

NEWS & OPINION

Art of the Decade

Best Baltimore Exhibits, Projects, and Experiments 2010-2019

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“What are you going to write about, after you’ve written about all the *good* art in Baltimore?”

This was a question someone asked me a decade ago, when I worked as the Art & Culture Editor at The Urbanite Magazine, after I told him what I did for a living. I’m still not sure if he intended it as a provocation or he was just clueless, but the implication was clear: It was impossible to fathom that Baltimore could generate enough “good art” to merit me writing about it, day in day out. A decade later, I am happy to report that I have been writing about art in Baltimore, in some form or another, every single day for over a decade, and my list of stories to write next is longer than ever.

I knew then what I know now: Baltimore’s pool of talent—realized in ambitious projects, collaborations, and cultural events—is an ever-expanding universe. In my current line of work, I will never, ever run out of stories and the deeper I dig, the more I realize this place is richer, weirder, and more interesting than I could have ever believed. And I’m not talking about some quaint, participation-prize level shit, either. No. The innovative ways that artists build their lives, the earnest experimentation, the interdisciplinary connection between media and community practice, as well as the exquisite quality of artistic output is proof that Baltimore-based artists are not only participating in a larger dialogue about who makes and owns culture, but are leading it in many cases, especially within current movements to rewrite the art historical canon from the perspective of those strategically kept out of it.

When I think back on the past decade, it's been a blur of challenge and collaboration. For me and for BmoreArt, it has been a decade of profound change. As you will see if you click on some of the older links included, this publication existed and functioned at the start of the decade, but has transformed, especially since adding a biannual print journal in 2015 and two incredible full-time employees in 2019. After a decade of wondering if a focus on the art and culture of Baltimore was a naive gamble, this year I was honored with an unexpected Rabkin Foundation Writer's Grant. It doesn't significantly change the work I am doing, but it is national validation that I am on the right track, that paying close attention to the art of my own place and time is vital, despite the ongoing trend in media against local and regional publications.

Looking toward 2020, I am thrilled to work collaboratively with BmoreArt's core team, as well as an expanding team of excellent freelance writers, art critics, designers, photographers, and artists. I am looking forward to the launch of our new website this January, designed by Amanda Buck to be more image-friendly and in line with the aesthetics of our print journals, and to create a platform for Baltimore-based artists through a series of exhibitions in our new gallery and office space at 2519 N. Charles Street. The end of a decade may be an arbitrary marker in time, but it is an opportunity to assess progress and to make plans for the future based on lessons learned.

As I sifted through BmoreArt's wormhole of archives in search of significant art and cultural markers for each year in the past decade, I was surprised at what I found: Rather than seeing "radical" changes in arts and cultural movements, especially in recent years, I saw strategic, progressive steps—consistent throughout the decade. Rather than seeing one or two individuals leading the cause, I found a network of hard-working, passionate people and organizations, who understand that our success as a city and community is collective. Rather than an emphasis on art for arts sake, it became apparent that the battle for equity and social justice in the arts goes hand in hand with the most innovative, excellent, and ambitious projects of the decade.

Regardless of optics and external validation, I suspect that those of us who choose to center art and culture in our lives are doing so because we love the deliciousness of being embedded in the process of our work, as well as the relationships we build through collaborative efforts that offer more richness than obvious rewards can reflect. Please join me on a trip down memory lane that is complicated, consistent in intent, and authentic to Baltimore and surrounding regions. Based on the achievements of the past decade and the creative leadership of artists, I believe that we are in an amazing position to elevate, support, and activate the work of Baltimore-based artists and with them, the success of our city as a whole. I know that I am never going to run out of "good art" to write about.

2012: Joyce J. Scott at Goya Contemporary, *Revealing the African Presence* at The Walters, New Contemporary Wing at the BMA, and *Vampire Travel Agency* at sophiajacob

***Joyce J. Scott: On Kilter* at Goya Contemporary**



Sharp as a razor and powerful as hell, Scott's work plucks you out of your comfort zone and drops you naked, on the front line without a weapon. My favorite solo show this year was *On Kilter*, curated by Amy Raehse, which featured mostly sculptural works by Joyce J. Scott at Goya Contemporary. Composed of repurposed figurines, classically blown Murano glass, and skillfull beadwork, Scott's work has long since crossed the threshold from craft to fine art with a capital F, and takes no prisoners. It's no surprise she is taking the international art world by storm; with Prospect 2 New Orleans and the Museum of Art and Design, NY recent exhibitions, and Glasstress at the Venice Biennale on the near horizon.

I have to admit a strong preference for Scott's sculpture and beadwork over her prints, which were featured in numerous exhibits this year, including the BMA Contemporary Wing, Stevenson University's First Impressions, and a second solo exhibit at The Creative Alliance, but this doesn't matter. This artist is going places way beyond Baltimore and we're lucky to still have her here.

New BMA Contemporary Wing and Permanent Collection Exhibition

"Things are better now than they ever have been for women and artists of color," said the Guerrilla Girls, outspoken experts on equality in the art world. "Right now there is decent representation of women and artists of color at the beginning and emerging levels of the art world. At the institutional level however, in museums, major collections and auctions sales, things are still pretty dismal for all but white guys."

Although the Baltimore Museum of Art had prominently featured a number of white male artists in its contemporary wing, the newly opened Contemporary Wing featured a number of women and artists of color, including an early Grace Hartigan abstraction, a Rirkrit Tiravanija installation, a square Elizabeth Murray painting, two Anne Truitt sculptures, a series of prints by Joyce Scott, a Jenny Holzer text piece, and a number of other works by artists formerly marginalized by museums,

including Baltimore-based artists Richard Cleaver and Jimmy Joe Roche, all from within the museum's vast collection.

2019: Deyane Moses at MICA, *Generations* at the BMA, The Collection of Darryl Atwell and Lisa Gregory at Silber Gallery, and Joyce J. Scott and Elizabeth Talford Scott at Goya Contemporary and the BMA

Joyce J. Scott and Elizabeth Talford Scott: *Hitching Their Dreams to Untamed Stars* at the Baltimore Museum of Art and *Reality, Times Two* at Goya Contemporary



The two related shows featuring Joyce J. Scott and Elizabeth Talford Scott—*Hitching Their Dreams to Untamed Stars* at the Baltimore Museum of Art and *Reality, Times Two* at Goya Contemporary—highlight their creative lineage featuring a digestible selection of the prolific artists' work from the early 1970s to the '90s, and of Joyce's through the present day. They also offer a loose narrative of making something—in community with others, often out of on-hand materials, with excellent craftsmanship—because it needs to exist, because its critical engagement can benefit the world, at least as the first drop in a ripple.

Located in the small Berman Textile Gallery of the BMA's American Wing, *Hitching Their Dreams* feels like a coda to the abundance of *Reality*. But what rings loud to me in both spaces is the artists' dedication to detail, every stitch and bead intentionally, lovingly secured. It can feel gauche to talk about art and love at the same time—a holdover perhaps of the western-white-supremacist-capitalist art world's tendency to divide art from culture and craft and life—but in their respective practices, Joyce and Elizabeth Scott have re-emphasized the value of art suffused with devotion and care, and the change that can emerge from that.

PETER BLUM GALLERY

Not that the content of these works is particularly tender or soft—in Joyce’s case, it’s often brutal. Typically what sticks to my ribs for days or years after I see her work are the intense images and acts of violence depicted or implied. Joyce is celebrated for her mastery of beading, sewing, and glass-blowing and for her dexterity in creating disturbingly gorgeous pieces of art that challenge white supremacy and racism, sexism, and the other -isms that provoke violence. A common line about her work is that it’s a one-two punch; she draws us in with impeccable craft and colorful, gleaming materials and then, once we’re seduced, the implications of both blatant and covert violence—be it through guns, stereotypes, colorism—become clearer. (Rebekah Kirkman)

It’s quite difficult to predict the future and sometimes it takes decades before we can recognize, let alone process, the significance of past events. It is highly probable that we will feel differently about this list in ten years, that future events will shape their meanings in unpredictable ways, that some will grow in influence and others will wane. As with all “Best Of” and End of the Year lists, I am sure there are artists, projects, and exhibitions that our team has missed and others that will reveal themselves to have a lasting impact well after they are gone. While it is tempting to predict the breakout success of certain artists, like Amy Sherald or Stephen Towns for example, and to hedge our bets for the future, I believe that this list should be considered as a whole, a continuum of relationships and collective success that we can all claim.

Rather than focusing on individuals, this list is an opportunity to consider the potential for doing our best work in the future, especially in collaboration with one another. Whose work are you interested in learning more about? Whose studio do you want to visit? Which galleries do you often intend to visit but haven’t made time for yet? How do you envision your own potential being realized in the next decade and who do you want to spend your precious time with?

Last, how can an independently run art publication in a small city make an impact upon lives, careers, community, and a city as a whole? It’s been a wild and fascinating growth cycle, this past decade, and BmoreArt intends to continue to grow and evolve as a locally grounded and community-accountable publication, despite a lack of any established publishing model to emulate, locally or nationally. This is just fine with us, as BmoreArt is a publication run by artists. We are comfortable with innovation and collaboration and we look forward to creating new models for arts coverage for the future because we know that Baltimore will never, ever stop producing art that deserves a much larger stage and smart, well-informed, and creative press coverage.

Cheers, twenty-teens! Thanks for the memories, Baltimore.