For more than 40 years, John Scott has been a force of artistic legend, making timeless, powerful statements through his artmaking and teaching. He was one of those rare artistic spirits who let the “sidewalks of New Orleans speak to his soul and imagination. That is why the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities has embarked on its mission to make the LEH Humanities Center a focal point for Scott’s art; for no other artist has captured the cultural spirit and complexities of New Orleans and its people as eloquently.

Throughout his long career, Scott drew upon the city’s rich African-Caribbean culture and musical heritage in creating vibrant kinetic sculptures that explored themes such as the “diddley bow” from West African mythology or rhythms inspired by early 19th century African slave dances in the city’s famed Congo Square.

Scott used the words “jazz thinking” in describing his art “If you listen to a really good jazz group three things are always evident. Jazz musicians are always in the ‘now’ while you’re hearing it, but these guys are incredibly aware of where they have been and have an unbelievable anticipation of where they are going. To me that’s jazz thinking. It’s improvisational thinking in the sense that I don’t have to contrive some system of connecting two things that don’t seem related, because I understand the relationship.”

Scott was awarded the prestigious “Genius Grant” from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation in 1992 as one of the nation’s most innovative artists. He was also awarded honorary Doctor of Humanities degrees from Michigan State and Tulane universities. The New Orleans Museum of Art ( NOMA) recognized Scott’s contribution in a major retrospective, Dance Dance: The Art of John T. Scott in 2005.

Scott studied art at Michigan State University and Xavier University of New Orleans, where he later taught art for over 40 years.

On September 1, 2007, Scott died in Houston, after two double lung transplants and his long struggle with pulmonary fibrosis. He was 67.