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Colby Museum of Art: Faith Ringgold “Story Quilt” Acquired

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Faith Ringgold, *The Sunflower's Quilting Bee at Arles*, 1997
 Silkscreen on white wove paper. (Ed. 414/425) 33 ¾ x 35 in. (85.7 x 88.9 cm)
 Museum purchase from the Lindsay Leard Coolidge '78 Print Acquisition Fund
 Accession Number: 2015.002
 © 2022 Faith Ringgold / ARS member, Courtesy ACA Galleries, New York

Faith Ringgold “Story Quilt” Acquired

ON VIEW NOW, THE PAINTED TEXTILE TELLS THE STORY OF A LONG HISTORY OF OPPRESSION

By Bob Keyes

African-American artist Faith Ringgold, 91, is finally receiving the recognition she has long deserved. This winter, the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York opened a career retrospective, an event of such significance the *New York Times* named it among a dozen of the most anticipated art happenings of 2022.

The Colby College Museum of Art will have its own Faith Ringgold moment this year. The museum has acquired one of Ringgold’s renowned “story quilts,” a painted textile

that merges domestic art-form sensibilities with African-American folk traditions. Colby’s story quilt is *Coming to Jones Road #4: Under A Blood Red Sky*, which Ringgold painted in 2000. It is one of 10 in Ringgold’s culturally important *Coming to Jones Road* series.

The artist made multiple versions of *Coming to Jones Road #4: Under a Blood Red Sky*, but only one that she turned into a story quilt, now at Colby. The museum will put it on view in late spring. It joins a Ringgold print, *The Sunflower's Quilting Bee at Arles*, in the Colby Museum collection.

Acrylic on canvas with fabric borders, the painted textile (78 x 52 in.) tells a story of the resilience of enslaved people as they make their journey north toward freedom along the Underground Railroad, a network of secret routes and safe houses that extended into New England. Along the edges, Ringgold inscribes first-person narratives of the people on the journey: “By day we prayed for the black of night to come to cover us.”

In her painting, Ringgold includes a luminous white moon to offer guidance to the figures, painted in black, as they make their way through a clearing of trees amid a deep red backdrop. Night stars ring the border.

Ringgold has said she was motivated to make the *Coming to Jones Road* series when she and her husband moved from Harlem to Englewood, N.J., in 1992. Few Black people lived there, and Ringgold encountered hostility and suspicion.

Jacqueline Terrassa, the Carolyn Muzzy Director of the Colby College Museum of Art, called it a “rare opportunity” to acquire one of Ringgold’s story quilts. “It has art-historical and broad cultural significance,” Terrassa said. “We are fortunate that when the opportunity arose to acquire it, we were able to act on it through our acquisition funds.”

The story quilt strengthens the museum’s holdings of works by influential women artists and by Black artists. The story quilt will be useful for teaching art, art history, American history, American literature, performance studies, and environmental humanities. It also will help museum visitors learn about the Underground Railroad, the dangers encountered by enslaved people seeking personal freedom, and the strength and cultural affirmation that were also part of these stories.

Born in Harlem in 1930, Ringgold is a painter, mixed-media sculptor, performance artist, writer, teacher, and lecturer. She created her first political painting series in the 1960s and produced her first quilt, *Echoes of Harlem*, in 1980. She had her first retrospective at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 1984. An accomplished writer, she has written many children’s books, including *Tar Beach*, based on a story quilt in the collection of the Guggenheim Museum.



Faith Ringgold, *Coming to Jones Road #4: Under A Blood Red Sky*, 2000
 Acrylic on canvas with fabric borders, 78 ½ x 52 ½ in. (199.39 x 133.35 cm)
 Museum purchase through the Jere Abbott Art Endowment and Jette Art Acquisition Fund
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