

WE WANTED A REVOLUTION

BLACK RADICAL WOMEN 1965–85

This exhibition focuses on Black women artists during the 1960s, '70s, and '80s. It was an important, and at times tumultuous, period for those working to increase equality in the art world and in society in general. The works of art and ephemera (a word for historical documents) in this exhibition reflect what the artists did to build and create space for Black women in a field often dominated by white male artists.

Objective

Students will explore their own identities by creating self-portraits. They will also incorporate writing to further examine themselves as individuals.



Faith Ringgold (American, born 1930). *Early Works #25: Self-Portrait*, 1965. Oil on canvas, 50 x 40 inches (127 x 101.6 cm). Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Elizabeth A. Sackler, 2013.96. © 1965 Faith Ringgold. (Photo: Sarah DeSantis, Brooklyn Museum)

Activity

Begin by showing the students the self-portrait by Faith Ringgold. Ask the younger students to find all the components that make up a portrait (eyes, nose, mouth, etc.). Have the older students look at the additional elements Ringgold painted, including her choice of colors, her accessories, and her pose. If possible, read one of Ringgold's children's books to share part of her story.

With materials available to you, have the students draw themselves. After they have completed their self-portraits, explain what the word "identity" means. Explain that they are going to go see works of art by Black women artists who used those three specific words to identify themselves. Many of the artists in the exhibition also identified as friends, sisters, mothers, daughters, activists, community organizers, and leaders. Ask your students to think of words that describe their own identities.

Now they can add their identifiers around their portraits. You may choose to have them write just the words, or create a poem about themselves to include as part of their artwork.

Vocabulary-Building Exercise

Self-Portrait:

A portrait of an artist created by that artist

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Identity:

The distinguishing characteristic or personality of an individual

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Self-Identity:

Awareness of oneself as an individual

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Jan van Raay (American, born 1942). *Faith Ringgold (right) and Michele Wallace (middle) at Art Workers Coalition Protest, Whitney Museum, 1971.* Courtesy of Jan van Raay, Portland, OR, 305-37. © Jan van Raay

- Ask the students what their favorite work of art was and why.
- Encourage your students to make a poster to raise awareness for something they care about, like the women in the photographs by Jan van Raay.
- Create a fashion-design project inspired by Jae Jarrell. Ask your students to make/draw a piece of clothing to represent who they are.
- Go over the definition of the word “radical.” Ask your students why they think that word was used to describe the Black women artists they saw at the museum.
- Show your students Dindga McCannon’s *Revolutionary Sister*, 1971. Look at how the figure is standing, and have the students try to mimic her pose with their own bodies. Ask: Do you feel strong in this position? How do you stand when you want to feel powerful, like a warrior? What do you call this position?
- Make a list of the works of art they remember seeing during the guided tour. Were they surprised to see any of these works in a museum? Why or why not?

We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965–85 is organized by the Brooklyn Museum.

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