

Kids @ CAM – At Home Family Projects

Spotlight on Art History

FAITH RINGGOLD

About the Artist:

“You can’t sit around and wait for somebody to say who you are. You need to write it and paint it and do it.”

Faith Ringgold (born in Harlem, NY 1930) is a painter, writer, mixed media sculptor and performance artist, best known for her narrative quilts. Ringgold's artistic practice is extremely broad and diverse, and includes media from painting to quilts, from sculptures and performance art to children's books. As an educator, she taught in the New York City Public school system and at the college level. During the early 1960's Ringgold traveled in Europe. She created her first political paintings, *The American People Series* from 1963 to 1967 and had her first and second one-person exhibitions at the Spectrum Gallery in New York. In the early 1970's Ringgold began making tankas (inspired by a Tibetan art form of paintings framed in richly brocaded fabrics), soft sculptures and masks. She later utilized this medium in her masked performances of the 1970's and 80's. Although Faith Ringgold's art was initially inspired by African art in the 1960's, it was not until the late 1970's that she traveled to Nigeria and Ghana to see the rich tradition of masks that have continued to be her greatest influence. In 1973, she quit teaching public school to devote herself to creating art full-time. Ringgold began experimenting with sculpture as a new medium to document her local community and national events. Her sculptures range from costumed masks to hanging and freestanding soft sculptures, representing both real and fictional characters from her past and present. Ringgold has been an activist since the 1970s, participating in several feminist and anti-racist organizations. She made her first quilt, *Echoes of Harlem*, in 1980, in collaboration with her mother, Madame Willi Posey. The quilts were an extension of her tankas from the 1970's. However, these paintings were not only bordered with fabric but quilted, creating for her a unique way of painting using the quilt medium. She published her first book, the award-winning *Tar Beach* in 1991. It has won over 20 awards including the Caldecott Honor and the Coretta Scott King award for the best-illustrated children's book of 1991. The original painted story quilt, *Tar Beach*, is in the permanent collection of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City. In 1995, Ringgold published her first autobiography titled *We Flew Over the Bridge*. The book is a memoir detailing her journey as an artist and life events, from her childhood in Harlem and Sugar Hill, to her marriages and children, to her professional career and accomplishments as an artist.



ART AT HOME – AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL QUILT

What You Will Need:

- Fabrics (you need one larger solid piece for the background, preferably with light colors, and smaller pieces to create the frame)
- Fabric glue
- Pencil or thin tipped marker
- Many colors of paint
- Paint brushes of different sizes
- Fabric markers
- Cardboard that is the same size as the background fabric.

Faith Ringgold's work often focused on telling her story. Her work represented what was important to her as well as scenes and memories from her life. Before you begin, think about what you want to convey in your work. You can illustrate a favorite memory or develop a scene that expresses who you are and what you value.

- Step 1 – Glue your background fabric onto the cardboard. Smooth the fabric with your hands and allow it to dry.
- Step 2 – Cut other pieces of fabric into thin rectangular pieces that will fit as a frame. Place them to the side to apply after you paint.
- Step 3 – Using your pencil or thin tipped marker, sketch out your design.
- Step 4 – Paint in your design.
- Step 5 – Once the paint is fully dry, outline parts of it with fabric markers if you like.
- Step 6 – Glue your fabric frame onto the edges of your background fabric.
- Step 7 – Clean your work area.

Tips:

- To keep the glue from being too thick and showing through the fabric, you may want to apply it using a paint brush.
- Painting and drawing on fabric feels different than painting and drawing on paper. Take your time and use small brushstrokes at first.

Questions for Discussion:

- Show your work to someone else and ask what they see when they look at it. Tell them about what you were thinking when you were making your artwork.
- How does it feel to create artwork based on your life?
- Look at the many different types of work of Faith Ringgold. Which is your favorite? Is it her sculptures? Her paintings? Her narrative quilts? Explain why.

Follow Up Project Suggestion:

- Read Faith Ringgold's book *Tar Beach*. Use that as a guide to write your own story that illustrates the artwork you created.

