



Johns Hopkins University to award Baltimore Artist Joyce J. Scott honorary Doctor of Humane Letters

by Jannette J. Witmyer | May 19, 2022



Joyce Scott is Baltimore's quintessential genius; and regardless of the medium in which she works, she never disappoints. (Photo courtesy: Grace Roselli)

When Johns Hopkins University holds its 146th Commencement ceremony on Sunday, May 22, the University will award an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree to Baltimore artist Joyce J. Scott, a visual and performing artist well known for creating intricately designed beadwork, sculpture, and quilt-work to expose and address social issues. Her exemplary work and commitment to the arts and social issues serve as the foundation for her selection.

Ronald J. Daniels, president, Johns Hopkins University, also serves on the university's selection committee. "Johns Hopkins is recognizing Ms. Scott's significant contributions to the visual arts, from beadwork to performance to sculpture," he says in her support. "We are equally excited to honor another set of significant contributions she has made to the world, namely her visible and visionary commitment to art as a conduit for honoring the rich and storied history of our ancestors and for conveying profoundly resonant commentary on cultural stereotypes, systemic racism, and healing."

Scott says that she is very honored to receive the honorary doctorate and, initially, was surprised that Hopkins would be rewarding people in the arts. But she then realized how it aligns with her beliefs about the importance of the arts, especially as a lifelong West Baltimore resident, who has never considered leaving her childhood community.



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“I realized that I’ve always talked about the arts being important within the Black community. Outside of your ability to do it, it helps to modify and enrich your community,” she explains and continues. “It’s also a great example of how a round-the-way girl can work really, really hard and receive some kind of great signifier that the work you’ve done in your life, in and outside of your own medium, can make a difference for others.”

“There literally are going to be young folks who see that I received it and that I wasn’t a nuclear physicist or an astronaut. That I was somebody who started in Sandtown and who still lives in an inner-city, challenged community, but I still can have a life of merit and import.”

Recipients of honorary degrees from Hopkins are welcomed as members of the institution’s family, but the artist says that both Johns Hopkins University and Hospital own work that she and her mother (the late-Elizabeth Talford Scott) created and have for years. Their family connection has long been established and is reinforced by the University’s prominent display of her work, allowing the community to see what she’s doing.

Maureen Marsh, secretary, Board of Trustees, says that Scott’s work located on the University’s Homewood Campus has had a profound effect on all who see it, stating, “Her work has enticed viewers and patrons alike for decades with its meticulous and arresting detail. But, perhaps most importantly, it also, as she has said in the past, “incites people to look and then carry something home ... that might make a change.” This is certainly the case here at Hopkins, where our student curators have displayed Ancestry Doll 1 at Gilman Hall in ways that confront the lack of diverse representation across our own history.”



The honorary degree recipients for 2022 are (top row, from left) Bonnie Bassler, David C. Hodgson, Jill McGovern, (bottom row, from left) Alexis Ohanian, Samantha Power, Joyce J. Scott, and Al Sommer. (Courtesy Photos)

Despite having previously received honorary doctorates from Maryland Institute College of Art and California College of the Arts (CCA) – San Francisco, Scott is deeply moved by the upcoming honor and, in her initial response, expressed it only as the inimitable Joyce J. Scott could. “What do I feel about it? A third one... Well, you know that I am *cock-a-hoop! I mean... What is going on? Yay!!!”

Then, settling down just a bit she says, “I just know, back to the old African American adage, ‘whose shoulders I’m standing on.’ And if my parents could be here now, ex-sharecroppers seeing me get a doctorate from Johns Hopkins University, dressed like a bumblebee, sitting on the stage. It validates all those things they did to get me here. It validates all my teachers who called me little Joyce and who gave me materials to work with in the summertime. It validates all of that kind of thing, and that’s a real deep appreciation for me.”

Joyce J. Scott will be one of seven recipients being awarded honorary doctorate degrees during the University’s commencement ceremonies. Other recipients include: Bonnie Bassler, internationally known molecular biologist; David C. Hodgson, accomplished and successful private equity investor; Jill McGovern, member of the SAIS Advisory Board, the SAIS Europe Advisory Council, and the Hopkins-Nanjing Council; Alexis Ohanian, pioneering internet entrepreneur and co-founder of Reddit; Samantha Power, Pulitzer Prize-winning author, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, and current administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development; and Alfred Sommer, epidemiologist, ophthalmologist. Samantha Power will address the Class of 2022 at the university’s Commencement ceremony.

Goya Contemporary Gallery in Baltimore is the worldwide representative of artwork by Joyce J. Scott. We are thrilled that this honor will be bestowed upon one of Baltimore’s most loved hometown heroes.

(*cock-a-hoop: overjoyed; extremely and obviously pleased, especially about a triumph or success)