

## QUILTED STORIES

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



**Faith Ringgold** (b. 1930, Harlem, New York, NY).

Bringing together more than fifty years of work, the exhibition **“Faith Ringgold: American People,”** demonstrates the breadth of the artist's unique practice. Among Ringgold's most well-known works are her groundbreaking story quilts, paintings on fabric bordered by quilting with her writings. Incorporating quilting,

painting, soft sculpture, printmaking, and storytelling, Ringgold's story quilts include semi-autobiographical writings that depict African American activists alongside artists from the European canon, while detailing some of the challenges she has faced as a Black artist and mother. In this way, Ringgold reclaims a place for herself within an art world largely shuttered to African American women. In addition to her innovative use of mixed media, Ringgold's ever-evolving engagement with art institutions through protest, activism, and mounting artist-curated exhibitions has created opportunities for other artists.

This Kids Menu focuses on *The Sunflowers Quilting Bee at Arles: The French Collection Part I, #4*, (1991), one of Ringgold's celebrated story quilts. In *The Sunflowers Quilting Bee at Arles*, Ringgold portrays a group of famous and influential Black women from across history seated at a quilting table:

**Sojourner Truth**, **Harriet Tubman**, **Madam C.J. Walker**, **Ida B. Wells**, **Mary McLeod Bethune**, **Fannie Lou Hamer**, **Rosa Parks**, and **Ella Baker**. These women advocated for African American rights, freedoms, and opportunities, reshaping the course of American history. The group stitches fabric covered with sunflowers, while the mid-nineteenth-century Dutch artist, Vincent van Gogh, stands in the background holding a bouquet. Some of Van Gogh's most famous works are his **paintings of sunflowers in Arles**, which are referenced in the title and imagery of this work. Ringgold said of *The French Collection* series:

"....I wanted to show there were Black people when Picasso, Monet, and Matisse were making art. I wanted to show that African art and Black people had a place in that history.

...For me it also had a lot to do with my mother, as you know. She was a seamstress, and she taught me how to back the quilts up and how to put the seams in and hold them together. Although she was a dressmaker, she still knew all the steps to make quilts, because she had grown up at a time when African Americans still made quilts to go on beds. Women would sit around and make quilts and talk and tell stories as they did. So yes, storytelling and quilts have been related for centuries..."

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

Follow **this link** to read the full transcript of the story quilt *The Sunflowers Quilting Bee at Arles* and others in the Ringgold's *French Collection Series*.

Watch this video to learn more about Ringgold's art and how it intersects with activism, storytelling, quilting, and painting:



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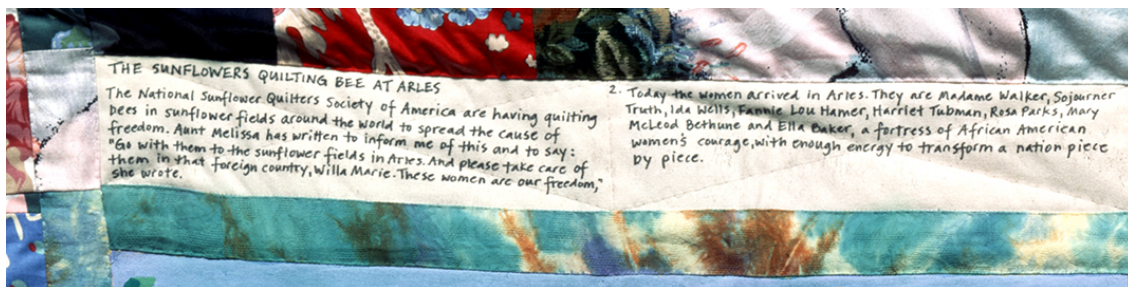
## KEY WORDS

- **quilting:** a method for piecing together fabric to make quilts that are often used for warmth and sometimes also for decoration. Ringgold's use of quilting is part of her visual arts practice and was influenced by co-creating artwork with her mother as a child.
- **story quilt:** a unique form of mixed media art created by Faith Ringgold that includes a central painting on fabric with quilted borders and Ringgold's written stories. Ringgold developed story quilts as a way to share personal narratives and her point of view as an African American mother and artist.
- **narrative:** a story; artwork that conveys a story through images and/or words
- **mixed media:** an art-making technique where one combines different processes and materials not typically found together; for instance, Ringgold's combination of painting, quilting, and storytelling
- **foreground:** the area that is closest to the viewer; or to make a prominent or important feature.

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## START WITH ART: FAITH RINGGOLD





- What do you notice about the women's clothing in this artwork? Do the people appear to be the same age, or from the same era or time period?
- Ringgold's writing is on the white borders above and below the central picture. How is the placement of the words different from and/or similar to books you've read? Are you able to read the words on the story quilt? What effect does the size of the words create?
- What is the relationship between the man holding sunflowers and the women at the quilting table, and what are they doing? Who is in the background? Who is in the foreground or front of the painting? Who do you think the artist wants us to notice first?

- What do you notice about the border around the painting? What kinds of colors and patterns do you notice? Do any of the patterns or colors repeat?

How can Ringgold's **mixed-media story quilt** inspire us to make a **narrative** artwork honoring people we know from our own lives and families, or important people from history or today?

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## MAKE ART

Let's create a mixed-media story quilt collage using materials available at home to celebrate people we know and love in our daily lives, or people we admire from afar.

### Materials

- Plain paper or fabric for drawing, painting, and collaging
- Markers, colored pencils, oil pastels, watercolor, acrylic paint, or any other drawing or painting supplies
- Magazines, newspapers, catalogs, or books that you can cut and use to make a collage
- Old clothing, fabric, or fabric scraps you're allowed to cut
- Scissors
- Wet school glue
- Optional: digital images of family members, people you admire from history or today, and a printer

### Making

1. Think about who you want to honor in your story quilt. Are there family members, people from history, or cultural icons you want to feature?
2. Once you select your honorees, assemble images of them. If you're representing family members, look for printed copies of photographs, or print them out if you have access to a printer. If you're including contemporary or historical figures, look online for images to print, or cut images out of newspapers or magazines. You can also make drawings or paintings of the people you'd like to include instead of using printouts of photographs.

3. Consider what the people you're representing have in common. What visual elements (colors, shapes, repeating images) can you use to tie them together? For example, Ringgold used sunflowers in *Sunflowers Quilting Bee at Arles: The French Collection Part I, #4* to link African American women activists spanning two centuries and a European, male painter.
4. Make a few arrangements of your cutout prints of people. If you are making drawings or paintings of people, you might cut them into different shapes and arrange them, too.
5. Once you've found an arrangement you like, glue the pieces onto a piece of paper or fabric.
6. Next, add elements or create an environment connecting the people in a shared space. In Ringgold's story quilt, she linked people who would not have been together in reality because of geographic distance or because they lived during different times. If you could have people you know and admire meet anywhere in the world, where would they meet? Add visual elements or an environment to link the people in your artwork.
7. Now, think about the border of the story quilt. Ringgold pieced together fabrics in different patterns using quilting. If you have patterned fabrics, you can cut small pieces and arrange these around the edge of your artwork. You can also look for patterns printed in magazines or catalogs and use these instead of, or in combination with, fabric.
8. After gluing down your cut fabric and/or paper patterns to create the border, think about whether or not you want to include writing. What would you like to say about the figures? You can add in words above or below your figures, or anywhere in the artwork you think the words fit.
9. Consider showing your finished quilt to a family member or friends, and see what kind of story they can tell about the artwork.

## Reflection

- How did you decide who to honor in your story quilt?
  - If you showed your finished artwork to a family member or friend, were they able to recognize the theme or any of the people? How did their version of the story compare with your story?
  - How do you like to tell stories? Speaking, writing, with pictures, or a combination of ways? How does making and sharing a story quilt compare and contrast with these other ways to tell stories?
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Image: Faith Ringgold, *The Sunflowers Quilting Bee at Arles: The French Collection Part I, #4*, 1991. Acrylic on canvas, printed and tie-dyed pieced fabric, and ink. Collection Oprah Winfrey

New Museum · 235 Bowery · New York, NY 10002 · USA

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