Faith Ringgold (1930–)

from African American Almanac

Painter, Fiber Artist

Born in Harlem, New York, on October 8, 1930, Faith Ringgold was raised by parents who made sure she would enjoy the benefits of a good education. She attended the City College of New York, receiving her B.S. in 1955, and her M.FA. in 1959. She is a professor emeritus of art at the University of California at San Diego.

Committed to a revolutionary perspective both in her political subject matter and her unconventional aesthetic, Ringgold is a symbolic expressionist whose stark paintings are acts of social reform directed toward educating her audience. Her most intense focus has been upon the problems of being black in America. Her works highlight the violent tensions that tear at American society, including discrimination suffered by women.

Her boldly political work has been well received and widely shown. She has had several one-person shows, the first in 1968; and her paintings are included in the collections of the Chase Manhattan Bank, the Museum of Modern Art, the Bank Street College of Education, and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

In 1972 Ringgold became one of the founders of the Women Students and Artists for Black Liberation, an organization whose principal goal is to make sure that all exhibitions of black artists give equal space to paintings by men and women. She donated a large mural depicting the roles of women in American society to the Women's House of Detention in Manhattan.

Aesthetically, Ringgold believes that “black art must use its own color, black, to create its light, since that color is the most immediate black truth.” Her most recent paintings have been an attempt to give pictorial realization to this vision.

Her first quilt Echoes of Harlem was completed in 1980, and was followed by The Sunflower Quilting Bee at Arles, and Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima? In 1991 she illustrated and wrote the children's book Tar Beach. Notable works include The Flag Is Bleeding, Flag for the Moon, Die Nigger, Mommy & Daddy, and Soul Sister, Woman on a Bridge.

Ringgold has received many awards and accolades inclusive of the 1992 Caldecott Honor Book for her book Tar Beach, and a 1996 award from the National Museum of Women in the Arts for her accomplishments.

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