



3 Questions

## 3 Questions with Artist Dread Scott



(Courtesy Dread Scott)

By [Alex De Vore](#), August 03, 2022 at 12:00 am MDT

Brooklyn-based [Dread Scott](#) begins his artist statement by saying, “I make revolutionary art to propel history forward,” and, across his storied career, that’s precisely what he’s done. Scott has become what some describe as a provocateur: He’s spoken at TED Talks; he’s been shown in the Whitney Museum, MoMA and the Brooklyn Museum. Scott’s 2019 community-engagement piece, “Slave Rebellion Reenactment” has even been called one of the most important artworks of the decade. And now, he’s coming to Santa Fe to talk as part of the **Santa Fe Art Institute’s Art of Change 2022** fundraising series (**5:30 pm Saturday, Aug. 6. \$250-\$1,400. 1600 St. Michael’s Drive Bldg. 31**) We caught up with Scott to learn more.

**Would you say you feel a responsibility in any form as an artist to tackle big things, to help us filter emotions?**

I guess I feel as a person it's important to fight for the world you want to bring into existence. Some people have a disproportionate influence, and artists are some of those people. What artists do matters. This is a world that is brutally divided, principally between the tiny handful of people who control the great wealth and knowledge humanity as a whole has produced—and the people who produced that. Billions of people are functionally locked out of full participation in society. They can't have a conversation like we're having right now because they're busy working out how to eat. In large parts of the world...literally half the planet is trying to live on, I believe, less than \$3 a day. Those of us who have the relative luxury to work with ideas—do we reinforce the status-quo, or do we try to upend that in some ways large or small? I think it's really important to talk about the big questions.

As far as emotions, there are tons of ways artists have addressed this, and some of them are very emotional. And I mostly don't make work safe from my own personal feelings, per se. I'm just trying to look at what would it mean for people to understand that enslaved people were self-determined and trying to get free in the 1800s; that their descendants can try to make rebellions in the present, whatever that means. What does it mean to look at what the US flag and patriotism, and to give all sort of ordinary people the opportunity to participate in that conversation?

**You've had your work banned. Do you feel a sense of accomplishment from that, almost like it's working as intended on some level?**

Yeah, I mean, I tend to focus on the people who were inspired by it—people in housing projects who don't, let's be honest, don't much think about contemporary art works by undergraduate art students or standing in line to see the work. [In 1989] America was becoming more militaristic, and it wasn't quite the War on Terror, but they were starting to invade more countries and bomb more countries. People were starting to have more questions about that, so I think those are the people I'm mostly focused on, and the fact that the rulers of the country didn't like this work and went to the extraordinary length of banning it says a lot about the power of art and the frugality of this system.

People questioning the flag and US patriotism...to ban an artwork that does flies right in the face of the First Amendment. It was about much more than my artwork, but yeah, the work is working as intended.

**I'm curious about your take on this point in human history as an artist and someone who has been described as revolutionary. I read somewhere in an interview that you've considered the last few years inspiring. Are you still feeling that?**

I think it's more contradictory now. The protests around George Floyd were very inspiring—that people all over this country and the world and in big cities and small towns, including towns that don't have a lot of Black people—were saying Black lives matter...

The initial opening salvos of #MeToo were very good; the youth fighting for climate justice...that's very inspiring and very important. Some of the far-too-small, but courageous response to the overturning of Roe v Wade, the young activists—mostly women, but people of all genders—that's mostly good, but the other part of the dynamic is that fascism is on the rise all over the world and is particularly manifesting in the US.

The climate crisis is only getting worse, there's no government doing anything to stop the emergence. We're seeing runways in Europe melting and, in this country, women can't control their own bodies. This is very heavy, and I think that as part of this fascist movement, there are the Proud Boys, the Three Percenters. They're armed and dangerous, and it is in this cauldron of resistance and reactionary moves to consolidate the form of rule, in this is the actual possibility that people could lift a different future out of this situation.

I wouldn't say I'm hopeful, but I also don't think it's bleak. The fact that there were all these people standing up around George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, that was important for its own right, but there were also people who learned something. There are a lot of people looking at what's going on with the Supreme Court ruling of Roe, and they don't believe in this minority rule, which is very open that the Republicans in general are completely about that and disenfranchising people.

So could you look at Sam Cooke's 'Change is Gonna Come' and say that created civil rights legislation; could you look at the Clash's 'London Calling,' or 'Guernica,' or Billie Holiday's 'Strange Fruit' and say that stopped lynching or fascist bombing? No—but it does actually clarify for lots of people what right and wrong is. I jokingly tell people Joe Strummer saved my life. I never met him, but at a time when rulers of the world looked like they were truly insane to young radical kids, to have somebody in a young, popular band say 'Hey, you kids who think something is wrong? You're right...'

I think art helps people see questions differently. People who look at 'Slave Rebellion Reenactment' have to confront people's slavery, but see that the enslaved had the most radical notion of freedom in the US at the time. That is something to feel proud of and celebratory for. However difficult that was, that was the work we needed to do, that is something that does change how people think, whether it causes a specific shift in policy or more activists organize differently. But that's not what art does, I think, but it can challenge people.

I think I'm a good public speaker, and the 25 years of art I've made, when people see a comprehensive presentation, those that are looking for light in the darkness find something. A lot of people might know one work of mine, but to see the arc of it? For those who don't like the status quo, it's like, 'Wow, this is fucking cool.' I hope people will enjoy the conversation and learn something about my art and contribute funding to the Santa Fe Art Institute, which is a pretty cool organization. All these small arts orgs need support because they support artists.