
PROTEST POSTERS

New Museum Kids Menu provides families with activities to learn about contemporary art and ideas at home.



Spanning nearly sixty years, **“Faith Ringgold: American People,”** now on view at the New Museum, shows the depth of **Faith Ringgold’s** (b. 1930, Harlem, New York, NY) engagement with materials, particularly textiles and paint, and the breadth of her cultural influences, including Tibetan thangka paintings and African textiles. An African American artist and mother born in Harlem during the Harlem Renaissance, Ringgold began making art during the civil rights movement. Her work centers the experiences of Black women through figurative representations of herself and fictional characters. Ringgold uses paintings, storytelling, performance, and protest posters to emphasize the intersecting struggles for women’s and Black liberation.

Inspired by the Black Power movement, Ringgold developed a unique language of symbolism in her protest paintings and posters, which included the black, red, and green colors of the **Pan-African flag** and geometric shapes inspired by African textiles, such as those created by women of the **Kuba**

Kingdom, modern-day Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Directly referencing women's and Black liberation movements, Ringgold's *Woman Freedom Now* (1971) poster centered African American women, who were active and yet largely marginalized and not visible in representations of both movements. The poster was created as part of a fundraising effort in support of Black feminist causes, including the freeing of Black scholar and activist Angela Davis, who was imprisoned at the time. In Ringgold's own words:

"The climate in the States was changing in 1967 from the Civil Rights period to the beginnings of the Black Revolution. Clayton Powell Jr. and Stokely Carmichael had yelled and proclaimed, 'Black Power!' And everybody went crazy: 'What do you mean, 'black power'? We'd never heard of it. Black? How could black have power?' It was a very exciting time when we realized that you're not going to get anywhere in this world unless you have power. It was recognizing a freedom of identity that we had never had before. Even though we were only ten percent of the population, a very small group, it did not matter. What's wrong with black power? It's good."

— Faith Ringgold, interview in the exhibition catalogue, **Faith Ringgold: American People**

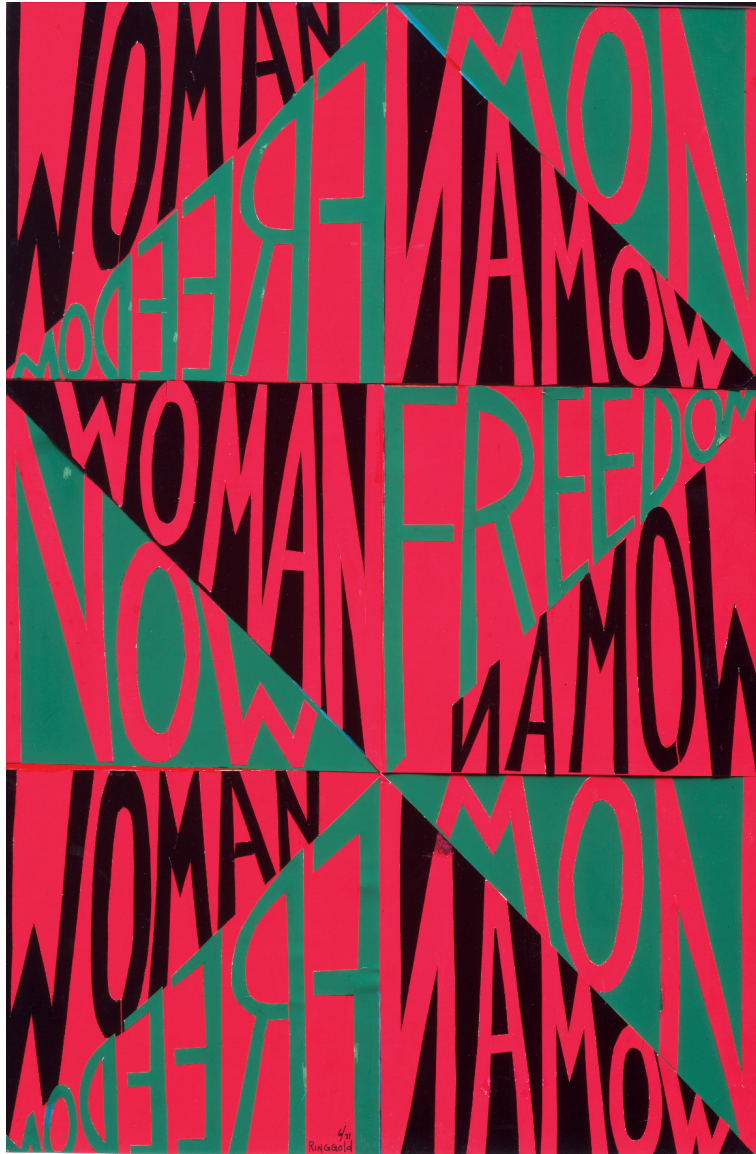
Watch this video to learn more about Ringgold's art of activism, storytelling, textiles, and painting:



KEY WORDS

- **protest** (noun): the act of expressing disagreement; (verb): to demonstrate through group or individual means one's dissatisfaction with policies, laws, or practices. Group protests might include organized marches, occupying a space outside or within an institution, or boycotting businesses or products with posters and chants.
- **protest poster**: printed material conveying dissatisfaction with laws, policies, or practices. Posters might be handmade with markers, paint, screen printing or other methods, printed out, or photocopied.
- **Black Power**: a movement that arose out of the 1960s civil rights movement, intent on achieving freedom for African Americans and uniting and empowering people of African descent. The term Black Power was first coined by Stokely Carmichael in 1966. Symbols of the movement include the Pan-African colors black, red, and green, which Ringgold used frequently in her work.
- **symbol**: colors, shapes, and other visual elements that represent a word, phrase, belief, idea, movement, or group of people. For instance, Ringgold uses black, red, and green colors in her art to reference the Pan African flag, which was also used by the Black Power movement.
- **pattern**: colors and/or shapes that repeat to create a noticeable or regular rhythm.

START WITH ART: FAITH RINGGOLD



- What letters or words do you see?
- What shapes do you notice?
- Do you see a pattern? How would you describe the pattern formed by the shapes, colors, and letters?
- Why do you think the artist chose to combine these colors, shapes, and words?
- If these colors were feelings, what would they be?

- If you could hear these words what would they sound like? Try reading or saying them aloud.
- What message do you think the artist is trying to share?

How can Ringgold's use of **symbols** and **patterns** in her **protest poster** inspire us to make our own activist artwork?

MAKE ART

Let's create a protest poster using colors, shapes, letters, words, and/or symbols to communicate an idea or opinion about an issue we care about.

Materials

- Plain paper of any scale for your design, but larger than standard 8.5 x 11" if you want your poster to be seen from a distance
- Pencil and eraser
- Coloring tools as available, including markers, colored pencils, crayons, or oil pastels
- Optional: a ruler to draw straight lines and/or shapes
- Optional: alphabet stencils for tracing letters
- Optional: scanner and printer or photocopier

Making

1. Think about a current issue that is important to you. This might be related to gender and/or racial equality, concern for the environment, or something else that is specific to your experience, town, school, or local community. If you could share your opinion and feelings, what would you say?
2. Do some research on your issue. Are there symbols people have used to express similar beliefs? For example, if your topic is the environment and you're talking about recycling, you can use **the symbol for recycling**, or incorporate the color green into your poster.
3. If there are no existing symbols associated with your issue, or if you want to create a new one, combine shapes and/or colors that you think

communicate what your issue is about with the tone and feeling you want to express. For example, Ringgold used triangles rotated in different directions and the colors green, black, and red as symbols in *Woman Freedom Now*.

4. Think about words you might want to include in your poster. Consider writing them out on scrap paper and checking the spelling with an adult or older sibling before arranging them on your poster.
5. Consider the overall design of your poster. How do you want the words, symbols, and colors to interact? You might make a few sketches before picking a final design.
6. As part of your design, consider creating a pattern with your symbols, shapes, colors, and/or words, similar to how Ringgold created a pattern by rotating and repeating words, triangular shapes, and colors.
7. Once you have a design you like, make your final version, carefully spelling out words, and organizing symbols on your final poster paper.
8. Hold up your poster as if you're in a protest. How does it feel?
9. Optional: Scan and make copies of your poster design to trade or share with others.

Reflection

- How did you decide which issue to portray?
- What words and symbols did you use to share your opinions? Did you create your own symbols or use existing ones?
- If you showed your poster to friends or family, did they recognize the symbols? Did they understand the opinions you were sharing?
- How do you think it would feel to hold your poster in a public protest, or to hang it in a public space?
- How might your poster inspire others to take action in support of the same or a different issue?

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Images (top to bottom): "Faith Ringgold: American People," 2022. Exhibition view: New Museum, New York. Photo: Dario Lasagni; Faith Ringgold, *Woman Freedom Now*, 1971. Offset lithograph; 30 × 20 in (76.2 × 50.8 cm). Courtesy the artist and ACA Galleries, New York

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