

Stitched Storytelling

Hourglass, Elizabeth Talford Scott

Let your eyes move around this quilt. What shapes, colors, and materials do you see?

At the center of *Hourglass* is a piece of fabric with a black background and red, purple, and yellow coils patterned throughout. Stitched on top of these coils are stones. Most are gray; some are purple or teal. Surrounding this field of coils and stones is a gray plaid fabric on which geometric shapes are appliquéd, including two hourglass shapes. Yellow palm tree-patterned fabric creates a border around the quilt.

Elizabeth Talford Scott (born Chester, SC 1916; died Baltimore, MD 2011) grew up in South Carolina to sharecroppers on the land where her grandparents were enslaved. A sharecropper is someone who farms rented land. Sharecropping became a widespread practice after the American Civil War (1861–1865) and the end of slavery. Elizabeth had 13 siblings, and resources were scarce. As children, she and her brothers and sisters were taught to repurpose scrapped materials to make useful goods, including quilts. Decades later, after a hiatus from quilting, a move to Baltimore, Maryland, and the birth of her daughter Joyce Scott, also an artist, Elizabeth returned to her practice. She continued to use fabric scraps and found materials to create quilts that told stories from her childhood and her family's history. Growing up, one of her responsibilities was to watch over the heated stones that kept pots of stew warm. The clusters of stones at the center of *Hourglass* are symbolic of this task. The use of found objects, such as the rocks and plastic pieces sewn into the middle of the quilt, references her father bringing home materials from work. The palm trees evoke the warm climate of her childhood hometown.



Elizabeth Talford Scott. *Hourglass*. 1984. Cotton and synthetic ground, cotton and metallic embroidery threads, glass beads, plastic and metal objects, rocks. 60 1/2 × 45 1/2 in. (153.7 × 115.6 cm). The Baltimore Museum of Art: Collectors Circle Fund for Art by African Americans, Baltimore Appliqué Society Fund, and purchased as the gift of the Joshua Johnson Council, and Mr. and Mrs. Irvin Greif, Jr., Lutherville, Maryland, BMA 2012.225. © Estate of Elizabeth Talford Scott at Goya Contemporary Gallery | TALP

Classroom Activities

- Elizabeth Talford Scott learned to sew from members of her family. She passed the skill along to her daughter, Joyce. Ask students what they have learned or would like to learn from their parents, grandparents, or other family members, and invite them to share with the class.
- Ask students to gather scraps, clean recyclables, and natural materials from their homes or school. Put all items together in a shared materials bank to be used by all students. On a paper base, and using glue and the found objects, invite students to make a collage that tells a personal story.

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