

TWO AMERICAS • LUMINARIES • ARTIST

Stitched Into the Story

Faith Ringgold and the Quilt as a Vehicle for History

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Contribution Track • ERA VI-Living Record • Harlem, New York

Who She Is

Faith Ringgold was born October 8, 1930, in Harlem, and raised in a household shaped by the Harlem Renaissance's afterglow — her mother, Willi Posey, was a fashion designer, and Ringgold later credited her with teaching her to sew, a skill that would become central to her mature work decades later. She earned a bachelor's and master's degree in art from the City College of New York, and taught art in the New York City public schools for eighteen years while building her own painting career on the side.

American People and Confrontation

In the 1960s Ringgold produced her American People series, a body of paintings confronting racism and the civil rights movement head-on, including *Die* (1967), a large-scale, violently kinetic canvas of Black and white figures caught in a riot, painted the same year as major uprisings in Newark and Detroit. She became an outspoken activist as well as an artist, co-founding groups protesting the near-total exclusion of women and Black artists from major museum exhibitions, including a 1970 protest at the Whitney Museum that helped force the inclusion of Black artists in its exhibitions.

The Story Quilts

Beginning in the early 1980s, working with her mother before Posey's death in 1981, Ringgold developed the technique for which she became best known: story quilts, combining painted images, pieced fabric borders, and hand-written narrative text stitched directly into the quilt itself. Her best-known work in the form, *Tar Beach* (1988), depicts a Harlem family on a summer-night rooftop with a child imagining herself flying free over the George Washington Bridge; Ringgold adapted it into a celebrated children's book in 1991, which won the Coretta Scott King Award and the Caldecott Honor. Across more than eighty story quilts and a parallel career as an author of more than a dozen children's books, Ringgold used a domestic, often-dismissed textile craft to carry serious historical and political narrative — a deliberate reclaiming of quilting's roots in enslaved and rural Black women's labor as a legitimate fine-art form. She died April 13, 2024, in Englewood, New Jersey, at ninety-three.

"I wanted to be a fine artist, and I couldn't understand why quilting wasn't good enough." —
Faith Ringgold

NC Local Lens

No documented biographical connection between Faith Ringgold and North Carolina, Fayetteville, or Cumberland County was found in this research pass. A thematic link exists rather than a personal one: North Carolina holds a long, well-documented tradition of African American quilting, including enslaved and rural Black women's quiltmaking practices that historians and folklorists have studied extensively in the state. This entry keeps that distinction explicit — Ringgold's own life has no confirmed NC tie, and any connection drawn to North Carolina's quilting tradition is thematic, not biographical, and should never be presented as though Ringgold herself had a personal North Carolina history.

Sourcing Caveats for Future Sessions

No personal NC connection: do not conflate the thematic tie to North Carolina's broader African American quilting tradition with an actual biographical connection to Ringgold herself.

Number of story quilts: commonly cited as over eighty; exact count varies by source and by what counts as a distinct work versus a series component.

Citations

Chicago Notes-Bibliography style, primary and institutional sources.

1. "Faith Ringgold," National Gallery of Art, accessed September 13, 2026, <https://www.nga.gov/collection/artist-info.1573.html>.
2. Faith Ringgold, *We Flew Over the Bridge: The Memoirs of Faith Ringgold* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995).
3. "Faith Ringgold: American People," New Museum, exhibition record, 2022, <https://www.newmuseum.org/>.
4. Faith Ringgold, *Tar Beach* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1991).
5. Penelope Green, "Faith Ringgold, Artist Who Told Hard Truths in Fabric, Dies at 93," *The New York Times*, April 13, 2024.

Prepared by the Two Americas research process. Verify all figures against primary sources before publication if stronger originals become available.