

PIPPY HOULDSWORTH GALLERY

Survey | Faith Ringgold

05 December 2019 - 08 December 2019

For the Survey section of Art Basel Miami Beach 2019, Pippy Houldsworth Gallery is delighted to present, Faith Ringgold: A Family History, a focused selection of work that examines America's racial history and politics by means of the artist's own story. Throughout her career, Ringgold has addressed the experience of African Americans, but only rarely through the lens of the self-portrait. Here the intimacy of a personal narrative is woven together with the wider politics of her practice. The booth offers the opportunity to see key works from distinct periods of the artist's career. Each painting has been shown at the artist's solo exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery, London this summer before it tours to Bildmuseet, Umeå, Sweden and Glenstone Museum, Potomac, MD.

The presentation focuses on the three large-scale Slave Rape (1972) paintings, presented in the US for the first time since 1973 when they were exhibited in Faith Ringgold: A Ten Year Retrospective at Rutgers University, NJ. Fear Will Make You Weak, Run You Might Get Away and Fight to Save Your Life are significant as the artist's last oil paintings on canvas and her only 'tankas' or quilts to use this medium: from hereon she used acrylic which allowed her to roll the works for transport. The paintings were made at a turning point in Ringgold's career, marking the first time she brought issues of race and gender together in the same work. They were also, importantly, the artist's earliest collaboration with her mother, Willi Posey, who made the fabric borders. Ringgold addresses the rape of slaves, examining the position of African American women through the lens of her female ancestors. The paintings comprise stylised portraits of the artist and her two daughters, touching on issues of motherhood and representation of the black female body. The three women, vulnerable in their nudity, yet active in pose, are urged to resist and fight. The artist depicts herself pregnant and grasping an axe, lively in self-defence and protective of her unborn child. Ringgold, who learnt the art of quilting from her mother and grandmother in turn, ties together her ancestral history with three current generations of the family.

Alongside, Ringgold further explores the bond between mother and child in The Flag is Bleeding #2 (American Collection #6) (1997). The work is a response to her American People Series #18: The Flag is Bleeding (1967), highlighted in the ground-breaking 'Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power' as part of its tour in the US. A mother shelters her two naked children against the backdrop of the American flag, reconfigured with harrowing potency: the red stripes drip blood – providing an antithetical image of the freedom and rights that the flag is meant to symbolise. Ringgold explains 'Jasper Johns presented a beautiful, but incomplete idea. To complete it I wanted to show some of the hell that had broken out in the States'.

Drawing a parallel between the African textile border and the geometry of the flag, Ringgold says 'the flag is the only subversive and revolutionary abstraction one can paint'. While Flag Is Bleeding #1 addresses the dominance of white supremacy, the marginalisation of the black man, and the invisibility of the black woman, Flag is Bleeding #2 highlights the heroic role of the black woman in protecting her children. The artist has adapted the tradition of the American slave quilt, a medium through which enslaved women were able to make their voice heard. That the artist's great-great-grandmother was born into slavery and produced quilts for plantation owners lends Ringgold's work a deeper, personal register.

Early Works #16: A Man Kissing His Wife (1964), a key early painting and one of the first to depict a portrait of a white woman presented by a black artist, considers the impact of race on marital relations. This painting is one of the few available works from the decade that saw Ringgold produce her Early Works and American People series (1963-67), the culmination of which, American People Series #20: Die (1967), is now in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. The tender intimacy of A Man Kissing his Wife belies the controversial nature of the relationship. At the time of painting, interracial marriage was illegal in the US.

About the artist

Faith Ringgold (b. 1930) lives and works in New Jersey. Her work is included in over 50 prominent public collections including Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; MoMA, New York; Brooklyn Museum, New York; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Smithsonian Institute of Art, Washington; Baltimore Museum of Art; High Museum of Art, Atlanta; Newark Museum and St Louis Art Museum, to name a few.

Ringgold has received more than 75 awards, fellowships, citations and honours, including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Fellowship for painting, two National Endowment for the Arts Awards (for painting and sculpture) and 23 honorary doctorates. Ringgold is professor emeritus at the University of California in San Diego, California.

Following the Museum of Modern Art's acquisition of American People Series #20: Die (1967) it has recently published a monograph on the work. As part of the museum's new expansion, the work is currently on show alongside Pablo Picasso's Les Femmes d'Alger (O.K. R. 1965), offering a reevaluation of both paintings and highlighting the importance of Ringgold's practice.

Following Faith Ringgold's first European solo exhibition with Pippy Houldsworth Gallery in early 2018, the artist's first solo institutional show in Europe was presented at Serpentine Gallery, London in summer 2019. As well as many solo exhibitions with ACA Galleries, New York, the gallery with whom Ringgold has worked since 1995, the artist's work has been the subject of numerous solo museum exhibitions since the early 1970s. In 2010 the Neuberger Museum presented a survey of her important paintings from the civil rights era of the 1960s. Recent group exhibitions include those at Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Dallas Museum of Art; and the Smithsonian, Washington. Ringgold's current projects include a commission to design a new set of windows for Grace Hopper College, Yale University and a series of work in progress, Ageing-aling-aling, that addresses the issue of aging.

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/03/arts/faith-ringgold-art-basel-miami-beach.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share>