

MARYLAND



Baltimore-based artist Jordan Tierney wades in the Jones Falls dressed in one of her works, a cape of plastic bottles. CHARLES COHEN

COMMENTARY

Wandering, wading through the once and future Earth



Dan Rodricks

I try to imagine what it would be like to stand along a river — say, the Jones Falls as it meanders through Baltimore — and look up from the mesmerizing flow to suddenly see a woman draped in a long cape of plastic bottles. What would I think?

Did she rise from the river, like some gritty sprite burdened and barnacled with trash? Is she a cast member from a new post-apocalyptic movie: “Mad Max in Waterworld”?

Who is this woman in the Jones Falls, bristling with bottles, and each bottle containing a stick with colored string?

“I don’t even call myself an artist, I’m a visual philosopher,” says Jordan Tierney, who created the cape for a narrative about a storyteller who wanders through the late 21st century after climate collapse. A video of Tierney wading through the Jones Falls is performance art; she’s acting out the role she imagined — a shaman-like figure who mourns, remembers and carries

the past as she wades the waterways and hikes the woods in and around Baltimore.

All of this comes not from conjecture, but from Tierney patiently explaining what she’s tried to achieve with her creations — the bottle cape for the storyteller, a colorful “winter festival garment” made from a junk shop raccoon coat and flattened aluminum cans, a “ceremonial garment” made from old shoulder pads, twine and wooden tool handles.

Tierney creates art from objects collected while hiking and wading through Herring Run, the Jones Falls, Western Run and small, nameless streams. She’s done this for years, thinking deeply about the environment and how humans have altered life on the planet, the whole time becoming intimately familiar with each place.

It started along Herring Run. She visited every day and came to feel a bond with the place.

“It took knowing it for a year of all the seasons,” she says, “in sun, rain, snow, wind, light, dark, bare tree limbs, spring floods, wildflowers, snakes shedding, falling cottonwood seeds, beavers chewing trees down, ospreys grabbing fish out of the current,

when I knew where to find the mulberry trees for a snack, the habits of the deer, mourning a beautiful sycamore that fell ... how the shoreline had changed in the last heavy rain, observing a decomposing carcass until only bones remained.

“My curiosity would always be rewarded there. I left the house everyday looking for everything and nothing.”

Tierney collected bones and feathers, the things that come naturally, and the things humans left behind — forks and knives, tools and toys and toy guns, pieces of machinery and lengths of rope, fishing lures and bobbers, the limbs of action figures. Tierney reaches into riffles for objects that have magic, or juju.

“I collect things with juju everyday from the stream and woods so the things in my environment are like the words in my head,” she says. “The things I find come with a story, a history, and have usually gathered more after they were cast off, been folded, rusted, run over, stepped on and traveled downstream.”

The imagined storyteller in the bottle cape, and the bottles with the colored sticks — what about all that?

“The plastic bottles with the sticks inside wrapped in color coded string patterns are just mnemonic devices to help remember stories,” she says. “I feel like my medium is really the energy an object can carry.”

Some of Tierney’s work appears through March 1 in an exhibit called, “Post-Consumption Benediction” at the BmoreArt Connect+Collect Gallery at 2519 N. Charles Street. Also on display are works by graffiti artist Adam Stab. Both turn objects they’ve collected — pieces of the urban past, scraps from our ferocious consumerism — into commentary on the present and future.

Regarding the latter, I asked Tierney if she felt we were doomed. The narrative she’s created — survivor settlements along rivers, a wandering storyteller draped in plastic — shouts resignation about what scientists believe will be the Earth’s sixth mass extinction.

“I am burdened by the knowledge of what we’ve done to the planet,” she says. “But I have learned that to only speak of that horror is to chase people away. ... I do believe we have brought about the eventual collapse of

the fragile balance that allowed such a lush planet to evolve. ... I have so much grief and guilt for what I have participated in and witnessed over my 60 years of living here. My work is now mostly about sharing the beauty and magic I still find out there.”

Tierney has a bone-deep sense of place now. She broke free from the structure of modern life to spend hours in the nearby natural world. “Once I started feeling Earth’s decline every waking moment, I needed a reason to continue to get up every day and to feel I could have a valuable role beyond just planting trees or something,” she says.

“The urban streams are so abused and forgotten I feel completely in a different time and dimension when I am there. It is not part of most peoples’ consciousness. I come home from my wandering laden with imagery and knowledge of the type that the dominant western culture tried to eradicate or devalue. I am existing outside the fracas. People get near my work or in my studio and tell me I have connected them to things they had lost about themselves and the earth. I realized I was acting as a shaman for them.”

Piece of Tubman statue returned

By Luke Parker

The Annapolis Police Department has returned the beaded staff stolen from a Harriet Tubman statue in December to the Banneker-Douglass Museum, museum officials announced Wednesday.

“Words cannot describe how relieved we are to get back this precious artwork by Dr. Joyce J. Scott,” Chanel Johnson, the museum’s executive director, said in a news release. “I want to thank the Annapolis Police Department, Del. Shaneka Henson, Dr. Scott, Goya Contemporary Gallery, museum staff, and the community at large for working together to get the missing work back to the museum.”

The staff, or vévé, is part of Scott’s “Araminta with Rifle and Vévé,” a 10-foot statue honoring the Maryland native and hero of the Underground Railroad. Tubman, who was born Araminta Ross into slavery in Dorchester County on the Eastern Shore, is depicted holding the staff in one hand and a beaded rifle in the other.

The rifle is adorned with flowers, and the vévé, a religious symbol used throughout African diaspora in different branches of Vodun, holds two birds.

In December, toward the end of what then-Gov. Larry Hogan anointed the “Year of Harriet Tubman,” the vévé was stolen from in front of the Banneker-Douglass Museum. It had received the statue on loan from the Goya Contemporary Gallery in September. Scott’s statue was brought to Annapolis from Baltimore as part of the museum’s latest exhibit, a collection of works from Maryland-based Black artists called “The Radical Voice of Blackness Speaks of Resistance and Joy.”

Scott, a Baltimore native and MacArthur fellow, offered to re-createthe stolen staff if it was not found.

Capt. Amy Miguez, a police spokesperson, said the department received several tips after hosting a Facebook community update with Johnson and Henson. In it, police showed security footage of two suspects, a man and a woman, they believed were responsible for the theft, saying, “It is possible the individuals who stole the staff were not aware of its significance and may now want to do the right thing and return it.”

The update took place on a Friday in January. Soon after, a man called police and said he had one part of the staff and knew who had the other. The vévé was returned in its entirety that weekend, Miguez said.

“The collective resolve to restore the dignity of this monumental figure — which exemplifies the resilience of the real-life person renowned for fighting against injustice — offers symbolism that cannot go unnoticed,” Amy Raehse, Goya Contemporary Gallery executive director, told Baltimore Sun Media.

“May we all continue to work together toward more enlightened times,” she continued, “and use this moment to shine light on the power of Harriet Tubman and her insistence on a more just future.”

Damage to the vévé is still being assessed, Banneker-Douglass officials said Wednesday, and staff members are working with Scott, the Goya Contemporary Gallery and an insurance company “on a path forward.”

It is “undetermined” whether the vévé will be reinstalled to the statue, according to a news release, and museum officials said Wednesday they had yet to decide whether they would file charges for the theft.

AG investigates failed traffic stop that led to pedestrian’s death

By Tony Roberts

The Maryland attorney general’s office is investigating a failed traffic stop by Baltimore Police that left a 54-year-old man dead, five car passengers injured and a building partially collapsed Wednesday night.

The attorney general’s office said a Baltimore Police Eastern District officer in an unmarked vehicle saw a black Hyundai Sonata that was reported stolen driving in the area. Officer Devin Yancy responded to the area in a marked police car and attempted a traffic stop around North Patterson Park Avenue and East North Avenue, but the Hyundai failed to stop, the attorney general’s office said.

Officers followed the Hyundai to the area of Sinclair Lane and North Wolfe Street, where it continued to flee, the attorney general’s office said. The Hyundai entered the

intersection of North Wolfe Street and East North at the border of the Broadway East and South Clifton Park neighborhoods where it collided with a sedan, the attorney general’s office said.

Both the Hyundai and the sedan struck a pedestrian who was standing on the sidewalk before crashing into a vacant rowhouse, the attorney general’s office said.

The pedestrian, 54-year-old Alfred Fincher of Baltimore, was pronounced dead on the scene. Of the five people who were injured in the vehicles, two were in the 2017 Hyundai Sonata, and three were in a 2006 Mitsubishi Eclipse that was struck by the Sonata.

The driver of the Sonata, 33-year-old Shawn Lee Brunson, has been arrested and charged with auto theft, and future charges are pending, police said, adding that the vehicle was stolen Tuesday.



Rubble lies at North Wolfe Street and East North Avenue, where two cars, one of which police were attempting to stop, collided and struck an East Baltimore building on Wednesday, according to Baltimore Police. KIM HAIRSTON/BALTIMORE SUN

Nuquanna Zimmerman, the daughter of a woman in the vehicle that was struck, said her mother, Nina Subber, was in surgery Thursday and had broken both ankles and fractured a knee. According to Zimmerman on Saturday, Subber has yet to be discharged. The other two passengers, her aunt and a cousin, also were injured. They suffered minor injuries and were discharged from the hospital the next day, while Zimmerman said.

The attorney general’s office is reviewing the death under a state law that went into effect in 2021 that

requires it to investigate all police-involved deaths in Maryland.

Baltimore officers are prohibited from pursuing a car if there is a “crime against property,” including auto theft or a minor traffic offense.

Public safety, familiarity with the area and whether the suspect’s identity is known are some of the factors that are supposed to go into the decision to chase a vehicle.

Although Baltimore Police cruisers are not equipped with dashboard cameras, the officers were wearing body-worn cameras, footage from

which is typically released within 14 days of an incident.

However, there may be situations in which more than 14 days are necessary, including needing more time to complete witness interviews and delays caused by the need to shield the identities of witnesses or to allow family members to view the video before it is released.

Since the attorney general’s office just picked up the investigation, it is unclear whether there will be any delays. In addition, the attorney general’s office is still investigating how many officers were involved.