

**FAITH RINGGOLD**  
**AMERICAN ARTIST**  
**1930 –**

Faith Ringgold is a contemporary, African American female artist living and working today. She began as a painter and art educator, but has also created soft sculptures and dolls, performance art, and become a well-known children's book author and illustrator. Ringgold is best recognized for taking the old tradition of quilt making and combining it with painting to create her famous STORY QUILTS. She is one of the pioneers in making quilts a high art form rather than a craft. Since 1980, Ringgold has made over 80 quilts. Most of these are paintings with some of them incorporating printing media such as etching, lithography, and silk screen. A few of them have appliqué

Born in Harlem, New York in 1930, Faith Ringgold spent many of her childhood days sick at home, through most of kindergarten and first grade. Her mother Willi Posey Jones took care of her and often gave her paper, crayons, needles, thread, and fabric along with her school books. Willi was a fashion designer and dressmaker, thus cloth and fabric were always around Ringgold's home throughout her life.

Ringgold began painting in the early 1950s. In 1972, she made a trip to Europe and visited the Rijks Museum in Holland. This is where she encountered an exhibit of Tibetan **TANKAS**, paintings on silk cloth. When she returned to the United States, she took up teaching and was doing a lecture and exhibition tour. During the tour, sixteen of her watercolor paintings were stolen from a truck on their way to New York from the University of Louisiana in Baton Rouge. This was Ringgold's first experience with art theft, and it discouraged her from continuing in this art form. Watercolors were expensive to transport, and their glass frames made them susceptible to breakage. She realized that if she wanted to continue to promote herself and her artwork, she had to find a way to ship her work inexpensively and easily. She understood paintings on canvas could be rolled and shipped inexpensively but was still wondering about the framing issue. Using ideas assimilated from her mother's sewing and the Tibetan **TANKAS**, Ringgold decided that her paintings could be framed in cloth and she began doing so in the fall of 1972.

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Originally, the cloth frames were an effort to get rid of frames, glass, and heavy cumbersome stretchers for her paintings. But as time went by, Ringgold's work evolved. Often she heard her mother tell stories of her grandmother, a slave ancestor, who boiled and bleached flour sacks to line quilts. Her grandmother had been made to do this **QUILTING** as part of her plantation duties. Ringgold also heard her father's stories of his father, who was a minister. He had apparently been a great storyteller and was able to share many tales about everyone in town. Ringgold became naturally interested in using quilts as a means to telling stories. The central theme in most of her work is addressing the issues of African American women in American history.

Ringgold's first quilt was done in collaboration with her mother in 1980 and was called "Echoes of Harlem". Her second quilt, "Mother's Quilt" was done in July 1983 in a single weekend in memory of her mother. Her third quilt, and first **STORY QUILT** was begun in January of 1984 and was entitled "Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?" It took her a year to complete.

"Tar Beach", a quilt painting that incorporates a written story is from her "Woman on a Bridge" series, which she completed in 1988. This story quilt was seen by a publisher who suggested that she tell the story in book form, with her accompanying illustrations. This was her first of many children's books. It has won more than 30 awards, including a Caldecott Honor and the Coretta Scott King award for the best illustrated children's book of 1991. These stories of fictional heroines present images encouraging children to 'take flight' and follow their dreams.

Ringgold has illustrated fifteen children's books, twelve of which were also written by her. The newest book, *Harlem Renaissance Party* will be released in 2015. She has exhibited in major museums in the USA, Europe, South America, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. She is in the permanent collection of many museums including the, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Smithsonian and the National Museum of Women in the Arts.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY/RESOURCES

### Books

#### Children's fiction by Faith Ringgold

*Tar Beach*, 1991  
*Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky*, 1992  
*Dinner at Aunt Connie's House*, 1993  
*Bonjour Lonnie*, 1996  
*My Dream of Martin Luther King*, 1995  
*The Invisible Princess*, 1998  
*If a Bus Could Talk: The Story of Rosa Parks*, 1999  
*Counting to Tar Beach*, 1999  
*Cassie's Colorful Day*, 1999  
*Cassie's Word Quilt*, 2002  
*Harlem Renaissance Party*, 2015

#### Faith Ringgold and/or other authors

*O Holy Night: Christmas with the Boys Choir of Harlem*, Public Domain and Faith Ringgold, 2004  
*A View From the Studio*, Curlee Raven Holton, 2004  
*We Flew Over the Bridge: The Memoirs of Faith Ringgold*, Faith Ringgold, 2005  
*The Three Witches*, Zora Neale Hurston, and Faith Ringgold, 2006  
*Getting to Know the World's Greatest Artists*, Faith Ringgold, Mike Venezia, 2007  
*Bronzville Boys and Girls*, Gwendlyn Brooks and Faith Ringgold, 2007  
*Henry Ossowa Tanner: His Boyhood Dream comes True*, Faith Ringgold, 2011  
*Talking to Faith Ringgold* by Faith Ringgold, Linda Freeman & Nancy Roucher, 1996  
*911 Freedom Flag Stories*, Faith Ringgold, 2011  
*Faith Ringgold Portraits of Women Artists for Children*, Robyn Montana Turner, 1993  
*Inspirations: Stories About Women Artists: Georgia O'Keeffe, Frida Kahlo, Alice Neel, and Faith Ringgold*, Leslie Sills (p.40), 1988  
*Dancing at the Louvre: Faith Ringgold's French Collection and Other Story Quilts*, Dan Cameron, 1988

#### Quilting

*Sam Johnson and the Blue Ribbon Quilt*, Lisa Ernst, 1992  
*The Patchwork Quilt*, Valeria Fluornoy, 1985  
*Patchwork Quilt Designs* (coloring book), S. Johnston. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1979  
*The Quilt Story*, Tony Johnston and Tomie De Paola, 1996  
*The Quilt*, Ann Jonas  
*14,287 Pieces of Fabric and Other Poems*, Jean R. Laury, 1994  
*Coat of Many Colors*, Dolly Parton, 1996  
*Eight Hands Round, A Patchwork Alphabet*, Ann W. Paul, 1996  
*The Keeping Quilt*, Patricia Polacco, 2001  
*Quilting, Now & Then*, K.B. & Dock, J.B. Quilling. Ashland: Now and Then Publications, 1994

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## Videos

*The Last Story Quilt\**

*Faith Ringgold Paints Crown Heights\**

*Tar Beach with Faith Ringgold*

\*Greater Reston Arts Center has copies of the video in VHS

## Websites

[www.faithringgold.blogspot.com](http://www.faithringgold.blogspot.com)

[www.faithringgold.com](http://www.faithringgold.com)

[www.ndoylefineart.com/ringgold.html](http://www.ndoylefineart.com/ringgold.html)

[www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/ringgold\\_faith.html](http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/ringgold_faith.html)

[www.pbs.org/wnet/aaworld/arts/ringgold.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/aaworld/arts/ringgold.html)

[www.pbs.org/americaquilts/century/stories/faith\\_ringgold.html](http://www.pbs.org/americaquilts/century/stories/faith_ringgold.html)

[http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/most/hd\\_most.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/most/hd_most.htm)

## Local art

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY - "Street Story Quilt",

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC - "Bitter Nest #2: Harlem Renaissance Party"

American Craft Museum, New York, NY - "Shades of Alice"

The High Museum Atlanta, GA - "Church Picnic"

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY - "Tar Beach"

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA - "Tar Beach 2"

Spelman College Museum, Atlanta, GA - "Groovin' High"

Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, MA - "100 Years at Williams College 1889-1989"

St. Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, MO - "Jo Baker's Birthday"

## Permanent Installations

Eugenio Maria de Hostos Community College, Bronx, New York

MTA 125th Street IRT Subway, New York, NY

Public Art for Public Schools, P.S. 22 Brooklyn, NY

The Women's House of Detention, Riker's Island, NY