



**Worcester Art Museum to Present Focused Survey of Work by Acclaimed Artist Faith Ringgold**  
**“Faith Ringgold: Freedom to Say What I Please” Will Explore the Artist’s Career Through 16 Artworks, Including Story Quilt From Museum’s Collection**



Worcester, MA—July 20, 2023—This fall, the [Worcester Art Museum](https://www.worcesterartmuseum.org/) will present *Faith Ringgold: Freedom to Say What I Please*, a focused survey of work by the renowned American artist, author, and activist. The exhibition will comprise a total of 16 artworks in a variety of media—including paintings, prints, textiles, and large-scale soft sculpture—together representing the full scope of Ringgold’s continuing career. The central work of the exhibition will be *Picasso’s Studio* (1991), one of Ringgold’s most celebrated narrative quilts. A cornerstone of the Worcester Art Museum’s collection, this will be the first time it has been on view at the Museum in several years, particularly since it has been on loan for other presentations of Ringgold’s work. *Freedom to Say What I Please* will mark the artist’s first solo exhibition in New England in nearly 15 years. Organized by Samantha Cataldo, the Worcester Art Museum’s Associate Curator of Contemporary Art, the exhibition will be on view from October 7 through March 17, 2024.

For six decades, Ringgold has used art to investigate her place in the world, particularly her experience as a Black woman in America. From her galvanizing activist prints of the early-1970s to her more recent works, *Freedom to Say What I Please* will guide visitors through the history of America’s sociopolitical landscape through the lens of the artist’s perpetually relevant career. Born in Harlem in 1930, Ringgold began as a painter and later expanded her practice to include a wide range of media, including sculpture, performance, and textiles. Deeply personal, celebratory of African American culture, and rooted in political activism, Ringgold’s work incorporates craft and storytelling to

explore themes around identity and history.

“Since the 1960s, Faith Ringgold has built vibrant worlds, into which we are invited to celebrate the wonder and resilience of life and to have conversations around difficult truths about our history,” said Matthias Waschek, the Jean and Myles McDonough Director of the Worcester Art Museum. “*Faith Ringgold: Freedom to Say What I Please* will show New England how art can change lives, both on a global and a local scale. Presented during the Worcester Art Museum’s 125th anniversary year, this exhibition will be a timely reflection of our mission to connect people, communities, and cultures through art.”

Each artwork in the exhibition will be related thematically back to *Picasso's Studio*, Ringgold’s painted quilt that will serve as the heart of the show. Recently presented at the New Museum in New York City in 2021 and at the Musée National Picasso-Paris in 2023, this work is one of the most celebrated examples of the artist’s signature “story quilts,” which combine painting, storytelling, and quilting. Part of Ringgold’s *French Collection* series illustrating the story of a young African American woman visiting Paris in the 1920s, *Picasso's Studio* depicts the heroine modeling for Picasso against a backdrop of his *Les Femmes d'Alger*. Ringgold effectively recontextualizes the main sources behind Picasso’s work—the female body and African masks—by centering an African American woman. Though fictitious, the story is semi-autobiographical in its central theme of a young artist establishing her artistic voice in the face of racism and sexism. The title of the exhibition is drawn from the handwritten text that borders the painting: “You asked me once why I wanted to become an artist and I said I didn’t know. Well I know now. It is because it’s the only way I know of feeling free. My art is my freedom to say what I please. *N’importe* what color you are, you can do what you want *avec ton* art. They may not like it, or buy it, or even let you know it; but they can’t stop you from doing it.”

This sentiment will be reflected by all the selected objects featured in this exhibition. This includes several prints, which will demonstrate Ringgold’s direct political activism. *United States of Attica* (1972), for example, was the most widely distributed of Ringgold’s posters during the 1970s, which the artist dedicated to those who died during the 1971 uprising at Attica prison. Described by Ringgold as a “map of American violence,” this artwork depicts a map labeled with violent acts of racism and other forms of oppression in the United States as well as uprisings of Indigenous, enslaved, and immigrant peoples.

Ringgold’s ongoing interest in American histories will also be seen in her *Declaration of Freedom and Independence*, a suite of six paintings she created in 2007-2008 to be proposed as a book. This series is one of several examples of how Ringgold’s past as a public school and college educator has informed her work. Each painting depicts a scene from American history that has been widely celebrated in the dominant national narrative alongside a historic scene of trauma or resilience experienced by Black people

in the United States. The series calls into question the moments in American history that have been characterized as successful, asking who these accomplishments were for and at what cost.

While national, sometimes global in scope, Ringgold's work is also influenced by her close ties with her community and her close female relationships with friends and family. The exhibition will present two human-sized soft sculptures, part of a series of early portraits of people she knows. This will include a self-portrait of the artist from 1973 titled *Family of Women Series: Faith*, as well as other works inspired by her family

Special programming including docent-led tours of the exhibition will be available throughout the run of the show. For additional information about related programs and events, visit [worcesterart.org](http://worcesterart.org).

*Faith Ringgold: Freedom to Say What I Please* is generously supported by the Fletcher Foundation and an anonymous donor. It is also funded in part by the Don and Mary Melville Contemporary Art Fund and John M. Nelson Fund.

### **About the Artist**

Ringgold received her BS and MA degrees in visual art from the City College of New York and has received 23 Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degrees. She is the recipient of more than 80 awards and honors including the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship; two National Endowment for the Arts Awards; The American Academy of Arts and Letters Award and the Medal of Honor for Fine Arts from the National Arts Club. Her work has been collected and exhibited in museums throughout the world. Ringgold is a celebrated author and illustrator of books, including 17 children's books. She published her first book, *Tar Beach*, in 1991 as a companion to her story quilt of the same name, which has won over 20 awards including the Caldecott Honor and the Coretta Scott King award for the best-illustrated children's book of 1991.

### **About the Worcester Art Museum**

The Worcester Art Museum creates transformative programs and exhibitions, drawing on its exceptional collection of art. Dating from 3000 BCE to the present, these works provide the foundation for a focus on audience engagement, connecting visitors of all ages and abilities with inspiring art and demonstrating its enduring relevance to daily life. Creative initiatives—including pioneering collaborative programs with local schools, fresh approaches to exhibition design and in-gallery teaching, and a long history of studio class instruction—offer opportunities for diverse audiences to experience art and learn both from and with artists.

The Worcester Art Museum, located at 55 Salisbury Street in Worcester, MA, is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10am to 4pm. For information on admission and discounts, visit <https://www.worcesterart.org/information/hours-and-admission>. On the first Sunday of each month, admission is free for everyone. Museum parking is free.

**For more information, please contact:**

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Images (left-right):

Faith Ringgold, *Picasso's Studio: The French Collection Part I, #7* (1991). Worcester Art Museum, Charlotte E. W. Buffington Fund, 1998.148. © 2023 Faith Ringgold / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, Courtesy ACA Galleries, New York

Faith Ringgold, *United States of Attica* (1972) © 2023 Faith Ringgold / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, Courtesy ACA Galleries, New York