

Graham, Regina F. „50 years after she was called a n\*\*\*\*\* outside the Whitney, artist Faith Ringgold's work – inspired by that day – hangs in the New York gallery that once refused to show her paintings" *Daily Mail UK* February 13, 2018



## 50 years after she was called a n\*\*\*\*\* outside the Whitney, artist Faith Ringgold's work – inspired by that day – hangs in the New York gallery that once refused to show her paintings

- Artist Faith Ringgold, 87, protested in the 60s and 70s against the discrimination female and black artists faced with getting their work displayed at prominent New York museums
- During a 1971 protest at the Whitney Museum, she was called the N-word for the first time by a white man
- Now, half a century later, one of her most iconic pieces, *Hate Is a Sin Flag*, that was inspired by the day at the museum, is now prominently displayed inside it
- Ringgold, who has created art for Bill Clinton, Oprah Winfrey and Maya Angelou, is happy about the purchase
- She told *DailyMail.com*: 'I cannot cease to be amazed that the Whitney bought the print all these years later and that they would tell that story.'

Nearly half a century ago, Faith Ringgold marched outside New York's Whitney Museum of Art with dozens of other women protesting against the gallery's latest modernism exhibition comprised only of white male artists. Today, one of Ringgold's most iconic pieces – inspired by being called a 'n\*\*\*\*\*' for the first time in her life while protesting that day – is prominently displayed inside that very same establishment after the Whitney bought it for an undisclosed sum.

The 2007 painting shows a confederate flag branded with the words HATE IS A SIN, while an inscription around the flag blasts the Whitney for discriminating against black artists. It also describes the shocking incident that happened outside in front of her two teenage daughters.

Ringgold, now 87, lives in a spacious New Jersey ranch house, where several paintings, photos and her story quilts adorn the walls. It is here, while sipping green tea and reaching into a bowl of raw almonds and cranberries, she recalls that painful day outside of the Whitney.

She speaks softly, hands clasped in her lap before breaking them apart to touch her face as she remembers January 31, 1971: 'I was standing outside the Whitney holding flyers with my daughters Michelle and Barbara as we demonstrated against the museum's discrimination against black artists and how they did not include women in their latest exhibit. This little white girl was with her father and he was going into the Whitney with her but she was fascinated by my signs and everything and she stopped to get a flyer from me. This little girl wanted to talk to me, you know she's a little kid and is curious. But her father says "Don't talk to that n\*\*\*\*\*" or something like that to his young daughter. And I said "Oh my goodness what did that man say?"

'I was shocked. You know, he sees us out there demonstrating and he's going to call me a n\*\*\*\*\* right there? Right there in front of my daughters?'. Her voice rises, the decades-old incident as fresh as the day it happened. 'That was the first time in my life I had been called n\*\*\*\*\*.'



Nearly 50 years ago, artist Faith Ringgold was protesting outside of the Whitney Museum against the discrimination of female and black artists. It was there that she was called n\*\*\*\*\* for the first time by a white man January 31, 1971



The artist is circled above with her then-teenage daughter, Michelle, following behind her holding a sign outside of the Whitney Museum on the day the incident happened.



Now, one of her most iconic prints about the incident is on display at the New York museum. The 87-year-old artist is pictured above next to a print of Hate Is a Sin Flag that is displayed inside her New Jersey ranch house\



During the 1971 incident, Ringgold was protesting with fellow artists and her two daughters, Michelle and Barbara Wallace. At the time, both girls were teenagers and were equally shocked about what happened. She is pictured above being embraced by her daughter Michelle

'I cannot cease to be amazed that the Whitney bought the print all these years later and that they would tell that story,' she adds of her Hate Is A Sin Flag which is part of the Incomplete History of Protest exhibit.

She takes another sip of tea, leaving behind a red lipstick mark before adding: 'That's good though, it's art. It makes me feel great, that they bought it.'

Raised by liberal parents in Harlem's vibrant Sugar Hill neighborhood, Ringgold was encouraged for her profound talent and artistic creativity. It also helped that the family counted Billie Holiday, Langston Hughes, Duke Ellington and James Baldwin as friends and neighbors while living in the area influenced by jazz musicians.



The 2007 painting shows a confederate flag branded with the words HATE IS A SIN, while an inscription around it blasts the Whitney for discriminating against black artists. It also describes the shocking incident that happened where she was called 'n\*\*\*\*\*'. Pictured above is a print of Hate Is a Sin Flag inside her home

While growing up, she suffered from asthma which forced her to be home schooled by her mother. As a result, Ringgold was not openly exposed to the discrimination others experienced during the 1930s and 1940s when schools, facilities, housing, medical care, employment and transportation were segregated.

Her mother, a fashion designer, encouraged her daughter to explore the visual arts and attend the City College of New York to study art.

She aspired to break the color barrier and become the first black person and woman to be allowed to study art at the college when she enrolled in 1950; but segregation had not yet ended across all the states and in fact did not end until 14 years later when the Civil Rights Act was put in place by lawmakers.

'I was not taking no for answer when they told me I couldn't major in art at the City College of New York. I wanted to study art and nothing else but they kept telling me no that I could not attend the school to study art. Finally I met with the top administrator who made a deal with me. He said he would allow me to attend but on one condition - I had to major in art education which was something women were allowed to study at the time because most went on to become teachers. So that's what I did.'

Ringgold finished college in 1955 after marrying her first husband - a jazz musician - and having her two daughters. She began working as a public school teacher by day, and worked on establishing herself within the changing Big Apple art scene in her spare time.



Of her work being displayed at the Whitney Museum, she told DailyMail.com: 'I cannot cease to be amazed that the Whitney bought the print all these years later and that they would tell that story.'



Raised by liberal parents in Harlem's vibrant Sugar Hill neighborhood, Ringgold was encouraged for her profound talent and artistic creativity. It also helped that the family counted Billie Holiday, Langston Hughes, Duke Ellington and James Baldwin as friends and neighbors while living in the area influenced by jazz musicians. She is pictured above inside her spacious studio



Ringgold has created pieces for dozens of prominent figures including Oprah Winfrey and Maya Angelou. The image above was taken in the early 1990s during a surprise party hosted by Oprah for Maya. Ringgold told DailyMail.com





She also created a painting for former President Bill Clinton and presented it to him at the White House in the 1990s. The painting is currently housed at William J. Clinton Presidential Library and Museum in Little Rock, Arkansas. The above photo was taken during one of her visits to the White House and hangs inside of her studio.

'During this time period in Harlem, you know drugs started to emerge in the jazz scene and a lot of people I knew as friends were dying from overdoses,' she noted. One of those people included her husband, who became addicted to heroin. As a result, they separated and he later died from an overdose.

Despite the tragedy, Ringgold kept raising her daughters, teaching by day and painting by night in her apartment. She fell in love for a second time with a man who she had known for most of her life, Burdette 'Birdie' Ringgold.

They married and he encouraged her to continue creating art pieces which were inspired by Harlem, Africa and racism, all of which fueled her passion to paint, but it was also that which made many galleries in New York unwilling to sell or display her work, prompting Ringgold became an activist, joining artists, feminists and anti-racism groups to fight against the exclusion of women and black artists from the major New York museums in the late 1960s and 1970s.

She breaks off to talk about when she and Birdie bought the New Jersey house in the 1980s and the discrimination they faced buying in a white neighborhood and begins a tour of her apartments.



She may be approaching 90, but Ringgold is still active today as a painter, writer, sculptor, quilter and illustrates children's books. She has also received nearly three dozen honorary degrees and awards for her work over the past few decades



The mother-of-two was commissioned by Yale University for a series of stained glass windows that will be installed in the next coming months. Above she points to the colored sketches of the designs she has created for the windows



Besthe creating new pieces, the 87-year-old also has a busy travel schedule. Last month she spent time in Los Angeles and is set to head to London for the Tate Modern gallery and Humboldt University in Germany in April

'They did not want us here at all and made it known through several actions but that did not stop us from moving in, it was our right and we had the freedom to do so. I wanted to build a second level to this house and found a great architect who designed a magnificent space for me to continue creating my art. But my neighbors took me to court in protest against me, doing that. We battled for two years before I finally got the green-light to have it built.' While climbing the steps, Ringgold pauses to explain the different prints and pieces she created over the years that are hanging on the walls. One in particular is a sketch drawing of her house in black and white.

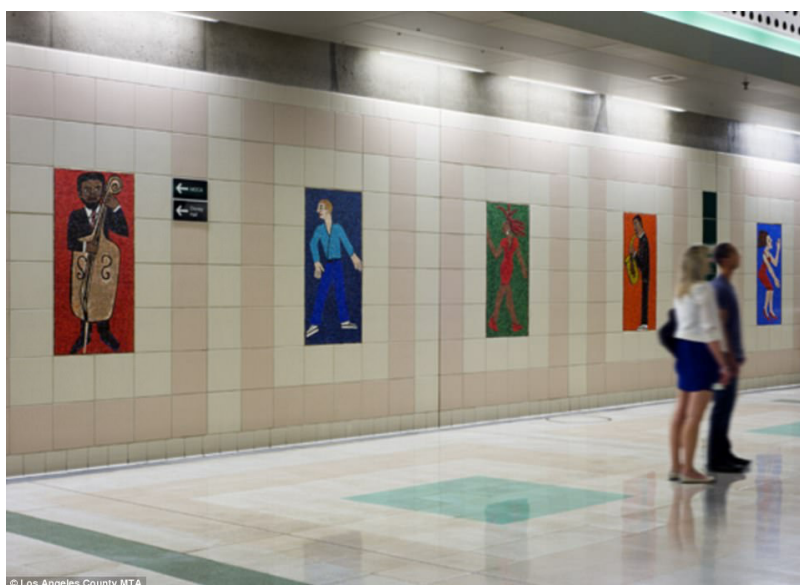
'You see how long I drew the road and driveway to my house? I made it that way because we were on a long road to get here fighting against my racist neighbors,' she says. Entering the studio, natural light floods through the skylights before she flips a switch to turn on the custom lighting fixtures inside the huge space where her sculptures, paintings and prints are on full display with her awards, family photos and honorary degrees. She points to one: 'This photo was taken in the early 1990s at a surprise party for Maya Angelo that Oprah hosted for her. Maya didn't like to be surprised and hated it, but you



know, Oprah insisted on doing it and she commissioned me to make one of my story quilts to surprise her with. So I did it and boy was Maya surprised when she walked into that party.



Every day millions of commuters pass her distinctive mosaics on the walls of the New York City and Los Angeles subways. You've almost certainly seen her work. Pictured above is her Flying Home mosaic mural inside the 125th Street Station in New York City that honors Harlem notables and makes them fly



Pictured above are the 52 individual smalti (glass) mosaics that Ringgold designed for the Los Angeles Metro station downtown across four mezzanine walls. Each is a personification of creativity, performance, sports and fashion

'It was such a good time. She kind of looks like she's still surprised in the photo of the three of us,' Ringgold says while pointing to the image pinned on one of the walls next to a letter from former President Bill Clinton thanking her and Birdie for joining him and Hillary at the White House for dinner.

Of the story quilt that was gifted to Angelou for her 61st birthday, it was sold at an auction in 2015 for a whopping \$461,000 by the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas.

The artist has received dozens of awards including the National Endowment for the Arts awards in sculpture, the National Endowment for the Arts awards in painting, a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, and most recently was awarded a Chubb Fellowship by Yale's Timothy Dwight College.

She also previously served as a professor at the University of California, San Diego and has received dozens of honorary degrees.

Ringgold may be approaching 90, but Ringgold is still active today as a painter, writer, sculptor, quilter and illustrates children's books and is currently working on a series of stained glass windows that were commissioned by Yale University.



Ringgold is just as passionate as ever, the 87-year-old artist doesn't hold back from expressing her opinion. She told DailyMail.com: '...I don't let those people tell me what to paint, we're talking about freedom of speech'



She added, 'I do what I want and don't let anyone stop me. Sorry, if you don't like me'

She still counts media mogul Winfrey as one of her long-time friends. Ringgold, who splits her homes in New Jersey and California, also painted a portrait for the Clintons that hangs inside the William J. Clinton Presidential Library and Museum in Little Rock, Arkansas. The 'Hate Is a Sin Flag' will stay on display at the Whitney, as the museum does not have an end date for 'An Incomplete History of Protest: Selections from the Whitney's Collection, 1940-2017' exhibit. She also has pieces on display at New York's major museums including the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim.

Every day millions of commuters pass her distinctive mosaics on the walls of the New York City and Los Angeles subways.

You've almost certainly seen her work. And she's just as passionate as ever and doesn't hold back from expressing her opinion.

'...I don't let those people tell me what to paint, we're talking about freedom of speech. I do what I want and don't let anyone stop me,' she says, adjusting her waist length dreadlocks.

'Sorry, if you don't like me.'