

# BmoreArt

## ***Unfinished Republic: America at 250***

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Installation view of *Unfinished Republic: America at 250* at Goya Contemporary Gallery Photo courtesy of the gallery

### **Goya Contemporary**

**Artists: Sonya Clark, Kyle Hackett, Joyce J. Scott, Paul Rucker, Elizabeth Talford Scott, Louise Fishman, and Soledad Salamé**

**On view through July 8th**

It might seem odd to include a Goya Contemporary show on a list otherwise dominated by alternative spaces in rowhomes. It is, after all, essentially one of the only “flagship” established commercial galleries left standing with a dedicated brick-and-mortar space in Baltimore, a regular program including participation in international fairs and exhibitions, and a roster of A-listers showing both at home and abroad.

But walking into the opening of *Unfinished Republic* at first felt as convivial and familiar as a visit to an old friend’s living room. There are always-delightful quilts from Elizabeth Talford Scott, glass or seductively beaded sculptures from iconic daughter Joyce J. Scott, embroidery on digital prints from Soledad Salamé, et al.—a veritable “who’s who” of artists we know and love.

Linger just a bit, however, and *Unfinished Republic* quickly reveals itself to be a pretty dark, thought-provoking show once the serotonin from hugs and recognition wears-off. Director Amy Eva Raehse has mined both recent works and the deep archives of her artists to curate a show about how, nearing its 250th birthday, this country has very much not matured enough to deal with its baggage.

From gun violence, slavery, sexism, environmental devastation, racial inequality, a freakin' Civil War, and abhorrent treatment of refugees—to cite just a few—the themes tackled by the works in this show read like a list of traumas and grievances Americans never fully worked out in family therapy with the motherland. Even the most psychedelic Talford Scott quilt is no substitute for the serious amount of ayahuasca the United States would need to unpack its psychic scars and finally get its shit together.



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A central thesis of Raehse's curatorial text is that the nation's impulse to obfuscate or forget its own dark history (and present) is counterproductive. In the immortal words of Stevie Nicks, "A wound gets worse when it's treated with regret." So it feels like a double sting to see that so many of the artworks in this show are older than the current Trump presidency but feel as urgent as ever.

Salamé's striking 2011 *Gulf Distortion* series of deliberately garbled silkscreen prints on mylar, for example, reflect the uncertainty following the Obama-era Deepwater Horizon petroleum disaster and its impacts. Fifteen years later, those once-apocalyptic scenes are largely forgotten—even as we're likely experiencing the health and environmental consequences—yet eerily evocative of contemporary, shaky cell phone video of oil infrastructure presently on fire around the Persian Gulf. This dumb country refuses to wean itself off fossil fuels, even though we know the teat could literally explode at any minute.

But it's perhaps most notable how many of the artists in this show—particularly women of color representing backgrounds who've suffered disproportionately from America's policy failures—approach outrage-inducing injustices with labor-intensive processes that speak to acts of care or repair, mending, or ornamentation.

There are multiple reasons Goya is one of the last ones standing in the great commercial gallery extinction event, and this show is must-see evidence of why. Hell, at the rate things are going, there's a good chance Goya Contemporary might just outlive the "Great Experiment" of the Republic itself.



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