

Vanessa Luna

Research Paper 1

Faith Ringgold is an artist best known for her narrative quilts. She currently has an exhibition at the New Museum in Manhattan where “Woman on a Bridge #1 of 5: Tar Beach” is on display alongside her other pieces. Mrs. Ringgold made this piece in 1988 with mixed media, which included acrylic paint, canvas, printed fabric, ink, and thread. The image depicted on the quilt is a summer night out on a rooftop of a building in Harlem. Laundry draped on a clothing line, family playing cards, and children laying down on a mattress. One can also see the main character, “Cassie Louise Lightfoot,” flying high over a bridge.

Mrs. Ringgold made this piece to represent confidence and freedom, a little girl of color capable of anything and daydreaming of what her reality could be. Examining the artwork, one can see Cassie flying over the George Washington Bridge. But what could this mean? A small girl going high above a strong man-made structure all by herself. The artist is clearly using Symbolism in her work to express the character’s freedom and, as the artist puts it, “My women are actually flying; they are just free, totally. They take their liberation by confronting this huge masculine icon—the bridge.” This is a great example to use when explaining what “denotation and connotation” is. Where what’s being present isn’t necessarily all there is to the meaning of the piece. What they pictured as a girl flying around like a superhero isn’t all there is to it. That would be the connotation of the artwork, the straightforward “meaning” of it. As for the connotation, it would be the implication of what’s

shown instead. So in this case, it would be the meaning of freedom. That is what the bigger meaning is, with the implication that a little girl overcoming something that may seem impossible.

Symbolism in art has been done throughout the years, but looking at it now, it feels deeper and more diverse. Because now it's not just limited to a similar group of people and it's better to have a bigger "Pool" of artists. Observing all aspects of different ideas gives the current and future a better understanding as well as new knowledge. Naturally, improvements come into play that allow the art world to better itself. When examining "Woman on a Bridge #1 of 5: Tar Beach", many theories and thoughts come to mind. Thinking about how new and refreshing it is to have a different "Canvas" by using quilts. A known to be feminine skill and craft amplifies the message of freedom. Which was also in her favor because it allowed her to advocate for the feminist movement in her own way. It was and still is a big focus for women to keep on advocating for the movement, all while also having roots coming from Africa.

Possessing a skill that at the time and still is mostly just taught to women and girls. It's a statement to use it to send the message of freedom and longing to accomplish anything women set their minds to. Another movement that was happening while this piece was created was diversity in museums. It was 1988 in New York City, and the art world in the city was going through artist diversity and aesthetic arguments. There were many protests against big museums because they lacked and undermined the works of people of color and women. Mrs. Ringgold took on the big role in organizing the protests against museums.

Having to work with what you know to express your views all while creating something completely new at the same time is something important to Faith Ringgold clearly made clear in her work. It's rebellious, groundbreaking, and falls into the futurist theory without a doubt. The futurist theory stems from an avant-garde movement founded in Milan in 1909 by the Italian poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. Marinetti launched the movement in his Manifesto of Futurism. It's a theory focused on the speed, energy, and power of the machine and the vitality, change, and restlessness of modern life.

To quote Marinetti "Let us leave good sense behind like a hideous husk and let us hurl ourselves, like fruit spiced with pride, into the immense mouth and breast of the world! Let us feed the unknown, not from despair, but simply to enrich the unfathomable reservoirs of the Absurd!". He believed one should not listen to set rules because they held us back, breaking rules and going in full force creates new exciting pieces. It's also not in bad faith if the results of rebelling are to better and expand with what they currently knew.

Mrs. Ringgold's piece was for many reasons rebellious not just for the statement it spoke but because instead of a canvas she used a quilt. Having a way to stand out from the standard European traditional art, she made the switch from painting to fabric to quilts. Some may dislike her switch, but it amplified her message and branches out from the standard.



“Woman on a Bridge #1 of 5: Tar Beach”

Biography

Faith Ringgold: American People : New Museum

<https://www.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/view/faith-ringgold-american-people>

Woman on a Bridge #1 of 5: Tar Beach, The Guggenheim Museums and Foundation

<https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/3719>

The Futurist Manifesto, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti

At the New Museum, Faith Ringgold and Women in the Workforce

<https://www.thecut.com/2022/05/faith-ringgold-new-museum-event.html>

About Faith, Faith Ringgold

<https://www.faithringgold.com/about-faith/>