



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Joyce J. Scott,
2009 July 22

Funding for this interview was provided by the Nanette L. Laitman
Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Joyce Scott on July 22, 2009. The interview took place at Scott's home and studio in Baltimore, MD, and was conducted by Robert Silberman for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project For Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

ROBERT SILBERMAN: This is Robert Silberman interviewing Joyce Scott at the artist's home and studio in Baltimore, Maryland, on July 22, 2009, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, card number one.

Hello again, Joyce.

JOYCE SCOTT: Hi.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Perhaps you could begin by talking about your childhood and your family. When were you born, to begin with the—

JOYCE SCOTT: My name is Joyce Jane Scott. I was born in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1948 from Elizabeth Caldwell Talford Scott, who's from Chester, South Carolina, and Charlie Scott Jr., from Durham, North Carolina.

My parents left the South—he picked tobacco, she picked cotton—on that immigration north to get better jobs. And they stopped in—they met here and they had me 48 years ago, living in a working-class neighborhood in Baltimore.

I had a very classic African American youth. I was raised in an all-Black neighborhood across the street from the projects, one block away from my elementary school. I walked to school every day. I was known as "little Joyce" by the parents because the moms were usually in the window looking at their kids perambulate to school. My mom always made sure I got to work—of course, my father worked at Bethlehem Steel; he was at work already.

I remember that my mother was very, very supportive of me, no matter what kind of hijinks that I got into. So I might dress up and she'd have to call in to work and say that she'd be coming to work a little late that day because I dressed up and if the principal got me, if the principal saw me at the door, I was coming home. It was only a block away, but I was coming home to change my clothes.

Miss Agnes lived on the first floor; we lived on the second floor in the apartment. I was a latchkey kid—come home; Miss Agnes would make sure that I got home and got in. I did my homework, call my mom, let her know that I did my homework, and then the rest of the time until the parents got home was *mine*.

Sometimes I had prescribed an amount of friends, who I'm still friendly with from elementary school, who would come and we'd do homework together. I didn't know until later in my life, many years later in my life, that my mother would be sacrificing her food so that they could eat. She'd eat at work or eat less so that the kids could have something to eat when they would visit me.

I had little art classes—I still have photos of that. I was an only child at that time so I had all the games and all the toys and so we'd play at my house, watch TV—had a TV before other folks had TVs—all of it.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: What were the favorite TV shows growing up?

JOYCE SCOTT: *Howdy Doody*—I liked all the classics and I liked all the cartoons and they all inform my artwork until today. All the puppetry, the peanut gallery, all of those things still lurk in my artwork. One of the things about that period was that they had real theater on TV. I can't remember, like the *Colgate Comedy Hour* or—

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Right.

JOYCE SCOTT: I'm still very much influenced by all the Jewish comics: Phil Silvers, Carl Reiner, Totie Fields. All these people were very duly [ph] influential on what I do right now as a theater person. [Laughs.]

And all the family shows. It was a really kind of prosaic American scene. But it wasn't African American at all,

unless it was *Amos 'n' Andy*, who I really loved. But there wasn't a wide variety of things that you could watch on television that spoke to anything other than a very middle-class, even Western white culture. And I loved all the Westerns—all of them.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: We'll come back to TV later when we get to African American presence on TV.

JOYCE SCOTT: Okay.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Art classes, Joyce?

JOYCE SCOTT: When people ask me, when did you start learning art, I say, *in vitro*. I had probably the best-looking placenta possible.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: [Laughs.]

JOYCE SCOTT: I'm sure the inside of my mother's tummy was festooned with most wonderful drawings and love letters to her—"I love you, Mommy!" When I came out of my mom's womb and they hit me, other people are yelling, I'm, like, I don't like this place.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: [Laughs.]

JOYCE SCOTT: I think the colors are all wrong and please, don't wrap me in that unless it's a Sasson [ph] piece. [Laughs.]

My mom, of course, is an artist and so I did art always. I was also really lucky to be targeted as an art person, and even in elementary school, junior high school, senior high school, my art teachers would always give me excess art supplies. And in the summertime, they'd give me supplies so I could work all summer and I'd always be playing with something. So that kind of art study was really in-home. My mother was my first bead teacher and my first sewing teacher. I had the best-looking dolls in the whole neighborhood—the whole thing.

I had a—I can't remember her name—one lady who helped me after school when my mom needed that kind of transitional time. Lived across the street in the projects and she was an older lady and she did art projects with me. We'd take the comic books and we'd cover cigar boxes with them and put little components in them and make jewelry boxes and paint and draw.

This was a time when "the community" meant something really different. I mean, I live in a community right now; I live in a neighborhood and I don't know my neighbors very well. If something would happen to their kid, of course I would try to help, but I wouldn't really know who to go to and know about their family business and how I could be of help. I'm not that to them. I'm the artist on the block.

But when I was a kid, you really could do that and there was real safe harbor around. You know the house you could run to, you know who you could ask to stay with if your mom—or something happened and you came home early. There was that kind of connectivity. And so I had that with my friends and with the folks in the neighborhood. And because I did artwork, they saw that about me and they helped to perpetuate that with me.

Now, as a singer, I sang in church and I sang in school but I was much too timid to be a lead singer. All of that kind of performance work happened after I got out of college.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Mexico.

JOYCE SCOTT: Mexico and the Maryland Institute College of Art, which we call MICA now, here in Baltimore.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Right. Let's pause before going to MICA, and could you talk more about your mother as an artist and the artmaking in your family because it goes way back and it's so important.

JOYCE SCOTT: Way back. And you're going to be hearing ambient sounds all the time—people yelling on the street. This is absolutely an urban interview.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Right.

JOYCE SCOTT: So you'll get all kinds of stuff which really sauces it up [laughs] like that.

Well, my mother, Elizabeth Caldwell, was born in 1916 in Chester, South Carolina, to a family with, I think, 10 children. All of them did not live to majority, but I think at least eight of them did. And I might be wrong—it might have been 14. There are so many stories. [Laughs.]

They lived on the land that was—if not was the same land, was very close to the land that their grandparents

had worked as slaves. They were cotton-pickers and they picked all kinds of veggies—whatever was being grown in that area. They lived in a building that was very much a log cabin with the kitchen on the outside. They had a victory garden and their own animals as well.

My mother went to a one-room schoolhouse. All of this is the kind of story that you hear about happening in other parts of the world, but not so long ago was indicative of how people, rural people, lived right in this country, not so long ago.

My mom says that she and the white kids and the Black kids all played in the schoolyard together but when they entered this one-room, ramshackle house, they were segregated by a big sheet of cloth. There were schoolbooks that the white kids got first. And the white kids who were really fun and who had Black friends would send notes on the books and when those books got tattered and they'd pass them to the Black kids, they'd have notes from the other kids. And the ones who were really rotten also sent notes.

My mom talked about going to the well and having to guard her sister, Queen Esther, who was her favorite sister. My mother has dementia now and she doesn't call my name very seldom [*sic*] but she still yells "Queen Esther" all the time because Queen Esther was so pretty, she'd always have to go to the well and guard her against the white and the Black boys.

It was a perilous time for them. They had night riders—the story was that my grandfather, Samuel Caldwell, made such good white lightning—and I'm talking about a drink, not anything else—that he was allowed to move around the county at night—when Black men weren't—as long as the night riders got theirs first because it was so good. I want you to know, my father's side of the family also had stills. I'm lucky to have a liver or be able to speak, period.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: [Laughs.]

JOYCE SCOTT: Now how does this all influence my mom? My mom was, I think, a pretty average kind of girl who worked the fields and cotton all the time. She really wanted to go to school but they didn't have a really good school and the kids went to school in direct regard to how much time they had off the plantation, off the work.

My mom remembers picking cotton in the field and having these prop planes fly over them to spray the boll weevils, but they sprayed everybody else as well, while they were cotton—they were, in essence, no better than a plant or a field animal.

Through all this, she was a cantankerous youth, she told me. She was a rascal and still is. But she had this great desire to learn how to read and to make artwork. I think I found out in my mother's seventies, as we were watching one of those specials on TV, that my mother must have been dyslexic. I say that because the guy was talking on TV and he was talking about transposing words and not being able to read and she said, I told them I wasn't stupid.

This is in her seventies. And then it made it clear to me—and I talk in circles, remember, I'm from the South, so it's one of those circular kinds of stories—that my mother would tell me, when she would come into a city, she would get a live-in job taking care of people's families. And she would, from that one space, learn the bus routes and the routes, but she didn't talk about how she learned them from street signs. She learned them from sights and that's because she didn't read well.

Well, how did that stuff manifest itself for her, artistically? I met a lot of people who have dementia. [Laughs.] I'm sorry. I met them too; they just don't know it—

ROBERT SILBERMAN: [Laughs.]

JOYCE SCOTT:—who have reading problems who have used the arts as their vehicle to have a better life. So my mom would make shapes and forms and do really wonderful art and tell stories in the way that she couldn't via reading.

My mother came from a family of craftspeople. My mother's grandfather was an ex-slave and he taught them basketworking, caning chairs, and metal arts—blacksmithing. My mother's father had as many jobs as he had children and he had 14 children—I give this spiel sometimes, so now it's not 10 kids, it was 14 children. He was a blacksmith—they worked in clay; sharecropper; he worked on the railroad; he was a musician; and *he* was a quilter.

In one of my plays, I wrote about a story that my mother told me about her father coming home down the road from the railroad and having all the things that the kids would need. He was burdened with them, wearing them like a giant, giant costume on his body.

So he'd have 14 pairs of shoes and he'd have candy sticks and he'd have maybe sugar and spices, and they'd all run up to him trying to get those candy canes. Everybody would go for the shoes, because the last person who got the last pair of shoes had to keep them whether they fit or not. He would come down and they would go through all of his pockets.

And that directly related to the story of her grandmom, who was a quilter, who worked in "a big house." And when she'd come home in the evenings, she would have rolled biscuits in the band of her skirt to keep them warm, and the girls and the boys would have to play with her tummy to unroll her skirt to get these sweet biscuits that she brought. So not only did she have to cuddle this big mama, but the essence, this effluvium, this great smell and this great aroma of her body that had been wrapped around these biscuits. So you're sitting there eating that but you're not just eating something that's nourishing to the body: It's that soul kind of nourishment that you're getting.

So they lived in a poor time and they were living during the Depression as well. But, you know, for farmers who had some land, the Depression meant that they weren't making money but they might be able to feed their children because they had victory gardens.

My mom came from a family that were quilters. And I told you they lived in a small cabin, so they did what lots of people did. They would have a quilting frame that they could heist—not hoist but "heist"—up to the ceiling. It was connected to cables—probably just cord—and you would heist it, or hoist it up, so it'd be out of the way; and then you would lower it to waist-length and people would sit around it and they'd all quilt.

What's the story about my mom learning quilting? And let me say, this was absolutely similar to when I went to the San Blas Islands in Panama later on. What happens is, she said, that the kids would sit under the quilt as a little tent. And needles would come down and then they'd see one and they'd send it back up. They would thread the needles and they'd make their own little sample quilts and they'd be under there listening to all the family stories.

Think about this great tent of colors going on as they were quilting. My grandfather was a quilter and he'd come in and quilt sometimes, too. But the stories that I hear about him—I didn't know either of my grandfathers—was that he was such a rascal—that's why I am who I am today, from both my grandparents, all four of my grandparents and my parents—that there'd be a lot of laughing going on and sometimes the men would also be around outside while the women were quilting.

A lot of the quilts were real fancy quilts. You know the stories, right, about quilts being used as hallmarks for slaves? So you might make a fancy quilt and it might have—I was about to say the Star of David but I meant the North Star—but who knows, maybe a few. [Laughs.] Oh, that's very funny! Maybe the Lost Tribe came all the way over, trying to get north like everyone else. [Laughs.]

ROBERT SILBERMAN: [Laughs.] The question is solved—we now know.

JOYCE SCOTT: Isn't that hilarious? *Oy gevalt*. [Laughs.] Did I say that? [Laughs.]

Anyway, they would make quilts and some of them would be fancy so they would be displayed on Sunday around the church. Some of them were utilitarian—just big swaths of fabric.

What I forgot to say is, it's said that the cotton would go to the few local mills because remember, milling, all of that is really [the] northern part of the United States; but there were mills in the South and they might have the cotton that went to the mill to make the fabric that they would buy or barter back for their own use.

They also took the short hairs of the cotton—the throwaway stuff—and that was the batting, or they would spin it, maybe with a little wool or something else and they would make yarn that they would crochet their—my mom called them booties, but they were little sandals. She said they didn't wear shoes most of the time because it was warm.

Well, my mother told me that she was considered a bit different as a quilt-maker because she didn't like to stick to the old-fashioned designs. And when everybody did crazy quilts, her quilts were always just a little crazier than everyone else's.

That kind of improvisational skill, that kind of—real kind of dense storytelling all wrapped up in love, and all of the other things that happened when you were a child living under this kind of gross pressure of the South, being a have-not and the racism. I mean, I really think about the kind of work that she makes and how glorious it is, when I think about her youth where you were afraid to—you don't have running water and if you don't have a well that's super-close, you're afraid to go get the elixir of life, water. You're picking cotton and you're being bitten by the very things, but you can't not pick cotton because that's how your family has a livelihood to live. This is a—we don't know this. We don't really know this. But that informed then, the house that we lived in.

My father picked tobacco. He came from, I think, eight kids, maybe. My mother's darker-skinned, my father's lighter-skinned. His travails here were at Bethlehem Steel. I didn't hear this until maybe two years before. My godfather, who also worked at Bethlehem Steel, who was darker-skinned, told me this story. Wyatt, who was my godfather, who was a Pentecostal preacher—I did street ministry with he and his wife, who's my godmother. So it's Wyatt Brown and Lucille Brown. I'm on the street playing the tambourine with them while we're doing street ministry. I told them I was sure that they were responsible for a few of my emotional problems later in my life. [Laughs.]

But until he passed away, he would drive me to the airport because I was traveling around the United States speaking and teaching. And he told me this story driving, and remember, this all goes back to everything I talk in circles. He said, you know, you're a white girl. And I said, wait a second, back up. What do you mean? He said, "Well, people are not appreciated but they are designated by their skin color and your having education makes you a certain kind of person in our culture." I said, "Well, but, you know, I understand what you're saying but I'm still that little Joyce." He said, "Yes, you are," and then he started telling me a story about what he meant.

My father was tall with curly hair. My mother told me when she met my father he had on short pants and that kind of amber-colored shoes and curls falling down front and a little stingy brim hat to the top in the back. And I said, Mom, that's Li'l Abner; that looks just like the Li'l Abner. She said, that's what he looked like. She said, the worst thing I did was teach your father how to dress.

Well, my father told me, and I'm going to use the—can I use the N-word, do you think? [Laughs.] My father told me that he'd been called every nigger possible: a yellow nigger, a red nigger, a white nigger, a Black nigger—because he worked with Polish people, a Polack nigger—now, that takes more time than it's necessary to say! They wouldn't even, like, break it down to initials. [Laughs.] They'd actually say the words.

And one day—I didn't know this story so my godfather told me this story—one day he just had it and he swooped this white guy up in his arms and he was taking him to the smelter to drop him in. And people were seeing him—he was in a daze. He was on a mission. People would jump him and he'd swat them off. My father was a crane operator, but my godfather worked in the heat and he was watching this, and he said it took a bunch of men to bring him down.

And he just said, I don't want to ever hear it again or I will burn you. And I don't think he ever heard it again. So every day, even into their adulthood, they were burdened with that kind of whisper that they weren't good—they weren't worthy, whatever, Americans, whatever. They weren't worthy.

And both my parents made a home for me where that wasn't true. I always had a home where I felt worthy. I was a princess and I could make as much art as I wanted to even though my father didn't understand a bit of it. So I had my own art supplies and my mother and I made art.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Can I ask a question about your grandfather? I think one of your grandfathers made a quilt when you were born?

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes. Thank you. That's my mother's father, Samuel Caldwell. I still have it. When I give lectures, I talk about these quilts. People think that this is African American art, in toto. They like to think that the blues is what we do and we're quilt-makers.

And then when you have the Gee's Bend's women [Gee's Bend Quilters Collective, Boykin, AL]—who are amazing women and they make these quilts that need to be celebrated—that once again underlines that for people who are lazy and don't take any time to see all the other wonderful things that we do. Well, I understand that, but I don't think any ethnic group only has one way of working. But I understand what they mean.

My grandfather made strip quilts and this strip quilt hearkens back to kente cloth, where there's a man who is weaving strips and he's imbuing these strips—[sings] *Yeah, yeah / yeah yeah, yeah yeah / Yeah yeah*—with the rhythm, with the syncopation of his culture and they're all improvisational; they're not the same. Then you lay these strips down, you sew them together and there you have this wonderful kind of sheet music. I mean, you're looking at my grandfather's quilt and you can see Dizzy Gillespie's cheeks just blow right up, right? Because there's bebop in those quilts. They hearken the future right there.

I still have that quilt and when my grandfather wanted to dye fabric, he didn't go to the art store; he had to [sings] *Wade in the water*. Went down and got some yellow ochre clay and boiled it. And so the yellow strips in that are from the ochre that he used.

Let me give you a story about my mom and I. Years later, when my mother was still able, we were asked to be artists-in-residence at the University of Colorado in Boulder, so, of course, it was wonderful and my mom was quite a zesty speaker. So we got on the airplane and it was late and we pulled into the new Denver airport, the one with all the cloth at the top that drips on everything. Okay, we pulled in, we missed our ride and they lost

our luggage and the guy was pushing us in the wheelchair and we were the last people—Negroes in the airport—and of course I was done for. I was yelling, I have to go to a four-star restaurant, hotel, nothing will be open all night and how will I ever live? And so we did.

Well, the next day we got to Boulder and it was snowing and the trees—you know how the airline gives you a cab voucher? Well, I took the cab to another city. [Laughs.] The trees were weeping these beautiful icicles and we pulled into a motel—which I talked to them about later, how dare they [laughs].

That night we gave a talk, a wonderful talk, and I said to the audience—to the teachers in the audience—well, you heard my mom, you know that she was a weaver, you know that she's a textile artist and we come from a line of people who were crocheters and weavers and spinners and quilt-makers and garment-makers. So does anybody from the textile department want us to come and talk to you tomorrow? No one raised their hands.

I said, now, she talked to you about her father and grandfather—you know they were blacksmiths—and my mom still remembers the songs they would sing while they were working on the forge and on the metal and all this other stuff because my mom said that one way that they found out that the metal was right—it wasn't only by color. Hitting it, and whatever key it was in because they had songs to the right key, that's how they knew. Anybody from the sculpture department? No one. So I said, but I've also told you that my mom comes from a family of pot-makers, clay-makers. Is anybody from the—Betty Woodman, a very famous clay woman, said, come to my class. And the next day, we went.

Did I tell you a story over, Rob?

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Worth telling again. Great story.

JOYCE SCOTT: I tell so many stories, Rob.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Good.

JOYCE SCOTT: So we get to the classroom and I become just fixated and in a trance like all the other students, because I hadn't seen or heard this in a long time. My mom starts talking about what they did to make pots and how they made them; how they dug holes in the ground, lined them in big rocks, built fires. As the fires were just beginning to get warm, they had slats over the fires and that's where they would finish off their pinch pots and coil pots—by that, I mean make sure they were dry—but it had to be a really slow process so the pots wouldn't crack; take those off and they'd put them in the fire and add leaves and then maybe cover them with some earth and they'd start cooking these pots.

The same time this is happening, Betty Woodman would chime in something like, in China that's called the *gring-geseh* [ph] technique—[laughs]—and in France, it's *bleu de sue du sun gu ger gu ger* [ph], and my mom was like, yeah, and we're all talking and we're all listening and all of us were just—and we realized my mom's making a pinch pot while she's talking. She takes someone's pot—doesn't ask—turns it upside down, starts building.

And then she says, we didn't have that—she meant glaze. So she'd talk about how they used berries and how they'd take tools and inside designs to decorate the outside. Now, this is all very primal. It's done by everybody in the world. But this was *my* mom talking about how they did the work. And she said, if we wanted the pots to be watertight, we'd add pitch on them and then we'd decorate the pitch.

And the students and I and Betty Woodman were like ogogulated [ph]. We were packahoop [ph]! We were just like, wow, because we had first-person. You know, I'm very blessed because my mom is first-person to people who did all-hand. Forget about computers, electric lights, cars, right? When her generation finally goes, there'll be nothing but memories and films of people who had a completely different way of living. Our food isn't grown that way anymore—talking about the West. It's all very different now. Now, how did that influence me?

ROBERT SILBERMAN: One of the great works from the retrospective of your mother's work was your work, your beaded hands, *My Mother's Hands*.

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes. Yes. Yes.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: You said once that, "Magic carpets wrapped me in slumber land" when you were a child, meaning the quilts. But can you talk a little about your mother's early textile work and quilt work, and then when she returned to it?

JOYCE SCOTT: Okay. Her earlier work was very utilitarian. I didn't have anything—if there was a hole in it, it was festooned. It was either embroidered, in my shirts, or all of our pillowcases and the towels in the house. Especially if they were starting to become worn, they were decorated. And she would do tablecloths and the

pillows and doilies—all of that stuff was very utilitarian. We always had that kind of festive house.

After I attended undergraduate school, I started realizing what I was looking at, after you start looking in books and realize there's a real context for what your mom's doing. My undergraduate work had a lot of crafts going on, so not only was I doing clay and everything, but I was weaving a lot, stitching a lot, doing exactly what my family had done.

Once I came back from graduate school and started traveling the world, I realized that my mom's work was of great importance because she'd started to quilt again, doing large quilts and not only using the traditional kind of stitching and trapunto and stuffing, whatever. She started to integrate materials like buttons and beads and rocks and twigs and shells in her artwork.

And many of them were allegorical, many of them talked about her childhood. So she'd have different kinds of insects and frogs and the animals, and she'd do shapes of houses and she'd do people in them, and she'd talk about the sunrise and sunset. And she'd do them in such wonderful ways that weren't the way Harriet Powers did them. They're not the way I'd seen other older artists who weren't patternmakers do quilt work.

She also felt that the work had a spirit of itself and could be used in the healing arts. So you're looking at this piece—pieces like this were small; pieces were little body coverings or they would go on the chair and you'd lean against them and you'd feel better. Well, I don't know. She was using some kind of massage therapy since there were all of these rocks in them.

When she became ill, I took a little—I call them pocket-sized one—I have a pocketbook-sized one—and put it on her tummy so that she would feel okay in the hospital. She felt that these stories were really important and shouldn't disappear because she talked about these croaking frogs that would croak so loud at night, you didn't know. And she'd talk about people would get them confused with haints. You know what a haint is? A haint's a ghost. And haints, in the South, you always make sure that you were next to the water because haints can't go over water.

You know the bottle trees that you see? You know that bottle trees were made as traps for haints because the haints were so mesmerized by the glistening color that they would just slip into the orifice—the hole of that bottle—and then they'd be trapped there and you could get home. That's a very Congo thing. That is a Congo way at work.

So all of these stories and this kind of glistening stuff—that's what the quilt's about, trapping from haints and reflecting. All of that was important for her work. And it told those stories and I thought, hey, I have to make sure that people see these. And I had other friends who did. Dr. Leslie King-Hammond, who was the dean of graduate studies at the Maryland Institute College of Art, who's now the director of the Center for Race and Culture there. Lowery Sims, who used to be a curator at the Metropolitan [Museum of Art] who's now a curator at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York. They were very, very helpful. George Cecil, who was the curator for my mother's exhibition who's at MICA now, but who's a writer. All these people converged with me to help mom's work be shown.

The work is musical. And it also talks, not only about a different time, but her own personal stories that she sneaks into each stitch because each stitch is a word and the lines of stitches are sentences and they become paragraphs. They become diaries for preliterate people. They become ways for people to talk about their lives when they don't have photos and they don't read and write well, so they can't write books about it. They write these quilts.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: The stories are there. And one of the quilts is the *Three Generations Quilt*.

JOYCE SCOTT: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] That is now—it's funny you should say that because last night I was at a birthday party with a 71-year-old friend. And one of the guests' husbands is—I won't say that. But they are at the Johns Hopkins Center. There's an oncology center and there's another place. Well, there's a walk—there's a bridge from one building to the next. And when you enter this building, there's my quilt—the *Three Generations Quilt*—hitting you in the face. And I've heard from so many people how that just—makes them feel better.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: That's great.

JOYCE SCOTT: It's great.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Maybe you should describe briefly the three—the quilt and the three generations that are referred to there.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: I will. Okay. Well, firstly, this was a quilt that I did not want to sell because this quilt is a really active quilt made out of a quilt from my father's mother, a quilt from my mother and myself.

And I layered them and I cut through them. I used the mola work technique in Panama, I used trapunto, I used all of the things; I embroidered and I stitched; I used all of these—all of these different things to interweave these three generations together. And there's beadwork in it. And, wow, is it—it's just very alive.

And when we talk about forms of music, you can—[hums] *Mmm-mmmm, hmm-hmmm—uh-huh*—hear the blues and the spirituals that I heard in those storefront churches in my youth. But there's—[sings] *skee-dop, ski-da-doo-doo-dee-da, oo bow-de-dow-de-dow*—there's scatting. And there's even a little spoken word: "Yo, everybody up in the house!" It's just like totally drenched in all of these, like, good dinners and all the nourishment I talked to you about. And I wasn't going to sell it because it was that.

But the curator said, you know, if it's that much to you, think of what it could do to others who are ill. And I cannot tell you how many times I've been stopped by people who told me they were coming from the other side of this hospital burdened with the knowledge of what was happening to themselves or their family members and saw this quilt and just went, oh! [Laughs.] Did the James Brown: "Good God!" [Laughs.] May he rest in peace.

[Direction.]

ROBERT SILBERMAN: One other quilt I'd like you to talk about and that's of your mother's. That's the quilt that she started as a young girl and finished much later.

JOYCE SCOTT: *The Fifty Year Quilt*.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Yes.

JOYCE SCOTT: Well, remember, I told you they were under the big quilt tent and they'd be working. Well, you didn't always buy fabric. You cut up the fabric. That's when I talked about the utilitarian quilts were sometimes made of out of the old thrown-away fabrics. And they were great storytelling quilts because you might be somebody like me who's been around the world and is totally full of herself—[laughs]—and thinks she's all that and a bag of Hawaiian chips, kettle—[they laugh]—okay. And you go to the South and you're like, hello, everyone, I'm back from a marvelous trip in Paris. How is everyone doing?

And I don't care who you're, you—whatever ethnic group you're. You have an uncle or you have a Juanita or you have a *jin gua shou* [ph]; whoever you're, you have a auntie like this: "Child, come on over here and give me a kiss. Come on, sit right here. "

"Oh my, why would I sit on that? It's all tattered and torn."

"Baby, that's not tattered and torn. You know what that is? That's Uncle Ben—that's a quilt."

"But there's this big spot?"

"Yeah, that's a spot. That's Uncle Bennie's knee print. You haven't met Uncle Bennie? You don't know Uncle Bennie? Uncle Bennie every year had a victory garden and he was trying to make sweet tomatoes. He had always had the sourest tomatoes. We had so much cha cha pickle. (His daughter's a slut.) You know that Uncle Bennie—" [Laughs.]

Well, those quilts talked about the family history. And those are those preliterate—those are those diaries for preliterate people. The *Fifty Year Quilt* was like that. My mom had small patches of fabric that she brought with her from the South that she started quilting on as a kid learning her stitches.

She had one stitch that her exhibition was named after, called a tumbleurd. The tumbleurd stitch really talks about a dung beetle who rolls dung. And every time the dung—every time it rolls, it leaves a dot in the sand or the dirt. And those dots are called picots when you—when you're sewing, the technical name is called the picot, this little dot. But my mom always called them the tumbleurd marks. That's what they called them—you know, and chicken feet and all these things—there were no other names that directly related to, like, the technical names that we had.

She had these little samples or a dress that was special for her. And she kept putting them together to make this quilt. And then as I became older, she used my swimsuit. I loved *Casper the Friendly Ghost*—we were talking about me and TV—and the swimsuit had these dots and it was white with these lines and it just looked like Casper flying. And so we used that. And she taught me with this quilt by using my old fabrics and her old fabrics.

And after 50 years of schlepping this around—[speaks in Yiddish accent] *mit the dragink*. I'll be Hispanic next. [Laughs.] I'm wearing Rob out. Now, Rob's like, okay, so we're Jewish; okay, drop it! She made this *Fifty Year Quilt*. And there are vignettes on it. Some of it's just stitching. Others have a lot of tumbleurds. And they have the dung beetle on it. There are butterflies. There are faces on it. And it's wool and then just, you know, lightweight fabric.

And I look at it and I just know about all the places that—that she dragged this before she finally lit or lighted herself, got here—because she wanted to go to Chicago. I'm glad she didn't. I love Chicago, but, boy, is that cold! But she met my father and said she got trapped here in Baltimore.

So this quilt was one of those magic carpets that I wrapped myself in. When I talk about wrapping in them and taking these magic carpet rides, there isn't anything except being directly embraced in someone's arms. There's not things that replicate this kind of knowing that someone put each stitch in this, and they know the proper way. There might be a bonnet, and, I don't know, she used a dishcloth from the kitchen, there might be a little bit more of that chicken smell left in there. You know what I mean? Or maybe she used one of her old blouses and you can still have the fragrance of Mom in there. This is very special kind of work.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Incredible.

JOYCE SCOTT: What else do you want to know? I'll just keep talking. [Laughs.]

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Well, maybe we can shift back to when you went to MICA.

JOYCE SCOTT: Sure.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Well, went off to school. Why did you go there?

JOYCE SCOTT: I went to Eastern High School, which was a girls' high school. And I'm so sorry I cannot remember—I do—Olin Yoder was the name of my art teacher. It was a girls' school and across the street was a boys' school. And that was Baltimore; there were two girls' schools and two boys' schools and we—so sister/brother—and we would combine certain classes like music and art and sometimes history. And Olin Yoder was a real support. He saw this gift that I had.

And eventually I received a scholarship to the Maryland Institute College of Art. A four-year scholarship. Back then it was, I think, \$1,400 a year. It's now 40,000 [dollars], I believe. And so I had to do work-study to stay. My father didn't like that; he thought I should be a social worker. And I said, no, I'm going to art school. My mother was overjoyed. So I went to the school not only because I got a scholarship but because it was an art school. And I knew I was going to be an artist. In vitro I knew. So I knew.

In maybe my freshman year—and I say this, I've said it to the teacher who said it to me, but he doesn't believe it—I was told to stop painting for the betterment of myself and the entire human race. [Silberman laughs.] Well, I thought I was going to be a teacher, but this really cemented that I was going to be a teacher. It was the best move that I'll make. And I'm going to do a circle about if I was such a bad painter.

I became an art teacher. Well, when you're an art teacher, they make you study everything. So I was doing all this stuff that my family had done—weaving and stitching and basket-making. I was printmaking. I studied everything.

When I was student teaching with a wonderful teacher, I realized that if I were to be a teacher in public schools, in probably the first three years, I would become a 700-pound alcoholic. This was not for me. So I got my degree in education and I did very well. But I ran off to Mexico and became a hippie like everybody else.

Now, the Maryland Institute of Art was very different than what it's now, only in the sense that it was much smaller. But it was a classic—a classical art school, so sculpture and painting and printmaking and all the things that you quest for, they were there. I didn't have the best liberal arts education, so everyone talks about popular authors and science and things they learned in college. And I really didn't get all of those.

Now you have everything.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: History of art or history of crafts when you were there?

JOYCE SCOTT: History of everything. Oh yes, of the visual arts. Absolutely. Arts and crafts.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: And your mother took you to the Baltimore Museum of Art?

JOYCE SCOTT: And the Walters Art Museum. It was the Walters Art Gallery then. When I had my retrospective [*Joyce Scott Kickin' It With the Old Masters*] at the BMA, the Baltimore Museum of Art—I think it was in the year 2000—they opened the front doors for me.

When I was a kid, well, they didn't know about climate control and how it was destroying paintings. So we always walked in the front door. And the front door was up—it was very kind of Greco-Roman, that kind of thing, with the columns on the outside; Doric, Corinthian, whatever, whatever. And there was a giant sculpture of *The Thinker* out front. And I did what all kids do: You walk by it, you play, you climb on him; you look for his genitalia;

you can't find it. You go into the front.

And my mom would walk with me. What I didn't say about my mother and father and about them not having a lot of academic education—they had a lot of mother wit; mother wit's what we call it—mother wit. Of course that meant I did all the reading for them. I paid the bills, you know, for them.

And walking around the museum with my mother meant that I—we were talking about the paintings and things and I'd have to read who it was and say, it's from Germany. "Oh, I work for German people." That kind of thing. And we'd talk about the paintings and it might be some painting of people working in a field or the colors. It'd be Van Gogh—why is the painting that—the paint that thick on that? Or you know, a lot of Degas stuff with dancers—whatever it was. And I think they had an African collection back then and an American Indian collection. And she understood because that's why it was made to be that way—the building of the museum and the grand halls. She understood the gravitas and the weight of it.

Now, I also remember the Walters Art Gallery—which is now the [Walters] Art Museum—because they had an enormous Egyptian collection. And years later I curated in that museum. Walking around that and just—the Egyptian work, the mummy and all of the cartouches and all the stuff that's painted. And also all of the medieval things. And of course, a lot of jewelry. I'm loving this jewelry. My mom took me—this was, you know, this was a leap for her. This was a—you think about where she could have taken me.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Did she suggest it or did you say, let's go?

JOYCE SCOTT: It's 60 years—it's 50 years ago, so who knows? All I know is I was there.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: You went.

JOYCE SCOTT: And we were there not because a school trip took us—because she took me. Yes, so it was a—it was very different than what the other kids had.

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ROBERT SILBERMAN: This is Robert Silberman interviewing Joyce Scott at the artist's home and studio in—

JOYCE SCOTT: It's fabulous!

ROBERT SILBERMAN: The artist's fabulous home and studio in Baltimore, Maryland, on July 22, 2009, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, card number two—or since we're going to Mexico, *numero dos*.

JOYCE SCOTT: Dos.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: So Joyce, you graduated from—?

JOYCE SCOTT: I graduated from the Maryland Institute College—*colegio de arte*.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: In Baltimore.

JOYCE SCOTT: In Baltimore.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: And then you went south of the border.

JOYCE SCOTT: *Yo voy a México*.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: You went to Mexico to San Miguel de Allende.

JOYCE SCOTT: San Miguel de Allende in Guanajuato.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Why and what did you study?

JOYCE SCOTT: *¿Por qué no?*

ROBERT SILBERMAN: The perfect reason—why not? The spirit of adventure.

JOYCE SCOTT: Well I said earlier, I realized if I were going to be a teacher, I'd be a 700-pound alcoholic. I didn't want to do that. It was 1970 and what would any self-respecting artist do? You go to Mexico and live out your dreams of being a flower child or a hippie.

I went with other artists and we were really just going to wander around and try to find the essence of ourselves

and the deep trueness and why we were put on the Earth [sings] *kum ba yah, my Lord*.

We went to San Miguel de Allende. We were lucky. It was the first year they were starting a graduate program and we got scholarships. At least I got a scholarship to do my graduate study there.

You know, I wanted to go someplace that was different and new and a challenge to myself. I also wanted to go to a place where there were people, in quotes, "indigenous people" who were still living, many of them still having a real grasp on their history and that the history was alive in their country.

I mean, you could go to pyramids. You could do things. There'd be temples they'd have their hand on top of and they'd be making tacos or just like they did hundreds of years ago and there were still people who dressed as they did hundreds of years ago. It was a wonderful, invigorating time. And I'd always been taken care of really well so I wanted to live as an adult and we were hippies.

We weren't like the drug-sodden, terrible hippies but we were—we lived in a house together and we all made art. I sang in a nightclub to make money. It was just very much that kind of '70s thing. I was there when Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix died and did big memorials at the bar that I sang. And it was growing up in a very arty way.

San Miguel de Allende is an arts colony. I found out later it was probably built by Black slaves, this colonial place. So there were people from all around the world. It was bilingual. A lot of English was spoken. That's why I don't know Spanish as well as I should. The *instituto* was bilingual and I was working sometimes with people who were very similar to my mom in the way they gave me artwork, the way they gave me instruction. The weavers and the metalsmiths were very hands-on and very much like my mom and dad.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: It was a program in craft.

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes, my graduate degree is in craft.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: So metalwork, weaving, what else were you doing?

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes, well, I studied—it was similar to my gig except it was much smaller. I studied metal, so I did jewelry. I loved it. I had a giant loom and because it was so big they warped it. So I didn't have to warp my loom because, I swear, if you ever weave, you understand why they call it warping because that's what happens to your brain after you do it.

I did clay. I'd been doing clay. We dyed things. Yes, I did a lot of different stuff. I did some painting, too.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: And were you looking not only at traditional crafts in Mexico but the archeological works? Did you travel around?

JOYCE SCOTT: Archeological work as well as contemporary work, yes, I did travel around Mexico a bit. And then as I—after I left the school and got my degree, my whistle was wet for me to travel around Central America, South America, to see the work in contemporary as well as classical and old, old artwork.

It's a thing about being able to touch it, just touch it, and the fact that people are not—they have homelands but it doesn't feel the same as the—the tribal lands for reservations here, you just shouldn't be walking in their place. They are a sovereign nation.

It's very different in Mexico. You can be with people who have an old-style way of life and who are not only living that but maybe selling that. You can walk into that much easier than you should be able to do here, since it's their sovereign land here.

It's also that they were brown; seeing a place where the majority of the people were brown. That was of great interest to me as well.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: How did the traditional work you saw, or the contemporary work you saw, influence your work? What was your work like at the time?

JOYCE SCOTT: I was doing a lot of stitchery, a lot of weaving. You know, I was just—how could I say, how did it influence me? It was the freedom. If it was anything, it was just that I was absolutely free to partake in whatever I wanted to and that the people were just so wonderful in that they wanted to give to me. And then I gave back in the ways that I could.

Anything that I asked about weaving, they showed me. And the whole metal thing—I do jewelry today. I don't do metal because it's too much like cooking; clay, the same thing. It's too much prep work. It's too much like cooking. It stinks. You've got to clean up. And I'm mesmerized by fire. That's why people blow glass for me. I had

never learned how to do it because it would just all melt away.

My metal teacher taught me the same way—because I had African teachers after that—the same way I believe I would have been taught 500 years ago. He didn't have—I go around and talk to metal departments now and I look at all the wonderful tools they have. He did have a bench and all the stuff but a lot of his stuff was, you take this wire and you twist it like that. Maybe use your pliers but it might be better if you use your fingers to twist it. It was very primal and hands-on and it would be the thing that you could do in your home. It also was so incredibly relatable that I could honestly [phone rings]—

—Miss Barbara, could you get that please?

[Side conversation.]

It was so relatable that I could do that in my studio. I came home and used techniques in my studio. Now we're going to take a break because—no, you're not going to turn it off.

[Side conversation.]

JOYCE SCOTT: Now, see, this is what happens when you're really in somebody's house and not a studio. You get phone calls and everything; we just had some apple juice. And what else do you want to know? [Laughs.]

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Well, so you traveled to Central and South America after school?

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: And then what? Now you have your master's degree. Were you thinking or worrying about career or were you living the hippie life and going to address that when you stopped travelling and went home?

JOYCE SCOTT: I didn't worry about a thing [laughs]. I really didn't worry about a thing. I came home. I guess I thought I might teach, and I did teach when I came home. But I came home and I got the only real job that I've ever had, a nine-to-five job. I came home and became a drug counselor.

And I used the arts as my modalities. We were in an old Catholic school. We painted the walls and we did little theater pieces, and that's how we worked. And I didn't even think about what would happen. After I had that job, where you're working with drug abusers and you see the very best and the very worst of people, I realized that I never wanted to work for anybody again. And I think at 23, I just said, I will be a studio artist. And my mom was, like, yes.

So we bought the house that I'm in now, we both established studios in it and I've been self-employed ever since. But self-employment meant that you'd make artwork and I'd teach some place for a short period of time.

By this time I was doing theater with a man named Robert Sherman and we did theater pieces in New York and in Baltimore back and forth. So that was the way I made money. And I'd save up maybe \$2,000 and then I'd travel with someone I met in graduate school in Mexico, Nora Banner [ph], who I still travel with, still see.

And that's 40 years by now—30 years ago. And once a year we'd go someplace. So we went to Guatemala and Panama and Peru and one other place in Central America; four countries in Africa. By the time that happened, I—we also went to Asia. We went to Hong Kong and Thailand.

But by the time that was happening I was also working with Kay Lawal. We were the Thunder Thigh Revue, traveling all around the United States, Scotland, Holland, and Canada, doing shows that I wrote in collaboration with her called—oh, lots of things. But we were the Thunder Thigh Revue and so I was traveling that way and just all making money and seeing the world as an artist. I'd be teaching sometimes when we'd travel, maybe doing some writing. But it was all about the art.

And I want you to know I was also, when not on the road—because I was at that time on the road maybe two weeks out of the month. I'd travel once or twice a month. I was also seeing all of the United States. I probably missed around six states out of them and I can't even tell you how amazing this is, just to be able to go around this country alone. I'm very proud to be an American. And everything I saw other places I see here, just the geography of the place, and it all informed the kind of artwork I do.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: You were doing—I mean, your work has been influenced by Native Americans, for example. Did you study the Navajo weaving at one point?

JOYCE SCOTT: I went to Haystack Mountain School of Crafts twice. The first time I went, they had a large African and African American double session and so I worked with Twin Sevens [ph], Sevens—I worked with, trying to see, Gimo Brimo [ph]; I worked with a lot of people and I did Gimo's wife—not Gimo—Twin's wife, one of his

wives.

Nikki was a weaver and I studied traditional women's weaving, Yoruba weaving. I'll never do that again—just because it's, you know, too many threads to an inch, all of it. But I did make a wonderful strip there; I learned a great deal and I did lost-wax casting.

Now remember, I'd done that in Mexico and now I'm with a guy from Nigeria who's doing very primal form. He had a little primal, sad little, little way to fire things and it was just—I thought I was, like—I was 500 years ago.

Then I came back again in 1976, which was the bicentennial year, which meant just like Black History Month in February, the bicentennial year, most Native Americans were employed, I can tell you. [Laughs.] It's just like February.

So they did a large Native American session and I studied—I'm so sorry I can't remember her name—with a wonderful Navajo weaver and I learned traditional Navajo weaving, which I will never do again. It's too many threads to the inch, but, boy, I learned a lot. I worked with Hopi artists.

And I learned the peyote stitch there from just another student. We were just hanging out one evening and I was doing all of my work, was either on the loom or sewing on fabric, and she taught me this stitch, which is a stitch that only employs needle, thread, and bead, that is improvisational. I could throw away the other accoutrements that weighed too much or that wasn't translucent enough, because, remember, I'm a hippie, so I want it to be translucent, to have the world come through me, I want the light to shine, blah, blah, blah.

Okay, so this allowed me to do that and this allowed me to go right back and stand in my mom's and grandparents' shoes of improvisation of the work, the immediacy of it, and not having—you could be an itinerant artist in the way that you only needed needle, thread, and beads, some beeswax and some scissors. But you know what I mean. I didn't have to have a loom. I didn't have to drag around a lot of stuff.

I'm trying to get off the whole Yiddish thing because he's going to beat me up later. *Yo tengo mucho mucho cosas entonces.*

So it just opened up the world to me. My artwork changed incrementally because of that because I didn't have the same—the same way I could scat during a song, the same way I could immediately make something happen with crayon or with—I won't say with paint because paint has to dry. That immediacy of stuff, it happened with the peyote stitch and the beadwork.

And, no, I did not do peyote while I was learning it. I know what these people are thinking. No. Let me tell you why they call it the peyote stitch. This is what I was told and I read it. The bulb, the outside of the peyote stitch, of the peyote, has little dots that fall in a diagonal. The peyote stitch is a weave that falls on the diagonal. So it's called the peyote stitch and I'm sure you have to do peyote somewhere.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: We should interrupt this interview for an infomercial commercial. I should say that you're the author of *Fearless Beadwork [Improvisational Peyote Stitch: handwriting & drawings from hell]*. Rochester, NY: Visual Studies Workshop, 1994] which includes not only the instructional part but drawings from *Improvisational Peyote Stitch*.

JOYCE SCOTT: There you go, yes.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: *Peyote Stitch*, published in 1994 by the Visual Workshop, one of the great—

JOYCE SCOTT: In Rochester.

ROBERT SILBERMAN:—one of the great craft instructional manuals of all time, with instructional diagrams plus words of wisdom, trust yourself, etc., and drawings of you in your Superwoman costume with heels and cape and gray stones like triangular sunglasses.

JOYCE SCOTT: Well, I can tell you that I—thank you, Rob—and I can tell you that it's a comic-book format and that I tell everyone because I'm wearing unitards like I did when we were performing with the Thunder Thighs, that the only profanity in this book is the picture of me in a unitard, except in the glossary the term "dickwad" is in it, and I have no idea what it means but I loved this word so much I just threw it in there—because this is an adult book.

I've had people who have liked the book and had people who don't because they took me back to being a freshman. Who taught you how to draw? Shut up, shut up. But I did look at, like, a lot—not—I've always wanted to do a volume two because I developed techniques and learned a lot more. I just have not had the time to sit down and do it. I will, though.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Had you done much beadwork before you discovered peyote stitch and the sort of improvisational possibilities?

JOYCE SCOTT: My mom taught me when I was five. So a lot of my stuff had beads on it. When people say you're such a good beadworker—I'm 60 years old—I say, I've been doing it for over 50 years. If I don't know how to do it by now—*ihíjole!*—come on, you know.

So, yes, I'd done it, but it was really sewing and it really was this thing of the translucency of the work wasn't there because there was fabric on the back of it or so much thread shoved into it, and once again I'm working on a bead loom, like a large loom. So you have to deal with warped threads and the cleanup—how do you make it look good and how do you shape it. And this peyote stitch allows me to have a different communion with the materials and the design principles, properties.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: You've said you've never been satisfied or comfortable with just one medium, and you've worked in so many and we'll talk about some of the others, but in beadwork, when you got to that point, at what point did you say, now I know what to do with this stitch and now I'm making work that's my work, not what I'm doing at a workshop.

JOYCE SCOTT: Okay, let me say I was very seldom ever at beadworking workshops but I did refer to other cultures to make beadwork and I was using techniques the same way that everybody else used them.

When I first learned the peyote stitch, I was so happy. I made all these big figures. I made all these things in jewelry. I put in everything, I would say, except the kitchen sink, but if I think back there might have been a sink in there—and every time I made these big glorious pieces of work, which sold right away, I had to relearn what I was doing.

I realized that I was reinventing the wheel for myself because I had not mastered the technique. I took all the extraneous materials out and only worked with needle, thread, and bead and when I really—it became second nature to me when the needle and thread were real extensions of my fingers and when I was thinking about something I could immediately do it and not think about how to do it. That's the way it is now.

It's like talking. I don't have to learn how to talk now. I know how to talk, boy, do I ever. Rob's shaking his head, like, boy, do you ever, Rob, and it's the same thing with the beadwork. It's second nature. And that's when I knew that I knew what I was doing.

And that's also when I started to truly teach it because I wouldn't teach it before because I'd had teachers who you were embarrassed for. So I could teach it then and it was very fluid and it's that extension. It's like watching things just descend and just jump out of you. It's like talking because it's so immediate.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: And at that time, were you making both jewelry, which I guess in this case means primarily your great necklaces, and your rings, and sculptural?

JOYCE SCOTT: Everything, yes, and garments at the same time, too, yes. Remember this is '70, so everybody was vested in themselves—new thing, new thing, new hat—and it was also a great way of making money. But I was also talking—I look back at these earlier things and a lot of these necklaces were about death and rape and politics and racism and it was—I was on such a mission after learning this and being so in love with the technique because I'm the right person for this job.

Do you know how people find what they're right for? I am the peyote stitch girl and it had just allowed me to spit out a lot of things that I would have had to really mull about. This beadwork allowed me to do that in the artwork.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: What was on your mind, what you were seeing in the world, could go into your work immediately.

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes, and what I was living and being; all could come out very easily, so there were fat things. A lot of this was at the very beginning of rap music, when rap music was called jungle music, when rap music was put down, and that's before gangster rap, remember. It was just Black people making this kind of music.

And then when I did a piece called *What You Mean Jungle Music?* [1988] because after hearing all that I'm watching them white people sell Coca-Cola with it, rapping like this, "If you want to have Coke and you,"—uh-oh, I've got to do some artwork on this.

So it just allowed me to contemporize this technique and not help it be mired in one way of thinking about beadwork which is in, quote, "ethnic art" and art to wear or ritual work, work used for sculpture or things used in ceremonies and in quotes. I don't use this word very much, but people understand when I say "fetishes" and

things.

So I and another band of people, we became this motley crew of folks who were trying to get folks to look at beadwork as just another technique that was comparable to other high art techniques, and since sculpture talks about dimensionality, not necessarily material, you can do beadwork as sculpture and have it viewed as such.

Right? Not only a crafty—notice I didn't say "craft" because I'm a craft person as well and I believe in that—but some kind of crafty thing that you can pay less for and appreciate less. It's the same artistic aesthetic impulse to make it as you do. And Rauschenberg's a great example. He put a quilt in his work.

What makes a quilt in his work less when it's a quilt? What makes it better being in his work? What makes painting a cup better than a cup? If you ask a potter that, they'd have, like, 7 billion kinds of answers to talk about just the brilliance and the essence of why you would even choose a cup because of its beauty and what it brings forth.

His eyeballs are twirling. He's thinking of something. You're thinking.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: I'm thinking about that necklace, *What You Mean Jungle Music*, and when I first saw it I couldn't believe it. It's a great work, and if I remember that incorporates non-bead elements as many of your jewelry necklaces do.

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes, photographs and—

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Did you do that from almost the start?

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes, because before I really, really started working in beadwork, I was in, quote, "a mixed-media artist," too, and I did lots of stuff, lots and lots of work with things all mixed in it and it's very interesting how your artwork is a salve for you, if you allow it to, how it's medicine for you because I had a hysterectomy when I was very, very young.

I really didn't think that it made this difference because I wasn't sure that I wanted children and all that other stuff. I did for years burnt-up gnarled babies made out of mixed-media things—at that time I was doing a lot of clay—clay mixed with beadwork and hair and photographs and coiled work, you know, fiber, and they were all babies who weren't formed.

Later on in life, I looked back and thought, well, look what I was working out. So it always had a lot of materials working but the beadwork allowed me to bring once again the translucency and the immediacy of it and because, I tell you, I'm afraid of power tools—I'm smelling trash—and the drilling and all that other stuff and baking and the dirt.

I'm a slob, just having to clear your studio, oy, beads are not that. I'm sorry, I should say—*ihíjole!*—because the, oy, we're out of Eastern Europe now and now we're in Central or South America.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: We're moving around the world. Some of what—we sort of touched on it—your work obviously is at times extremely political and extremely direct, to the point of being shocking, but also extremely funny.

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Was it always a combination of—not shock and awe but shock and humor from the beginning?

JOYCE SCOTT: You might have just described me. There's something about when, in your DNA, when certain barriers were given to you. Mine are—if I don't—I got them but they might drop or they're not in full force or something because I, in the comedy especially—I've gotten better about saying it to people—but I don't have those barriers up and I'll say things.

I honestly don't know why I would make art unless I could make it the way I make it, unless I could spit it out. I don't know why. I just—I'm working now and I started a series last year called *Day after Rape*, and I also just started a series called—I think it's, like, *Flayed Tanzanian Albinos*. It's about the albinos in Tanzania who are being killed because the Africans think that they have some special magical force, so they kill them. They dismember them. They cut their hands and their feet off and I—don't you smell something stinky?

Should I just close this door? Now you're getting the urban stink-smell. It just rained, and I think we're getting something, maybe even the trash. Talk amongst yourselves—*hable con nosotros*.

I can't stand up, I got bad legs. Oy, ee, ai, ah! Evil.

OK, I'm going to close the door. I'm walking; I'm really toddling, because I have bad knees. I'd doing with the toddle. Do you think we need the fan? I'm closing the door; I'm walking back. I'm not falling over the cord. Now I'm sitting—

ROBERT SILBERMAN: And we're back.

JOYCE SCOTT: Ta-da!

ROBERT SILBERMAN: The other fantastic great, or one of the other fantastic great Baltimore artists, filmmaker John Waters, did say, "She lures us with beauty, cushioning our fall from the shock with humor," and I think that's true. Have you ever gotten in real trouble or had problems because people objected too much, or institutions had strong concerns about, your work because of your outspokenness and the strength of it?

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes, sure. Well, I went to one place, I won't say where because I don't want to in any way get anybody in trouble, but sometimes it's your own folks.

So I've gone to a couple places. One place I went to and the Black staff wouldn't talk to me because they didn't like me using the N-word and they didn't like my talking about, necessarily the abuse of women, or the overt nudity that I use in the work. And I said, well, you know, now, that doesn't make sense to me. I'll answer any questions you guys have. I'll talk to you about it, and once you talk to me about it you might understand not only why I do it but why I feel that it's important to have these things done. And they all say the same things about the big fat Rubens—the women in the Rubens paintings—and they'll accept Picasso with the girl's legs splayed open and, and, it wrapped her head and one of her eyeballs was gone.

But this work, so I've had that. I will say that I was supposed to show in Nashville and that entire show was cancelled because they said it was really the content of the work. I've read the guest books from some of the shows and there've been some people who were out-and-out white supremacists, who'd talk about this being nigger art and all kinds of other things.

There'd be people who didn't know I was African American and thought I was trying to take advantage of the imagery, in some way co-opt it or belittle folks. I've had people who just don't like the idea that I so blatantly talk about sex. It's sort of like telling secrets about your ethnic group.

I've had all that. The majority of what I get, though, is really—is just very positive and people being delightful and really supportive of what I do. But I also—knowing the work, I think I'm supposed to expect that kind of work because these are hard issues. And although they are specifically sometimes about African Americans, they are really about all humans.

I think if we don't talk about it then there won't be the possibility of change. There are people who think because Obama's now president, okay! It's done, all right. Not by any stretch of the imagination. And thank God he's profound enough to tell people that as well.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Could you talk about how you actually develop a work, the process?

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes, there are so many ways. It might be as simple as I've had a dream, or sometimes it might be a Martin Luther King moment, I have a dream. [Laughs.] It might be that I'm in the studio and I'm just confounded and I just start working and then something happens.

It might be that I've been working on a specific—working with blue the whole time and I make myself not work with blue anymore; work with certain colors, certain shapes. I might have seen something on TV or heard kids say something and think, I ought to work about this.

This thing about the albinos so profoundly hurt me, that another human being—first, that we do it all the time. We look at each other and we don't see ourselves as humans, so we kill each other.

But here's a person who's afraid to go out. He is African like you're African. If you think he's special, instead of elevating him in his specialness, you kill him, and you harvest him like you're harvesting sheep.

You don't even do what you do with a sheep, [where] you eat everything on the body. You may just want his hands or his arms and you cut him up and you leave him on the side of the road. Some people have been found like that.

So I made body parts and I'm going to continue. The fact that women are being used as pawns in war, they're raped, they're impregnated, they're made to be servants and/or prostitutes—they're not prostitutes, because they're not getting paid. Sex slaves for people at war, the very people who represent your daughter, your mom, your sister, your auntie—that, really, I can't believe it.

So I'm not thinking—I don't want to do the rape but what happens the day after it when she's left? What happens? That stuff, and because there's so much to say about it they become serious because they take so long. And I'm just becoming a better person—that word—pushing this stuff through and working it through it myself so I don't become one of those people who use that kind of behavior as an excuse to be mean to people or to do this or that.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: I think one of the great works you've done, but one of the great works of our time about outrage and topical political art, in the sense of responding to something, was your work on Rodney King. *They Squashed Rodney King's Head Like a Watermelon*.

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes, thank you. The Philadelphia Museum of Art owns that piece and that really was—that was me trying to use some kind of multileveled intellectuality in it, in a sense that the watermelons are euphemisms for African Americans, and beating him and squishing it and squishing him and how he was just nothing but a stereotype or a look or an idea.

Are you getting warm now? Okay, keep going.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Well, there's so much to say on that issue because your work has addressed racism and sexism and violence so powerfully. I wonder—

JOYCE SCOTT: And beauty.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: And beauty and humor and politics. I'm still interested in this question of medium and why you use one at a particular time rather than another. But I wanted to ask you about another medium, which is prints, because you've done monotypes and I read that you said that you felt more free. I think the first set of monotypes you did was on the subject of child abuse.

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: But you felt more free working in that medium. If you have an issue, do you have to sort of think, do I do—this is on my mind, now do I do a necklace piece or do I do a sculptural piece or an installation piece? How has that happened over the years?

JOYCE SCOTT: Well, you know, babe, you can ask a material and ask it and it may not have the answer for you. So then I'll go write something about it—or I can ask that and ask it and I'll have to use the material that works the best. And you can be very frustrated and then you realize, well, the beads aren't the medium that I should be using.

These monoprints that I did—I think I did them at Pilchuck [Glass School], the first monoprints—were really my having the ability to be in the studio and just do stuff, make prints and then print them; and also because I was in Pilchuck I wasn't in my city and people didn't necessarily know me, so I could talk about issues that were either personal or salient to groups of women or whatever and not worry about being questioned about it.

Those prints were really important and I did some prints that just were strange, and I didn't even know what they were about. They were good prints, but they were just strange. It was wonderful for me. This goes back to the printing, to the painting, because printing is the closest I'll probably ever get to be a real painter, the monoprints that I do.

Although I have thought, because I keep looking at painting—if there's so much painting out there and there's so much of it that's crappy and I'm a crappy painter and that crappy painting is selling, maybe I should go back to painting. It may be the environment where I can really evolve as a moneymaker. [They laugh.]

The prints are also a way of getting dirty, being childlike and have someone else clean up for you, because you're in their studio and it's a way of working. I love working with paper. It's a way of working. It's just another way of doing stuff. I think it's also a way of working with a medium that people will understand.

People still very much understand drawings and prints and painting and books, and that had a different connection to them than beadwork does.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Since you mentioned glass, let's talk about glass for a minute. You were at Pilchuck, I believe, in '92 and then again with a co-sponsorship of the Tacoma Museum of Glass a few years ago, and you were in UrbanGlass [New York, NY] in between.

JOYCE SCOTT: Oh, I worked at lots of places since then.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: What's it been like working with glass in the different times?

JOYCE SCOTT: The first time—I'm sorry, I keep walking on you. The first time that I really went into a glass studio, as I remember it, was at Haystack Mountain School of Crafts and I can't remember who was doing glass there. His name may come back to me.

He was wonderful and I had the wife in my class and the husband was in his class and we would go to the glass studio and sit around, and they called us glass bunnies and I was, like, we're not glass bunnies; we're glass whores because we tell you what to do. We define. And all of us laughed and we drank and we—was it Fritz Scholder—no, Fritz is a painter, an American Indian painter. I was a name like that.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Dreisbach?

JOYCE SCOTT: It was Dreisbach. That's who was there and—was it Fritz Dreisbach? What's his first name?

ROBERT SILBERMAN: I think so.

JOYCE SCOTT: That's the Fritz part. He was fabulous and he made things. We made little things and then I maybe brought some beadwork on wire and he blew into that and that really wet my whistle. I think I went to Penland [School of Crafts]. I know I did glass in Penland. I was asked to be an artist-in-residence at Pilchuck Glass School. I did that twice and then I came back and taught once beadworking, flameworking with beadwork.

Then, and while I was at—the first time I was at Pilchuck I also worked at the Pratt—Pratt which is an art center—Pratt Art Center [Pratt Fine Arts Center]. We did glass and then we—I came back and taught a couple of times.

Then my retrospective went to the Tacoma Art Museum. I did UrbanGlass as well and then I worked with Anthony Corradetti here and we went to—I ended up—I just lost my train of thought.

My retrospective went to the Tacoma Glass Museum and they brought me out. And there, when you talk about really taken care of very well—they take care of you differently in each place, but Pilchuck and Tacoma are incredibly contemporary and well-equipped and being at the Tacoma Art—first of all, my show's up. I'm out there, of course, at the exact same time—it's a conference on race at another school.

So we're doing both and I am working in that studio, which is a big silo.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: I've been there. It's a magnificent space.

JOYCE SCOTT: You know, and they have a screen when someone interprets, another glass person tells you what you should do. A student of mine who'd been my assistant in one of these—I think Penland, one place—who lived in Portland, came and she worked with us and I had, I think, four to five people doing whatever I wanted.

I was a pig in slop. I was a fool. I had the bestest time ever. I painted. I did enamel work on glass for the first time. They blew this most sensuous celadon giant vase that had, like, the lips of a flower. It was so beautiful. And they included these paintings that I'd done and I want you to know I would do paintings right away with Paradise paint and they'd put them in the garage and warm them up and then they'd gather and they'd do exactly what I wanted.

And we put diacrylic glass on and it wasn't compatible and it cracked off and I just was afraid I was going to lose this piece. And this young guy came out of nowhere and he said, I'll grind that off for you. I'm, like, wow, you can fix it, what do you mean grind—he ground off everything that was bad and then I painted that with enamel. So that was all new to me.

I got to yell at the audience. I just had the bestest time ever and they were all very sweet to me and I got to be Joyce in a glass studio while people were watching and filming this, poor fools.

Then I've also done lampwork different places also, flamework. I just did it at the—excuse me—thank you, the Virginia Center for the Arts in Richmond and I worked flamework around.

Now, this kind of glass thing, see, this is sort of like what we do in theater, where you talk about the word being made physical. That's what you're doing when you're acting it out and glass is like these thoughts being made physical in a real different way for me and I can get them to blow images and figures and do that; and I do, then, get to be a bit pompous and *la reina* and I get to tell them what to do—"No, no, no, I don't like that! What is that?"—experiment, I've got to think how I want this.

You get to draw on the floor and I sing to them sometimes and—you know I'm a nut, silly, but I get to see what I want. You learn about loss because with glass it doesn't all come out of the annealer, or you get it, and me, I drop it, and so it's all very wonderful.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: It's a performance piece but there's a product.

JOYCE SCOTT: Did you say Prada or product?

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Wearable glass.

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes, and what it does is it lets me have people who don't do the kind of work that I do and watch them change.

I've had people say that's not going to work or I've had people say that's stupid, because a lot of this is the integration of glass directly into—integration of beadwork directly into the glass and they're shocked that if I cast it a certain way—it's usually the blowing where it's just not compatible. They're shocked, like, oh my God, it worked. I'm like, "Uh-huh, y'all don't listen to me, right? I had told you and everything." That's a Baltimore girl.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Another successful experiment.

JOYCE SCOTT: Exactly.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: The naysayers disproved.

JOYCE SCOTT: That's the whole thing about the work. See, when earlier you asked me and I said I'm just—I'm not patient and I don't feel good about doing one medium—that's my quest for knowledge and it's also the quest, like the debunkation [laughs], the debunk-eology [*sic*] of the idea that things—it's the same thing with life, things can't work together.

It's not that they can't. It's *how* do they work together. If something breaks, it's not a mistake. It's an opportunity to someplace else. All these things are roads that happen. I just—that's what I love about the making of the artwork and love about collaborating with others, where whenever you hear "no"—with personalities like mine it's like, "What you talking about, Willis?" It's like I don't—you not the boss of me, I do whatever I want to do, let's try this.

Sometimes, the best part is when they're like, okay, but it's stupid—oh hell, it's fabulous. Then you get to have that kind of fun with them. Sometimes I'm too much for people. I don't know, I could be a little too much for them.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: And the last time out there I think you also incorporated African sculptures, like wood figures, masks.

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes, I'm doing a lot of incorporating. It's like I wanted to use these images and why should I have to make it? [Laughs.] So I just started buying them and they were so pure and right there, and, remember, I don't want to work with power tools, so there's a wooden piece of sculpture right there and I'm not doing anything that's not cool because a lot of these pieces, they really are made just to be sold and be used.

They're not religious pieces, most of them. They're made to be used by people. So I'm using them and I like how literal I can be about it. I'm about to do a series. I did one or two of them—called Ancestry Progeny, where you can't choose your ancestors and they can't choose you and so all those rules we set up about what should be, who we should be, what will happen, you have no control over.

Plus, you think you're one thing and then all of a sudden your DNA pops out a baby with blue eyes and blond hair and you're dark-skinned and you're, like, what? Or Mick Jagger sings with those lips and nobody can say a word, you know what I mean?

Another thing I've been trying to work on but I haven't found enough examples of, it's a series called Africa in Unexpected Places.

I was going through this magazine and then we got to men's underwear and this white guy had these buttocks and I'm, like, Africa in unexpected places. Or you'll see—actually I did that in a performance once—you'll just see things, lips, or you'll see people who seem to be outside of what the stereotype of who they are, and you know that's Africa creeping out.

Well, that's the thing about ancestry and progeny. You can't control it. We think we are. We're much more fluid in how we interact with each other, especially sexually.

So these pieces, one piece is the arms and legs are made out of African sculpture but the person, the face is white and they're wearing a white dress. Then the pieces that I'm working on now are like that, but they may have—they're Inkisi pieces so they may have African sculptures with bottles and mirrors and things, where you're reflecting and you're keeping possessions from.

They're very traditional in that sense, but I'm using the materials and the techniques differently. But the impulse

and the form of artwork comes from very traditional renderings in Africa. Native American work a lot, that's another thing. Many, many African Americans are part American Indian. Some folks think that's good. Other folks don't think that's grand.

I think it comes from quite a wonderful history of one group of people who were being marginalized and pushed off their land and being moved around, American Indians, many times accepting runaway slaves and integrating them within that process.

Or people who were together—people forget that the kind of racial laws and things that we have now happened; a lot of them didn't come here. They came here after people were getting along very well, and people can see how you can lose power like that.

So I do—of course, beadwork is a big technique that's used by many American Indians, whether they just do it for their own satisfaction or in their artwork, and I like to talk about how we're not who we think we are, and African Americans are very proud to say that we're part Native American—and sometimes Native Americans aren't that happy about it [laughs].

ROBERT SILBERMAN: You did a magnificent wearable art piece influenced by Native American patterns.

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes, the moccasins and the dress.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: I believe Leslie King-Hammond, there's a picture of her wearing it.

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes, I did a lot of that and you know I went to lots of powwows in my life, a great one in Minnesota. Lots of powwows, looking at the artwork, looking at the work of Seminoles, and that being a group of people who's mixed. Part of the war was about African slaves with the Seminoles and going to Oklahoma; and going to historical societies and knowing that the Trail of Tears, that when Cherokees came from the Carolinas and walked over they brought their wives, Indian wives—they maybe brought their Black wife and they might have had a white wife, too, and how that really has influenced the kind of work that they do. A big, big population in North and South Carolina are Africans and there's Cherokee in Lumberton, those groups.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Right, multiculturalism in life and in art.

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes, yes, that's we—we know who we think we are. That might be the title of a next art exhibition, because we're not and it plays out now our everyday life. I like to do artwork that is on the debunkification. That's got to be a rap, a hip-hop word, the debunkification of all the mysteries that people think they got, that's what I'm talking about.

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ROBERT SILBERMAN: This is Robert Silberman interviewing Joyce Scott at the artist's home and studio in Baltimore, Maryland, on July 22nd [2009] for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

JOYCE SCOTT: *Bonjour!*

ROBERT SILBERMAN: *Bonjour.* Card number three.

Joyce, I wanted to ask you about your work in installation art that you've also done, including a show in San Francisco at the Art Institute in 1995, which was "Images Concealed." There you worked with language, you worked with painting, you worked with another set of materials. Could you talk about that project?

JOYCE SCOTT: Well, for a while, you know, that really came out of those hippie days of performance and happenings and instant art. I've been doing performances for a while—some are larger; some are smaller. And I've been [doing] installations for a while.

But I was asked to come and do an installation and, you know, when they send you the floor plan and you see it and it's this size of three inches by four inches, you think, I can do that. So I planned it out. Once I got there, it was, like, my God, this is so big. But they knew that I wanted to do something on "images concealed," on "hiding in plain sight," and I had students to work with me, so I took this entire gallery and turned it into a kind of light show and a series of altars that spoke about love seen, love hidden, about people seen, feelings seen, spoken of, internal, subconscious.

So I had a lot of different things and I used a lot of materials. We painted the walls magenta. Then I painted a giant skeleton on one. We printed one of my poems and next to the words were different tchotchkes and peepoes [ph] and shtunkies [ph] and nickel-lickles that I'd collected in my life and made and that my mother had made—a felt frog she made me—and that kind of thing, and dolls, and we nailed them up, that's the periphery.

And then there was one glass piece that was dripping glass figures, and on the floor, it's a skeleton made out of rice and coal with glass in it. There was another altar that was a pyramid shape that had hundreds of incense in it—that one was made to love, with hearts.

You know, I had a young white student in there. And the ethnicity makes a difference in this sense. Remember, this was in San Francisco, and I said, I want you to go buy me, like, 150 sticks of incense, because we were going to use them during the show. And I don't want any of those, you know, designer scents or anything. I want you to go to him and say, I want something that smells of love.

So I can see this young little white girl going to probably a Middle Eastern or Asian person, buying incense, saying, "I'm working on a piece for Joyce Scott; she's an artist at the San Francisco Art Institute. And she's doing a really big piece and she told me to buy 150 sticks of incense that smells like love." And she brought them back and they were perfect.

I had walls covered with aluminum foil that you could press your hand and leave your handprint on or write on. And there were two artists—two altars, one covered in pennies and that one was—I mean, this one, I just kept going. And I had veils of beads, big curtains of beads around until I ran out of money and the lives of students. I was just going to keep—I was going to really keep working on this. And at the top of the steps was a very small exhibition where I think I had four to six pieces, all about stereotypes and the sexual objectification of African American men, so a lot of Black penises used in that exhibition.

You could tell you were in California, in fact, San Francisco, because when it opened they allowed us to light the incense. The incense—150 incense sticks—covered the entire place in this kind of smoky, love scent [laughs]. People were reappearing and appearing. I remember we used—because my theater, we had theater lights—that were gelled, so parts were green and parts were pink, and it was really quite amazing. It was a lot of fun.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Was that your most ambitious installation? Have you continued to do them since?

JOYCE SCOTT: You know, there're not a lot of money that I find for it unless—maybe the one at Charleston, [S.C.], *Believe I've Been Sanctified* [1991], might have been as ambitious because of—the piece was between 15 and 17 feet tall and I had to find a site and I took the carcass of their old art museum, someone was living under it and I used the columns to make hanging trees and my mom came down with me and she helped me build that.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: That was in Charleston for the American Spoleto Festival [Spoleto Festival USA].

JOYCE SCOTT: Yeah. It was, I think, the first year that Mary Jane Jacob really curated a large, international, site-specific installation show at Charleston.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Right. Twenty artists, including a number of other really great artists—Antony Gormley and Ann Hamilton and others working at different sites around town.

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes. They're both very funny people. Gormley is just hilarious.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Right now he has people up on a plinth in London, in the main square, being art works for a day. [Laughs.]

JOYCE SCOTT: I went to see his installation and he was at the prison—an old prison. I mean, an antique, old prison. And he was building a bulbous kind of—like a goiter growth under the stairs and he's lying down and said, "Hey, hello, Joyce, how are you?" That's—that's a really bad cockney. It wasn't like that. It's like, "Hello, Joyce, how are you?" I said, "So you're the Gormley cat, right?" "Yeah." And he's—he's rubbing this big goiter-shape like it's a woman—[They laugh.] And I'm saying things to him, like, [speaks in New York accent] "Anthony, Anthony, what you doing? Get the hell out from under there. You're driving me crazy with that."

So then he took me to this room where it was just filled with those figures—hundreds and hundreds of figures in a prison. I said, you're pretty crazy.

I'm sorry. Are you—

ROBERT SILBERMAN: No. Great. No. I wished I had seen it. I wished I'd seen your work, too. But—

JOYCE SCOTT: Hamilton, she was amazing.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Maybe we should talk—she did a piece with blue jean material.

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Maybe we should a little more about the *Sanctified* just to describe it and talk about the work is built on the remnants, these old columns of the museum, which before that was connected to all kinds of racist institutions, right?

JOYCE SCOTT: Well, it was—it was the art museum. I called the Black Historical Society and said, "I'm thinking about using this space to do an installation for the show." And they said, "Why do you want to use it? They never wanted us in there in the past." And I said, "Well, that's why I'm thinking of using it." And they said, "Huh?" And when I heard that "huh," I realized there were levels on both sides that I could play with.

So there were four big columns and they just had—I was going to say Hurricane Helen or Hurricane something that knocked down all these—everything—

ROBERT SILBERMAN: You had the tree—the tree fragments for the tops.

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes, so I used the tree fragments for the actual treetops and then I had all of these beads on a line sent down from New York and we made them weeping willows. Now, when I went up on that cherry-picker with this guy, I didn't have—this was just the beginning of using those nail guns, you had to squeeze really hard to make it work and I don't have that kind of strength in my hand. And he was just mean to me, because I wanted him to nail and I had to show him where to point but I couldn't do it myself. So that was his power over me and he kept saying but don't shake the catering. And I realized my power was in my hips. [Laughs.]

So every time we'd go to staple, I'd do a little swagger and it would—and he turned around and, like, what, what happened? What do you mean? I ain't do nothing.

So we did these four trees. Then we—go between 15 and 17 feet tall, all dripping. And then hanging from the center was a tree that I turned upside down that David—Hamm—David, you know, the Prix de Rome winner, David Hamill—that's not his last name.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Hammons?

JOYCE SCOTT: Hey, thank you. David Hammons came over, he gave to me—and, you know, I called it *Prick de Rome* because so many guys get it. You're another *Prick de Rome*, aren't you? [Laughs.] He said, I think you can use this. It was a tree. He turned it upside down so the roots were up. It looked like a person and my mom—sewed all these things inside lace for me, and so they became like the entrails, and we sewed them up and that became the figure that was lynched.

When people were watching me work on it, they'd say, what is this, and I'd say, well, this is about transformation. I didn't want to say "lynching," because I knew there was going to be "viewer intervention" since it was in a park—meaning vandalism. And under this lynch figure is a giant pyre of logs that I got students to paint later on—sort of painted them bright colors. And then we lit it like an opera stage. And I—you know, I even thought I'd come up and sing one night.

However, it was vandalized before I could take pictures of it lit. I knew it was going to be vandalized. Then they told me somebody was living under it. And also, people yelled at me because this was where people would have weddings, and I chose it and they couldn't have their weddings there. But it was very successful.

People paid—let me tell you why I chose that. As we were wandering around Charleston, my looking for places, I went to a plantation, I wanted to wrap an entire tree. What's wild about this is that all these ideas that I had, like, in 1989—whatever this was—

ROBERT SILBERMAN: '91.

JOYCE SCOTT: '91—have been done now by other folks. I was going to wrap the whole tree in beads on the plantation as, you know, a special tree. And then—and I'm laughing and I went into the big house, I was looking for slave quarters because I was going to do a slave work. They didn't have any slave quarters on this space, and I said, now, wait a second. This is really far away. Who's going to come out here and review this? They said, probably not a lot of people are going to come this far out. So I said, I'm going back to the city. Everybody else was going to be in the city and get reviewed. I'm going back.

So I went around, I went to one place that had the slave quarters and the big house. The big house was being redone. They took me to the slave quarters. The quarters was just like any other project. The steps were kind of broken down and the rooms were small, no windows. And I didn't have enough budget to do what I wanted there. And then by happenstance I kept driving by these columns and that went back to what we were talking about—the old Roman and Greek days, and it just worked for me.

And when they said, yeah, you can have it. Now, you got to remember, this is a wonderful thing from Mary Jane

Jacob, who knew my work and knew my work being, the beadwork being probably no bigger than two feet at that time. And she said, I believe in you. And so I did a piece that was 17 feet tall. A lot of people didn't like it—some people did.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Great work of art; a great job of curating as well.

JOYCE SCOTT: Oh, she did a great job curating.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: She did phenomenal work. It became "Places with a Past [: New Site-Specific Art in Charleston"], I believe was the title—

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes.

ROBERT SILBERMAN:—of the volume.

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes. And, you know, she—I don't know if she's still doing it but she did it year after year. [Gian Carlo] Menotti hated it. He resigned. There was a lot of drama attached to it, it being a music festival and opera too. But it worked really well.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Have you done any other works that large, that scale? Because—

JOYCE SCOTT: I don't think so.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Could you talk for a minute about the flip side, which is working small-scale on your bead pieces, which are extremely powerful but also relatively small.

JOYCE SCOTT: Usually small, yes. Well—in saying that, I started going back to small pieces because my beadwork had gotten to be, like, three, four feet tall. I mean, I started doing the large things, and the addition of blowing cast glass allowed me to do larger pieces.

For some reason, I started back to doing these small pieces because they were—they were intricate and very intimate, and that's the thing about working in my studio and these smaller pieces, they are a sort of meditation—and we were talking about spirituality and about religion, they are ways of having a prayer and a direct contact, or whatever your spiritual base is. And you can do it alone, for as long as your hands and your brain allow you to. You have no one to answer to but yourself and the muse that forces you, who cajoles you into making this work.

When you're doing large pieces, you must submit to others. You have to submit to timetables and budgets and to people who are doing well and those who aren't doing well, but you can't look at them and call them "stupid" and kick them in the knee, as you really would like to.

So one big difference is that I'm no longer truly in total control. And I have to do such planning that I can't always make the changes that I would in the studio because I'm reliant upon others. I have a budget and I make materials. I also have to be aware that—of how people view it. When I'm no longer making a piece that I'm in total control of, then sometimes people have their own set rules about what can and can't exist in these spaces.

So I might want to really do, you know, a 40-foot penis, but I'm not doing it. That might have been the truest—to have a lynched penis over a fire—might have been the truest piece that I could have done and spent all that money on beads to create a big—[inaudible]. That would not have flown in Charleston.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Spend a year dealing with the controversy.

JOYCE SCOTT: And a controversy that would not have been about the sexual objectification of African American men. It would have been about using a big penis. So that—those are some real differences in the making of it.

Now, the great pluses are, is that you're out of yourself. You're being allowed to involve yourself in a community, whether they want you there necessarily or not, or whether they understand what your import and input will be. The fact that you go beyond the set rules that you make for yourself because you're out of your comfort zone. Even, I think, artists who are consistent public artists and who do size-specific work, part of the zest of it, part of the quest, is to go outside of your comfort zone and to be tested, your mettle tested and that is what kept happening to me.

I mean, David Hammons coming to me, giving that tree was a sly way of saying, Joyce, this is not up to snuff. And instead of my doing this: Who do you think you are? No. You're from New York. All you New Yorkers—no, no. I'd said, okay: Let's see how I can make this really good. He's telling me something, but it also is a way for me to prove myself to myself and to him and to others, because it was still the same—it was still the same way that I work, even though I've been through all these planning, we still were doing beads on stuff.

I had to ask the questions. I said, I know somebody's going to jump on that lynch figure and pull it down. Can I put barbed wire in it? And they said, yes. And I said, you're really going to let me put barbed wire in it? And it was that kind of flat question like, "barbed wire in it." And they said, yeah. And I did. And nobody pulled it down. I'm sure somebody would go, oh, gee, ouch! Oosh!

It's different in that it allows your audience to—there was someone who had made a really nice—in a little park in the middle of a neighborhood, houses around the little park. It had a lot of loud sounds and little stanchions with things written in. An artist who should have known better, went out there with pliers and tore it up. Now, not only could he have killed himself, he's an artist, he should know—

So I knew mine would—you always have to think of how your viewer might intervene in the work.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Right. Public art means the public's there in many ways. Some more problematic—

JOYCE SCOTT: You know, it's not unlike doing public singing. I just did something, the re-commemoration of the Billie Holliday—you have a Billie Holliday sculpture on Pennsylvania Avenue [in Baltimore]. She's from—she's not from Maryland but she lived a long time in Maryland and she sang on the avenue. Pennsylvania Avenue was like 125th Street in New York.

And the band's right across the street from a market in a very challenged neighborhood, that's slowly changing, and as the band was setting up—and I was the guest singer—that was the first time I ever sang with the band—I was watching three cops handcuff people. It's a place that has a lot of down-and-out people walking and you see them. They look a certain way. They're down and they look it.

The band starts playing. They're so appreciative and they change. And then the same kind of faces I saw when the kids came and watched me and my mom do stuff to make this, or then somebody would ask me what's it about and I would tell him.

And, you know, I'm singing and people are yelling and I'm sitting, waiting while the band's playing and people would come up—no barrier—the other thing about public art, no barrier of stage. The stage is not what a stage is in theater. They came up on the stage and was staring at the drummer. He's just so good—or on the stage, a woman comes up, she wasn't even listening for a while, came up and danced. Put her stuff down on the edge of the stage, danced all over the stage, and then left.

People asked if they could sing. This is a performance. This is like going to a theater somewhere and, say, can I sing? It really is a performance. They let him sing. It was—it was wonderful. It was the same kind of thing with the public work, the kind of real viewer intervention.

I was a lead curator and I would say—that's what they call me—but I was the curator with Homer Jackson—and Linda's last name ran away but it'll come to me—in Philadelphia through the Village of the Arts [Village of Arts & Humanities] and the village is a small little block, tiny houses, and they were going all around their neighborhood and they built stone effigies in parks and done beautiful thing—mosaics, all kinds of stuff.

So we were doing a show. And my essay for the catalogue is about the dance intervention of spirit and love in these spaces and the healing property of it. Installations many times can be healing properties for it. You know, that's what the American Indian Museum, [Washington, D.C.] is. It's a big, big bottle of heal, and the center dome with the light coming through, that's what it's about.

You want to ask me stuff about spirit or religion or something?

ROBERT SILBERMAN: No. But would you like to speak about spirituality and religion?

JOYCE SCOTT: I think we're right on it.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Why don't you continue? Well—

JOYCE SCOTT: Well, give me some specific questions.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Well, you mentioned way back that your godparents were Pentecostal and you were on a street corner helping them out. How does church background come into your work, or how has—

JOYCE SCOTT: I feel remiss.

ROBERT SILBERMAN:—been transformed into other forms that bring you to spirit and love in your work?

JOYCE SCOTT: I feel remiss as a godmother to not have taken my kids and made them go to church as much as I did, or at least as [inaudible]. It's very easy, especially the way I was raised with having loving parents, to be

very self-centered. And they always called me—

Miss Barbara, saying I was spoiled. I wasn't spoiled. I was just the center of attention because I was supposed to be. I said, did you say I'm spoiled. And I wasn't that spoiled.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Yes, you're spoiled.

JOYCE SCOTT: I'm not spoiled.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: You're spoiled.

JOYCE SCOTT: I'm just the center of attention. Because I was s'posed to be. That's all!

[They laugh.]

I just called you in to verify that. That's all.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Well, I know you're spoiled [laughs].

JOYCE SCOTT: Oh my goodness!

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Liz told me. [Laughs.]

JOYCE SCOTT: It's really easy to become real self-involved, self-this—and then we live in a culture where you can be really self-involved. I mean, if you can make a little bit of money, you have your own apartment, your own TV, your own iPod, your own computer, and you can eat well and you can go out with friends who are like you and it's about self.

I was raised, though, through the Pentecostal Apostolic religion to know that you're not the center of it, and that part of what you're supposed to be doing in your life is spreading joy to others. Now, some people do it by spreading overt religion to others, but your joy *is* your religion, your understanding that, you know, you're not the center. If you're the center, the center is filled with a lot of a spirits. And God gives you great gifts and you should share it.

And that's—that is what I learned and that's I do in performance, that's what I do with the visual art. However, I don't think that is all about joy. So I talk about harsh things because we're meant to be here for more than just to have fun, I think.

I could be totally wrong. So what have I lost? Let's say I'm totally wrong. Let's say there's no God, there's no hell, there's no joy, there's no—none of that. When you die, you turn into some energy, something, you turn into a toenail [laughs]. I tell everybody if there's reincarnation, if I don't straighten out, I'm coming a back as snot or some other bad body fluid. I got to straighten out, God. I got to.

Anyway, suppose that's true. Well, then what have I lost in my quest to not believe that? What have I lost in having a fulfilled life? My mom always wanted me to have a fulfilled life. And my father and mother, both were actually bitter about not having education. So they liked that I had—that I was on that quest. They feared for me all the time because they were afraid I would be hurt.

But going to some place where there are no white people or Black people. When I am in Machu Picchu, I'm—we were in Africa somewhere, we're in a bush taxi driving from one city to the other late at night, they will fear but they also thought that they I had the *cojones*—we're back with Hispanic—"stones" to go after it. And a lot of that came from my feelings that humans are basically good. That came out of our religion.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: You've done this—I can't think of a piece that's directly about Christianity. There may—you may have done them and I don't them. But I mean, you have done those pieces featuring Buddha, featuring Shiva, some as religious spiritual figures, sometime with a little irony, as in *Buddha Gives Basketball*—

JOYCE SCOTT: —*to the Ghetto* [1991].

ROBERT SILBERMAN: —*to the Ghetto*, which one writer called a hoot of an idea—[laughs]—which it is and it's a great work. But have you done works, and what are those like, that are directly addressing religion? And what about Buddha appearing in your work, or Shiva?

JOYCE SCOTT: Well, you know, being raised in a Christian religion and, honestly, going to church on Sunday and then probably Wednesday night and I knew—I felt I knew a lot about it. I should be looking at something else, because it was the quest to find out how alike we are. But I would do—was Lazarus the one that got—no, who got hit by so many arrows?

ROBERT SILBERMAN: [St.] Sebastian?

JOYCE SCOTT: It was—for a while I did St. Sebastian things. I did necklaces, I did that kind of stuff. I did a lot of crosses in my life. I did a couple of things about large sculptures with glass about Christ, they were sculpted—the actual Christ and the crucifix were made in Kenya, carved—and then everything else was beaded and—so, yes.

But I went to Thailand and—first I went to Hong Kong, first. And we saw Confucius. I like the Confucian kind of temples and everything, and they were really—they were dark and there were really big and different statues. And they were cool and they were a little dramatic. It was almost something Disney-like about them because of how highly painted they were and because almost every large town has a Chinatown and we have emulsified with those images look like so much. You know, we've boiled them down to—when you look at it, you really have to try to read something about it and step back and know that these images are not what we made in pop culture, right?

When I went to Thailand—totally different way of being, and the wats or their temples—that's what they call it—because I made lots of jokes about the Watts Towers blah-blah-blah. Going into these temples and seeing Buddha, seeing how quiet and contemplative his face was and the fact that Buddha exists everywhere. And he's just this cat who's about being centered and good thinking and doing well by others. There's a lot of stuff in it that's just about being—clearness of thought that I dug.

One day, we were walking and we walked into this little community holy place and there's, like, 20 Buddhists and they're all Black and they all have the corkscrew hairstyle and the lips. And I'm, like, okay, I know I'm not supposed to be saying this, but something's up. Little something, something is up here. You know, by that time, we knew that everybody was from Africa and some—still trying to figure out how they got from place to place. And I thought, I have to bring Buddha back to America because this Buddha is not only Black and, of course, that doesn't mean skin color at all. It means something else.

But he did have little baby dreads beginning and he had the lips and a wide nose. I thought I can talk about how this kind of imagery can be used. That *Buddha Brings Basketball to the Ghetto* is Buddha sitting in a contemplative stance, out of the top of his head, the font, there's golden kind of bronze basketball player holding a round basketball.

This is like the elevated person. You went to school, you studied, you became a basketball player. You're making a lot of money and you have your own athletic shoe and you're giving money to—you're Magic Johnson. And then he's holding a basketball, which is cut in half, which becomes a prayer cup and out of it's a flat, unarticulated body and that's the basketball player who didn't even make it to college. He did other things besides becoming this total, rounded self.

A Buddha has many incarnations and they're all about the total human and that's what I liked about this figure. And I thought I got to bring Buddha to the ghetto. And I did him a couple of times. He's washing an unclean soul in the waters of Yemanja. The thing about this—the way of thinking about spirit is trying to integrate different orishas or gods or saints from other parts of the world, so Yemanja, or Santería, or Controble [ph], you know, the parallel religion with Catholicism that Indians and African slaves made to allow their religion to exist while the Catholic religion was still existing.

Are we doing—we're on—we're good?

So this one, where Buddha washes an unclean soul in the waters of Yemanja is Buddha with one arm up and wrapped in wire is a person, and the other arm, like a shot of electricity, is in the vagina area of Yemanja. In Brazil, Rio de Janeiro, the Rio is Yemanja. She's the water goddess. So in doing this, there's a slight color change from cobalt. His wood is black but his hand is cobalt—like when you're in water, your hand changes when it's wet—but he's beginning to get that charge that will clean the unclean soul.

That's the whole religious thing about baptism and wading in the water. I was dunked. I wasn't baptized in a church. It was the old Southern way. I was submerged in the water by my godfather and then you have—you go—all those things, once again, very first-person and very—"tribal" is not the word that I'm thinking of—but very much the old school, very much the way they did it in the South in 1840, about. You know—it's very much that.

And that's what I seek when I travel. I seek first-person kind of religion, so I may, on the road, especially in Central and South America—and I haven't been on the road in a long time. I just got bad knees and kind of lost my desire after I put my very massive butt in a seat on an airplane and have to go to first class. I got frequent flyer miles. That's the only way I could afford it. It's not comfortable anymore, but when I was young I was—went on a lot—and to be in a car—what's the name of the place? Nazca, where the drawings are carved into the ground.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: In Peru.

JOYCE SCOTT: In Peru. Well, we drove that at night. So you couldn't see anything, but they were over there in their little small altars on the way and I would have the guy stop, because we hired a car for part of it and you stop at the temple—he'd stop because he had a long drive and he'd go into the small churches, so we went in to the [inaudible] or we get a bush taxi going from one part of the country to another or a whole other country and we're scuttled in there with a lot of other people. You know, lots of hips.

And they always put me next to the driver because I don't sleep a lot and I would give him raw peanuts or something and he would tell me what I'm looking at in the dark. And we kept hearing "boom!"—like that—and I realized the next day that he was hunting with the car. He'd hit something and go throw it on the roof, and the next day there are all these animals and we were, like, I don't even know what that is, or there are birds in the grill and [laughs]—people would stop. And we would stop someplace and I'd ask what it was and they would show me different.

Or we're in Mali, and we were trying to get to Timbuktu but it's the wrong season and they have one airplane that they called Air Maybe—and they'd given it to the Japanese—they call Air Mali—this was many years ago—they called it Air Maybe because maybe it would come—and they'd given it to the Japanese ambassador so we couldn't go—we couldn't fly to Timbuktu and we went to see the ship that would take us. It's, like, absolutely not.

So we decided to go to the Dogon instead, which was a much better trip. And so, of course, the guy was three hours late and we were riding with French people who were so mean, so nasty, because—well, he was three hours late—that his boss came and said in French—and I—remember, I only knew a little French—[speaks in mock-French]—which meant, don't do anything special for them.

So they put me next to the driver of a Jeep and I gave him raw peanuts as we talked and he loosened up and—we were trying to get to [the] Dogon and he spins wonderful stories bringing us back. And we ended up being on this highway, the car breaks down—we were in a Jeep. We get a flat tire. And there's no one.

Out of nowhere comes a little boy. I mean, he'd walked out of nowhere. And I had long, long braids and I put all kinds of charms on all the ends of them so I could give them away. And he looked at my hair and I pulled it up and he took it and then he disappeared into the horizon.

But we're standing there in the heat—oh, my God—and out of nowhere, comes this little bus, this is very Disney—[hums] with tall, slender, very black, charcoal, beautiful African men hanging off the side. Everybody stuck inside, people are now sitting on the top and the only space left was to hang off the side. These men, they are statuesque and it was like watching—talking about what influences me—it's like watching a piece of sculpture come alive. They are that beautiful.

They look at us. They stop. They picked the Jeep up—pick it up, fixed the tire. They won't take money. They jumped back on the bus and drive away.

Then we go to the Dogon. To get to the Dogon—where we were, we had to go to a hole that was cut out of the Nile. And then we were wandering through and—their homes—you know what granaries look like. But the place, the part we were, the homes were even like granaries. And we passed the Japanese [laughs], we passed him. They're dancing for him, [laughs] right? And the driver says, you're not supposed to look at that. And I'm, like, you know, oh, come on. I shake my body. I do a little thing. I'm a whore for this—now that I think about it. And he lets us watch a little bit.

And we wander around and as we were wandering around, I buy a piece of sculpture by this guy. It's half-done, half-chewed up by worms. And outside of this little house is this woman who looks like my mother. She beckons me, and as I get there, I realized she didn't want to talk me. I had on a beautiful scarf that she wanted.

We couldn't speak anything. We're sitting there together, laughing and she looks at my skin, I look at her. We laughed while she looks at my hair, I tear off one, and then she takes my scarf by the end and pulls it off my neck, like it's magic, that kind of thing. Then we started laughing, because I'm shaking my finger. Now, I know why I'm in here and I get to look around. It's a tiny place. And then, you know, we hug and I leave.

We end up at a waterfall and Nora—this is the person I told you traveled for years—a nice Jewish girl, originally from New York who lives in Redington, Florida—both of her parents just passed away, may they rest in peace. Her father was a chef, took me with his other children and his wife to the restaurant where he was working and, you know, I have this aquiline nose—it's a hook—but aquiline is a sweet way of saying it. This was the time when there are not a lot of Hispanics working in kitchens with Black people, and he says, "And these are my daughters." And I'm looking at the people in the kitchen working [laughs] and say, I knew he was up to something from the very beginning.

Anyway, Nora and I find this waterfall. We need water badly, but we're sure we're going to get a disease. Then we realized, are you kidding? We're not in the city, we're in the Dogon. So we drink water and, finally, we get a ride home. It's stuff like that—a very funny story, this—okay—that makes me do work about water. It makes me proud to be an African. I saw my mom in a granary, okay? So I come back and I do those shapes and I do African women.

We were in another part, in Senegal, living in a little place and we want watermelon. Now, you know how stereotypical it is for an African woman to go looking for watermelon? And Nora and I—my very bad French, her no French at all—we go into a little market looking for watermelon. And I'm, like, *melon de agua, le vert*—I mean, I'm trying with stripes and everything and I go from place to place and I'm wearing an Indian dress with mirrors on it in Africa, with the hair. I mean, they don't even know what the hell I am, although one boy walked by me and said, I swear to God, "American Indian." We were, like, what the hell? [Laughs.]

And I go from stall to stall. They can't figure out what's happening and Nora's taking pictures. They don't know. We're about to leave the market and this big woman comes up to me—looks like one of my aunts on my mother's side—with a watermelon in one hand, like this. And, like I can't—*qu'est-ce que c'est*—I can't remember "how you say"—how do you say this is—*qu'est-ce que c'est en français?* And she tells me the name of it. And she's not going to let me have it—she puts it down—unless I danced for her.

And she does, like [scat-sings]—and does a dance, and I'm, oh, snap, I could be shot or something if I do the wrong dance [laughs]. So I did a [scat-sings]—and then she does [scat-sings]. Nora says—she disappears, she said to me, I knew I was in the wrong place, I should not be there. She didn't even take pictures. And we just grabbed the watermelon a little bit. People are laughing and yelling. We're all laughing. I get the watermelon. We did a hug—a big hug and then I walked out of the joint.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: The magic of travel.

JOYCE SCOTT: But there was also food, nourishment. You know, if I were talk to my godfather, if he were alive right now, he'd say, that's the Pentecost right there. That's just people connecting in joy and love without any desire for anything but the little communion right there.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: The spirit.

JOYCE SCOTT: It was like a prayer—just like that.

And I toured Europe—traveling around Europe is different, but it still is a lot of fun, a lot of good, a lot of us performing at the Edinburgh Festival in Scotland. My name is Scott, so I said to the audience, I'm a Scottish girl; I'm here looking for my ancestry. They laugh at me. They think this is so funny. And I'm thinking, okay.

So the next day I go on what I call my ethnicity jaunts—go to a bookstore, looking for books about the history of Africans in Scotland. Oh, yeah. Then I go to a gallery and a museum, of course, the same thing, there we are as slaves and blackamoors with the big silk hats on, holding bowls of fruit, but we're in Scotland.

So the next night when I announced that I was a Scottish girl, being there for my ancestry and they laughed, I had a few things to tell them about Scotland. But I had a great time there and because I like beer, I had a better time. And they had a good time with me.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Great. Maybe I can go back and ask you a little more about the performance in theater. So you worked at the—you said you started with Robert Sherman, doing work in New York with masks.

JOYCE SCOTT: New York and here, yes.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Had you done theater before? Was that the first time?

JOYCE SCOTT: No, I'd done—that's how I met him. You know, for years, I'd done stuff at the Theatre Project here. Phil Arnoult always brought international groups into his small theater called the Theatre Project right downtown, not far from where you're staying in Baltimore. And we had international theater festivals here. We'd meet people and we'd do music, oh, puppetry, we'd do something.

I think that is where I met Robert Sherman. He was working with another company and he had a thing where he worked with clay and he would do—send the spirit, send these characters into the clay. And he'd built a mask out of it. He'd put it on his face and he built a mask and we became a team for a while. And then we even had—there was a quartet of us with music and we choose a character, he'd write a little play and he would build—always a whole—oh, boy, now he'd talked about, boy, was that the '70s and '80s, boy, were we it.

So by the time then, that was here in New York, we'd start working together and a friend who was a poet said, you're a comedian, you really should meet my niece Kay Lawal. She does theater and she's a comedian and we

became the Thunder Thigh Revue, doing work about stereotypes, about politics of the time. We performed in Spandex and lace, singing, a lot of it was vaudevillian. I remember I told you about Jewish comics and the whole thing about Yiddish theater, Black theater, all of it, [Dewey] "Pigmeat" Markham—it's all that kind of thing, my years—

ROBERT SILBERMAN: The borscht circuit and the chitlin' circuit.

JOYCE SCOTT: Borscht, chitlin', and also after living in Mexico and looking at—you know, they did old films. They still do films from the '30s. They love to watch them. And those—Cantinflas [Mario Moreno]—those comedians and just the stereotype—a lot of stuff on stereotypes about women and—in Mexico, at one period, it's just big, very shapely women with enormous breasts, but they had to be blond. And, you know, Cantinflas was really short and he would—[laughs]—it was—so we did all of that.

We did a lot of work on that. And a lot of the imagery that I couldn't make happen visually, I made happen during performance. And I really performed around the United States, you know, Scotland, Holland. We performed at a colored festival in Holland. We thought that was hilarious. But there, that's what they call mixed-race things, and so it was an international festival and they call it—they call it Colored Festival International. And we thought that was hilarious.

Canada, yes.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: And was that a nice balance to your studio—you've been working alone in the studio and then you'd be collaborating and going out in front of the public?

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes. I'm also very—I am a clown. I'm saying I'm a ham, but that's double, since I'm a fat woman. I have real opinions that I'd like to talk about. And this was during a time, you know, feminism and all that other stuff where you—where being vocal was okay. Civil rights movement, the end of what we saw as the overt civil rights movement, '60s into the '80s—'80s were still in feminism, '90s, then we're talking about other stuff.

By the '90s I wasn't working with Kay anymore, I was doing one-person performance and I did a series of one-person—just when genetics started happening. I did a [performance] show called *Generic Interference, Genetic Engineering*. And I did a lot about genetics and I took that around the country doing it. I did another one about—

ROBERT SILBERMAN: You did *Virtual Reality*?

JOYCE SCOTT: Thank you. I was—because I think there's one before that, but the *Virtual Reality* was about our immediate—computers are really young. We only have 40 years old or something—but our *immediate* submission to technology in this way.

Our immediate submission to technology and how for some is that losing the first person again. So someone is in the office with you and you would rather e-mail than just say, hey, Rob—and then the last one I did was called *Walk a Mile in My Drawers*, which was the combination of a lot of things. It was really a very self-propelled thing where I talk about myself and it's so like the best-of.

So I wrote new songs, but I also used some of the older songs and I talked about my mom, the fact that she has dementia, no longer speaking and couldn't talk, so she couldn't be at my performance with me—talked about that. It was the first time I had a theater, a good director. This theater hadn't gotten an NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] [grant] in 12 years and we got money to produce from the NEA and we got money to make the CD of the original music.

So I did all of this at once and it was me on the stage for an hour without—an hour and half without an intermission, being Joyce and being these characters. And I really thought this was probably the last one because I have these rotten knees and my director made me walk and walk, and up and down steps. And he said to me after he saw the first show, he said, you know—[laughs]—you really are walking around a lot on those knees? And I thought, I think this is the last one. I don't think I could do this again.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Let me—

JOYCE SCOTT: What it takes—

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Not that kind of physical, with that kind of—

JOYCE SCOTT: Maybe I did—yes, not where I have to do everything. This is where you get a really enormous grant, you have a director and then you see—I also had a lighting director, but you see a lot of the—certain kinds of responsibilities to them. Now, Kay Lawal and I are going to do a reunion in September, probably this is the—probably the twenty-fifth anniversary of our not working together. I think we stopped in '89.

[Telephone rings.] Yes, please. This is on my answering machine.

What else you want to know?

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ROBERT SILBERMAN: This is Robert Silberman interviewing Joyce Scott at the artist's home and studio in Baltimore, Maryland, on July 22, 2009, for the Archives of American Art.

JOYCE SCOTT: *Na zdrowie!*

ROBERT SILBERMAN: We are now doing Russian. Smithsonian Institution, card number four. We were just talking about theater and performance. And I would like to ask how the sort of cross-fertilization worked between theater, performance, and your other work.

JOYCE SCOTT: He brought up sex. I did not bring sex up. He said "fertilization." It was his mouth.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Uh-oh, uh-oh.

JOYCE SCOTT: Well, we were also talking earlier about why to do it and that kind of crossing of the two. They are different adventures. The thing about the visual arts for me is that they are this quest. There's this big adventure. And doing installation is like going on the grand tour. You're out of that studio. I love being in the contemplative space in my studio. I mean, you see how much I talk. But people think I talk all the time, but I don't. The majority of my life is very quiet. It's me spent working.

And since, once again, Mom has dementia, she doesn't talk now. So, really, it's a lot of quiet time for me, doing things. The thing about when you're doing collaborative work and installation work is that you're talking a lot and the adventure is very different. It's a way to make physical these ideas, and you use people physically. They become your brushes and your pliers and your things. You move them around and that's very amazing for me to be able to have the ability to do it and have people who want to go on that ride with you, because it's a roller coaster. It's that kind of ride.

I can honestly say all the installations that I've made haven't been that great. So some of it is a great, wonderful ride. And other things, you're going home on the plane, like, I will never be able to show my face again. This is terrible. I know I am going to get yelled at. I know it. You're asking about the—

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Well, when you did, say, performance, you were on to computers relatively early on and on to genetic engineering relatively early. But then have you done computer sculpture pieces or genetic sculptures that address the genetic issue? I mean, a lot of artists are working with that.

JOYCE SCOTT: I have done genetic sculptures. But I thought you meant have I used a computer to design and I have not.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: No, but did computers and technology become an issue in your sculptural—

JOYCE SCOTT: I'm sure they have. I can't remember a piece right now. But, of course, they have. The DNA for a while dogged me because it's right back to ancestry. See, it's the whole thing about ancestry and progeny. It's about how we believe we are what we are by the way we look, but our DNA tells us something very different.

We were talking about Skip Gates [Henry Louis Gates]. He did that show on TV and people thinking that they are one thing. And this one guy was sure that he was African and Caribbean and Jewish and he found—I mean, African, Caribbean, and American Indian. And he found out there's no American Indian in your family; you're Jewish. He's like, what the—

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Mel Brooks, the Yiddish-speaking Indian chief.

JOYCE SCOTT: Well, you know, Mel Brooks—I would love to meet him because he definitely bent my brain up very young in my life, in the early stages of my life.

The installation work is important because it's kind of a validation many times of what you do. Of your smaller work, it's a validation that you can be chosen to do the larger work and that work can stand on its own.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Well, let's talk about, if you would, about another large-scale commission work.

JOYCE SCOTT: Is that a fat joke? He's making about me fat jokes.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Oh, no, no—about the commission you received to do a work at what was a while ago

National Airport and is now Ronald Reagan Airport in Washington [D.C.].

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes, Ronald Reagan. Well, that was wonderful. You know, Cesar, Cesar, Cesare, Cesare—whoever this guy is, Pele [ph], asked me to be one of the artists in this. And this was a big deal for me because I would get to design it, but I wouldn't have to fabricate it. And you know what? I forgot that there are things that you don't know about that I've done, site-specific things here in Baltimore that we'll talk about, installations.

So it's a long, funny story, but I'll shorten it up, but I'll try to keep it funny. He had the artists come to Washington because they were regional artists. He was trying to do people of the Maryland, Washington, D.C., Virginia area to represent the art that was of that region and for the airport. So we went. And I want you to know they had seen all my—I kept sending them drawings of things that I thought were great.

And first, I send them nudes because, you know, you do your research about the floor. It's a floor mosaic. And in Rome and Greece, they're nudes, and people. And they laughed at me—they're like, no, you can't do naked people. So then I sent them naked babies, in all kinds of vines and floral designs. No, no, you can't do naked babies. Then I sent them naked animals. And I sent them animals with clothing on and, you know, trying to make it funny. They're laughing at me.

They had seen this one slide that I had done of one of my sculpture pieces that is a big eye and spindly arms. And they said, can we just do that? And I said you mean a big eyeball and lips—it's called *Lips*—and squinkly [*sic*] arms. You could do that because it's less scary, but you think nudes is scary. You won't do the human form. I said, well, I have to do a lot more drawings. They said no. I said, absolutely.

So I did the drawing, a band of different kinds of things, different eyeglasses and things circling this figure. And they were fabulous. They made the mosaic for me. And they even made—because the figure is beaded—mosaics, the old style are squares or they're odd shapes. But they drew red glass in the shape of rods, circular rods, so when they sliced them, they would look like beadwork. It's beautiful.

They call me up and say, we're going to put down your floor tomorrow, the day after tomorrow. Can you come? And I am, like, absolutely. It's the wintertime. It's raining. I'm having a bad day, period. Firstly, I don't get up that early. I had to get up early. I got on the train. Then I had to get on the Metro to go to the airport. You don't see me. I wasn't as big as I am, but I was still a big girl. I had on animal-patterned leggings. Why this happened—someone tell me what I was thinking. It wasn't like I was running late. And I had a bad hair day, so I had on this hat. And I walk in, in a big kind of magenta jacket. And I walk in and they show me where my work is.

Now, the airport has not really been—it's being redone, so there's nobody there but workmen. And it's this giant soundstage. They make me wear a hardhat. My hair is so bad; I put the hardhat on *over* my hat. Now, you've got to know how I looked. I walk in, I go up on the escalator and I look down at what they're doing, and I see this work starting to happen. And I start singing.

But I don't sing like the old Negro spiritual [sings] *Nobody knows*—I start doing this kind of operatic [sings/trills] and I'm in a good voice—[sings/trills]. And the workers stop and they all come and they listen to me sing, because this is this enormous sound tunnel. And the guys who are laying down, they stop. I stop singing and I thank them all and I tell them how this is so fabulous, I can't stand myself. And they applaud and they go back to work.

They go down the escalators and there are these little short Italians who are doing it for me. And we all hug and they let me lay down one little section. And we take pictures of it and then I go.

Then I drag myself, animal-patterned legs out, and I'm sitting on the Metro on my way to Washington. I'm sure I didn't go straight home. I'm sure I gave myself a fabulous meal or something or bought another pair of shoes, something girly. But I'm sitting on the Metro going to the train station thinking, that's my artwork. It's 18 feet in diameter. And I sang and it was wonderful. And I tell everyone, you should go see it because that's the only time you will be allowed to walk on me. Snap, snap, snap. [Laughs.]

ROBERT SILBERMAN: And it's still there and it's still great.

JOYCE SCOTT: You know, that airport, if it closes as an airport, I think they are going to keep it open as an art mall and they'll just fill it with restaurants and shops or something because I am one of 30 artists or something. And the work is amazing. The floors are just phenomenal. Sam Gilliam has—I mean, it's just wonderful.

But that was talking about a validation. I didn't even know that the validation of my beadwork was coming, that they didn't want any of my drawings. Remember what a lousy painter I am? But they chose a piece of beadwork to be used. Years later, I was talking to someone and I was saying, you know, I think, in many ways, this is this kind of beacon place for me.

In Santería, it's a beacon. And I think this is maybe like Shango. I can't remember everything that I said. And someone said it can't be that because you have to have a tower and a beacon to make it. And we're, like, duh—it's an airport. Of course it's got a tower. And we realized that—we went back to spiritualism and everything, that it also had some kind of spiritual components as well.

And then I worked here in Baltimore. I've been asked to do some installations—permanent installations. I've done two park things at Druid Hill Park, which is our largest—it's an enormous park. They used to have something called the colored swimming pool and the white swimming pool. And the coloreds—it was a segregated park—could only go here. And the thing about the colored swimming pool was it was filtered because they were really sure that we had something. But the white swimming pool wasn't filtered, so they were peeing in the pool and giving people all kinds of diseases while we—

So when it was no longer in use, they asked me to design for it. You know, I designed something for that area. Then I've just been asked to do another mosaic, a ground mosaic for the conservatory [the Howard Peters Rawlings Conservatory & Botanic Gardens], which is our giant hothouse. And I've done a big—I've designed a big mosaic. And eventually, in this economic environment, they'll raise enough money to make that happen as well. And I won't have to fabricate it. I'll just get to go over and look at it and say, you know, that's not the color yellow I chose.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: And sing, again.

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes. Well, I would sing to people when they were blowing glass. They either love it or hate it. [Laughs.]

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Can I ask a question about the Ronald Reagan airport piece?

JOYCE SCOTT: Yeah.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: When it was a sculpture called *Lips*, was it, in part, a political issue?

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: And did they—

JOYCE SCOTT: They didn't get it.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: I mean, it's a wonderful work. But it is about stereotyping physical features, et cetera.

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes, they didn't get it. It was also, though, also about—I did that for an exhibition in Pittsburgh at the Society of Art and Craft. And they asked us, what has happened to you in the last 20 years? Me and Bob Ebendorf, it was, like, four of us, I think. And I thought now, how have I changed in the last 20 years? I've done a lot more performance. I've used my mouth. That's my lips. And my hips have gotten bigger. So I did sculpture on hips and I did that piece on lips, too. And it's also, of course, about the stereotype of big lips.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Can I ask a question that takes—

JOYCE SCOTT: No, you can ask no more questions, no. [Laughs.]

Yes, Rob. What?

ROBERT SILBERMAN: A question that takes it back to something we were talking about earlier, which when we talked about the altars in the San Francisco installation, you once said you want them to be specific mysteries. And then when we were talking about the Buddha pieces—*Buddha Brings Basketball*—and also the piece about water.

As you describe them, I wonder how you regard what you're doing in your mind versus what you think the people seeing it will get. I mean, the title of the Buddha piece is great. It's a wonderful piece to look at. But your explanation certainly adds a lot more—and the same thing with the water piece. So how do you view that process of your working versus someone perceiving it?

JOYCE SCOTT: Well, firstly, you have to realize that the work will leave you and you want to make it in a way that someone can, hopefully, find the essence of what you have created. But you don't have any control on what is in somebody else's head. That *is* why I do a lot of performance, because you can actually say exactly what you think.

And that is the difference between the visual work that leaves you and goes someplace. And then you will have someone, not unlike yourself, possibly, who will tell you what they think it means. And then you read it and you

think, I never even thought about that. Wow, that's good that I learned something new about it. Or, this person is so totally wrong; what's his e-mail address? But the performance really allows me to be right up front, right in people's faces, and tell them exactly what I want. And that is the difference.

Now, people would ask me—maybe you should put an explanation on the wall next to the artwork or, you know, text. And I say, well, if that's what you want—because I do believe these are teaching institutions—I'll do that. But I can tell you, I go in and I can go through maybe four sentences. But those kind of ponderously long texts that's on the wall—I would rather see the artwork. I don't want you to tell me what I ought to be thinking.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: I'm with you.

JOYCE SCOTT: I like the brochures that are given out and they give some overview over what's going on.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Good.

JOYCE SCOTT: Now, in the making of the performance, there's a difference in that and how I do my artwork, because I don't do sketches, generally. I just jump in. The test is when you're having people—like people blow glass for you. I may draw an image on the floor. That's the way they do it, in chalk. Or I may talk to them about it. But I don't want to overwork it because then I don't have any joy. I mean, I should sell the sketch. I don't have the joy.

But the great thing about theater is before you can get onstage, unless you're only going to do extemporaneous work, stream of consciousness work, is that you have to write it. And that's really good for me because I get to hone the work differently than if I were doing visual work.

You know, I write with a thesaurus. I want it to be like a splendid meal where there are different spices and there are different tastes to it. So I can't use the same word over and over again. We've all seen writers who use the same word—that when there are 90 other words that you could use in different sentences, so that maybe it would be not just wonderful.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Uh-oh. I'm in trouble. Guilty as charged.

JOYCE SCOTT: I was just hinting at him so he might know what is happening. You know what I mean. So that writing helps him make me more fluid in my thought. And then that directly jumps back to the kind of artwork that I do, because sometimes then I make myself—I give myself tests and I give myself work-study things to do so I'm not only making figures the exact same way. I'm not only using these same stitches, always. I've used that blue now 100 times.

I give myself homework. But that came out of—I think that happens more and more, or happened more and more, because of the writing, because I saw that I needed to intellectualize more the visual word; because you can get stuck or get comfortable in working certain ways, especially if you're good at them and especially if they're answering questions. But I wanted deeper, more actualized questions. I wanted to be a deeper, more actualized artist. And the thinking that I had to do to make the performance work is what, in some way, was helpful for the visual work as well.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: But you've done visual works in series, where you take a theme and then you do one work and change it dramatically and do another work?

JOYCE SCOTT: Usually the theme picks me.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Right.

JOYCE SCOTT: That usually happens. And I couldn't sell everything—let me take this down—I couldn't do everything in the first work. Then if you do a theme on politics, something happens, you know, like Obama's running. Wait, Obama got it. I haven't done enough Obama work yet, although I just did a series of prints because they were yelling about his ears.

So I had a series of prints with Obama with big ears. He has Buddha ears—he might have rabbit ears. He has Dr. Spock ears. Actually, but then we looked at it and said these look more like Yoda from the *Star Wars* thing. And he's just him, doing—and then I did some other things with him with Frederick Douglass and Martin Luther King, but a *mélange* kind of—I haven't worked them out yet.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Great. Keeping up.

JOYCE SCOTT: Keeping up. Some other questions about what else? You went back—you said the things. What else—

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Let's shift a little and—

JOYCE SCOTT: I'm shifting.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Shift gears here. Let's ask about your teaching, Joyce. You have done a lot of workshops, where you do art projects, but you're working with students.

JOYCE SCOTT: I like that short kind of shotgun teaching where I can go in—I don't like grading—I can go in and I can impart as much as I possibly can. I wring myself dry. I'm spent. I am ridiculous. I must take to my bed and stay there for two days after a good teaching thing. I'm joking about that, but I do try to wring myself dry. I don't try to keep any secrets about what I do. I try to help students as much as possible. Then I don't necessarily need to see you again. [Laughs.]

That's not true, in the sense that when I see my students after years, I'm always happy to see them. My point is, I couldn't be a studio artist and teach, so I'm really wanting to stay a studio artist. So I do teach a lot. And I don't teach by kits and I don't teach projects generally. And nothing against those; that's just not the way I am built.

I'm a technique teacher and I like to develop techniques. Once again, back to beadwork being a medium where I should always be evolving and helping it to evolve, so that when I make my artwork, you really say oh, that's a piece of sculpture. It might be the size of a doll, but it's not. You can't say that about little Degas sculptures. They were little Degas sculptures. And you asked me about if I had a favorite piece of art.

I did the *Dancing Girl* that Degas did, which you end up finding out may have been—might have been a young prostitute because many times, these dancing girls had to do a lot to stay dancers. But the original Degas dancers had on fabric shoes and a dress and a wig.

Now, when people ask you about the difference between art and craft, she's a bronze sculpture—I think the original ones might even have been wood—who's wearing this stuff, now? Come on. For me, it's always pushing those boundaries, so that I might become better at what I do and make the—and have the artwork have a solid place, too.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: You've taught at universities, art programs within universities, colleges.

JOYCE SCOTT: Bead stores, recreation centers, schools.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Workshops and at craft institutions. We talked about your going to Haystack. But I first met you when you were at Split Rock [Arts Program], which was a University of Minnesota program, which involved some craft, some art, some literature.

JOYCE SCOTT: And it's different in the fact that the arts and literature are combined in many of them.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: And then you've done residencies at places like Pilchuck.

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Are there other craft institutions where you have done residencies or been a teacher or done both?

JOYCE SCOTT: Well, certainly, there's Haystack, Penland, Split Rock, the Oregon School of Arts and Craft—

ROBERT SILBERMAN: OCAC [Oregon College of Art & Craft, Portland].

JOYCE SCOTT: I've done a lot of that. I was an artist-in-residence at the University of Delaware in Newark. I've come to lots of places as an artist-in-residence. One of the good things is I might come in and I'd be at a large university. And when I'd call, I'd say, you know what, see if there's an African American institution, a smaller one that can only pay a little bit of money. And let's see if we can have me come and go to that school, so the doubling up of it, the added value, was that I got to do things in places that people maybe wouldn't have been able to afford all the expense of bringing me.

I've done lots and lots of universities, lots of universities that are large, lots of universities that are small. I worked at the University of Hawaii in Honolulu, and going down there talking and I got to hang out in the glass department. I'm trying to remember the name of this person who people told me I should always meet because we had this similar personality. And it ends up that he was there in Honolulu and then I went to see his lecture and his exhibition. His name will come to me.

I've worked in lots and lots of places. And the places that have smaller things, sometimes I'll come in as an artist in residence like the Society of Arts and Crafts in Pittsburgh. And I was there for something else—oh, because I

was in an exhibition there. And I've also curated for them. I've also curated. And while I was there, they said, well, what do you want to do? I said, well, I really want to work with the framewokers.

So they set up a whole little workshop and I worked with a framewoker. I've done that other places, too, the Virginia Center for the Arts in Richmond. While I was there, I also worked at VCU [Virginia Commonwealth University], the other—The Virginia University something—VSU, Virginia State University, I think, something like that in Richmond. Sonya Clark is the head of their material studies department. So I gave lectures and did some crits in that.

With fiber people, I'm still going back doing all the old stuff. And I also did a cold workshop kind of demonstration with a framewoker. And we did it—I wanted to do it with him because he did faces. He does very beautiful, classical, traditional work and I do dirts, dirts, dirts [ph]. And, you know, he does also very clean. And they say don't do this, because it will get dirt in it. And then I show them how to roll dirt in it.

So I get to do stuff everywhere.

And I put this down—I don't know why now—I answer you with it. I am talking about my long, sumptuous dreads that are now driving me crazy.

I've gotten, at the age of 60, I ask for things. So if they say, well, what do you want? Well, I really don't want to do that. I really want to do framewoking and I want you to bring somebody in. And you'll be happy when you see how nutty I am in what I do.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Great.

JOYCE SCOTT: Doing the teaching at the Pilchuck. When they asked me to come, I was so honored to be there. And then they said, yes, but you guys, you have got to know I am not a framewoker. I'm a—framewoker-esque. I'll do things [inaudible] things, so they got me two assistants who did the framework with me. I apologized to the students because I said you've got to know that we are going to be mixing framework and beadwork together.

And so the thing with these framewokers is, we would sit down and talk, and they were very sweet to me at Pilchuck, too, because I was, like, I'm a little concerned that I'm not an amazing framewoker. He said that's why we have—people don't always teach their own classes. That is why you have assistants.

So we go in, in the morning, and I'd say, have you guys ever done that thing where we combine wire and stuff and they do it and [inaudible]? They said, well, we studied it once. [And I say,] Let's do it! And then the students would come around and they're, like, we're going to what? And then I would teach them things that would be easily coordinated or added with beadwork and shapes. And people came out with some very interesting things. I was very pleased with myself. It took me a while because I was scared I was doing something wrong.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Well, in your beadwork book, I think you said in beadwork, I'm fearless, I'm valiant. But in other things, too.

JOYCE SCOTT: In everyday life, I'm not.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: And then the students learn to be fearless in their approach, too.

JOYCE SCOTT: Yes, yes. Sometimes to your chagrin, because they're fearless while they're still with you. Shut up! [Laughs.]

ROBERT SILBERMAN: What about your relationship to the different craft organizations, both locally and nationally? You're involved with different craft media. But how has that worked in the course of your career?

JOYCE SCOTT: You have to call me and ask me. And if I can do something, I will. But I am not a joiner. I'll try to join. I was at one point on a lot of boards and stuff and I got off all of them because, quite honestly, I want to be a studio artist. I don't want to have the responsibility of doing stuff. But I call myself, you know, I'm a migrant worker for the arts. I don't have any money to give to the arts. But they all know I'll come in. I'll do a concert, or I will—I am a really good emcee.

That's how I work with them. Or I'll be in an exhibition. I'll donate a piece of jewelry or something. But I haven't been very good with working with—I actually was on some kind of panel board with the American Craft Council. And I was just terrible. I got off it. I apologized because I just could never do the work. And they were also very sweet because they understood what being a studio artist is.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: What about your relationship to galleries and museums? Your first shows—we've touched on a couple of shows. And your mother's exhibit and your exhibit here in Baltimore both had major community

involvement. But what about your experience with galleries? You said you really sold from the start, your jewelry and work. But what has that been like?

JOYCE SCOTT: I've had galleries forever. Right now in this economic time, I'm hard-pressed to sell as I used to. But I've always had galleries. I believe personally in the gallery system. I really want to have the time to make the art. I don't want to be selling my art and making it. I said I don't go to most of my openings if they're not very, very close. I believe if I make the work, then it's the gallery's responsibility to sell it.

I've been with Mobilia Gallery [Cambridge, MA] and with Snyderman Gallery [Snyderman-Works Galleries, Philadelphia, PA] for a really long time. They are in Philadelphia and Cambridge, Mass. And I have a local [Baltimore] gallery, Goya Contemporary. And for a while, they had Goya-Girl Press, so I printed with them as well. And they are, in a sense, different because Mobilia and Snyderman—although Snyderman does refined arts—they have a very large craft footprint. And I don't really sell any jewelry. I only sell sculpture and prints with Goya.

But I've worked with other galleries, too. I sometimes work with Maurine Littleton Glass Gallery [Maurine Littleton Gallery, Washington, D.C.]. And I've shown other places that I know I'm forgetting for a long—some of them are closed. Susan Cummins in San Francisco did everything and she was a great support to me. And I tell you, I've shown everywhere. When I go to SOFA [Sculpture Objects & Functional Art], I wander around and see the people that know me from teaching or I've shown in the galleries. Helen Drutt was my gallery for a very long time before she closed and went to Snyderman.

They don't necessarily want you to have multiple representation. I explained that to Susan Cummins once, and she was really good. I also explained it to Helen Drutt. That's where it came out. It was, like, you know what? I have to have multiple representation for a couple of reasons. One is that, if you have an enemy, then they're my enemy. If they don't want to buy from you and you're my only representation, then I'm not going to sell it. That's a lost sale. But that is not really as big an issue for me than my being thoughtful and responsible to an African American audience.

And my work has been blessed with a lot of museum shows and shows in museum galleries on universities and university galleries that are open. When everybody is at work or they're open and there's a fee. Commercial galleries are usually in urban settings or someplace where people are going to walk and see it. You may have your kids out. You're walking. You're working in the daytime. And students can go without paying. There should be someone in that gallery who can explain what they are looking at. This is a way for more people to see the artwork without the pressure of buying it. And it's a way for me to be responsible to African Americans who want to see my artwork and can't get to see it.

Now, many people are like, that's not what we do. I said, well, that's why I have to have more than you. And I need you to be sensitive to that because that's the world in which we live. That's not the world that we want, necessarily. That's the world in which we live. And I have to be responsible to myself and to the groups of people who made me who I am.

And it wasn't just you and your wonderful gallery. Long before I met you, I was lifted up on the shoulders of a lot of people. And how else do I do it, because they're the ones who made me really want to do art. They're the ones who helped me go to the museums and the art galleries and who took me to the movies and who did paper—excuse me—*papier-mâché*, because we are in France or wherever with me.

They're the ones—I must be responsible not only to them and their memories, but to the kids who are like me who just need that one sparkling minute, that one time where the truth just smacks them in the head. And then after that, they're artists. They are on the road to do artwork.

So I've had galleries who were not—they didn't like it, but they understand why it's happening; because they're the bottom line, and I talk to them about, your bottom line is money. My bottom line is having a life where I'm not all about me, where you have to—and they're like okay, we get it. All right. They don't like being at, maybe, an art festival where they see—an art festival, an art show or an art something, where they see my work being represented by someone else. I try to make that not happen. But that's the way of the world.

And now, how do I know I am right about this? And I am not a right fighter, so it's not usually right or wrong. It's usually what works and doesn't work. I've been stopped in airports and they've said, are you Joyce Scott? Yeah, I just came from—I was shopping, blah, blah and I saw this at a gallery or I saw this at an art center and I didn't have to pay anything and I saw it. And, girl—I've been bumped to first class because of that.

Somebody saw a poster of me singing somewhere or whatever. Was that you? Girl, I wish I could do something. You can. You can bump me to first class. And they come back and do it. My point is to have—students will tell you. I've had students who were students when I visited them or when they saw my work in a gallery, who are now heads of departments who brought me in to work because of what they saw. Come on. Come on.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: That's great.

JOYCE SCOTT: You know what I mean, how it's paying forward? But you also reap the benefits of it. Yes. I also believe in the gallery system because I love the idea that people can just walk in and see artwork whether you have an underlying reason like I have. Hey, you can walk in and see artwork.

And if it's a good gallery, they don't have someone snooty at the desk who's not going to talk to you if you don't have on the newest Versace thing and having the best Prada bag. They're just going to be happy to see you and know that you're elevating that day for a person by letting them see art and answer your questions, because I actually have been in galleries. I went to one for an Alison Saar show in California years ago. I don't remember the name. And I walked in with another woman and she was older than I. She had orthotics in her sandals and they were sticking out of the back. I watched this girl look at her and I watched her size us up. And I was actually going to go to that gallery because Saar's work was there; that means maybe they're interested in that kind of work.

I wouldn't go back, ever, because of who they had at the door, because of how they were treating everyday people, not just the art stars and those people who could buy from them. As well as you never know who's going to buy from you—because, I tell you, millionaires have on a small herringbone check shirt and khaki pants, and you just don't know. You don't know. You don't know your ancestry or your—[inaudible]. You don't know. You should always treat people well.

What else do you want to know about galleries?

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Well, what about collectors who buy your jewelry, some of which is in your face?

JOYCE SCOTT: They yell [ph]. Well, it's funny. I had a collector in—I did a residency at Artpace in San Antonio. And that was wonderful. This was also while Mom was well. I came and got her. They give you your apartment and your workspace turns into the gallery. It's an old car dealership—old days. And this came from Linda Pace, God rest her soul. She has passed now. But it was the Pace picante [sauce] money. She was very generous—I'm spitting on you—what she created with this Artpace.

Well, a woman came—you know, I've been working the Houston—I worked in Texas before. So this woman came and she had on a necklace that I made that she'd lent to my exhibition called *Nigger Lips*. She was a good old' girl from Texas. And she told me—she was older than I—she told me, what I do sometimes is put it on backwards to make people—force them to read the word. And then I got them and then we talk about why I would be wearing this necklace.

And then I will meet the tiniest of people who will have my large jewelry on. You know, I try to do pins and earrings and things that are affordable. Then I have a production line that specifically I sell in Baltimore that's just strung and there's not a lot of peyote stitch in them. It's just a lot of fun jewelry. I have people who come up to me and who will come to an opening and they have on something I made out of buttons and wires 30 years ago because that's their Joyce piece.

So there's a whole array of what happens. There are people who buy it. Sometimes it's so political. They need the work, they want the work, but now they don't even wear it. And I'm a little chagrined when I hear that, because they know I make them to wear. But then I also understand why they can't do it also.

I use the same impulse, the same everything, to make a piece of jewelry that I do a piece of sculpture. It's not that it has to be worn. I put that in it so a person can actually easily wear it. But I want it to kick your butt, either through beauty—I luxuriate in beauty. I love that. It's the other thing about doing beadwork. I love that you're working with something that is beautiful. And what you make makes people pass that Rothko, walk right past because there's something listening down there that they've got to see.

Yes, I like that about it. I luxuriate in beauty. I teach that. I don't believe artists have to be political at all. It's just part of what I—it makes me a better citizen. I am not a politician. That's how I've got to get it out. But I also just like to roll around in the beauty of the materials and my skill to make work, as well.

ROBERT SILBERMAN: Roll on, Joyce.

JOYCE SCOTT: What else do you want to know?

ROBERT SILBERMAN: On that note, maybe we should stop.

JOYCE SCOTT: You want to stop, since I'm luxuriating in beauty?

ROBERT SILBERMAN: And make people walk past Rothkos. That is a good—

JOYCE SCOTT: I am sure they will get calls about that. I've never walked past a Rothko for you, Joyce Scott. And I'm talking about—

ROBERT SILBERMAN: You may get testimonials. I do it every time.

JOYCE SCOTT: But those people are—they think I am talking about somebody, Jimmy Rothko, their cousin. I say no, the painter. Can you work with me here?

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