

VISUAL ART

# The Best Baltimore Art Exhibitions of 2019

Another good year for Baltimore's visual art scene

December 23, 2019 | Words: Rebekah Kirkman



The best Baltimore art exhibitions of 2019 looked backward and forward, often simultaneously, probing current and past sociopolitical concerns as well as our increasingly foreboding environmental climate. Artists such as Deyane Moses and Nicole Ringel dug—in some cases, quite literally—into the ground upon which they stood and into the archives, pulling up and putting on display a major educational institution’s racist legacy (in the case of Moses’ work) and the chaotic pace of downtown Baltimore’s development and the parabolic broader implications of such change (in Ringel’s work), varyingly intense and bold, subtle and implicit. In two concurrent shows that opened this spring, curators Amy Eva Raehse (Goya Contemporary) and Cecilia Wichmann (BMA) considered legacy, inheritance, and the mother-daughter relationship as they brought together the art of Joyce J. Scott and her late mother Elizabeth Talford Scott. And then, this fall, the BMA brought in a massive exhibition to showcase the long-extant and ongoing profundity of abstract art by several generations of Black artists, many challenging the common conception of what “abstraction” can mean or what it is for. Experiential, immersive installations also stuck in our minds all year—even a few paintings exuded a similar quality, like Ryan Syrell’s, their scale and vivid colors fixing us in a trance while almost transporting us elsewhere.

It was, in short, another good year for Baltimore’s visual art scene and we’re eager to see where we wind up next year. Instead of a qualitative ranking from one to 10, we listed these shows in

chronological order. Read on for BmoreArt staff and contributors' thoughts on the 10 best exhibitions of 2019.

4. Elizabeth Talford Scott & Joyce J. Scott: *Reality, Times Two* at Goya Contemporary & *Hitching Their Dreams to Untamed Stars* at the Baltimore Museum of Art | May 10–July 31, 2019 & May 15–December 1, 2019



If you've ever spent, at minimum, 30 seconds in the presence of Joyce J. Scott you know she can tell a good story. Spend some time with her art and it'll reveal something too. These two exhibitions presented art by Joyce and her mother, Elizabeth Talford Scott—both of whom employ somewhat unconventional “art” materials such as beads, fabric, thread, and found objects. For decades, Joyce and Mother Scott worked side by side in their home studio in West Baltimore, and the influence of one artist on the other is undeniable, while their visual storytelling remained specific and unique. Both of these shows, as I wrote in July, crafted “a loose narrative of making something—in community with others, often out of on-hand materials, with excellent craftsmanship—because it needs to exist, because its critical engagement can benefit the world, at least as the first drop in a ripple.” And although it would have been easy for such a narrative to fall into Hallmark-like sweetness, the shows edified the mother-daughter relationship as a worthy subject, for all of its intellectual and emotional possibility. “Working side by side was a kind of history-making on its own, infusing both artists’ work with histories and memories, sewn with intention.”