



## Baltimore Museum of Art spotlights quilted art of Elizabeth Talford Scott

by Jannette J. Witmyer | November 18, 2023



“Eyewinkers, Tumbleturds, and Candlebugs: The Art of Elizabeth Talford Scott,” an exhibition comprising 19 of Scott’s intricately stitched and colorfully adorned fabricated works of art, coupled with an extensive array of community programming and a focus on accessibility, opened on Nov. 12 at the Baltimore Museum of Art. Presented in partnership with the Maryland Institute College of Art and the Estate of Elizabeth Talford Scott at Goya Contemporary, the exhibition marks the 25th anniversary of its namesake and original presentation as MICA’s inaugural Exhibition Development Seminar (EDS).

Guest-curated by MICA’s curator-in-residence emeritus George Ciscle and organized by BMA’s associate curator of contemporary art Cecilia Wichmann, the exhibition builds on a mission to expand recognition of Scott’s artwork and engage the community. It is supported by current EDS students, who, following the guidance of 2023-24 EDS instructor Deyane Moses, are organizing “No Stone Left

“Unturned: The Elizabeth Talford Scott Initiative.” That campaign will culminate in presentations and free public programs from February through May 2024 at eight area museums and institutions: Cryor Art Gallery at Coppin State University, George Peabody Library of Sheridan Libraries at Johns Hopkins University, Maryland Center for History and Culture (MCHC), Decker Gallery at MICA, James E. Lewis Museum of Art (JELMA) at Morgan State University, The Peale, Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture, and the Walters Art Museum. There will be an opening celebration for the presentations at the BMA on Feb. 4.

“Elizabeth Talford Scott’s textiles are more than quilts; they are prayer pillows, healing shawls, and family diaries—artistic creations that incorporate her personal symbolism with motifs of Africa and the Deep South,” said Ciscle. “I am delighted that the BMA and MICA are working collectively to give Talford Scott’s life story and works the time and attention they warrant and command, as well as expanding what inclusion in the arts might look like as a sustained commitment.

”Displayed within a succession of galleries in the BMA’s Contemporary Wing, “Eyewinkers, Tumbleturds, and Candlebugs: The Art of Elizabeth Talford Scott” allows viewers to explore meaningful events and people in Scott’s life and feel a sense of her impact on communities through the storytelling of her quilts, written and recorded commentary from family, friends, and collectors, and visual and musical interpretations by other artists. Additionally, Scott is featured in archival interviews from MICA, Maryland Public Television, and WJZ CBS News, allowing visitors to sit and watch the late artist at work. The exhibition’s Community Celebration Gallery features a photographic timeline of the Scott’s life, resource table with slides and materials from the 1998 retrospective’s exhibition catalog, a scrapbook of research materials and an assortment of books, all available for visitors to examine.

For increased accessibility, the exhibition features dual access points and entry via stairway or elevator, which places visitors at the start or finish of the show’s My Dreams Gallery, depending on where they entered. Scott’s last quilt made before developing dementia, *My Dreams*, hangs in this area, accompanied by a music commission, providing an atmosphere of reflection and a board onto which visitors can write and post their dreams.

The late Elizabeth Talford Scott was born into a family of sharecroppers in Chester, SC in 1916 and spent her adult life in Baltimore. A lifelong quilter from generations past, she passed the tradition of quilting to her daughter Joyce J. Scott, now an internationally acclaimed artist, at an early age. In March 2024, the younger Scott’s work will be featured in a 50-year retrospective at the BMA, *Joyce J. Scott: Walk a Mile in My Dreams*.

In what almost seems to be a magical turn of events, the scheduling of their exhibitions overlaps, and, for a time, both mother and daughter will have their work featured in a major retrospective at the BMA, concurrently. When asked how it feels to have her mom’s work in an exhibition at the BMA, she says warmly, “My heart is full. My mom, Mama Lizzie was a beacon, cosmic purveyor, and rascal, all rolled into a warm unsmashable embrace.”

If her mom was here today, she thinks she’d say, “So this is what my years have meant. From cotton fields to the museum with my baby girl. God never sleeps.”

*Eyewinkers, Tumbleturds, and Candlebugs: The Art of Elizabeth Talford Scott* will be on view at the BMA from November 12, 2023 through April 28, 2024.