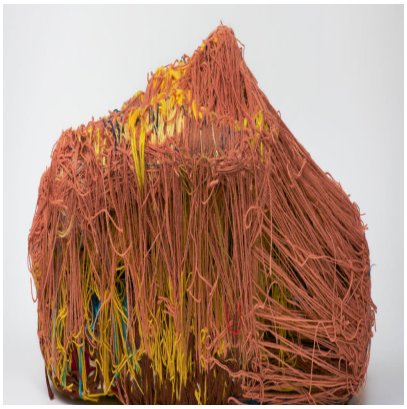

Fibres and Found Objects: Judith Scottâ??s Textile Art

Description



Judith Scott, Untitled, 1988-89, American Folk Art Museum, New York

The life of American textile artist Judith Scott is a remarkable story â?? one of struggle, survival, and strength found through the power of creativity. Born with Downâ??s Syndrome and diagnosed as deaf, Scott spent much of her early life in a care home. Years later, through the encouragement of her sister Joyce, Judith uncovered a profound connection with fibre art, making intricately woven art objects that merge yards and yards of colourful yarn with an eclectic mix of found objects. She spent days, weeks and months wrapping together cocoon-like creations that have the quality of living forms, resembling tangled undergrowth, tree roots or living creatures, muffling their original sources and transforming them into something entirely new and unrecognisable. Today her work is held in museum collections around the world, and her work is a testament to the communicative potential of art.

Judith Scott was born in 1943 in Cincinnati, Ohio. She spent her early years at home with her twin sister Joyce, and the pair developed a close, inseparable bond. However, when a bout of Scarlett fever left Judith deaf, doctors and psychologists deemed her â??uneducableâ?? and put immense pressure on Judithâ??s parents to move her into a care home. At the age of 7, Judith was taken by the authorities to an institution for the disabled, where she remained until 1986. As she grew up, Judithâ??s life was severely limited, and she never learned how to speak. By now Judithâ??s sister Joyce was grown up with her own family, and she chose to take on legal guardianship of her sister, a move which would change the course of Judithâ??s life.



Judith Scott, Untitled, 1993, Ruth Fremson/The New York Times

Joyce enrolled Judith into the radical Creative Growth Art Centre in Oakland, which was dedicated to encouraging neurodivergent individuals to find freedom through artistic expression. At first Judith struggled to connect with the course, finding little excitement or enthusiasm for drawing or painting, but the fibre art lessons with textile artist Sylvia Seventy had a profound impact on her. She subsequently began making a series of wrapped sculptures by weaving colourful yarns around discarded scraps of wood, producing a series of long, straight artworks now known as her â??totems.â??

Over time Scottâ??s sculptures became increasingly large, complex and ambitious, sometimes taking many months to complete. She began incorporating a wider range of eclectic found objects from baskets and bicycle wheels to scraps of ribbon and fabric, and even old chairs into her woven creations, concealing these â??readymadeâ?? objects through her hard-won, careworn acts of transformation. The results are hefty, overbearing sculptures with the same crude, colourful expression and theatrical, physical presence as Phyllida Barlow or Franz Westâ??s sculptures.



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Judith Scott, Untitled, 2004, Ruth Fremson/The New York Times

The threads and yarns Scott worked with varied from one work to the next, and they demonstrate a sensitive and acute awareness of colour, surface and texture; sometimes she covers almost the entire sculpture with white, save for a few accents of dark or bright thread, while other works merge together a series of earthy hues with small accents of hot pink or bright orange.

The communicative power of these sculptures is made even more profound by the fact that Scott never learned how to speak, yet she found an incredible outpouring of creativity through making art. Once she found her confidence, her drive to keep making was relentless â?? over the next 20 years she worked nearly every day, producing more than 200 wrapped sculptures. Remarkably, Scott also found herself dressing more creatively as she found her voice through art â?? she began wearing flamboyant fabrics, headscarves and jewellery that reflected the same visual language as her art. Scottâ??s first exhibition was held in 1999, coinciding with the publication *Metamorphosis: The Fibre Art of Judith Scott*. Since then, her art has been bought by museums and private collectors around the world, including Brooklyn Art Museum, The Smithsonian, The Museum of Modern Art in New York, the American Visionary Art Museum and the Irish Museum of Modern Art, and her work has featured in numerous retrospectives, demonstrating her widespread, international success, and her enduring legacy.

CATEGORY

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2. WEAVING
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