

FAITH RINGGOLD

Teacher, Painter, Activist, Creator of Masks, Sculptor, Quilter, Printer, Author, Illustrator

Faith Ringgold was born October 8, 1930 in Harlem, New York, the youngest of three children. Being asthmatic as a child, she spent a lot of time in bed reading, coloring, drawing, as well as creating things with bits of cloth that her mother, a fashion designer and dressmaker, gave her. She received a B.A. degree in Fine Art and Education from City College in New York in 1955, and a Masters degree 1959. She taught art to children of different age levels in the New York City school system in various city schools for eighteen years, from 1955 until 1973, teaching college courses in the early 1970's as well.

During the 1960's Ringgold began painting professionally. She started learning about African art and design, mixing it with the art of old masters which she learned in college, and creating art that spoke to her experience as a black woman and to the discrimination in society. She called her work "Super Realism". One of her early series was oil paintings titled the "American People" series, a visual expression of the Civil Rights movement from a woman's point of view. Its style synthesized post cubist Picasso, pop art, and traditional African sculpture.

She initially was not accepted into the black artist community and had difficulty finding galleries to show her work, but had her first real contact with other black artists in 1966 when she participated in a black exhibition in Harlem. The next year she started painting protest murals, "The Flag Is Bleeding", "U.S. Postage Stamp Commemorating the Advent of Black Power", and "Die", the largest of the three, 72X144, a warning about violence, painted after Malcolm X and Robert Kennedy had been assassinated. The next year Ringgold had her first one person exhibit at a gallery in New York City. The following year she participated in a

benefit exhibition for Martin Luther King at the Museum of Modern Art.

Besides her art, Ringgold became an activist beginning with the exclusion of black artists in the 1968 Whitney Museum exhibit, "The 1930's: Painting and Sculpture in America". She helped organize a demonstration outside the museum; though small, it gained press recognition. From 1969 to 1970 she also protested MOMA's exclusion of black artists.

In the 1970's she became a feminist and organized protests at the Whitney to include 50% of their art created by women. She won an award from the Creative Arts Public Service Program to do a mural, which she did with all female imagery, for a woman's prison in New York City. Also in the 1970's she began lecturing on black and feminist art, touring colleges and universities.

On a visit to the Rijks Museum in Amsterdam in 1972 Ringgold learned about Tibetan Tankas, soft cloth frames, which she started using for her paintings and which enabled her to get rid of frames and glass. She could then roll up her paintings, making it easier and less expensive to transport to the university museums which began to show interest in her work.

Ringgold first used tankas in her "Feminist" series, working with her mother who made the frames. In this series, Ringgold wrote messages inspired by the words of African American women, such as Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman and Shirley Chisholm. This was a precursor to her story quilts.

In 1973 she started creating masks with intricate beading, later adding costumes to them. She also started making dolls for a series of lectures and exhibits..

Faith Ringgold is perhaps most noted for her quilts. She made her first one in collaboration with her mother in 1980, "Echoes of Harlem". After her mother died the following year, she planned to make a quilt almost every year in her mother's memory. She has made over eighty

quilts since. Half are story quilts, the text being incorporated into her artwork. Most of the stories are about women and all the narrators are female. The quilts are mostly painted; some include etching, lithographs, silk screen and appliqué. These quilts blur the line between craft, as quilts were traditionally considered, and “high art”. Her first story quilt, “Who’s Afraid of Aunt Jemima”, represented a feminist issue. Another well known story quilt is “Tar Beach”, from her “The Woman on Bridge” series; it is in the permanent collection of the Guggenheim Museum in New York. Her most ambitious quilt tribute to her mother is “The French Collection”, a twelve part painted story quilt series about a young black woman artist who goes to Paris, painted in the manner of Van Gogh, Matisse, Monet and Picasso, and incorporating her ancestors.

Ringgold launched a new career as a writer and illustrator of children’s books with the Publication of Tar Beach in 1991, based on her story quilt and silk screen, which was named a Caldecott Honor book and won the Coretta Scott King Award for illustration, as well as many other awards. There is an animated version of it on HBO and it has been released on DVD. She has written sixteen children’s books to date, her most recent Henry O. Tanner: His Boyhood Dream Comes True, published in 2011.

In 1999 Ringgold created a series of story quilts titled “Coming to Jones Road” referring to the underground railroad and the escape of slaves to the north. She also self published an eighteen page book of the same name. Besides the story quilt painting “Under a Blood Red Sky”, she created two multiple editions of the image: a twenty edition silkscreen on canvas with fabric borders and a forty edition lithograph as part of the Jones Road series.

Faith Ringgold has received more than seventy-five awards, including twenty-two honorary Doctor of Fine Arts, including one from her alma mater, City College, and one from the Chicago

Institute of Arts. Her art is in many private and public collections (the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, Boston Museum of Fine Art, the St. Louis Art Museum, High Museum, Williams College Museum of Art, among others). She also has many public commissions.

Faith Ringgold is now professor emeritus at the University of California San Diego where she taught art from 1987 until 2002, dividing her time between California and New York, and later Englewood, NJ where she now lives.

From June 21 to November 10, 2013 forty-nine of her paintings were exhibited at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C.

KIA Library source:

[We Flew Over the Bridge: The Memoirs of Faith Ringgold](#) (Boston: Little Brown, 1995)

Submitted by Marian Fisher

SCREEN PRINT or SERIGRAPH

“The Serigraph (commonly known as the silk screen) is created by forcing ink through a finely meshed screen onto the paper underneath. Non-image (white) areas are blocked out on the screen with a stencil, thus preventing the ink from reaching the paper. Serigraphs are characterized by perfectly flat, uniform areas of color, which are well suited to abstract, geometric images and simple designs.”

From KIA handout, “What is an original print”