



NORTON
MUSEUM
OF ART

Faith Ringgold (American, born 1930)
Moroccan Holiday: The French Collection Part II, #12, 1997
Acrylic on canvas, printed on tie dyed fabric
Purchase, R. H. Norton Trust, 98.765
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Courtesy ACA Galleries, New York

TAKE A LOOK



A CLOSER LOOK

CONTEMPORARY COLLECTION

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ABOUT



The Artwork

Faith Ringgold's *Moroccan Holiday* provides the viewer with an intimate glimpse into a private conversation between two fictional characters: an artist named Willia Marie Simone, and her daughter, Marlena. Surrounded by paintings in Willia Marie's studio, the women engage in an emotional discussion about the personal and professional choices Willia Marie made that have led them to this present encounter. Both women appear at the center of the composition in front of four large portraits of Frederick Douglass, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Their dialogue appears in single horizontal bands at the top and bottom edges of the image, while a decorative quilted border of brightly colored material frames the entire work. You can read the entire transcribed dialogue at norton.org/educators.

Moroccan Holiday is the final quilt in *The French Collection* series, a 12-part story quilt saga narrating highlights from the life of Willia Marie Simone, a black woman expatriate in Paris. Ringgold began working on *The French Collection* in 1990 during a 5-month sojourn in France. She designed this series of adventures to explore Willia Marie's challenges to succeed as both a mother and an artist. In each stage of the story, Ringgold gives the protagonist access to a variety of well-known European artworks, geographical locations, and historical figures. The saga includes *Dancing at the Louvre*, *Wedding on the Seine*, *The Picnic at Giverny*, and eight other topics, in addition to *Moroccan Holiday*.

The Artist

Born in Harlem, New York on October 8, 1930, Faith Ringgold grew up surrounded by the legacy of the Harlem Renaissance. Her greatest artistic influence and role model was her mother, Willi Posey Jones, a popular fashion designer and dress maker. She fostered Ringgold's interest in quilt-making at an early age by teaching her to sew. Ringgold's great, great, great grandmother who was enslaved had created quilts to tell stories. Ringgold continued the tradition by designing "story quilts," paintings on soft fabrics with decorative quilted borders. After finding inspiration from Tibetan and Nepali paintings (called *tankas*), Ringgold decided to hang her works directly on walls and to frame each piece with fabric borders, rather than rigid frames. Ringgold and her mother collaborated to create their first quilt in 1980. Willi Posey continued to quilt the borders for each work until her death in 1981, after which Ringgold completed both the painting and quilting.

Two significant questions have influenced the direction of Ringgold's work since the 1960s: what opportunities exist for an African American woman to become an artist and what subject matter should she select? Frustrated by the lack of attention paid to black women artists, Ringgold chose to explore racial stereotypes and black female identity by creating African-inspired crafts, soft sculptures, and story quilts. Her story quilts are always narrated by women and specifically address women's themes. The stories are fictional, but they are based on the lives of her family members. By uniting an African American craft with the aesthetics of contemporary art, Ringgold's story quilts challenge the division between definitions of fine art and craft.

Above:

Faith Ringgold (American, born 1930)

Moroccan Holiday: The French Collection Part II, #12, 1997

Acrylic on canvas, printed on tie dyed fabric

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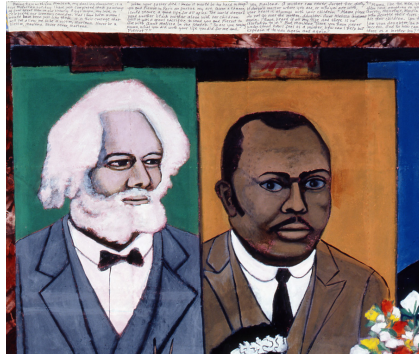
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Courtesy ACA Galleries, New York

SEE



THINK



Observe & Describe

Have students take time to look at Faith Ringgold's work of art *Moroccan Holiday*. Ask them to observe shapes, lines, colors, textures, and the position of people and/or objects. Encourage students to try to observe as many details as possible before giving any information about the artwork. You can use the following questions to guide the conversation and to encourage them to look closely.

- What do you see?
- Where do you look first? How do your eyes move around the work of art?
- What do you notice about the shapes? The colors?
- What do you notice about the texture?
- What do you notice about the composition?
- What medium/material do you think was used to make this work of art? Why do you say that?

Looking Closely

Now that students have practiced close looking, have them use what they're seeing in the work of art to make conclusions about what the work of art might be about.

- Describe the figures in the foreground of the work of art. Who do you think they are? What makes you say that?
- What do you think the two figures in the foreground might be saying to one another?
- What do you notice about the figures in the background?
- What details did the artists add to help us recognize the figures?
- What else do you notice about the setting?
- What might the overall story be? What makes you say that?

Above:

Faith Ringgold (American, born 1930)

Moroccan Holiday: The French Collection Part II, #12, (details), 1997

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Classroom Discussion

For Younger Students

Now that you know about the story of Willia Marie Simone and her daughter, Marlena in *Moroccan Holiday*, what do you think might happen next in this story?

- *If you could create a story through art, what would it be about? What medium would you use?*
- *Is there anything else you wonder about this work of art?*

For Older Students

Ask students to read the text written around the border of *Moroccan Holiday* by Faith Ringgold. The entire text can be found, as well as a digital version of the poster, online at norton.org/educators.

How do you view this work of art differently after reading the story?

In Faith Ringgold's text, her character Marlena states:

"You not only feel guilt but anger too, Mama. You are guilty because you gave up motherhood for art, and you are angry because despite the fact that you have lived your life exactly as you pleased, you still can't have the power of men. You want it all, Mama, and what's more you deserve it. Pierrot and I are proud of you, Mama. We love you and we know you love us."

In your own words, how would you summarize the conflict they are discussing? What does Marlena mean by

"...despite the fact that you have lived your life exactly as you pleased, you still can't have the power of men?"

Why do you think Marlena feels that way?

Why do you think Faith Ringgold chooses to incorporate quilting into her Story Quilts instead of painting on a canvas? If you could make a work of art about your life story, what medium would you use?

Is there anything else you wonder about this work of art?



Example of a completed Alter Ego artwork by Rosanne Sammis, Visual Arts Teacher at The Benjamin School, 2020.

Extend it! Activity Ideas

For Younger Students

The character Willia Marie Simone might be seen as an alter ego for the artist Faith Ringgold. Introduce the term alter ego to students. Have them brainstorm who their alter ego would be. Students can even write a sentence to several paragraphs depicting the story of their alter ego. Then, students can use pencil, markers, glue, paint, or whatever is available to create their alter ego on a piece of paper.

How can students use elements of art such as line, shape, color, texture, and composition to communicate a story? Educators and students can view a complete alter ego art lesson by teaching artist Jill Lavetsky at the Norton's YouTube channel under art classes and workshops.

For Older Students

Lead a discussion in a new way through a debate! This is a great opportunity to practice social and emotional learning skills by facilitating a student-led conversation. A debate encourages listening to other people's perspectives and ideas.

Split the class into two and ask them to debate opposing viewpoints. These can be viewpoints found directly from the text in *Moroccan Holiday*, or from a broader theme that relates to the work of art and your classroom curriculum. Set the stage for the students before the debate begins! Give ground rules such as those found in the Educational Resource section on uscourts.gov. Ground rules allow all students have a shared understanding of debate etiquette.

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