. He had these bridges he'd pour over the rods to keep them cool. We never knew gloves either—it was pretty amazing. To know that glory hole was over 3600 degrees. I have two little misshapen things I made.

Scott: It's not easy at all. First of all you're blowing through this really long thing and you've got to have a lot of breath. As a singer, I have a lot but then the guy is like "stop," and it's all out of you. And you know who named it a glory hole? Need I say more?

Rail: Who?

Scott: Guys! Being that close to a hot burning orifice is like...mmm.

Rail: Did you make glass when you participated in workshops in Haystack?

Scott: I tried a bit but it isn't for me, but I did lab work. I did Pyrex, that kind of lab work, and I liked that a lot. But this blowing into a pipe and having to sit and going up to the glory hole and watching all the hair on your face disappear. It wasn't for me, it wasn't. And glass is very, very heavy. So you have to have people to work with, but you can do flame work by yourself.

Rail: You've also worked at Pilchuck and Wheaton right?

Scott: Wheaton was a great time for me. Wheaton is in this part of New Jersey that used to be a glass area where they made cosmetic bottles and all kinds of little things for make up, but its fallen on hard times though they still have a glass studio. I cast a bunch of guns there, and I can tell you—this was maybe eight years ago—and I thought it was 1975 again. The glass guys were living in trailers, some in housing, and they made me dinner in one of the trailers and there's a dog sitting next to me. And I am like, "This is wild!" Because at this point I'm old and I'm eating with a dog and a bunch of guys. It was actually a great deal of fun and they did just about everything I asked them to do. They were purveyors of an ancient form, and I respect them.

Rail: What was it like at Penland in North Carolina?

Scott: Firstly, I went for a long time with my mom. My mother progressed with dementia for fourteen years and it really seemed to manifest right after her large retrospective. So another good friend named Oletha Devane and I would drive from Baltimore with my Mom, stop in North Carolina, see my father—who was ridiculously funny and just ridiculous—then we'd go over the mountains, and down to Penland. They were so nice to me. They gave us our own little house, let me drive a golf cart and run up around and yell at the llamas. It was wonderful for me because my mom was there and we taught the first class together. It was also that kind of maturation when you're a grown up and you not only have something to give to somebody, but it's *good*.

I was also doing something my mom and my father, to a different degree, had taught me. I'm telling you this because it showed me I was on the right track. Once there was a very famous person and I said, "Why don't we swap classes so people will get to know what we do?" She came to the class; she talked about herself, and didn't teach anything. So then I did my class and I taught for them and did all of my diagrams upside down and backwards so they could see it. When I was with my mother, Elizabeth Talford Scott, that's when I would not be denied, and I was rapidly coming into my own as an artist and proud of it and knowing it. It's very important for many reasons, not only as an artist but as an African American artist, as an African American woman, all those things for me were very important, to not only be good. I often say I am not interested in being one of the ones; I want to be *the* one. That may not happen—*it will happen*—but that's what I'm working to. That's why excellence even in the little things you do for others is very important.

Rail: So a lot of the glass here in this exhibition was done at Adriano Berengo's Glasstress studio in Murano. I think some of your best work came from this. Why don't you talk about that? I remember you were telling me about your experience going into this very Italian, male oriented, traditional studio, and you're Joyce "Crazy Ass" Scott from Baltimore.

Scott: The first year was 2011, so it really wasn't that long ago, and I am sixty something now so I was a woman. This was the first time in all my travels where I had gone by myself

to do a project, nobody with me, in a country where I didn't speak the language. So I would get on the water-taxi with my little cane, and I'd say to the young men who'd drive me—because I know they love their mothers—"Prego, prego!" Then I'd walk over a little bridge to the studio. I remember the first time I walked in clad in velvet, and I went in singing. I like singing aloud, I like to sing to my gaffers a lot of time they're like, "Alright Joyce," and they were like, "Oh she crazy."

I would do bead work while they were doing glass and we drew on the floor and I'd give them drawings then amend the drawings. We made some really wonderful work the first year, we really did, but I wasn't as aware of the chemistry, so I brought beads that were not as compatible, so things would crack or pop off the surface. I was teaching at Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Maine, so I asked "where can I get antique Italian seed beads." My students told me and I bought them. I made that face on that Buddha, there's a big green figure with a red face. I made a bunch of faces and shapes and figures out of the right beads and this time nothing popped off. This time they were like "Ay-o!" and I was like "Yeah ay-o." [*Laughter*] We laughed, and we joked, and we made these pieces together.

I asked one of my gaffers, Sylvano, who was an ex-boxer, "How do you feel about women in glass blowing." He said "No." I said, "You mean you don't think ever?" He was classically Italian, so this is for men. And I said, "Well how do you feel about working with—" "Oh with you, you're different." Which means, "You'll be gone in a month and I'll never have to see you again." But that thing where women are working, that was very hard for them. But it was uplifting and freeing for all of us to make the kind of work I'm making. I'm doing things where women are having babies or pulling babies from their vaginas or asking these Italians to make things that were more African. I'd bring them African sculptures and they'd still look like very thin, flat butt-ed angels and white girls. I was like "No." I was playing with color this kind of stripe thing, and also this millefiori piece and making figures out of it, clear faced. They had context for it but they didn't have an African American context for it. We really grew together.

The third year I went back because my work was in one of those satellite exhibitions for the Venice Biennale. I went to see them and they were like, "Yay, you're here, we like the work," because I'd added beadwork! I'll give you an example: Adriano Berengo—I called him Berenegro—He said, "Do you know what a totem is?" I said "I'm part Native, of course I know what a totem is." Then he pulled out a book and showed me these ugly ass Italian totem poles. Just ugly. He said, "I'll give you the studio with gaffers on the weekend if you will do some totems." I said okay. I got my assistant and said, "Okay, how about you look up guns and muskets and rifles because we are going to do something on sex trafficking." We made a five-foot rifle with wood grain and everything. He would come in and say "What is this about?" because there was a woman hanging from the gun And I say "it's about sex, it's about being forced into selling sex." I think in his head he was like "How are we ever going to sell this?" Then I got the MacArthur and now he's like, "Yes."

Rail: I have seen you at work so many times. You are up in your studio producing prodigious amounts of work by yourself. I'm surprised you don't have carpal tunnel or arthritis or something.

Scott: I have all those things; I just will not be defined by it.

Rail: What was it like moving into a situation where other people are executing your ideas?

Scott: It worked for me because I came from a theater background. Robert Sherman and I did performances earlier in life in the '70s and '80s. I did a lot of collaborative work in that genre. And the '70s and '80s was hippie time and everyone was doing performance in front of something they painted or draped over or made costumes out of bubble wrap. Something terrible. So being [at Berengo's Studio] was all good. Having them understand the spirit and essence of what I was making, coming from an African American background and trying to get them to understand the importance of some of these things. Why the Buddha could be transformed into the wind or earth. That was the challenge, but once they got it they were like, "Oh," because Catholicism has a lot of parallels with that kind of stuff.

Rail: I remember one of my favorite stories that you told. I think you were making a glass figure who would become one of the *Water Mammies*, one of which was acquired by the Museum of Arts and Design. But the glass workers didn't like the feet so they were going to discard it and you told them no.

Scott: You don't discard anything. They made this wonderful kind of saint for me, and they said they couldn't get the feet like they wanted so it's not going to stand so they were going to throw it out. I said, "Absolutely not," so what I did was turn it upside down and had her inverted as water and made another figure at the top. That was one of the things we did a lot of, because they are used to making beautiful things or assembly line things, they have to look alike. They can't be what they consider to be flaws, which I of course think are opportunities and what humans are actually about. When we got over that it was a lot of fun. I just put down beaded figures on the model, which was the metal table. We just poured melted glass on it, flip it over, pour glass on the other side and there'd be this image in the glass. They were like, "Really? That didn't occur to us," "I know." And so playing with them and stretching the materials in that way was different. I'm not saying I was the first one to stretch with them, that's not what I'm saying at all, but I am one of the few African-American women who came with this knowledge of what glass beads could do with glass and pushed them along with pushing myself.

Rail: I thought it would be interesting to talk about some of the subject matter of some of the pieces.

Scott: Okay.

Rail: So, Joyce had a large retrospective that I co-curated with Patterson Sims. After the first meeting we had about the exhibition—this was at The Grounds for Sculpture—we decided to divide up the work; he did the survey of work and I worked with her to coordinate a new installation called *Harriet's Closet* (2017). It was about imagining the private life, the interior life of Harriet Tubman. We started talking about how there would be three avatars of Harriet—one would be in packed dirt, one would be Styrofoam covered in fiberglass, and then the third one was supposed to be Styrofoam covered in fiberglass also. Then we get this midnight text, in which Joyce informed us, “I had this dream. I think I want to do Harriet as a Buddha.” We’re two weeks away from installing the show and there’s no Harriet Buddha and she tells me that she’s going to Lubbock, Texas to do a lecture and I said, “Why?”

Scott: Because they would pay me a lot of money.
[Laughter]

Rail: But the cosmos intervened and she couldn’t travel because her passport had expired so she had to stay and work on Harriet. And I’m going to tell you, these are big beads, we would get pictures. I believe this sculpture was done in five days, think about that. First we got the crossed legs, then we got the torso, then the head—it was literally five days.

Scott: I told you I could do it, I don’t know why people don’t just trust me on that. What you’re not saying about the three Harriet’s—one is a fifteen-foot Harriet made out of dirt. We worked with Dirty Dan—that’s what I call him, “Dirty Dan”—to get the right mixture of bentonite and stuff because we wanted this fifteen-foot piece to stay up for the entire show. Well, it hasn’t come down yet. I went after it with a shovel on a cherry picker and Harriet’s like, “Do you know what I did for my life and you’re going to knock me down?” I do believe there will be somebody late at night knocking it down or spraying it with water. We covered her with beads and graffiti. You were like, “What do you mean you’re going to cover her with graffiti?” “We’re going to write all over her! The dirt, just write on it.” It worked out really well.

Rail: It did.



Joyce J. Scott, *Harriet As Buddha* (detail), 2017.
Glass beads, plastic beads, thread, and stone.
Courtesy the artist and Peter Blum Gallery, New York.



Joyce J. Scott, *Graffiti Harriet*, 2017. Soil, clay, straw, resin gun with beads, found objects, dimensions Variable.
Photo: © Ken Ek for Grounds For Sculpture.

Scott: And she had a fifteen-foot long gun made out of resin. Then the second Harriet was ten-feet and it's now in Kansas City at Open Spaces which is a large sculpture park. She's actually in the train station. Get it, Underground Railroad? [Laughter] And I'm thinking this is the funniest thing and people are like, "What do you mean?" Don't you know who Harriet is, the Underground Railroad? "Really? What do you mean?" Anyway, she's there, she's ten-feet, she's kind of a bronze, coppery color with mirrors, and her gun is probably around eight-feet long and she's holding a beaded vèvè or power piece that you might think of from Haiti.

The third one was supposed to be a life-sized Harriet, maybe in a nightgown so we were really seeing her, standing on pennies because remember Abraham Lincoln's face is on it and copper is a magical, conductive metal and then I didn't want to do it. I said, "Wait a second, Harriet is Buddha. Buddha is not a god; he's a man who evolved. He evolved so much that he was one with truth." If you're going to drag hundreds of slaves through to freedom, you can't read or write, and you're a slave yourself, an ex-slave, but really they're still hunting you, and you're going to do that? And remember, that was from her youth up until she was older. She was a spy, she went to the Union army and said, "You know, if you would let me,"—this is me being Baltimore—"If you would let me go hide out, I could probably find out stuff for y'all at the same time I'd be guiding the slaves out." She did that! So I thought, how much more Buddhist can you get? How much more evolved and elevated

than at the end of her life with her second husband—because with her first husband she said, “C’mon let’s run away,” and he said, “I’m not going,” and she said, “Bye,” They were older, they had a home, and they opened that home to people who had no place to stay and for ex-slaves who were ill. I don’t know how you get more evolved than that.



Joyce J. Scott, *Araminta with Rifle and Vévé*, 2017. Painted milled foam, found objects, milled foam rifle with blown glass and mixed media appliqué, beaded staff. Dimensions variable. Figure approx. 132 x 60 x 60 inches. Vévé approx. 60 x 42 x 1 inches. Rifle approx. 78 x 6 x 3 1/2 inches. Photo: © Ken Ek for Grounds For Sculpture.

She’s wearing a dress that makes me think of quilts, so not only does the piece refer to my mom but also quilts, which are very emblematic in the Underground Railroad. You would put one outside and it had certain symbology on it to show you whether you could come there that night or pass by. My mother made a quilt that was a topographical escape route and then we found out that people said, “Really?” but they did more research and found out what the women would do was they would quilt—and some men—the rows of crops like you’re looking at a map and figure out how to get off the plantation, like an escape route. And she’s holding a necklace made by my mother out of rocks that represent, also for me, a rosary or another kind of power and peace. I don’t like to be told I can’t do certain things like, “you’re black so you can’t do Buddha or Bobo the Clown, whatever you’re thinking, you can’t do it,” and I’m like, “Yes I can!” “No you can’t,” “Watch.” So this piece is very much about not submitting to those who should have no power over me. I don’t know who should have power over me. [*Laughter*]

Rail: In contrast, let’s talk about that sculpture with the white face, *Buddha (Wind)* (2013).

Scott: That's from a series of Buddhas; there's four of those, one has not been resolved yet, one's owned by the African American Museum in Washington and it is *Summer* and I think *Fire*, so it's holding a figure that's on fire in its hand and that challenge was to make those beads look like this person was actually burning and it worked. They represent the four corners of the earth, the four seasons, attributes. This one represents the wind, that's what all those curly clouds are. I think she is midnight in fall.

Rail: How did you keep the beads that make-up the face integral with all that heat because the glass must have been very hot?

Scott: Well, it's on synthetic thread and he has to roll it up really fast, back and forth, back and forth. And because we weren't absolutely, completely sure about these beads, he couldn't do another gather on top, the beads had to sit on the surface in case they popped off. They were really questioning because they had to figure out how to make something Buddha like, they don't look at Buddhas. Maybe in Chinatown or somewhere when they go, but they don't really see Buddhas so we looked at the ears and the head and it's like, "Those are kind of Mickey ears, let's not do those," and the hairstyle and the blackness and talking to them about blackness.

Rail: Beautiful. You mentioned that sculpture over there, *Breathe* (2014), with the baby being born out of her vagina: that's a very powerful piece.

Scott: It's about freedom and it's about the amazing power between a mother and the child. That's kind of all I know. I do know that it was challenging for them to make just for the size alone. The legs were made separately and glued on in the cold shop—they call it the cold shop because you do it when the glass is cold—making sure the legs were a certain way and there's holes in the legs because I thought I'd do a whole bunch of beadwork like a colony inside of her. When I looked at her, because there is beadwork, there are blue patches that were beads that kind of snake around her neck, that's all she has. So my growing up also means that I learned how to stop, too. People still don't believe it, but it's true.



Joyce J. Scott, *Buddha (Wind)*, 2013. Hand-blown Murano glass processes with beads, wire, and thread, 20 1/2 × 12 1/2 × 13 inches. Courtesy the artist and Peter Blum Gallery, New York.



Joyce J. Scott, *Breathe*, 2014. Hand-blown Murano glass processes with beads and thread, 20 1/2 × 19 1/2 × 16 inches. Courtesy the artist and Peter Blum Gallery, New York.

Rail: I want to switch up a little bit. This is the first time your work has been seen in New York in quite some time, because I think the last time was with Richard Anderson?

Scott: No, it was at the Museum of Art and Design. The show you curated.

Rail: I'm talking about in a commercial gallery.

Scott: Yeah, it's been a long time. I've been in group shows, but not a one-person show for a very long time.

Rail: I'm curious because people feel that to have a career, at least initially, you should be in New York. Then when you make your reputation you can go out to Baltimore and other places. But you were born in Baltimore, went to school in Baltimore, and still live and work there.

Scott: I showed all over the United States. I showed all over the world. I pursued a career by having multiple galleries around the country. I never believed Baltimore was the end for me, I never wanted to leave my home. Anyway, why should the art business be unlike every other business where you have franchises and you go out and you search for the work?

Another reason I did it, I got yelled at once by my gallerist when I had multiple galleries and she said, “I don’t like being on your bandwagon.” My first thing was, “Are you making money? Because if you’re making money I don’t know what you’re complaining about.”

The only way African Americans are going to see my work is if I have multiple representations in commercial galleries. They’re working at the exact same time everyone else is working, so you’re not going to go to a museum and if you have three kids—many museums charge—so you can’t go. You’re not going to see a university show; a lot of people don’t go to university shows unless they’re scholars or at the schools. You have to go to a commercial gallery that’s open on Saturday, bring everybody in for free, and the person at that gallery is supposed to be able to tell you what my work is about. I was strategic about having one in California, Chicago, Charlotte, Philadelphia for a while, New York, Maryland, I had them around to make sure that my own people would be addressed in looking at the work.



Joyce J. Scott, *Celadon II*, 2010. Blown, fused, painted and flame worked glass, glass beadwork, thread and wire, 30 × 10 × 10 inches. Courtesy the artist and Peter Blum Gallery, New York.

I was in lots and lots of shows, so when younger folks asked me about it I just went to—it’s very different now, this is pre-computer—I’d go to the back of all the art magazines and see which shows were happening and if they said a figurative show and they didn’t give me the material, then I would submit to it and I just showed a great deal. This is also the time when the NEA was talking about a more regional approach to the arts so there was a lot of theaters being built like DiverseWorks in Houston, Maryland Art Place in Baltimore, WPA in DC. There were a lot of alternative things happening so that artists could perform at a really high level in their own region, and that’s also something that I believed in.

Rail: Speaking of theater, performance has been a very strong aspect of your work, particularly in the ’80s. How does that all come together? Did that come from your early work where you were working with fashion and display?

Scott: Certainly, it came from years of making clothes and then you do fashion shows. I laughed about working with Robert Sherman but he, at the time, was also a ceramicist and clay artist and we did performances using wet clay and my sending sounds into him and him building. It was so ’70s, ’80s and it was fabulous. But you’re in the studio and you’re just beating the hell out of this artwork trying to make it work and you realize the piece isn’t about visual work, it’s about music or it’s about spoken word. It was also at the time that Kathy and Moe and Whoopi Goldberg and other people were doing that kind of—I’m just going to call it guerilla now for lack of a better term—but standing up straight on your

two feet flat doing theater and receiving accolades for it. Also, then that means having more places to perform like that. So I and Kay Lawal—she's Kay Lawal-Muhamed now—traveled the entire United States, Canada, Scotland, Holland, England as the *Thunder Thigh Revue* doing work that we'd written; comedy, music. I made all of the sets and the props and it was really about feminism, racism, misogyny, you name it, but we did it in a way that people would laugh and then go, "What the?" And then I left. When we stopped working together I worked with *Honey Chil'Milk* and then I worked with another company and I realized the real risk was not to work with anyone. So for five years I did one-person shows, the last one was called *Walk a Mile in My Drawers*, and you can see that's a long walk, because I'm fat. [*Laughter*]

Rail: Was that the piece called *Rodney Dangerfield* or *Rodney Dangerous in the field*?

Scott: Remember Rodney Dangerfield, "I don't get no respect." Well I had this character who would not leave me alone called "Rodney Dangerous in the Field, the first standup slave comic. I don't get no respect. Now, Rodney Dangerfield had a tie, his was a yoke. He'd tell all of these jokes about being a slave, "I'm going down to the fields to tells me a couple of jokes because I got me a captive audience." [*Laughter*] He'd tell really terrible jokes, he became James Brown, he asked the master for freedom and the master was like, "Well then you have to tell me a joke," and he was like, "Take my wife please! Take my wife please! And he did." [*Laughter*] And then he's like, "That's how I got my freedom, right?" and he said, "No," and then he got upset and then master hit me once, "Ow!" hit me twice, "Ow! Ow!" hit me three times, "Ow! Ow! Ow! And take me to the bridge y'all," and then the master hung him from it. And then there was another one where master threw him in the water. When the master hung him from it, Woody Woodpecker came and pecked through the wood but not the rope and he said, "Woody free me," and he said, "Why should I free you? You's just a n****r," which means that a woodpecker is worth more than Rodney. He kept appearing in all of my shows. In my last show, he's deeply in love with Sally Hemmings and by this time I couldn't remember words so I would have a wonderful book and try to make it a prop. I wrote a lot of music for *Walk a Mile in My Drawers* and Rodney is just talking to Sally Hemmings and she has just come back from France so she is like "Bonjour Rodney," and he keeps acting free and he keeps telling her she's not. So this was the kind of thing I couldn't do with that kind of depth and let the audience know in a piece of sculpture but I could do that in performance.

Rail: But don't you think that some of that point of view appears in the sculpture?



Joyce J. Scott, *What Next and Why Not*, Peter Blum Gallery, New York, 2018. Photo: Etienne Frossard.

Scott: Absolutely. The difference is, you know it and I know other performance people know it, is taking the risk, being bare, just saying outrageous stuff, saying things that can be hurtful to others but for a reason, and it's all very blatant and that's not as blatant in the work, people have to surmise things. Or I can put a litany of stuff on the wall. I never read that stuff other than the first three sentences so I wouldn't believe that anybody would read mine either. The performance, it also allowed me to become this Joyce—I know some of you are like, “Oh God,”—but to become the Joyce who knows why she's doing the work and what she's doing because my mom's side of the family were craft people but they were also performers. My mother's father played guitar and he raced horses and both sides of the family had stills and they were potters and quilt makers. Also they'd be down at the juke joint making music and talking a lot of trash and that really has coalesced in me. It's the idea about humor being the key that opens the door to all of it, be it more fun or real sadness and pain. Don Rickles was really good at that, that's why some of the people that we look at—Richard Pryor was really very good at that—you see that there are many levels to it and that's what I would like to happen in the visual work because I'm only singing now. I'm not doing performances anymore, I'm telling a truth.

Rail: Is there any Baltimore in your work?

Scott: All of it's Baltimore. I'm a round-the-way-girl from Sandtown. All of it is my memories of walking to school and being caught at the door by the principal because I had on too much jewelry or something. All of it is the lady who used to take care of me after school and we would cover cigar boxes with the comics, but her rules were that I had to

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read all the comics and come in and tell her all the colors and everything to teach me. Yea, we made art, but there was a reason. Baltimore is quirky in the sense that people are frank and upfront, even in the most dastardly times and I think that's very much in my artwork, too.