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Oral history interview with Faith  
Ringgold, 1989 September 6-October  
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## **Transcript**

### **Preface**

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Faith Ringgold on September 6, September 13, September 22, October 4, October 11, and October 18, 1989. The interview took place in New York City, and was conducted by Cynthia Nadelman for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The original transcript was edited. In 2024 the Archives retranscribed the original audio and attempted to create a verbatim transcript. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. Additional information from the original transcript has been added in brackets and given an -Ed. attribution.

### **Interview**

[00:00:01.86]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I'm interviewing Faith Ringgold on September 6, 1989 at her apartment at 345 West 145th Street, is that—all right. Let's see, first thing we should do is give us your full name, the way you—

[00:00:24.33]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Faith Ringgold is my name.

[00:00:28.11]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay.

[00:00:29.01]

FAITH RINGGOLD and CYNTHIA NADELMAN (IN UNISON): And— [They laugh.]

[00:00:33.84]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And what else do you want me to say?

[00:00:37.26]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Do you have a middle name that you ever—

[00:00:38.82]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No. No. I never used my middle name.

[00:00:41.73]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And you don't divulge it, either?

[00:00:43.77]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, it's a long story connected to my middle name, and I'm not even sure—yeah, I'm sure what it is, because I discovered what my middle name was when I got married the first time. I figured—you know, because I had thought it was Elizabeth and then I found out it was Willi. Willi was my mother's first name. And I was shocked. She had a plan—my mother had planned to change it to Elizabeth. Faith Elizabeth Jones was my full name before I got married.

[00:01:21.28]

And she had planned to change it to Faith Elizabeth Jones, but she never did. But on all my school records, it's Faith Elizabeth Jones. Because they had to give babies—I was born in 1930, and before you left the hospital—before my mother left the delivery room, she had to name me, because some babies had gotten mixed up. And so she had to name me, and she wasn't prepared to do that. Because that was a new ruling and it hadn't been the case for my brother and my sister.

Plus, my brother, Ralph, had died nine months before I was born. Yeah, nine months before I was born, she had just lost this baby. So she was depressed, you know? And so here, the problem is, something's happening. She was not prepared. My father was not available, you know, because men were not allowed to be in the delivery room then. [Laughs.]

[00:02:36.17]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right there and then, somebody said to her, "You have to name—"

[00:02:39.11]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, "You have to name this baby now." Plus she's scared to death because she's just lost one child. She figures God, maybe, I'll lose this one, you know? And now hear this. Now she has to name—so she was just totally unable to function. And so the nurse said, "Name her Faith." And so that just seemed perfect.

[00:03:04.95]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's great, yeah.

[00:03:05.70]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Because she wanted to have faith that this baby would be all right. And so I don't know where the Elizabeth came from. I mean, I don't know where—oh, the Willi came from—that's how I got to be Willi. Faith, and then she said, "Okay, why don't we give her your middle name? Your first name as her middle name." Faith Willi Jones was my—

[00:03:31.32]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That you were born with. And you mean—so that's on the birth certificate?

[00:03:33.86]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right.

[00:03:34.62]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And then it got—

[00:03:36.09]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, and then I married Wallace, and then I married Ringgold.

[00:03:40.44]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: But the Elizabeth, you mean, started getting put on forms and things, but—

[00:03:44.79]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, because she had planned to change it, but never did. So she just sort of changed it. Yeah, Elizabeth. So you won't see Faith Willi Jones on anything.

[00:03:55.74]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, okay.

[00:03:56.94]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Except my birth certificate. That's the only thing—

[00:03:59.46]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And you didn't even know about it.

[00:04:00.82]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And I don't even know it 'til I got married and saw my birth certificate. Then I found that out. And that was 1950.

[00:04:08.74]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, okay. Had you gotten attached to Elizabeth, or did you not care much?

[00:04:12.16]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, I was kind of attached to it. I was kind of attached to it. Yeah, so for 20 years, I was Faith Elizabeth. And then I found out I was Faith Willi. And that's like the most traumatic reality of my life.

[00:04:30.31]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Really?

[00:04:31.87]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That's kind of nice. [They laugh.]

[00:04:33.59]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, right.

[00:04:34.21]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, I mean, that's like the only thing that I can think about—that I found out late that I was shocked about, which is good.

[00:04:43.43]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. [Laughs.] Yeah, it's—

[00:04:44.20]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Very good. You know? [Laughs.] So I told that little story.

[00:04:49.03]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:04:49.69]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Not such a great story, but it's a nice story.

[00:04:55.20]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: No, it's cute. What's the actual birth date? I mean, when's your birthday?

[00:04:58.02]

FAITH RINGGOLD: October 8, 1930.

[00:05:01.87]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And you were the third child?

[00:05:05.78]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I was the third child.

[00:05:09.10]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And—so there was a son who had—he was, what, two years old when he died?

[00:05:14.08]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Actually, I was the fourth, because one died.

[00:05:16.06]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Really? Oh.

[00:05:16.93]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So there were two that lived, and that was my brother, Andrew, who was seven years older than me, and my sister, Barbara, who was four years old, almost four years older than me. And then I was the last child, and the baby. And so I guess everything about the way I was raised has to do with the fact that I was the last born, and born nine months after my brother died. So I was like—my mother never let my feet touch the ground. She spoiled me totally. Totally.

[00:06:05.16]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. So you had—you enjoyed that? I mean, you had a good—

[00:06:08.19]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I had a great childhood. I mean, it was absolutely fantasyland. I had a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful childhood. And I don't know. Maybe that also has to do with the fact that—yeah, I don't think my life is so wonderful now. I mean, it's un—it's not pressured. I don't have a whole lot of big problems. But it's not great. I don't feel like I'm having fun and stuff. You know what I mean?

[00:06:46.16]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:06:47.12]

FAITH RINGGOLD: But you can't have that all through your life. You know what I mean? You can't—

[00:06:51.16]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. A lot of people have the very unhappy childhoods, I guess.

[00:06:53.99]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. Right. Yeah, well, I didn't. I had a—I had a good. I was sick a lot. I was sick. I had asthma. But I think that contributed to my happiness.

[00:07:05.84]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, people paid you a lot of attention?

[00:07:08.12]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I didn't have to go to school. A lot—

[00:07:11.90]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Really?

[00:07:12.58]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yeah. I was absent from school a lot. But I got special everything. My mother would bring my homework, you know, like, daily. When she would go up to school to take my brother and sister, she would go see my teacher and get my work. And then she would bring it to me, and I would get all the special help. My family—I come from a long line of teachers. And my mother was just a born teacher. And she would help me with my work. So I never felt—I never was behind. When I went back to school, I was right there with the other kids.

[00:07:51.42]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. You were probably ahead.

[00:07:53.28]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, maybe. But kids were on the ball in those days. I mean, and the public schools were great.

[00:07:58.86]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:07:59.01]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Public schools were great. So that didn't help my popularity, did not enhance my popularity with the other kids, because I was the special kid who was absent all the time. But when I came back to school, I was right there with the others. And they couldn't figure out, how the hell does she get to not come to school and she doesn't have to pay? There's no penalty involved for her. Why is that? So kids didn't like me. I was not favored. I wasn't popular at all when I was a kid, in school. I was very popular with my family and with friends outside of school, adults mostly. Adults mostly, but then I had a brother and sister. I didn't really need them.

[00:08:54.60]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Well, how about the brother and sister? Did they pamper you also?

[00:08:58.68]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, my brother idolized me. My sister, well, my sister wasn't so crazy about me. But I still—I mean, it was just—I had a great kind of—we had other little kids that were friends with us. So I mean, outside of school—that's probably why I didn't like school, you know, because I don't have good memories about school. You know, I don't. I don't have any great—like kids when they graduate from school, they would want to go back and see teachers. I never wanted to go back to see anybody. There was nobody I wanted to go back to see.

[00:09:42.54]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So you didn't form that strong attachments to either schoolmates or teachers too much at that point?

[00:09:49.48]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No. No. I had one good friend in school, and that was Katherine—English. And I know her today, although I don't see her like I should. And I keep saying I'm going to. In fact, I'm going to call her today because I keep saying, I'm going to call her, I'm going to call her, and I don't do it. But she and I have been friends since the second grade, which is when I really started going to school, by the way. Because I never went to kindergarten. And first grade, very little.

[00:10:20.38]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Because—

[00:10:21.14]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Because of the asthma. And then the second grade—because there was a lot of TB around in those days. And the doctors did not want me exposed to children's diseases and all of that because they figured that with asthma, I might get something. So they did not encourage me to go to kindergarten, or very much, to the first grade. By the second grade, I was going to school, but I was also absent a lot.

But anyway, I never liked school. But it never occurred to me that I wouldn't go, or wouldn't graduate. See, that was not in the plan. Because I was taught from the moment I came in the world, you're going to go to college, you're going to be something. You know, you're definitely going to go to college. And everybody who went to college in my family was held up to me as this role model. Particularly, my mother's father, who was a school principal. And just recently, I was given his license papers from 1887, or something.

[00:11:39.04]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Really?

[00:11:39.52]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, which is—I was shocked, because—that he would be licensed in those days in South Carolina and all different parts of the South. He would travel around and teach in different schools and be the chief headmaster, and put the schools together. And then he would move on—take the family and move on to another town. And each town he went to, he had to be licensed, which means—

[00:12:12.94]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: All over again.

[00:12:13.78]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, they would give him a little test. And I don't know, little, big, they'd give him a test and a grade.

[00:12:20.11]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Really?

[00:12:20.74]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. And I have some of those documents, which is fascinating to me. Because the South being what it was in those days, I didn't know they did all that. He must have been a hell of a man.

[00:12:36.59]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Public schools?

[00:12:36.89]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, public schools. Yeah, public school. Those one-room schoolhouses, I assume. You know? And he was a very strong, stoic 19th century Black man. He wanted his family to—so I just feel that he is a guiding spirit in my life. He's somebody that I was told about forever, since the day I was born. You know, "Professor B.B. Posey, blah, blah, blah."

And I thought a lot of it was kind of made up until I got all these papers. And then I said, hey, this man was—but you know, I was never able to—my mother never saw those papers, I don't think.

[00:13:26.84]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: How did you get them?

[00:13:27.38]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, she was alive—I got them through a cousin. And her mother had them. And her mother was my mother's sister. She was older than—my mother was the baby in her family. And so my mother never—I don't think she ever saw those. Because if she knew about those papers, she would have showed them to me. You know? But yeah, so I come from this long tradition of teachers, people who taught people.

[00:13:55.61]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Did you know your grandfather?

[00:13:57.80]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, I never met him. He died very young.

[00:14:00.08]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Really?

[00:14:00.56]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, well everybody died young in those days. Not everybody, because my great-great grandmother died at 110.

[00:14:09.20]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Wow. Yeah. Wow.

[00:14:11.03]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Wow, huh?

[00:14:12.50]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:14:12.95]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, she died at 110. So I don't know. I'm trying to be inspired by the two of them. My grandfather who died young, he was about 37. And my great-great grandmother, who died at 110.

[00:14:32.58]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Was she on his side?

[00:14:34.47]

FAITH RINGGOLD: She was not. No, she was on my mother's side. She was on my mother's side.

[00:14:41.40]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That would still be on his.

[00:14:43.44]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No.

[00:14:44.64]



CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Because he was her mother's partner.

[00:14:47.15]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, right. Oh, I don't know.

[00:14:52.71]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: But you seem—you know quite a lot about your family, right, it sounds like?

[00:14:56.68]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I know quite a bit, yeah. I need to even more; I would love to even more, because there are a lot of Poseys that went—there some that went to California, and went to other parts of the country, and became lawyers and doctors and people like that, and we kind of lost contact with them. And now everybody's dead in my family. My mother's dead; my aunts are dead. And now that I'm really interested, I can't get all that information that I want.

[00:15:27.13]

But I have all of my oldest uncle's papers. And so I have letters that they wrote backwards and forwards to each other about property. There's a lot of writing. I have a lot of letters that have to do with money and property. And it's funny because it's little bitty money. But it was big money then. And it's about somebody dying, and who gets the house. And then it goes—there was one brother, a Posey, who was a lawyer. And he was handling the distribution of some relatives' affairs and money and stuff. And the language that they use when they wrote to each other, and the handwriting, you know that old scrolly kind of script writing that they wrote? And brother—"I will long for the day when we are back together again." And "God be with you—" you know, all that long writing. [Laughs.]

[00:16:38.84]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Flowery.

[00:16:39.30]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, flowery-type thing. Yeah. So it's—it was the family tradition. But for that, who knows what would have become of me with the asthma, and not going to school, I might have been a dropout, or something. But that was not possible under the circumstances.

[00:17:01.67]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Right. Maybe you heard more about it by being at home or something.

[00:17:07.21]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You know, you might be right. You might be right. My brother was not—my brother got caught up in being involved with street gangs and things, trying to establish his manhood. And my mother wasn't good to him like she was for me. My father and mother separated early, although he was available to us all the time. I can't remember when they actually first separated, because my father was always there.

[00:17:40.27]

Even though they weren't together, he still came, because he had to be there for my brother and for us and make sure that everything went well, because he supported us. My mother was a housewife. So he came often. But my brother, who was very bright and did very well in school—but my mother made him into like a little Lord Fauntleroy. You know, he wore the Eton collars with the little bow and a little short pants, and the buckskin shoes. Mother bought his clothes from Rogers Peet. And the kids laughed at him. You know? And these street gangs were starting. That was late '30s. And they were trying to establish their manhood, or whatever it was they were doing. And we moved from that area. We moved up here, which was called Sugar Hill in those days. We were living in Central Harlem. And then

we moved up here, which was really, a great area at the time. Beautiful area. But he kept going back.

[00:19:01.64]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh. Well, he'd been older when he left, I guess. Right? He was a teenager?

[00:19:03.83]

FAITH RINGGOLD: See, I was—I was 11. So he was 17. So it was—I had been sick. And he kept going back. Now he was a sweet kid. And everybody loved him. I mean, walking down the street with him, everybody would run up to him, "hi," "hi," "hi," "hi." They called him "Baron," actually—that was his nickname. He was very protective of me and my sister. So nobody tried to beat us up or anything. Kids were into beating kids up after school.

[00:19:40.75]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh yeah, I remember that.

[00:19:42.10]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They do that forever.

[00:19:43.21]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Right.

[00:19:44.86]

FAITH RINGGOLD: But nobody tried to do anything. So people would say, "That's Baron's sisters, man. Don't get involved." So everybody protected us. But I don't know, I never saw my brother fight anybody. And he was skinny. Who the hell is he going to beat up? You know, I mean, come on. But he had a reputation.

[00:20:05.41]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: He didn't get the reputation from the Rogers Peet clothes, I guess, either?

[00:20:08.48]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No. No. Well, maybe—what he did was he would alter those. He learned how to sew something in his pants to make his pants look pegged. And then he got it. By the time he was 17, he had a little job, and he was working. And he wasn't wearing those clothes anymore. I mean, he—and my father got involved, too—early. And said, "No." And then he wanted to join the football team. And my mother said "No. No. No. No. You can't join the football team. That's out. Because if you join the football team, you might get hurt."

[00:20:55.48]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:20:56.06]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Now looking back on it, realistically, I don't know that he could have played football. He wasn't big. He wasn't short, but he was slight of build. Now what kind of football player was he—

[00:21:11.63]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Quarterback, he probably could—

[00:21:12.82]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. I don't know. Maybe. Maybe he would have gotten big if he had played football. I don't know.

[00:21:21.28]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Was he athletic? I mean, did he like—

[00:21:23.14]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. Now what he played all the time was basketball. Constantly played basketball at the park. And stickball. Basketball and stickball, because you know, there weren't cars. People didn't have cars then. Maybe one or two people on the whole street owned a car. And so there were no cars parked in the street. So the kids played in the street.

[00:21:51.67]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. They weren't going to get run over, either.

[00:21:53.17]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, they weren't, because how often did a car come by? Not very often. And so he played in the street just like all the other boys. But I don't know that he really would have been a football player. But there was this real scare that he would hurt himself. My mother was too protective of him, just like she was protective of me. But with me, you know, I guess I liked it, but he couldn't deal with it. He couldn't abide it.

[00:22:27.84]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And what happened?

[00:22:29.40]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, my brother had a traumatic thing happen to him in 1940—must've been about '44 or '42, or '43, somewhere in the early '40s. He went to visit a friend who lived on Hamilton Terrace, an area up here near Hampstead Avenue in the '40s. And it had just—it was just—Black families were just beginning to move in to that area.

[00:23:13.99]

He went to visit this friend of his. And these white kids jumped him and beat him in the head with an iron pipe, a rusty iron pipe. And the police stood around and watched this going on. Anyway, he was able to get home by himself, from there, to where we lived. We lived on 150th Edgecombe Avenue. And he—I'll never forget the day he—that night, he rang the bell. And I opened the door. My mother was next door, visiting a neighbor. And she told me, "As soon as Andrew gets home, come and get me," because he was late.

[00:24:03.68]

And when I opened the door, he was just a bloody mess. You could see his bones in his head. And I—I was just absolutely— He said, "Don't tell mother. Don't tell mother." And I said, "Well, I got to tell her. I mean, you got to go to the hospital, or something." And he was trying to make this—and blood was just—oh, it was everywhere.

[00:24:34.71]

So I went and I got my mother. And my mother was—she was a—sometimes she was a hysterical kind of person when she could be. But when it was necessary for her to be cool, she was, too. So she came over, and I guess her first inclination was to faint, but she didn't. She grabbed him and she ran to the hospital. It was a hospital right on the corner, a little private hospital. This neighborhood was totally different than it is now. There was a little private hospital on the corner, which is now a hotel, 150th and St. Nicholas Avenue. And they just didn't deal with my brother. I mean, they didn't want to accept him because he was Black. So—right on that corner.

[00:25:28.89]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:25:29.85]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And so that delayed the process. So mother got a taxi and took him up to Medical Center. And he stayed in the hospital up there for maybe a couple of months. There was some sort of neurological—something happened to him. And he was not accepted into the Army. They said he would not be able to take orders. It was very bad. I mean, the whole—I was young at the time, and I don't remember the total details of it.

[00:26:09.72]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:26:10.86]

FAITH RINGGOLD: But that beating and what happened to him as a result of that encounter left him scarred for life. His—I don't know. It seems like his resolve is broken. His spirit was—he just wandered from then on. He became involved with drugs. This was the—by the late '40s, he became involved with—see, he couldn't go into the Army. And the Army was kind of like a refuge for young Black men who needed to find themselves, or establish their manhood, or wherever. They went in the Army. But he couldn't go in.

[00:27:06.14]

And he lost interest in school. Mother couldn't make him go to school. That almost killed her. Oh, because the whole family was—firstborn, the boy of the family's gotta go to college, gotta go to school, gotta finish high school and go on, you know. And when he wouldn't do that—oh, my mother, it was like a death in the family the day he quit school. And my uncle just really—my uncle never got over that, that Andrew quit school.

[00:27:45.78]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Your mother's brother?

[00:27:46.62]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. But I understand why he quit school. Because in those days, I mean, we grew up in a neighborhood with kids whose fathers had college degrees and who worked in the post office. Couldn't get a job. Hey, you know, I mean, it was like a joke. So he didn't go to college. So what? As a matter of fact, I went from 1948. I graduated in 1948. And in all the time I was going to college, I mean, it was like, what are you doing that for? You know, I mean, you didn't get anywhere. You know, it was a joke. I mean, that was the general attitude, and that wasn't far from wrong. It wasn't far from wrong.

[00:28:47.02]

Plus, it wasn't popular anyway for people to be going to school in the '40s, college. A lot of people didn't go to college in the '40s, especially Black people. But people in general didn't. But anyway, he figured, what the hell? I mean, I don't gain anything. And there was such racism in the schools. I mean, it was so heavy. It was heavy. And he was very sensitive, although I never heard him talk about it. He was a kind of sweet boy. He was—everybody liked him. As a matter of fact, that was true of both my brother and my sister. They were extremely well-liked by their teachers, by their classmates. They were loved. They were revered by everyone. It's amazing. And I was just taken for granted. [They laugh.]

[00:29:42.83]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Maybe you were more self-contained, or something like that.

[00:29:47.69]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I don't know. I don't know what it was, but they were all—everybody always loved them. I mean, they just—and it didn't make any difference what they did. You know what I mean? I didn't notice that they were particularly doing anything to please people, or being nice to people. They were just really liked a lot. Everybody just liked them. And they just liked having them around them, you know. Whereas, I was running around trying to please people.

[00:30:15.76]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Really?

[00:30:17.03]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I mean, I think I did. I mean, I felt like I was doing that. Anyway, my brother became a drug addict and broke my mother's heart. And eventually, when we went to Europe in '61—I went to Europe the first time, took my two daughters and my mother. And we went over there to Europe. And while we were gone, I just had a funny feeling that something bad was going to happen. He went to the—we went over on a boat, the *SS Liberté*. And I just had a feeling at the bon voyage that I would never see him quite the same way.

[00:31:09.10]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Was he there?

[00:31:09.95]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. That was the last time we saw him. We got the—we got the message in Rome. That—that he had—the phone rang. We were in this palazzo in Rome. We had just come back from the Vatican. And you know, it was the strangest thing, how it happened. Mother had made a date with the taxi driver to come and get us the next day to take us for a tour of Rome in a taxi, because there were some things we wanted to see that they were far from each other, and we figured we had a taxi, we could maneuver around a little better. So she was making this arrangement with the taxi driver.

[00:32:02.65]

Now, the taxi driver spoke Italian. Mother spoke English. But they were out there, both of them waving their hands and trying to communicate. When down the street came this little lady, and she heard and saw what was going on. And she said, "I will take you." She said, "You don't need him." She said, "I will take you tomorrow. I speak English and Italian." And she said, "So I will take you."

[00:32:30.43]

And my mother took to her immediately. Now my mother was a very friendly person. She was not a risk-taker at all. But she seemed to have been able to size people up immediately, and she was right every time. And somehow or another, she took to this woman immediately. I did not. Something about this lady, I didn't like. It was like she was the purveyor of doom. She looked like the devil incarnate to me. She looked like Mephistopheles to me. But my mother didn't see that. And the minute I put my eyes on her, I said, "I don't like this woman." But my mother really took to her like they had knowing each other for 20 years. So my mother told the taxi driver to go. And we stood out there, right in front of the palazzo.

[00:33:25.98]

And my mother talked to this woman. And she was—she actually been born in the Midwest—Iowa, somewhere. She was an Indian, Native American. She'd gone to Rome, and she'd been there for several years. She spoke Italian, and also spoke English. And so mother said, "Well, come on in and have dinner with us." So now it's my mother, me and my two kids. So we go into the palazzo. And before we can sit down, the concierge comes up and says, "it's a phone from America, for you." I said, "For me?" "For you."

[00:34:21.94]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You already—

[00:34:23.94]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Too many things happening at once. Too many things. Too many strange things, right? So I got to the phone. And on the other side of the phone, I heard Birdie's voice, which is my present husband who I wasn't married to then. And I said, no, no, no, no, he's not the type to call me in Rome. No, there's no way. Something is wrong. But anyway, when I looked this woman, was standing right there by us. The Indian woman.

[00:35:02.79]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. She had followed you to the phone?

[00:35:04.76]

FAITH RINGGOLD: She followed me to the phone. And he—well, there had been some problems anyway with the operator, and stuff. So she had to take the phone to do that. And then when finally—actually, when I got the connection together, you needed to be talking in Italian. Then I heard Birdie speak, and he said, "Andrew is dead. You should come home right away. I'm here with Barbara and your father. But you should come as quickly as possible." So she said to me—so I hung up the phone. This little lady said to me, "How are you going to tell your mother?" It was like she knew.

[00:36:04.67]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, and she didn't—

[00:36:05.40]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It was like she knew.

[00:36:07.47]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: God.

[00:36:08.15]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It was like she knew all the time. I mean—

[00:36:12.26]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that is very weird.

[00:36:13.94]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Weird.

[00:36:14.91]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Huh.

[00:36:17.31]

FAITH RINGGOLD: First, it was like she was coming down the street to meet us. And then it was like she was coming in the house just in time to get the phone call.

[00:36:29.90]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:36:30.14]

FAITH RINGGOLD: She was a step ahead of us all the way.

[00:36:32.27]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:36:33.77]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So I said, "Well, the first thing I have to think about is how to get back to New York as soon as possible." So she said, "Don't worry about that. She said, I'll help you do that." And I said, "Well, I don't know how I'm going to tell my mother." Because I knew my brother was my mother's heart. That was her son. And I told you, he was a very sweet boy. So no matter what he did, he was never thought of as anything else but sweet. So we went back to the table. And I did tell her. She was expecting something. And so she did get it. And she held up pretty well. Because I guess she realized she had to. We had to get home.

[00:37:33.09]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Maybe she'd been expecting something in the back of—

[00:37:36.00]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, somebody's a drug addict, you know, you should expect something.

[00:37:41.25]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:37:42.31]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Anyway, I had this whole list of train schedules because I had been my own travel agent. And I knew there were certain flights out of Rome. But we couldn't get any flights. There was no airplane the next day. We could not get a plane out, because we had to go back to Paris for some reason. I don't remember what—oh, our flight home was from Paris. See, we already had a reservation from Paris. Somehow or another, it could not be changed. I don't remember the details.

[00:38:29.16]

And the only way we could get to Paris in time to do what we needed to do was take a train. I mean, the connections, we couldn't get any kind of other reservation that quick. And we wanted to leave immediately. So what we could do was get a train immediately up to Switzerland and get to Paris just in time to catch this plane and get out of there. So we did that. And mother was just—she had been wonderful through the whole trip with the kids and their clothes and washing their little things every night and keeping them nice and clean.

[00:39:15.99]

And I was just having a good time. I was the tour director. And I remember when we first got to Rome, my whole thing was—in fact, every place we went, I just pushed everybody. As soon as we got there, I said, come on, let's go see this, that, and I had a whole list of things to see. Now let's go—because I had a feeling that we weren't going to finish this trip. I felt that—I had that sense of urgency. You better do it now. Don't wait. And fortunately, we didn't. Because you see what happened. We got cut short.

[00:39:54.71]

But when mother—after Andrew's death, mother kind of slacked up. I remember the last train we took—you know, I love European trains. We took this first-class train. It was one of those crack trains that didn't stop, went right straight through. And I remember going into the dining room. You go—snobby Europeans. And my little children with their dirty dresses on. [Laughs.] They were so cute.

[00:40:33.45]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: They were—how old were they?

[00:40:35.39]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Let's see.

[00:40:35.87]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Under ten, or something?

[00:40:37.88]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They were—that was 1961. So they were under ten. Yeah. Because they were both born in 1952. So they were both under ten—seven and eight, or six and seven. So anyway—but you know how kids are, they don't know that they got on dirty dresses. They're just—[Laughs.] But anyway, because we had just been on this train too long, and we were not looking like we should. But we didn't care. We didn't care at that point. So we had a—they had a pretty okay time on the train. We were able to not show them all of our

depression. So we never saw that lady again.

[00:41:30.10]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: She just kind of disappeared that night.

[00:41:31.63]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah.

[00:41:31.93]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And you didn't take her tour—

[00:41:33.22]

FAITH RINGGOLD: See, we got up from dinner, went upstairs. She helped us pack. And she went and got her car, and put us in it, and took us to the train station.

[00:41:49.24]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So her only role in your life was this.

[00:41:53.47]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Isn't that something? Took us to—I write about this in my autobiography. Took us to the train station, and I had this whole list of trains. So when they said there was no train out to so-and-so, I said, "Well, yes, there's one here." And they looked and then they found that train. And we did get on it. And we got out. We got back to Paris. And one of the things I remember about arriving in Paris, we had no hotel reservation. So we got out of the train station. We just went to the hotel across the street. Now that was a real luxury in those days—we're talking 1961—because we couldn't have done that in America.

[00:42:48.41]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: To be able to just go into any—

[00:42:50.21]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, just go into any hotel. I mean, we didn't have to say, "Well, is this hotel okay? I mean, will they accept Black people, or whatever?" And we just went to the nearest hotel and just went in. And got a room for the night. And then got out of there the next morning early and got on a plane and came home. I have to say, though, in retrospect, that I was very angry with my brother. My mother says to me, anyway, "You know, when people die, you get angry with them."

[00:43:24.59]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:43:26.62]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And I think she may be right because I'm a little angry with her, for dying like that and not even giving me any—well, she was getting old and getting tired. But my mother just went to sleep. You know, she just didn't wake up.

[00:43:40.15]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Moreso than you ever—

[00:43:41.68]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, I mean, she wasn't sick.

[00:43:43.75]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: No?



[00:43:43.99]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No. She just—she had hardening of the arteries. She had high blood pressure. But she had her work. She had—you know—

[00:43:54.70]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, you were working on a project.

[00:43:56.44]

FAITH RINGGOLD: We were working on a project together. I mean, she had all her work laid out for the next day, her ironing board was up. And her cutting table was open. Her house was immaculate. And then she goes off to sleep. And so—and she told me that. She said "You know, you get angry. When people die, you get mad with them."

[00:44:19.60]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yeah.

[00:44:21.85]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I was a little bit angry with my brother for dying like that. And cutting my vacation.

[00:44:32.75]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:44:33.89]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And bringing us back in such a condition. It just seems so—you know, I mean, I had to save to go to Europe. First trip abroad and then I had to come back.

[00:44:51.23]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. How much had been cut off?

[00:44:54.95]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I guess we must have lost about maybe three weeks. Yeah, we must have lost about three weeks. But he and I were very—we had been very close before I began to realize that it was hopeless, because there was no help for drug addicts. There were no programs. You know, it was interesting, I was just watching—listening to the President here making this war on drugs.

[00:45:27.72]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:45:28.95]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Big deal. Oh, boy, that should have been done years ago. Wasteful. When people don't understand suffering of so many people for so many years without any help, without any hope. I mean, if somebody in your family was a drug addict, it was just like, it was like the greatest disgrace. It was a death sentence. And anything that was hopeless like that was something that you would normally stay ashamed of. I mean, it was—

[00:46:02.23]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: As you got older and weren't any more a little kid next to him being a big brother and all that, did you talk to him? [Cross talk.]

[00:46:10.18]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh yeah, tried. Tried to. But see, there wasn't, in my family, this male protector, which was my father's legacy. You have a little man of the family, and you are supposed to protect and take care of your sisters and your mother when I'm not around. And

so it's hard to speak to your protector, especially when you're the baby. And also when you're talking to him about something that you don't know anything about. Nobody knew anything about drugs; even the people that were taking them didn't know.

[00:46:53.24]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, sure.

[00:46:53.42]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You know, I mean, it was not all of this sophistication that's going on now. People just thought that if you used dope, you were dopey. You were some kind of a crazy person. And you were also a disgrace to your family and yourself and everybody else. So it was hard for me to talk to him about it. And he couldn't stop. There was no help for him anywhere. Mother went to everyone, and there was nothing.

[00:47:34.06]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Did you have—

[END OF TRACK AAA\_ringgo89\_6379\_m]

[00:00:05.54]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay. I was asking about whether you had other extended family around, and all, as one kind of—

[00:00:13.25]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, I grew up in a whole extended family environment, not with a lot of kids, necessarily, but a lot of aunts and uncles and great friends, because I was born during the Depression. So people—and also, during the period when a lot of Blacks from the South were coming north. And as they would come north—people would come north with like two cents in their pocket, you know. In all different kinds of interesting ways, they would arrive here. They didn't go down to the—they didn't go to the airport and get a flight because there weren't any planes, and they didn't get a train, either, you know.

[00:01:05.20]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And they didn't have a place to live when they got here.

[00:01:07.81]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And they didn't have a place to live, right. And they didn't call up and ask somebody if they could stay because nobody had a phone. So they just appeared, and people would just appear in neighborhoods and say, "Do you know the Parkers?" It was nothing rare to see a person with bags and baggage standing in the street, saying to whoever came by, "Do you know the Parkers? They have a little girl. She must be about ten, and he's a railroad man. He runs on the railroad. He's a sleeping car porter, or whatever, and she's a little short woman, oh, about so tall."

[00:01:57.35]

"Oh, I know who you mean. They live in 342, apartment 5-H, yeah, right up the street. Yeah, in fact, I just saw her go by a few minutes ago. She's home. Go on down there." Everybody knew everybody's business. I mean, it was an amazing. In fact, people would ask you, if you walked down the street on a street that you didn't live on, somebody would say, "Where are you going?"

[00:02:29.67]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: "Who are you looking for?"

[00:02:30.43]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, "Who are you looking for?" And you'd say, "I'm looking for the Smiths or the Joneses or something." "Oh, you mean John Smith?" "Yeah." "Yeah, oh, Long

John Smith?" "Yeah." "Oh, he's—" they said, "Oh, we just saw him. He went up the street. He's home," or whatever. I mean, there was no way you could keep anything. I mean, everybody was protecting everybody, and that's why we didn't have all this crime. That's why we could go up on Tar Beach and sleep all night without anything because everybody was looking out for everybody. If somebody rang my bell, the whole floor would open their door, you know?

[00:03:09.74]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yeah.

[00:03:10.37]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And if my mother wasn't home, when she got home, that person would be sitting in another person's apartment. They would have been given dinner, and they would be sitting there talking and enjoying everything. So I grew up in a time when there were always a lot of people around, and strangers, some strangers, and all strangers to me, practically. A lot of them were relatives, or friends, or friends of friends. And my mother was very gracious, and was always giving, and my father was perfectly in tune with her allowing as many people as she wanted to stay, because there was always room for one more person to live.

[00:04:02.16]

And plus, we didn't feel crowded, somehow. People cooperated. They would share the washing. They would tell my mother, "Okay, if you're going to cook, I'll take the kids out." And they would take us to the park or take us to a movie. Or they would cook, and they'd tell my mother, "Why don't you go take the kids out," because there'd be too many people in the house, you know.

[00:04:27.36]

But it was—and then at night, when we would all go to bed, we could hear the adults talking, and that was the best part. Sometimes, we would be able to—if it was a hot night, I remember my mother would put out all the lights because the lights would make the house hot, and throw all the windows up, and the adults would sit in the windows and talk in the dark.

[00:04:52.41]

And we would be sitting there real quietly so that we could stay up and hear. And sometimes, my mother would forget that we weren't in bed. My mother put us in bed every night at six o'clock. We had to go to bed with the sun up. And then somebody would sneeze or cough or something, and say, "Oh, these kids—listen, come on. You all, come on. You all have to go to bed." We had already had our bath. We were in our nightclothes. "Let's go. Time to go to bed. You're on my time now." She would discover us, and we would have to go to bed.

[00:05:25.65]

But oh, yeah, it was constant. And they could stay with us until they got a job and got a place to stay, or if people got dispossessed because they couldn't pay their rent, or whatever. Then they could—I remember one family came and stayed with us. A mother and two kids came and stayed with us. She had lost her apartment, and Mother loaned her a down payment on her house. She gave her our rent to put a down payment on a house in Brooklyn. Just goes to show you what money was about in those days.

[00:06:14.59]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:06:15.04]

FAITH RINGGOLD: She stayed in that house for years and years and years. She's dead now, but that's the kind of thing. And she paid my mother back. Everybody—people were just good to each other. There was no welfare. There was no unemployment insurance. There was none of that.

[00:06:33.79]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, the people—

[00:06:34.36]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I mean, people just had to help each other, and they did. But she gave me that. I kind of like—I enjoy helping people. I feel as though it's part of what you're supposed to do. I come from a totally different time where nobody was in the street. It was unheard of that anybody could be homeless, I mean, because there was always somebody's couch you could sleep on.

[00:07:14.04]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Was there a sense as you got older, there was more poverty around you, and stuff like that?

[00:07:20.33]

FAITH RINGGOLD: As I got older?

[00:07:21.18]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, I mean, things are changing anyway, I guess.

[00:07:24.90]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, as I got—okay, so the '30s, people were poor. It was the Depression. People were poor. But they were clean, and they were proud. The '40s—they were becoming more affluent. It was the war, and for the first time, women were going to work. My mother started working in 1942.

[00:07:55.46]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: During the war?

[00:07:56.42]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, she went and worked in a parachute factory, making parachutes, and then from there, she said, "Well, wait a minute, why am I doing this? Why don't I go make clothes? That's what I've always wanted to do," because she sewed. And so she left there, and she went and made Eisenhower jackets. And then she left there—and she also divorced my father in the process. And then from there, she went and became a sample maker in a dress factory, and started making her own clothes, and became a fashion designer and dress maker herself and went into business for herself.

[00:08:35.17]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I see.

[00:08:35.92]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So by the '50s, she was already in business for herself, but she got her start from working in the '40s during the war, when women were needed to do these jobs in these so-called war plants.

[00:08:55.00]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. In New York, in the city, was that?

[00:08:56.02]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. Yeah, right here in New York. And so in the '40s, people became more affluent. For the first time in this country, more Black people were able to get jobs and go to work and become—I think that was our introduction into the middle class. Of course, the '20s—there were middle-class Black people in the '20s and '30s and all, but I mean, they became more so in the '40s. People started moving out of Harlem and buying homes and doing this and doing that.

[00:09:31.51]

The '50s was a depressing time. It was a bit of a down beat after the war, and that it was not a very prosperous period, the '50s. That's when I got married. And oh, it was just before the '60s. The '60s was a prosperous period, not the early '60s, but the late '60s. The late '60s was prosperous. So it's been on and off. It was on and off.

[00:10:16.69]

But through all of this, of course, I think there has been a hard core of people who have become more and more desperate, a hard core, and it's confusing, because then there are others who have gone on to school. For instance, the late '60s saw more people going to college, because of the demands on the part of college students to get a college education. So then that happened. And then the '70s saw a kind of breaking down, and now the '80s is a really bad period where we've got kids dropping out of school, and so even more of an acceleration of drugs, and all kinds of really bad problems.

[00:11:18.37]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: [Inaudible].

[00:11:19.39]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Excuse me.

[00:11:20.09]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Oh, excuse me.

[00:11:20.80]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It's okay. And so I think that on the one hand, there was a rise of the middle class, let's say, from the '40s on now, and that has continued. But there's also the downgrading of the underclass into a kind of despair, because in the '30s, nobody thought they were going to be poor forever. People thought they were just going through a phase.

[00:11:56.97]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And people took care of each other. People weren't lost in the cracks.

[00:11:59.58]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. Everybody had a hope, yeah, and there was no drugs. The '40s—people were hard working. They worked real hard, and they tried real hard. And some were poor, but they were trying. The '50s—people, I think, were in despair because that was just before the '60s, and then in the '60s, people were, again, hopeful, very hopeful that they could change the world. They could make things better. I think in the '70s, people said it didn't work.

[00:12:35.92]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Let's do something else.

[00:12:36.95]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, it didn't work. So it's been like a seesaw.

[00:12:40.40]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, and you've been here the whole time.

[00:12:42.45]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And I've been here the whole time.

[00:12:44.15]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Let's see. I wanted to come around to all the different places

where you've lived and stuff like that, neighborhoods, but I also wanted to—your parents, your mother and father. Had they come up from the South?

[00:12:58.82]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, they came up from Jacksonville, Florida, and from—My mother was born in Palatka, and as I told you, her father had traveled all over the South.

[00:13:17.00]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. When she was a child, she traveled with him.

[00:13:19.01]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. Yeah, the whole family traveled. My mother's mother also taught with him. And so they came up from Florida, because Florida was their home state, even though he had taught in all these other states as well. And my father also came from Florida. Jacksonville was his city. So they came up when they were very young.

[00:13:46.70]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Had they met down there?

[00:13:47.84]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No.

[00:13:48.38]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: They didn't.

[00:13:49.10]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, they met here. They were both teenagers, very young. My mother must have been about 15, 16 when she came.

[00:14:01.54]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And her family—you said that was their home state. Had there been various grandparents and great-grandparents, and they were mostly located in Florida?

[00:14:08.77]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, yeah, I think Florida was it.

[00:14:13.27]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So they come up here, and then she went—did she go to school?

[00:14:17.53]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, she did.

[00:14:18.04]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: She went to school up in—

[00:14:19.42]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, she went to—first, she graduated from high school. She went to—oh, I forgot the name of that.

[00:14:26.97]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I saw the name of it in one of your—

[00:14:28.53]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, I can't remember the name of it.

[00:14:29.55]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: A friend of mine said her mother had been there.

[00:14:30.99]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, and then she went to FIT for her fashion design. Yeah.

[00:14:38.99]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. So did she make all your clothes and kids' clothes when you were growing up?

[00:14:42.08]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yeah. Oh, yes, indeed, absolutely. There was always lots of clothes.

[00:14:49.21]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So there was always sewing going on.

[00:14:50.28]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, always sewing going on, always. And she gave fashion shows, and I would help her. Oh, we would just be up all night, and I would be doing all the handwork. So she taught me how to sew. Yeah, she taught me. She was just ingenious with cloth. She just cut it. It just fell just like she wanted it to. Just wonderful.

[00:15:14.08]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And you did do it, also, when you were a kid, when you were little.

[00:15:17.77]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, when I was very little, she used to give me scraps of cloth, and I used to try to make things. These things never came out like I wanted them to, and I never liked them because they looked like I made them, which, of course, I did. [They laugh.]

[00:15:38.20]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You mean things like toys, and [inaudible]?

[00:15:39.67]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, I used to try to make—I used to try to make shoes. I remember once I tried to make a bra. [Laughs.] I mean, I just wanted to make things that people don't normally make, and I would discard them because I couldn't get it to work right. I tried to make little dolls, and things.

[00:15:59.59]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Did you play with dolls as a baby, child?

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yeah. Sure. Oh, we had dolls. I had a stove, whatever, all those kind of little girl's things.

[00:16:09.13]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, all those make-believe things.

[00:16:11.71]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:16:13.03]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And when you had the asthma, do you remember—you don't seem to remember too many bad parts of that. Were you in pain, or did it [inaudible]?

[00:16:18.97]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh yeah. In fact, I must have been near death many times, but my mother told me that no one ever died from asthma.

[00:16:29.45]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Well, [inaudible].

[00:16:32.85]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So—and that's good too she told me because I might not be here today if I hadn't thought that. And she said, "Oh no, nobody ever died of that." People died from that.

[00:16:41.75]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:16:41.90]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I never found that out until much later. And now that I look back, oh, I used to have it pretty bad. Oh, yeah, especially during holidays.

[00:16:53.39]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, and wintertime, probably.

[00:16:55.48]

FAITH RINGGOLD: The doctor told my mother—I remember the doctor told my mother, "Don't have anything exciting around her. Keep things very calm during holidays. Don't make it exciting." But my mother didn't know how to do it any other way. She really didn't. She was that kind of person. She was very flamboyant. She was very theatrical. She didn't know how to play it down. I guess she thought she was, you know.

[00:17:24.50]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: But you remember it as being pretty lively [inaudible].

[00:17:27.85]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh boy, and I guess I just couldn't handle— Plus, I think in a lot of ways, it was my way of getting attention. I don't know what it was.

[00:17:42.83]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Well, a combination.

[00:17:44.74]

FAITH RINGGOLD: A combination of all kinds of things. But I never stayed in the hospital longer than a week.

[00:17:53.24]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. But you stayed at home for periods of time.

[00:17:54.74]

FAITH RINGGOLD: But I definitely—and then I'd stay home for another week, recuperating. So that would be two weeks, and that would happen every couple of months or so, definitely Christmas, yeah, around all holidays, whenever things got really exciting, I would—And my mother was a perfectionist, so she had to have—see, when a holiday comes on when I was raising my kids, I never could keep the house clean and get the dinner done and entertain the friends and everything. Something had to go. But my mother had it all—

[00:18:34.32]



CYNTHIA NADELMAN: She did all those things, yeah.

[00:18:35.43]

FAITH RINGGOLD: She got everything done and done right, and as a result, I mean, I guess she was just like this. And I could feel that tension.

[00:18:44.67]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You could feel it? Were you doing art, things like that, drawing and stuff like that at that time, or was more of a sculpture—

[00:18:49.89]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, I've always—yeah, because my mother would give me my drawing book and my crayons, and then she would give me my fabric and my needle and thread. And I had both of those things together, see, and I had my homework, too. See, so I would have my little reading book, and my math book, and my history book, and then I would have my coloring book and my crayons. And I would have my fabric and stuff. And so I had all three of those things working at the same time. And see—and I was able to keep active all—because my mother was busy every minute of the day.

[00:19:35.53]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So you couldn't have her attention all the time.

[00:19:39.98]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, I had it, because she was there with me. She was always busy. That's how she managed to keep everything perfect because from the minute she got up—and she'd rise early, five. Before the sun came up, she was up. And she had done—a day's work had been done before she left the house to take Barbara and Andrew to school. She had already cleaned her house and washed her clothes and ironed, and fixed the breakfast, and da-da-da-da-da. She was a fabulous housekeeper because she knew that she wanted to not only take care of her family, she wanted to do something for herself, too. She wanted to do her sewing. She had to do her creative work.

So in order to do that, she had to manipulate her time. And we had to get in bed at six, because then she could have her time. Plus, she also wanted to entertain her friends. She didn't want to just be all work and no play, so she would get everything done, and then get us in bed. And then she'd have—some of her friends would come by, and she'd be sitting up there sewing or doing whatever she was doing and talking to them and get them working, too.

[00:20:54.16]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So she was very organized, it sounds like.

[00:20:55.84]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Extremely. She was the most organized person I've ever known.

[00:21:00.80]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So you had a good structure all around you all the time as you were growing up?

[00:21:04.78]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. Yeah, she was extremely—she died organized. She died with everything in place. It's just amazing how she—what I liked about her organization the best was her use of time, and I try to copy that as much as possible, her use of time. She didn't let any time—and she took a nap every day.

[00:21:32.97]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Really? Yeah, I'm amazed. People who can do that are generally the

people who are on top of things.

[00:21:39.03]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, she took a nap. Yeah, she would lay down with me. If I was home, she would lay down with me and take this nap about half an hour. And then she'd get up, and she'd be ready. She was wonderful. Oh, she was just so wonderful.

[00:22:01.89]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: How about the places where you lived? Because you mentioned moving at one point. But the first when you were born that you were taken to—

[00:22:09.96]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, I've lived not many places.

[00:22:13.23]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: No?

[00:22:13.65]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And they've all been right around here. So we lived in Central Harlem, 146th Street, which is right down the hill. Then we moved up here in 1942.

[00:22:24.58]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: "Here" being—

[00:22:26.86]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Edgecombe Avenue, right around the corner here. So I lived right around the corner here at 150th and Edgecombe Avenue.

[00:22:33.31]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: 150th and Edgecombe.

[00:22:35.53]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And now I live 145th and Edgecombe, so I just came down the street.

[00:22:39.82]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Did you live—well, let's see. Did you live at various times—did you live with your first husband?

[00:22:47.38]

FAITH RINGGOLD: My first husband lived next door to—I lived in 363 Edgecombe. He lived at 365 Edgecombe. So when I married him, his mother went into the Army with her husband, her new husband, and gave us her apartment, which was right next door to my apartment, next building.

[00:23:12.55]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And your parents—where your mother was?

[00:23:13.78]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, next building. And so I moved there. And then when we broke up, got our divorce, I moved back to my mother's house, 363. And then my mother—and then at some point, I lived—with Earl, I lived for a very short space of time in Brooklyn, for about a couple of months. And then we came back to Edgecombe again and stayed in his mother's house. And then I lived with my mother. And then I married him, Burdette Ringgold, and lived in the Bronx for about two months and then moved here.

[00:24:13.75]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Moved here. Did you move here with him?

[00:24:16.03]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. I married him in 1962, right after coming back from Europe.

[00:24:25.08]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh. From that trip, the one you were just talking about?

[00:24:26.52]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, '62, and then I moved here in '63. So, Bronx was about a year.

[00:24:36.80]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Did Dinah Washington live—is this where she lived? 'Cause I heard that—

[00:24:39.27]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah! Right! First time I came here to see the apartment, all of her stuff was still in here. She had all these packers who were packing up her things. And oh, they were doing a messy job of it, too, by the way.

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So she lived there just before you did?

[00:25:01.33]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. So she and I have lived here.

[00:25:03.25]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Really?

[00:25:04.06]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Nobody else. Right. She and I.

[00:25:04.66]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Because it's a nice—

[00:25:08.99]

FAITH RINGGOLD: A nice—

[00:25:09.70]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: —a good apartment.

[00:25:10.36]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah.

[00:25:10.84]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: It is.

[00:25:11.83]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And now it's a co-operative, so—

[00:25:14.11]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

[00:25:15.47]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I'll keep it for a while.

[00:25:17.96]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. So this is—were all the other houses walk-up-type, brownstones or something like that, or have you lived in—

[00:25:27.39]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, yes.

[00:25:27.99]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: —other apartment complexes?

[00:25:28.50]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They were. On Edgecombe Avenue, the houses are five floors, and I lived on the fourth floor. But Edgecombe Avenue was a beautiful, tree-lined street with these huge oak trees on both sides of the street. It's a beautiful avenue, all the way up to—it goes from 155th to 145th, with only one break at 150. You know that area?

[00:26:03.42]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Not really, no.

[00:26:04.22]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It's beautiful. Overlooking the park. And you can see all the way downtown.

[00:26:08.05]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, huh. That's great.

[00:26:10.69]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It's this way.

[00:26:11.89]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. But Edgecombe is a pretty short road.

[00:26:15.73]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, it's a short street.

[00:26:17.02]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, yeah.

[00:26:17.41]

FAITH RINGGOLD: A short street. But it goes—no, wait a minute. After 155th Street, it goes on up to 180-something, 180th—yeah. All the way up. It's suffered some deterioration, but it's a potentially beautiful avenue. And it's all residential. No stores. When I was a kid, it was just—I remember when we came up there to look at the apartment—because in those days, you could just go from apartment to apartment, looking at apartments. I mean, there were so many apartments. I mean, they would, like, move you. They would move you—

[00:27:03.77]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: How do you mean?

[00:27:04.56]

FAITH RINGGOLD: If you—the landlord would offer you a month's rent and move you.

[00:27:12.20]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh. They wanted tenants.

[00:27:12.54]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yeah. Because there were so many vacancies, you know? So we looked at a lot of places.

[00:27:22.82]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So when you—about how old were you when you made the move to Edgecombe?

[00:27:28.09]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Eleven.

[00:27:30.93]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay. And before that, you lived down in 146th?

[00:27:33.18]

FAITH RINGGOLD: —46.

[00:27:34.02]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Which isn't down. It's only down from 150th.

[00:27:36.53]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, when I say down, I mean down the hill.

[00:27:38.26]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, okay.

[00:27:39.22]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It's down the hill. See, this was called Sugar Hill, because it's up the hill. And down there, it's actually called Valley, because it's below. It's going down. You know, you climb several hills together from Eighth to Bradhurst, and Bradhurst to Edgecombe.

[00:28:00.50]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I see.

[00:28:01.05]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You're going constantly up.

[00:28:02.49]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh. Yeah, right. I had never noticed that.

[00:28:06.34]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. We always called it the hill. And then in the '20s, they called it Sugar Hill because all the rich Black people lived there.

[00:28:16.01]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, okay, I see. I guess when you're saying down—up and down, I'm thinking up and down—

[00:28:20.34]

FAITH RINGGOLD: —town.

[00:28:20.64]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: —street-wise, right.

[00:28:21.21]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah.

[00:28:21.53]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Up the hill. Okay. And, well, to get back to a little chronology of your life—Oh, I have a school. Did you pretty much stay in the same school?

[00:28:39.49]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, my mother—even when we were living in Central Harlem, we went to school on the hill. We went to P.S. 186 on 145th and Broadway. Oh, it's a dilapidated, broken-down building now, but it was big in those days. And we used a friend's address because you had to live in the district. So my mother used this person's address, which made it a little traumatic to me in a way, because whenever I got asked my address, I had to lie, you know? But my mother was determined that we should go to the best possible school. And the school that was in our district was not as good as she wanted it to be. So we were all going to school up here.

[00:29:33.31]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: This would be elementary?

[00:29:34.51]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, elementary. And then after I graduated from elementary school, we moved up here. So then I went to junior high school up here.

[00:29:45.08]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And you could use your own address.

[00:29:46.18]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. And I went to high school up here. Went to George Washington High School.

[00:29:53.87]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And in high school, does the same thing kind of apply? You said you weren't really too attached—you were kind of detached from schoolmates and school, or were you going to school more often?

[00:30:04.58]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, I was absent, like, straight through.

[00:30:07.44]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:30:07.82]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I was absent a lot in junior high and high school, staying out sick with asthma. I did not stop—now, when I got to college, I still had asthma, but I wasn't absent. [Laughs.] Because you couldn't be, okay? It's not about bringing a note, you know what I mean? You weren't there, you weren't there. That's it. And you couldn't—I didn't have that kind of setup. My mother didn't go to school.

[00:30:45.81]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, right.

[00:30:46.77]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You know? So I had to be there. I had to be there.

[00:30:51.82]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And that was City College, right?

[00:30:53.17]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That was City College, right. So actually, I've gone to school in this area all my life. Right here. I have gone to school. Not attached, no. I never was—no, I didn't like those people at City College, either. They weren't good. They taught me. They taught me. I got a good education. But there was not very many of them that I'd want to go back and see, except Professor Heard. I think she was good—she was good for me. And Robert Gwathmey was one of my teachers.

[00:31:30.04]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. I was going to ask you about your teachers.

[00:31:32.35]

FAITH RINGGOLD: He was fun. He was wonderful.

[00:31:33.92]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah? I would think so.

FAITH RINGGOLD: But school wasn't—school was someplace I went to learn. It was business. You know?

[00:31:46.42]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: What—you studied—

[00:31:48.73]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Art.

[00:31:49.15]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You did study art?

[00:31:49.72]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And—

[00:31:52.63]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: As an undergraduate, like as—was that going to be a major or something like that, or [inaudible]—

[00:31:57.49]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, you know, when you graduated from high school, you had to decide what you wanted to do in order to make application to a college. You had to—

[00:32:04.09]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You already—

[00:32:04.84]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You commit yourself. So I had never thought about being an artist. I just didn't. I was always the class artist.

[00:32:15.52]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Back in high school, even?

[00:32:17.23]

FAITH RINGGOLD: All through, elementary right straight through. I was the one who did the Santa Claus, or Easter time, I did the bunny, or whatever. And so—but I never thought about being an artist. And even through high school, somebody asked me how come I never went to music and art. I didn't know anything about music and art. They never told us.

[00:32:39.40]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:32:40.03]

FAITH RINGGOLD: See, a lot of this information was not given to Black kids, that there were special schools like Bronx Science and stuff like that. So we couldn't take the test. It wasn't whether we could pass it or not. We couldn't take it.

[00:32:51.94]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Didn't know about it.

[00:32:52.27]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Because we didn't know anything about it. Now, for school—music and art, there's two times a year that you can take the test. And I didn't know about either time, so I never took it. And there were also special art classes at the high school, which I also never took. I mostly took the academic courses—which, of course, I could have majored in art and still had my academic courses, but I was a fairly good student, so—could have been a better student, but in high school, I kind of, like, wasn't trying as hard as I needed to. And I was trying to socialize, and stuff like that. So my grades didn't do all that well. I didn't—I knew I was going to college. It was going to be no problem there. But I wasn't plugging like I should have been plugging. But still, I was a good student. But anyway, I—you know what? I've lost my train of thought.

[00:34:18.40]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: We were talking about what—whether you specialized—that you had to declare something that you were interested in majoring or—

[00:34:23.73]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, so when I graduated from high school—oh, actually, yeah, to get back to not being such a great student, I had cut some classes, and was in—was probably not going to be able to graduate because I had failed a couple classes. Was going to be able to graduate in summer school, and needed to take an extra course. And they had said no in George Washington, "No, because your average had not been high enough." You had to have a certain average in order to take this extra course, which I had—obviously, must have failed, or something.

[00:35:13.09]

So my mother—oh, oh! She would have thought, "Oh my god, my daughter; what's going on?" So I must have had to tell her, though, because I had to get transferred to another school so that I could graduate in June. And the idea was to graduate in June. Didn't make any difference what school, because I wasn't any more attached to George Washington anyway. So actually, I graduated from Morris High School because they would let me take the extra major.

[00:35:47.64]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So you can still graduate by June, even?

[00:35:50.10]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. So I graduated in June. I was supposed to graduate in June 1948,



and I did. Other than that, I would have graduated in the summertime, and I didn't want to do that. So I transferred the term before, which was a great feat.

[00:36:05.76]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So in other words, with only one semester left, or one term?

[00:36:08.39]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, one semester at Morris.

[00:36:10.31]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Wow.

[00:36:11.27]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That's weird, isn't it? That's a very strange thing.

[00:36:14.42]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Interesting.

[00:36:14.81]

FAITH RINGGOLD: But I mean, I had that determination—and I didn't, because my mother was totally—

[00:36:20.27]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: She didn't probably want to know about—

[00:36:22.18]

FAITH RINGGOLD: She want to know too much about it.

[00:36:23.74]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:36:24.16]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And she helped me, though, because we had a friend who lived in the Bronx. And we cooked up a story about something. I don't know. Anyway, I got the transfer, and so I graduated from Morris High School in the Bronx, in June, with my class, but not in that school.

[00:36:46.33]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:36:47.93]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And then—so I went to college, and had to say what I was going to do. But you know, what was interesting was that Morris—they didn't know me then.

[00:36:59.16]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, right.

[00:36:59.70]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You know? So they asked—for the yearbook, they wanted to know what I wanted to do. So I said that I—oh, I forgot what I said. Anyway, the art teacher said, "Bring in some of your work. Oh, you like art? So bring in some of your work." So I had all this work I used to do at home, because I used to take my allowance and buy pastels and paper, and I liked to do portraits. Everybody that came to the house, I'd do a portrait of in pastel.

So I remember bringing in my work to show her. And she said, "Oh, this is nice." She said,

"But now, from now on, she said, I think it's better for you to do original work." I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "You know, as opposed to copying. You should do original work." Yeah. And I didn't say anything, but it was all original work, you know? I couldn't figure out why—why did she think I had copied this? And who did I copy it from?

[00:38:12.58]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:38:13.48]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I didn't know whether that was some kind of a compliment, or put-down, or how I should take that. But anyway, I didn't say anything to her, because I figured, well, this lady—it's not going to make any difference if I say anything or not say anything. So I didn't say anything. I mean, she can't—you know, I can do anything I want. I don't have to—I don't need her authorization. She just wanted to see my work. So that was the only comment I got from her.

[00:38:40.64]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's great. So for the yearbook, did they—they wanted to find out what your interest was?

[00:38:45.50]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. I don't remember what I said exactly, but they never got to know me, because I was only there for six months. Nobody could figure out where I came from or —

[00:38:55.40]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, what you were doing there. [Laughs.]

[00:38:56.78]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, what I was doing there or why. But you know, one of the reasons why I went there, too, is my sister went to that school. My sister went there all the time.

[00:39:03.81]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, really?

[00:39:04.34]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, she graduated from there and went there. And she loved it. She was very popular there and—

[00:39:13.82]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Huh.

[00:39:14.43]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. She had a great experience. But anyhow, maybe I was just following her. I don't know.

[00:39:20.15]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You had to take a subway to get to it?

[00:39:23.92]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, a bus.

[00:39:24.52]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: A bus?

[00:39:25.03]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It's just right over the bridge. Yeah.

[00:39:27.16]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: But did you—the other schools you've been to—were they walk—within walking distance, or—

[00:39:32.44]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, we used to walk.

[00:39:33.88]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:39:34.39]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Because we used to spend our pocket on candy. And so we would walk. Now, George Washington was all the way up 200-and-something street.

[00:39:45.52]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's a good, long walk.

[00:39:46.06]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So that was a hell of a walk. And my high school—my junior high school was 168th Street and Edgecombe Avenue. So that was a good little walk, too. We always walked back. So I got plenty of opportunities to walk as a kid. And then when I went to City College, I always walked, backwards and forwards. I had morning classes. I'd run back home —

[00:40:10.26]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Really? You'd go back—

[00:40:10.80]

FAITH RINGGOLD: —afternoon class; sometimes I had to go back at night and have some more activities or whatever. So I was constantly walking. So then after college, there it is. No more walking. So I gained weight. Yeah.

[00:40:30.26]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Well, walking on a regular basis like that is probably good.

[00:40:32.85]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah.

[00:40:33.00]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: It's good.

[00:40:33.44]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That's great. That's great.

[00:40:34.95]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Did you—the Gwathmey courses are the ones that you remember as far as art goes, the best—

[00:40:46.04]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, Gwathmey was—it was Gwathmey and another teacher named Boberg. I lost track of him, but he was a sweetheart, too. These—and Helen Heard. Those

were the people who encouraged me in college. The rest of the people—I mean, I was told all kinds of stuff. Like, "You can't draw." "You'll never be an artist." "You're too busy." "You're just not going to make it, girl. Forget it."

[00:41:26.67]

So, I mean, I—I never decide these things for students. One young man just called me a couple of days ago. He sent me his slides. He's actually at another school in California. And he wanted to know—he said one of his professors told him—he's getting ready to get his bachelor's degree. He's going on for his master's. And he's not sure of what to major in. And he said, "What do you think I should do?" He sent me his work.

[00:42:01.90]

And I said, "You know, it wouldn't make any difference whether I thought the work was strong, or whether I thought it was weak, or whether I thought it was good, or whether I thought it was bad. I can't tell you whether or not you can be an artist. That's your decision. It's up to you. It's totally up to you. It's how much you want it. It has nothing to do with talent. It has something to do with how much you are prepared to pay to be an artist."

[00:42:43.00]

When I was in college—I mean, I did terrible work. I know that. I mean, I know it was awful work. And I know that when these people said to me, "Well, you know, so-so, type—always got A's." "I always got my A's because I worked very hard," you know? But what they were saying is, "Okay, you're doing good work—" but to be an artist in those days, before the gallery systems, before all of this, and then also being Black, and a woman and being—because I got married and had my kids before I graduated from college, you know? I mean, with all of that, too, I mean— "Who the hell do you think you are?"

[00:43:34.24]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, right.

[00:43:34.63]

FAITH RINGGOLD: "You're not going to be any artist. I mean, you're okay, but no. You know what it takes?" You know? And I guess a lot of them said, "You know, look at me. I'm not famous. I'm not—I didn't make it, you know? And I'm a white man. Who the hell do you think you are," you know? And so—I mean, they didn't encourage me. They didn't encourage me. I was not the chosen one at City College to be successful. You know, I was taken for granted. I was like, eh. You know, I got my A's because I worked really hard. And I was determined to get them. You had to get them, or they'd throw you out, you know? But they did not think I would do anything at all.

[00:44:29.06]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: No.

[00:44:29.79]

FAITH RINGGOLD: But I did. I did, because students were not pressured to be original and great artists when they were in school when I came along, thank God.

[00:44:48.53]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:44:48.93]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You know?

[00:44:49.32]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Also, there were probably conflicting kinds of art you should be doing, and if you weren't looking like—doing—drawing classical nudes or something, then—

[00:44:57.56]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And that's the way we were trained, too, by the way.

[00:44:59.47]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You were doing—yeah?

[00:45:00.11]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yeah, we had Greek busts that we would copy. I mean, a whole string of them were up on these shelves in the drawing room.

[00:45:10.63]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So that's one of the things you did in drawing classes.

[00:45:12.97]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. And then in painting, we copied. We copied everything.

[00:45:18.38]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:45:18.73]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And I was a good copier. You know? And so when I graduated, it took a long time for me to get to me. Because I had copied Degas, copied Rembrandt and copied all these people. You see? So now, where's mine? And so I guess that's what they meant, too, you know? Eh.

[00:45:38.83]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:45:39.34]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You know?

[00:45:40.12]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: What was somebody like Gwathmey teaching? I mean, did you—

[00:45:42.94]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Now, Gwathmey was my painting teacher.

[00:45:44.83]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Painting.

[00:45:45.64]

FAITH RINGGOLD: He—I remember I was a freshman. We're talking 1948. And I come into the classroom. And all these kids were there, and I'm threatened anyway because most of them are coming from Music and Art. And they already know everything about all these art supplies and stuff. I don't know nothing. And Gwathmey comes on with his drawl. You know, he has this thick, Southern drawl.

[00:46:20.97]

And it's 1948. And I am not going to stand there with that man with that drawl. No way. This is City College, and nobody's going to let me slide. Nobody. And I am the only Black person in that class, and the only Black woman in the department. Just me and Al Hollingsworth. That's it. And I'm not—and you know, I cannot afford any failings. That is out of the question.

[00:46:59.20]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. You and who?

[00:47:00.43]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Al Hollingsworth, an artist, who's—you know, became quite well-known today. And so I heard that, and I said, "I'm getting out of here," you know? So I move toward the door. And he came over, and he stopped talking to the class. And he said, wait, "Just wait a minute," in his drawl. He said, "I know what you're thinking." He said, "But just give me a chance."

[00:47:29.38]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that's interesting.

[00:47:30.98]

FAITH RINGGOLD: "Just give me a chance. I know what you're thinking, but if you just give me a—"

[END OF TRACK AAA\_ringgo89\_6380\_m]

[00:00:04.06]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: —on September 13 at her apartment.

[00:00:10.50]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Think I should put that in?

[00:00:13.83]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Well, let's see.

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:00:22.33]

Okay. Last time we finished off where you were talking about your classes at City College. And you were talking about Gwathmey. Some of that got cut off, actually. So maybe we could just—he was saying—he asked you to give him a chance to teach. [Laughs.] And I think he was saying something about coming after class too, and that was lost.

[00:00:47.77]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Doing what?

[00:00:48.46]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Did you come to see him after class, or something like that?

[00:00:50.65]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, no. He just told me to wait. Yeah, sort of—stay there.

[00:00:55.18]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: By yourself, maybe.

[00:00:55.86]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, stay there. Stay to the class and after class. Because he wanted to have a chance to talk to me about who he was, and to prove to me that he wasn't one of those.

[00:01:10.65]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:01:11.73]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You know. And so I did. And as it turned out, he was very encouraging of my work, and he mentioned that—I'll never forget one time there were these guys that were fellows there, and they were graduate students. And we looked up to them, at least we wanted to. In those days, we really—people wanted to have someone to look up to, everybody to look up to. We didn't call it mentors, or heroes, or role models. But people were constantly trying to look up.

[00:01:53.95]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Be respectful and all that.

[00:01:56.09]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That's right.

[00:01:56.54]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Have respect.

[00:01:56.99]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And it was then I was beginning to realize that there wasn't a whole lot to look up to. A lot of the people that you were looking up to, you ended up looking down on, unfortunately. And so these guys were our predecessors. They had gone through the undergraduate school, and they were now in graduate school. Because people didn't move around a lot. If you went to graduate school, you went—you went to undergraduate school somewhere, you went on to graduate school in the same place. That was okay.

[00:02:32.93]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And then you'd teach there too, right?

[00:02:34.19]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. And then you went on and taught there, if you could. Of course, that wasn't going to be true to me. And it wasn't true for a lot of them either, because City College was very archaic in the way they hired people. I never could understand how they did that. But anyway, so these guys were standing around one day. And I had painted this picture, a kind of moody looking picture. And I used to try to keep my tones, values rather close to not depend on lights and darks, but depend on intensities of colors, and warms, and cools, and hots, and like that, and not light and dark. And so he said they were looking and deciding that I was like, no good, okay?

[00:03:31.58]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: The assistants were?

[00:03:32.39]

FAITH RINGGOLD: The assistants. You know, they were kind of snickering, like "What's this?" You know? And so he said, "No." He said, "That's very interesting." He said, "I've always been trying to get my work to be as contrasty as possible. I always worked for the greatest contrast." And he said, "This is interesting. You're not doing that at all. You're just trying to not even think about that."

[00:04:03.96]

And he said, "I think it's wonderful. Just keep right on." And not only did that encourage me, it showed me something about teaching that I try to incorporate as a teacher myself, with my students. Sometimes I look at things they're doing and I say to myself, "Oh, my God, what is this?" But I control myself. I don't share that with them, because that's ignorance. See? That's a display of my ignorance. I'm looking at something I don't understand. And so I'm pooh-poohing it because I don't understand it. This kid might be right.

[00:04:47.39]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that's a very enlightened way—

[00:04:49.76]

FAITH RINGGOLD: The kid could be right. So what do I say instead? I think about Gwathmey, and he taught me that. If nothing else, he taught me that. I say, "You know, that's interesting. Let me see more of that. Try to develop that. Could you explain something about what it is you're doing here? And let's see you go further with it." You know? And I let them, because I understand, as he understood, that if I believed in it that's all it's necessary. It's neither right nor wrong. There's no such thing as right and wrong in art. I mean, who's got the right answer? Nobody.

[00:05:29.13]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:05:29.72]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Go ahead. That's your thing. Do it. You know? And so he gave me that, and I never let it go. I never let it go. Of course, I think that's been my way all along. But at the same time, it's wonderful to have people endorse you. And he endorsed me. Now, he didn't do for me what he went ahead and did for Al Hollingsworth, whom I was discussing him with recently, who was a man.

[00:06:05.76]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:06:06.69]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, they went out and got drunk together, and they went to bars. And, you know, they palled around.

[00:06:13.80]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Yeah.

[00:06:14.76]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So Al has a whole other story to tell on him. And they had a ball together. He's heard him say some things that he didn't approve of, and some other things. And they went into the back-slapping and the whole thing. So he gave me a whole lot of anecdotes on Gwathmey, which I don't have because I'm a woman, and I wasn't there when they were doing all that horsing around. So I don't get to see him in that light.

[00:06:45.87]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Just to focus on the painting itself for a while, I guess you feel that at that point it wasn't—you hadn't, as a painter—and you're not doing that so much anymore. Well, you are, but—

[00:06:57.69]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Sure, absolutely.

[00:06:58.74]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, you are. The work would develop after college, I assume.

[00:07:07.02]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yeah.

[00:07:07.14]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I think of at least the first things that are on canvas as being kind of very contrasty, very clear cut and sort of—

[00:07:14.97]



FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. Maybe that is true. Yeah, right.

[00:07:18.00]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Was it more kind of Impressionist at that point? Were you more—what kind of painting was it?

[00:07:21.00]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yeah. I was an Impressionist all the way. I was an Impressionist. Oh, sure. Oh, absolutely. Yes. You hit the nail right on the head. But I find that, as I've circled around with my painting, I think I'm still right there trying to do that, just what I was trying to do before. Of course, I can do it a lot better, but I'm still trying not to concentrate on black and white, lights and darks, but to have intensities—differences in intensities not in lightness and darkness. So I'm still doing that—

[00:08:06.18]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. That's true. That's interesting.

[00:08:08.47]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And trying to get it right. So that's all we ever do, is we just keep on trying to get right. And I just use my subjects, and so on, to give me inspiration because that's what I like to paint about.

[00:08:21.37]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Right. And it's also not just [inaudible] formal. It's always involved with a story or an [inaudible].

[00:08:30.67]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yeah. And then it's with my fabrics. which also I select in that same way for that same thing, for their color relationships. So, sure, it's all put there together. It's all very mixed media. But it is still a painting. The painting is still there. But the painting is—a lot of people don't realize that it's painting. They think it's something else, which I don't know—I can't figure that out. Is that good or bad? [Laughs.] I don't know.

[00:09:11.17]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: It's a good thing—even if you can ask that question, it's probably good. Because then maybe you'll get rid of the hierarchy.

[00:09:16.06]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Maybe they're just looking at it as art, you know?

[00:09:17.74]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. It doesn't matter whether it's—what they think.

[00:09:19.81]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It's not this, it's not that. It's just—well, I mean, some people look at it and say, 'What is it?' [Laughs.]

[00:09:25.95]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: They don't realize actually that there is paint?

[00:09:27.86]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, they don't. No, they don't.

[00:09:29.27]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Well, I think mixing the media like that, maybe people don't.

[00:09:31.52]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. It's like I did this quilt for the High Museum. It's one of the most popular ones that I've done. And they made it into a poster.

[00:09:47.77]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: It's in the permanent collection down there?

[00:09:49.63]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. It's in the permanent collection at The High. And it's called "Church Picnic Story Quilt." And it's a picture of all these people sitting on the grass. It takes place in 1909. And there's a story that goes with it and everything. And so it was on exhibit at The High, and they had this poster of it. So it's quite well-known. So this person told me they were there and there were a lot of people lined up around, it reading the story. And this one woman said, "Hmm. Boy, how did she do that? She really can stitch."

[00:10:41.38]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Wow. "She even makes it look like brush strokes". Right?

[00:10:44.20]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, right. "I mean, she's good. She's really good."

[00:10:51.31]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's interesting.

[00:10:52.03]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. And so my friend looked to say, "Wow, they really don't know this is painting?" I mean, come on. You're looking at it. You know? That's true. A lot of people think it's weaving. They think it's applique. They think it's—they think it's a lot of things. They don't think it's painting.

[00:11:18.75]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. But people often don't know. It's interesting because there's a lot more appreciation than knowledge, I think, out in the world.

[00:11:26.07]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, but that's kind of nice too.

[00:11:27.69]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, I think that's all right.

[00:11:28.62]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, that's all right, as long as they're looking, I think. I do think that people really enjoy sculpture a lot more than they do painting.

[00:11:40.03]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's interesting.

[00:11:41.32]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, I think so.

[00:11:43.12]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I think you may be right. They enjoy it. Regular people do.

[00:11:47.41]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, regular people.

[00:11:48.22]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I've found that people in the art—a lot of students who studied in the '60s or '70s didn't really—don't know—I've had people say, "I don't know how to look at sculpture. I don't know—what do you do with it?"

[00:12:00.13]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. Yeah. Well, they want to look at it. You see, I think just normal everyday people, they don't think about it.

[00:12:09.71]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Exactly.

[00:12:09.79]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They just accept it. It's a thing in space, and it's nice, and they like it, and they accept it. And they don't try to intellectualize on it or make it be a problem to them. But when they see a two-dimensional thing, they think they're supposed to understand everything about it. And it makes them scared. Because they say, "Oh, my God. What that that? That's supposed to be this, this, and that?"

[00:12:33.28]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:12:33.61]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You know?

[00:12:34.15]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: It's much more art than what's called art.

[00:12:35.86]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, much more art. Right. Yeah. Maybe that's because we're three-dimensional. We're a thing.

[00:12:41.56]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, I think that's—right.

[00:12:41.86]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So you just accept it, and it's fine.

[00:12:44.71]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And you find that with your work?

[00:12:46.48]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yeah. Except that quilts are sculptural.

[00:12:54.54]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. That's true.

[00:12:56.32]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They have a kind of body. So they can accept them for their bodies, for their thingness in space, and for what they represent. They represent something that they already know about—a quilt. Somebody's mother, somebody's grandmother made one. Everybody has slept under one at some time or other in their lives. So they feel comfortable.

It's warm. You can feel the hand. You know something about the way it was done, whereas a painting, stretched canvas—[gasps] It scares the hell out of them. They don't know what to do with that. And that's why they probably decide that my work is not painting. Because they don't feel that fear.

[00:13:49.18]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: It's not the way they've seen painting before.

[00:13:50.70]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That's it. Right. Right. So it's okay. I would say that they are—my quilts are accepted as well as my sculptures ever were. Yes—more so, because people buy them.

[00:14:05.78]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: As much as your sculptures—

[00:14:07.64]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Ever were.

[00:14:08.69]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, ever were. Yeah.

[00:14:09.50]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Ever were. People buy the quilts for much higher prices than they ever bought the sculptures. I don't think sculptures sell as well. I don't think they sell—I don't think they sell as well as paintings. But I think they're certainly appreciated more—

[00:14:27.18]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. That's interesting.

[00:14:29.00]

FAITH RINGGOLD: —by people generally.

[00:14:30.41]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Well, I think it is the materials of painting, I mean, the canvas and paint and all, that if it doesn't enter your life—

[00:14:37.09]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, it's just magic too, that you can just take this liquid stuff, and just do something like that, and it comes to be something. That's scary.

[00:14:45.23]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:14:47.87]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You know? So it's a different and interesting kind of thing too. But I find that just painting and having the painting just be a painting is not interesting to me anymore.

[00:15:11.01]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:15:11.39]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I don't want to do that.

[00:15:13.67]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Did it stop being interesting pretty much when you made the transition from painting to, I guess, the first things you did—

[00:15:22.37]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. Yes, you're right.

[00:15:25.19]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: What were they? Going from painting, what substance were you first using?

[00:15:27.74]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I remember in 1967 I did my "American People." I finished that. And then, in '69, I had a show coming up. And see, those shows are deadly to artists. You have to have them. It's very important to have them, but they're deadly. Because they force you to create a body of work about something, and sometimes it's a mistake. It's all just a big mistake.

[00:15:54.81]

I was ready then to create a new medium, to do it in a new way. I wanted to, but I didn't know what to do. I had no idea which way to go. I knew that I was bored with painting stretched paintings on canvases. I knew they were too heavy. They required crates. I was working too big to get into my elevator to get it downstairs. We had to walk them downstairs. I had to depend very heavily on the men in my life to get them downstairs. I had to cajole my daughters, beg them, plead with them, try to pay them. Please, walk these pictures downstairs. And we live on the 14th floor.

[00:16:41.88]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:16:42.54]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So I said, "I don't want my life to be like this. I don't want to have my career dependent on other people." Because you can't even pay people to walk them down 14 flights and then walk it back up again. There's no way I can take them down by myself. And the elevator, damn it, is too small. So I said, you got to change. You're not going to let this whip you. You are going to change. And you will do something where you can work large because I love to work large. I can't work little I want to have a big space.

[00:17:19.43]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:17:20.31]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So you will have to work so that you can work. And so I thought of creating paintings that were soft, that could be rolled, and also making the sculptures that could be rolled, and whatever, put in trunks, and so I could travel with them. It just solved all my problems—the problem that I had of not being able to get my work out, because I couldn't find any gallery or any place in New York that would show my work that was here.

[00:17:59.06]

And so therefore I had to reach beyond New York and go out there. And so I started traveling. I found a—I didn't find. I was recommended to an agent by Florynce Kennedy, the famous activist lawyer. And they suggested to me that I might do lectures at colleges and universities, and that I might have shows to go with the lectures. And I have suggested this to many artists, that they do package shows. And I don't know whether university museums are as interested as they used to be, because I think now everything is just packaged and it's much more professionally done.

[00:18:48.73]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: It seems—yeah.

[00:18:49.75]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I think it made the opportunity for an individual artist to get their work that kind of exposure may now be gone. I'm not sure. But I know that at the time that I was doing it, it was fabulous.

[00:19:03.49]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: They were open to the artist presenting the work the way they wanted.

[00:19:06.10]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, they were very open to it. And then I could do—I was able to quit the Board of Education, which is where I taught for 18 and a half years. From 1955 to 1973, I taught in the public schools in New York.

[00:19:26.16]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, which I'd like to get back to it in a minute.

[00:19:27.87]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, so I was able to quit that job. And my kids were now going to college and had decided they did not want to go to Harvard, Yale, Princeton, wherever. The schools that wanted them, they did not want.

[00:19:44.79]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Hmm. Good for them.

[00:19:46.35]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Good for them?

[00:19:47.16]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:19:47.70]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Okay. All right. Well, all right. All right. Well, of course, they're sorry they made that decision today.

[00:19:53.87]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: They're sorry?

[00:19:54.21]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yes, yes, yes. Yes, they're very sorry. And my mouth was hanging open and I couldn't believe it.

[00:20:00.75]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, I bet.

[00:20:01.65]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I was like, "What?" I mean, I've done all this. This is what I was doing all my life, sending you to this great private school where you could learn this, and that, and the other, and in small classrooms where you could have individual instruction. And my youngest daughter takes four languages, and before you graduate from high school you're proficient and fluent. Now you tell me you don't want to go to an Ivy League school?

[00:20:30.64]

And the kids have been out there picketing, and taking over buildings, and opening things

up so that Black kids can go to colleges all over the country. And you're saying no? Are you out of your mind? Are you crazy? So they said, "No, we don't want to go. We want to go to a school with the brothers and the sisters." I said, "Where do you think the brothers and the sisters are going to school now, nuts!"

[00:21:00.42]

So I said, "Okay, you're going to be sorry. I went to City College. It was a great school. I'm not saying it's not a great school now, but you're not prepared. You've never been to a school that big. You've always been to a little tiny school. You know, you're going to miss all the cultural experiences that you're used to. You're just going to be sorry. I'm warning you." "Oh, what do you know," they said, blah, blah, blah.

[00:21:24.82]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And they were the same age, pretty close.

[00:21:26.74]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They were like twins.

[00:21:27.42]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And they agreed with each other?

[00:21:29.25]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, they agreed. So I said, look, Faith, you're through. They're not listening to you. So what you do is you use this—[Telephone ringing.]

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:21:51.04]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So I think you said to me like, so what happened—and I have dot, dot, dot.

[00:21:55.17]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So what happened, what?

[00:21:56.16]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I don't know. We were talking about your daughters' choice—the college.

[00:22:01.52]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yeah. So they were able to—so they went on to City College and the other one went to Lehman, and I was able to quit my job.

[00:22:14.94]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, right.

[00:22:16.05]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Okay, I don't have to teach anymore. And so I started doing this lecturing and exhibiting around the country. And it really helped me with my career, because I was able to pursue it. And also, because they were now growing up, and getting out of the house, and going on and doing their thing, I now could do my thing. You know? So that was a thing that I thought—initially, I thought it was a bad thing, but it turned out to be a good thing for me.

[00:22:54.27]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, right.

[00:22:55.06]

FAITH RINGGOLD: As far as they're concerned right now, I think they regret not having gone to an Ivy League school.

[00:23:03.10]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Well, you get contacts, and things like that.

[00:23:07.21]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. See, that's what it was. But what it did do for them is it made them seek out, in the places where they were, the stimulation that they needed. And the little one, the one that was just on the phone there, she ended up going to London, to the University of London for her senior year, and stayed on there and began her doctorate at the university before coming here to go to CUNY to get her doctorate there.

[00:23:44.79]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Right.

[00:23:45.16]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So they just had to be—they just had to get the best out of where they were. Because they were no longer in the kind of place where there were only a few people, and where they could be—where their whole experience would be tailor-made.

[00:24:09.01]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, sort of special for them.

[00:24:10.84]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Special for them. Right.

[00:24:13.53]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Huh. Had they gone to high school in New York?

[00:24:16.86]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. They went to New Lincoln all the way. Before that, when they were very young, they went to a little private Lutheran school. It was also very, very lovely for little children. But as they got a little older, I felt they were becoming too indoctrinated into the religion type of thing. So I took them out of that and put them in New Lincoln. And they stayed there until they graduated from high school, and received a very, very good education there, basic education. They received very good education at City College, also, very good there, but just different.

[00:24:57.43]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, right. So now, you had actually shown at a gallery before you—

[00:25:05.70]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Before Bernice, you mean?

[00:25:08.05]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Hadn't you? No, I mean before going off to the universities, it was the Spectrum—

[00:25:12.70]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, right. That was the Spectrum Gallery in 19—

[00:25:15.57]



CYNTHIA NADELMAN: But those were regular paintings, I guess. Right?

[00:25:17.44]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. That was my "American People" series that I showed in '67 and '69 at the Spectrum Gallery, which was a co-op, but a very different kind of co-op. We had a director, and it was like a co-op in the old tradition. It's very well run and very well thought of. We got reviewed. The reviewers reviewed us constantly. [Buzzer sounds.] It was just an excellent place to get a show.

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:25:57.10]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay. Well, I guess we can go back to the—I want to get back to the whole process of getting into the gallery and everything. But the actual thing—the reason you were talking about the universities was when you—because that's when you decided to start doing softer things, I think, that could go up and down the stairs.

[00:26:12.46]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. Right. Yeah. I felt that the art had to be reflective of my life and me. And it had to make sense with who I was. It just had to embrace every aspect of my being in order for me to be able to do it. You know? And I didn't want to—I'd seen a lot of people who thought of themselves as oil painters. And they wouldn't dare be caught doing anything else.

[00:26:52.83]

Well, I thought of myself as an artist. I make art in whatever way. And I wanted to try many mediums, as much as possible. And so I just wanted to be open to new things. What I wanted to do was to be able to communicate through art. And I would just do it in the best way that I could do it. And I thought that working soft, creating sculptural forms that were soft was my way, not realizing that eventually I would use these forms to create performances. That came later. Because I also was trying to attract an audience to my work so that I could get some feedback, so they could see what it was I was doing, how people were receiving it.

[00:27:57.44]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, this new thing.

[00:27:58.94]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. And so I traveled all over the country with these exhibitions, which were very well received. I got a lot of people interested. And in every town that I went to, I would get writings, people who would write about me.

[00:28:22.61]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:28:24.68]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Anyway, yeah, so I needed to feel that I was not the solitary artist working alone, struggling against the world. I needed to—And, I mean, I didn't have to have New York. I didn't feel like, well, if I can't show in New York, I'll just drop dead. No. I felt that wherever, it wouldn't matter as long as it was people. And as long as they were ready to receive what I was doing, they could inspire me. And I was looking for inspiration. And I've always felt that people are inspiring to me. Sometimes when I feel uninspired I just go take a walk. And I'm going to see something that's going to lift me up, even in this neighborhood. [Laughs.] You know, people trying—somebody's trying to do something is inspiring to me.

[00:29:28.21]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:29:31.12]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So I received that kind of inspiration all over the country, and have tried to give it back as much as possible.

[00:29:39.44]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Do you remember the first—did you try to—you were talking about an exhibition being something that made you have to think about what to do next.

[00:29:52.78]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:29:53.05]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: The first non-painting thing that you did, how did that come about?

[00:29:59.31]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I was having a ten-year retrospective at Rutgers. They wanted to show all the work that I had done for the past ten years. It was going to be in 1973. So they wanted to show the work from '63 to '73. So I felt—I said, "Uh-oh, you're having a ten-year retrospective." This is my first really big show. And I said, "So what you need to do is you need to show where you're going. You can afford to do something very brave and different. Because it'll just be a few different things and you'll get an idea of what people think about it."

[00:30:45.93]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:30:47.03]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So in this show were all of these paintings painted traditionally—oil paintings on stretched canvas, watercolors, and stuff like that. And so I said, "Now, what are you going to put in there too are going to be some masks." Because I had been teaching African arts to students at Bank Street College. While I was teaching in the public schools, I was also teaching in college as an adjunct, okay? And I had learned all this African beading and all these African art techniques, which I was fascinated with, but hadn't been using them in my art.

[00:31:31.41]

Because I was an "artiste" in the true tradition of fine art, until one of my students went and saw one of my shows and wrote me this long letter during the summer, saying to me that she was disappointed because she had gone to see my show, and though it was interesting, she said, it was disappointing to her because I had used none of the wonderful African art techniques that I had taught them.

[00:32:09.49]

Well, what was I doing, she said. I mean, she expected to see all this wonderful work, and she went there and she saw these watercolor paintings under glass. She said, "Now, you wrote stories on each one and that's nice." Because I was writing on my work at that time most days. She said, "But it just didn't do anything for me. And I do think that you should be using some of the things that you're teaching us."

[00:32:40.25]

And I said, "Well, this kid's got her nerve. How dare her tell me what to do?" I mean, I'm not prepared to be told that I'm making crafts. Okay? We don't have enough problems? I mean, do I need that too? I'm not completely crazy. So, I mean, I'm ostracized and alienated in New York as it is. I mean, if I do that I'm really going to be in trouble. And then I thought about it.

[00:33:12.56]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: It kind of sat there.

[00:33:13.64]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It sat there. And I said, you know, she's got a point. I mean, after all, these people aren't paying any attention to me anyway. Why am I doing something—Why am I keeping my keeping myself in a box?

[00:33:31.07]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, doing this for them.

[00:33:32.78]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. Don't put your own self in a box. Let somebody else do that. Don't you do it to yourself. They're not paying me any attention. Nobody's saying to me, "Look, if you do it this way, we'll do that for you." Nobody's even paying any attention at all. Go ahead and do what you want to do." So that was at the same time that I was getting the offer to travel around the country.

It was at the same time that the student was making this point to me, that the women's movement was saying, "What is women's art? Is there a women's culture?" At the same time that I was defining myself as a Black woman, all this was happening together. I said, Faith, this is your great opportunity. Go for it. Go for it. Do it. It's not such a big thing, because you're already doing it with your students. You're just not saying it's your art. Make it your art. Let it be your art. It is your art."

[00:34:45.43]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Were you teaching them to do this as art students, kind of thing, or—

[00:34:51.16]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They were teachers.

[00:34:51.80]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: They were teachers?

[00:34:52.93]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. And I was teaching them to go back to their students with it, and to teach their students how to create all these things. And see, I had been doing it even before that, in the '60s. I had been doing it with my students at Brandeis High School. I had taught them how to do needlepoint.

[00:35:16.57]

Those tough boys who later went out and graffitied up the subways were sitting there in my classrooms doing needlepoint, sitting on top of the desk with their hats on, because they love to have their hats on in class. I never knew what that was about, but they loved that hat on in the class. And they liked to sit on top of the desk, not in the desk. It made them feel more—something.

[00:35:41.84]

Now, with me they could sit on top of the desk, and they could even have their hat on. But they had to be working. Because if they weren't working, they couldn't do anything. I'd just get on their case so hard that it would be terrible. As long as they were producing wonderful work, they could sit on the desk and pretend they were in the street or whatever they want to do, whatever their fantasy was, you know.

[00:36:03.17]

But they did wonderful work. They would make these patches and they would put them on their jackets. And then I taught them beadwork. And I discovered that they loved to create

beading. I taught them all different kinds of bead weaving. And they loved to work with little tiny beads. The smaller the beads the better.

[00:36:25.61]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Wow.

[00:36:27.11]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Isn't that interesting?

[00:36:28.12]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:36:28.48]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, they loved it.

[00:36:29.71]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Very detailed.

[00:36:30.22]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Very detailed. Ooh, and they had—oh, boy, they'd look for just the right bead. "Oh, wait a minute. Now I got to get this one and that one." Oh, they were fascinated. And then they would take their beadwork and they'd go and sell it. And so they were—I mean, I really loved—and what made me start doing that with them, was that I had no supplies.

[00:36:55.76]

I couldn't get the paint. And this one particular year, the art supervisor said to me, "Oh, you won't have any problems with—there are some colors we don't have," she said, "but you won't have any problems because you're so smart." This was being sarcastic, by the way. I said, "Well, what is the color that you don't have?" She said, "We don't have any blue." I said, "Well," I said, "if I can make blue—if I could make blue I don't think I'd be sitting here talking to you right now." But what I did was we kind of mixed green and purple and got something real ugly. But anyway, we never did have blue that year. And so I said, "This is just demoralizing."

[00:37:49.36]

Then I couldn't get any paper. You know, I just wasn't getting any cooperation from anybody. And these were high school students. I mean, they were better than that. I thought kids—yeah, I think they were wonderful then. My students were just such a—they were uplifting. It was a wonderful time for kids, somehow or another. They weren't like they are now. They hadn't been deluged with all this negative stuff. And they were hopeful. They were just more hopeful. I just loved that.

[00:38:27.57]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I think art had a different place in people's lives then at that time too.

[00:38:30.62]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, it did.

[00:38:31.25]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Part of that hope, in a way.

[00:38:32.78]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So I was teaching at Brandeis High School, which was right across the street from Woolworth's, down on 66th Street. I was at the Annex. So one noontime I decided that I would bring to them what I had been teaching in my college classes, and I

would just start teaching them some of those crafts and see how that worked out. I started with the beading, and I would teach some needlepoint and stuff like that. And so I went over to the Five-and-Ten and I started buying yarn. And I just bought it out of my own money.

[00:39:10.88]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Really? Yeah.

[00:39:11.75]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, a lot of teachers did that.

[00:39:13.07]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I think so. Yeah.

[00:39:13.85]

FAITH RINGGOLD: A lot of teachers just went ahead and spent their money so that they could teach their classes, because they just couldn't get supplies. And so I started doing that, and it just worked. It worked, and so I continued. I taught them how to make masks. And I just taught them everything I knew about how to manipulate materials and how to make—and then I brought the slides and the film strips from my college classes, and I showed them different kinds of art from Pop, to the Mexican muralists, to Black artists, to the Impressionists. I just showed them everybody.

[00:39:59.30]

And then I'd give them a slide test, and they did well, just to see if they understood what was going on. And I also had a kind of project with the Museum of Modern Art, the education department there. They used to send me slides over, and then they would send somebody over to pick them up and take them back. So I had a constant flow of good materials to show them, which made all the difference in the world.

[00:40:28.71]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:40:29.18]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Now, sometimes I used to have to battle to get the slide projectors, and they weren't all that cooperative at the school with my program. Because somehow or another there is that feeling that, "Oh, why are you doing all this for these kids?" You know? But they were wonderful. And I just fought to do it for as long as I was there. For as long as I taught, for the whole 18 and a half years, I struggled against the system to teach. I struggled to teach, just to get the right to teach the kids.

[00:41:05.66]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I know. I have friends now who are having the same problems.

[00:41:08.39]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, my goodness, I know they are. Oh, now it must be awful. Because when I left in 1973, that was probably the end for teaching art in the public schools.

[00:41:22.55]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:41:23.67]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I understand the very next year they got rid of all the art teachers in the Annex. And they moved the art program to the main building. And then they continued to get rid of them, and now they're out. They're out of the system altogether, I understand.

[00:41:38.23]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:41:38.96]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, they have something else going. I don't know what.

[00:41:42.35]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Was the main building right next door?

[00:41:44.36]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No. The main building was on 84th, and the Annex was on 66th. But actually, so all of this business of working with crafts started in my teaching in public school because I didn't have any materials, and because I also wanted to make the children aware of African roots, of African Art. And most of my students were Black kids, were kids from African roots of one kind or another. And so then I had to begin to realize that these art forms were real, and that I could use them for myself, and that I should use them for myself, and do it. And I did it, you see, with the help of all these different stimuli that we just mentioned.

[00:42:46.78]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Another situation where you sort of picked up from the students.

[00:42:50.56]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That's right. I learned a lot from them. That's the value of teaching, really, is that it just keeps you out there being exposed to the new, fresh ideas that are coming. And it also helps to redefine you so that you don't keep being so sure of who you are. You know what I mean? Because they're looking at you in a whole other way. And it's kind of nice to know what that other way is.

[00:43:29.77]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Were you at that—just to digress for a second—were you at that school most of the time, most of your teaching?

[00:43:35.20]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, no. Oh, no. I taught—I must have taught in six different schools over those 18 and a half—well, five, at least five. I would stay—you see, I never went there to stay. I really never went there to stay. After the first six months I figured it out—this is not the right place for me. I'm not going to be able to advance. They are not looking for this as a career. This is not a career. They don't think of it as a career. The only career here is being a principal. I don't want to be a principal. See, I want to teach kids. So that is not any kind of serious profession, the way they see it.

[00:44:29.26]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, there's nowhere to go.

[00:44:30.34]

FAITH RINGGOLD: There's no way to go. It's a nowhere—it's a dead-end job. You know? But what you can do to make it exciting—because, see, I knew that if I was in a dead-end job, I was going to be uninspired. And I know I have to have some inspiration from somewhere. So the only thing that I'm going to be able to do with this job is get to teach in all the different kinds of experiences and places that I think are exciting. So that's what I did.

[00:45:05.31]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. [Telephone ringing.]

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:45:08.54]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So I figured that the best thing to do would be not to shackle myself in one school. Because I figured the system does not respect teachers; more so, they don't respect students. They don't respect children. Children are not able to have any kind of self-determination in terms of the kind of education they get. Parents are not there, don't know, don't understand. So it's a hopeless kind of situation. Teachers don't really have that much power to do anything. So what you need to do is find a way to make it the best kind of experience that you can. And the way I thought to do that was to go to different schools, have different kinds of experiences teaching different kinds of students.

[00:46:08.67]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:46:08.92]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So I went and I taught at a high school, because I had a high school license. And in those days, it was very hard to teach in a high school being a Black person. I mean, I ran into a lot of trouble trying to get a job teaching in a high school around 1950 —'55, I taught for one year at a junior high school, which I decided was not my cup of tea. It was just unreal. So I left there and I said, "I have a high school license. I intend to teach in high school." And I was told, "Well, Blacks—there are no teachers teaching in high school," in 1956. So I said, "Well, I don't know anything about that. I know I have a high school license."

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[00:00:06.80]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay.

[00:00:08.21]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And you know, I was told, "Don't even bother to try, because you're not going to get a job teaching in a high school. You may have a high school license, but you're going to have to teach in junior high school." So I said, "Well, I don't know about that. I think I am going to find a job."

[00:00:27.93]

And I remember going out to—I went out to Bensonhurst. Would you believe that? In 1956, which was when I was looking for this job. No, it was still '55, I guess, because I had to look before the term came up. I was still at the junior high school. And I remember I went to New Utrecht, and I went to that other school in Bensonhurst. I can't think of the name of it. Taft, was it? And I mean, those people—I mean, they were fine on the phone. And when I got there, I mean, you would have thought the boogeyman had walked in. [Laughs.] Oh, my god.

[00:01:11.58]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So they would have had you teaching elementary school, or junior high school, or something like that, you're saying.

[00:01:17.28]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. See, I could have gotten a job. Well, I couldn't get a job in elementary school, because I have a high school license.

[00:01:22.71]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:01:23.14]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And I had not been trained in common branches, so I could not teach in elementary school at all. But where I could teach was in junior high school—and of course, only in certain areas, by the way. There's a lot of racism, a lot of racism. Anyway, I finally went to a school called John Jay High School. I mean, I complained to the Art Department

that I could not get a job, X, Y, Z.

[00:01:52.65]

So they sent me to the school. It was called Manual Training. It wasn't a vocational school, but it had that name. It's now called John Jay High School. And it's in an area in Brooklyn called—oh, I forgot the name of the area. But before, it was a first-generation Italian-Greek area when I was there. And now it's kind of poshy. It's called—

[00:02:28.65]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Not in Queens?

[00:02:29.67]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, it's in Brooklyn. It's called—oh, I forgot the name of it. But I know a lot of people live in that area now, so it's kind of an arty kind of area. But anyway. I went to this school. And when I walked in, the chairman of the department had already been told this woman is coming up there. She's been to New Utrecht. She's been to Taft. She's been all these different schools, and she's getting the run around. Now, if you got a job, you better let her know, because she's mad, okay?

[00:03:08.71]

So I went out there, and Max Greenberg was my chairman's name. And I said, "Look, I don't need to go through this interview, because I've been asked questions like, what did I have for breakfast? People stalling because they're so shocked to find out that they're looking at a Black woman. So I mean to say, do you or don't you have an opening? Because I don't need the interview, okay?"

[00:03:44.23]

So he said, "Look, you got the job, okay? You got the job. All right? Now let's talk." He said, "You went to City College, right?" And I said yes. He said, "I went to City College. Now, we got something to talk about now?" So we sat out there, and we talked. He turned out to be wonderful. He was really a very nice—I never really trusted him, because I just had such a hard time with everything that was going on at that time. It was a bad time. It was a good time and a bad time. It was just—I don't know. It's just, life was not all that great in the '50s.

[00:04:28.34]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. And you were just a few years out of college.

[00:04:31.49]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, right. So I wasn't out of college. Was I? No. '59, I got my master's. Yeah, I didn't get my master's 'til '59. I finished with my masters. Well, I was out of college—

[00:04:43.25]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Undergrad.

[00:04:43.43]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, but I—wait a minute. Yeah. 'Cause I was still getting my master's degree because I had two kids. So I just kept going. So I was still going to get the master's. Anyway. He was very nice, very nice guy. He helped me a lot. He taught me a lot. I had wonderful—you know what I did have—I never liked my teachers. I told you that before. I never liked any of them. I thought they were awful. They taught me. They taught me. But they did nothing for my soul and spirit. They weren't warm, and they weren't giving.

[00:05:26.63]

And they taught me in this way: "You better learn because you've got an obstacle. See, you're Black, and you've got an obstacle. And I don't want to hear from you later that you never had a chance. So you better learn. You better—you didn't bring your homework? You, of all people, are not prepared? And then later on, you'll say you never had a chance." You



see, that was what they used to say to us then. "And you'll say you never had a chance."

[00:05:58.77]

So I had to learn in that atmosphere. That was the atmosphere that I had to learn in, because I knew I wasn't going to get any kind of break. I wasn't going to get any kind of break. So therefore, I never liked those people. And that continued through college, by the way. But who I did admire and who I thought was great—and I don't know what this means, but these were the people who helped me, were the people later on that I taught with, the principals and the chairmen that I had.

[00:06:46.40]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Chairmen of departments?

[00:06:47.64]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Departments, yeah, my department chairs—with the exception of Brandeis High School. By the time I got to Brandeis High School, things were changing. It was just getting bad everywhere. And I was just so experienced, I guess I didn't need all that help. You get me? So I didn't like that principal. He was—that wasn't any good.

[00:07:13.25]

But up until then, I had had wonderful supervisors who had taken me by the hand and had really shown me the way. And the teachers that I worked with—people were very, very eager to help you. That was my experience. And I had wonderful, wonderful teaching supervisors who would come by and not just complain about what you were doing, but take over your class, and show you some masterful teaching. Okay? And that's great.

[00:07:58.95]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And were they generally artists, also?

[00:08:01.62]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, yes, they were artists, too. And they respected me as an artist. And they also respected that I had a different way of going about things. Like Max used to say, "Now, see, you wouldn't teach the lesson this way because you were younger, and you got a whole other way of going about things." He said, "But I'm going to show you my way, and then you translate it into what you would do." And he was masterful.

[00:08:37.92]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Do you remember the name of that school?

[00:08:40.68]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, that was John Jay.

[00:08:41.94]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, that's the John Jay one.

[00:08:43.05]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, that was John Jay. And then from John Jay High School, I went to Junior High School 113. I went back to the junior high schools because I was coming back to New York because of my kid. I had to follow my kids. So when I was teaching at John Jay, they were very little, so you know. Then, they started at school, and they went to that Lutheran school in the Bronx. So I left Brooklyn and came to the Bronx, and taught at this wonderful junior high school—Junior High School 113 in the Bronx. And Liebson was the principal there. He was wonderful.

[00:09:26.25]

In fact, I just met somebody recently who taught at that school. She came up to me, and she

said, "We taught together in Liebson's school." And I said, "Really? Wasn't that a great school?" And she said, "Wasn't it?" You know, people were looking—what are they talking about? Yeah, he was a great principal, and it was a great school, and he taught me a lot. That was Liebson and the 113. And then from 113, I went and I taught at Wagner High School. Now, Wagner High School in the Bronx, too, was supposed to be this great school. It was all girls. And the principal had been the principal there for a thousand years and everything. And so I taught there one year. She was very oppressive, extremely racist, horrible woman.

[00:10:15.94]

And in that year, that was 1963 or 1964, or something. And they thought up this new program called MES, "mess," More Effective Schools. And they gave me an offer, if I wanted to join one of these More Effective Schools, I could teach an elementary school, which I wanted to do that because I heard that little kids were great. But how the hell was I going to get to them, because I had high school license. You see what I mean?

[00:11:01.72]

So I said, "I'll take it." So they said, "Now, wait a minute. You'll be an art specialist, and you'll get all this extra money to have to do clay and ceramics, and you have assistants in the morning and the afternoon. We'll connect it with the colleges, and they'll send their kids over to assist you. Plus, the teachers will bring their classes to you. You'll have this big studio, and there'll be all these people in there working with you and the kids, and you can do all these special programs. Plus, after school, you'll get the top kids of the area in a special after-school program to teach specially gifted kids."

[00:11:45.34]

Oh, it was wonderful. It was wonderful. I did that for four years. And that was my opportunity to teach little kids. And I would steal into the pre-kindergarten rooms and teach the pre-K—because they didn't want me with the pre-kindergarten, because they thought that it would be too stimulating for the little ones, because they were already getting music, and they were getting science. And they felt there were too many strangers coming in. [Telephone rings.]

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:12:20.93]

I really wanted to teach those little ones. And so what we would do is, I would go into the room, and the teacher would stand at the door to watch to see if the principal was coming down the hall. [Laughs.] And I would be in there, teaching these kids, the little ones. Oh, they were—[Laughs.] And I would watch when they would start with the scribbles. And then I would watch when the schematic would come in, and then they would start the storytelling in their work. And then it would become people, and they would start taking form. Oh, that was wonderful.

[00:13:05.53]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Now, that's interesting. You knew you wanted to work with them because you thought they would be stimulating, or because you like little kids, or what?

[00:13:11.50]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, because I had learned about them anyway when I was teaching. I mean, when I was going to school, I had learned about experiments that had been done with kids and how naturally creative they were, and the ways in which their creative expressions and drawings developed as they got older. And I wanted to see that happen, you know?

[00:13:37.74]

Plus, recognizing being a painter myself, the value of this kind of loose way of creating, and the magic they have with paint, I wanted to be there with that. And I got a chance to have that experience because I was right there in the elementary school. And I saw that they have that until about the second and the third grade, and then it begins they start questioning

themselves and start tightening up, and then it kind of goes. Yeah, it goes away a little by little.

[00:14:10.59]

And then sometimes it comes back again in junior high school. And it wanes backwards and forwards—except for the specially gifted. They kind of keep it throughout. But the little ones are just—they're magic. Now I'm watching my grandchildren do that same thing. They do. So then I was there for four years. And with the Board of Education, if something works, then they take it away from you and see how you can do without it. Well, of course, when they took away my program, I had to leave, because I was only there on a waiver anyway because I did not have an elementary school license.

[00:14:49.09]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. What the program meant was that you were sent to an already existing school under the special program, right?

[00:14:54.98]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. Yeah. It was an already existing—now, I had been told by my principal at the high school that I had left—the Wagner—she said to me, "How dare you leave to go to teach in Harlem? Are you out of your mind? Do you know that this is the best school in the Bronx and probably one of the best schools in the city? And you're leaving here to go teach in an elementary school in Harlem?"

[00:15:26.11]

She said, "You gotta be kidding." She says, "Well, I was going to give you an oil painting program next year. I was going to do this and that." Well, I mean, sure, I had been wonderful for her. I mean, I was helping her get her art students into this college, and that college, and the other college because I had been teaching them oil painting, and she was going to give me a special oil painting class, with a special studio, and a special this, special that. I never found that—that wasn't my challenge.

[00:15:53.83]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, right.

[00:15:54.04]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I always wanted to teach in Harlem. I just couldn't teach here because the schools here were just not going to let me teach. And I didn't want to fight kids. I wanted to teach. So if they would give me a school where I could teach, that's where I wanted to teach. And they gave me a beautiful situation. So why wouldn't I take it? So I took it. Anyway. It phased out. In four years, I'd left.

[00:16:17.44]

So then I had to get out and I had to go back to high school. I tried to get into Music and Art. Well, I tried to get into Music and Art right through. I couldn't get in because they weren't hiring Black people. Now I think it's changed. They have them in there now. But in those days, no. So I could not get into Music and Art to teach there.

[00:16:41.86]

So I went to Brandeis. I said, well, since I can't get into Music and Art, I just better take the school closest to my house. There weren't any high schools in Harlem at that time, so I went and I taught at Brandeis. And then in 1973, I left. So I just got a chance to teach—so I think that's five schools.

[00:17:06.91]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. And different age groups, also.

[00:17:08.68]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And different age groups, yeah.

[00:17:11.27]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Huh. And then at one point toward the end, you were also teaching the Bank Street College?

[00:17:16.91]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. Yeah. I was teaching at Bank, and teaching at Wagner College. I used to go all the way to Staten Island one night a week and teach at Wagner College. Well, I figured, eventually, I'm going to teach in a college. I better get some experience. So I'm glad I did.

[00:17:39.33]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. And then, aside from that, then there was a period of not teaching at all.

[00:17:45.24]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. There was a period of no teaching at all, except that I've always done my workshops and lectures. And they've always been in colleges.

[00:17:54.91]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So they took that—

[00:17:55.95]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. So they took the place of all that missing stuff. So yeah, so in one form or another, I've been teaching now for the past 34 years—since 1955. And now I'm teaching again steadily at UCSD, University of California San Diego.

[00:18:28.07]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. I'm not sure whether to go backwards or forwards. [Laughs.] Is that a very different kind of teaching experience? I mean, it must be.

[00:18:37.51]

FAITH RINGGOLD: AT UCSD?

[00:18:38.26]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, instead of going to that—

[00:18:40.00]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, is it very different kind of teaching experience? Um, no. Hmm. It's teaching college students. It's kind of easy, you know.

[00:18:52.40]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Are these Fine Arts majors, or something?

[00:18:55.82]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, they are. They're Fine Arts majors. But also, I teach a lot of—the school is mostly a science school—pre-med students, and stuff like that. And there's a lot of those students who take art classes. They take classes in the Art Department. So I get a chance to teach students who are both Fine Arts majors and non-Fine Arts majors. And they're rather creative. They're kind of wonderful. They're loose. California, you know. They're open to whatever. And it's fun teaching them.

[00:19:42.38]

I have one course that I do out there, which I introduced, which is Fabric and Sewn Art. And

it's the kind of course that graduates and undergraduate students enjoy. I have students who keep taking it over, and over, and over again. I think they're limiting them to three times. They had to force them to say no more. I have young men as well as young women in the class. Some even staff members want to take it, because it's a collaboration type of course. They get a chance to not work in isolation. They can collaborate with each other. Plus, they also get to do their own individual thing.

[00:20:36.63]

I also teach painting. And I teach a course—it's called Tableau, but I use it as a kind of performance course in which they do costumes and masks, and they and they create this kind of tableau performance piece. I teach drawing. I really enjoy teaching drawing, also. I do something in my drawing classes, which I think the students enjoy. Some classes enjoy it more than others. I tell them stories, and they create drawings out of the story—I mean, just a wild, crazy story that has a lot of visual imagery in it. And then they make drawings that go with the story.

[00:21:27.00]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You'll make one up?

[00:21:28.11]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, I make it up on the spot. Yeah.

[00:21:32.14]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So they do this kind of spontaneously?

[00:21:33.79]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It has to be very spontaneous, right. So I try to get them real loose and get them to be in touch with their innermost feelings and just do it. Do it. Don't think about it a whole lot.

[00:21:49.09]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Get in touch with the expression, what it seems to me.

[00:21:52.57]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And the way I also teach a lot, because, see, at UCSD, we don't have facilities for teaching a lot of technique. Plus, it's just not the philosophy of teaching there. It's a rather conceptual performance-oriented type of program, which is nice. I go with it. I think if they want to learn all that technical approach to art, they can do that somewhere else. Plus, I recommend texts to them that will help them to understand the media and so on.

[00:22:33.20]

But what I do for them is we do a lot of critiques, and I encourage them. And there's nowhere for them to work on campus. The studio space is extremely limited. And the studios that we teach in are just absolutely unreal in terms of space. Oh, yeah, it's just bad. So they have to work outside and bring their work in. And also, I think a serious limitation is being so far away from the center of art, so that there's not an awful lot for them to see. It's not like New York, which has got everything.

[00:23:20.78]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: In L.A., it's just it's not—

[00:23:22.97]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. And L.A. is—no, it's two hours away. So what I do with them is we do a lot of critiquing of their work. I show them slides. We go to see shows as much as possible. The La Jolla Museum is there, and there are shows there—and rather good shows too, by the way. And I have videotapes I show them. So I try to bring in as much—and I tape

everything on television on my VCR, that I can get to bring to them. And I have a rather large collection of tapes to show them of artists working because they're really hungry for that.

[00:24:16.82]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Actually, rather than slides, you'd rather show them the art, or—

[00:24:19.76]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I think the tapes are better than the slides in a lot of ways. The slides can be used to introduce the artists. And then the tapes are just fabulous because it really gives them a chance to see interviews and really get a feel of everything that's going on because they're really isolated from—

[00:24:41.21]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: These are tapes of contemporary artists working?

[00:24:43.15]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah.

[00:24:44.06]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Do you make them?

[00:24:45.26]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Some, I buy. Last year, I spent \$500 on tapes.

[00:24:50.15]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Really?

[00:24:50.81]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, I got \$300 of it back. And then I do some taping, whatever I see on television. Now, I bought one of Andy Warhol, whom I think is just fabulously interesting for students and for me, too—for everybody. He's an interesting artist. So I bought one of his tapes. And I think I just taped him on *We Got to Have Art*. And I think that is not the same tape that I bought, but I'll see when I get out to California, because I left my tapes out there. So now I may have two tapes on Andy Warhol, which is wonderful because I have a choice I can show.

[00:25:36.16]

Yeah. So this year, when I get out there this winter, I will be teaching my performance course. I will be teaching my Fabric and Sewn Art course. And I will be teaching a graduate course on painting and mixed media, and I'm calling it "Ten Men, Ten Women," and I'm going to introduce them to ten men and ten women artists whom they don't know anything about.

[00:26:13.54]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's interesting. And how do you teach performance? I mean, I'm sure—

[00:26:16.57]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, the performances are—one of the most exciting courses that I teach there is this course in which I teach them how to make masks. And we get a theme. It sometimes starts off rather slow because there has to be a theme. Everybody has to agree. And then we have to work it into a performance in which everybody participates. The masks are being made all the time as they are projecting the ways in which they are going to participate in this performance. And the mask becomes the persona of who they are in this performance. And then the costume comes, and then here comes the music. And then here

comes the script.

[00:27:26.00]

And the script is a process that I put together in which they begin—they have to select who they are. The last one that we did had to do with the environment. I can't remember it very clearly. We also do videotapes of the performance. They had to select aspects of the world that needed to be changed in the year 2000, or crucial issues for the year 2000. So each one selected who they were going to represent or what they were going to represent. And in that way, they were able to create their mask, and their costume, and all.

[00:28:31.82]

And so they have all this time while they're creating the mask to be thinking about the ways in which they're going to approach being this thing. Then, each one does a monologue, which is due at a certain time. And the monologue can state either positively or negatively who they are. Now, as each person recites their monologue, that's taped. And the others are listening. So each person does their monologue. That's their presentation.

[00:29:16.54]

At the performance, they will do that to camera. They will come out, and they will do their movements, and they will display. They will have their music. They will have their whole thing done in that—I don't know—three-minute monologue, whatever. Then, after that is done, each person knows, or begins to know how they are going to relate to what has been said by other people. And that is the meat of the performance.

[00:29:52.85]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Is their interaction with each other.

[00:29:54.17]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Interaction, right. So now what we do next is with the tape on, we just encourage them to start to react to each other. This one young man was a consumer addict, which is to buy everything. If there was a problem, he says, "I'll just buy it, whatever it is." And another woman was going to be fire. And another woman was acid rain, and so she was very evil and very negative. Fire was very powerful, but very calm. She knew she had this power, but she didn't want to use it against anyone.

[00:30:55.93]

Another one was this—he produces all kinds of very negative toxins in the air. I forgot what he called himself. But he and the consumer guy were very close. [Laughs.] They made a nice—and the acid rain people—those three were the negative three people. And then there was the rivers and the oceans, who were very pitiful because they're being polluted and destroyed. And then there was the air. It was poisonous, and so on.

[00:31:41.18]

And the acid rain was saying, "Well, I don't care anything about you because you're going to die anyway, because I'm going to rain on you and destroy you. I'm destroying everything about you." [Laughs.] And it's very negative. So in the end, so then they battled with each other. And I get them to constantly do that. It's like a whole encounter session. And some of them have trouble getting in there. I said, "Well, you got to do it. You got to find a way to express what it is that you are. If you believe in who you are—" see, that's why it's important for them to truly believe in the person they become—

[00:32:24.77]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Step into their character.

[00:32:25.67]

FAITH RINGGOLD: —or be a true advocate for whatever it is that they are suggesting is their persona. Anyway. It's terribly interesting. And the video that comes out of it is, too. So what happened in the end—the fascinating part for me is I watch the shifts in leadership. I watch

what's going to happen because there's no—sometimes they want me to decide who is going to run things, who is the good people. I said, "No, no, no, I don't have—look, I don't know. You decide. You're the ones who decide."

[00:33:11.83]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:33:14.17]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So in the end, in this particular performance, they decided that—oh, the birds. Oh, there was one young woman. She was the birds. And oh, she was just so lovely. And she says, "Oh, you are destroying my life. And we are flying." And she has this wonderful way of—she was a med student, by the way. She really enjoyed this course because she said, "Well, these are a bunch of cuckoos, you know?" [Laughs.] And she was just flying around, and all. And acid rain and all, they were all laughing at her, and making a mockery of her.

[00:33:54.77]

But anyhow, they decided that they would put her in a cage—the bad people would cage her. So the consumer guy, who was all dressed with dollar bills hanging all off him—oh, he was wonderful. He had a camera hanging around his back and another one hanging this way and another one hanging down his back. And he had a hat with bills hanging all over it. He was just constantly counting his money and trying to buy something.

[00:34:24.50]

And so him and the one who—the corporate toxin guy and acid rain locked her in a cage. He made this beautiful cage and locked her in. And then what happened is that the others banded together and destroyed acid rain and those other two guys. I think they destroyed them. I can't figure out exactly how they destroyed them, but they destroyed them. And they just laid down, and they just died. And then they went and opened the door and let the bird out. And they all did this wonderful dance together. It's the kind of thing I think that may not be able to happen here. [They laugh.] It could only happen in California. And we do all this outdoors on the campus.

[00:35:23.71]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You get audiences?

[00:35:25.21]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, we have audiences, and we're taping it at the same time. And it's just wonderful. And they think that—of course, I have to supply some leadership because I don't want sometimes for some people to feel suppressed as if they are in a rut or anything. And so I may suggest to them, "Well, now, don't you think this may be getting too one-sided? And maybe is there a way that we can—I mean, how do you feel about the outcome of this performance? Do you feel as though it—does it make you feel good? Does everyone feel good about the way things are happening here?" And if they say, "Well, it does seem like X, Y, or Z." I say, "Well, let's see what we can do about that."

[00:36:18.32]

But the performance is totally there. It's a total collaboration. And it requires that we do a lot together. So all of my classes are very much like that. Students really get to know each other. They get to call each other after class. They get to see each other on the weekends. And they just get a chance to work a lot together.

[00:36:46.01]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And working like they might work on parts of the project—

[00:36:49.28]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They have to.



[00:36:49.79]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: —outside of class together.

[00:36:50.63]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They absolutely have to. They cannot do it all in class. So I mean, that's the kind of thing that I do at UCSD. Now, in the painting, the painting class is much more individual. That's each kid working individually on their own work. And what we do is we review together. We all sit around and talk about the work, which I don't know how much they realize the value of because that, you don't get after college.

[00:37:24.76]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You only get after college?

[00:37:25.74]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You don't. You don't.

[00:37:27.06]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Critiquing, you mean.

[00:37:27.33]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, who's going to sit around and look at their work, and spend all that time talking about it?

[00:37:33.48]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Well, that's true.

[00:37:35.14]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Plus, you can't talk about something if it's not there. So they have to work. You got to do a lot of work. I really like that way of teaching. I think it's extremely beneficial. I like to see the growth, and there's a lot of growth, because they know that work is going to be looked at. They know it's going to be critiqued. They know it's going to be taken apart. So they got to have it there. And if you work, you're definitely going to improve.

[00:38:03.93]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Sure, yeah. So one of the important things is make sure that new things keep getting produced.

[00:38:08.32]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That's right. You've got to work. You've got to work. So I really enjoy teaching at UCSD. It's a great deal of fun. It's just great. I like it. I love the kids. I like it a lot.

[00:38:28.90]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: When you're out there, do you live near the university?

[00:38:31.27]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. I live near the campus. I live right on the water, right on the beach. I wake up in the morning, and I say, "Hi, beach." [Laughs.]

[00:38:42.85]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: As opposed to the tar beach.

[00:38:44.62]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, right! Out on the real beach. As a matter of fact, in the morning, I go

have my breakfast on the beach with my phone, and call my friends. And I say, "Hi," and they say, "What? I can hardly hear you." I say, "Yeah, I know. It's the ocean. But I'll talk a little louder, and you'll be fine." And they say, "Get out of here [laughs], get out of here." Oh, yeah, I'm on the beach. I love the water. That is my best place is near the water.

[00:39:18.71]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You go in it, too? I mean you like being—

[00:39:20.09]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So, in California, I never put my foot in that water.

[00:39:23.87]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You don't?

[00:39:24.29]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It's threatening.

[00:39:25.07]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, yeah? The waves are—

[00:39:25.79]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, I don't do that. I go to the pool, because there's also a pool. In this particular house that I live in now, there is no pool, but there usually is a pool as well as the beach. But I guess I'm right in the water. So I mean, I have to go to the pool. I can go to the pool on campus. I mean, I can go to the pool other places. I'm on the beach every day.

[00:39:56.12]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. And it's probably not even that crowded.

[00:39:58.48]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, no, because it's all—it's a private beach, but other people can come on it. But each house has the beach, right? So no, no crowds. There is no crowd anywhere in San Diego—I mean, that I know anything about. I've never seen a crowd. Even at a sale, there's no crowd. [Laughs.]

[00:40:18.14]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Really?

[00:40:19.55]

FAITH RINGGOLD: There's no such thing as a crowd. Where's the crowd? I haven't seen a crowd.

[00:40:24.89]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Because everyone's so spread out.

[00:40:26.69]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, there's no crowd. Uh-uh [negative].

[00:40:31.16]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: It's like going to the movies there. I'm sure nobody—

[00:40:33.61]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, sometimes I see a line.

[00:40:35.69]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, really?

[00:40:36.74]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, an actual line. But I think they're just lined up because the movie's not open yet. I don't think it's a real line like here. I think it's just that the movie isn't open, and so those are the people that are going to go in. It's amazing. No, there's no crowd. I don't see crowds.

[00:41:00.00]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And how long have you been out there teaching?

[00:41:02.31]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Since '84. Since '84.

[00:41:05.40]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So you know people, and all? Is there a community out there?

[00:41:08.76]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, well, no, I wouldn't say that. I wouldn't say that there is a community. But then, I'm going to not blame it on them because I think that maybe I'm just not very friendly. But I don't know, really. I mean, I have assistants out there, and I have friends in L.A.

[00:41:28.49]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Friends you had anyway.

[00:41:30.74]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, people I've met other places, and then people I've met in L.A. But I don't really know anybody in San Diego. I mean, I have made no friends there. The people in the department are not—everybody's trying to do their work, and everybody's just real busy. So I mean, it's not a very socially open type of place, San Diego. It's not for that. You go there to enjoy the beach and to enjoy a completely unpressured, unstimulating existence. You take your stimulation with you because it is not there. It is not there. It is a getaway place. It's a resort.

[00:42:30.35]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, I guess that's true.

[00:42:31.40]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It's a resort. And so I wake up in the morning, the first thing I see in the morning is the blue sky. And the first thing I hear is the waves, and that's it. And when I go outside, the sun is coming down. It's a wonderful day, and everything's wonderful, and there are no crowds. And I walk along the beach about three or four blocks. I go up the hill—a very steep hill—over two blocks, and I get the bus, and I go to school. And that's it. And that goes on every day. And it's like this and that. And nothing changes. It's just totally unencumbered. It's just not—

[00:43:16.90]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Is that good for your work, do you think?

[00:43:19.75]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I get a lot of work done there. I get work done there. See, when I go out there, I have had such a traumatic experience here, [laughs] and you know what's here, right?

[00:43:35.13]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:43:36.07]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I mean, I have seen so much. I mean, on the subway, you know what's going on in the subways now. And I'm just saying, I got to get out of here. I can't take it anymore. And so by January, I'm ready.

[00:43:51.61]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. So I'm sure, half the time, once you get out there, it's just been [inaudible]—

[00:43:55.63]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It's fine, just trying to get over it. Plus, I'm out of town every weekend.

[00:44:04.13]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Here or there?

[00:44:05.72]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I go here—I mean, there. When I go out there, I'm back here at least twice a month.

[00:44:12.20]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, I see.

[00:44:12.77]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Back here. And somewhere—every weekend, I'm gone. So I don't have a chance to get bored, because I'm not there that much when I am there. I do a lot of traveling. And in 1990, which is the next school year that I'll go out there, my show will be traveling. I mean, I'm already booked up a lot already. So I know that I'm going to be very busy traveling. So it's wonderful. I teach two days a week, and I'm gone three. So I'm fine.

[00:44:53.58]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Your show of quilts will be traveling? Is that what you're showing?

[00:44:56.67]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Mm-hmm, uh-huh. No, it'll be a 25-year retrospective. So it'll be from 1963 to 1988, 25 years.

[00:45:19.69]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, wow.

[00:45:22.69]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So it will be everything.

[00:45:23.89]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Now, is that being organized by the—

[00:45:28.33]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Fine Arts Museum of Long Island. So there'll be a big catalog, and it's going to be a wonderful show. It's going to travel for three, maybe four years.

[00:45:43.53]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Wow.

[00:45:44.16]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And it's going a lot of different places.

[00:45:46.89]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. It's opening at Long Island?

[00:45:49.05]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It's opening at the Fine Arts Museum of Long Island in Hempstead. It's going to go from there to the High Museum in Atlanta. And from there, it's going to the Arizona State University Art Museum in Tempe. And then from there—I can't remember—I think Albright-Knox in Buffalo.

[00:46:11.49]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: It's moving around.

[00:46:13.20]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And it's going to Davenport in Iowa. It's going to Mills College in Oakland. And it's going in Florida—and a whole lot of places.

[00:46:29.87]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: A lot of—yeah. And then part of 1990, you'll be away, too. You're going to be in France.

[00:46:32.93]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And then I will be in France—in the South of France and in Paris, because I can go on weekends to Paris. Because if I recall correctly, it's not far from the South of France to Paris. It's like, four hours or something.

[00:46:57.65]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN Yeah. It's a fast train.

[00:46:57.80]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It's not long. And I love those trains, so I just—

[END OF TRACK AAA\_ringgo89\_6382\_m]

[This is Cynthia Nadelman interviewing Faith Ringgold on September 22, [1989] at her apartment and studio. -Ed.]

[00:00:11.85]

I know one thing I wanted to ask you while I have it in mind. Maybe this will spark up something else. I don't know. I read somewhere that you spent—was it a summer or longer than that— at Provincetown at some point.

[00:00:20.96]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yeah.

[00:00:21.26]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Was that during school, or—

[00:00:23.36]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I started going there in 1957 or '56. I forgot which. And I would go—the kids were very young. And I would take them. Yeah, it was 1956. The kids were very young,

and I'd take them up there. I'd take them to Provincetown and rent a cottage, and I would paint. And we would go to the beach and spend a whole summer there.

[00:01:04.90]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. This wasn't part of the Province—any colony there or something like that. You went on your own.

[00:01:10.15]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, I went on my own. I remember once a friend of mine took me to Hofmann's studio, where he was teaching people there. And I almost joined that group. I almost started going—

[00:01:28.13]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Studying with him?

[00:01:28.95]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, I contemplated it. And then I thought, hmm, maybe I don't want to do this, or maybe I'm not sure about this, whether I want to do this or not, or whether I even want to investigate the possibility of doing this. I don't even have any idea what it cost or how the arrangements were, or what. But I remember being there in this kind of barn-like place. And I don't remember any particular person there. But I always like to look back on that and think about what might have happened if I had studied with Hofmann. [Laughs.]

[00:02:09.47]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And become indoctrinated, right?

[00:02:11.58]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. That might have been interesting. I don't know. Maybe he might not have even accepted me as a student. I don't know.

[00:02:18.24]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:02:20.31]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And then again, he might have. But that would have been interesting if I had gone to school there. I mean, if I had gone to study with him. At that time, I was painting fishing boats, and my work had not evolved. I hadn't gotten my master's yet. I was still groping like mad. So I mean, he could have molded me and made me go off in a totally different direction.

I better close that window. I'll fix that blind. This has been a pain.

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:03:02.09]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Had you already been painting things like—Did you go there for the fishing boats, or is that one of the things you found yourself [inaudible]—

[00:03:08.30]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I went there because it was an artist colony. They said it was—people that I had known had said it was very nice, very nice, beautiful for the kids. People there were great, they were very nice to kids, and there was very little racism there. I wasn't going to have any trouble that way. And the weather was great. It was the beach, and I love the water. And it was just perfect in every detail. I met the nicest people in the world. Every year that I—we went several years. And every year that I went there, I either got a cottage of my own or I stayed in an apartment in somebody else's housing kind of complex thing.

[00:03:48.20]

Later, I met a woman who had a house right on the water, and we stayed with her then every summer after that. And she was just marvelous. She had this wonderful house. And she had some painted furniture in it, but it hadn't been decorated. So she got me to decorate several of the pieces. Whoever has that house now has several pieces of furniture that were decorated by me.

[00:04:20.24]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Painted, you mean?

[00:04:21.17]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Painted with flowers and trees and people and all kinds of stuff, all over this furniture. And then she had a gate that separated my section from her section. And I remember painting that and putting all kinds of things on it. It'd just be fascinating to see it today because I have no idea what it looks like—what it looked like. But it was totally painted by me.

[00:04:49.22]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Well, that's great. That's good. Where about—where was it? Do you remember what [inaudible]—

[00:04:52.85]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It was on Commercial Avenue.

[00:04:55.06]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: The main street, yeah?

[00:04:56.03]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, right on the main street, near Sal's restaurant. You know the Italian restaurant? There used to be an Italian restaurant named Sero's and Sal's.

[00:05:09.12]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yes. Right.

[00:05:09.87]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Okay. I think they broke up at some point and it just became Sal's or Sero's. I can't remember which. But it was a great Italian restaurant. We lived right next door.

[00:05:19.86]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, all right. Well, that's interesting.

[00:05:22.03]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They're still there, I understand.

[00:05:23.38]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, it is still there. You mean the people or the—

[00:05:25.72]

FAITH RINGGOLD: The restaurant is still there.

[00:05:26.74]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. I was there for the first time this summer. I was doing a story, actually, and I did go there. So [inaudible].

[00:05:33.01]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Did you go to that restaurant?

[00:05:34.12]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:05:35.22]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, my God! So you saw that—

[00:05:37.84]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right next door.

[00:05:38.75]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right next door is that house. And in that house is that furniture, unless she moved it out. She sold the house. She's now in Europe now, this woman. And so she may have taken the furniture with her. But those houses in Provincetown are very unique. You notice how they're built? They're just built crazy.

[00:05:59.52]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Oh, yeah.

[00:06:00.15]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They're all on top of each other. And they're just built all funny and everything. But that's the charm of that place. Oh, I just love it.

[00:06:07.41]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. It's helter-skelter in there.

[00:06:08.52]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And that would be nice. I'd like to have a house in Provincetown because you can go there in the winter. I understand it's wonderful there in the wintertime. [Cross talk.] A lot of writers go there in the winter and write. And oh, it's just marvelous. Is it still a lovely town, like it used to be?

[00:06:23.37]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, well, I don't know what it used to be like. Actually, when I was there, it was rainy. And it was kind of wintry, although it was early spring. And yeah, it had a lot of atmosphere. So it was kind of nice, seeing it in that weather, in a way.

[00:06:37.68]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Wonderful food.

[00:06:38.79]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:06:39.45]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, lots of fish.

[00:06:41.01]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Great food. Yeah, lots of sort of—

[00:06:42.09]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, great. Great.

[00:06:42.89]



CYNTHIA NADELMAN: —Portuguese influences [inaudible].

[00:06:43.72]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, great place. Love it. Love it.

[00:06:47.55]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Do you have things left over from that period, or did you just really kind of reject—

[00:06:52.81]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh no, I have work from that period.

[00:06:55.15]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. They were paintings, not just paper?

[00:06:57.30]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, they were oil paintings of fishing boats. And I never show those paintings. [Laughs]. Isn't that something? I never show those paintings. Those paintings are so deep in storage. They are deep in storage. One day, they have to come out. That's another reason why I need a house, because I need to have all my work so I can see it. And that work, I need to have it available to see. And I mean, I could see it, but it wouldn't be all that easy for me to get it. It's packed up underneath, and duh-duh-duh. So yeah, but I still have those works, yes. I didn't sell any of them, that's for sure.

[00:07:44.73]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, well, how about—in those days, were you trying to sell—what kind of avenues did you have for getting—

[00:07:52.74]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Okay, we're talking about the '50s. Um, I had no avenues.

[00:08:00.05]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You had pretty much just come out of college.

[00:08:02.03]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, I wasn't even out of college. I didn't graduate—I didn't get my master's until '59. I was really trying to raise these two babies and trying to get through my master's degree. I was teaching and trying to be an artist, but not knowing how or what, and having no connections.

[00:08:28.51]

I never had a show or been in a show, a serious show. That didn't come until 1960—that didn't come—My first serious show didn't come until '66. 1966. I was in my first showing, serious exhibition with serious artists. And that was in—that show—[Telephone rings]—was at the present location of the Studio Museum.

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:09:18.94]

So noisy. Oof, man. [Telephone rings.] Come on.

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:09:24.44]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay.

[00:09:27.19]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I was talking a little bit about the '50s. I distinctly remember the '50s. The '50s was taking off—I was in my 20s. And the '50s, it was my fun time. I had a lot of fun in the 50s. I had gotten out of the house by getting married, and then I had two kids. Well, I won't get into that. [Laughs.]

[00:09:56.18]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Why not? Come on.

[00:09:57.17]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, it would have been—thinking back, of course, it's wonderful to have kids because you never know what human beings are going to do. And it's nice to know that you're the mother of two kids who could do anything.

[00:10:10.61]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, anything can happen.

[00:10:11.12]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They were both very bright, and I totally adored both of them, and gave them everything I could find to give them. I sent them to the best school I could find, and worked with—that's why I taught, so that I could send them to this special school where they could be one of eight in a class, or maybe one of two in a class. Michele took classes that only she was in. She just thought up stuff, and they would do it.

[00:10:41.01]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Great.

[00:10:41.85]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And so they just had—and even today, they love school. I just spoke to my daughter, the little one, the one who has the grandchildren, and she said she's making tests. Everything has always been fun for her, which is a problem too, because she doesn't attack work. She only has fun, because she's bright and she can do everything. So when the time comes to write her doctoral thesis, she doesn't write it, because that's not all that much fun. You see what I mean? The coursework was fabulous. Straight A's. She passed that. That's gone. But when it comes time to sit down and write the thesis, that she's not doing.

[00:11:24.99]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:11:25.81]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Anyway, she's teaching. I warned her. I said, "you don't want to teach in a public school, I said, because it's going to be horrible for you. Why do you want to do that? You've taught in college. You almost have a doctorate, except for the thesis. What the hell are you doing in a public school?" And she says, "Well, it's not so bad." She said, "I'm doing a very exciting project." She writes tests for the whole district. And she's doing all kinds of exciting things because she's so highly qualified.

[00:12:00.29]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, they probably need [inaudible]—

[00:12:00.72]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They're smart enough to realize that we've got somebody here that we—why the hell did we get her? We got her because she teaches in school right across the street. She's got three little babies. It's convenient for her to be there, and she gets off at three o'clock. She's got her summers and her weekends and her holidays. And so it was the perfect job. And they're raising the pay. And she's making more money than I ever made

when I was teaching. So I said to myself, see, this kid, she manages to get past—everything that I warn about doesn't happen. It just gets past it. So, okay.

[00:12:36.85]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Not a problem.

[00:12:37.42]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, so it's fine. But anyway, in the '50s, I was teaching, and I was trying to find a way out. I thought seriously about going back and getting my Ph.D., because I told you about my uncle telling me, "Okay, you should get your Ph.D." My uncle who kept—

[00:12:59.84]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I don't think you mentioned him.

[00:13:00.59]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, I had this uncle who was the family mentor, and he was the one who—Everybody in my family did it, but he was in charge. My father was not so gung-ho about education. I think my father thought that women should kind of get married and have children. This is my father's idea—although he was not allowed to express it because my mother was into going to school.

[00:13:29.80]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. And your uncle was her brother?

[00:13:33.11]

FAITH RINGGOLD: My uncle was her brother. So he took the role of the person who—the male person who pushed school. And so he was the one who said, when I was in elementary school, "Oh, well, that's good," when I graduated from elementary school. "That's good. But we'll talk about it when you graduate from junior high."

[00:13:54.80]

Then when I graduated from junior high, he said, "No, when you graduate from high school, then you will have done something." When I graduated from high school, he said, "When you graduate from college, get your bachelor's degree, that'll be it." I get my bachelor's degree, "When you get your master's, that's the time when we'll really know you've done something."

[00:14:14.00]

Now mind you, before that, my sister had done all these things. So he had gotten it—my brother rebelled. He would not go through the process. So they would just really—because he was the boy in the family. He was bright and he was handsome and he was everything. And he wouldn't do what they said.

[00:14:36.35]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. We haven't talked about your sister. I forgot about her.

[00:14:38.73]

FAITH RINGGOLD: But my sister had gone before me, and so that kind of nullified me. So then I had to do something she had not done. So I didn't want a Ph.D. I wanted to be an artist. So I went and I had my first one-woman show. I'm getting a little ahead of myself, because I'm still talking about my uncle. I had my first one-woman show in '67. So from '56, when I was going to Provincetown, painting fishing boats, and not knowing anything about anything, I got to 1967. When I finally did get a gallery, it was a co-op gallery called The Spectrum Gallery. It was on 57th Street. And they did give me a one-person show, which turned out to be a wonderful one-person show.

[00:15:25.03]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That was after the thing that you had—You had something in 1966 at the—

[00:15:28.69]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That was my first show. That was being in a first show. That first show, in 1966, was the first Black art exhibit since the '40s, I think, since the '40s in Harlem—in Harlem since the '40s. And it brought out Romie [Romare] Bearden, and Jacob Lawrence, and Charles White, and Hale Woodruff, and Lois Mailou Jones and all the famous Black artists that I had never met. And I was excited.

[00:16:07.11]

Now of course, I had to scramble to get in the show. It was not easy getting in that show. I was a Johnny-come-lately. Nobody knew anything about me. And in those days, nobody wanted to. I was not embraced and welcomed. I was looked upon with suspicion. Who is this upstart? Now I wasn't all that young, but I guess I looked young. And I was young compared to them, I guess. But at the same time, I was not greeted with open arms. I came with a lot of problems. I was extremely outspoken. I was what they call militant.

[00:16:47.68]

We were going through the Civil Rights—Actually, we were in the Black—what do you call it? We were in the Black Art period, because Amiri Baraka, I think, is the one who had named Black Art. So by 1966, we were moving from the Civil Rights period, which I classify as the period of pride, Black pride, to the period of Black assertion, Black confrontation, Black identity. Black identity was the later '60s. The "Black is beautiful" period essentially was the later '60s. And I think it sort of started in 1967. So in 1966, we were still going through the Black pride period.

[00:17:40.69]

And people were denying that they were doing protest art or that they had any interest in protest art. They weren't interested in that, you see? And I was. And that was what my work was about. And so they didn't like that either, because they thought I was rocking the boat. The older artists, I think, thought I was rocking the boat. They were beginning to get something, and I was going to make it bad. You see?

[00:18:09.76]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. And you were one of the—you were sort of the thorn, or were there a couple of other people here trying to—

[00:18:11.92]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I was going to be a thorn. No, there were not a couple of other people. There was me.

[00:18:16.24]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:18:17.14]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And later on, I found—well, when you start raising hell, you do find others that are raising hell too. Right where I was, in Harlem at that time, I was the only one. But then later on, I found someone else—Tom Lloyd, who was raising hell somewhere else. And we got together and started working on the museums and stuff.

[00:18:37.70]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: One question. Where was—what was the name of that gallery and the show? You said it was in the location of the current Studio Museum.

[00:18:46.13]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It was a furniture store. And this man who owned this furniture store gave

us the bottom floor, the basement, for this gallery space. And that is the current place of the Studio Museum. He finally just gave the whole store to the Studio Museum, the furniture stuff. So I don't remember the name of the store. The name of the show, I don't remember that either. But I can give you information about that, the name of the show. So that was an historic show. And I was in that show. And that was my beginning.

[00:19:26.45]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. And you showed paintings at that? [Cross talk.]

[00:19:29.29]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. I showed my "American People" series. So then in 1967, the kids were getting older. We were no longer going to Provincetown. They were getting older, and I wasn't able to paint like I was when they were kids because they were wanting to go out. And I was being a mommy, and doing a whole lot of all that stuff. And I said, wait a minute, I got to arrange something different. They have to go to camp, and I have to go somewhere else. I got to get some time in the summertime because they don't enjoy going away with me anyway because they're too big. They want to do something else.

[00:20:18.44]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, they're teenagers now.

[00:20:19.49]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They're teenagers now, so—not quite. I don't think they were quite teenagers. They were born in '52. We're talking '67.

[00:20:29.03]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Well, they were like 15, I guess, or something.

[00:20:30.47]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. Yeah, they were teenagers. Okay. So the gallery that I belong to had offered me this show. It's the summer of '67. The gallery director—because it was a co-op. But we had a director. And he was a wonderful guy. Robert Newman was his name. I don't know where he is, but he was a marvelous guy. He was also a poet, and a writer, and an artist. Anyway, he said I want you to take the gallery, which was on 57th Street, as your studio for the summer of '67. He will be in Maine. He goes up to Mohegan—Mohegan Islands?

[00:21:18.21]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Monhegan.

[00:21:18.78]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Monhegan Islands. And—"You take the gallery. And go ahead and paint. Make some beautiful murals—" or I don't know if he said "murals," or one, or what. He said, "And just get it all in." He said, "Well, this is a historic period we're going through." '67 was big. "And you should get it all down." Says, "You have been doing these little pictures." And in '67, everybody was doing huge pictures.

[00:21:51.57]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. And you weren't yet.

[00:21:52.83]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, I was doing little pictures. I was the only one in the gallery doing little pictures. Everybody was doing big pictures.

[00:21:59.64]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And what other kind of work was there? Mostly abstract?

[00:22:01.68]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Abstract. Mostly everybody was abstract. Well, there were some figurative people. But this guy was very interested in my work, and he managed to get me in that gallery even though the rest of the artists did not want me in there. But he kept pushing them and pushing them. And every time I would call him to find out whether or not I had been voted in, he'd say, "No, you call me next week." And he got me in that gallery. Yeah, it was wonderful.

Anyway, it takes those kind of people. I have so many people like that, throughout my whole career, who have gotten in there and helped me do things. Anyway, so he said, "You're taking the gallery. And you're going to paint here." [Telephone ringing.] "And you're going to do these wonderful, big murals."

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:22:50.72]

First of all, I find that what I do—usually, when I'm getting ready to make a big step, I fall into it. I have no idea what's getting ready to happen. All the things that I've done, that can be marked as big steps for me in my career, I have stumbled into them. And a lot of them have been other people's ideas. Somebody else has said, "Why don't you do x?" It's like he said, "Why don't you make these big murals?" I had never thought of making a mural. It never occurred to me to do that.

I was going to do some painting because I had sent the kids, with my mother, to Europe for the summer. And they were going to study French at the Alliance Française. And Mother was going to go and travel to France and Italy and look at fashions, because she was very much interested in fashion design. And we had been to Europe already. And she loved Italy. And she was going back to Florence and Rome to visit the couturiers [dress houses -Ed.].

[00:24:00.65]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: This was after the trip that you took that was cut off, right?

[00:24:03.32]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. Yes. She went back several times after that. And I had arranged for her—and when she died, I saw all of these invitations that I had gotten for her, to go to see all of these different collections.

[00:24:19.91]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, neat.

[00:24:20.48]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, I didn't realize I had done all that stuff. Anyway, so she had a wonderful time. The kids had a wonderful time. And I stayed in Europe, in New York—penniless, but able to paint. And so as soon as I got them on the plane, I immediately went to the Jewish Museum, because at that time they were showing big pictures. That was their big thing. And they were the ones who had kind of—there was a curator there. I forgot his name, but he turned out to be—he went on to the Metropolitan and did "Harlem on My Mind," or something. You remember him? I can't remember his name.

[00:25:06.30]

Anyway, he had this big exhibition of big, huge canvases. And I wanted to see now, what do you do with these big canvases? So I researched. I went to The Modern. I went everywhere. And then I had to go get the canvas and I had to get the stretchers and I had to find out how to make a big stretcher thing like that. So I went through all that process. And I had to do it fast, because I only had two months. So that's when I made my three murals—"The Flag is Bleeding," "Die," and "U.S. Postage Commemorating the Advent of Black Power." I did those three murals. Isn't that something? Yes, I did.

[00:25:58.17]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And how brave.

[00:25:59.06]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And those particular paintings are still being published by people, written about by people, exhibited—constantly being exhibited. Not sold, by the way.

[00:26:12.01]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Really?

[00:26:13.24]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Never been sold. But they are constantly on exhibit—everywhere. Yeah, they've been every place.

[00:26:21.13]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: When you say murals, you just mean in the sense that they were big, mural size, right?

[00:26:25.69]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, they were big.

[00:26:26.59]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: They were on regular stretched canvas?

[00:26:26.98]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They were on stretched canvas, right. "Die" is twelve feet wide by six [feet]. And the others are eight [feet] by six [feet]. So it was a big-format painting. As a matter of fact, what happened is, when Robert—and I constantly kept in touch with Robert. So I have all these letters that I'm writing him, and he's writing me back—about the work.

[00:26:50.35]

And then what happens is, in the end, when he comes home, he discovers that my paintings are bigger than anybody else's in the gallery. So I went from having the littlest pictures in the gallery to having now the biggest pictures in the gallery. And so then that show came off in—1967, in my first one-person person show there. And then I had another one there, in—end of '69 or the beginning of '70. I never can remember which it is.

[00:27:29.62]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Just to get back to those paintings a little bit, did you do things like drawings first, block them all out?

[00:27:37.18]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yes.

[00:27:37.30]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And was the first one really quite difficult?

[00:27:39.36]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yes, yes, it was. It was. The first one was really quite difficult because when you're painting something very big like that and you're deciding what it has to be about, you're not just letting what happens happens. I wasn't into doing that in those days. In fact, I'm not even into doing that now. You have to make drawings. So I made several drawings. And I even made a cartoon. Because those paintings was my first big paintings. And a big picture can just throw you. So yeah, I made drawings, and I made cartoons, and I put my graph down. And I put it in there, and then I went ahead and I painted my pictures. And it was my first time to put writing in my pictures, because there's writing in "U.S. Postage Commemorating the Advent of Black Power." There's writing in that one. And—yeah,

so my first show and my first really big step, first big step.

[00:28:54.42]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Yeah, and that one got quite a bit of coverage.

[00:28:56.55]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yeah, I got the *Art News* I got Arts. And I got—the *Amsterdam News* wrote me up—and my teachers union, the UFT, wrote me up.

[00:29:10.69]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, that's great.

[00:29:12.39]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. A lot of people came to the opening. And it was a wonderful beginning, a really wonderful beginning in 1967.

[00:29:21.38]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. And so by then, did you have artist friends, or—

[00:29:26.81]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Okay. By now, I had a friend in the gallery, Jeannine Petit, who also shared the gallery space. She was doing her work there too. And that was fun. She was an abstract artist. And we would paint all day. And then we would go and have dinner in the afternoon and talk. It was just a great summer. It was my first summer to myself in my whole life—in my whole life. I mean, before that, I had my mother to answer to. After that, it was husbands and kids. This summer—because I left my husband. That was the first thing I did when I put the kids on the plane. I moved to my mother's house.

[00:30:08.48]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That summer, you mean?

[00:30:10.34]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Uh-huh [affirmative]. I moved—

[00:30:12.55]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Let's see. Was this—which husband?

[00:30:14.31]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, this is a new husband. That's all right. I got married again in 1962.

[00:30:18.78]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay, '62. All right.

[00:30:19.77]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, '61, I went to Europe. '62, I got married again. '67, I had my first one-person show and moved to my mother's house for the summer.

[00:30:31.41]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I see.

[00:30:32.46]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Because I was not going to spend the summer cleaning the house and doing all the "woman—" all those things that go on in the house, cooking dinners and stuff. I wanted my summer to myself to just do my art. I would take care of it later, after the kids—



[00:30:48.94]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: It was a temporary move?

[00:30:49.82]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, it was a temporary move. After the kids came back, I'd find out what was what. But for right now, it's going to be at my mother's house. So I just did that.

[00:30:57.29]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's great.

[00:30:58.14]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And I got the work done.

[00:30:59.12]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Good. Let's see. As long as we're on the subject of husbands, I guess [laughs], you first got married in what, 19—

[00:31:14.93]

FAITH RINGGOLD: 1950.

[00:31:19.74]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And to—I forget his first name. Wallace—

[00:31:22.35]

FAITH RINGGOLD: His name was Robert Earl Wallace. That's my children's name, Wallace. And that ended in 1954. And I got an annulment because I couldn't get a divorce. They looked askance upon people getting divorces in those days. So I got an annulment from him and married Burdette Ringgold in 1962.

[00:32:00.60]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So there was quite a period in there where—between—

[00:32:03.90]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, what did we have, six years?

[00:32:06.18]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:32:06.51]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, well it took—yeah, six years, from '66, which is when I could have gotten married, to—

[00:32:13.79]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: From '56.

[00:32:15.58]

FAITH RINGGOLD: '56 to 62. Yeah, six years.

[00:32:23.66]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. And the kids lived with you and everything—all the time?

[00:32:26.00]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Oh, yes, the kids constantly lived with me. And—

[00:32:36.19]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay, well let's see, back to the—what—had you been—I seem to be jumping around here a little bit.

[00:32:45.97]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That's okay.

[00:32:46.09]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: But in terms of the painting that you did for that summer show—had you had been painting—even on the small scale, the work had been similar for a while—

[00:32:54.86]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, it's the same work. It's just that in these pieces, I made bigger statements.

[00:33:02.80]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. When did you first switch into that statement at all, from the landscapes and things, into—

[00:33:08.59]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, okay. 1963. In 1962, I got married. In 1963, I went to Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts for the summer. I stayed with a very nice family there, and they gave me a place to paint. And they had a beautiful, huge estate. And actually, I painted on their lawn. I'll never do that again, because the flies and stuff fly into your work.

[00:33:41.32]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, yeah.

[00:33:41.92]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And plus, the light from outside is not the light I like that much to paint with. But anyway, it was fun. And that—I took up with me, James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, *Native Son*. I took Amiri's *Blues People*. I read those books to try to figure out how I was going to approach the painting of what was happening to Black people in America at that time. What was going to be my point of view? How was I going to go about describing, painting-wise, what it was I was feeling and thinking? Something that 10, 20, 30 years from now, I would still not mind being identified with. So I read these people, and then I came to my own conclusions. And that is the body of work that was shown in 1967, and my first serious, mature body of work. And I called it the "American People" series. And there are about 20 paintings in that series.

[00:35:14.38]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Some of them—the smaller ones, before the—

[00:35:17.38]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, there are 17 of the little ones and three of the big ones.

[00:35:26.60]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Have the smaller ones—have some of those have been sold? Or are they—do you have them?

[00:35:29.71]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yeah, yeah. Some did get sold, but many of them—I still have two. But many of them also traveled quite a bit and are still talked about and written about and thought about. So they're becoming significant parts of that period.

[00:36:02.83]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay. Yeah. So after the show, you hadn't hooked up with that many like-minded—I mean, the artist you said who you were friendly with in the gallery was an abstract painter.

[00:36:11.25]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:36:11.56]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You didn't have yet other kind of bosom buddies or whatever, art-wise —

[00:36:18.37]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No.

[00:36:18.70]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: —as far as the art went, right?

[00:36:20.29]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No. In '67, no, I did not. No. In '68, things were beginning to come around. Black artists were beginning to meet—

[00:36:34.38]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: To organize.

[00:36:35.16]

FAITH RINGGOLD: —and organize. I was invited to a meeting that an artist—actually, it was not an artist; it was an art writer—had called because the Whitney Museum had put together an exhibition of artists of the '30s, and had left out all of the Black artists from the '30s. And so he had put together, a show of the art of Black artists of the '30s at the Studio Museum, and he had written a statement about the Whitney leaving these Black artists out. And he had called it "Snubbed," and some people thought that that was kind of strong language. And—

[00:37:35.22]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Pretty good title, I think.

[00:37:36.68]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Boy. And thought it was strong language, and wanted him to either apologize—I couldn't figure out what it was all about. But anyway, they had a board meeting.

[00:37:49.55]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: The Whitney or the Studio Museum?

[00:37:50.54]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, the Studio Museum.

[00:37:51.41]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay.

[00:37:51.77]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And I was invited to come to that meeting. Eleanor Holmes Norton was there. She was on the board. And several other people whose names I don't remember quite right now. And I couldn't figure out why I was there, because they had never invited me to show anything at the Studio Museum. I mean, I was like not included in whatever they were

doing. What the hell did they ask me to come there for? Except that maybe they thought that they needed my input because this was a political issue.

[00:38:32.99]

So I said, "Listen, I don't see anything wrong with what's going on here. I don't think the Whitney Museum is even thinking about us, and whether we feel snubbed or what we feel. They're doing what they want to do. So I mean, what you do is what you want to do. So you wrote your piece, and they kept the Black artists out of the show. Everybody's doing their thing." I said, "But actually, I don't think that Black artists are doing enough. I think what we need to do is demonstrate. We need to make a line around the Whitney Museum and show them how we feel—not just say 'snubbed,' and write it, but do something."

[00:39:10.68]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. You mean, he was just going to write something, but there was also going to be a show, too?

[00:39:14.51]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. Well, they were going to open their show.

[00:39:16.73]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay, right.

[00:39:17.86]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And the artists were just going to write "snubbed," and that was going to be it. You know, but people were finding their way. The '60s was coming. It was not quite here in all of its massive—you know—

[00:39:34.23]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:39:35.16]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And the artists had not been demonstrating and carrying on like the rest of the parts of the Black movement had been doing. And so they said, "Well, a demonstration?" So it happened.

[00:39:54.27]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah?

[00:39:54.78]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes.

[00:39:55.47]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So was there—

[00:39:56.49]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And so I volunteered my gallery. By now, the gallery that I belong to, Spectrum Gallery, was no longer on 57th Street. It was now on Madison Avenue and 70—the Whitney is on—

[00:40:12.91]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: 75th.

[00:40:13.61]

FAITH RINGGOLD: —75th. Okay. My gallery was on 79th, so just four blocks down.

[00:40:18.79]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: This Is '68?

[00:40:21.19]

FAITH RINGGOLD: 1968. Right. So we had moved now, to—Madison Avenue. So I said, "Well, okay, I will volunteer my gallery space to do the posters and to be a headquarters." We told everybody to come there, pick up their signs, and then go down to the Whitney. And now, I had initiated the show—I mean, the demonstration—because those people were hemming and hawing, and they weren't going to do anything.

Okay. I had volunteered my space with the permission of the gallery director, who thought it was just wonderful. And I had helped to make signs. And I had my sign there with something about Romie Bearden. We should have a show for him and all. I was really into it. And when time came for the demonstration, we all went down and we got on line. Of course, it had to be done just this way, and all the guys were in charge. Henri Ghent was in charge. And when Grace Glueck came up, I distinctly remember her. It was the first time I'd ever seen her. She came up to interview the person who was in charge. Henri spoke.

[00:41:52.13]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: This is Henri—what's his name?

[00:41:53.51]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Ghent, G-H-E-N-T.

[00:41:55.05]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay. Very good.

[00:41:56.63]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And he spoke to her, and we just demonstrated. Now I took my two daughters, because you needed people. So it was me and Barbara and Michele. It was their first demonstration. They demonstrated a lot after that. And that was the first time I got called "nigger," by the way.

[00:42:17.03]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Really? Out there, by—

[00:42:18.94]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Outside the Whitney Museum. First time.

[00:42:23.42]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: By just some spectator?

[00:42:25.04]

FAITH RINGGOLD: This man came up, and he had his daughter with him. It was a little kid. I'll tell you, the kid must have been about seven. And we were not trying to keep anybody from going in the museum, but we were handing out literature. And so I stopped to give him the literature, and he said no. And his daughter went to get it, and he said, "Oh, you don't want to take anything from those niggers."

[00:42:55.23]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Wow. Madison Avenue was very [inaudible].

[00:42:59.81]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And I said, "Well," I said, "One day your daughter may show you who a nigger is."

[00:43:07.68]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Heartbreaking.

[00:43:08.63]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. I don't think that's the kind of thing one should say in front of their daughter, especially during a period like when we were going through. Anyway, that was my first experience, outside the Whitney Museum in New York City. Anyway, I've discovered, from '68, that these demonstrations are tricky, because you're just used as manpower, the women. And then when time comes to sit around the table, it's the men who go in and sit around the table, and very often sell everybody down the river, compromise everybody. So they went on to the Metropolitan to demonstrate against "Harlem on My Mind." I did not go with them because I could see that these people and me were not of the same mind. So I—

[00:44:10.14]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Really? So you already had decided that?

[00:44:11.39]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, I split, because I had an idea what I'd like to do. I wanted to see the museums open up. I didn't want to see a few people go in and make deals. I wanted to see them open up. I wanted to see Black people get in those museums and have shows there and be a part of it, because that was what I had dreamed of, actually, since I was a college student. I wasn't sure I wanted to be an artist. I wasn't sure of many things. But I knew that there was an art world out there that I had heard about. I knew about all the museums. And I knew that if I was an artist, that I was supposed to be in those places. Those were the places that my work was supposed to be.

[00:44:54.12]

Now that there was this spirit of change—I mean, here was the '60s. It was the spirit of change. It was the time to do it. This was the time, I thought. I don't want to be with a bunch of people who are going to make these funny deals. I don't want that. I don't have time for that. So I split from them, and I joined up with the Art Workers Coalition, which was a large group of artists, most of them white. But there was a Black coalition within that Art Workers Coalition, and Tom Lloyd was the person who was over that. Now it was really nobody but Tom Lloyd. Tom Lloyd had a big mouth, but he was a symbol. And so he called me up. After the Whitney, he called me. See, so he found me.

[00:45:52.44]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Was he involved in that in any way?

[00:45:54.57]

FAITH RINGGOLD: He was out there demonstrating. And he also saw that he wasn't going to be able to make it with those people.

[00:46:03.51]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Did they, by the way, get any—what was the upshot [of the demonstration at -Ed.] the Whitney?

[00:46:06.24]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, what they got was they got a Black show. What did they get? Finally, they got a Black show, but that Black show didn't come off 'til '71 or so. They did get something. Nothing much, because they were too busy, as far as I was concerned, selling out. So they didn't really do all that much at the Whitney. Black people have never done anything that big at the Whitney.

[00:46:35.68]

There was this show in '71. And as far as I know, there has been nothing else. Jacob Lawrence had a show there, a huge show there, which was the largest show ever given to

any Black person in any major museum in this country, I would think. Might have been the Whitney Museum show that he had in '74 or '75.

[END OF TRACK AAA\_ringgo89\_6383\_m]

[00:00:04.33]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Takes a long time. Okay.

[00:00:07.27]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Now, as far as the Whitney is concerned, to put the history in place, well, that's later. When I get up there later—some other shows did occur, but they occurred in connection with the women's movement, I would think.

[00:00:25.25]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:00:25.86]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, later. So I'll talk about that a little later on because I did go back to the Whitney. When I went back to the Whitney—see, I didn't go back with the men, the Black men. Anyway, so I went to the Modern because the Modern was really my baby. That was the one I really wanted to do things with anyway. And Tom invited me to come there because they were demonstrating. All these artists had these problems with the Museum of Modern Art.

[00:00:55.80]

And the Art Workers' Coalition was this huge group of artists who met every, I think, Monday night at a place called Museum, just Museum. It was on West—it was on Broadway, right off Eighth Street. And there was this big sort of loft space, and you'd just go in there, and all the artists sat around in a circle, and you brought flyers of whatever your thing was, whether it was artist housing, AIR, or whatever it was, all these different directions.

[00:01:28.89]

All these things were happening at once. Everything was happening. And so you bring your stuff in, and you would throw your packet down on the floor, and then people would go around and pick up one of each. And then you would see what you were interested in joining on. People would say, "Well, we're demonstrating against the XYZ on Tuesday because of blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." "And we're all going down to the mayor's office because we're trying to get our building AIR, blah, blah, blah," and this and that and the other.

[00:01:57.75]

And it was just fascinating. And in order for you to find out what was really going on in the art world, you had to go to Museum. You had to go down there to the Art Workers' Coalition and see what was happening, you know? And everybody came—I mean, the famous, and everybody mixed in. That's how I met everybody there at that time.

[00:02:18.31]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And that's pretty much where the feminist art movement—

[00:02:21.52]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Started.

[00:02:21.93]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: —started, too.

[00:02:22.11]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, yes. The feminist movement started. And they were—now, when they—okay, so I demonstrated with Tom Lloyd with the assistance of the Art Workers'

Coalition for a week for Martin Luther King at the Museum of Modern Art.

[00:02:39.16]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: All right.

[00:02:39.93]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And we demonstrated down there, I mean, several—all through '68 and into '69. And what came out of that, because the Black artists would not support us—

[00:02:54.04]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah?

[00:02:54.85]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Okay? They thought that, well, why should we support this? Because if we do this, this will just get something for Faith and Tom.

[00:03:05.44]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I see.

[00:03:06.92]

FAITH RINGGOLD: This will not be anything for the rest of us. Now, I don't know how they decided that, because, first of all, I definitely wasn't going to get anything, because not only was I a woman, I was a Black woman. And the Modern has never, ever given a show to a Black woman. Not even in 1989, have they done that. Okay? So I wasn't going to get anything anyway, you know. Tom—I mean, how many times—if we had gotten the wing, how many times were they going to give Tom a show?

[00:03:37.55]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, right.

[00:03:38.54]

FAITH RINGGOLD: How many shows would Tom get in this wing? Okay? I mean, it didn't really make any sense. But the Director of the Modern, which was John Hightower at the time, came here and talked. For four hours, we talked about it.

[00:03:59.19]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Really?

[00:03:59.61]

FAITH RINGGOLD: He was, I would say, committed.

[00:04:03.21]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Committed?

[00:04:03.62]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Committed.

[00:04:04.44]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, to that idea?

[00:04:05.76]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. And I think we were going to get it. But we couldn't get the support of the Black community. There was a political feeling at that time, too, that artists should stay in the community. It was all—there were institutions in the Black community who felt



that Black artists should stay in the community.

[00:04:34.35]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Like the Studio Museum, for instance?

[00:04:36.00]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Studio Museum, the Schomburg, and I guess some places in Brooklyn and so on, who would not support this idea. Although I had heard—and the fact that John Hightower came here indicated that there was a strong feeling for this. I understand Rockefeller said—Nelson—said, "Well, what's the problem? I understand that there's an idea of a Rockefeller wing for Martin Luther King." [Laughs.] "I think it's a good idea," he said. You know? So, I mean, it could have happened.

[00:05:29.50]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:05:30.25]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It could have happened. But when Hightower went around to the different Black artists' studios, not one of them would be supportive.

[00:05:41.19]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:05:41.66]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Not Romie, not Benny [Andrews -Ed.], not any of them. They all felt that it would just be something that they would not be in control of, and that we would—now, we weren't going to be in control of anything. It was simply going to have Martin Luther King's name on it, as many of those wings do have people's names on them, and it would be devoted to the work of Black and Latino artists—not just Black artists, by the way. It would be Black and Latino artists.

[00:06:15.68]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:06:17.24]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And that would be in keeping with the idea that several wings are devoted to French Impressionism, French Expressionism, early Abstract Expressionism, whatever, whatever. I mean, they do that. So, I mean, that's just one of the things that happens anyway. Certain kinds of work do go in certain wings and are endowed by certain people. Okay. But anyway, the support was not there. The community was opposed. I had finally gotten in touch with Coretta King.

[00:06:55.41]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: On this? About this?

[00:06:57.33]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And I had said to her—because Hightower said, "If you could get her to call me, I'll give you my home phone number. I'll give you my home phone number. I'll give you my phone number at the office. If you can get her to call me, I think that'll go a long way to helping this situation to happen." And I couldn't get her. But I got an assistant, and I explained it to the assistant. I said, "It's very important that we get her support on this. It will not cost her anything. We would like to use his name because he is such a guiding force and such an inspiration to us all here in New York, we artists, we everyone. And it would be a wonderful way of keeping him alive in the creative community." But they were building their own thing in Atlanta, the complex for him.

[00:08:04.48]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:08:04.90]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Okay? And Coretta King was busy raising money for that. So she was not interested. So what she ended up doing, we got—what we ended up getting was a consultant in the name of a man named Carroll Greene, who I had suggested. He turned out to be a mistake. But anyway, I had suggested this man to be a consultant for the show that we did get. We ended up getting a show of Romie Bearden and Richard Hunt's work. Instead of getting the wing, we got that.

[00:08:56.54]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Two-person show.

[00:08:57.83]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah.

[00:08:58.78]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Huh.

[00:09:02.03]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And Carroll Greene was the consultant for that. So she wrote a letter thanking him or commending him for hiring Carroll Greene.

[00:09:15.69]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, Coretta King did.

[00:09:17.36]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. And I have the letter. I have the letter. I have a copy of the letter. But it didn't say anything about, you know, "I support the wing, and I think it's wonderful you're going to do this for my husband," or whatever. She didn't do that. She did this other thing. And so we didn't get it. We didn't get that.

[00:09:35.76]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:09:36.15]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And so we got the show for Romie Bearden and Richard Hunt. I was not invited to the opening, because it was thought that I would be still angry and maybe do something.

[00:09:51.63]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: How soon did that show happen?

[00:09:53.49]

FAITH RINGGOLD: '71.

[00:09:54.21]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Pretty rec—yeah.

[00:09:56.12]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So that was the end of that period. And, of course, that kind of thing, it might happen. It might still happen again, you know. But it would be done differently.

[00:10:09.34]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:10:09.67]

FAITH RINGGOLD: See, that period had its own special way of doing things. And we were right on top of everything. You know, I worked so hard. I didn't do any art for a couple of years because everything I had went into working on that museum then. So after that, I decided that I can't work with the men anymore.

[00:10:44.48]

They co-opt you, they use you, and you don't grow. You just work for them. And it's stupid. What are you doing that for? So—because before that, I had said, "Look, I don't want to get involved with any women's movement," because I had been invited to come to the first meeting of NOW in 1967. And I had said, "Look, no, I don't think I would go to that." I mean, I have I have different priorities. You know, I'm a Black woman. I'm interested in Black people. I mean, what is this women's thing?

[00:11:24.93]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:11:26.61]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You know? I'm not going to that. But nobody ever embraces a political movement until it touches their needs. They have to have a need. And at that time, I was not in touch with what my need was, or the fact that I was not going to be able to achieve it in the way that I was going about it.

[00:11:53.67]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, but you were doing it to try—

[00:11:55.21]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I had to go through—see, I really had to go through all of these experiences. And later on, when I talked to other Black women, and they said, "Oh, well, I don't really think that the women's movement relates to Black women," I said to myself, "Well, I can understand how they feel, because they haven't walked in my moccasins." They haven't done what I've done. They haven't been out there supporting these men. I have. They haven't gotten a show for Romie Bearden at the Museum of Modern Art. I did that.

[00:12:31.23]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, [inaudible] got the credit.

[00:12:31.93]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Okay? I know for a fact he wouldn't have gotten that show without me.

[00:12:36.66]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:12:37.53]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It took all that dedication and all that time and all those years and all those demonstrations, all that typing, all those flyers, all that running around doing all that stuff, all those meetings with those trustees, all those times, in order for that to happen.

[00:12:57.88]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:12:58.81]

FAITH RINGGOLD: See?

[00:12:59.59]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:13:00.07]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And I don't want—that's not my life. That's not what I'm here for.

[00:13:05.14]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, right.

[00:13:05.83]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You know, I don't know all of what I'm here for. But I know I'm not just here for that. I'm here to help to make change, but not in the process of that, not to eliminate myself.

[00:13:18.97]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:13:19.45]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I am part of the change that I want to make. So the year I began to realize my place in the women's movement was 1970. The Art Workers' Coalition had been changed to something called Art Strike. And that summer, the artists pulled out of the Venice Biennale in Venice to protest the war in Vietnam and oppression at home. And so Robert Morris announced this to the Art Workers' Coalition. He had come in. They were calling him the "Prince of Peace," and it was, oh, man, big deal going on, you know. [Laughs.]

[00:14:14.42]

Now, I'm still not interested in the women's movement. I got a whole other agenda. I think I'm still—I don't know what I'm doing. Anyway, so I think the show with Romie is pretty settled in. We're not going to get the wing, because the Black artists are not supporting us. And I'm not sure what I'm doing. But anyway, I know that I'm still not interested primarily in WAR. It was Women Artists Revolution. That was the name of the group.

[00:14:44.99]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: The one that was part of the Art Workers' Coalition.

[00:14:47.24]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, right. Anyway, I sat there, and I was listening to this thing about Robert Morris and all of them pulling out of the—and I said, I wonder if this is going to be a show that everybody can be in, or is this going to be the same racist, all-male, all-white Venice Biennale show that I first became aware of when I was a college student that represents the United States—the United States sends a representative, and they're always white and always male. I wonder if that's going to be—because that's also one of the things that I thought my career should have to do with, not just showing in the museums, which my tax dollars support, but also, my tax dollars support sending artists to represent the United States. I, too, am a citizen. What about me? Okay?

[00:15:44.85]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:15:45.39]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So I said, I wonder if this is going to include any people of color.

[00:15:53.81]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: In other words, if the protest was going to include them also.

[00:15:56.21]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, right. It's going to be about racism as well as the repression.

[00:15:59.96]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Not just the war.

[00:16:00.77]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah—just the war. So I found out where the show was being set up. See, I didn't ask at the meeting, because I had a funny feeling that nobody was prepared for that question.

[00:16:14.15]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:16:14.66]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And I didn't want to fight the battle there. I had another strategy I had in mind.

[00:16:19.94]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. And they were going to set up an alternative to Venice over here.

[00:16:23.99]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, and it was going to be at the School of Visual Arts.

[00:16:26.15]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay.

[00:16:26.81]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Summer of 1970, it was going to be at the School of Visual Arts. And they were going to open their short. The work was already there or was coming there from Venice. And who had pulled out was Andy Warhol and you know, all the big, big—

[00:16:41.75]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, I see.

[00:16:42.81]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So I went over there. '70, 1970, I was teaching. I was teaching at Brandeis High School on 66th Street. So during lunchtime, I went on over there. And they were over there. They were all very excited, set up Art Workers' Coalition, all the women, who were mostly the girlfriends of the guys, and they had set up the office, and they were getting it all ready.

[00:17:10.84]

And I said, "Look," I said, "Are there going to be any Black artists or Latino artists in the show?" "Oh, no, no, no, no, no. No, these are just the artists that were in Venice." I said, "Are there going to be any women in the show?" "No, no, no. No, Faith. These are just the artists that were in the Venice Biennale. These are the artists that pulled out. So they're having their show here." I said, "You mean they're going to have the same racist, sexist show that they were going to have in Venice? They're going to have that same repressive, oppressive show here that they were going to have there?"

[00:17:50.01]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right What makes them any better than the artists—

[00:17:51.42]

FAITH RINGGOLD: "Yeah, so they should just stay over there, then." "Oh, no. You don't understand. You don't understand." And so immediately they concluded—I said that I did not know who these people were.

[00:18:04.44]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

[00:18:06.87]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I couldn't believe that they would think that I didn't know who they were. "No, these are very famous artists, Faith. Don't you understand? You got to be kidding. I mean, we can't have that shit in the show," one of them said.

[00:18:23.24]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, really?

[00:18:25.90]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So I said, "Look, let me tell you something. If this show is not opened up to include Black and Latino artists, as well as women, this show is going to be closed down. Do you understand that?" Now, mind you, I am a party of one. [They laugh.] I am a party of one!

[00:18:57.28]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You're going to close it down singlehanded.

[00:18:58.70]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I'm going to close that show down. Oh, my God, they went nuts. "What are you talking about? You don't understand." So at that point, I walked out. I just left it with them. My phone rang off the wall that night. Robert Morris calls me.

[00:19:20.18]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah?

[00:19:21.61]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, several artists called me. "Now, I want you to try to understand that this show is the Venice Biennale show. These artists are distinguished artists. They represent the country." You know, and, again, they repeated the names because they were convinced that I was so ignorant that I did not know who these people were and that they were the leading artists in America today. And if I did realize that, I would know that Black artists and Latino artists and women and students and all these different other people were not supposed to be in that show. I would understand that. But the point was I was too ignorant to know who these people really were. So one of the powers of the '60s was you played on that. People thought you were ignorant? Just let them think it. You can't deal with a person who's ignorant. So don't try to deal with me. Just give me what I want.

[00:20:21.29]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, yeah.

[00:20:22.16]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Okay, I'm ignorant. I don't know. So don't try to explain it. Just open the show because I'm ignorant. Okay? You're not. Open the show. That's it. Anyway, there were enough people at the Art Workers Coalition who agreed with me.

[00:20:42.99]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You brought it up there, and, yeah, okay.

[00:20:44.87]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, it got around like wildfire. I mean, the news was just zoom, zoom, zoom, zoom, zoom. Everybody was talking. So Monday, when the meeting came about, oh, Carl Andre and this one and that one, and there were people who couldn't oppose because they were too politically set.

[00:21:03.49]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: They were afraid.

[00:21:03.70]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They could not. They knew damn good well they could not say anything. Those were not the women. Those women who had been after me to join the women's movement were not the ones who were supporting me.

[00:21:18.94]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: They were not supporting you.

[00:21:19.99]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No way.

[00:21:20.64]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay, so they were—

[00:21:21.40]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No way. They were not ready for that kind of a confrontation. They were not prepared to confront their white male mentors, peers, boyfriends, whatever you want to call them, with that. No.

[00:21:40.48]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:21:41.05]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I was totally prepared to do it. You know, why not?

[00:21:45.25]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:21:46.15]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I couldn't see any reason why not, you know. This seems like the perfect opportunity to show everybody that we in fact are opposed to war, racism, sexism, and all the rest of it. And so there were several meetings, and people tried to convince me. And then, finally, they realized they couldn't convince me, plus they were—I was gathering forces!

[00:22:14.22]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, so you were starting to get—

[00:22:14.98]

FAITH RINGGOLD: More people were coming in, realizing that this was a wonderful opportunity to get the Panthers included. People were saying, "Well, I'll bring some Panther posters." Oh, I mean, they got wild. [They laugh.] Why not?

[00:22:29.44]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, right, right.

[00:22:31.69]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I mean, it was no longer in Venice, right? So that's it. Forget it. It's all over. If you wanted that kind of show, you should have stayed there and done it out there.

[00:22:41.44]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, just repeating the same mistakes.

[00:22:43.30]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, so okay, so the meetings kept going on. So now at this point, we were in the process of writing a press release. Robert Morris came here with Poppy Johnson. Remember Poppy Johnson?

[00:22:55.97]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I know the name.

[00:22:56.69]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Do you go that far back?

[00:22:58.79]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Through reading about it. I didn't experience it.

[00:23:02.06]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Okay.

[00:23:02.54]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I know it was a women's issue.

[00:23:02.90]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, Poppy Johnson eventually got married to Robert Morris. But anyway, at that point, she and he were very close, and she was a big member of Art Workers'—she's one of the women who was supportive. And she was—

[00:23:20.42]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: [Inaudible]

[00:23:20.63]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, and she was Robert Morris's girlfriend at the time.

[00:23:24.02]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:23:24.47]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So Poppy Johnson and—you know who Poppy Johnson is.

[00:23:27.77]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I don't know, not really.

[00:23:28.64]

FAITH RINGGOLD: But she just—I don't know where she is today. But she was a conceptual artist, and very, very—oh, she was in the Guerrilla Art Action Group, GAAG, remember, with Jon Hendricks and Jean Tosh, and it was Poppy Johnson. Anyway, so Poppy Johnson and Robert Morris came up. And together with Michele, my daughter, they made a press release. See, we had to do everything together. Everything had to be written in threes and fours. That was the spirit of the times.

[00:24:06.73]



So we wrote this new press release, saying that the show would open, and it would be—oh, let me tell you about the 50% women, because that's also coming from that period. Michele was sitting over here. This is my daughter. She was 16 or 17 at the time. And I had had her with me during all of this because I needed the support. I didn't have anybody else. The women wouldn't help me.

[00:24:29.86]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, and so she was following it and everything.

[00:24:31.87]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, she was right in there. So I said, "Now we have to ask for a percentage. We can't just say they have to have Black people in the show or women in the show. You have to ask for a percentage or you don't get anything," I said, "because they'll just put one in, and that'll be it." I said, so what do you think about a percentage? And I'm really talking out loud. I didn't expect anything sensible. She said, "50%."

[00:24:58.72]

I said, "50%?" I said, "Michele," I'm saying, "What percentage of Black people, women, whatever?" She said 50% should be Black and 50%—50% should be women, 50% should be men. Of the 50% men, 50% of those should be black. And 25% students—we'll make it less for the students, Black or Latino or whatever, you know.

[00:25:30.57]

And, oh, man, everybody caught on to this percentage thing. Oh, you should see what's happening in the art community. Artists are being selected now on a 50% basis, and it's supposed to be 50% this and 50% that. And then people started saying funny things. "Oh, well, should it be 50% housewives and 50% da-da-da?" And everybody just went—anyway, it started with Michele. And after she said 50%, I said, "Well, I can't let her be more radical than me." If she's going to say 50%, I have to go—and why not 50%? Now I'm thinking, why not 50%? Sure, 50%. Of course, 50% women, 50% Black, 50% everything, 25% of students.

[00:26:22.07]

Okay, so we took that down there, the 50%. They went wild. Oh, people got up and started screaming and yelling, mostly the women screaming and yelling at us. "How dare you, X, Y, and Z?" And we did some funny kinds of things. Like, Carl Andre was doing these sugar cube things. We took down a whole bunch of sugar cubes and scattered them all, talking about art that was antihuman art and stuff. So we just did a whole lot of really crazy things. Anyway, we got the show. All the dealers agreed that the show would open at Museum. Everybody came with their work. All those women who were opposed came with their work. It was truly 50% women. It really was.

[00:27:14.80]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Was this an alternative show or was it—

[00:27:16.97]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It was at Museum. They couldn't have it at the School of Visual Arts, because the School of Visual Arts said, "I'm not having it here," he says, "because I'll lose my fire permit. I'm afraid that—you know, I'm getting threatening letters and things saying that if that show opens up with all this added stuff in it that it will be firebombed and stuff." And the dealers don't want any problems. So the show will be opened up at Museum.

[00:27:41.58]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And so the other show didn't open. It did not open, the Venice one, or did it?

[00:27:45.74]

FAITH RINGGOLD: The Venice show was included in the open show. It was called the open—the Venice Biennale, the Open Venice Biennale. And it opened in—

[00:27:55.50]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Museum.

[00:27:56.43]

FAITH RINGGOLD: In Museum. And beautiful opening—we had music. We had a band that came. People came and danced. And on the surface, it seemed fine. But there was still the undercurrent of people who were angry, and who wanted to do something bad. So what happened is that one night—there was a guy who stayed there at Museum. And he was, like, the caretaker.

[00:28:28.09]

And one night, he was there, and he said that—why I'm telling you this is because some of the work got stolen and caused the end of the show. The show was up maybe for one or two weeks before some work got stolen out of the show and the show had to be closed. Okay? Now, the way it happened was one of the women who was a girlfriend of one of the artists came to Museum during the show and enticed this man, this caretaker guy, into one of the back offices under the guise that she liked him and was going to give him something nice to think about or do, you know what I mean?

[00:29:25.90]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:29:26.62]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And he just said he couldn't believe that she was making up to him like this, because he'd always thought she was attractive, but he never thought she thought he was. And so he said, oh, boy, he said she had him back there in that back office, and he said he was just feeling very good. He was feeling no pain. And when he finally came out of the office, the work was gone. And so were the other two people who had come with her. And that's how she managed to get the pieces away—

[00:30:06.16]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:30:07.00]

FAITH RINGGOLD: —by distracting him.

[00:30:08.20]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. They took other pieces? Were these artists who took—

[00:30:12.52]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They took some of the key artists'. Longo was one, and I think Rauschenberg might have been another, something like that, because we had all of them there. I don't know about Warhol—

[00:30:24.39]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Longo being Vincent Longo.

[00:30:25.77]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, Vincent Longo and Rauschenberg, I think, got stolen, and some others, and maybe Carl Andre. I'm not sure. Anyway, everybody knew who had done it. And they knew where the work was. So there was another meeting called. Bob Morris said that he was going to go and get the work.

[00:30:47.18]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Now, why was it stolen? Not for monetary reasons, was it?

[00:30:50.75]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, it was stolen to close the show, to disrupt the show, to make the dealers say, okay, that's it.

[00:30:55.22]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: All right. I see.

[00:30:56.18]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, that was the way to end the show, to steal the work—kidnap the work. The work was—they called it kidnapping. Anyway, this was done by women, by the way.

[00:31:07.57]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:31:08.50]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And so that ended that whole thing.

[00:31:15.09]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:31:15.78]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Now, what happened next was I got a call from Lucy Lippard saying that—asking me if I would come and join an ad hoc group to do demonstrations against the Whitney for the Whitney Biennial, which would open in 1970—the 1970 Biennial. So I said sure. We were in the spirit now. But what I am saying here for the sake of history—because not many people are recording it in quite this way—I mean, people tell history in their way.

[00:32:07.54]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:32:07.82]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So, you know, it's fortunate that I can write and talk, so that I can put things in straight context. WSABAL, Women, Students, and Artists for Black Art Liberation, which was the name of the group, which was me and Michele, which did the Biennale thing, what we did was actually the beginning of the activist part of the women's artist movement in New York City. It was the beginning of activism, an active way of dealing with women's rights here in the art world. Before, they had been talking, but they hadn't done anything. This was the beginning of doing. So they invited me to come. And a lot of people were angry with me, by the way. But—

[00:33:15.76]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: After the show, you mean, or—

[00:33:17.02]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, they were angry with me for daring to fly in the face of all this male supremacy, white male supremacy. How dare I do it. I don't think they realized I had nothing to lose. I really had nothing. They may have had something to lose, because it was their boyfriends and their friends and stuff. But they were not my boyfriends, and they were not my friends. I actually had nothing to lose. They were not part of my consideration. I was thinking about art and opportunities for doing it, and change. I was not thinking about what they were thinking about or what—they shouldn't have even been thinking about what they were thinking about, it would appear to me. But to each his own.

[00:34:11.02]

However, now the women were interested in becoming 50% at the Whitney Biennial. So

there was a meeting called at Lucy's house in the fall of '70. And I went, and Marcia Tucker was there, who was then the curator at the Whitney. And I made it clear that I do not do sculpture. And so therefore, I am not here to get myself in the Whitney Biennial. It was a sculpture show.

[00:34:56.33]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: [Inaudible] [Cross talk.]

[00:34:56.78]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, a sculpture show. But I am very interested in getting the work of certain Black artists—women—into that 50%.

[00:35:11.85]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:35:12.63]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And those women are Betye Saar, and Barbara Chase-Riboud, and Selma Burke. So I named those three women. I did not select Elizabeth Catlett, because I figured that I wanted to get everybody that I demanded, because I had so few. Not many Black women were doing sculpture. Very few were doing it. So I said, now I am not holding a lot of cards here. So I want all the cards I'm holding. So I'm not going to—I'm not going to dissipate my time and energy with Elizabeth. I want to try to be smart about this, because I don't think her kind of work sits well at the Whitney. Yeah, she's too political. They're not going to be interested in her. But these two people will. They fit the whole image of the Whitney, these two people. So I am demanding them.

[00:36:41.14]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Two or three, or was the third—

[00:36:43.11]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, and also Selma Burke. Now, Selma Burke, they told me, is dead. She's not dead. She's not even dead now. That was 1970. She wasn't dead. In '89, she's still not dead.

[00:36:55.25]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:36:56.26]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They told me, "Oh, Selma Burke is dead." You know, it takes a long time to find out anything, but the woman was very much alive, but I didn't know it. She was alive in Pittsburgh. Anyway, I said, "Well, okay, two. And that's the demand, and it's nonnegotiable. Those two women must be in the show. That's the end of that." And they were.

[00:37:30.96]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:37:32.84]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Okay?

[00:37:33.83]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So Marcia Tucker was there [inaudible]—

[00:37:35.96]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Marcia Tucker did not like that at all. I mean, I did not do myself a favor by confronting her in that way. She didn't like that. She didn't like it at all!

[00:37:53.16]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Well, the other ones were confronting her, too, though, right?

[00:37:55.74]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, but, I mean—yeah, the others were confronting her, too, but, I mean, she didn't like what they were doing, either.

[00:38:02.19]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:38:03.90]

FAITH RINGGOLD: But she definitely remembered me forever. I mean, anyway, I was adamant. I really wanted that to happen. And it did happen. And I felt very, very good about it because that is the first time that Black women have ever shown at the Whitney, ever, in the history of that whole place. And I did that, too.

[00:38:30.38]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:38:31.07]

FAITH RINGGOLD: See, so at least now I'm working for women. And I think that if I have to work for other people, let it be for people who look like me, for instance, you know what I'm saying? I mean, I'm not going to do this stuff for men. I'm really not. I'm just not. I just decided I will not do it, under no circumstances. And that is my entree into the women's movement. That's how I figured it out. What I was supposed to be doing is working with women to help women. And that's when I started doing. Well, also, in 1970, I also got arrested for the flag. 1970 was a big year for me.

[00:39:16.16]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Wow, yes. For the painting of the flag?

[00:39:18.17]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, for the show, for the exhibition—"The People's Flag" show, which happened at Judson Memorial Church. Two hundred artists came together to put on a flag show to protest the protest the government's restrictions of artists using the flag as art.

[00:39:49.67]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh. And it's topical for now.

[00:39:51.50]

FAITH RINGGOLD: How about it? And so we did this—we put the show together. I was on the committee, and we were there on one Friday night. The show had opened beautifully. Yvonne Rainer's troupe danced, and we had poetry readings, and oh, it was just wonderful. Everybody was in the show, everybody. Jasper Johns, Carl Andre, everyone was in the show. And all artists—it was an open show, a truly open show, anybody and everybody who wanted to do something about the flag.

[00:40:23.54]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, right.

[00:40:25.46]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Okay, so it's Friday now. We're talking November. I've gotten through to November. I mean, I've been through all this stuff, the Biennale and all this stuff is happening. And so it's nine o'clock. The show is closed, and we're coming out of there, when four people appear at the door and say, "We'd like to see the show." They're all dressed in dungarees and they're looking like artsy types. And I said, "No, come back tomorrow.

Tomorrow is the last day. We close tomorrow. So come back tomorrow. You can see it." "Oh, no," they said. "We're from out of town, and we won't be here tomorrow. And we really—we've come a long way. And we really want to see the show. We heard it's a wonderful show."

[00:41:15.34]

And I said, these people don't look—the woman particularly does not look like an art-goer. And these other guys look like they just found a pair of dungarees from a friend. You know, I mean, I'm suspicious of these people. So I said, well, you know—so my daughter Michele was there, and Jon and Jean. So they took them upstairs. And I said, "Well, okay, I'll wait for you down here." I said, "Please come right down because I really want to go home."

[00:41:43.31]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Who were Jon and Jean?

[00:41:44.60]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Jon Hendricks and Jean Tosh.

[00:41:46.35]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay.

[00:41:47.00]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Those are the two artists who eventually I got arrested with that same day, the same night, little did I know. I think it was Friday the 13th of November. So they took a long time to come down. And I said, "Wonder why they're taking so long." So I went upstairs, and there they are, standing in the center of the sanctuary because that's where the exhibition was. And so I said, "Okay, come on, Michele, let's go."

[00:42:17.19]

So she said, "I can't go." So I said, "Why?" She said, "Because I'm under arrest." I said, "You're what?" She said, "Yes." I said, "For what?" She said, "For organizing, for being on the People's Flag Show committee." I said, "Listen, I said, she is a minor." You know, I said, "She's only 17," I said, "and I'm her mother." And they said, "Yeah, she's under arrest, though." And then they flashed their badges. All of them had them.

[00:42:51.95]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Wow. They're undercover.

[00:42:53.33]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So I said, "She's not on the committee." And they just looked at me. And I said, "I am." So they said, well, "Okay, we'll arrest you." So instead of her, they took me—which, of course, is illegal.

[00:43:16.81]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: To arrest—to come in that way, you mean.

[00:43:18.44]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. First of all, to come in without telling people, "Now, look, I'm going to ask you some questions, and you need to know that I'm an officer of the law, and anything you say may be held against you. Are you a member of the People's—" they didn't do that.

[00:43:33.74]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:43:34.49]

FAITH RINGGOLD: But they did it for me. So I was really the only one who was legally

arrested, except that I was a ransom for Michele.

[00:43:42.80]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, and because you—

[00:43:44.78]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I didn't complain, because I didn't want her arrested.

[00:43:47.30]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, right.

[00:43:48.02]

FAITH RINGGOLD: She was 17, and I didn't want her in jail, under no circumstances. I did not know what was going to happen. And I didn't want it to happen to her, whatever it was going to be. Anyway, at that particular time, the women's house of detention was down in the village. And Angela Davis was in there. And I didn't want to be her there, too, you know. And they didn't want us in jail, because they figured the artists would have a massive protest and it'd be just a big mess the next day. So the idea was to get us immediately down to the Tombs, get us all processed and out of there.

[00:44:30.88]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: The other two also?

[00:44:31.83]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, get the three of us down there and out of there before night court was over. Don't make these people stay in jail, because there's going to be trouble.

[00:44:43.02]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:44:43.86]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So first thing they wanted to know was where was the police station, because they had to sign in to the—these guys were from Washington, D.C., we found out later. They had been sent down by Nixon.

[00:44:58.17]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So they were more likely the FBI or CIA or whatever.

[00:45:00.81]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. Anyway, I told them, "Look, I don't know anything about this neighborhood. I don't live here, and I have no idea where the police station is. And if I did know, I wouldn't tell you, because I don't intend to go there," you know?

[00:45:16.65]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:45:17.70]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Anyway, Jon and Jean were very cooperative. They said—

[00:45:20.88]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Were they also under arrest?

[00:45:21.78]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes.

[00:45:23.20]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You mean, they cooperated with the—

[00:45:24.78]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. So they said, "Oh, well, it's on X Street." So we all got into cars. It was a funny kind of arrest. I mean, this is the way they searched me.

[00:45:35.61]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, did they?

[00:45:36.39]

FAITH RINGGOLD: The woman. And we all got into cars. I took off all my jewelry and gave it to Michele, and I kept my credit cards and some money because I didn't know whether I was going to end up in a cell or what.

[00:45:50.63]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, right.

[00:45:51.90]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It was scary. So anyway, I went on down, and her job was to go home and call everybody and make sure that the lawyers were there. But the lawyers were going to be there, no problem. Anyway, we got down to the Tombs. And we ended up having to sneak into the Tombs because we got there after 9:30. And nobody is admitted into the Tombs for night court after 9:30. So I said, we'll just go home, you know. They said, well, you're going to have to sneak in. The guy at the gate said, "Listen, you can sneak in if you want to, but I have nothing to do with it, he said, because I cannot admit anybody after 9:30," the officer. So he turned his back, and we sneaked in.

[00:46:37.42]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You mean the guys snuck in—these—

[00:46:39.28]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, the four police officers that we had and the three of us snuck in the Tombs on a Friday night at about ten o'clock.

[00:46:49.69]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:46:52.18]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Weird, huh?

[00:46:53.11]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:46:53.80]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So we got upstairs, and we saw a person who represents people—I forgot what they call this guy who—you know, when you get arrested or something, he—

[END OF TRACK AAA\_ringgo89\_6384\_m]

[00:00:05.63]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: But anyway, the story, you're in the middle of it, being sent to the Tombs.

[00:00:08.09]



FAITH RINGGOLD: Okay. So I rode in the back of the car with the woman. Well, I already said that. We already got into the Tombs, and we snuck up the stairs. And we were inside. And I got a walk through the inside of the Tombs, which was very, very scary.

[00:00:25.55]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that must have been, with the cells on either side or something like that?

[00:00:28.56]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, I mean that—what I recall was people in cages. And then big groups of men just sort of lined up, and large groups of recalcitrant men yelling things, being taken places in groups. You know, it's just a whole total demoralizing experience of prison and jail. And it just—I don't know what the answer is to it, given the situation of drugs now in 1989. I just don't know what to say about—anyway. I'll talk more about that later. Anyway, we got to court. Jon and Jean were put in cages. One interesting thing, when you get arrested with a man, immediately, you separate.

[00:01:26.70]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Right.

[00:01:27.24]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, that's—they went this way. I went this way. They knew who we were. They had—

[00:01:36.24]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: At the [inaudible]—

[00:01:37.47]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Those guys who arrested us knew exactly what was going on. They knew they weren't going to keep Michele. They had come for me. And that is why, when I said, "She's not on the flag show committee, they just looked at me," as if to say, "Well, so?" And when I said I was, then that was beautiful. Because you're the one we came for, anyhow. You know? So anyhow, we got before the court. And—

[00:02:10.35]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: This is that night, when you [inaudible]?

[00:02:12.09]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. And I was told that my lawyer would be there. And he was there. And, in fact, we had two lawyers there. And I wonder whether somebody knew we were going to be arrested that night, that—I don't know. I didn't know anything about it. I was totally unprepared for the eventualities that occurred.

[00:02:37.26]

Anyhow, we ended up going back and forth to court about this, and raising money to go to Supreme Court. We never got to Supreme Court. The money was used for other purposes by the American Civil Liberties Union. And we ended up paying a fine of X, which was eventually paid by donations from many, many people who donated. And you know, nothing bad happened. Nothing big happened. But we didn't get to Supreme Court, which was what I wanted.

[00:03:20.49]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: After the fact, you wanted to—

[00:03:22.11]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, I wanted to get to Supreme Court, because I wanted to be made

innocent. And I didn't get that opportunity. So I remain, today, interested in all flag cases because I'm one.

[00:03:38.13]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. And at that point, there was no—you did have to pay the fine?

[00:03:43.53]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes.

[00:03:43.79]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And was there much uproar or anything like that, or discussion of it in —

[00:03:48.36]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, the artist community was somewhat involved. I would think they were—there was an auction at Castelli Gallery. And there were some things. Some people got involved. It wasn't an altogether ignored situation. But there was also this gallery dealer who had been arrested. I forgot his name. But I think he was made innocent. He was exonerated. He was—

[00:04:21.34]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Really?

[00:04:21.61]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, I think so. I'm not sure of the total details because it happened so long ago. And I have a lot of information, and I haven't read it in a long time. But that's what happened. We turned out to be the first artists who ever got arrested for putting on a show. And I think they felt, in the end, that they had made a very foolish mistake to arrest us like that. And the guys who arrested us even said, "We don't like the idea that we had to do this. We don't see any reason for us doing this, except that we're just doing our jobs." And that's all there is to it.

[00:05:01.56]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And the complaint was that you were doing things, that you were altering the flags, or—

[00:05:07.44]

FAITH RINGGOLD: The complaint was that we had violated the business code, some business code, that said that you do not in any way display the flag in any way that denigrates it so that other people can see in any kind of public place.

[00:05:25.89]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And did the show have to close down?

[00:05:28.93]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yeah.

[00:05:29.18]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Or was it going to end already?

[00:05:30.56]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yeah, the show had to close. The show was going to close, anyway, the next day.

[00:05:36.35]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Right. They just wanted to get—

[00:05:38.90]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They just wanted to arrest us, harass us, and make us not do it again. They let the show go on for the whole week, and they did this Friday night so that Saturday, the show was going to close, anyway. You get me?

[00:05:50.63]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:05:50.90]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So we were just kind of used as pawns, in a sense.

[00:05:57.61]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Examples.

[00:05:58.07]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Examples. We were examples—right. Because I was no more responsible for that show than the other 199 people who were on the committee. A whole lot of people were on that committee.

[00:06:10.25]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And the artists themselves, I would think.

[00:06:11.84]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. There were 200 people on the committee, any of which could have been arrested.

[00:06:16.70]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, right. You were just there.

[00:06:19.84]

FAITH RINGGOLD: But we were the three who were there every time. So we got to be the ones that got arrested, see? And everybody signed a statement saying that they were responsible for their work. Because it was an open show. We did not jury anything.

[00:06:40.89]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Which meant that people, if they had a work that would fit in, they just, basically, brought it.

[00:06:44.61]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Just did it. People did all kinds of stuff. Somebody came and did a string of flag stamps and just pasted them to the floor. So it was not, in any way, that we selected particular things to be in the show. It was a totally open show, in the spirit of the Biennale show.

[00:07:09.85]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, right.

[00:07:11.17]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It was open. Again, 50% women, all kinds of Black people. Everybody was in it, along with some superstars, you know? So who is it? That was my 1970. 1970 was a hell of a year.

[00:07:28.90]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's a big year.

[00:07:29.60]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, it was a very big year. And what I can say about that is that I think that 1970 was my coming out as a feminist. And in doing that, I alienated a lot of people. Eventually, it was impossible for me to show my work in New York. I mean, I had no contacts here. Things were opening—

[00:08:10.28]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: After all this stuff happened.

[00:08:11.33]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. Things were opening up for women. And things were happening, but not for me.

[00:08:18.23]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Because you were just the most vocal?

[00:08:21.58]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I had stepped on a few toes, I guess. And they had been the wrong toes. And I was not going to get invited to do—if you do the yelling, somebody else gets the rewards. They do that a lot. So I began—in 1972, I was approached by an agent, a speaking agent, through Florynce Kennedy, who was a very famous Black woman lawyer. And it was her agent. And for the first time, Black people were going around, making college tours. This was the beginning of that happening.

[00:09:13.87]

So Black people and women were making college tours all over the country, speaking. Because before that, it had just been these white guys who wrote books and stuff. And so now, we were getting into the act. And so I was approached by this agent, who said that, "Look, how much do you get for a speaking job?"

[00:09:38.02]

And I said—well, I didn't really get anything. Because I'd do it free, just to be there, you know? I said, "Well, maybe \$50." So she said, "Well, look, I can get you \$750, plus your transportation and your hotel and your food and everything." And I said, "Well, what do you get out of it?" And she said, "Well, I get 25%, which means you go home with 560-some dollars. Every time you go out the door, you get 560-some dollars." Now, in 1970, that wasn't bad.

[00:10:15.82]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: No, that's a lot of money.

[00:10:16.84]

FAITH RINGGOLD: In 1972, '73, that wasn't bad. So I ended up being able to quit my job.

[00:10:22.60]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Wow.

[00:10:23.22]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Uh-huh [affirmative]. I quit my teaching job. I went to Europe in '72. The summer of '72, I went to Europe. When I came back—of course, when this woman told me this, I said, "Oh, this is a joke. This is not going to happen."

[00:10:39.46]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And she told you this could happen on a regular—like, regularly?

[00:10:41.92]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. She said, "You are political. You're a woman. You're Black. You're a feminist. You're in the band. I can get you all over the country. You're an artist." She said, "Can your art travel?" So I said, "Yeah." It couldn't, but it will. [Laughs.] So I went to Europe. And that's when I saw the thangkas, the paintings framed in cloth, at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

[00:11:21.05]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, uh-huh [affirmative].

[00:11:23.16]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And I decided, I said, you know, I said, this is your opportunity to have an audience, to show your work. Because you're not getting anywhere in New York. So what you need to do is find a way to do your paintings so that they can be rolled up instead of stretched on those stretchers. Because that's gonna require a lot of money to ship. And you're gonna lose the opportunity—see, people want to pay you. They don't want to pay for the shipping. They want to pay you a salary. So you have to find a way to have the shipping done inexpensively. And the way to do that would be to do art that is soft, that can roll. And that's how I got into doing the soft work.

[00:12:08.42]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You just decided you were going to—

[00:12:11.07]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, sure. Because it was a survival thing, you know. You want to be an artist. This is the way you're gonna have to be one.

[00:12:18.23]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You could even take them with you and stuff like that, traveling.

[00:12:20.30]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. And I did. I took some pieces with me. And I shipped some pieces. And I did the whole thing.

[00:12:27.29]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Now, when you talk about thangkas, were they—the whole things are painted down on cloth, or the middle—

[00:12:34.67]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No. They're done in—they're painted on canvas. See, I've always done the painting on canvas. Now, even with the quilts, the painting is on canvas.

[00:12:42.79]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, really?

[00:12:43.22]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Or if it's an etching, it's still—

[00:12:44.66]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay. But unstretched canvas?

[00:12:46.28]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, but unstretched, right.

[00:12:48.11]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, okay.

[00:12:48.41]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And so then, the painting was on canvas. And then my mother would sew the cloth borders, which were really my beginning quilts. But I never thought of them that way. And I would have never stitched through the paintings the way I do now, you see? But those were really my early quilts.

[00:13:09.36]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:13:09.72]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And so I'd just roll them up with the sculptures and the masks and all the soft sculpture stuff that I did, and put those in a trunk. They'd get 36 pieces. And they could keep it for two weeks. And for that, I would get the \$750. And then they raised the price to \$1,000, and it just kept going like that. And I got to go all over the country. I went everywhere. I mean, I went to these little towns that were this big. And I was like, a big star in that little town, with that school. And they had beautiful galleries. A lot of colleges have wonderful galleries. They have wonderful spaces.

[00:13:48.34]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, I just did this—

[00:13:48.95]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And they give you beautiful color brochures and take care of you. It's just wonderful. So I did that.

[00:13:58.04]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: From '72, on?

[00:13:58.91]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I did that from '72, on to—well, I'm still doing it. I'm just not sending the shows like I used to. I did it until it got too difficult to send the work, which must have been about '80, maybe '81—maybe '80, '81 before I started holding back on sending the work. Because the shipping companies got to be more expensive, and the insurance got to be more complicated and all that. But when I first started out, for \$35, I could send a show anywhere in this country. It was wonderful.

[00:14:47.78]

And so that really helped me to get myself out of there. Because people who are in Iowa today are in New Jersey tomorrow, in New York the next day. So people circle around. I mean, I see people today who tell me, oh, I saw you in 1970-so-and- so at so-and-so college, or so-and-so this and that. And I say, "Yeah, that's nice."

[00:15:12.10]

Or people call me on the phone and say, "You know, I was a student at such-and-such a college. And you came, and you had a show. And you gave a lecture. And now I am the director of X, and I would just love for you to have a show there now. And so I'd like to know, how can I go about having that happen?" So that was—

[00:15:32.76]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I'm sure you made a lot of new avenues in that.

[00:15:34.15]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And that was a huge networking thing that I did and, again, not realizing what I was doing, exactly—not realizing.

[00:15:44.52]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Would you go and talk about the art and, also, about the politics of New York—

[00:15:48.98]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Uh-huh [affirmative].

[00:15:49.59]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: —situation and stuff like that?

[00:15:50.82]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They wanted me, primarily, to give a slide lecture on my own work, and to put it in context with everything that was going on. Because the work, in various different ways, reflects what's going on at the time, in one way or another. So they wanted me to do that. And then I didn't realize when I started doing the masks that I would soon be doing performances. Performances came out of that. I was trying to get a larger audience. Because when you go on a college or university campus, the art audience is not always that big.

[00:16:28.26]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that's true. And it would be bigger for performances?

[00:16:31.32]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yeah. Yes. So I would often get the people from the sociology department, and I would get the people from the writing department, and I would get the people from the Black studies department, and I'd get the people from the art department.

[00:16:45.82]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right—drama department.

[00:16:47.98]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. Now, when I do performances, I can get anybody. Everybody likes a performance.

[00:16:52.06]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, right. That's true.

[00:16:53.56]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And the performance that I began to do in the beginning, "The Wake and Resurrection of the Bicentennial Negro"—I started that in 1976—used students as the actors.

[00:17:05.47]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, for the parts?

[00:17:06.58]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So automatically, I got a lot of people. Because all the students wanted all their friends to come and see them perform. See, I was the director. They did the performance. And I did that performance from '76 to '81. It was not until 1980 that I started doing performances myself.

[00:17:28.48]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. First, you were directing other people, then, were you?

[00:17:31.06]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. So in 1980, I put on the mask, and I did my first performance. And I think I told you about this before. I did it because I had written my autobiography and couldn't get it published. And so I was performing my autobiography.

[00:17:45.76]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, okay, yeah. You did mention that. Now, you had a work, the soft sculptures, also called "The Wake and Resurrection," right?

[00:17:53.31]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. That is the same piece.

[00:17:54.86]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So did they—

[00:17:55.56]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They would get that installation, which was about 30 pieces. And then I would come and do the performance within that environment, or they would move part of it to the theater.

[00:18:08.30]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Would they use those pieces?

[00:18:10.67]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. Yeah. And then I'd bring the masks. Well, the masks would be there already. See, then they would have the people—Bena and Buba would be laid out. And then there would be Bena and Buba in masks. That would be the students. And then we would reenact the whole scenario.

[00:18:25.16]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right—pretty dramatic, huh?

[00:18:28.77]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. Yeah, it was. And they would bring flowers. The first school that I went to with this was Wilson College in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. You know Wilson College? It's a small Ivy League—small liberal arts college, about 400 students, all girls. And they gave me an artist-in-residency there to develop this performance. And so I did it there first. And they'd bring fresh flowers every day for the two dead people, the young man and woman. And so every place I went, they had a different way of dealing with death. It was really fascinating.

[00:19:21.04]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that's interesting.

[00:19:22.54]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It was fascinating that—because I was doing this, and I wasn't sure why I was doing it or what I was doing, except that I was saying—it was like a commemoration of 200 years of struggle of Black people in America, the bicentennial—not a celebration, but to ignore it would be to forget all the people who've died and passed on and struggled and lost or gained or won. So it had to be dealt with.

[00:19:58.22]

And so I created this performance to deal with that struggle. And I called it "The Wake," because I didn't want to think of actual funeral, because nobody was going to be buried because they were going to be resurrected—"The Wake and Resurrection." So that piece is now with the "Making Our Mark" show, the women's show that's now at the Pennsylvania Art Academy.



[00:20:37.87]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, okay.

[00:20:38.41]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So it's several—in fact, the main pieces, the weeping mother and grandmother and the two young people and the flowers and all, laying on the cooling pad, is now at the Pennsylvania Arts Academy. And so the pieces live after the performance. I'm no longer doing that performance. But the pieces are still—

[00:21:06.35]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Well, they've been photographed—reproduced quite a bit.

[00:21:09.20]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Reproduced quite a bit. They were in *Art News*. And they've been there. So they will continue to, I guess, be part of the work.

[00:21:18.89]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: They seem to be a pretty important piece.

[00:21:26.71]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And then the performance changed to me in the mask and doing my autobiography. And then I decided to lose the weight in 1986. And that's the first performance where I took off the mask, which was my "Change" performance in 1980—the first one I did was in '87. Well, I started in '86. And I started doing it before I was quite ready. And I'd been doing it right along. Now, "Change 2" came about in '88.

[00:22:11.74]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: What's "Change 2"?

[00:22:12.82]

FAITH RINGGOLD: "Change 2" was that I had maintained the weight loss of 100 pounds for two years and was now going on to lose 30 more pounds. I had to stop. It was too much. Yeah. Come on. I had to get something to eat. [Laughs.]

[00:22:35.80]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, right.

[00:22:36.52]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So "Change 2" was an announcement that I would be going on. And in 1990, there would be "Change 3." And I would have lost the rest of the weight, which is what I'm doing now.

[00:22:53.95]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. So what you're doing—I mean, this brings up—it's a whole other, different concept. You're doing the performance all the time, right, and not even—

[00:23:00.26]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, oh, yes. I'm doing the performance all the time. This performance is the most—you know, it's, obviously, the most successful one, the one that people are most interested in. And it is—although "The Wake" was pretty popular, too. But this one is constant, in constant demand, this one.

[00:23:20.81]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You mean you actually do go—you do a performance—

[00:23:22.78]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yes.

[00:23:24.23]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: —of short—

[00:23:24.80]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Of songs and dances and everything. Oh, yeah.

[00:23:28.31]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, okay. Telling that story that you also wrote—that's on the quilt.

[00:23:31.61]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. With "Change 2," it's a different story with songs. And "Change 3" is going to be even more different. I haven't fully decided on what "Change 3" is going to be, but there'll be more songs and dances and chanting. And I think I'm going to work—see, I like the audience involved in my performances.

[00:23:57.44]

And I think what I'm gonna do is I'm gonna do something where the audience will form a chain. I'm gonna get a chain going with them. Because what I've been doing is inviting them to come up on stage and dance, see? But I think now, I'm going to lead them in some way, in walking. I think I'm going to lead them in different walks. Because walking is boring. It's a great exercise, but it's boring.

[00:24:21.85]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, right.

[00:24:22.66]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So I'm gonna really explore different kinds of walks, different ways to walk.

[00:24:31.18]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Different forms of walking? Okay, yeah.

[00:24:33.37]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. There's a lot of different ways to walk, right?

[00:24:37.51]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. You know that Monty Python? There's a funny—Monty Python, the comedy group.

[00:24:43.34]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah.

[00:24:43.75]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: They have a whole series that John Cleese did, telling that he was the minister, or it was the "Ministry of Silly Walks," or something. You see that?

[00:24:52.90]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yeah. Okay.

[00:24:53.07]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Kind of goose-stepping, things, but they're not really. They're sort of

funny and weird. He's got this funny body, and it's long. Anyway, you might want to look at those.

[00:25:02.18]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I would love to.

[00:25:03.37]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You could probably get some tapes. I don't know.

[00:25:05.16]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Where? You think they would have it in a video shop?

[00:25:10.42]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I don't know. Do they have—I don't know if they'd be available yet because they still have them on TV sometimes, reruns and stuff, watching late at night some night. I don't know, unless—people might have. You could ask around. I don't know too much about that because I don't—

[00:25:25.53]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, I want to do a whole series of those walks to bring some more interest to walking. Because walking is boring.

[00:25:35.61]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. These are probably sillier than what you want. You want real—very real walking.

[00:25:39.60]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I want silly, too. I want silly.

[00:25:41.82]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah? All right.

[00:25:42.51]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Sure. I'm gonna make them silly.

[00:25:44.04]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I'm sure you can make up your own.

[00:25:44.91]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, they've got to be silly. But I want them to be also associated with real people walking.

[00:25:51.84]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, and doing it.

[00:25:53.31]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right.

[00:25:54.33]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. That's interesting. How did you start out? How was the first of the performances? Because it's an interesting thing in terms of time. You must have—you had to announce this performance before you had done anything, right?

[00:26:06.00]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. Yes, I did announce it, right. I announced it to everybody. And then it was announced in the catalog for the show. So I just kept announcing it.

[00:26:18.51]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. But you hadn't done it yet. Or had you already started to lose, and then the idea occurred?

[00:26:22.53]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, I started to lose in '86. And when I started to lose in '86, January of '86, when I went to Optifast to start losing the weight, I said "Then, I will be doing X." And that was part of the show that was being planned. So I was also planning my show for '87. January of '87, I was going to have this show. And this was what was going to be the show. And the show was called "Change"—"Change," okay?

[00:26:52.56]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:26:52.86]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So there's no way. "Faith Ringgold's over 100 pounds weight loss performance story quilt." That's it. I did the quilt. I did the performance. It's gotta happen. There it is. Can't back away from it.

[00:27:11.63]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you do you—you did the quilt and wrote the story before you'd gotten to the end of it. I mean, well, you still haven't, I guess, is what you're saying.

[00:27:19.99]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. Right. Because you see the—

[00:27:22.69]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: But that was way before you had—

[00:27:23.20]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, way before. Because the quilt, it starts with 1930, when I was born. And I had gotten those pictures together. I had to have them etched, have the plates made. Everything had to be done way ahead. So I was in deep. I'm still in deep.

[00:27:43.29]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, yes. Right. [Laughs.]

[00:27:46.65]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I am still in deep. In 1990, I will be doing that performance a lot. I did it a whole lot this summer, this year, '89.

[00:27:57.18]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I would think you'd have a whole new venue, venues of Overeaters Anonymous, and bring in all kinds of—

[00:28:04.29]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I have places now that I just do the performance. They don't even know I'm an artist. They don't even know anything about any quilts or anything. All they know is performance. So I definitely did get a new audience, which is what I wanted. I did want that. I want to get as broad an audience as I can. I think that art does not suffer from a broad audience. It's nice. I don't mind that. So, there's more to cover. Let's see.

[00:28:37.43]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay. Maybe we—how are you—you want to make a break?

[00:28:40.09]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Maybe we could stop now. And then—

[00:28:42.51]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Because I can use the—

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

That's the end of the September 22 taping.

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:28:55.47]

This is Cynthia Nadelman interviewing Faith Ringgold on the 4th of October at her apartment, 345 West 145th Street. Okay, just to go back a little bit, you did the mural for the women's detention center at Rikers Island. And that was back in the—

[00:29:21.44]

FAITH RINGGOLD: 1970—in 1970, I think it was, I got a grant from Creative Artists Public Service Program. They called it CAPS. And I think that was my first grant, if I remember correctly. And you were supposed to do a public service with the grant. So I decided that I wanted to do a work that would be installed in a public place, and that the place I wanted to go to was the Women's House of Detention.

[00:30:08.38]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So you decided that. It wasn't a—they weren't looking for somebody to do it.

[00:30:12.19]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No. They weren't looking for anybody. [Laughs.] Least of all, me. And so I went to them and asked them about it. And it was interesting because they didn't say, "Oh, no, we don't want that," or, "Oh, yes, we'd love to have that." They just kind of—they went along with me and never said yes, never said no. But they invited me out, and showed me around, and made me feel welcome without ever committing themselves one way or the other.

[00:30:53.71]

And as time got on and I wanted to get started working, I started pushing them a little harder. And then they invited me to talk with some of the young women. And they got some of the people who worked there, some of the guards there, to circulate a paper, and some questions asking them what kind of book they would like—no, what kind of painting, actually, this was not a book—kind of painting they would like to have and so on.

[00:31:29.91]

So I got feedback from them, and I got a chance to talk to them and stuff. Now, I knew, pretty much what I was going to do. But of course, I wanted to see whether or not that was not going to be a good idea. And what they wanted was, one woman said she wanted a picture of a long road leading out of there. But generally speaking, what they all wanted was some image that could show that women could live together and work together and be together. And I thought that was kind of interesting, that they wanted to show some kind of solidarity. And so I did this quilt. It's a painting. I keep calling it a quilt. Everything with me is a quilt.

[00:32:23.35]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And especially if you've just been looking at them.

[00:32:26.11]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, since we've been just looking at them. I did this painting. It's eight by eight feet. As a matter of fact, it's the last oil painting I ever did.

[00:32:36.73]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Really?

[00:32:37.15]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. It finished me off. Because after I got finished with it, I couldn't get it on the elevator. So it had to be walked downstairs. And it just made me realize that those big paintings—as long as I'm living here, those big paintings were just too difficult. And there was no way I could handle that.

[00:33:03.52]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So that just added to that argument.

[00:33:04.84]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Uh-huh [affirmative]. It's just going too far. So we finally—we got it downstairs. The guys from—the day they came to pick it up, and this is to go ahead of my story a little bit, they sent a big truck from the prison, the Rikers Island Correctional Institution or center or whatever they want to call it. They sent this big truck, which is what they, I guess, transport prisoners around in, to pick up the—and I told them. I said, "Bring a truck big enough because it's pretty big." And they said, "Listen, you don't have to worry about that. I don't think it'll be too big to get in this truck." And that was right.

[00:33:46.99]

Anyway, the quilt—the painting—it is divided into eight sections, I believe, because I was very much into dividing my paintings into sections and then painting in the various different sections. And in these different sections, I deal with different aspects of women's life. Now, some of it has to do with some aspects of their life that haven't happened yet, that hadn't happened yet, like I show a woman policewoman. And we didn't have women policemen there.

[00:34:28.12]

And so I remember I sent my daughter over to the police station to ask them for a copy of their shield, because I wanted to give a real policewoman, policeman's, shield. And I wanted a copy of the shield, and I wanted some other information. And so Michele told them what she was doing there and what I was doing.

[00:34:54.03]

And so the captain said, "Well, now, I don't think your mother should give these women the idea that they can be policewomen. Because, first of all, they're in jail. And we don't endorse people who've had prison records being policemen. And furthermore, we don't have any women policemen, anyway." So Michele said—

[00:35:25.57]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Catch 22.

[00:35:26.02]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. So Michele told me about it. As a matter of fact, they called me on the phone to tell me. And I said, "Well, a lot of these women who are there have not been convicted of a crime. They may, in fact, be innocent. In fact, they are innocent until proven guilty, right?" I said, "So, some of them may end up policewomen. Because some may be innocent. Am I right?" "Well, yeah, except that we don't have women policemen." I said, "Well, you're going to." [Laughs.] I wonder if he remembers that. [Laughs.]

[00:36:09.01]

Anyway, then I have a woman running for president and getting it. And she's standing in front of the shield of the President of the United States, standing up there with her husband and her kids, like the men standing with their wives and their kids, but she's standing there with her husband and kids. And at that time, at that very time, Shirley Chisholm was trying to run for president. So I used that as a kind of impetus to suggest that a woman could be president.

[00:36:49.01]

And then I have women playing basketball. And one of them is wearing Wilt Chamberlain's number, which I can't remember what it was. But I've got women playing basketball. Then I have a woman dancer, also playing a drum, not that that's something that women don't do. It's something that women do, and do well, and grow into old age doing it beautifully. So I wanted to applaud that.

[00:37:20.85]

I have a woman and child, a woman with a baby. I have a woman doctor, helping a group to understand more about drug addiction. And I have a woman bus driver because we didn't have women bus drivers then, either. Isn't that something? So the day of the installation, it was a big party at the prison. And I was allowed to invite, they said, 20 people. I invited 200. And they came. [Laughs.] So it was fun.

[00:37:57.94]

So the day of the installation, I'm standing up there in front of the painting. And one of the guards and some of the inmates are standing there. And one of the inmates says to me, "Why do the women all look so sad?" Because I was very careful not to make them smile. Because this was the first painting that I ever done which had all women in it—consciously women—doing things that don't necessarily have to do with women. They're just things in your life. And I didn't want them all smiling.

[00:38:40.75]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, looking like Miss America.

[00:38:42.47]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, looking like Miss America. So if they're not smiling, they're frowning, you see, in this woman's mind. So she said, "How come they all look so sad," meaning they're not smiling. So before I could say anything, the guard said, "Because they're in prison." [Laughs.]

[00:39:04.38]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Wow.

[00:39:10.41]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So that gives you a little idea of what some of those inmates have to deal with, kind of mentality. I mean, and she wasn't joking. It was not a joke. She meant, "They are in prison." She didn't understand. She didn't understand anything about the painting.

[00:39:27.43]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Was the guard a female guard?

[00:39:29.41]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. But she didn't get it she didn't get it. [Laughs.]

[00:39:37.24]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: No, right. Where was it hung?

[00:39:39.13]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It's hung in the Women's House of Detention on Rikers Island in the area that is right outside the auditorium. And it's right near the commissary, where they—now, they used to meet there constantly. They'd go get their candy or cookies or whatever they're getting, and then they would be right in that area.

[00:40:07.45]

But since the painting went up, they no longer have access to that area unless there's company there. Then, I understand, when there's company there, they put a big table, and then they cater it there, and they use the paintings as backdrop. And when they have shows and things, they meet there as, kind of outer lobby for the auditorium.

[00:40:31.75]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: The auditorium is used by inmates, you mean, for special—

[00:40:34.94]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. It's for all kinds of performances. Or it's inmate performances. And sometimes it's people who are invited there to entertain the inmates. And so they're very prideful of it. It's for special—it's for show. It's like a family thing that you pull out when company comes. Other than that, they can see it through the glass door. There's glass doors all around. They can see it. When I first did it, I didn't want to cover it with Plexi. I wanted it left out until they did a little writing on it. [They laugh.]

[00:41:17.34]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And then—they were ahead of you.

[00:41:21.55]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They were ahead of me, ahead of me. So the supervisor called me—superintendent called me, and said, "I think you should come over here and cover this painting because they're beginning to do a little writing." So I said, "Oh, I'm dev—" so I came over. And fortunately, they had written in crayon. So I brought a little turpentine with me. And she was amazed to see how easily I got it off. Well, it had been—I had done it very carefully, and it was very thin painting. But it wasn't going to take a lot of writing. It was very light writing they did. You could hardly see it. So I got it off. And then I had it covered with Plexiglas. And it's been covered ever since.

[00:42:12.99]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And it's still there, as far as you know.

[00:42:15.42]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Still there. The men's House of Detention has—there are several prisons over there, you know. The men's House of Detention has a painting by Dalí, Salvador Dalí. And it's in the cafeteria where they eat. And it's sort of behind bars. They didn't put Plexi on it. They just put, sort of like bars, and kind of—unless they've done it lately. But mine is not like that. If I remember correctly, it's up high, and it's got some, I don't know, some grate, or something over it. You can hardly see the painting itself. Mine is down, on eye level, with Plexi on top of it. And it takes up a whole wall.

[00:43:15.52]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Huh. Did you do any performances or anything like that?

[00:43:18.97]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No. I wasn't doing any performances in '71. That was before performance time.

[00:43:24.43]



CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, it was. Okay. But I'm surprised that—you also weren't doing that many narrative-type of paintings at that point, were you?

[00:43:34.80]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No. That's true.

[00:43:35.57]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So that must have been sort of an unusual—

[00:43:37.50]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Hey, you know something? That is sort of the first narrative-type—

[00:43:42.01]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: The storytelling.

[00:43:42.85]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, right. Yeah, it is. I never thought of it that way, but that's exactly what it is.

[00:43:48.88]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Because you were coming out of doing the paintings that were showing, like at the Spectrum Gallery, right, which were more [inaudible]—

[00:43:58.29]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. I had just finished the "American People" series, which was '63 to '67. And then, from '67 to '69 was the "Black Light" series. And they were, none of them, storytelling-type things, no. They weren't. This was the first. This was '70. It was installed in '71. And right after that, in '71, '72, I began doing the thangkas. Yeah, because I said I was through with the oil paintings on stretched canvas. It was just too much. So I started—I did a series called "The Feminist Series," which was paintings on canvas framed in cloth. But I did them. First ones I did. And I glued the fabric around. They're very crudely done. And the image is a landscape. And I call them political landscapes.

[00:45:24.72]

And then, in the sky, I did my first writing. And the writing is quotations from Black women dated from slavery to '71, '72, when I did these series. And I got them from a book called *Black Women in White America* by Gerda Lerner. And I was really very impressed by that book, because there's a lot of things I saw in there I didn't even know Black women had written.

[00:46:03.05]

And so I figured, let me write these and put them on these paintings so other people can share these wonderful insights and ideas and these beautiful words. And that series, which was 20 paintings, traveled extensively from 1972, oh, to about 1982—traveled all over the country, a lot of different places. So that was one of the groups of paintings that traveled, that got rolled up and put in the trunk and traveled around.

[00:46:39.63]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And eventually, kind of, led into the quilt—work doing quilts, right?

[00:46:43.48]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. See, those were, really, my early quilts. But it would have never occurred to me to sew through the painting, you see?

[00:46:55.98]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You mean the painting was kind of sacred?

[00:46:58.20]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. You can't put stitches on the painting, you know? And then, right after that, in '72, I went to Europe. And it was at the Rijksmuseum that I saw these thangkass. And then I said, Oh, that's what you're doing. You're making—in fact, Camille Billops told me when I came back. She said, "You're making thangkass."

[00:47:23.43]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, really?

[00:47:24.49]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. She said, you should go down to the Asian Institute and see them. And I said, "Well, I did, as a matter of fact, see these paintings in at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam." I didn't know they were called thangkass. But I saw them. They were paintings framed in cloth. The cloth was beautiful brocades. They were all rotten because they were a thousand years old, from 14—

[END OF TRACK AAA\_ringgo89\_6385\_m]

[00:00:02.82]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You wouldn't normally think of them as being framed in cloth because they are now framed in glass with wood, and all of that. But if you look, you can see the remnants of this very rich brocade that obviously had framed these very beautiful paintings that were used by the Buddhists as kind of prayer images. So when I came home, the idea was that mother would sew my thangkass. So I took her. We went down to these galleries, and she looked at the way these things were done. And then she came home and devised her own method of framing my paintings and cloth. And I did that in—from '72, '73, '74. I did three series of paintings framed and clothed with my mother.

The first one was—I did, which was the "Feminist" series. And then the second one was the "Slave Rape" series, which mother did. And then the third one was "Windows of the Wedding." And that had to do with a kind of background—backdrops that I made for—for some sculptures, a whole set of couples' sculptures, which was like a performance but not a performance. It's the beginning of my ideas about using art to tell stories, and set a scene, and stuff like that.

[00:01:56.16]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. So when you did start making the characters, figures in three dimensions, before you were doing performances—yeah, they're not really so much sculptures as they were dolls that you've made up stories around?

[00:02:13.55]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, and I wanted them to move. And people called them puppets, which they weren't. But they hung from strings, invisible strings. And they really were the real beginning of trying to tell a story, trying to make it come to life—make the art come to life.

[00:02:39.76]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. And their limbs would move.

[00:02:42.13]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They could.

[00:02:42.52]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: They weren't rigid, right?

[00:02:43.03]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They were not rigid. No. They were made so that they really had a kind of

ambiance about them. And as a matter of fact, if you walked by them and made a little wind, they would move with you. Yes.

[00:02:55.36]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And you did think of them—when you made them, did you make their faces according to the way you were visualizing the character in—to whom something was happening in particular? Or—

[00:03:05.98]

FAITH RINGGOLD: The faces were made of coconut. The faces were made from coconuts, because coconuts are wonderful. They look like people. And I would get these coconuts, and dry them out in the oven, take the—split them, take all the meat out, and make sure they were good and dry, and all the oil was out. And then I would put them back together, and paint them, and then put the hair on them. Did you ever see any of those?

[00:03:43.81]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, I've seen—well, I've certainly seen lots of photographs.

[00:03:46.18]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Okay. So I really love that series, as a matter of fact. And then the bodies—I had a lot of trouble with the bodies, because what I did was I sprayed the bodies and sewed the bodies. But spraying is no good on foam rubber because it eventually comes off. The paint comes off. So it always has to be covered with cloth. And if it's covered with cloth, it seems to almost last forever.

[00:04:12.51]

FAITH RINGGOLD: The ones that I covered with cloth are doing fine. So I have that whole group, and I did—I did five or six families. And they were all out in California because the heads are fine. But what's not fine is the bodies. But the way I constructed the bodies, I can make new bodies and this time cover them with cloth because all the joints are there. See, I have the hips. It's like a skeleton underneath.

[00:04:46.18]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:04:46.60]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And so it would be very easy for me to put them all together.

[00:04:50.83]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And what's the skeleton part made of?

[00:04:53.02]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Rope. Rope and—what do you call it? Basket—

[00:05:09.90]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Wicker?

[00:05:11.22]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Wicker. Yes. This thick wicker for the shoulders and for the torso area, the hip, and then from that big pieces of cord that are knotted for the knees, and knotted for the ankles, and knotted for the elbows, and for the wrists. And that's how when you put the skin on, which would be the foam rubber covered with cloth, they have a kind of way of moving. And the arms don't go in a way that they're not supposed to go. They swing, but they don't swing against the bone.

[00:05:42.96]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, right. Interesting. So you cover them, and it's the foam rubber that's having the most problems.

[00:05:49.55]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, so I took all the foam rubber off. And so what I have now is the heads and the skeletons. And what I need to do is—I can get an assistant to do that. I need to cut the bodies out and then have somebody sew them together again, which could be done rather easily. I must do that, too, because all the clothes are out there, and they've all been washed and ironed. And my mother made all those clothes.

[00:06:22.57]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, wow.

[00:06:23.17]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So I'm very close to those clothes, and I want to get those back together. See, they won't be in this show coming up.

[00:06:30.16]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Because of this? Because they're not—

[00:06:31.77]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They're not ready. But they'll be in another show.

[00:06:37.45]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Did you think of them as—they weren't the first three-dimensional things you'd done because you had done masks.

[00:06:44.89]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No. I started with—I started in '73, making little dolls out of gourds. I got these dried gourds, dried them, and painted the heads. Every year at this time, I'd be running all over the city, buying gourds. And then I would hang them up and dry them for all the season. And then I would paint them, and use those as heads, with tubes, and make these little dolls.

[00:07:23.08]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:07:23.53]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And so that was the beginning of the dolls. And then I got bigger and bigger.

[00:07:31.09]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:07:31.63]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And then I made—and then I started the masks. The masks also started concurrently with the dolls.

[00:07:36.16]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, okay.

[00:07:37.34]

FAITH RINGGOLD: The masks in '73. And I wanted the masks for—remember I told you when I do a retrospective—for instance, when I did the one at the studio museum, I wanted something new and different to put in. So I did the "Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?" When I

did the ten-year retrospective at Rutgers, which was my first retro, in '73, I wanted something new, so I did the masks.

[00:08:06.11]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Right.

[00:08:07.72]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And those are the masks that I had been doing with my students.

[00:08:10.94]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. And you still weren't combining them with performances yet?

[00:08:14.69]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No. My— [Cross talk.] Not to cut you off. But my 25-year retrospective that's coming up now, I don't have anything new to put in. I didn't do anything new.

[00:08:30.25]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Well, the quilts seem like such a rich thing that you're still working on. You don't need anything new. [They laugh.]

[00:08:40.24]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I don't know. I had thought that I—and I said, Faith, really, why don't you just be quiet? So I decided that, with my book contract and all these different things, leave it alone. It's okay. I don't need to do it. I'm not there yet. You understand what I'm saying? If there's a new development coming, I don't know what it is. I don't have a clue as to what it could be. I could be right in the middle of it. I'm not aware of it right now.

[00:09:12.51]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. And if you felt the need for some brand-new thing, you'd be doing it.

[00:09:15.75]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Uh-huh [affirmative], and I don't. So there it is.

[00:09:18.78]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. No, it seems to me like there's a lot more to do there with that group. Anyway, they're great, rich. [Faith laughs.] So the sculptural pieces—I'm trying to get into—there wasn't any other kind of sculpture that you were particularly keying into at that point. People weren't doing the figure that much anyway, and certainly not like that.

[00:09:45.58]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No. I was doing—I was really doing the figure, the couples. I was doing the rolling and the folding of the foam rubber to form the different parts of the body. I didn't do much stuffing, you know, the kind of the stuffing things together. I did one piece like that that was two street people. I was into couples a lot.

[00:10:12.45]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:10:12.99]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And I did these two street people, Zora and Fish. They're going to be in my retrospective.

[00:10:18.48]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, yeah.

[00:10:19.95]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Do you remember—you haven't seen them? And they were stuffed because I wanted that cripply kind of body that comes from being in the street. And that lended itself to that. And they also had coconut heads. They had the coconut heads. Now, I didn't stop with the coconuts until '85. I made the Harlem series of masks, Adam Clayton Powell and Martin Luther King. And I was trying to do some imagery that would speak to Harlem, as they were about that. And so I needed—I needed a woman who everybody would know, who would be a Harlem image. I couldn't find one, so I used Mama. Okay?

[00:11:25.32]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:11:26.13]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And so I made those images, and I wanted to make faces. I didn't want to use the coconuts anymore. I wanted instead to use—to make my features by cutting the features out, and folding and sewing to make a likeness. And so I—are you getting warm? Is it kind of hot in here?

[00:11:53.25]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I'm not too bad. But—

[00:11:54.23]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, you're not?

[00:11:55.13]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: But it is—

[00:11:55.97]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, it's a little bit hot for me. Maybe it's just because I'm doing too much talking. But anyhow, so I did that, but I also didn't cover it with cloth. So all those heads have to come out and be done again and this time covered with cloth because the oxygen—it becomes oxidized. Or something happens and—

[00:12:21.62]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: They dry out.

[00:12:22.31]

FAITH RINGGOLD: —it crumbles. Yes.

[00:12:23.54]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. You mean it was just open to the air. That's what it was?

[00:12:30.48]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, but it was sprayed with enamel paint. The foam rubber was sprayed with enamel paint, and it just doesn't work.

[00:12:39.96]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. And how did these relate to the latest one? I guess the Purple series is the latest ones that I've seen.

[00:12:46.08]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They're covered with cloth.

[00:12:47.73]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: With cloth?

[00:12:48.11]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Uh-huh [affirmative]. They're these foam rubber heads, and they're little dolls. And I started that whole thing in 1979. I did a whole series called "The Ringgold Doll."

[00:13:01.91]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: The Ringgold—

[00:13:02.81]

FAITH RINGGOLD: The Ringgold Doll.

[00:13:03.38]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay, right.

[00:13:04.63]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And they were like—they were dolls from—they were an international series. They were from all over the world, men and women. And also, I did the Carters, because they were the president then. And I wanted to do—I wanted to do portraits. So I wanted somebody very recognizable.

[00:13:34.91]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:13:35.93]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And the people that I wanted to do were live. I wanted to do Muhammad Ali, but I couldn't catch him. I tried everybody I knew, trying to get to him to get his okay, couldn't get it. And I wanted to do—it was somebody else I wanted to do. I couldn't catch them. So who I did get was the Carters.

[00:14:00.23]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You had to get permission from them?

[00:14:01.40]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. I called the White House. And they said, "Fine. Write us a letter, saying what you want to do, and we'll send you a photograph." And they did. They sent me two photographs. So I said, "Hey, let me do them."

[00:14:22.02]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: They're very—

[00:14:22.76]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They're cute.

[00:14:23.39]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. [Laughs.] [Inaudible]

[00:14:23.90]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, everybody knows who they are. And so Mother said, "Oh, that'll be wonderful, because we'll make her a pretty dress, and we'll put him in a robe." We'll make her a—we have them in robes. She has a pretty, lacy robe, and he has a flannel robe on.

[00:14:46.88]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, uh-huh [affirmative]. Instead of a suit.

[00:14:47.87]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. Mother thought that up because we couldn't make pants because these dolls don't have legs. And we didn't want to put him in a skirt because he's not the type. [They laugh.] So we had to put him in a robe. And then the little girl, what's her name?

[00:15:03.99]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Amy.

[00:15:04.56]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Amy. Amy has on a nice little robe too. So it was the three of them, so I did—have you ever seen those?

[00:15:10.54]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, I've seen pictures of them.

[00:15:13.92]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They were funny.

[00:15:14.69]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, I like them.

[00:15:15.48]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, they were funny. So I did those. See, that was all 1979. So the purple dolls are really coming from that same genre. Now, the new doll that I would do—now, that's what I wanted to do. It's not new, but it would be new in a sense, but not a big sense because it's not a new idea. It's just new for me. I would like to do some composition heads that would be dolls, because my mother made me endless clothes for my dolls.

[00:15:50.04]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That you still have unused, you mean?

[00:15:55.40]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Endless clothes. So I am dedicated to having another series of dolls, but this time with the composition heads.

[00:16:05.64]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: How do you mean?

[00:16:06.77]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You know, made of porcelain so that I would do the head, and then I'd have it reproduced.

[00:16:11.77]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, okay.

[00:16:14.39]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I'd do the head, the hands, and the feet.

[00:16:17.90]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So it would be a molding process? You'd mold it with clay?

[00:16:21.05]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Absolutely. Yeah, I have to find out how I can do that because that is something I really want to do, very much so. [Cross talk.] I got the clothes.



[00:16:34.73]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You got the—right, you just haven't quite figured out the subject yet or who they would be or something like—

[00:16:38.90]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, I can do that. That's no problem. The problem is, who will do it, you know, which foundry will I go to, what the process will be, that type of thing. Oh, that is a project that's coming up. I would project that project for 1991, because I can't do it now.

[00:17:04.76]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, so it won't be in the retrospective.

[00:17:09.89]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Uh-uh [negative.] Unless—hmm—no, don't give me any ideas. [They laugh.] No, I can't. I would love to have it done before, but I don't think so. I don't see how I could do it. But it will be done.

[00:17:24.09]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:17:30.64]

FAITH RINGGOLD: There are companies that do this.

[00:17:32.05]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Right. Right. Would you set them up sometimes in different ways? If you had something that's hanging on a wall, they'd always be the same way. You'd hang it on a wall. But would you put the sculptures or the dolls sometimes in different positions, things like that?

[00:17:46.45]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Sure. I did that a lot. I did that a lot, and that was my beginning performances really.

[00:17:54.03]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You could mold them and play with them.

[00:17:55.96]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Absolutely, put them in different groups, and stuff like that. I did that because they went out exhibiting all over, and I did—and then people would do it, too, because they would install the work. And then they would put them in different kinds of ways.

[00:18:18.45]

All this was pre-performance. Not until 1976 did I do the first performance piece, which was "The Wake and Resurrection of the Bicentennial Negro." That came about in '76, but that was after '73, '74, and '75. I'm making all these dolls, and these figures, and all this, and the paintings, the backdrops, and putting them all together to form these kinds of storytelling type installations.

[00:18:50.79]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And that one had the—there were dolls. There was a performance, and there were also dolls of that piece, weren't there, "The Wake and the Resurrection—"

[00:18:59.79]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. Yes. There were—there was Mama and Nana.

[00:19:04.80]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, and they were life-size, weren't they?

[00:19:06.75]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. The two weeping—they are the ones that were in *Art News*.

[00:19:10.05]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, right.

[00:19:10.74]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And then Bena and Buba, the two young people who died. And yes. And they had the soft faces. The faces were made of cloth.

[00:19:22.27]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, right.

[00:19:24.16]

FAITH RINGGOLD: 1976. And—and the—and then the masks, I made several different kinds of masks, but one particular kind that were worn by the main characters. So Bena and Buba also had a mask, and Mama had a mask. And then there was Pop and Auntie. And so all of those masks came into play when the performance was being done.

[00:19:57.64]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. And who would you usually play?

[00:20:00.55]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I didn't play anybody.

[00:20:01.54]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, you didn't play any of them?

[00:20:02.23]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I was the director.

[00:20:03.91]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh. But you are—nowadays you play them?

[00:20:06.81]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Now. But the first performance I did was in 1980, and that was my autobiography. And it was always in mask. I never performed unless I was in mask until "Change 1" in 1986, '87, when I did my weight loss.

[00:20:31.29]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And that's the first time you came out of the mask?

[00:20:32.84]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Performed without a mask. Right.

[00:20:38.35]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's because you had sort of turned yourself into—your own life into a story by then, right?

[00:20:42.61]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Maybe. I don't know. Oh, I don't know what was going on then. A whole lot was going on. I don't know what it meant. I don't know why shedding weight made me suddenly feel as though I no longer needed a mask.

[00:21:06.31]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Huh. But you already had shed weight before you would perform that—

[00:21:12.22]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No.

[00:21:13.54]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: —when you were in the process of it, I guess.

[00:21:15.40]

FAITH RINGGOLD: In '86, I was losing the weight. In '86, I was preparing for my show in '87 —January of '87, in which I would have lost this weight. But before I lost it, people started asking for the performance even before!

[00:21:31.78]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:21:32.92]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And I had already lost some but not all. So I started doing it early in '86. In October of '86, I did my first performance. And then I did it again maybe November, maybe December. And then I did it in January. That was "Change 1." And then "Change 2" was done in '88, and that was really maintaining weight. And "Change 3" is the completion of the process, the loss of the last dregs of fat, hopefully [they laugh], and a great celebration. The first performance I will do of "Change 3" will be January 12 in San Antonio, Texas.

[00:22:27.47]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah?

[00:22:28.07]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, I will be doing my first "Change 3."

[00:22:33.13]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And do you have a story already around—a storyline for that?

[00:22:36.73]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, "Change 1" was really going back to each decade and talking about what I did, how I ate, and what I did, and all of that stuff, because that's what I did. I got all the photographs from the '30s, when I was born, and I looked at them. And I said, well, see, you weren't fat. This is what you were doing. This is what your life was like. My mother, my father, my brother and sister, everybody's there.

[00:23:08.74]

Then I got the '40s out and looked at how I was in the '40s, wasn't fat there either. Then I got —thankfully for me, my mother photographed us constantly as a child. Sunday, the photographer came to the house. In those days, photographer came to the house with this big thing. And he got behind it and puff of smoke, and he put a thing over his head and all that. Or we went to the studio. We also had beautiful studios, and we would either go to the studio with this background behind you. You'd sit there. But taking pictures was big in my family.

[00:23:50.64]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And these were formal portraits.

[00:23:52.62]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Formal portraits. And then my mother got a camera early on and started taking pictures. So we were photographed to death. So I have all these great photographs, you see, leading from the day I was born. Okay, so then I went through all those decades, got all the pictures out, and discovered that it was the '60s that I began to gain weight.

[00:24:18.15]

Yes, '60s. And then I could see what I was doing in the '60s. I got married again in the '60s. Kids were teenagers in the '60s. I went to Europe in the '60s. All that stuff is right there in the photographs. By the '70s, I was hopelessly overweight. And in the '80s, I really reached—I did it big. I did it big in the '80s. [They laugh.] And '80s I also lost the weight.

[00:24:45.18]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:24:45.63]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So by 1989, I will have completed the weight loss, which is perfect, because 1990 I'm starting a new decade. And I will be 130 pounds. That's definite. And so that's what I started. That's what the challenge was in the "Change" quilt, was to make that proclamation, to make it public, and to do performances about it, and make it stick. And it has worked for me, because I do have this public out there who comes to see, how is she? Did she gain it back? And the costume that I wear is very big and bulky, so they don't know what's under there.

[00:25:28.66]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: The end result—

[00:25:28.90]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They don't really know. Maybe she did gain it all back. You know what I mean? So anyway, in '83, for the "Change 2," I made up all these songs that I sing, and a chant. "I can change. I can do it. I can change. You can too," and a whole lot of stuff. And the audience chants with me. And then I have other songs that I sang about each one of the decades. For the '30s, I sing the song, "Mama Made Me Do It."

It says, "My mother made me eat." You know how your mother says, "clean your plate." And I said, "piled my plate up high, right up to my eye, made me eat to grow strong. My mother was never wrong." [Singing:] "Mama made me do it / Mama made me do it / Mama taught me to be good / Said, shut up, girl, and eat your food." So I sing all those songs.

And for the '40s, I sing a song called "I Hate to Exercise." I really hate to exercise. [Laughs.] I can't stand doing exercises. And I just go on—And then in the '50s, it's greasy food, because that's when I got into eating greasy food. Boyfriends used to come and bring me pork chop sandwiches instead of flowers. [They laugh.] And I talk about that. And then in the '50s, it's greasy food.

[00:27:20.71]

The '60s is trouble, I think. I talk about trouble in the '60s. My kids are teenagers, and it's—oh, trouble will make you eat. "Trouble will make you eat. Run out in the street, looking for a treat, a treat to eat, to eat a treat. Trouble!" [Laughs.] And then in the '70s, it's pain. And in the '80s, it's, "I really have to change." And I talk about—the song has to do with changing totally, saying, this is the time to do it. And I end with the whole chant. "I can change. I can do it. You can change. Just keep trying, and you'll do it." And I change that around. Now, for "Change 3," I think I'll be talking more about my success now. I won't go back to the past as much as I have been doing. I'll be talking—I'll be giving anecdotes about now, the kinds of things I do when I go out to eat.

[00:28:50.20]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that's interesting. [Inaudible]

[00:28:52.63]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Sharing all those really intimate things with the audience, and having some more songs, which I've started to write. But none of them come to my brain right now. And I have a drummer, who comes with me, and she does the music.

[00:29:09.91]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: But otherwise, you're the only person in these performances, right?

[00:29:12.76]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And then the different thing that I—and I invite the audience to come up on the stage with me and dance. What I plan to do now is—because walking is my chief exercise. And it's such a great exercise, too. I want to explore, with them, different walks.

[00:29:33.60]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, yeah, you mentioned that. Right.

[00:29:34.87]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. So what we'll do is we'll form this big chain, and we'll walk all through the audience, carry it out into the audience.

[00:29:41.96]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. So you walk regularly—I mean, go walking.

[00:29:45.50]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, I try. I do. I try to keep my body moving.

[00:29:52.43]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:29:53.76]

FAITH RINGGOLD: [Laughs.] So hard. So hard. And I do the stationary bicycle, but it's not as good. And I really need a whole gym, but where in the hell am I going to put it in here?

[00:30:06.86]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:30:08.09]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I don't really have any room for it, but it would be nice to have. Well, it would be nice to have one of those gyms, one of those really compact gyms. I was just at somebody's house who had one. It's wonderful. You can do everything. I would say it's about this big.

[00:30:26.53]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: [Inaudible] here.

[00:30:27.22]

FAITH RINGGOLD: What's this? This is 11—this is about 33 by 33. Yeah, this is—each one of these I think is 11.

[00:30:35.50]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, okay.

[00:30:36.13]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So it's about this big. And you can do everything with it.

[00:30:42.88]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Everything's—

[00:30:43.73]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Everything's there.

[00:30:44.33]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: —all in one.

[00:30:45.17]

FAITH RINGGOLD: All in one.

[00:30:47.91]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Do you think of yourself as—this performance puts people like Richard Long to shame, who does the long walks in England and stuff. It's a very conceptual kind of performance, but it's not—all those seem to be very much more about—I don't know—documenting what's already taken place, I guess, or something as it's happening, taking the walk. And he brings back rocks or mud from where he took it. But yours is much more—somehow it's in that same category, because it involves real life. But—

[00:31:28.60]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah. It—

[00:31:30.66]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: It's also forward. The fact of it being forward looking is kind of a unusual thing. I'm going to do something, and then doing it.

[00:31:36.67]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. And also, Even though I will be celebrating the end of my weight loss in "Change 3," I'm looking forward moving in another direction. I'm trying to deal next with relationships, because I think that that is at the base of problems that people have, generally speaking, and mine, particularly, with eating.

[00:32:07.03]

I would like to be able to deal more positively with anger, you know. [Laughs.] I really want to be able to handle relationships with people in a more positive, better way. I'm going to be dealing with that in my performances in connection with food. I probably won't ever leave the food, because the food's going to always be a problem. But so are the relationships going to be. I want to have a better way of dealing with anger. When you get angry with somebody, because they've really done you dirt, how do you deal with that? What do you do with it, outside from eating over it—

[00:32:56.23]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, right, right.

[00:32:57.25]

FAITH RINGGOLD: —because eating is good for that, you know?

[00:33:01.03]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:33:01.96]

FAITH RINGGOLD: But what's happening is that long after the situation is over, the fact is there for you to think about and see.

[00:33:10.09]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And make you feel worse.

[00:33:11.65]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. So I want to—the next performance will be dealing with that in connection with the food.

[00:33:20.57]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Have you worked some things out? You feel like you're at a place—or you hope to do it through the performances?

[00:33:25.67]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I will do it through the performance. I haven't worked a thing out yet. [They laugh.] I'm still doing my stuff the old way. No, I have to find ways of letting go of—letting go a whole lot of things that are in your head that need to come out. I think it's the kind of thing I could do with an audience. See, some things I can do with other people better than I can do by myself.

[00:33:53.54]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, because of the feedback.

[00:33:55.29]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. I can't do it. This weight thing, I couldn't have done it without these people. Without that performance, I don't think I could have done it. If I didn't have that performance to look forward to, I couldn't have done it.

[00:34:12.32]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Is it mostly just the fact of the people being there? It's not necessarily anything they say back to you. Or is it? Do they tend to have an impact?

[00:34:20.78]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I can't afford to let myself down in public.

[00:34:26.42]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:34:26.96]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I just can't do it. I'm not going to do it. I know I have no excuse that is acceptable. And I hate excuses anyway. So what am I going to do? I have made this proclamation. I have said I'm going to do something, and I am not going to go back on my word. I am going to do it. It's a good thing for me to do, and I'm doing it. Now, if I had not done that, I would have lost some, but not like this.

[00:35:00.71]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Right.

[00:35:01.70]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It's the thing that keeps me going. Because I was just in Atlanta, and they made a big meal, and everybody—and I love—and another thing I realized, I love sitting around socially, eating with people. I love that. I really—and I can't do it now, but I love it. And so that I'm planning now—and that has to do with relationships. See?

[00:35:31.46]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Elaborate on that.

[00:35:32.82]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, it's the relationship of doing—it's having people to do that with, spending time setting that up, saying, okay, I'll go out to dinner with you. Okay, you come have dinner with me. Okay, let's meet, do this, that, the other. It's relationships with people.

[00:35:49.97]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Social.

[00:35:51.95]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And I really like that. I like—in fact, I like only that. I would like—I know people who, if they're not having dinner with somebody, they won't eat. They say, "Oh, I forgot to eat yesterday because there was nobody around, and I was busy. And I just didn't eat." I think that's fabulous, because I wouldn't care if there was nobody around or if there was somebody around. [They laugh.] When time comes to eat, I'm eating. But I want to be like that, and I think I am like that. But I'm not in touch with my being like that. I want to develop more of being like that, because I think that is really what I am. I don't think I like eating alone. I don't like eating alone.

[00:36:39.66]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Well, sometimes I think when one eats alone, you're replacing the absent person with food.

[00:36:45.33]

FAITH RINGGOLD: The absent—there you go. Right. And I don't want to do that anymore. So I'm setting up situations that will preclude my doing that in California and in New York. I'm fixing it up. And see, I have a husband who, A, doesn't eat. Well, I mean, he eats, but he eats to live. He doesn't live to eat, like me. Yeah. So he can enjoy good food, and he eats like a normal person. It's the only thing that's normal about him is his eating. [They laugh.]

He will sit down, and he knows when he's full. And he knows when he's hungry, and he knows when he isn't. But if he's hungry and he has something to do, he'll go do that instead of eating. You understand? See, I will find a way. Last night, he went out here to work, and I had made him some of his favorite food, which I'm not even going to tell you what it is because it's terrible. [Laughs.] It's not at all healthy food. But every now and then, like a good wife, I give him what I know he really likes.

[00:37:57.72]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Did you not get to eat that?

[00:37:59.09]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, no, I did not eat any of that. That's one reason why I went to give it to him, because I can't have it. I can't have—I can just watch him eat it! Well, it was too late for him to have it. And he had to go. So he left it.

[00:38:16.23]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Wow.

[00:38:17.79]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I would have found a way to take that food with me! [Laughs.] You kidding? I would have found a way to get that out of here.

[00:38:25.08]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, right.



[00:38:26.81]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Not him. No. And that is good for me in the sense that I can never say what a lot of women who have problems with weight say. "Oh, well, I have to make all this cake and all these pies, and my husband loved this, that, and the other. And I have to have—" I can give him anything. It doesn't have to be this, can be that.

[00:38:48.21]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It can be my most diet food. It can be salad. He loves it, no problem. So I can't blame it on him, ever. So that's good that I don't have somebody that I live with who keeps pushing food in my face. But on the other hand, I do have to—because he does have this way, I do have to make sure that I have enough people to eat with.

[00:39:16.17]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:39:16.93]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You understand what I'm saying? So therefore I have to work on other relationships, because I have a tendency to only live—and I've done it for years—live within my family, just the people who are close to me, who I'm related to. That's it.

[00:39:33.27]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And not make an effort to—

[00:39:34.61]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That's right, and that's not good. That's not good at all. And I'm working on all those things. I'm working on them. But I think a lot of women do that. And then they wake up one day, and either the husband dies or leaves them. And the kids grow up and leave them, and they're sitting there with no one. Of course, that won't be my situation, because I am a public person. I'm out in the world. So I have people that I know and all, like that. But still, those relationships need to be developed.

[00:40:05.89]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:40:06.27]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And so I'm working on all of that.

[00:40:12.63]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. How do you organize your schedules and everything with your husband? What does he do? You go off for periods of time, and stuff.

[00:40:19.56]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. You mean when I go off, what happens to him?

[00:40:21.99]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:40:23.22]

FAITH RINGGOLD: He stays here.

[00:40:24.63]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: For the long—

[00:40:25.77]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You mean when I go to California?

[00:40:27.27]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: California, yeah.

[00:40:28.20]

FAITH RINGGOLD: He stays in New York. As a matter of fact, he has never been to California. And that's not such a great idea, I don't think. But he has never been out there. He's one of these people who doesn't like to fly. And so consequently, he's not about to jump on a plane and run out like I do. I come for the weekend.

[00:40:55.41]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You're right back here.

[00:40:55.95]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, I go—I'm also here so much that it's—before he can turn around, good, I'm back, so I guess he figures it's okay. It is, and it isn't. It's okay, and it's not okay. I would like it if he came out. But he's not letting me tell him what to do, so he doesn't go.

[00:41:20.40]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:41:21.18]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So he stays here. In a way it's good because suppose he came out there, and liked it, and wanted to stay.

[00:41:29.95]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Then you'd have—then you'd be—

[00:41:31.72]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Then I'd be in trouble, wouldn't I? Because I don't have a base here.

[00:41:35.80]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:41:37.72]

FAITH RINGGOLD: He's the base here.

[00:41:39.16]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:41:40.76]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So you understand what I'm saying? If he went out there, then who would be here? [Laughs.]

[00:41:46.51]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:41:48.15]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So it's good that he doesn't want to—and if he ever came out there, quiet as a cat, he might never want to come back because it is Never-Neverland.

[00:42:01.69]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:42:02.86]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And I always lived right on the beach. He loves the water. And he doesn't mind the isolation.

[00:42:13.31]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Is he in the art field at all, or anything like that?

[00:42:16.87]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, he is not in the art world. Burdette works for General Motors in their plant in Tarrytown. And he's been out there for years, and years, and years, way before we ever got married, sort of stuck. And he's managed to not be resentful of the fact that I guess he put his life and aspirations secondary to taking care of me and my two daughters from my first marriage, and being the stable, dependable breadwinner for us all so that I could do what I want to do.

[00:43:10.69]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:43:12.31]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So he's done that. He can—for instance, anytime he wants to, he could retire. He could leave now that we're on even keel, but he doesn't feel that way. He feels like we're still right back there with the kids, and they're young, and they're in private school, and we need the money, when we're not in that situation. But he doesn't feel that way. He still feels like he's still struggling—can't stop struggling. That's bad when you can't—when you don't have to, and you still think you do.

[00:43:49.72]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, right, right. So he was there all the time? When you were bringing up your daughters, he was their father?

[00:43:54.61]

FAITH RINGGOLD: He's been my backbone all the time. So it's a hard—it's—it's not hard. It's easy in a way. But it is hard, because I guess in a lot of ways we take each other for granted. He takes me for granted. He thinks I'll always be here. He doesn't have to worry about me, and I feel like I don't have to worry about him.

[00:44:20.30]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. So you do kind of come and go.

[00:44:23.12]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Pass in the night. [Laughs.] Yeah, we don't—I don't think we think that we will ever get tired of each other. I don't know. Maybe we are. Maybe we don't think we are. I don't know. We've been together 27 years.

[00:44:46.19]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that's a long—

[00:44:48.20]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Been married 27 years.

[00:44:50.45]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Through all your different periods of doing things, must have been an awful lot of activity around the house a lot of times.

[00:44:56.96]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I married him in 1962, and I did my first mature work in 1963. So he is directly connected with my development as an artist. I felt secure enough that I could take on the idea of being an artist and being a mother, because I didn't want my children to suffer. And I had him to make sure that everything kept going on.

[00:45:28.15]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right.

[00:45:29.06]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So he's encouraged me. I don't think he thought it would go this far, though.

[00:45:35.27]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That your career would go that far?

[00:45:36.62]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No. He didn't think it was this serious. He just thought, well—

[00:45:40.88]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Is that a good thing?

[00:45:43.67]

FAITH RINGGOLD: What, that he didn't—

[00:45:45.14]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Is he interested in it enough that he thinks it's pretty—

[00:45:48.21]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes.

[00:45:48.51]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: —pretty good that things have worked out?

[00:45:49.56]

FAITH RINGGOLD: He never thought that it would go this far. He never thought that it was that serious. But he has—he doesn't—he's not one of these people who's, "rah rah, my wife, rah rah." No. But he makes it possible for everything to go on, doesn't get in the way of anything, ever.

[00:46:11.92]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:46:12.37]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So I like it like that. I don't want him—some women's husbands are extra encouraging of them. I don't want that. I don't really need that.

[00:46:25.81]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:46:27.48]

FAITH RINGGOLD: He is a silent partner on the art scene.

[00:46:31.70]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:46:32.15]

FAITH RINGGOLD: He stays out of it, but he's very open with his criticism of anything that he does not think is right in my art. He thinks he's a critic of my work.

[00:46:51.60]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:46:52.53]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And he is in a sense. He is in a sense. He'll tell me—when I did the portrait of Knox and the one of Maya, he said, "No, it's not ready yet. It's not ready. You got to do X, Y, and Z." And sometimes, I know it's not ready, but I don't want to be told that. You know what I mean? I know it isn't. But he's good that way. I don't let anything go out without his seeing it and okaying it, because I know he has my best interest at heart always. And so I always let him see everything and okay it.

[00:47:34.45]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[END OF TRACK AAA\_ringgo89\_6386\_m]

[00:00:02.36]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: [In progress:] —and Faith Ringgold.

[00:00:06.32]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Okay. We've known each other since I was 12 years old. We lived on the same street, and you could just say we grew up together.

[00:00:17.85]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:00:18.35]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So we—

[00:00:20.13]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So you knew him before your first marriage, even?

[00:00:23.45]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. Yes. But I also knew my first husband since I was 12.

[00:00:29.03]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, okay. [They laugh.]

[00:00:31.31]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So I have—both men that I married, I knew them since I was 12 years old, so that says a lot for my—

[00:00:39.20]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:00:40.16]

FAITH RINGGOLD: —daring pursuits. [Laughs.] I say, in a way it—it's kind of nice in that we don't have a whole lot of catching up to do.

[00:01:01.34]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Yeah, really.

[00:01:03.46]

FAITH RINGGOLD: [Laughs.] You know, because we kind of know each other.

[00:01:05.11]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Don't have to explain yourselves.

[00:01:05.29]

FAITH RINGGOLD: We don't have to explain ourselves, right, because we know each other. And we know each other's families, and we and we know a lot about each other. And so in a lot of my work, as I'm doing it, I use Burdette as my consultant a lot because he's coming from the same—he's coming from—he's a year older than me, and so we know the same things. We've been seeing, we've watched the same things happen, and we know a lot of the same things that I use in my work a lot. So I'm constantly—

[00:01:52.11]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, well, I'm sure if something didn't come out quite sounding genuine, that he would [inaudible].

[00:01:58.01]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, was very helpful on "The Bitter Nest."

[00:02:00.62]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh? Oh.

[00:02:01.61]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Uh-huh [affirmative], this story about this doctor, because there was a doctor that lived in his building, a Black woman doctor, who was the first Black woman doctor we ever knew. And her name was Dr. Chin, and he used to tell me stories about her because she had her office in his building. And so that story was coming somewhat from her. It's not like her at all, but it had that same kind of mystique, the kind of dues a Black woman played being a doctor back then.

[00:02:35.61]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, yeah.

[00:02:36.19]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You know? I also remember that his mother told me that her husband was sick. She was a gynecologist, Dr. Chin, and obviously a feminist, from the story I'm getting ready to tell you, and he was sick. And so she stopped by Dr. Chin's office, and she said "You know, my husband is having a problem with his X, Y, or Z—" I don't know what it was he was having—"and I'd like to bring him down to see you. Can you see him this afternoon?" She says, "Oh, no, I'm sorry, I never treat men."

[00:03:14.07]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Wow. [They laugh.]

[00:03:18.34]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So she tried to—

[00:03:22.54]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: She just went—

[00:03:23.66]

FAITH RINGGOLD: His mother tried to convince her that, well, you're a doctor. I mean, "What do you mean you don't treat men? I mean, this is an emergency." She says, "I never treat men."

[00:03:32.81]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Wow.

[00:03:34.24]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Said, "Have you ever seen any men patients coming in here?" She says, "No, as a matter of fact, I haven't." She said, "Well, I never treat men," and she didn't treat him either. [Laughs.]

[00:03:44.59]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I hope he's all right.

[00:03:45.76]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, Dr. Chin was something else. Well, my character wasn't like that, but she was the opposite. She was like—made herself a bit of a doormat, you know. So there's extremes, and she went to that extreme. But yeah, so I use him a lot because he knows a lot from that period that I don't know, being a man, number one.

[00:04:09.90]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative], yeah, the other side, I guess.

[00:04:12.02]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, and not having been so acculturated as I was, having gone through colleges and universities, because he's not college-educated. So I have that point of view coming from him, you know.

[00:04:26.71]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:04:27.43]

FAITH RINGGOLD: But he's—not having been college educated, he believes that education is like, wow, you know, the most important thing anybody ever did in their life, and regrets not having gotten a college education himself. But remember this, that in the '40s, when I went to college, how many people went to college, you know?

[00:05:01.69]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:05:03.38]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Come on, you know, and I never thought about that. As a matter of fact, he told me that—let's see. I got married in 1950. I had still a couple years to go before I graduated. But we were so in love—this is my first husband—and I wanted to get out of the house, so we got married. In '52, I had two kids. So everybody said—now, they didn't say it to me, they said it to Burdette, who was a good friend—"She's going to college? That's a joke. What's that all about?"

[00:05:41.38]

Now, when I left my first husband, I was seeing quite a bit of Burdette, so he knew the seriousness of what I was doing. And he said he didn't bother to tell them anything, but they thought it was very funny because this woman with these two kids, and she thinks she's going to graduate from college. And nobody's going to college anyway. I mean, what does she think? It's crazy.

[00:06:08.40]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:06:09.37]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And he said that he would just look at them, because he knew what I was doing, because sometimes he'd come and babysit while I'd go down to the library, you know, so he knew my life.

[00:06:19.83]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Right.

[00:06:21.25]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And when I did graduate, they were like—[Laughs.] You know? Well, it was kind of—it was more than a little unusual for that time—

[00:06:29.86]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Yeah.

[00:06:30.37]

FAITH RINGGOLD: —because there were not that many opportunities for Black people even after they graduated, and we grew up with a whole lot of people whose fathers had college degrees and who worked in the post office.

[00:06:47.93]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Menial things, yeah.

[00:06:49.25]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That's right, so I mean to say that was not unusual for them to do that. So it was generally thought, you can get a college education if you want to, but it's not going to help you do anything.

[00:07:03.71]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:07:06.03]

FAITH RINGGOLD: As a matter of fact, yesterday, I was being interviewed. And I don't know whether you have asked me this, but "What did I want to be when I was a child," that's what she asked me, when I was a little girl growing up, what did I want to be. And I just don't know. Did I want to be an artist? I don't remember. I know I was always drawing. I was always painting.

[00:07:29.01]

I was always doing art from the earliest I can possibly remember. I did it in school. I did it at home. I did it all the time. But did I say, "When I grow up, I want to be an artist?" I don't think so. I don't think I said that, and I must tell her when she comes back next time, the reason why I didn't do that was because I was a little girl. We're talking about 1930s.

[00:07:54.87]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Right.

[00:07:55.47]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You know, what are you talking about, when I grew up, I'm going to be an artist? It didn't make any sense. It wasn't the kind of thing—it wasn't in my head. When I grow up, I'm going to college—that, I said.

[00:08:08.33]



CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's a big—yeah.

[00:08:08.78]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I was fed that day and night. You're going to college. You're going to be something when you grow up. But what? I don't remember what. I never thought of what, until I graduated from high school, and they said to me, You want to go to college, what are you going to major in? What's going to be your life's work? Now you had to make up your mind immediately. And then I said, "I want to be an artist."

[00:08:40.77]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Yeah.

[00:08:41.91]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That's when I knew, but I didn't grow up saying that; no.

[00:08:45.95]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Yeah, that's—huh. Let's see. Well, we got through relationships and stuff. We were talking about relationships, and the other—you seem to have had a good kind of relationship with your daughters all along. I mean, I don't know about all along, but it seems like there's a lot of give and take.

[00:09:08.23]

FAITH RINGGOLD: When they were very little, we had a wonderful relationship. I think they were wonderful. They were sweet kids. They were very bright, always very bright. When they became teenagers, in their adolescent years, all hell broke loose. [Laughs.]

[00:09:28.72]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah?

[00:09:29.32]

FAITH RINGGOLD: All hell broke loose. Well, you probably—

[00:09:32.35]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I don't know, it sounds like they were still involved with you, doing all this.

[00:09:37.50]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I had to get a little—I took a—

[00:09:42.84]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I mean, in the sense that they got arrested because—one of them almost got arrested because of the show you were in. [Laughs.] It sounds like you were introducing—

[00:09:54.68]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, I was taking them around with me. That's the early '70s, late '60s, early '70s. I politicized both of them, because they had to participate with me in the different demonstrations that I got involved in and stuff like that. And so they would go with me, but they were also trying to find their own way and develop their own ideas about things, and moving away from me, getting boyfriends and things like that. And then we just sort of fell apart along the way.

[00:10:41.13]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah? But haven't you gotten back—it sounds to me like—[Faith laughs.] I don't know where I got the impression that you have—that you get a lot of opinions from them, back and forth.

[00:10:52.48]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Not anymore.

[00:10:52.69]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And, well, you've collaborated on some things with them.

[00:10:55.09]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, we have. We have. Not anymore. My oldest daughter and I don't collaborate on anything anymore. We don't even talk to each other. And maybe we will one day soon, but right now we're not.

[00:11:10.36]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And she's the one who has baby Faith, right?

[00:11:12.18]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No. No.

[00:11:12.98]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, okay. That's what she—

[00:11:13.30]

FAITH RINGGOLD: She's the one who doesn't have baby Faith.

[00:11:14.68]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: All right. I see.

[00:11:15.16]

FAITH RINGGOLD: The one that has baby Faith, I talk to all the time, because she's got baby Faith. [Laughs.]

[00:11:18.47]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, well that's it. [They laugh.]

[00:11:19.66]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Baby Faith, and baby Teddy, and baby Martha. She's got three babies. And so I see her quite a bit, and those sweet babies, I see them, too. But the other one has no babies, and I never see her. But she's doing quite well. She's writing, and she's very—I hate to say she's very bright, but so what, you know? She is. But she does all these wonderful things and I'm very proud of her, but we don't—

[00:11:49.31]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You don't—

[00:11:50.09]

FAITH RINGGOLD: —we don't like to be together, let's put it that way. We don't like each other's company.

[00:11:55.94]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Okay. Yeah, well—

[00:11:57.35]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Which is—you know, sometimes that happens.

[00:11:59.68]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Sure.

[00:12:00.26]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You know, and maybe it'll be different one day. But I'm kind of tired of trying. I'm off—that's another aspect of my relationship—dealing with relationships, my relationship with my daughter is a big aspect of it. And I'm ready to accept the fact that we're not friends. We're just not friends, and I've—and I don't want to try anymore, either.

[00:12:37.33]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Yeah.

[00:12:37.58]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I'm through with trying it right now, anyway. Maybe later on again, but not right now.

[00:12:43.64]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Huh. Yeah. Maybe that's something that you'll get in doing these performances with—on the next stage. Yeah, the Changes 4 or 5, right?

[00:12:59.61]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, well, see, you see, the relationship thing, I think, is going to be a very important performance piece for me. But I have to get the weight out the way, so that I can give all my time to it, because it keeps cropping up. It just keeps cropping up in my performances. I see people come up after the performance—husbands will come up with their wives, boyfriends with their girlfriends, girlfriends with their boyfriends, mothers and fathers with their kids, and they would kind of push the kid or the person toward me and say, "Tell them what you said," or "Tell them this, or that, or the other."

And the kid, either the kid has said something during the performance or, "Mommy, why don't you try that," or, "Mommy, I think I can change this," or something or the other. So people have these things that they want to change, and they're in a relationship with somebody that can affect or not affect the change. So relationships and changing, I think, have a lot—depend a lot on each other. If there's something that you need to change real big, it's going to affect all your relationships with other people.

[00:14:21.70]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that's true. Uh-huh [affirmative].

[00:14:23.08]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You know, so it's a companion piece, and I'm really very eager to get working on it. I think it's going to be a nice performance. And since people won't let me stop doing performances—

[00:14:37.58]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, there's a lot of demand for those.

[00:14:39.29]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. Yeah.

[00:14:40.34]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's interesting. From arts places, and universities, and all that kind of—

[00:14:45.95]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Mm-hmm [affirmative], and there are people who don't even know I do

art.

[00:14:48.62]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Really? So you're on a whole sort of two different set of circumstances.

[00:14:51.25]

FAITH RINGGOLD: See, it used to be that when I did "The Wake," they would get the whole exhibition, and then I would come in and I would do the performance. But now, with this performance, there is no art that they get unless they have a show. Now they just—some of them just get me. And they say, "Oh, you do art, too?" They don't know that. They only the performance.

[00:15:15.53]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. No, I see. Have you done it at some places that are not at all art related or anything like that, or no?

[00:15:20.96]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Not really, no.

[00:15:22.52]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Or a performance place?

[00:15:23.06]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, somebody knows I do art. Somebody there knows it.

[00:15:25.80]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Right. Oh, okay.

[00:15:26.72]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Maybe not the person I'm talking to right then, but, yeah, and I get a whole other audience. There's another audience there—

[00:15:34.16]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, yeah, which is—

[00:15:35.72]

FAITH RINGGOLD: —which is nice. I like that.

[00:15:38.29]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Has everything been videotaped that you—your performances and things like that?

[00:15:42.81]

FAITH RINGGOLD: A lot of them have been, yes, but it's really a problem getting a good one, getting one that's edited down and done—

[00:15:50.32]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That can be your sort of your standard record.

[00:15:51.71]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. Sure. That's the hard part.

[00:15:54.27]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Huh. But almost all of them, they do have some record.

[00:15:57.39]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Absolutely.

[00:15:57.78]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Interesting.

[00:15:58.17]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, I've got a lot of tapes. I hate looking at them, though.

[00:16:01.93]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah?

[00:16:02.77]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, I can't stand it.

[00:16:04.51]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, I would think it takes away a lot from the spontaneity.

[00:16:06.97]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, I can't stand looking at the tape. It's just drives me crazy.

[00:16:11.08]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh. Huh. How about—

[00:16:13.57]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And I don't want to think about the fact that it's taped while I'm doing it.

[00:16:17.56]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: No, right, yeah. That puts sort of tension into the whole thing.

[00:16:23.03]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:16:23.98]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And other people were in your earlier performances that you even—I mean, there were the ones you were directing, and then there were ones that you were in in a mask, or something, and other people were in, too. Who were in the—who would you put in the performances?

[00:16:37.64]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, I didn't have anybody in those performances.

[00:16:39.34]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, you didn't? It's always just you?

[00:16:40.45]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, wait a minute. No. No.

[00:16:42.26]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Well, your daughter was in it ten years earlier.

[00:16:42.98]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, right, my daughter and I did one together. That was kind of interesting. She and I did—right after my mother died. It was kind of like a mourning. I had this performance to do. And Mother had died, and so she did it with me. And yeah, that was just one time, though. That was nice. That was nice. She did that with me at Kenkeleba House, I think it is, Kenkeleba House, down in the East Village.

[00:17:19.61]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh. Uh-huh. Right.

[00:17:20.57]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:17:24.88]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So otherwise, they're just single person.

[00:17:26.85]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes.

[00:17:27.01]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: They're just you taking all the characters. I didn't realize that.

[00:17:29.47]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. Right. Yeah. Now, when I do it with my drummer, of course, she's there drumming.

[00:17:34.61]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, for music.

[00:17:34.87]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And she does—I play off her, and yeah, so she's involved with it, with it, yes. It would be great to have a whole stage full of people.

[00:17:49.06]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You do think so?

[00:17:50.29]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, I'd love that. I wish I could have that. That would be wonderful.

[00:17:55.84]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Well, who did you direct in the ones where you were the director, and that you wanted—

[00:17:58.71]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, I would go there and I would get students from the college.

[00:18:03.93]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

[00:18:04.20]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, and I'd tell them—you see, they would get all the information before I get there. And then they would go to the music department and the drama department, and they would get these kids. And I'd tell them what I need. "I need a young man and a young woman." Those are the stars. "And then I need a mother, and I need an old

man, and I need an auntie. I need five characters. And then I need all the other people," because they say, "Oh, well, we have this one and that one and the other one who wants to be in it." And I'd say, "Well, I've got a whole lot of mourners and people who are signifiers, people who speak out."

[00:18:42.24]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. A chorus, okay.

[00:18:42.87]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. I want those people, and I've got masks for all of them. And they kind of sit there, and they're the official mourners. And they're kind of like the storytellers. They kind of—while all this is going on, they're kind of telling the story. "Oh, that boy was no good. He really wasn't no good. I don't care what you say." "Yeah, but he tried." "No, uh-uh, he wasn't no good."

[00:19:04.57]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: [Laughs.] Right. Right.

[00:19:05.41]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You know, that type of thing is going on in the—

[00:19:09.10]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, yeah, I see. Do they make up their own things, or do you sort of—

[00:19:11.92]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They know—see, I tell them the story, and they go do their thing. And we have several—actually, we rehearse for a day.

[00:19:19.42]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative], 'til you get it.

[00:19:20.91]

FAITH RINGGOLD: [Snaps fingers.] It's done rather spontaneously. It's really—I tell you, it's really coming out of the Black experience. And it's amazing that the experience persists and continues—the church, the hymns, that sets the mood for this death. And it's not sad. It sounds like it would be sad, but it's not. There's a lot of laughter and a lot of gaiety, because they are resurrected. They come back to life.

[00:20:03.29]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. So then—

[00:20:04.28]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They're laid out there dead, but when Mama gets through with her dance and her retching and her carrying on, they come back. And through it, these signifiers are telling the audience what's going on. "Well, you know, I saw that boy one day, and he was so high off that stuff, he didn't even know me." "What?" "Yeah, girl, he was a hopeless one of them people, child. He used to take so much of that stuff. It's terrible the way these young people killing each other and killing themselves," you know. And they would be telling that kind of signifying. Now, I wouldn't tell them exactly how to do it. I would suggest to them, and then they would go ahead, because they know.

[00:20:44.78]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: They've seen it. They've been around.

[00:20:45.63]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They know. They've seen it. They've been around. They've heard their

aunts. They've seen their old grandma, this one or that one, say this, that, or the other, you know.

[00:20:54.20]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:20:54.50]

FAITH RINGGOLD: But I also had this—being in the mourning group also gave me an opportunity to include others in the production that weren't Black, because anybody could be a mourner. Anybody could sit there and read. And anybody can also have something to say, you know. As long as there is this core of people who sort of direct the tone of it, others can also have something to say.

[00:21:20.97]

An interesting thing that happened once is that in a production or performance I did in Texas—I think it was Houston—the Auntie was white. And, see, what happens is that the two bodies of Bena and Buba are laid down, the sculptures, and then the real bodies are laid next to them, the real people with the mask on are laid next to them. And the family, Mama, Grandma, Grandpa, and Auntie are sitting on this side of the stage.

[00:22:14.70]

And they have just entered. They've come down the aisle weeping, and they're wearing these long veils and stuff like that. Now, the real mourners, the real people, the other people, who are signifying, are sitting on the opposite side of the stage, and the bodies are in the middle. Each one of them, after they take Mama up, and Mama looks at the body, then they take—then Auntie goes up and she looks at the body. And each one of them gets a chance to do their dance, to do their expression, to say what their—that's their solo. That's their solo in front of the body, their respect.

[00:22:53.51]

Now, in the Black community, this is big. People do whole productions at funerals. I mean, they go up and they talk to the dead person. They say, "I'm gonna take care of your flowers now. Don't you worry about nothing. Them flowers gonna be blooming. Next spring, you're gonna to have azaleas just like you always do. You just—don't you worry about a thing. And I'm gonna take care of your records, too. I got your whole collection, and ain't nobody going to borrow them from me." They go up there and seriously talk to these people.

[00:23:24.89]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Right.

[00:23:25.34]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And then somebody else in the audience say, "He hear you, that boy hear you!" You know, and it's just, it's riveting, because you're saying, "Wow!" [They laugh.] Now, I've heard this. They have heard this. You know, so they know.

[00:23:44.00]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So they figure out what they should say.

[00:23:44.88]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Okay. This young woman, this was a white young woman. So she wanted to play the role. She was devoted and committed to this. And they were all actors. They were all from the drama school. So I said, okay, let's do it. What happened is she got up—each one had gotten up and did a very powerful thing, a tribute to these dead people. When her turn came, she got up there and she looked down at them, and she totally collapsed. I mean, she—I didn't think that was acting. I said, I don't know, I don't think this is acting. [Laughs.] This looks like the real thing to me, you know. Oh, she wept.

[00:24:29.75]



CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Really?

[00:24:30.32]

FAITH RINGGOLD: She wept. She wept and she—they had to come and get her.

[00:24:35.34]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah? [Laughs.] Oh, my God.

[00:24:36.07]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They had to get home and get her.

[00:24:38.25]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Really?

[00:24:39.22]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, they had to get themselves—"Papa." And—wait, let me tell you this—Mama, Nana, and Papa, so Papa came to get her, and he couldn't handle it by himself. So Mama couldn't come because she's the official mourner, so the Grandma had to come. It was very powerful. It was extremely moving. I mean, she really—she did it.

So after it was over, what happens customarily is that the students take their masks off, and they sit on the stage. And then they're asked several questions, and one popular question is, "How did you feel wearing the mask? Did it feel real to you?" And so they always say, "Well, you see, the mask makes you do things you wouldn't normally do. You just feel free to just give vent to everything that you—" so that's why we don't need all those rehearsals.

[00:25:37.06]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Right. Right.

[00:25:38.65]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You know, because they're able to just go straight. And so they asked her, "What were you doing?" And she said, well, listen, she said, I just—she said, "It just seemed like all the suffering in the world just came right in front of me, and I just felt so clearly everything that this production is about. You know, the whole 200 years of suffering of Black people, it just got me down. I couldn't take it anymore." And she said, "I just collapsed. I just felt like the more I cried, the more I wanted to."

[00:26:14.29]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Right. Wow. That's quite a catharsis.

[00:26:15.58]

FAITH RINGGOLD: She said, "I couldn't cry enough. She said, I just felt like my crying was just going to make it better." And she said, [laughs] "I was glad somebody came to get me, she said, because I had no idea how I was going to get off the stage." [Laughs.] It was wonderful.

[00:26:29.41]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Wow.

[00:26:30.40]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, I'm going to tell you, that was a wonderful piece.

[00:26:33.42]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:26:33.64]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I haven't done it much since '82. I think I did it once in—oh, yeah, I did it in '83, did it in '83. And I've done it—maybe in '85 or '86, I did it once. But I stopped doing it after Mother died. But it's not a sad piece, because there's a lot of jovial, uplifting stuff in it, plus funny. People love it, because it gives them an opportunity to deal with some things maybe they haven't dealt with. A lot of people come up to me after and say, "Oh, I'm so glad you did that," she said—this particular woman, she said, "Because my husband died last year, she said, and I haven't cried at anything, she said, but I sure cried today."

[00:27:23.99]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Oh, that's interesting, yeah. Well, dealing with death like that, it's—

[00:27:25.50]

FAITH RINGGOLD: She said, "It really gave me a release," you know.

[00:27:28.58]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:27:29.34]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So that performance, my first one—and I did that before I went to Africa. And that is a very African-type performance, including storytelling, singing, dancing, all of that stuff included, is very much the way they do performances in Africa, African productions, which I found out—I put it together in '76, and then I went to Africa. I went to Africa that summer after I put it together, and I noticed, I said, hey, look at this, you know.

[00:28:04.25]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Oh, that's interesting.

[00:28:05.39]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It's very much like it's done here.

[00:28:07.43]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Where did you go in Africa?

[00:28:10.34]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I went to Nigeria and Ghana, and I traveled from south to north, all the way up to the north countries in both of them. In both of those countries, I traveled up to the north, which is where they call the more primitive areas of the country, where people are less urbanized.

[00:28:40.48]

I had a marvelous time. Then I went back again in '77 as a representative of the United States. 250 of us went to represent the United States in a festival called FESTAC, the Festival of African Culture. And so there were Black people from all over the world there, but we were the largest delegation, from America.

[00:29:08.23]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Yeah, that's interesting. Was that in Nigeria or—

[00:29:11.83]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That was in Lagos, Nigeria.

[00:29:13.60]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh. Did anything come directly out of those works, or did they just feed stuff that you'd already been kind of—I mean, out of those travels—

[00:29:23.20]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Out of going there, did I—

[00:29:24.64]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:29:25.18]

FAITH RINGGOLD: See, when I went there, I thought I knew everything there was to know about African art. I thought I had seen it all, because I went to every—I bought every book I could get my hands on. The ones I didn't buy, I looked at. I went to every museum that I was anywhere near. If they had an African collection, I went and I saw it. So I thought I particularly was aware of all the different kinds of masks that they had.

[00:29:49.96]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:29:51.19]

FAITH RINGGOLD: But I wasn't.

[00:29:52.41]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, no, you can't be.

[00:29:52.77]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I wasn't. They currently make a lot of masks out of cloth, which I thought was true, but I wasn't sure how true, but it's very true. That's what they dance in, these fabulous cloth masks that just go all over their faces. And I just saw so much more art that I never knew existed. It's just so huge. That's why I went to Nigeria and Ghana, because those are the really rich art areas, the places where the art is just so powerful, and has continued—the history of it has continued uninterrupted since way before, you know, B.C.

[00:30:32.40]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, and you could see it come to life in dances and things like that, probably.

[00:30:36.55]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. Right. That's why I went to those particular countries. I would like to go to East Africa. I've never been there. Don't know when I would get to go there, but I would like to do that.

[00:30:50.21]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Huh. Let me just—

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:30:59.01]

That's the end of the October 4th taping.

[END OF TRACK AAA\_ringgo89\_6387\_m]

[00:00:02.28]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: [In progress] —interviewing Faith Ringgold on October 11, 1989, at her apartment at 345 West 145th Street. And maybe I should explain. We're looking over pictures of work from the '70s right now.

[00:00:19.25]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:00:23.90]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Maybe you could just say that again. What you did to get the fabric.

[00:00:25.97]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, this is the "Family of Woman" series, and the idea came to me early in—well, actually, the summer of '73, I had actually finished a series on slave rape. And my mother had framed these paintings of these African women trying to escape slavery. It was a kind of like—what should I say—a vision I had. This before I'd ever gone to Africa.

[00:00:58.34]

And then after I got to Africa, I noticed that the vulnerability that I imposed upon African women, and that I had them nude, and that I had them running through this beautiful landscape was very much like it actually is because when I got there, I saw how African women dressed casually, their clothes very often having to be adjusted constantly, and indicating that in their society—and that was 1976 when I first went to Africa.

[00:01:29.64]

There's obviously expression of a very protective kind of society, a society in which women feel basically as if they will not be assaulted—can do that. I mean, we couldn't walk around without clothes coming off of us, because it wouldn't work two seconds. So I mean, can you imagine what they must have been like 400 years ago, 500 years ago, not even thinking about being captured and brought anywhere?

[00:02:01.42]

And so I was trying to get in touch with that, and the reason why was because I was making—I was trying to understand feminism, and women's freedom, and women's right to speak up, and women's rights in general for myself and the role that other women should and/or would play in this whole movement, which we were right in the middle of in '73.

[00:02:35.37]

And I was frustrated, because in a lot of ways this movement was brand new. A lot of people refused to embrace it, especially a lot of women of color and Black women in particular, and I realized that I had to embrace it. I felt an urgent need to advance this movement for Black women and women of color because I felt if white women need it, we damn sure need it, because if anybody isn't free, it's us.

[00:03:07.23]

So it has to happen, and if I have to be there by myself as a one representative of women of color, I will do it. Whatever I need to do, I will do it, because I can't do anything else. I recognize the situation I'm in. I had been totally thwarted and stopped because I had spoken out, and so they had identified me—meaning the men, when I say "they." And I was being left out of everything.

[00:03:38.20]

So I had nothing to lose at this point, you see? So I was going gung-ho, not only politically as a feminist, but I was doing it in my work. I was trying to find out, what is women's art? What would you do as a woman in your art if you could do anything you wanted to do, and you weren't looking at the male, white mainstream? You were just looking within yourself. What would you do? And so I turned to African women.

[00:04:05.43]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: For your painting series.

[00:04:06.84]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, because when you ask about, "what is women's art," look at what

women did when they could be artists without calling themselves artists, when they were just working and doing something creative and not having the posture of, "Hey, I'm an artist, and I belong to a gallery. And I have shows, and x, y, and z." I mean, those were the original artists, the women who made the quilts.

[00:04:29.69]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. And that did coincide, just as far as your own time, with when you stopped teaching, you said [cross talk]—

[00:04:35.18]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Absolutely, yes, because I quit the school system in January of '73, and now I'm free. I've got an agent who is booking me to show my work everywhere. I've got a perfect situation. And somehow, I've always had a sense of urgency. I didn't know how long that was going to last. It was scary, you know.

[00:04:57.40]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, you wanted to use it while—

[00:04:57.68]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Here I had a situation that looked perfect. I could work on my own work. I didn't have to have a job. My kids were out of school. I had served them well. They were doing their thing, going to college, and now I could concentrate on my work. But how long? How long could I concentrate on my work? I didn't know. So I was working night and day, and night and day, in a feverish attempt to get as much work done as possible.

[00:05:29.04]

So by summer, I went up to Vermont to visit a friend, and I told my mother, I said, "Mother, when I come back, we're going to start a series of masks, and I'm going to call it the "Family of Woman." And they're going to be commemorative masks of Ms. Brown and Bernice, and Catherine, and Bert, and Dolores, and all these women that I knew, that were friends of yours, that I knew as a child, and their children, and because I'm so inspired by those women."

[00:06:06.56]

Now that I look back on them and I see what fabulous people they were, how little opportunities they had as women and as Black women, but what they did with the opportunities that they had, and the talents that they had and how they used them and how those women worked together to help to raise their children and—it was just a whole fabulous time that is part of—I like to feel it's part of who I am today.

[00:06:37.17]

I said, "Mother, I want to do this tribute to them. You will do the clothes, and I'm going to do the masks." And so she looked at me. She didn't know what the hell I was talking about. [Laughs.] I didn't know what the hell I was talking about. But I figured, I'll get it—I'll say it first, which is what I always do when I start a new project, and then I'll work it out. So I did, and the very first mask I did was a needlepoint face. Now, I don't know whether that—let's see if that one's here.

[00:07:08.57]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: It might—

[00:07:09.38]

FAITH RINGGOLD: A needlepoint face is the first one, and you don't have it here. And it was Ms. Brown, who was my mother's best friend. And see, I don't have all the pictures here. Wait, let's see. Here she is.

[00:07:22.82]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, it might be in another form.

[00:07:22.96]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Wait, here she is. Ms. Brown—let's see. Here she is. See, the face is needlepoint.

[00:07:30.26]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, and you did that? You did the needlepoint?

[00:07:33.29]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. Yes. I had taught my students—before I quit school, that was one of the projects that I had taught the kids. The kids loved to do needlepoint, especially the boys. They loved needlepoint. And so I had taught them how to develop different kinds of designs using needlepoint. And so the first mask I did was this needlepoint face mask. Let me see—let me go back.

[00:07:56.15]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That goes back. That's the—

[00:07:57.56]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, okay. Anyway, so Ms. Brown is done with the needlepoint face. And of course, it was so long and tedious that I decided not to do that again.

[00:08:10.25]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, right.

[00:08:11.42]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So then I decided that the faces would be painted because actually I wanted an opportunity to do my painting, anyway, and whatever way I could incorporate painting with sculpture, I did. So the rest of them are painted. And this, I think, was the second one I did, which was a portrait of me. And then the third one that I did was my mother, my brother, my sister and me.

[00:08:36.45]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: The group portrait.

[00:08:36.99]

FAITH RINGGOLD: "Mrs. Jones and Family." And then I did all the rest of them. So it turned out to be a total of 32 masks I did.

[00:08:44.64]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: About 32 masks all together or groups?

[00:08:47.30]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. Yeah, all together with about 11 families, or 12. I forgot which. Anyway, so Mother and I worked very hard together on that one.

[00:09:00.81]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. And she did all the clothes, as you said, you were saying. She had planned—

[00:09:03.27]

FAITH RINGGOLD: See, what I would do—she would do all the clothes. She would pick the fabric.

[00:09:08.55]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: With you. She would do that?

[00:09:09.99]

FAITH RINGGOLD: We would go buy the fabric, and then I would give her the fabric. These are the fabrics that we're going to use for this entire project. Now, as I would finish a face, like this—this is Florence and Junior. They are friends that we knew in Washington, D.C. And when I brought her this one, this face, this mask, I said, "Mother, this is Florence, and this is Junior." And that's it.

[00:09:44.03]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's all you have to—

[00:09:44.48]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Go for it. And then she's the one who picked the fabric that she would use. Now, this was a velvet—brown sort of toasty velvet, and then she had all these different kinds of trimmings and things. And so she put this outfit together. This is a sort of beigey stripe.

[00:10:04.46]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. On Junior.

[00:10:05.63]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, but all the—and I think he has red hair, and she has black hair. And then all this is embroidery. This is very tedious work here.

[00:10:15.92]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Well, I was going to say, you said you were painting the faces.

[00:10:18.68]

FAITH RINGGOLD: This is painted.

[00:10:21.41]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: They also have relief things.

[00:10:21.83]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, they're painted and embroidered, and some of them are also beaded. And this is a lot of work. I would never do this again. [Laughs.] Sometimes, you look back on things that you did, and by now, you find an easier and faster way to do things. But that was a lot of work.

[00:10:45.87]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Now, about how many paintings had there been in the "Slave Rape" series, just to go back, before this came out?

[00:10:51.49]

FAITH RINGGOLD: There were 20 paintings in the "Slave Rape," 20 in acrylic, and three in oil. The first three I did were oil paintings. And then I stopped doing that because they were cracking.

[00:11:05.79]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. And they did have outside coverings that made them like the thangka.

[00:11:09.48]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, that series is here.

[00:11:13.00]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, okay.

[00:11:13.47]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Here they are.

[00:11:14.04]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, all right.

[00:11:15.57]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They're in there. So yeah, so Mother and I had done those. We did those.

[00:11:22.26]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That was earlier. I know.

[00:11:23.07]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, that was actually—

[00:11:25.97]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I'm asking about that just so I know what you had just finished before doing them.

[00:11:30.12]

FAITH RINGGOLD: See, I went to Europe in '72, and when I came back, I came back with the thangka idea. See, so that's when the thangka—when Mother's participation in the thangkas began with the sewing. Those are all her thangkas there. She did those.

[00:11:47.24]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: The borders.

[00:11:47.99]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, all those borders. We did.

[00:11:50.12]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, it was because I wanted to talk a little bit about the style in them. It seems to be getting more—they're interesting. First, they start out kind of as portraits, some of them, and then they're scenes in the jungle.

[00:12:07.27]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, right, right. The women become smaller as opposed to the landscape. In the beginning, the women were monumental—the big—

[00:12:16.57]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: They were the main—

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. And then in these, the women become small, and very vulnerable in their setting.

[00:12:29.34]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And the style of the landscapes and things has more connection with your current—at least the painting in the than your quilts now.

[00:12:37.95]



FAITH RINGGOLD: Absolutely. They do.

[00:12:38.37]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: It was getting less—what? I don't know. I was wondering whether it had anything to do with the materials you were using, or just sort of general—

[00:12:49.87]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, actually, I think it had something to do with that they were being used with fabric, and so the kind of painting that I did was being affected by the fact that fabric was going to be used around the paintings. So it is very similar to what I'm doing right now, the way in which I'm working right now.

[00:13:22.17]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:13:22.32]

FAITH RINGGOLD: This is 1974 when I did—I did another whole series in 1974. I was still continuing the "Family of Woman" series in '74. That was the end of it.

[00:13:33.84]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And you would often show the figures with masks, the masked figures in front of the thangka [inaudible].

[00:13:39.34]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right, right. I don't know. See, that is the beginning—

[00:13:42.31]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's interesting.

[00:13:43.32]

FAITH RINGGOLD: —of the performance idea. It was kind of like creating an environment and—I don't know—in some way, trying to have the art come to life, setting a stage, so to speak. This is before I realized that the masks would ever become actual performance—

[00:14:12.45]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Props.

[00:14:16.15]

FAITH RINGGOLD: —props, right. This is all '74. And then after the "Family of Woman" series, we go into the couples series. And I have all of these couples, families, that are the men. See, now I'm doing men now.

[00:14:31.30]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, this is around '74.

[00:14:33.91]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yeah, here comes the men.

[00:14:36.70]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And they're more contemporary in their clothing and things.

[00:14:40.15]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Absolutely. And with them, I do a whole other group of thangkas, which are my first abstract thangkas, and they're called the "Windows of the Wedding." And they're

kind of like messages to couples, or they're like messages for relationships, kind of. I don't know. [Laughs.]

[00:15:13.45]

I'm not sure what I was actually doing here except that I was fascinated with the whole concept of the relationship between male and female, because I was coming from all this feminism stuff. So I was trying to see in the final analysis this relationship between male and female is definitely the most, I would think, difficult one to establish, to maintain, to everything. And so I wanted to explore it. And I felt as a feminist, I needed to explore that relationship and deal with it, aside from the fact that I've been married forever, and it's not been easy, ever. [Laughs.]

So I was doing it. I remember once my mother said, you got—and I have all of them hanging up in here, all my couples. And she said, "Boy," she said, "if these guys ever woke up and found themselves in here, she said, they'd need to get the hell out of here." [They laugh.] And I'd tie them together.

When I would send them out, it was very interesting. I would send these couples out to be in different exhibitions, and people would try to get the men away from the women. I'd have them tied, the strings to the heads attached so they couldn't separate them, and they were constantly calling me up, asking me, "Well, do they have to be together like this?" And I said, "Well, wait a minute, the hell are you doing?" Or they would try to take the children away from them.

[00:16:47.48]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Whereas, they belong. They were all one thing.

[00:16:49.03]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I was trying to keep him together, but it was just—

[00:16:51.16]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: They were one unit.

[00:16:51.67]

FAITH RINGGOLD: —something that I was—it was a statement that I was trying to make. And of course, people making the show, showing the show, was trying to make another kind of statement. And my mother was saying, "If these guys ever woke up and found themselves in here with all these women, they would definitely unravel themselves and get out of here." [Laughs.]

[00:17:18.90]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:17:19.11]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, Mother made all these clothes. Yeah, she made all these clothes. And these bodies have armatures. They have shoulders, and pelvic—like hips, from which the legs hang on cords so that when they stand, they appear—they're designed so that the string from their head allows them to move in a way that people move. So they are puppets in a sense. They're kind of like—

[00:17:54.33]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Right.

[00:17:55.05]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Their heads are coconuts.

[00:17:57.52]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Coconuts, okay.

[00:17:58.17]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, the heads are coconuts, because I really like the shape of coconuts. They look like—and they'll last forever. So they painted coconuts. Now, actually, these people are all out in California.

[00:18:10.53]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: They are?

[00:18:10.92]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, and they need to have new bodies, because when I made their bodies—the armatures fortunately are intact, so that's no problem. But what is a problem is the foam rubber that is the covering of their bodies deteriorated because I didn't have it—originally, it wasn't covered with cloth.

[00:18:34.98]

So when I do it again and when I go back out to California, I may have my assistant do that. That may be a project for her, to create new bodies for me, because all I need to do is cut the patterns, and all she has to do is sew them. And the clothes are out there. My mother made the clothes, so I've got all those clothes. They've been washed, and they're hanging up ready to go back on the people.

[00:18:58.69]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, so all they need is to be [inaudible]. [Pointing in back: -Ed.] What's this woman? Here's a single.

[00:19:03.12]

FAITH RINGGOLD: This is Bernice. This is—

[00:19:05.22]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: With her whistle. I like it.

[00:19:06.90]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, the whistle is indicative of that whole early period of the women's art movement when we used to do demonstrations against museums and blow the whistle.

[00:19:18.49]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, okay.

[00:19:18.82]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And we would sing, sing off key because so many people couldn't sing on key, including me. So we would sing off-key and blow whistles, and it would confuse the police. And it was just a mess, but anyway, it was fun for us.

[00:19:35.30]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Yeah, well, it's as if the animating—the figure, I mean—I don't know. I don't want to make too much of a theory, but it's kind of come out from the painting.

[00:19:45.74]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah.

[00:19:46.13]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And the subject has kind of become a sculpture with the painting

being more of a background kind of thing.

[00:19:53.39]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, it keeps going.

[00:19:54.94]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Creates context for it, or something.

[00:19:55.46]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, it keeps going backwards and forwards with that. But yeah, I think the sculptures do appear to be the three-dimensional manifestation of the 2D.

[00:20:10.19]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Now, when you were doing the different things at once, one was leading into another. Well, you explained that progression a little bit, about what you felt, what inspired the "Slave Rape" series, and then why. Then the figures themselves were more relating to your own life at that point, it seems like, right?

[00:20:28.31]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, yes. See, the "Slave Rape" was kind of like going back, and trying to understand some of the roots of Black women coming here. What are we doing here? What is the history of us coming to this country, and what were we like before we got here? You know? I wanted to be in touch with that.

[00:20:50.48]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And what was the environment like [inaudible]—

[00:20:52.85]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right, as opposed to—

[00:20:54.35]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: —a lot of nature and things in that one.

[00:20:55.67]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That's right, as opposed to what the environment is that we find ourselves here, in. And so I wanted—but the interesting thing was when I went to Africa finally. I felt as if my paintings had figured it out correctly. I mean, I just felt like, wow, this is right. It feels right. It looks right, and you know, pretty good.

[00:21:26.28]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. That's interesting. So let's try to get to the—well, then also, the clothes that your mother made, what was the first piece that was in modern—it's kind of more urban dress.

[00:21:44.05]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, it's these. It's the couples.

[00:21:46.04]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: The couples—they're the ones who were—yeah, okay.

[00:21:48.23]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. These are kind of like a tribute to my daughters—

[00:21:51.91]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, sort of the younger generation, kind of?

[00:21:53.47]

FAITH RINGGOLD: —this couples thing. Yeah, the younger generation, trying to give them some direction or whatever. It's kind of done in—in fact, they're all—some of them are named for them, even. I think that first couple there is Misha, and my daughter's name is Michele. And then I gave them families. They were not going through very stable times in those days, and I think I was kind of trying to stabilize them in my mind, just because things were really up in the air a lot. They were teenagers. They were not quite—were they teenagers? They were just starting college, and it was trying times for us. And so in my work, I was showing a very stable kind of past situation, but it wasn't going on in our lives at all.

[00:23:02.63]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, okay. That's interesting. But they do—yeah, they seem to provide models, kind of.

[00:23:08.17]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Plus, it gave me an opportunity to sew and to paint and to create something and to work with Mother. So all these things it did for me. And at that time, I was working a lot. I was traveling and working, and I could actually embrace any idea I wanted. I still had my mother's help, which was great.

[00:23:36.88]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that's interesting.

[00:23:37.40]

FAITH RINGGOLD: This is actually me.

[00:23:39.10]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, that's you?

[00:23:39.64]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, this one is me. Yeah.

[00:23:41.41]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: This is one of the African print things—

[00:23:43.63]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. This is red.

[00:23:45.12]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: —[inaudible] material.

[00:23:46.58]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It's an African print. It's red. And see, Mother had been to Africa before me.

[00:23:51.22]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, really? [Looking at illustrations -Ed.]

[00:23:52.15]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, my mother went before me, and she knew that the men there wear this fabric like women wear, and in suits. And so she introduced that idea. She also knew that when they get married, very often, the men wear white.

[00:24:10.51]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Huh. That's interesting. [Inaudible] white.

[00:24:13.13]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right, so she introduced that idea.

[00:24:16.34]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, so she did have real input into it.

[00:24:18.77]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, she did. Now, that one over there, the older couple, that's my mother and a man she actually did marry. And they're wearing kind of—notice what she put on them, a kind of pretty print that's flannel.

[00:24:46.38]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. With kind of—

[00:24:50.86]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, that's what she said.

[00:24:52.03]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Designs on it.

[00:24:52.90]

FAITH RINGGOLD: She said—Oh, and I had so much fun making the shoes.

[00:24:57.08]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You made the shoes?

[00:24:57.76]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I made the shoes. I did all of it, because this is something—this is something I used to try to do when I was a kid, make stuff that you're not supposed to make, that isn't made by people. And so here, I could do it for these people. Oh, yeah, I made these shoes and everything on them, all the little jewelry. And the hair is made of wig hair. I buy wigs and take them apart and then glue them on their heads.

[00:25:31.39]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Well, it's a great kind of record of the period, too. I mean, the way the clothes are cut and everything, seem very '70s. Then people started getting taller and taller kind of based on some of the basketball—

[00:25:44.02]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, this is Wilt, and I did this whole series on Wilt [Chamberlain]. Actually, he's the first of the couples that I made. The very first of the couples that I made was Wilt, and I liked him because he just appeared to be such a living sculpture.

[00:26:01.72]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that's interesting.

[00:26:03.19]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You know, seven foot three—he's a sculpture.

[00:26:05.56]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, right.

[00:26:06.43]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. So he was the first one I did, and the first one I did was him. And I did him spontaneously because he had come out in *Ebony* with this awful statement that he had made about Black women—very negative. And I decided to use him since, I figured, he had used us. You know? So I was going to just use his body as a kind of experiment.

[00:26:40.33]

And I put him together. I don't know whether you can see this one or not, but this is an early one. I made two very early Wilts with the basketball. And when I would go to a school, they would rig up a hoop and put him up there. The kids loved him. As a matter of fact, at one school, they stole him, and they had him in the kids' dormitory. And the whole school was up in arms, and they were on the phone telling me about it. And they said, we will find him. Don't worry about it. And they did, because kids are going to visit to see him, and somebody is going to tell us where he is. So please don't get upset. We will find Wilt. Anyway, they did, in fact, find Wilt, and I got him back.

[00:27:27.58]

But what I'm trying to say is I discovered that in some of the schools that I went to, they would all gravitate toward this tall, lean figure. Now, in the legs, there was no foam. There was only my method of creating these figures, which is to use this very heavy rope that I would knot at the knees, and I would knot at the ankles. And then I would put the shoes on that, and I would hang the pants on top of the whole thing. But people would go to feel the legs, and when they would feel the legs, all they would feel was this rope. And they would be disappointed. So I said, okay. See, I had not developed a way to make the bodies yet. We're talking early 1974, say January, February, March, whatever.

[00:28:27.83]

So in May, when I was going to stop traveling because the schools would be closed and I wouldn't be traveling to colleges anymore for the summer, I said, I am going to make bodies because people want to touch, and when they touch, I want them to feel something solid there. So I will use my foam rubber to create bodies, but I don't have time right now because I'm traveling.

[00:28:56.02]

So when I got the time, I made my first Wilt, and I gave him bodies with foam rubber, which covered the ropes, you see? And I made him anatomically correct as well because my husband said, "Look, you can't just—you can't do that. You got to give this guy—give him something to go on." [Laughs.] So I made him anatomically correct. And my mother heard about it, and she said, "Listen, you're going to bring this man over here for me to make his clothes. But you put something on him before he gets here. I don't want him in here like that." I said, "Oh, Mother, come on." But that was a problem, too, because as an artist, as you do your work, I'm sure all artists think about, what's my family going to think about this? What's my mother—what's my father going to think? You get the same thing, right?

[00:29:57.40]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:29:57.68]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. How am I going to—I don't want them to prevent me from moving ahead and exploring new territory in the way that I should, but at the same time. I'm constantly saying, god, what are they going to think about this? So I put Wilt up anatomically correct, and the kids got used to him. Everybody was used to him. And the news shifted back to my mother of what was going on here, so she was prepared, but not prepared, because she told me to make some pants and put on him. So these pants were made by me.

[00:30:36.11]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: They were made by you, okay.

[00:30:37.16]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, I made the first pants. And I took him, and then she made this jacket to put on him. And we decided to leave his chest bare, and I made him a belt. And then I made him these high-heeled shoes, which were platform shoes. And then I made him a girlfriend—

[00:30:55.75]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: As if he needed to be any higher.

[00:30:56.84]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. And I made him a girlfriend, and she's holding the first *Ms.* magazine—

[00:31:01.96]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I noticed that. That's great.

[00:31:03.14]

FAITH RINGGOLD: —cover. Yeah, and then I made him another girlfriend because he liked to have multiple girlfriends. And then I gave him a child, Wiltina. See the little girl?

[00:31:14.24]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. That's in the next one.

[00:31:15.62]

FAITH RINGGOLD: There should be another picture there with him, or there's probably a slide.

[00:31:19.73]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I think there's a—must be there.

[00:31:21.91]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, there's probably a slide there with—

[00:31:23.95]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, I see.

[00:31:26.17]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, where's the slides? Go back to the slide.

[00:31:28.90]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I put some out there. Is that what—

[00:31:30.94]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, here, here, here, here. No, it's not on here. This is '73. Yeah, it's there. It's there. Would it be there? Is that '74? When is this?

[00:31:42.17]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: These are, yeah.

[00:31:43.39]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, there they are. See the little girl, Wiltina? There's his two girlfriends, Willa, Wilhemina, and Wiltina.

[00:31:53.40]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, they're both in the same piece.



[00:31:55.06]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, all three are in the same piece.

[00:31:57.19]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I thought they were separately.

[00:31:58.33]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Mm-mm [negative]. See, he's got his little girl, and Willa, and Wiltina. And see, that's the way the bodies look. See the bodies there? And this is the way I put the bodies together. See?

[00:32:14.92]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. So, which is a kind of—did you roll the foam rubber or—

[00:32:18.96]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, rolled it around, and then sewed it, and then put the kneecaps on.

[00:32:25.04]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Do you ever show them without the clothes, or was this just for the picture?

[00:32:27.92]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, I said, should I show them without the—I never could figure out, what should I do? But I always felt as though they were too fragile to be exposed, and I was absolutely correct. They should have always been covered with cloth. If they're covered with cloth, they'll last forever, last forever, but without the cloth on them, they do deteriorate.

[00:32:49.40]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Did Wilt always have white girlfriends, or something? Was that the point of that? I didn't realize that.

[00:32:52.52]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh yes, was his point. That was his point. Yeah, so I gave him his girlfriends and his little daughter. [Laughs.] And everybody really took to those pieces. They really liked them a lot. They did a lot of traveling.

[00:33:08.15]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, and they're much more like dolls, or something. They don't have the same kind of emotional feeling that the masks have.

[00:33:15.50]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. Well, it's a whole different—they were very whimsical. They were fun.

[00:33:19.40]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. That's right, okay.

[00:33:20.42]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They were more fun, and being contemporary, too—

[00:33:24.78]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: [Inaudible]

[00:33:25.03]

FAITH RINGGOLD: —they were also just kind of—it's like an experiment that I was going through, a phase, you know. But the "Family of Woman" series is much more serious. This is Edith and Bessie. These are my two aunts. One was blind, and they were inseparable. [Pause.]

[00:34:00.77]

So yeah, so Wilt was the first of the couples, and then after Wilt, I did all these other couples. And the last couple that I did in that series was the couple that you're coming to now, which is Zora and Fish. And they were done in 1975, and they are—those are street people.

[00:34:26.56]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:34:27.64]

FAITH RINGGOLD: But you can see that that's a whole other time. You don't even see street people like that anymore. They were very—

[00:34:34.51]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Not much, right.

[00:34:34.96]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, they were very—I mean, now it's serious street. It's not like this anymore, where people are sort of eccentric, and kind of like saying, to hell with society, I'm going to do my own thing, and actually taking to the street almost as if they are embracing the street, and wearing colorful clothes and that type of thing. That's the kind of street people we had in the early and middle '70s. Now it's a life-and-death situation. There's all kinds of people in the street now that do not have anything to do with this kind of thing.

[00:35:18.29]

So I did this series to show the relationship because they did have these kinds of relationships. Now and then, you would see a man and a woman together. The man would have carried the chair for the woman to sit down to beg, and he would be a guy who drinks too much. And he would be kind of drunk, and the two of them would be trying to make their way in the world in this kind of weird relationship.

[00:35:47.45]

So she would—the first time I exhibited them was in a gallery in Soho, and I had gone into the local liquor store. Actually, it wasn't Soho. It was in the Bowery more. And I'd gone into a local liquor store, and I'd asked the liquor store owner, what kind of liquor or wine did the local winos, drunks, or whatever you want to call them in the neighborhood drink? Because at that time, most of your so-called bums were still relegated to the Bowery.

[00:36:27.01]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, I see.

[00:36:28.12]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, if you were going to live that lifestyle, you went there and did it. You didn't even stay in Harlem because we could not really support that kind of thing here. And as long as you could be fairly straight and live in a house and act fairly socialized, you could stay in a neighborhood, but other than that, you had to go to the Bowery, where you could have the services of missions and really lay in the street and do that thing. So that was still going on 1975 here.

[00:37:00.13]

And so he said to me that they drink Richard's Wild Irish Rose. So I bought a bottle of it, and

I put it in Zora's bag. And what happened—I left the bag open, and I put her there with her little begging cup because in those days, women felt they had to work no matter what. The men could just lay in the street and be drunk, but a woman, if she was in the street, she had to be doing something. So she had to be. [They laugh.] She had to be either prostituting or begging, something. So she's sitting there with her begging cup, and you see I decorated it with the cowrie shells and all, made it appropriate. And so the people in the gallery told me—when I came back and saw the bottle of Richard's Wild Irish Rose was empty—empty, but the begging cup had seven dollars in it.

[00:38:01.40]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh yeah? Oh wow.

[00:38:03.08]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So I said, well, what's the explanation for this? And she said, "Listen, if you could have been here and seen the people who came in this gallery and took a swig of Zora's Wild Irish Rose and then guiltily went in their pocket and got some money and put it in the begging cup!" So every time Zora and Fish went somewhere, I'd buy a new bottle, and she'd get more money.

[00:38:31.45]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's great. [Laughs.]

[00:38:32.71]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Was that weird? I said, well, wait a minute. There's more than Bowery bums drinking Richard's Wild Irish Rose.

[00:38:40.93]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You could buy a whole bottle for less than that.

[00:38:42.91]

FAITH RINGGOLD: How about that?

[00:38:43.60]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's great.

[00:38:44.26]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, because the bottle was only a dollar-something.

[00:38:46.03]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. That's a real participatory—

[00:38:48.16]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That's right.

[00:38:48.73]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: —piece.

[00:38:49.39]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I just thought that was wonderful. It was almost as if they felt as though they must participate in this whole thing by having a drink.

[00:38:56.44]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I like that.

[00:38:56.98]

FAITH RINGGOLD: But nobody took the whole bottle.

[00:38:59.50]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Just to take a little swig or something. [They laugh.]

[00:39:04.66]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Funny, huh?

[00:39:06.40]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:39:07.90]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They're going to be in my retrospective.

[00:39:11.80]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Well, that's good. And do they go with the painting in the background?

[00:39:15.09]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. Now, I put them with—this is actually—the painting behind them is actually the ones that I used for the weddings, the couples' weddings, but this is a serious couple, too. They have a serious relationship, so I let them share one of those backdrop thangkas.

[00:39:36.87]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And are they in—they're in better shape because they had—were they preserved [inaudible]?

[00:39:41.76]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, they're fine because they're all covered. See, that's 1975, so I had learned by then.

[00:39:46.37]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:39:46.73]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. But the only difference with them is that their bodies are not as carefully constructed because of the fact that they live in the street, and they have a kind of bumpy kind of quality to their—their bodies are not toned in the way that the other people's bodies are. But they're very durable; no problem with that. They have to be because they live in the street, you know.

[00:40:18.85]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that's right. They're tough.

[00:40:19.90]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Heads are also made of coconut, and their hair is made of unraveled rope, which I like to work with. Those are wonderful. [Still looking at book -Ed.]

[00:40:34.43]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Huh, right.

[00:40:42.21]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So that's 1975, and we're moving into the first performance piece that I did, which was finished in '76. But I started it in '75.

[00:40:54.54]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And when you started that one, which is the one—this is the one—

[00:40:58.36]

FAITH RINGGOLD: This is "The Wake and Resurrection of the Bicentennial Negro."

[00:41:01.26]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay, right. And here's Mama—and they went with it, but they were standing up there with the mourners.

[00:41:06.33]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right.

[00:41:07.23]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: When you first made this one, I mean, was this a—did you know it was going to be a performance at that point, or were you still making it in the spirit of the earlier works? Do you remember?

[00:41:17.73]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You know, I'm not absolutely certain if I knew that, what was going to happen here. I knew that there was a story. This is before I thought of writing this story on a painting or anything. In fact, this was not about painting. This was really—I was going to use the Feminist series early thangkas that I did as part of the environment. And those Feminist series thangkas were the very first ones that I did in 1972, and they were quotations from Black women's statements that I got from Gerda Lerner's book, *Black Women in White America*. So I was going to use them as a kind of backdrop for this.

[00:42:21.43]

And what I was doing was creating masks that represented Bena and Buba and the mourners for this 200 years of Black people in America, and the suffering that we had been through, and the high point of that suffering was the current drug addiction, which was at an all-time high in the 1970s, okay? It had started in Harlem in the late '40s and had accelerated undisturbed, you see. And by the '70s, I mean, we had seen a lot of people die, and it was a lot of—it was horrible.

[00:43:12.13]

Okay, so I was doing this in tribute to the survival of Black people over those 200 years, because there was a lot of discussion about the bicentennial. Yeah, well, we don't have anything to celebrate after all the 200 years that Black people—I mean, we've been here 400, 500 years. But for these last 200 years, it's been hell, and we're not celebrating anything. And I said, yeah, but a lot of people have contributed to whatever progress we have made. Those people have given their lives, many of them, to help us get where we are. As unadvanced as we may be, whatever we have done has been done at the expense of many people's lives.

[00:44:08.15]

And I think those people—there should be some commemoration for those people and for those efforts, and there should be something, some indication of what should happen in the future. We should look to the future. What about the next 200 years? Where are we going to go there? Okay, so what I want to do is have a look back on the last 200 years and then a projection for the future. That's why I didn't want it to be a funeral. I wanted it to be a wake

[00:44:38.77]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And a resurrection.

[00:44:39.28]

FAITH RINGGOLD: —and a resurrection. So that's what that was about. So I had the idea, and I wanted to create the images. Now, I didn't know that there would be actual sculptural forms. I thought they would all be masks until I went to the University of Connecticut in Storrs, and the men who invited me there took me out to a party just before the lecture.

[00:45:13.96]

And when we got me back to the University—I think my daughter was with me on that trip. When we got back to the University, I walked into the auditorium. The place was packed. People from town had come and brought their mothers and fathers and kids, and they were going to have—it was a little town, so this was a big event. He told me that there was no projector and no screen, and it was too late to get one.

[00:45:50.29]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: What did—he thought you were—he just never thought of that?

[00:45:53.44]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, I think he was so busy having a party for me that he forgot his responsibilities. And then he paid me. He gave me my check, and he walked out of the auditorium packed with all these people, who were sitting there smiling, ready for their presentation! And my name is all stretched across the campus in big banners. "Faith Ringgold—Welcome, Faith." What am I going to do?

[00:46:24.59]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that's crazy.

[00:46:25.42]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I have no slides. I'm supposed to stand up there for an hour and talk about art with nothing to show. Well, in those days, I used to bring stuff with me. I had an exhibition there on campus, but we were not in that location. We were in the auditorium. But I always brought some work with me because I'd pass it around as I was—so I said, oh, thank god I brought some work with me. So what did I have with me? I had Bena and Buba, the masks.

[00:46:57.62]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Just the faces?

[00:46:59.24]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Just the mask faces.

[END OF TRACK AAA\_ringgo89\_6388\_m]

[00:00:06.28]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: This is October 11th. It's the second installment of our tape with Faith Ringgold.

[00:00:13.66]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So I talked, and then I just felt a need to give them something more. And when you're doing something like this, you can't say, "Oh, well, I would have showed you slides, but—"

[00:00:30.82]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I don't have them. [Laughs.]

[00:00:31.93]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You can't do that. I mean, people who do that are boring. You know, I don't like that in the audience. I know you had something else prepared and that you don't have it with you. But don't tell me. Just entertain me. Leave me alone. I just want to enjoy what you've got. Give me what you got. So [laughs] I didn't bother to tell them. I was absolutely furious. Yet I could not share that with the audience. You understand what I mean?

[00:00:54.22]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:00:54.35]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It was a hopeless situation. So I said, okay, you've got Bena and Buba with you. I did know it was going to be a performance. But I had no idea how it was going to go. None whatsoever. So I said, now, you had planned to do a performance. You had planned to create a performance out of these people. You don't have any idea how it's going to be. But why not try it out on this audience? What the hell you got to lose? You got an hour and no slides.

[00:01:25.97]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:01:26.42]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So go for it. So I introduced the whole idea of Bena and Buba, and the Bicentennial, and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And I said, "I want to have this ready for 1976. I plan to tour the performance of it." And I said, "You're going to be the first to see this, in fact, to participate in this production."

[00:01:53.73]

So I took the two masks and I laid them out on the stage. And then I explained to them that actually, one of the greatest shows on Earth goes on at a person's death. People line up for blocks. People who don't go to see concerts would line up for blocks to see a person laying in repose. You know, it's just a weird thing. But people love to look at a dead body.

[00:02:25.97]

"So here I have these two bodies, which I want you to share with me because these two bodies represent two young people who have been caught in our 200 years of being here. Buba has died of an overdose of drugs, and Bena has died of grief. These two people will be resurrected during the performance. He will become a more humane, more sensitive man, free of obsession with drugs. And she will become liberated and more aware of her own power and strength. Now, how that will be done, I have not decided yet, but maybe you can give me some ideas. So I said, but what we want to do first is come up and view the remains."

So they came. They participated. They got in their line, and they came up, and they filed—and I talked to them about how, during—in our funerals, how when people come up to view the body, they talk to the body. And they—did I tell you that last week?

[00:03:41.39]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, uh-huh [affirmative].

[00:03:41.79]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And they have all these different kinds of things to say. But I'm going to carry on for you. It's almost as if they don't want to let the person go. The person now is living in another kind of way. But they're talking to that person as if the person is still there. So they came on up. People were wonderful. And I got through that whole thing.

[00:04:02.28]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that's amazing.

[00:04:02.95]

FAITH RINGGOLD: But, in the process, I recognized something. It has to be a body. It can't be a mask. It has to be a whole body—

[00:04:14.93]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, well, that's [inaudible].

[00:04:15.63]

FAITH RINGGOLD: —a whole person there. And so, when I came home, I said, okay, now I know that I need to do, and I was glad I did it. If that situation hadn't happened, I don't know what this performance would have been like.

[00:04:28.22]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, that's interesting.

[00:04:29.40]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Because I didn't realize that—that it had needed to be a body.

[00:04:34.62]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. And you didn't have the other two faces yet at all, or the—

[00:04:38.52]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Which other, you mean—

[00:04:38.79]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: The Mama and Nana?

[00:04:39.97]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, no, no, they were developed later.

[00:04:41.37]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay. So—

[00:04:43.11]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So Bena in Buba came first. So I turned Bena and Buba from mask—and you can see their little front pieces here. That was on the original mask—into bodies. And the whole design of them, the way the legs are attached, you see?

[00:05:03.85]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative], right.

[00:05:04.71]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Looking something like an Egyptian mummy.

[00:05:06.69]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Actually that's—

[00:05:07.86]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Huh?

[00:05:08.31]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.



[00:05:08.70]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And the way their faces are, the set look of their faces, sort of frozen face type. And then I put them on this red, black, and green flag, which is an actual Marcus Garvey—which is an antique Marcus Garvey flag.

[00:05:30.37]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Really?

[00:05:30.94]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And my mother made it into a cooling pad, which I never heard of, something they used to put dead people on, like a mattress. They laid them on that. So I made this—I mean, I took the flag and gave it to mother, and mother made this cooling pad thing. So all of this was the setup. So now I'm ready. See, I got my two people on my cooling pad, and it's real bodies laying up there, and it was successful.

[00:05:59.92]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Did you ever scare yourself doing work things like this, dealing [laughs] with these bodies and things?

[00:06:04.66]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, I tell you, I used to wonder, why in the hell are you doing this? This is gory. Isn't this kind of gory? I mean, do you really think you should be doing this? And while I was doing it, Lucy had come—Lucy Lippard had come up to interview me for *From the Center*. And there were these two bodies laying—

[00:06:26.01]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: From the what?

[00:06:26.61]

FAITH RINGGOLD: *From the Center*, her book, *From the Center*.

[00:06:28.57]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, *From the Center*, right. Yeah, I heard of that.

[00:06:30.91]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And these two bodies were laying up there. And so, I covered them over, like they do in the funeral parlor, they put—They look even worse when you cover them over. So what are you going to do? How are you going to hide death? It's there. But I had—well, my father had died. Was my father dead yet? Yeah. Yeah, my father had died. My mother was obviously still alive. And I was able to deal with death in a kind of open-eyed face manner. I hadn't—I think the effect of my father's death was far stronger than I was ever able to accept, maybe even now. And he might be in that a lot, now that I think about it, more than I realized. But—

[00:07:21.49]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: When do you think—when did he die?

[00:07:23.53]

FAITH RINGGOLD: He died in '69, see? And this is '76. So this might have been my terminal mourning for him. It might have been. But, anyway, I was able to deal with it. It didn't feel morbid or anything to me. It felt fine. And the performance was not morbid.

[00:07:43.21]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: No, right.

[00:07:43.84]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No. The performance definitely was not. It was a joyous type of performance. But, anyway—because it was a resurrection. People did come back, and they got better, and it was okay. But, anyway, I had to create this symbol, this something for them to get into. And that's what Bena and Buba and the cooling pad turned out to be. And then mother and I made flowers. See, the flowers are not there, but there's—yeah, I think the next one may have this. It's got to be one here with the flowers. This is the one of the performances.

[00:08:23.49]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, okay.

[00:08:25.02]

FAITH RINGGOLD: See, there's no flowers there. It's later on that—I don't think I have one here.

[00:08:28.86]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Well, there are these.

[00:08:29.76]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, but, I mean, there were actual—we made flowers and put them around the cooling pad.

[00:08:33.81]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I see.

[00:08:34.71]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Little white flowers. And then, every school that they went to, they would make an arrangement. It was very interesting, because the whole ritual of the wake, I never had to tell anybody what to do. They all knew to get the flowers and to attend to it in the way it needed to be attended to. I did not have to—it was just really interesting how people got together and did it. And one of the things that they used to do was, they would call the local cemetery and ask if there was going to be a funeral that day. And they would say, "Oh, yes." And they said, "Well, could we come up and get the flowers after interment?" And so, they would say yes.

[00:09:30.10]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, really?

[00:09:31.00]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Because they were anxious to have it out there anyway. And so, they would come up, and Bena and Buba's funeral would have great sprays of flowers saying "love for mother," and this and that. And I never could figure out where the hell are these flowers coming from? Boy, you must have gone through a terrific expense.

[00:09:49.96]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, right.

[00:09:50.65]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Because when I would get there, these flowers would be there. And it would look like a real funeral, as you can see. Look at that.

[00:09:58.27]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:09:58.60]

FAITH RINGGOLD: See that?

[00:09:59.14]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:10:00.05]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So this is what they would get from the graveyard. But these pictures that you're looking at here, this is the first performance, which was at Wilson College. Now, I got an artist-in-residency at Wilson College. It's in, Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. I got an artist in residency there to put the performance together. That was the purpose of the artist in residency, to prepare for the first performance. I had developed Bena and Buba. The cooling pad was done. What wasn't done was Mama and Nana. I didn't have all the fine points finished. I didn't have the masks of Bena and Buba, and so on.

[00:10:56.05]

So I went there, and I got all of that together, and we did the first performance there. And those are the pictures from the first performance. And then it kept growing, and growing, and growing after that. But a lot of things were established at that first performance, the idea of the flowers and the vase. But it was rather mild there. See, and it got very—

[00:11:21.24]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Would you send any kind of—when you sent them on somewhere beforehand and they had prepared it—as you said, they would sometimes prepare it for performance before you got there or something.

[00:11:29.94]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:11:31.27]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Did they get guidelines, or anything like that, or did they just think up these sort of more elaborate—

[00:11:35.88]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, they never did the performance before. I'm the director, so I would arrive with the music and everything, and they would have ready for me the characters [cross talk]—the people who were going to play the different roles.

[00:11:47.19]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay. Got it.

[00:11:47.99]

FAITH RINGGOLD: But what they did was they put the environment together.

[00:11:52.93]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that's what I mean.

[00:11:53.86]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And they would have the little chairs there for people to come in. And people would come from town with their daughters and their husbands and all, and they would sit in their chairs and meditate. And some of them would have music, church music playing. And they would have incense burning. And they would have—some of them would have little brochures there at the door with quotations from Lucy's *From the Center* about what this was about. And, oh, so they dealt with it very seriously. It was a serious, serious environment.

[00:12:32.78]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:12:33.12]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And it went a lot of places.

[00:12:34.96]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, but I mean, it would surprise you sometimes. When you'd get there, there'd always be something different?

[00:12:38.97]

FAITH RINGGOLD: There would always be a different approach, a slightly different approach to it. And people took it very seriously. And a lot of people came to see it when it was being performed and when it wasn't. Because they could participate, whether it was being done or not, because there would be the chairs there, and the incense would be burning, and the flowers would be there. And the students were very good about changing the flowers each day.

[00:13:06.81]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's interesting.

[00:13:10.53]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Now, Mama and Nana—mother made those clothes.

[00:13:14.09]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: She did?

[00:13:14.45]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And so, when time came to put their veils—because I wanted them to have veiled faces—I was not aware of the fact that those hats that women wear when they're wearing those mourning hats, you can't buy those hats. Those hats are always made by the family or friends or whatever.

[00:13:34.39]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, I had no idea.

[00:13:34.64]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Somebody would bring a black hat, and then somebody will go and buy the veil.

[00:13:41.18]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I see.

[00:13:41.66]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Now, those veils can be from very, very expensive lace to just a little cheap illusion, whatever. And they picked—selected very carefully by friends. The actual mourner doesn't do any of this. That's all done for them. And so, I didn't realize that. And so, my mother taught me that, and together we made the hats for these two women, the mother and the grandmother.

[00:14:13.05]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And the handkerchief is a very—

[00:14:14.79]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yes, the handkerchief.

[00:14:15.87]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: —it stands out very—for both of them.

[00:14:17.22]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Uh-huh [affirmative].

[00:14:17.67]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. They have so much life to them, the way they move and everything like that. I was wondering if you'd had an interest in filmmaking or anything like that ever. I mean, did that ever—

[00:14:26.37]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I wanted them to—I wanted—[laughs] I wanted them—well, I think all artists want their art to come to life.

[00:14:33.66]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:14:33.81]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I mean, that is the—

[00:14:34.95]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: But it's not always in such a tableau—

[00:14:36.60]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, right.

[00:14:39.43]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Well, let's—

[00:14:45.71]

FAITH RINGGOLD: See, that's Bena. So the two figures, Bena and Buba would be laid out as sculptures. Plus, the real people who played the role of Bena and Buba would wear the mask, and they would lay next to them. And then, during the performance, they would be resurrected by the love of mother. That also developed out of the performance, that mother's strength and love, of her weeping over their death would cause them to come back, and come back as different, stronger people.

[00:15:17.81]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. So the masks would be taken off the actual figures for the performance, or did you have second—

[00:15:27.20]

FAITH RINGGOLD: The masks would be hanging as part of the environment until the performance came. And then those masks would come down, and they would go on the actors, the people who played the roles.

[00:15:39.71]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I see.

[00:15:42.13]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And then there were a whole bunch of other masks that were mourners' masks.

[00:15:46.87]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, right.

[00:15:47.68]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And those people sat on the other side of the stage from Mama, and Grandpa, and Auntie. And they would be the signifiers. They would tell us what was going on.

[00:16:06.45]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. All right. Let's [inaudible].

[00:16:09.71]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And that's Buba doing his final resurrection dance in which he gives up his is his drugs, and fighting, and all these negative behaviors.

[Telephone ringing.]

[00:16:28.75]

[Speaking on telephone:] Hello? Who's calling, please? I'm sorry, I have to go. Uh-huh. Thank you.

[00:16:41.30]

So but one of the—I did it once at a Baptist college in Kansas. I mean, this is the Bible Belt. And I'll never forget that production. These kids—I would go in—I would arrive the night before, and they would have picked, in collaboration with the drama school, or the music school, or whatever, they would advertise and have for me five main characters, which would Bena and Buba, a young man, young woman, the mother, the grandmother—no, the mother, the aunt, and the grandfather—old man, old woman—no. Old man, mother, and auntie—sisters, in other words. I wanted those to be the live mourners. Don't ask me why it wasn't mother and grandmother, I don't know.

[00:17:52.05]

Anyway, they would have those people ready for this. And when I would get there, I would see them at night for dinner. And I would tell them the situation, where it was going to be. And I would show them pictures and all. And then we would meet early in the morning for the first orientation performance type of thing. And I would play the music, and I would direct them and all. And I would tell them, it's looking fuzzy and all like that, but it's going to be like that. But when the performance is on and you're wearing the mask, it's going to be wonderful. And it always was.

[00:18:30.20]

And then we would perform that night. And then the next day I would leave. So, I mean, it was just like a day I was there. But it was spontaneous. And it was able to happen, because this production, in which I went back to my roots in the Baptist church. Now, I don't go to church today. But I sure went a lot when I was a child. [Laughs.]

[00:18:54.35]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You did?

[00:18:55.25]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, because my mother made us. We had to go to church, and then we had to go to Sunday school. I mean, Sunday was spent in church from, say, nine in the morning 'til about—church let out at one. That's a lot. Ten, eleven, twelve, one—that's four hours. That's a lot. And we had to do that every Sunday. Now, as we got older, we rebelled and stopped doing it. We just got too old; my mother couldn't do anything with us, so that was the end of it. But that stuff is in me. Because the minute I decided to do this "Wake and Resurrection," boom, I went right back to those roots.

[00:19:37.35]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, right.

[00:19:38.37]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I went right back to that gospel music, right back to all of that stuff that I've known and seen all my life. And that whole experience, obviously, is a big part of the Black experience. So as I would go to school to school, and I would get these students—a lot of things I never had to explain to them, because they know. They understand that. They know about funerals—that stuff's still going on—still going on, you know? So they would just fall right into it.

[00:20:22.05]

When I would tell them, "Okay, now, you're going to walk in. The family comes in, Bena and Buba laid out in repose on the stage, the flowers are all around, it's a funeral. It's a wake. It's however you see that ritual of death, it is there. You are the mother. Your knees are weak. You are taken over with grief. Express that. When you walk in, the audience will be seated. Now you will make your move."

[00:20:59.64]

And for that, I played—oh, I can't remember what the processional was, but I taped it all at Abyssinian Baptist Church, all the music. And so here would be this church music, it would come up. And the audience would be sitting there. They wouldn't know what was going to happen. They're looking at all these flowers and the dead body and all this stuff on the stage. They're looking this way. Then, from the back of the stage, the performance has begun, and the characters are all holding each other's arms. And they're coming in.

[00:21:34.32]

And I said, "Now, at some point, you can't take it anymore. You know how it is. You're planning to be dignified, but you can't make it. So you drop to your knees and you say, 'oh, God, God, help me, my poor child,' whatever." Those kids would get into that. [Laughs.] They would fall down on their knees. "Oh, Lord Jesus, oh, God, please, Lord. God, I can't take no more." [Laughs.] And I would just sit there in amazement. It happened all over the country. [They laugh.] And then the audience would turn around. And they would see this coming, and these Black faces with all this mask stuff. It was powerful.

[00:22:22.06]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: It's strong, yeah.

[00:22:22.33]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It was wonderful. It made chills run through my body. And then they would come on up. But, you see, that was the magic. As those kids with the mask would see the audience's reaction to them, it spurred them on. That's what did it. Then they would look and they would say, God, the audience is falling for this. This is great. And then they would do more, you know.

And I said, "Then you get up and you walk a little more, and then you fall down again. And then they come to you and they help you up, and just milk it. Just keep on going. Just keep going until finally you get up to the stage." And then you sit down at the end of the processional, and then it's—Mama's singing, right after that. Oh, right after that, Martin Luther King comes on, and he gives the sermon. "I have a dream."

[00:23:20.64]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh. Somebody was—oh, on the tape, you mean?

[00:23:22.74]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. See, then you hear Martin Luther King say, "I have a dream tonight." And da, da, da, that sets the mood. That's the sermon. And then, after that, it's Mama's turn. Mommy gets up to pay her respects to her children. And I forgot the piece that plays for that. But that's Mama's retching, weeping.

[00:23:49.05]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Now this would be that person acting Mama doing this?

[00:23:51.33]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right, yes. And then the rest of it goes on. In the process of all of the family paying tribute to the dead, what happened, which doesn't happen in real life, praise God, is that they actually bring those people back.

[00:24:08.73]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, right.

[00:24:10.09]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So, after that phase, Buba wakes up. He begins to stir. And then he sits up and he looks out at the audience. But he's still bad—not good yet.

[00:24:29.03]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah? No?

[00:24:29.61]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, he has not actually revived himself. At this point he's still a bad boy. He goes out into the audience—oh, at this school that I was telling you about in Kansas, this Bible Belt school, this boy, he was saying to me, "Oh, I don't know how I'm going to establish that Buba is still not right yet." Because everybody had their way.

[00:24:55.32]

So, during the performance, he had it worked out. He took some pieces of paper and he rolled them up like joints. And he went out in the audience. And they had a gorgeous pulpit. We did it in the church—gorgeous pulpit with marble steps. And he kind of fell down in a drunken stupor down off the steps. And when he got out there in the audience, he looked at the audience, and he kind of stalked them. And then he went in his pocket, and he pulled out this joint, and he looked at them—

[00:25:30.57]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, [inaudible].

[00:25:31.74]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And he lit it. And the audience was like—[They laugh.] And the poor audience. I had been warned that I would have a thousand kids, or whatever, because it was the end of the school year, and all of them that had to have a certain number of cultural credits—in other words, they had to have attended X number of events in the culture program.

[00:25:59.73]

And many of them had not done that. So this was their last opportunity to make their quota. So they would all be there. And these kids, if you don't entertain them, you're going to have trouble. So I said, "I don't think we have anything to worry about. I think they could—Yeah, I think they will be pretty well entertained." But those kids were like this. [Laughs.] And, anyway, he came out there. And then he started giving away joints in the audience. Nobody would take one because these were good Christian kids, so-called. Nobody would take one. And then finally he tore them up. Oh, he was very—oh, that boy was very good.

[00:26:39.70]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:26:41.17]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And so, that was one of the ways he expressed his



resurrection and his new approach.

[00:26:48.31]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, that's interesting.

[00:26:48.70]

FAITH RINGGOLD: There was also a fight. I think that was earlier. There was a fight scene. They love that. And it was interesting how the way the young women would actually fight back.

[00:27:00.73]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah?

[00:27:01.90]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Very few people did I have to prompt not to be quiet. Because I'd tell them, I said, now if you're going to let this guy beat you up, the audience is going to get angry with him. You can't let him beat you up. All right? You must fight him back. And then—

[00:27:20.98]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: The fight would be between Buba and Bena?

[00:27:23.29]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And Bena, right. So they would have this fight. And then the fight would end with him repenting, apologizing, realizing that he's not fighting his equal physically. So, anyway, all those things happened. I mean, it was interesting the ways in which they used to fight, the ways in which they interpreted every aspect of this production. In the end, all the family came together. Of course, the family was joyous because they watched Bena and Buba come back to life. They got another chance. And then they would all go off. Mama was still quite weak from all her grieving. Even though she was happy with joy, she was weak. So that is the "Wake and the Resurrection."

[00:28:13.06]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Now, I have a couple questions about that. Is that just about your favorite piece, you think, when you—

[00:28:20.00]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, I think it probably is. I think it probably is. It's very—yeah, because I told you that my brother died of an overdose of drugs. I did tell you that, right?

[00:28:29.74]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:28:30.04]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And so did my first husband.

[00:28:33.52]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Wow.

[00:28:34.27]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And so, I had at least two young men, two very promising, brilliant, wonderful young men in my life who went because of drugs. So, I mean, this shaped my life. It definitely has shaped my life in a very, very strong way. It's had a very big impression on me, use of drugs. So—and this piece is a tribute. It really is a tribute to them.

[00:29:07.09]

Because I have found—and I don't know about today, because I'm really not in touch with people who use drugs today, so I don't know. But, as a young woman growing up in Harlem, many of the young men that I knew when I was in my teens and early 20s got wasted on drugs. It was a time when people didn't know how deadly drugs were. There was no rehabilitation programs at all. There was nothing. If you became a drug addict, you were going to die, and that's the end of it. And you were going to be ostracized and the whole thing. But—

[00:29:47.84]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Kind of a plague.

[00:29:48.52]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, it was a plague. And, in the beginning, drugs were used by young men from rather stable families. It was not being used by the down and outers. It was being used by the kids who were going to college, on their way to college, or whatever. So it was very sad. It was just very, very, very sad. And that's the part of it that I know about the best. I don't know too much about crack. I don't know anything about crack.

[00:30:18.37]

The experience that I do know about is young men—and it was always the men too, by the way. Women didn't use drugs. It was the men who used it. Now, today, a different story. And it was heroin. Their drug was heroin. And so, usually when I'm talking about drugs, in a sense, I'm relating to that period. Although things are much worse now. I mean, they're much worse now.

[00:30:47.84]

But how can you say they're much worse now? It's bad for everybody in the period that it's bad for them. So, I mean, everybody has to experience their experience at the time that they're experiencing it. And that was a very hopeless period, because nobody was addressing drugs. There were some individuals who were doing it and catching a lot of flak doing it.

[00:31:14.03]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. And it was something that people that you knew were succumbing to.

[00:31:18.32]

FAITH RINGGOLD: People that I knew. And it was a deep secret. It was a family secret that nobody—it was like AIDS was in the beginning. No one discussed it. It was very quiet. And if it was discussed, it was denied. My mother never accepted it—never, never, never. That her son could be a drug addict was just the worst possible thing. And my first husband's parents never accepted it—never accepted it. He was the first person in their family to ever do anything antisocial like that, and the first person in my family to ever do anything antisocial like that.

[00:31:59.79]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Huh.

[00:32:03.10]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And the question was always, where did they get this from? Why are they doing this? It was just such a disgrace on the family and such a terminal kind of thing to do.

[00:32:19.21]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. And do you have ways of—I asked you if you videotaped it, and you said there's maybe there's one videotape?

[00:32:25.39]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. There's—

[00:32:27.17]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Are quite a lot of the performances recorded somewhere? I mean, at least photographs, or something like that?

[00:32:31.27]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes.

[00:32:32.26]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: The different atmosphere of the different places, and the different people playing the parts are all preserved.

[00:32:41.59]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. I remember one school that I was at, I think it was in Hartford, Connecticut, this African young man played the part of Pop. And, of course, he was used to masks. And it was interesting to see how he worked with his mask differently from the way the Americans did.

[00:33:01.52]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's interesting.

[00:33:03.71]

FAITH RINGGOLD: He stalked like a—sort of like a panther. And he would turn and look at the audience and freeze. Oh, he was so dramatic as he was on his way to look at Bena and Buba laying there. And because he had spoken to me. And he was very excited about doing this. Because what I was doing was I was bringing his culture and putting it on display in America.

[00:33:37.53]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:33:38.01]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Because people from other places have to subdue their culture in a foreign land. And that's what he had been doing.

[00:33:44.66]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. You must have felt good to have found him too.

[00:33:46.16]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It felt great. He felt great about me, and I felt great about him. And so, he played a—even though he was the grandpa, he played a major role because everything he did with his mask, it was, oh, it was just so profound. Because, with a mask, you don't need to do a whole lot of stuff. Any slight movement echoes.

[00:34:05.76]

And the way he stalked across that stage and looked at the audience, and then he'd look at the audience, and then he'd look down at Bena and Buba. And he'd look at the audience, and he'd look down at Bena and Buba. And then he would do like this. Like, what a pity. And that said the whole thing. It was great the way he presented his mask. So I got all that kind of stuff. Now, he didn't have the Black American experience. He didn't have that because he—

[00:34:36.96]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, the church part.

[00:34:37.83]

FAITH RINGGOLD: He's an African, so he didn't have any of that. He could relate to the music, because that music is steeped in African experience, too. But he didn't have the slave experience, not having witnessed that in America. But he worked with that mask beautifully. And he took his lead from the Americans in other aspects of the production.

[00:35:02.29]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Huh. So, okay. So that was in 1976. And you kept doing that—

[00:35:09.58]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So this is 1976, too.

[00:35:11.86]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, okay. And—

[00:35:13.63]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I did that until 1981—my mother died.

[00:35:16.99]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: The performance, you mean? That's right. That's what you said. And how about the end of the '70s? What were other things that you were doing?

[00:35:25.03]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Okay, this is '76. Went to Africa in '76. And I saw that that performance, that "Wake" that I was doing, was very African, because that's the way they do productions. They don't just sing, or dance, or have a story, or a play. It's all together. It all comes together. And so, I toured Nigeria and Ghana and came back with this mask, the first mask that I ever did that didn't have a costume to it. I just wanted to explore the beads and the feathers and the fabric as faces and all of that. So I made a whole series of these masks.

[00:36:01.54]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And what fabric is it?

[00:36:04.51]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. It's a black and white print, large print.

[00:36:10.84]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Did you do this over there while you were on—

[00:36:12.40]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Uh-uh [negative]. I just came home with the idea in my head, because I thought I knew every kind of African masks there was. However, when I went over there, I said—hey, a lot of stuff I'd never seen. [Laughs.] So I came home with an idea that I wanted to do, using cloth, and creating these faces that would be heavily beaded and feathered and would just be sculptural forms, and would not be used for performance.

[00:36:46.40]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Would just be on the wall?

[00:36:47.12]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, would just be on the wall. So I did a whole series of that. And that's '70—that's the end of '76. And then '77 I did some more of them. And then I started doing these figures that were not hanging. They were stationary standard figures. These were actually the first ones that I did.

[00:37:13.23]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Well, how did they stand?

[00:37:14.36]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And they had big cans, huge cans that were weighted down with rocks, and that was their foundation. And their bodies were made of large, long tubes that had been reinforced and heavily packed. And then they were covered over with the aluminum foil. I mean, not aluminum foil, but with foam rubber. And then, all of these images came also in 1977. And no arms done, like the Greek sculptures, with no arms on them.

[00:37:57.23]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Like the busts.

[00:37:57.74]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, like those busts.

[00:38:00.22]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Huh. That's interesting.

[00:38:04.16]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And these are my "Women on a Pedestal" series.

[00:38:07.55]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, okay. The ones you just looked at, of the bust, head?

[00:38:10.91]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, I did a whole series of women on a pedestal. Let's see what you got. What's it, '78 now?

[00:38:23.26]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: This is '79 here. '78—doing this—

[00:38:27.37]

FAITH RINGGOLD: What is this? Oh, so in '78—'77, '78, I did a whole series, but you don't have them all there, because some of the pictures still aren't there. But I'll have more later—of "Women on a Pedestal." And then, in '78, I did a series of Harlem figures, which you should have some of them here. No, you don't have any of them here. But they were stationary figures. That's '73, is it? Those were stationary figures. And we can't talk about them much because they're not there. But they don't move or anything. They just stand there.

[00:39:05.89]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Are they a little bit like the faces that would later be on your quilt, "The Echoes of Harlem," or whatever? I mean, just people in the streets?

[00:39:14.21]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. Yes, that's exactly what they were. They were like people that you would see different places. And then, in '79, I did a series of dolls called "The Ringgold Dolls." They were international group of dolls. And I did those working with my mother. We were trying to develop something that could be marketable. I made so much art, and I was trying to create something that was more commercial. But it turned out to be just more art. [They laugh.]

[00:39:49.96]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Can't get around it, huh?

[00:39:50.84]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Can't get around it. Can't get around—and, see, I did portraits. And, out of that, I also did some portraits. And I wanted to do somebody that everybody knew. So I wanted to do Muhammad Ali, but I could never catch up with him, and I needed to get his permission.

[00:40:08.51]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, yeah.

[00:40:08.84]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, so I couldn't get that with Muhammad Ali. So what I did was I said, oh, hell, I think I'll do the President.

[00:40:14.87]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:40:15.38]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And Carter was in the White House. So I called the White House and they said, "Sure, we'd like that. It's okay." So I said, "Would you send me a photograph?" And they said, "Will you send us a letter and we'll send you a photograph." So I sent them a letter and they sent me the photograph.

[00:40:28.58]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:40:29.00]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So I did the Carters, and Mother did the clothes.

[00:40:34.34]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: She did—so these, you said, it ended up—sorry, did you show these in the show?

[00:40:38.96]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Everywhere. They're still going. And some of them sold so fast that it took my breath away.

[00:40:45.47]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Really?

[00:40:46.34]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, and so cheap, I can't imagine. So a lot of them—

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: About how tall are these? How high?

[00:40:53.41]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, they're about 17 inches. They're little. They're little. And Mother made all these clothes—

[00:40:58.70]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, wow.

[00:40:59.48]

FAITH RINGGOLD: —tons of clothes for them. So I still have lots of clothes.

[00:41:03.14]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: This is what she made extra, the ones that never got to be used for

the Ringgold doll.

[00:41:07.34]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. So what I plan to do is make another doll that would be a composition head that could be reproduced in porcelain or some kind of hard material and then dress them. That's a project that will happen sometime.

[00:41:32.96]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, you mean ones that you could reproduce, or something—

[00:41:36.50]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, so the bodies could be reproduced by others than me. And then I could dress them and have them at shows and things like that. Because these things relate very heavily to children. And children have always been a part of what I do as an artist. I like them as an audience. Although adults buy these. I mean, most of them, they're bought by adults. But, well, the doll is also a cultural symbol. It kind of establishes your connection with the society. And that has been a problem with Black people developing a doll language.

[00:42:24.47]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Well, that's interesting, because I was—

[00:42:28.22]

FAITH RINGGOLD: See, that has been—so we, as Black people, we had a fantastic doll tradition in Africa, because Africans knew exactly what they wanted of their culture. They understood who they were and where they—how they wanted to be through every phase of their lives. But, as Black Americans, we didn't have that option. We were always trying to be something different than what we were because what we were was oppressed. See?

So—and we didn't know what it should be, so that our dolls were always in question. What color should they be? What kind of hair should they have? Actually, what kind of dolls—what should they look like? We weren't sure of any of that. It wasn't set. The image was not set. So that's another reason why I like to do dolls. Dolls is a political issue.

[00:43:37.71]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, it seems to be that when you see the amount of them that you've done. I mean, that they build up one after another, and it gives them—it's not an isolated thing. It's not like the one token Black doll somewhere, it's a group; a whole life, of a whole family.

[00:43:55.41]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So now, and when I would show them, of course, I ran into a lot of trouble, because people would say, "Oh, Faith's making dolls. That's not important art, that's —" and, of course, especially men. But, as I did it, around the country, people would gravitate toward me and say, "You know, I'm making dolls now. I saw your dolls X place, and my mother made them, and now I'm making them. And I would like you to see them." So I got dolls from all over the country. Women start sending me dolls.

[00:44:31.66]

But there still hasn't been that definitive doll exhibition. That is the one area that the women's movement never really addressed. And part of it has to do with the fact that it touches on one of the most vulnerable and objectionable of women's shortcomings—one of the things that we see as our shortcomings, in that we are childlike, or are seen to be childlike and cute and not serious. And all of that is what dolls mean to us. And we want to get away from that. So I think that the women's movement has never really dealt with the fact that dolls is our cultural heritage. It's what our children relate to being before they know, before they can intellectualize. They play it out with dolls. And we should participate in that and develop it.

[00:45:57.31]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, and it's sculpture somehow come—all sculpture kind of comes from dolls on some level anyway.

[00:46:01.60]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right, right. And it's also a popular art form in that you don't have to be an artist to do a doll.

[00:46:09.04]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, or to understand one, either.

[00:46:10.69]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, you don't. You don't have to be any of those things. You can just go ahead and make up your mind as to what that doll should exemplify, and do it.

[00:46:21.40]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, yeah. Now, what you said about relating to children, having some interest in that, and part of that, you could say it comes from having taught a long time. But do you feel like you're pretty much in touch with—you seem to be pretty in touch with the child that you were.

[00:46:35.56]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That I was?

[00:46:36.22]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:46:37.03]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, I think I spent a long time being a child. My mother didn't let me grow up that fast. In fact, nobody in my family did. My father called me "Baby." "The Baby." That was my name. As a matter of fact, when he got—was in the hospital once, and very sick, and kind of in a coma, and they were trying to reach us, all he could say—

[END OF TRACK AAA\_ringgo89\_6389\_m]

[00:00:10.40]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay. Yeah, well, that kind of brings it up to the—just to skip along a little bit, because we know that you've been doing quilts, and I want to talk about them and everything. But speaking of that—then we get to the children's book that you're going to be working on.

[00:00:24.50]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. I mean, that is so wonderful that I will be doing this children's book. And it will be using a story that, though it is not a typical children's story, it is a children's story. It's a story that all people can appreciate and understand. And I would like to be able to do more of that. You know, what is this art that's only for adults?

[00:00:51.80]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that's interesting.

[00:00:53.42]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Why can't it be—I mean, all of our great art forms, children can understand. Children can go to the ballet. Children can go to the opera.

[00:01:02.30]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. That's true.



[00:01:02.93]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Children can go to the theater. Some things may be a little bit more advanced for them. But I took my children to see things long before they were able to understand them, to give them the feeling, this is theater. Children love theater. So why can't children understand, appreciate, and participate in art?

[00:01:21.60]

And today, people take children to the museums. My grandchildren love the museums. My daughter takes them—even though I used to have hell taking her, she takes them, and they absolutely love going to the Metropolitan, the Modern, and the Studio Museum, and whatever. So I would like to be able to translate much of what I think philosophically, politically, aesthetically, are the important issues for me to deal with now in such a way that children can understand them, too. So the two current stories that I'm doing, which will be story quilts, are about children.

[00:02:17.66]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You mean new ones, even?

[00:02:18.92]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, new ones that are just in the making. They are really about children. Children are the main characters, although the issues that it is about are adult issues. But it's the children who are dealing with them in these stories. The children are the heroines, like *Tar Beach*.

[00:02:45.46]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, in which children are prominent.

[00:02:48.57]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Mm-hmm [affirmative], right.

[00:02:51.89]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Was the first actual quilt that you did, the one that was done for that quilt project?

[00:02:59.31]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, that's 1980. And the first quilt that I did was "Echoes of Harlem" in 1980. And Mother and I collaborated together to do that quilt, and there it is. That's it. No story.

[00:03:25.50]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, just faces.

[00:03:26.91]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Just faces. It's coming from the '20s. To me, it has that feeling of the kind of look that people had in the '20s. And I just thought of all the colorful characters that lived in Harlem in those days. Because when I was growing up, the '20s was our romantic period. That was the period everybody talked about, because our parents were always talking about the '20s. And so we talked about the '20s.

[Telephone ringing.]

[00:04:05.88]

[Speaking on telephone:] Hello? Hi, Gordon.

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:04:08.90]

The '20s was our romantic period. It was just before the Depression. People were poor but proud. And it was a hopeful kind of period, because nobody had any idea that they were going to stay poor. Even during the Depression, people thought this was just a phase. It's nothing like now where people are hopelessly in the street. Nobody was like that.

[00:04:36.37]

Nobody was in the street, either. There was nobody in the street. I mean, anybody who was down on their luck or didn't have money for their time could always sleep on somebody's couch, or there was always an extra cot somewhere, or someplace somebody could sleep with somebody or stay with someone. Mother constantly took people in. We always had someone living with us who was not an immediate member of our family. And my father never objected that I can remember anything about. It was understood that you would house more than your immediate family, if need be.

[00:05:15.59]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Would they people you had already known, who became down on their luck, or something, or—

[00:05:18.95]

FAITH RINGGOLD: A lot of these people were people that I did in the "Family of Woman" series. And that was great when they would come with their kids. Wow, that was fun. Yeah, because we'd have kids to play with all day. And plus they would come with their little different culture, their little different way of eating, or doing. And they would take us to the movies, and they would—we would sort of get away with little things that we couldn't get away with otherwise.

[00:05:50.54]

So it was enriching. It made life interesting. It was never just us, hardly. It was always some cousin, or aunt, or uncle coming up from the South who needed someplace to stay for a couple of weeks 'til they got a job and got their own apartment, or somebody who had gotten dispossessed because they lost their job. No unemployment insurance, no welfare, none of that, and so they needed to just stay for a while.

[00:06:20.80]

I remember one woman, she had a daughter and a son. And she had dispossessed. I don't know what happened. Maybe her husband broke up or what—because women didn't have jobs. There was no jobs for women, so—any kind of woman practically. Black women had the option to be maids, but that was pretty well it. I mean, that was the main way to work in those days, you know.

[00:06:58.98]

But most women were housewives. My mother was a housewife. She never worked outside the house. She did her sewing, and that was how she got her work together, and then finally she became a professional at it. But she was a housewife. My father took care of us. So anyway, this woman couldn't pay her rent and got dispossessed. And what she did—and this is characteristic of the time. She bought a house. She put a down payment on a house.

[00:07:36.77]

She found this house in Brooklyn. And she needed some extra money to—she probably allowed them to put her out of the apartment that she was in, and withheld the money, so that she could put a down payment on this house since she was having trouble paying her rent anyway. And it would be just slightly more money to put a down payment on a house. My mother loaned her her rent for the month, and she stayed with us until the house was ready, or whatever. And I remember that case. Very clearly I remember that. And she stayed in that house until her children grew up and went off, and she died.

[00:08:27.16]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Do you go visit there?

[00:08:27.97]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, we used to go over there and visit. But that's the kind of thing my mother used to do. She loaned people the rent in a minute. And then she would tell the landlord, "I'll pay half in the middle of the month. On the 15th, I'll give you half. And at the end of the month, I'll give you the other 15." And the landlord would come by and sit. And they had a personal relationship with everybody in the building.

[00:08:53.39]

He'd come by, and he'd sit down, and he'd talk and have some coffee and sit there. And my mother would tell him, "Look, my husband is not home right now, but we're going to pay you. We have a little problem, and we're going—" and they knew my husband worked for—my father worked for the city. So that money was in the bag.

[00:09:14.69]

See, a whole lot of people didn't even have any jobs, right? So they knew that they were going to get paid. So my mother frequently did that. She never said no to anybody. But people didn't seem to take advantage of other people, either. People paid her back. If they said that they were going to do it, they did it.

[00:09:36.31]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Speaking of your father—I don't know whether I asked this. What did he do for the city?

[00:09:41.52]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, he drove a truck for the sanitation department. And so that was a—if I recall correctly, he made \$34 a week. That was a lot of money.

[00:09:54.76]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, it was. [They laugh.]

[00:09:57.60]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That was a lot of money. [Laughs.]

[00:09:58.72]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: But that must have been a pretty new thing. They couldn't have had trucks for a—well, I guess they had trucks for quite a while already.

[00:10:04.10]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, they had trucks—oh, come on! I remember that truck. He took me to it. Used to be a great big old white truck with a big jaw on the back of it. And it looked very much like the ones they have now, not too much different. And he drove the truck. And he wore a uniform, which my mother was very careful about getting him out of. She never wanted us to see him in that uniform. She didn't want that to set in our minds as any kind of thing for us to emulate. Now, she might have been wrong. I don't know what. But I do not recall seeing my father in that uniform except the time he took me on that truck and put me up in that truck, which I felt like I was in a mountain.

[00:10:55.85]

But she would get him in there, and his bath would be ready when he came home. First of all, she didn't want him touching us because, you know, he worked on that truck! She didn't want him touching us. So my mother would have that bath ready. And when my father came home, he was in that bath. And when we got a chance to see him, he was in his regular street clothes looking wonderful. Because people always had to be clean and neat. There was nobody dirty anywhere. I don't care how poor you were. You were clean.

[00:11:32.37]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, right.

[00:11:36.06]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Haircut, shoes shined, creases in your pants—everybody. A lot of time was spent on stuff like that. [Laughs.]

[00:11:48.10]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Right. Now I'm—Okay. That'll work. When this came up, were you gotten in touch with by the people doing the quilt project, and then it turned out that—Did they already know that you might collaborate with your mother?

[00:12:08.35]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, they wanted me to. They suggested that.

[00:12:10.39]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: They did.

[00:12:11.25]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, they suggested that—because each artist had to collaborate with a quilt maker. So they would go out getting quilt makers for people. Because you know, artists don't know how to sew. They don't know anything about making quilts. I mean, this whole thing of a quilt was a whole new idea for us, when in reality, I had been making a kind of quilt up to now, but not realizing.

[00:12:33.15]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. You'd been doing it all along.

[00:12:34.27]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. But anyway, some people said, "Well, let's get Faith, because she can work with her mother. She collaborates with her anyway." So then they approached me. And I told Mother, and Mother had had quilting experience in her youth. Her grandmother had made quilts and had learned it from her grandmother—from her mother, Suzy Shannon, who had been a slave, and had worked in the house, making quilts for the family that—the slave masters.

[00:13:16.30]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Keying into an old tradition.

[00:13:19.00]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And so she had taught—Suzy had taught Betsy, who was my mother's grandmother—Betsy Bingham—to make quilts. And they had made—she had made them out of these flour sacks. She had lined them with the flour sacks, and she had boiled these flour sacks. Mother told me about the process and everything, and how she had made these triangles, and these little baskets and things, and had sewn them together, and made these quilts. And my mother used to help her. So that was my mother's orientation toward quilts. Now, of course, I was totally ignorant where quilts were concerned, although I was brought up with quilts. But who knew what value they—to me, they were just something to put over you. So a lot of them had been destroyed and gotten rid of. They were like rags. They were nothing.

[00:14:08.79]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Well, and if they get used, they do get worn, I guess.

[00:14:11.78]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. But, God, I wish I had them today. And one quilt that my mother made for my buggy was made of little three-dimensional triangles that were kind of like

overlaid over each other. It was satin. I'll never forget it. Where is it today? Beautiful thing my mother made. And it was always on my buggy when I was a baby. I would love to have that today. I don't know where it is. It was like silver. We used to throw silver away because it was cheap. And when it tarnished, turned black, we threw it away, got some more. Can you imagine that?

[00:14:51.77]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that's wild.

[00:14:52.85]

FAITH RINGGOLD: For Christmas, my father used to buy us—every Christmas, we would get a brand-new mirror, and comb and brush set, silver, and we'd throw the other one away. Silver was extremely cheap. Today, it would be very valuable, but where is it? Gone. [Cross talk.] So I was trying to bring back that '20s period, which was before I was born, but was a very romantic period for all the young men and women whom I grew up with, whose parents had, like my parents had, told us about the '20s. And so that's really what that "Echoes of Harlem" was about. I had no idea that I was going to start writing stories on anything and—so there's really no story to be told here. It was really getting back to painting after doing all that sculpture.

[00:16:00.63]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. So you're painting on the quilt, yeah.

[00:16:02.50]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And I'm painting on canvas that has been dyed. I dyed my canvas, and then I painted on top of the dyed sheets, and then sewed them together to make this quilt. And then I incorporated these triangles. And Mother and I collaborated on putting that together.

[00:16:24.54]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And that was one of the last things you did together, right?

[00:16:26.85]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:16:28.81]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, I want to see. The faces in this always remind me also of—I could be wrong, but the kinds of outside barber shops, and things. Aren't there pictures and things like that?

[00:16:42.90]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, yeah, they have that kind of old look to them that just kind of just crept in, because that's kind of like where they're coming from.

[00:16:54.56]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: There you are as well. And then—

[00:17:01.51]

FAITH RINGGOLD: The '80s also is—oh, the '80s took up a lot of time writing my autobiography.

[00:17:11.29]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, really?

[00:17:12.01]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, I was writing my autobiography. And then I did a performance

wearing the mask and doing my reading from my autobiography. And then—

[00:17:23.17]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So—

[00:17:23.56]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Go ahead.

[00:17:24.34]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Well, some of that autobiography has reappeared in some of the later quilts, and in your—

[00:17:29.08]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. It just kept—

[00:17:30.52]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: —weight loss quilt, too.

[00:17:31.57]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. And then this is '81, and this is the "Atlanta Children."

[00:17:38.20]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Which you do as a chess board.

[00:17:40.21]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. Which I didn't know it was a chess board. I didn't even know it was that. I didn't know that it was—I didn't see that until after it got photographed. Then I said, "Oh, my God. Look at that."

[00:17:51.88]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: They were just blocks for you.

[00:17:53.05]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, for me, they were just—

[00:17:54.22]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: They were abstract things.

[00:17:54.72]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. They were just really pedestals for each of their figures. That's what they were. Each of the figures represented one of the children that had gotten killed. And then I made this poster too with all the names. See?

[00:18:12.47]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, wow.

[00:18:13.91]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And each one of the images got tagged. I made the heads of stone, little pebbles, and covered them over with satin fabric, and then painted the faces on them. See? And I did not realize that I was making any kind of chess board. It was not intentional at all, but it certainly does come off that way. And that's the mother and father screaming in the background, all tied up, unable to do anything about the situation.

[00:19:01.39]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Did you actually use pictures of each child?

[00:19:03.70]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yes. There's a—yeah. I put the picture from the newspaper article on this little tag. Now, this one that you're coming to now is another one of the series that I did, which I've only shown once, because I just saw it as so gory and grisly that I couldn't. But I had to do it—

[00:19:29.65]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Everything's so mutilated and—

[00:19:30.61]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. I had to do that, because it was part of my dealing with the issue. It's just an image of two young people wrapped and bound and beaten and standing in their dignity, but dead—you know, finished, totally wrapped and totally mutilated. This was for an exhibition that was shown at the—downtown on Lafayette Street in New York for the—I don't remember the name of it. But one of the parents from the Atlanta children's murders came, and she said it just reminded her of the situation. And I apologized to her for being so graphic. I said, "But what I was trying to do is bring home the horror of the children's murders." And she said she understood. I don't know whether she did or not, but—

[00:21:02.17]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: What, she came up in order to see it?

[00:21:04.36]

FAITH RINGGOLD: She came to the exhibition.

[00:21:05.98]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: The whole exhibition was on that subject?

[00:21:07.33]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And I just felt like I could not just do some pretty thing. I really wanted to do something that spoke to their last hours alive, which must have been devastating for them. This is actually the last thing that Mother and I worked on. It's a doll kit. And it was just two pieces of fabric that got stamped, and the person could fit—

[00:21:43.65]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You can put different clothes on them?

[00:21:45.09]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And so I made all these examples that people could do. And it wasn't a total flop. But I mean, people didn't want to do it. They didn't really want to do anything. They wanted it done for them.

[00:22:07.28]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Where would you take—I mean, you would—[cross talk].

[00:22:09.92]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I advertised a lot of places. I sold to people all over the country. I broke even on it.

[00:22:15.57]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: But they just—but it wasn't—

[00:22:16.85]

FAITH RINGGOLD: But it wasn't something that I would do again, because they—and they could make them any color they wanted, because they got the crayons to go with it. And so they could do it in their own image.

[00:22:34.66]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Now—

[00:22:35.68]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Okay, Mother died in '81. And in—what is this? '82?

[00:22:43.12]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: '82, uh-huh [affirmative].

[00:22:43.96]

FAITH RINGGOLD: '82, I did these series of abstract paintings, which I call the "Emanon" series.

[00:22:49.66]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. How did they get that name?

[00:22:51.73]

FAITH RINGGOLD: "No name" backwards is "Emanon."

[00:22:55.27]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, okay.

[00:22:57.58]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And this is like little images in their abstract forms, little non-heads. It was a process of painting where it just came totally out of my subconscious—no plans, nothing, just paint on canvas. And I did a whole series of paintings in that mode.

[00:23:21.01]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: This was kind of a reaction to doing all the things with the dolls, and things with your mother?

[00:23:25.33]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, I think so, and also a reaction to my mother dying.

[00:23:27.88]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's what I mean—

[00:23:28.51]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Trying to connect—

[00:23:29.37]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: —because you did that with her.

[00:23:30.43]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah—right. Yeah, because I wanted to do something I could do all by myself.

[00:23:37.91]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And this was with acrylic?



[00:23:39.84]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And I'd never done anything abstract before. I was just trying to connect with my spiritual self.

[00:23:48.76]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And you didn't—I mean, they do have little borders, but they're plain.

[00:23:52.84]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. And see, what I want to do—see, actually, what I was trying to do was compensate for the fact that I no longer had her to add her special touch, and to collaborate with me. And so I created these borders, which I want to get rid of now because they're not what I want. So I have on here—this is a series called "Baby Faith and Willi," because my grandchild was born the year after Mother died, see? And I had very crudely put this on here, which I want it off.

[00:24:44.77]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, I see.

[00:24:45.52]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So I've got somebody coming in. We're going to strip all these off, and we're going to put cloth around, which is what should have happened before. But I couldn't see it that way then. So I'm stripping all this off. And there will be new borders here.

[00:25:00.43]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Patterned cloth, you think—

[00:25:01.54]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. It's going to be a patterned cloth. And these are going to be in my retrospective that's going to travel.

[00:25:07.09]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: There?

[00:25:07.45]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So I did five of these, and these are tribute to Mother and Baby Faith, my grandchild that mother never saw. And in it, they were done in the same spirit of those paintings—just painting, with no drawings, no plans, nothing—just the idea and the paint and go do it. And then I would get back from it and see what I had—I'd get real close and paint, and then I'd back away and see what I had done. And in all of them, there's these little illusory images floating in the air. And those are—as far as I'm concerned, those are my mother.

[00:25:44.82]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that's interesting.

[00:25:45.73]

FAITH RINGGOLD: There's all these little images down here that are—

[00:25:48.45]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: —floating, sort of.

[00:25:49.38]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. See, later on, I have people actually flying, which I didn't know that was coming. [Laughs.]

[00:25:57.03]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, well, that's—yeah. Is that what also took the name—was that the "Dah" series?

[00:26:03.00]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, the "Dah" series came after that, in '83. Baby Faith is a little older, and she starts looking at my work saying, "dah." "Dah." [Laughs.] And we just decided that "dah" was just a whole philosophy of life. [They laugh.]

[00:26:25.84]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, okay.

[00:26:26.35]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And so I said, I think I'll do the "Dah" series because that's just—that says it all. It's the first word.

[00:26:35.68]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, right.

[00:26:36.72]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So "dah," you know? [Laughs.]

[00:26:41.62]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. They're more filled, right, I guess? The whole canvas is more filled. There aren't as much floating.

[00:26:45.70]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. And they also have metallic colors in them. There's all these metallic colors in them. And '83 is also the year that I did "Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?"

[00:26:57.34]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, okay. So that's the beginning of the—

[00:27:01.00]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Stories.

[00:27:01.36]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: —doing quilts as story quilts, I guess, the whole series. Huh.

[00:27:05.77]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So the "Dah" series is going to be recovered also.

[00:27:08.71]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: It will?

[00:27:09.31]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And it's going to be reframed with cloth. I'm showing two of the Dah and all five of the Baby Faith and Willi. But eventually, they're all going to be reframed.

[00:27:26.31]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And in "Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?" did you just stop doing the "Dah"—stop doing the abstract all one day, and then the next day start on the quilt? Or was it—

[00:27:38.37]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, how did that go? No, "Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?" took me a whole year to do. I started in January, and it took me an entire year to do it. So actually, I was working on both at the same time.

[00:28:00.57]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And did you make up a story? Was that something you already had?

[00:28:05.01]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, I had to write that story. I had to do all those portraits. I had to figure out who everybody was. I had to do research. And it took me a year to get it all done. And the show for which I was doing all this stuff for was in 1984, January. Show opened, I think, January, 1984. So I had to finish it all in '83, get it all together, and then I went out to California to teach in January of '84.

[00:28:38.90]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Was that the first year that you did that?

[00:28:40.81]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That was my first year doing that. And yeah, I didn't see any problem with working in those two ways at that time. I think that's the year that I went to—is that the year? No. No, I'll tell you what happened. "Dah" was done in California, wasn't it? I think the "Dah" series was done in California. How could that be, because I went to California in '84 and—maybe the Dah series was done in—oh, my God. No, it was definitely done in '83. Does it say '83?

[00:29:30.98]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: It says '83 on it. Yeah.

[00:29:32.10]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, so it was done in—oh, I know. There is a "Dah" series that was done in California, but it's not that "Dah." It's the "Dah" you're coming to.

[00:29:38.98]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, okay.

[00:29:39.50]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, that was done in '84, here.

[00:29:41.94]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So this was an earlier—

[00:29:42.92]

FAITH RINGGOLD: This is an early "Dah." There's two "Dahs." The next "Dah" is called "California Dah." And that was done to be a backdrop for a performance which I originated in '85, which was called "The Bitter Nest," for which I do all those quilts for later.

[00:30:05.54]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Oh, all right. You hadn't done the quilts yet—I mean, you had the name of the performance and the stories—

[00:30:09.74]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I had the performance. I had the masks. I had the story, the whole story, which was the performance. But I didn't do the quilts for it until '87.

[00:30:28.38]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, right. But then "Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?" you were doing that for a show, an '84 show?

[00:30:35.30]

FAITH RINGGOLD: My '84 show at the Studio Museum. I was going to have one quilt, and it was going to be "Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?"

[00:30:43.28]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay. And the way the figures are presented, it's a little bit like the Echoes of Harlem. But it's not just faces. It's a whole figure, and they're real figures.

[00:30:52.19]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. Now, I had planned whole figures, but in fact, the originals were whole figures, but they got too big. The quilt was huge. When I put it all together, it was so big that I couldn't contain it. So I said, well, you know what you're going to have to do. You've got to get rid of the whole figure. So I cut everything down, scaled it down, went back to the drawing board, and redesigned the whole quilt and made it smaller. And there's another quilt there called "Mother's Quilt." And that was done in '83, too. I did that quilt in a week.

[00:31:40.43]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Wow.

[00:31:41.11]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That was using some little doll dresses that Mother had cut out for me. And I wanted to make a doll quilt. And I wanted to collaborate with Mother on it. And she didn't want to collaborate.

[00:32:05.17]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: No?

[00:32:06.19]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, she wanted me—"Just to tell me what you want me to do." Because she said, "I have my work to do." She was getting some of her customers ready for their cruises, and she had a lot of dresses to get out. And so she just wanted me to tell her what it is I wanted to do so that she could do it. And I didn't want to do that. I wanted to brainstorm with her. And she wasn't interested.

[00:32:27.68]

So she said, "Well, Mrs. Ringgold—" whenever she called me Mrs. Ringgold, I knew I was in trouble. She said, "Okay, Mrs. Ringgold. You wanted me to cut out some doll dresses. I've just done that. Now, you let me know what else you want me to do, and I will see you later, because I have to go. I have work to do." See, she considered her work serious, because her work was commissioned work. She was getting paid. My work wasn't. I wasn't getting paid for anything. I was just doing work. [They laugh.]

[00:32:53.63]

So she cut out the doll dresses for me, and I kept them all that time. And then in '83—actually, this exhibition, "The Artist and the Quilt," was getting ready to travel. And Charlotte called me up and said, "Listen, we want to include something new that the artists are doing since they did the quilt—some new direction."

[00:33:30.86]

Now, unlike everybody else, I was now making quilts. I was now making "Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?" which was going to be my second quilt. So I said, I know what I'll do. I'll make

that quilt that Mother and I never made, the one that she cut the doll dresses out for. And because she said that making quilts was so hard, it's good. Let me experience making one by myself—and one that I can finish. Because this "Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?" is going to take me a year to do.

[00:34:06.88]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That one's still in progress.

[00:34:07.57]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So that's still in process, and that's going to be a long way off. So this one, I want to design a quilt that I can make all by hand, and I'm going to make it in a weekend.

[00:34:18.45]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Wow.

[00:34:20.08]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And so I did that "Mother's Quilt" in one weekend.

[00:34:25.04]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's great. What did you use for heads?

[00:34:27.66]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Satin cloth that was embroidered.

[00:34:32.26]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You didn't already have those in preparation?

[00:34:34.48]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No. All I had was the dresses. And so I designed that quilt, cut the fabric out, and sewed it all by hand. It's small, though. It's not a big one. It's now in China, and—

[00:34:47.86]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Who has it?

[00:34:48.76]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It's in an exhibition in China. It's traveling all over Asia. It's been over there—

[00:34:53.96]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's the one that looks to me like Japanese material, or something.

[00:34:57.08]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, it does. There's a picture of it in here somewhere. Yeah, there it is.

[00:35:03.68]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So it worked out doing your own quilt?

[00:35:06.77]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, I learned a lot. Fortunately, I did it before I ever finished "Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima," because she taught me some things. And it was also a tribute to Mother—you know, I used those doll dresses. So I sent it to Charlotte.

[00:35:23.51]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Charlotte Robinson?

[00:35:24.92]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. I sent it to Charlotte. That was my next step. And she got it and said, "Well, now what do you want me to do with this, because it looks so strange."

[00:35:36.33]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: She didn't think this was your artwork, or something?

[00:35:38.36]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No. I mean, what is this? This is not anything I can show to—I mean, she wasn't ready for it.

[00:35:47.70]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah?

[00:35:48.03]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I wasn't hardly ready for it.

[00:35:49.53]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Really?

[00:35:49.98]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, I mean, because this is different than anything I ever did.

[00:35:53.31]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. I see.

[00:35:54.27]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You know, what is this? [Door buzzer sounds.] So she sent it back to me.

[Side conversation:] Hello?

[Background conversation.]

[Recorder stops; restarts]

[00:36:18.63]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: No, I turned it off.

[00:36:21.17]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I didn't take it to heart because I didn't know whether she was right or wrong, or what she was, because I didn't know what it was I had done. That was done in a very emotional—my mother had only been dead since '81. This was done in the early part of '83. And so I was still grieving for her.

[00:36:38.44]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: But I don't see anything wrong with this, though. I don't see why—

[00:36:40.32]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, the imagery of it was just something that she was not ready for, accustomed to, or able to deal with in any way. And she didn't like it, and she sent it back to me. As a matter of fact, I think most of the stuff that she got, she sent back. In fact, all of it. Because she was asking for something, but she wasn't ready to receive what she got, and could not incorporate it in the exhibition. But what I like about it is that this is a quilt that's a very favorite one with a lot of people who like my quilts. Obviously, it was right, although I

didn't know what it was when I did it.

[00:37:20.05]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, it's old, and it has—

[00:37:22.30]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It's very old.

[00:37:22.66]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: —all the interesting—and it seems to relate to your earlier work in a certain way.

[00:37:28.52]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, it does. And then it starts relating again later.

[00:37:35.08]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Yeah.

[00:37:36.18]

FAITH RINGGOLD: See, it's not like "Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?" in any way.

[00:37:40.12]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: No.

[00:37:40.41]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It's not that square thing. It's not little boxes of any kind.

[00:37:44.35]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:37:46.18]

FAITH RINGGOLD: But then it starts looking like some later ones that I did.

[00:37:52.50]

[Background conversation.]

So just wait a minute because I'm doing an interview. You can just sit down. This is Denise. This is Cynthia.

[00:38:06.26]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Hi.

[00:38:07.50]

DENISE: Hi.

[00:38:09.91]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So go ahead.

[00:38:13.51]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay. Well, we should—I guess we could figure out how far we'll go.

[00:38:17.84]

FAITH RINGGOLD: We covered a lot of ground today.

[00:38:19.27]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: We have covered a lot.

[00:38:19.94]

FAITH RINGGOLD: We did the whole '70s, didn't we, or what?

[00:38:22.09]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, we did get through the—yeah. I guess—yeah, I thought we would finish on the quilts today, but I don't think we're going—

[00:38:30.19]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, but I think we can finish on them next time, decidedly so.

[00:38:34.77]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: All right. Well, let's see.

[00:38:40.72]

FAITH RINGGOLD: This is '80—

[00:38:41.52]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: [Inaudible] "Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima," I guess. Although, I think it kind of—

[00:38:49.23]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Did I explain to you the trauma involved with writing that story? I wanted my daughter to write the story. Did I tell you that before?

[00:38:59.98]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: No.

[00:39:00.91]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yeah. My daughter was supposed to write this story, because she's a famous writer. And I said, well, Michele will write the story. Because I always had problems with the writing. I always had a lot of writing to do, and always felt inadequate to do it.

[00:39:17.71]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You'd been doing your autobiography at this point.

[00:39:20.08]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, but still. [Laughs.] I always felt like I needed help, because it had to be right, okay? And I never felt like I could actually make it right. And then I had this daughter who's a brilliant writer. So why do I have to suffer with this when I've got somebody who knows how to do it right? Plus, both of my daughters are very good writers. And unlike me, they know very good grammatical form, and they use words beautifully. They're well-educated girls, you know.

[00:39:56.77]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You feel well-educated?

[00:39:58.49]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I said, well, why can't they help Mommy, you know? Because I never felt—I mean, I feel like I'm well-educated too, but I never felt proficient as a writer the way I feel they are. So I asked Michele. I said, "Michele, you know I want to do this thing on Aunt Jemima because I feel that she is a political issue." And she says, "Well, she's not a political



issue for me. I run seven miles a day to keep from being fat. So what you need to do is lose some weight."

[00:40:38.46]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, was that already—was the issue on this one having to do with food?

[00:40:44.26]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. I mean, Aunt Jemima is the personification of an oppressed Black woman. She's a big, fat, black woman. And she's brutalized not only by society, but by her own family. Her image is one of contempt.

[00:41:01.90]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. That, I did read.

[00:41:05.48]

FAITH RINGGOLD: She's not a happy woman. But she also represents a very powerful force. In every culture of women, there's an Aunt Jemima image. There's the fat Black woman, often doesn't get married. She's the aunt in the family. She's the mainstay in a lot of ways. She takes on a lot of the burdens of the family. And she stays there, and she's able to take this stuff on. She has the body for it. But yet she's condemned for not being the vulnerable woman on the pedestal. She's strong. Therefore, she's a political image. I mean, why are we abusing her? What'd she do that's wrong? Just because she's fat? You know?

[00:42:00.67]

So I said, "I want to use Aunt Jemima, because Aunt Jemima is not only the fat woman. She's the Black woman. And I want to express who she is and what she is." Michele said she wasn't interested in that, and it had nothing to do with her, and she wasn't going to do anything about it. So I said, well, all right. So I wrote this story. And then Moira Roth, my very good friend who wrote an essay for my first catalog, and who was—you know Moira, right? She's an art historian and critic and everything, from California.

[00:42:40.07]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Right. Oh, yeah.

[00:42:41.36]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Came to spend a week with me to interview me for the catalog for the Studio Museum show. And I had planned to have "Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?" in that show. I didn't know how I was going to get it in there because Michele had already told me it was a piece of junk. She didn't like anything about it. And she was not going to help me with the story. She thought the story was stupid, and didn't like anything. She was the editor of the catalog. She said, "That story is not going in the catalog under any circumstances. I have invited professional writers to write for you, and I am not going to upset them by having your work—you are an artist, not a writer. And I'm not going to have your work included in the catalog."

[00:43:28.34]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And at this point, you had, what, just sort of a sketchy outline of the story, but you hadn't actually written it?

[00:43:32.82]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I was telling this story to everybody. See, what I do is I—the first thing I do is I tell the story. Before I even write anything, I just start telling that story. And as you tell the story to people, you have to come to certain conclusions. So I just kept telling the story, telling the story, telling the story. And at this point, I was beginning—I had told her the story, and I was beginning to write the story. And then I would read her the story.

[00:43:53.34]

See, I was really bothering her a lot with this story. And she was disgusted. So when Moira came, she was going to sleep in my studio. Michele was sleeping in my studio. So she said, "Are you going to let Moira see this?" [Laughs.] I said, "You don't think I should?" She said, "Well, it's up to you. I don't know." So I hid it. And when Moira came, I felt as though I was being dishonest, because I was hiding something from Moira. Now, Michele was not about to tell her—"Listen, my mother's doing this awful thing and, God, you ought to see it." She wasn't going to—because she was ashamed of it.

[00:44:35.15]

So I said, well, I feel guilty. I am going to tell Moira that I have this thing. So I said, "Moira, I'm doing something now." I said, "I don't think I'll show it to you, but I don't know. I don't think it's coming out too well. Michele hates it, and I just thought I would just tell you that am working on this new project." She said, "Oh, what is it?" And I said, "Oh, no." I said, "I don't think you want to see." She said, "I would love to see it." So like a true historian, artist, art critic, writer, she pops open her notebook with her pencil ready. And so that's all I needed, right? So I pulled this thing out and I started—the story had now been written. I began reading the story. And she was fascinated. And I started showing her the strips of canvas that had been sewn together to make the quilt.

[00:45:25.86]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Did you have pictures yet, at all?

[00:45:28.00]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Some. I had some. And she loved it. She said, "It's wonderful. Oh, this is wonderful." So that's all I needed. So I got it done, and I showed it to Terrie Rouse, who was the curator at the Studio Museum, and she loved it.

[00:45:49.16]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Well, there you go. [Laughs.]

[00:45:51.17]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And then I showed it to Mary Schmidt Campbell, who was then the Executive Director of Studio Museum, and she loved it. She said, "Not only do we love it, but we're going to put it on the cover of the catalog." I thought, wow, this is great. But Michele said, "But that story is not going in the catalog."

[00:46:11.30]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, God.

[00:46:11.98]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No. "The story is not going in the catalog because we're not doing that kind of catalog." And I went with that. Of course, that's the only time I have had a show since then—since then, all my other catalogs include my stories.

[00:46:27.48]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Stories, yeah. I haven't seen that one, I guess. I saw the one—

[00:46:30.13]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, so that was my first big catalog, and it has no story in it. The story of "Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?" Is not in there.

[00:46:37.24]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: But the quilt is reproduced, right?

[00:46:39.10]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yes, the quilt is reproduced. And it's on the cover, and I believe you

can read the story from there.

[00:46:50.45]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Hm. So that's interesting. Did you have the title for it already at the beginning?

[00:46:55.76]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. "Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?" came to me pretty early, pretty early. And I also decided that another reason why I was doing—

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[00:00:02.51]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Cynthia Nadelman interviewing Faith Ringgold on October 18th. Well, I think last time we left off, we were just talking about why, something about the "Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?" quilt, but one of the things that made you want to write the stories was that on a quilt, you could make it your own story and nobody would get in the way of it, or edit it, or do anything like that.

[00:00:25.33]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right.

[00:00:25.66]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So was that one of the first actual made-up, fictional, long story that you had incorporated in an artwork?

[00:00:38.11]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That was the first. "Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?" was the first story quilt. And it might have been—it was the first story I've ever written, too, other than my autobiography. Yeah, it was number one. See, I could get it published.

[00:01:02.47]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that was it. You had gone through the thing with the autobiography.

[00:01:05.89]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right, right. And I wanted to see these things so that—in a published state. And it was a way of getting work that I had done, completed and out there. Because being an artist, I was accustomed to that. Because when you do a work of art, boom. It's out there.

[00:01:29.87]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:01:30.05]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You know?

[00:01:30.62]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: On a wall.

[00:01:31.16]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It's on the wall, right. But as a writer, you do have to wait until the publisher comes and says okay. And then they want to edit it and they want to play around with it and stuff. And then maybe they won't publish it. Not many writers go ahead and publish their own books. It's just not acceptable, right?

[00:01:51.62]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. I mean, they do it, but they do it more so they can say they had a book, not in the expectation that anyone will ever read it. [Laughs.]

[00:01:57.11]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. Yeah, right. Right.

[00:02:00.08]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that's interesting.

[00:02:00.74]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Whereas artists, we publish our stuff all the time. Put it on the wall. It's published, more or less. Somebody comes along and takes a picture, puts it in a magazine, it's published. That's it.

[00:02:12.75]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that's interesting. That puts you together. I always thought of Jenny Holzer as kind of working that way. But that would be an interesting show, to put artists who put their writing into it.

[00:02:24.41]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, Jenny Holzer—she's doing the same thing.

[00:02:25.73]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Kind of, yeah.

[00:02:26.27]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Just put that stuff right on the art and it's ready. It's public. That's it.

[00:02:32.78]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So the story kind of came out, there were elements probably from your autobiography, or from things you've experienced, at least, that you put in there. Not necessarily from your autobiography, but—

[00:02:42.74]

FAITH RINGGOLD: In "Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?"

[00:02:44.80]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Or things that you've seen—

[00:02:45.79]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yes. No, I mean, let me tell you about "Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?" In a lot of ways, "Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?"—this woman is me. I was grossly overweight. And I think that that was my book to deal with my image, which was being fat. And I also felt oppressed by my family. I felt like they kind of used me, worked over me, and made me into what, I don't know—somebody who could have easily not had a career at all. I mean, I could have just served them. I could have just ended up serving them.

[00:03:40.47]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:03:40.92]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You know, and Jemima is sort of like that. She serves her family, but she's just such a fabulous woman that she manages to do her own thing and help them. And that's

the role of so many women. I mean, that's Mommy. That's Mother. So she is the essential mother, Jemima. But she also has a man who loves her. You know, he sees beauty in her. And I didn't want to make her a total victim.

[00:04:16.44]

You know, I wanted to give her—I wanted to give her some air of normalcy. But I did want to put her in the context of the stereotypical oppressed Black woman. So there's a little of both in there, and aspects of it have to do with me, and the way I see my life with kids and as a mother and as a wife and all that stuff.

[00:04:50.17]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:04:50.98]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So I'm in there.

[00:04:51.88]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:04:52.81]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I'm definitely in there.

[00:04:53.83]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And that one went into the show at the Studio Museum.

[00:05:06.70]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes.

[00:05:06.99]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: They used it for the cover.

[00:05:08.96]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. And I was very shocked to find out that so many people liked it.

[00:05:17.55]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, right.

[00:05:21.02]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I didn't know. It's like with almost everything that I do, I'm running scared. I'm a little nervous. Most artists—I'm sure writers feel the same way. You put something out there, and you feel real good about it, but you're scared. You don't know. Is this anything? Is this okay? Or is this way off the deep end? I mean, what is this I'm doing here? But you just go ahead and put it out there and see. They don't throw it back at you, it's okay.

[00:05:51.32]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. And the response was good to that.

[00:05:53.06]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And the response was wonderful. They wanted to put it on the cover. They made a poster of it. And they put—so that was really my first art poster, was "Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?" And they're still selling it at the Studio Museum.

[00:06:09.74]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:06:11.66]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It's still there.

[00:06:13.16]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Do they do they own anything there?

[00:06:17.50]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Studio Museum, yes. They own the "Wake." Bena and Buba.

[00:06:22.15]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, they do?

[00:06:22.42]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I made another one for them. So there are two Wakes. There's one that's now in an exhibition called "Women Making Their Mark," which is at the Pennsylvania Academy. I'll be there tomorrow.

[00:06:38.95]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, yeah?

[00:06:39.40]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. And then there's another one that I made just for the Studio Museum's collection. And it's kind of nice because I was able to keep the original one, and they have the one that I made in 1987, which is an interesting but slightly different version because I couldn't do the same—I mean, it was, like, 11, 12 years in between each one. So I've changed. Things are different. And so that one is a little different. But they own that one. And "Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?" is owned by my lawyer, Fred Collins, who wanted it really badly. [Laughs.]

[00:07:31.85]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's great.

[00:07:32.80]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. He owns that.

[00:07:40.39]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay, well, then, after that one, which still had—now, this one has divisions, still. It's still like a quilt all over.

[00:07:49.54]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, it's squared off.

[00:07:51.16]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, and then some of them are images of people, and then the alternating image with the writing blocks.

[00:07:58.06]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Uh-huh [affirmative]. I don't do many that way.

[00:08:01.72]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Not anymore, or none at all.

[00:08:03.91]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, you know, I don't know how many I did like that, because I've never really sat down and analyzed them in that way. But there is—that squareness in my work started with Die, I think, with—no, it started earlier than that. It started with "U.S. Postage Stamp Commemorating the Advent of Black Power." That's when I first started those little squares. I put all those hundred faces.

[00:08:40.50]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:08:42.27]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And they've been going on and on and on and on, so a lot of squares. And actually, I was doing—I was preparing for the quilts way back then with those squares and didn't recognize it.

[00:08:54.19]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, because then the building ones are kind of like that with the windows.

[00:08:58.05]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, more squares. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:08:59.34]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that's true. Huh. And did you do some abstract painting in between? You did. You did some—

[00:09:10.19]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, I did.

[00:09:10.80]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: The "Dah" series was in the '80s, too.

[00:09:12.32]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That's right. The "Dah" series—and that has to do with my mother dying. And I wanted to do some paintings that were not about anything. They were just me painting.

[00:09:35.89]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: The expression.

[00:09:36.59]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, just painting. I said, hey, you know what? Let me try that. Let me do that. I want to just—I don't want to know what this is about. This is just about something that I don't know what it's about, you know? I feel like I have a need to do that. And so I did a whole series. I did a series called "Emanon," which is "No Name" backwards. And then "Dah" has to do with baby Faith, coming up and looking at my work and saying "Dah?" [Laughs.] When we decided that "Dah" was just a whole world of things, that was everything.

[00:10:16.85]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:10:17.21]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So let me see if I can paint some of those "Dahs," you know? And so I did a whole series of "Dah" in '83 and another one in '84, which I used for backdrops for performances.

[00:10:30.51]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: All right. Uh-huh [affirmative]. Just to get back to the autobiography a little bit and how you were feeling about getting something that you wrote out, did you do that completely on your own, unprompted, or had anybody requested it at any point?

[00:10:43.93]

FAITH RINGGOLD: The autobiography?

[00:10:44.83]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:10:45.28]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, nobody requested anything. But I had talked to an editor—an agent. And she said, "Go ahead and write it." Well, agents always tell you to go ahead and write things.

[00:10:57.84]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. [Laughs.]

[00:10:58.63]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right?

[00:10:59.32]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:11:00.31]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, why not? It doesn't mean that—

[00:11:02.26]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: If you have nothing else to do [inaudible].

[00:11:04.20]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, you go ahead. Write it. They encourage you. Why not? And so she encouraged me, and I went ahead and I wrote it. And then, when I wrote it, she wasn't interested in it. She figured that it needed more—it needed a lot of work, and it just couldn't go like it was. And today, I understand, they just publish things without even editing them. I mean, you have to bring your stuff in ready to be edited—I mean, ready to be printed.

[00:11:35.70]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Because they won't—

[00:11:36.30]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right?

[00:11:37.65]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Well, I don't know. It depends on the publisher, I think. I don't know if that's completely true, but they're probably not as—

[00:11:44.64]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, not like they used to be.

[00:11:46.14]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: They're not taking great pains with it now.

[00:11:46.98]



FAITH RINGGOLD: No, because, see, I was thinking the way Michele went through the process, which is all this laborious editing and backwards and forwards, and no, they're not into all of that. I mean, this woman wanted a book. She wanted it. "You got a book? Give me the book." And I couldn't produce that. I needed help. And I had no one to help me with it.

[00:12:09.19]

So what I had to do—it was a good period, and it was good that I did that, because I've had pieces of it published different places. As a matter of fact, there's a woman who wants to publish another piece of it, and I lost the letter. I've got to find it. Yeah, I've had pieces of my autobiography published.

[00:12:27.87]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Like in magazines?

[00:12:28.86]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And in books. *Confrontation: An Anthology of African-American Women Writers*, which was edited by Amiri and Amina Baraka in 1984, maybe—I had a piece in there. And then the rest of the time, it's been in catalogs. But I'm going to have another piece published in another anthology, from my autobiography, too. So this will be the second time they've been published by commercial publishers. So I get pieces published. And eventually, now that I have an agent, a literary agent, I could conceivably do a rewrite of my autobiography at some point and try again.

[00:13:25.05]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Update on it, too.

[00:13:26.43]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, update, right.

[00:13:29.09]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay. So we wrote that one. I'm trying to think what kind of comes next as far as a big story. It was probably the—was it "The Bitter Nest?"

[00:13:41.76]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, no the next big story—well, let me see, '83—

[00:13:46.98]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, "Street."

[00:13:48.90]

FAITH RINGGOLD: "Street Story" quilt was the next big story. And that took a year to write, too. The story took a whole year to write. I mean, it's really—it's an epic.

[00:14:00.86]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, it really is complex.

[00:14:02.94]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, it's a complex story. It's very long. And I remember Michele said, "Oh, it's just so complicated. It's too long. I mean, you really need to—it's much more complicated than "Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?" And in that way, she kind of said, it's not as good.

[00:14:21.51]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: But she didn't like "Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?" [Laughs.]

[00:14:23.47]

FAITH RINGGOLD: She didn't like that either, right! [Laughs.] It didn't occur to me that—you're just pointing that out to me. But anyway, it needed to be what it was. And that's why I put it in three parts, because there was three parts. There are three parts. The last part, in life, in real life here in Harlem, we are waiting for part three. We have had part one. I grew up in part one.

[00:14:59.47]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:15:00.49]

FAITH RINGGOLD: When people lived in their lovely tenement buildings. I remember every Christmas, the superintendent would put white curtains to the windows of the hall. Yeah, they would wash the curtains, and they would put the curtains up, and put a wreath there. And, I mean, imagine having that now. I mean, could you imagine that? And, I mean, this happened in all the buildings, all around. People all had wreaths in their windows, and they put new curtains up, and they did this and that. And people did sort of a sprucing-up job twice a year—once in the spring and once in the winter, which was around Christmastime. And actually, it was Thanksgiving time they were doing it. Anyway, so I know that—I know what Harlem was. I know what living in a community like Harlem is and was when I was a child.

[00:16:04.16]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:16:04.78]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So that's the first part. The second part, I also know how it goes, how it stops being that way, because something happens, because if anything happens, it's devastating, because it can't get fixed.

[00:16:27.01]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:16:27.43]

FAITH RINGGOLD: See, that's the problem with poor people. One of the big differences in living in a poor house and a rich house is that if something happens in the poor house, like a fire, or something gets broken, it can get fixed in a rich house. But in a poor house, it's not getting fixed, because there's no plans, no appropriation for fixing anything. So when this boy's family got broken, i.e., the mother had the accident and died, that family couldn't get fixed. They weren't able to fix it. And things just kept getting worse. And so did the house until, finally, the house burned. And that happened all over Harlem. Now, a lot of it had to do with landlords burning their property.

[00:17:27.78]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:17:30.90]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Okay. But it also had to do with *The Fire Next Time*, which was James Baldwin's piece.

[00:17:38.40]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:17:40.02]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Making way in a sense for part three, which hasn't come yet.

[00:17:48.51]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Which is somewhat unknown.

[00:17:49.93]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Which is somewhat unknown. But I am doing a story about part three.

[00:17:55.59]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You mean another separate—

[00:17:57.15]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, I'm doing a story about part three.

[00:17:59.53]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah?

[00:18:00.14]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:18:01.23]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: What's that called? Because it's an individual piece, right?

[00:18:03.60]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. It is called "The Last Dinner Party."

[00:18:10.54]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh.

[00:18:11.94]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And it will be a story essentially about the reconstruction of Harlem. And, of course, it's a surrealist story, very surreal.

[00:18:21.79]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah?

[00:18:22.29]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Extremely surrealistic, with people flying, and everything else, because that's what's going to take. [Laughs.] That's what it's going to take is a whole lot of magic. So there's a lot of magic in this story. But it's definitely the fixing of Harlem, and in a very magical kind of way.

[00:18:43.50]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. And you're working on that now?

[00:18:45.55]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes.

[00:18:46.05]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: In your word processor?

[00:18:47.29]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, yes, right. I am working on it in my word processor—"The Last Dinner Party."

[00:18:53.52]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, okay. Is that planned for a particular show?

[00:18:58.47]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, I'm trying to figure which show it would be planned for. I'm having a show with Bernice in March of '91 because I'll be going to France in '90, in '90. So I can't do any shows in '90 because I got my retrospective traveling anyway. But I'm also having a show in London in '91, which we'll travel to.

[00:19:27.99]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Travel in England?

[00:19:29.49]

FAITH RINGGOLD: In England. Right. And, I mean, there are always shows coming up all the time. So it can go in another show. There will be probably two sections to this quilt, and it will get a chance to be shown. I'm very excited about it. The story is coming along beautifully. I'm writing the story, and the story is coming very nicely. And that one is one I'm projecting to do and doing, as a matter of fact.

[00:20:02.85]

And another one that I'm doing is called "The Children's Story Quilt." And that has to do with a whole story about these magical children who are capable of making themselves invisible. And they have a mission. They have been—they have been sought out by four women, dead women, Black women, who have reached these children as a medium to heal the problems of the world. And these kids are going to do it. And they have this special power of making themselves invisible. So they're going to solve the problems of drug addiction, war, and homelessness, and all of our great issues of the day.

[00:21:01.21]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And that's going to be a quilt, maybe a book someday?

[00:21:04.36]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, right now—well, the story I'm writing, too. I'm writing the story, too. I'm trying to keep the story small. But if they get out of hand, they just get out of hand. I mean, it may get longer than that.

[00:21:16.57]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. But you mean you're writing the story for the quilt at this point.

[00:21:19.81]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right, right.

[00:21:20.14]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Actually, I wanted to ask you, do you usually write the story first? Does that come first?

[00:21:24.52]

FAITH RINGGOLD: If there's a story, yes, yes. I don't necessarily finish it before the quilt is done. But I've got my main characters. I know exactly what's going to happen and everything. There are some things that I may not know, but they're not crucial to the project. Yeah. See, the writing the story—actually, stories just excite me. They really inspire me to do the visual part of it.

[00:22:01.37]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:22:01.84]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They really do. But then there are some things that—there are some paintings, some works, some quilts, that I don't want a story for. I am excited enough by the imagery. It's like "Woman Painting the Bay Bridge." I didn't want a story about that. I mean, I could think of a story that I could write. But—I mean I could think of a story about a woman who would paint the Bay Bridge. But still, I didn't really need a story.

[00:22:40.54]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: The one image is kind of there. And in those ones, there's not a progression. It's a particular thing happening.

[00:22:47.02]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right, it's a particular thing happening, yeah. And you can come up with your own story if you like, but I don't really need to write a story about everything. I'm limiting myself at this point to what I'm going to write a story about, because I want to write this "Last Dinner Party" story because that one is really important to me. And I want to write this children's story book about the children changing the world.

[00:23:15.74]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that's interesting. And when you're writing them, I mean, do you have a very visual sense of it? Do you kind of see them—

[00:23:23.65]

FAITH RINGGOLD: The more I write, the more I see everybody.

[00:23:25.86]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:23:26.53]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And then the more these characters just take form, and then I begin to see them. I begin to see what they look like, you know, and what they're doing, and everything. And then I make my drawings. I make all these drawings. And the drawings are somewhat of what I see but not as close as when I paint it. So then, when I start painting, there comes another aspect of what I see much closer to the real thing. And then I know when I'm finished, it's almost the exact thing of what I saw and what I have now created.

[00:24:12.94]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Do the drawings ever get shown, or any of that, or are they really works in progress?

[00:24:17.29]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I don't really—I've never thought of—I never—now I'm showing drawings because Bernice keeps grabbing them and framing them and sending them places. So now I'm framing—I'm showing drawings. In fact, I'm in two drawing shows right now. And when I do commissions for people, we usually give them the drawings, the planning drawings, yeah, and I always make drawings to show them what I'm going to do. So they get their drawings. But I don't think—when I'm doing a drawing, I'm doing a drawing. I'm not thinking about exhibiting that drawing.

[00:25:03.99]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, right. It's a help to you.

[00:25:05.13]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It's a help to me, right. And I just—I'll do it on funny paper or—you know what I mean? I try to control myself not to have the wrong paper. Usually, I do it on graph paper, and the graph paper is rag paper. But, yeah, you know, I don't just sit down and do drawings. I should, because I love to draw. I love to teach drawing, too. I mean, drawing is wonderful—crazy about it. I don't draw as much as I'd like to.

[00:25:35.94]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You don't have the time.

[00:25:37.07]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I don't have the time.

[00:25:38.37]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Does "The Street"—sometimes it reminds me a little bit of that—there's a Romare Bearden piece, that collage that the Metropolitan has, "The Street," which is a more abstract version in some ways.

[00:25:52.99]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. That's true. I've seen it.

[00:26:01.07]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Are you kind of being—I would think you'd be sort of being embraced in some ways. Well, of course, writers don't want to embrace any other writers [laughs], but by the writing community, too. I mean, you're kind of straddling the art and writer—

[00:26:14.48]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, I tell you that's been difficult. From the first story quilt that I wrote, the "Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima," when Michele says, "You're not a writer. You can't have your work in the catalog," you know. And then I backed away very timidly. I think each group has a tendency to say, "You're not X. You're Y."

[00:26:40.88]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:26:42.26]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So I have not been approached or accepted in any way by other writers. I mean, they don't think of me as being a writer, I don't think. But what I have been is by writing departments and professors of creative writing programs in colleges, I understand, frequently use my story quilts in the teaching of their classes.

[00:27:12.80]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Huh.

[00:27:13.21]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yeah, I get letters about that all over the country that they do that. And I think that's wonderful. But not any of your famous writers, or your whatever writers do that.

[00:27:30.80]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I guess not.

[00:27:32.28]

FAITH RINGGOLD: My daughter has said to me recently, "You are the writer in the family."

[00:27:37.16]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Really? That's a big change.

[00:27:38.90]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I said, "Wait a minute. Come on." I mean, that is not true. But she is—

[00:27:45.68]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Well, there's different storytelling traditions that people are wanting to link up with again, and sort of [inaudible].

[00:27:55.20]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I think that storytelling just has to do with being ready to tell the story, and not being all uptight about whether it's you, or who, or what.

[00:28:14.10]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, yeah, exactly.

[00:28:15.15]

FAITH RINGGOLD: When you are all confused about who did what, when, and why, and is it you or her or him, then that messes with your story. See, I'm not into that. And I think that that's the difference in my ability to tell stories and maybe some other people's. They're constantly—because people are always asking me, "Is this you? Did you do—" Now, if you're worried about that, you probably won't be able to tell stories.

[00:28:50.43]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:28:50.82]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That becomes an issue. But I don't worry about that. I just go ahead and I write it. And then I know that they're going to ask me if this is my story, did this happen to me, and so on. One woman asked me about my "Slave Rape," which I did in '85, which happened back in the 1400s, so, I mean, really long ago.

[00:29:18.06]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And that was in '85?

[00:29:20.01]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I did it in 1985, but the story takes place during slavery, and I think it's the 1400s, or maybe the 1500s. But it's not anywhere near the 20th century. [Laughs.]

[00:29:34.92]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:29:35.52]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And this woman comes up to me—I was going to do—I was doing "Bitter Nest" at the Newark Museum. And "Slave Rape," story quote was inside. It belongs to the Newark Museum. And she had seen it. And the guard there was giving everybody a little short lecture on it. [Laughs.] He loved it. He loved it, you know? And he was telling people about it. And she must have confused his enthusiasm with feeling that it was my story, and she came outside, and she said, "All that really happened to you?" And I said, "Wow!" You know, I'm—wow, come on. Give me a break, okay? So, I mean, people really have a problem with storytelling. They can't often—

[00:30:35.13]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: They project things.

[00:30:36.18]

FAITH RINGGOLD: —separate the storyteller from the story.

[00:30:41.61]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:30:42.75]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And we used to have something that we used to say when I was a kid. "Your story," that means you're telling a lie.

[00:30:49.62]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:30:50.36]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So a "story" is very often thought of to people as a lie. You're lying.

[00:30:55.10]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:30:55.79]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I think Richard Wright's mother used to—or granny used to tell him, "Boy, why don't you stop telling these stories?" She would read something that he had written and berate him for making up tales. Yeah.

[00:31:14.04]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, there is something, I guess, a little bit—some people are suspicious about that.

[00:31:18.30]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Suspicious.

[00:31:19.49]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: It departs from reality.

[00:31:20.84]

FAITH RINGGOLD: There you are. Right. Sitting down there making up stories.

[00:31:25.07]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:31:31.40]

FAITH RINGGOLD: But, you know, Thalia Gouma-Peterson points out something of real importance in my storytelling. She says, as a child—and this is very true—everybody told stories around me. My father told stories, fabulous stories. My mother told fabulous stories. And I loved to listen to them talking about their growing up in Florida and what happened and this and that and the other, and the stories about the family and all of that. And they weren't talking to me. They were talking to each other, and I was listening. I was overhearing them.

[00:32:12.44]

And then my brother used to—we would go to the movies. And in those days, they had great stories in movies. And we would come back from the movies, and Andrew would tell us the story all over again, of course, with a lot of editorializing and stuff. But it was wonderful. We would sit on the floor, and he would take center stage. And he would tell us the story again. And then my sister would do it again. In another situation, my sister would do it. I never got a chance to tell the story. I was the baby. See, I was the baby in the family. And who the hell wanted to hear my story?

[00:32:54.83]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.



[00:32:55.31]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I was too busy listening to everybody's story to ever tell one of my own.

[00:32:59.78]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's interesting. You were taking it all in. Soaking it in.

[00:33:02.01]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I was taking it in, right. I soaked it all. I was a great listener, because my brother and sister were—my sister was four years older than me. My brother was seven years older than me. So I was really the baby. So I had nothing to say. I was listening to them.

[00:33:20.24]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. So between the stories of—the older people's stories and—

[00:33:24.50]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. And everybody had stories. All my mother's friends had stories. Everybody spoke in stories.

[00:33:32.72]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, right.

[00:33:34.07]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That's the way they spoke, in stories. It was wonderful. People don't do that today.

[00:33:42.08]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Not this generation. No, I mean, I know because my mother and my aunts or older cousins, yeah, they're creative.

[00:33:50.06]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Always had some story, and it was fascinating.

[00:33:52.37]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, and especially if it's about somewhere else, too. That's fine, too.

[00:33:55.28]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yeah, oh, absolutely. You could just sit down, and you just see the whole thing.

[00:34:00.05]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Yeah.

[00:34:02.36]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It's amazing. But anyway, so now I'm telling my stories. Now I'm the storyteller.

[00:34:07.37]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Then, after "The Street"—

[00:34:23.03]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That was '85. There was "The Street" and there was a "Flag Story" quilt also in '85. And in '86—

[00:34:36.03]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: There's this "Dinner" quilt I wanted to ask you about. Is that anything special?

[00:34:39.84]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Okay, the "Dinner" quilt is—

[00:34:43.59]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I love the composition of that. I mean, it's got these people inside the squares in the tablecloth.

[00:34:48.63]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, you know, that's also something that comes to me early. Right along with the story comes the design, yes, the sense of placement of images or how it's going to be. Is it going to be one in which I'm going to make the little squares and put things in, or is it going to be one in which I'm going to have a central thing with images coming around, like that table? I love those table things, because the possibilities of what you can do with people around the table is just so wonderful. I love it.

[00:35:28.95]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, yeah.

[00:35:29.97]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So I was looking forward a great deal to doing that dinner quilt to solve the problems of how those people would be placed so you could see them.

[00:35:43.86]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:35:44.49]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You know?

[00:35:45.15]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:35:45.45]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Now, you look at this one, and then you look at "The Bitter Nest" one in which they're sitting around the table, too. And you see "The Bitter Nest," they're sitting the long way.

[00:36:03.44]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Is it on here?

[00:36:04.82]

FAITH RINGGOLD: "The Bitter Nest" is '88. Yeah, it's number two in "The Bitter Nest." And you notice how I placed the table there and then the whole other way. Also, I love all the food on the table. I love painting food. Yeah, so I don't think any food appears in any of my work until '86.

[00:36:28.43]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah?

[00:36:31.84]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I don't think so. I'm not sure, but I don't think there's any food anywhere

until 1986, when I lost the weight. Then here I come painting all this food.

[00:36:42.07]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:36:42.91]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And I've been painting food ever since. So, yeah, so I have to get the configuration, the design of it. I have to have some concept of how that's going to be. And then all these things have to just work together.

[00:36:59.65]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:37:01.03]

FAITH RINGGOLD: But the dinner party was in a lot of ways a kind of reaction to Judy Chicago's "Dinner Party."

[00:37:16.55]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:37:17.20]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I mean, in a kind of tongue-in-cheek, kind of funny kind of way, you know, because in the story, she—the auntie, who is the person who's giving the dinner, does these mats, these place mats. And on them, she embroiders the names of famous women. So she was an early feminist.

[00:37:45.62]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:37:46.64]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And then, as she places everybody around the table, she gives them a name. She says, "Oh, you go ahead and sit by—you go ahead and sit with Billie Holiday. And then you're going to sit with Harriet Tubman," and so on. And as she does that, she gives a little history of who these women are.

[00:38:05.84]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Where's that written? That is written on it?

[00:38:08.63]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. That is on—each one of those quilts has—each one of those—

[00:38:16.94]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Panels?

[00:38:17.51]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Each one of those place mats has the name of a famous woman. And as she tells people where to sit, she gives a little history of who that woman is and has them sit down. I can get it, because maybe I'd like to read it. Turn this off, and let me read part of it.

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:38:43.25]

Okay, this is about Aunt Connie.

[Reading:] *Aunt Connie was a fabulous woman. Uncle Bates was crazy about her. 'Ain't*

*nothing too good for Connie,' he used to say. She was into women's lib back then, when nobody even knew what it was all about. One year, she embroidered the names of famous Black women on her place mats, then directed each one of us where to sit. 'Mama, you and Papa sit over there with Mary McLeod Bethune and Augusta Savage. Didi, you and your handsome young actor go sit with Dorothy Dandridge and Zora Neale Hurston. Ms. Fine, you and Mr. Winston sit with Maria Stewart and Bessie Smith. Lonnie, you sit with Harriet Tubman. Melody'—that was me—'you sit with Sojourner Truth and your ma and pa next to you with Fannie Lou Hamer and Marion Anderson. Bates and me are going to sit with Billie Holiday and Madam Walker.' But she did it eloquently like a lecture with anecdotes on each of the women. By the time we all sat down and Lonnie said a prayer in some foreign language he learned special for the occasion, we were all mad for the food, which was great and enough to feed an army."*

[Telephone ringing.]

[00:40:02.81]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's great.

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:40:03.62]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Okay.

[00:40:03.98]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay. So where did that story part appear on the quilt? Because I couldn't see it in the slide. Was that sewn across the bottom or something?

[00:40:12.56]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Okay, let's see. The story is—oh, yeah, it's here, here, here, and there.

[00:40:20.17]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, on the side.

[00:40:21.53]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right? Is that right? Wait, let's see. Let me look at it because I can't remember.

[00:40:25.24]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: It's so small.

[00:40:26.06]

FAITH RINGGOLD: See, now that's interesting. I didn't even know. Oh, yeah, there it is.

[00:40:30.80]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay.

[00:40:38.16]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Is this the food? Yeah, it's these places. Now, that's interesting, too, because I didn't do that very many times. That's not done often.

[00:40:46.62]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's not all separate things.

[00:40:47.46]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, that's not done often.

[00:40:49.20]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. That's great. Is this anywhere special now?

[00:40:55.53]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That is owned by a woman in the Midwest. But Bernice has it all the time. The poor woman never gets a chance to have it.

[00:41:07.17]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: This is a great—the colors on this are just—you know what? I would think somebody might hit you up for doing some stained glass someday. Wouldn't that be neat, a window?

[00:41:15.18]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, but, you know, this has that look, too.

[00:41:17.31]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, right. I was thinking—that's what made me think of it.

[00:41:19.35]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It really does. I would love to do a commission with tiles. I would love that. And I've done a few proposals. I'm going to do a commission which I actually proposed to do tiles, but they want a quilt. So maybe they're not ready to see me that way. But I really would love to do it. I think it would be great.

[00:41:44.46]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:41:45.03]

FAITH RINGGOLD: See, this is a short—it's a short story. And it's just divided into those four sections.

[00:41:50.07]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I see. So you just read the first one there.

[00:41:52.39]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I just read this piece here, this part of it, little piece of it.

[00:41:57.07]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that's neat. Huh.

[00:42:00.58]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So that was intended to be somewhat of a takeoff on "The Dinner Party." But it also is a love story, because the two little kids—you know, it's like little kids that you knew as a child. Their parents bring them. Your parents are bringing you. And you're kind of looking at each other, but you're there under your family. And you're fantasizing about when you grow up, how you're going to be there on your own. How are you going to do things different?

[00:42:38.33]

So that's what this little girl is—she tells the story of how her auntie used to give these dinner parties and how the family used to come, and how they used to talk about things and gossip and stuff, but they did it in a way that she couldn't understand what they were talking about. And then they would say things that she didn't understand, and then everybody's eyes would be flashing because they would be making reference to the fact that this man and this woman that came to dinner all the time weren't really married.

[00:43:12.43]

And that was—so they would be flashing about that. And when they would say that, it would reflect on the life of somebody else at the table. And so then they would start flashing their eyes around. And the kids never knew why everybody was doing all this eye business. It's because they were trying to get away from the facts, and away from the truth. They were trying to say something to each other with the eyes because they couldn't say it with the mouth because the kids were there.

[00:43:40.39]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:43:41.17]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Or because anybody else was there who they didn't want to know. So it takes years after you grow up to look back on those family scenes and say, "Ah, now I know what was going on there," because you were a kid. You didn't know. So eventually, she grows up and becomes a lawyer or something. And she meets this guy again. And he is—that little boy, he's actually the son of her uncle—stepson, okay, because Aunt Connie is not her blood aunt. She's an aunt by marriage. And so this boy is Aunt Connie's son. And so it's okay for her to be in love with him because they're not really related anyway. But so she invites him to her house.

[00:44:33.23]

And one of the things that their eyes have been flashing about is the fact that Uncle Bates is really into some illegal activity. He has a monopoly on pinball machines in the area, and his son is now working for him. I think that's the way the story goes. [Laughs.] I can't remember my stories that well. And she is a lawyer.

[00:45:05.17]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah?

[00:45:06.35]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And so she invites him to dinner. And it doesn't really work out as well as she thought, because they're grown now. It's not the same thing. You can't go back, you know? But all of these things—the fact that Uncle Bates was doing something a little shady—was the reason why Mama was constantly making excuses for her sons, saying they're good boys. You know, why do you keep saying somebody is a good boy? Nobody said they were bad. But the kid didn't know. Somebody was saying it.

[00:45:39.21]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. That's interesting. There's a lot going on.

[00:45:42.82]

FAITH RINGGOLD: A lot is going on. Right. Underneath, there's a lot going. That's why I really love to all those family dinners and stuff.

[00:45:51.57]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:45:52.53]

FAITH RINGGOLD: A lot going on, and I never could figure out what it was. [Laughs.] But I was trying.

[00:45:58.77]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, a lot of juicy stuff.

[00:46:00.93]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Juicy stuff, uh-huh [affirmative]. And people only have about twice a year, unless somebody dies or gets married, to come together as a family to find out who's doing what.

[00:46:11.94]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:46:13.29]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And why.

[00:46:25.38]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's true. [Pause.] Did we talk about the Purple Dolls? I think we did a little bit, maybe, but—

[00:46:29.20]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, the Purple Dolls are going to be my last doll series in that way. The next one is going to be composition heads. Yeah, I finally want to do that. And, yeah, I'd love to make some porcelain-headed dolls—would just love it. And so I did those sort of like another tribute to *The Color Purple*.

[00:46:56.59]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: In addition—after the purple quilt or—

[00:46:58.63]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. It went with that same show.

[00:47:02.29]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:47:02.77]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Uh-huh [affirmative]. They're like shameless—

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[00:00:02.86]

FAITH RINGGOLD: [In progress] And have them reproduced by some ceramic reproduction place or some ceramist or whatever.

[00:00:12.97]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Well, you need to get an alliance with somebody who does those kinds of things, I guess.

[00:00:17.99]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That's what Bernice said. Yeah.

[00:00:18.19]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: The way you do with the—How about the story of this cocktail purse or whatever?

[00:00:25.74]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. Yes. I need someone who does that, and then I can work with them. And I know people like that. I just haven't done it. I know somebody. Because I want to make some of those kind of dolls. Because I have all these clothes that mother made, and they can wear the clothes.

[00:00:45.50]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Huh. How about, just so I don't forget it, because I would like to discuss the etchings that you did on the quilts. Or is that really toward the end of the '80s?

[00:00:53.58]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, the etchings began in '85.

[00:00:56.30]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah? Interesting.

[00:00:56.70]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. They didn't get produced until '86. But they were done—maybe they were done in '84—'84 or '85, at the Printmaking Workshop, Bob Blackburn's Printmaking Workshop. And they were a total collaboration.

[00:01:22.32]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: With the printmakers.

[00:01:23.28]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. I did the plates. They made up the plates for me and put the tools in my hand, and I did all the drawings and stuff. See, this is part of a series.

[00:01:38.06]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:01:38.31]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And I used big plates, 24 by 36. In fact, this one here, "Woman, Power, Poverty, and Love," I call it the "Politically Correct Sheet" series, because I wanted them to be sheets.

[00:01:58.57]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:01:59.11]

FAITH RINGGOLD: You know? And so what happened here is that six 24 by 36-inch plates were sewn together to make an image that was 72 by 72. And I wanted to see what it looked like when it got that big, you know?

[00:02:14.96]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah.

[00:02:16.06]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And then I wanted to reproduce them, which I could actually do with the Fabric Workshop if I wanted to.

[00:02:23.41]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Well, did they do multiples of these?

[00:02:26.77]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. They gave me six, and I sewed them together. But what I wanted, I wanted a big one that wasn't sewn together so it could be a sheet with a nice pretty border around it.

[00:02:37.87]



CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:02:38.41]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So that's something else that I'd like to see done at some point.

[00:02:42.34]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Well, had they done much etching on fabric before? Or they created that idea for you?

[00:02:46.93]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah.

[00:02:47.47]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's interesting, I think.

[00:02:48.01]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. I saw they had experimented with something that Susan Weil was doing there. And I said, "Look, I would like to have my etchings etched on canvas." And so they said, "Well, we've never done that before." So they just decided they would just treat the canvas exactly as they treat paper.

[00:03:16.97]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And they didn't run into the problems.

[00:03:19.07]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No problems.

[00:03:19.60]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that's interesting.

[00:03:20.39]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No problems. There was a little bit of a problem with this series here. It's called the Love Letter Series, these two quilts here. They were very experimental. And I don't exactly remember why the problem. But there were some problems with that one. But the others, no problems, and I've done lots of them.

[00:03:42.92]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah?

[00:03:43.82]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. I would do the plates, and we would decide on what kind of series of plates we wanted to go together, and what colors they should be. But they would mix up the colors from a copy that I would give them. Or they would experiment with colors and see if I liked it. So there was a lot of printing done. A lot of it was done on paper, so I have a lot of etchings on paper. But the paper I never really liked, because it's so precious.

[00:04:17.04]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Well, that's what I was wondering. You say you're interested in working in tile, but it seems like such a hard kind of surface for you.

[00:04:25.20]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It's hard but it's permanent. It's not all like paper where you get your fingerprints on it.

[00:04:30.57]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, right. But it doesn't have that element of the fabric, though.

[00:04:32.09]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That's true, too. That's true. Well, yeah, it's hard for me, because I really don't like the hard media. But I do like the colors. [Laughs.]

[00:04:43.23]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. You mean the outside was printed, too, then.

[00:04:47.49]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No. No, this is fabric. When I say I like the colors, I mean with the tiles, I would like colors.

[00:04:52.71]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, yeah.

[00:04:53.49]

FAITH RINGGOLD: But here, this is all just fabric. Fabric is the best. It's the best. I love it. I mean, if there could be created some kind of fabric that could be outdoors—well, there are outdoor fabrics. My banners.

[00:05:14.30]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Where are they?

[00:05:15.53]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, banners are—you know, I just did one, and I'm going to do some more. And so banners is a possibility for outdoor stuff. But you do have to have hard—it has to be durable so that the weather doesn't affect it. So eventually somebody will give me a commission and I'll be able to do that.

[00:05:35.87]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:05:37.31]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So I'm looking forward to it.

[00:05:41.30]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Maybe the next big, big project was "The Bitter Nest?"

[00:05:47.83]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Okay, well, "The Bitter Nest" was written as a performance in 1985.

[00:05:58.85]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay, so that goes back.

[00:06:00.26]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And I did it several times. It was a storytelling performance. And I told the story of this doctor during the Harlem Renaissance, a black woman doctor during the Harlem Renaissance, and her relationship with her mother, who was very eccentric—and, you know. So then I would ask people to come up and tell their stories. And it was interesting. It was a performance that I did not get to do nearly as much because I lost the weight and I did this change performance which everybody absolutely loves. And so it sort of preempted The Bitter Nest.

[00:06:55.14]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:06:55.74]

FAITH RINGGOLD: But at some point I would like to go back to the storytelling, maybe in relationship to the next performance which I'm going to do. 1990, 1991, I will be doing "Change 3." Probably by 1992, '93, I will be doing the next phase of "Change 3," which will be my relationships performance. And that may also have a component that has to do with storytelling, because everybody has a story about a relationship. In fact, that is what they tell me. When I open it up to the audience after the performance and I take off the mask and everything, and I take the microphone and I say, everybody out there has a story to tell, and would you like to come up and share yours? It's always one about a very serious relationship.

[00:08:00.63]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Huh. Yeah. Interesting. Do you invite people to come out and do that, not in the "Change" performance, do you?

[00:08:09.11]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Not in "Change," no.

[00:08:10.13]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: In "The Bitter Nest."

[00:08:10.58]

FAITH RINGGOLD: In "The Bitter Nest," yeah. And they come up and they take the mic and I mean, they get into some serious things. And it's usually some kind of relationship experience that is unresolved.

[00:08:25.16]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: It's still on their mind.

[00:08:26.37]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It's on their mind. It's haunting them. Very often they haven't seen these people in years. They don't know what happened. Or there was a change of relationship and they don't know why. Or they neglected to do something in a relationship, and they're very sorry and they want to right that wrong, but they don't know how. Or there's something that they did that the other person does not know they did, and they don't know how to tell this person or they can't tell this person. Maybe this person is no longer alive. I mean, it's deep. You know?

[00:09:03.24]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Right.

[00:09:04.14]

FAITH RINGGOLD: But they need to—one man gave me a story. Now some people, it takes a while, too, for people to come up and tell these stories. So I found out that. It's not a half-hour type of thing. You really need a little more time. Because there's people who are not going to tell theirs right away. And then after they hear a few stories, then they say, "Oh, I've got to tell mine."

[00:09:31.71]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, right.

[00:09:32.73]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Okay? Now they want to tell theirs. So what happened is one time I did it, and it was too short—the period of their storytelling was too short. So the program was over

and there were all these people who had to tell their stories. So they came backstage and they told them to me.

[00:09:53.07]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Really?

[00:09:53.55]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I was there all night, damn near, listening to these stories!

[00:09:57.03]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's wild.

[00:09:57.45]

FAITH RINGGOLD: This one man told me his story that was very heavy-duty. He said he put his grandfather in a home, which was very traumatic for the family. But they had to do it because he wouldn't keep the door locked and you know, he was making a mess of everything. So for his own safety, they had to put him somewhere where he could be maintained and taken care of.

[00:10:27.07]

And the family was visiting him and they came one day—he came one day to visit his father, and his father—or grandfather, I can't remember which—was weeping uncontrollably. He was not able to communicate to the nurses and doctors what was wrong. But he had a picture on his wall of a white house with a yard in front of it. It was just a painting or a photograph. And he was pointing at it and weeping and uncontrollably.

[00:11:03.63]

The other brother or another relative came and told the story about the house. He said, "I know why he's crying, because this house represents a house that we lived in in Germany before the Nazis came." And what happened is that one of the women in the family was told or it happened—I forgot the details of it—she was there to delay the Nazis until the rest of them got out the back of the house. And he never forgot that because, I imagine she was raped or abused in some way. And when he saw that house, it took him back to that other house.

[00:12:01.31]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, I see. It wasn't the one.

[00:12:02.52]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And that yard, it took him back to that other yard, and he's just reliving the whole thing without being able to express it. And this man told me in that story. He didn't want to—maybe he didn't want to tell it to the whole group, but he wanted to tell it to me. And I thought it was a fascinating story. And then they took me out to dinner, and people told me more stories. So, I mean I just got—

[00:12:23.61]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So you just stirred them up, and they—

[00:12:25.40]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, it was a powerful performance. And I think that my relationship one has to be also a storytelling one.

[00:12:36.89]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: One that invites other people, too.

[00:12:39.01]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, because, I mean, it's not fair. I mean, I'm telling mine, and then they've got one. So I let them tell theirs. And furthermore, it's cathartic to tell it, to get it out of you, you know?

[00:12:50.95]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. The relationship of the quilts to the performances is not—I mean, the quilt isn't necessarily there while you're doing the performance or anything like that, is it? Is it just a combination of it, sort of?

[00:13:00.76]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, some performances need backdrops. However, it's difficult to get the backdrop there with me. This performance that would be about relationships probably will not have a backdrop.

[00:13:21.11]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Well, how about the quilts? Do they usually happen after you've formulated the performance?

[00:13:26.17]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yeah. This one would because I have no idea what a quilt would look like that has to do with this.

[00:13:30.85]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So you lead up to it through the performances?

[00:13:33.37]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. Because in 1985 I did "The Bitter Nest." I didn't do the quilt for it until '88, so it was three years. It took me three years to know what it was going to be.

[00:13:46.43]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. And certainly the "Changes" one about the weight loss, when it took place, it was done afterwards.

[00:13:53.54]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, the weight loss one, "Change," was thought of, conceived of, and in the process of being done while I was losing weight. The whole concept of it came to me at the point at which I was losing the weight. I decided that I would take each decade—I would take the photographs for each decade, and look at them and see what was I doing in that decade. The '30s, what was I doing in the '40s, the '50s, the '60s, you know.

[00:14:28.76]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:14:49.63]

FAITH RINGGOLD: This one is an interesting one, too. "The Church Picnic."

[00:14:55.03]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: In Atlanta?

[00:14:55.71]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, that's a commission.

[00:14:56.89]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:14:57.31]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And with a commission, it's difficult because you're doing something for someone, something that you wouldn't ordinarily do. It's not really something that was your idea. It's their idea.

[00:15:21.02]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: How much of an idea do they give you?

[00:15:23.06]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I don't like them to give me too much now. If they give me too much, it's no good. But I like them to give me something, because it makes it easier for me and doesn't distract me from my own work that I'm doing otherwise. With this one it was wonderful. He simply said he wanted a quilt, a story quilt, that was Southern and was positive.

[00:15:55.61]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's pretty broad.

[00:15:56.84]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Pretty broad, pretty broad. Also hard. Also hard. So I went on back to the turn of the century, 1909, when people were very hopeful. And Black people newly out of slavery were formulating all kinds of societal constrictions to create moral, ethical, political, educational standards that they had been denied during slavery, were very much involved with educational institutions like Black colleges.

[00:16:46.39]

And learning was a high priority. Although not many people were getting an education, those who were, were highly valued. And that was a priority on the list of the rest of the family at least to promote this person's education. There was a great deal of interest in Africa among the educated in terms of being missionaries to go there to help the Africans as much as possible. And so all of this is—and there was also this great morality that was there, which has a lot to do with a lot of rules. A lot of rules.

[00:17:36.17]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Customs.

[00:17:36.89]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. Heavy-duty customs and rules, and a heavy kind of social ladder set up. You know, this one's better than that one, that's better than that one. You know, that type of thing. And so all of that is in there.

[00:17:54.39]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And so you hit on the church picnic on a Sunday. Was there a particular one that you were documenting, that you had seen pictures of or something like that?

[00:18:01.43]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, I know about church picnics because I've been on plenty of them. And I know that they're very different from church picnics today. The ones that I was at and certainly the one here in the early part of the 1900s, people didn't wear dungarees, you know. They dressed up. You went to a picnic, you went with your hat, and your gloves, and the whole thing. If it was Sunday, you were dressed. That's it. And so these people are really dressed.

[00:18:34.30]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that's great, with the flowered hats.

[00:18:35.29]

FAITH RINGGOLD: The men are wearing dark suits, and they're all with their hats and stuff. And they've got all their food there.

[00:18:42.35]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And the nice blankets.

[00:18:44.26]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And their own little colorful blankets, and their Mason jars of drink. And the children are running around barefoot. That's the most relaxing thing you could possibly do is take off your shoes if you were a kid. And then the story goes on. It's a love affair between this young man and this young woman. This is his family over here, sitting to his right, and her family over here to her left. And of course, the regular problem, his family doesn't think she's good enough for him because of X, Y, or Z. You know? [Laughs.] And so they're all there and everybody's looking to see how is her family taking it and how is his family taking it? And their eyes are darting backwards and forwards.

[00:19:34.64]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, I see that. [Laughs.]

[00:19:36.49]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. And this woman here is the storyteller. And notice she takes the she's at the top of the line here. I was talking yesterday about symbolism in my work, you know. So this woman here is the main—she is the storyteller. And this is her son. And I couldn't figure out, why is this boy so big? Why does he become so large that—I just leave it alone. Because the figures get bigger as the picture goes up. Yeah, that's interesting. They're supposed to get smaller in reality. But I don't deal with perspective. So they get bigger in my paintings. And I leave them alone. Let them get big. It's okay.

[00:20:23.26]

But she's telling the story. And her daughter plays a very important role in this story, because her daughter is in love with the minister, too. So he's a young minister and she's a young missionary. And her daughter plays a very significant role, but she's not there. She isn't there. She's in love with him. This girl has just come back from Africa, the young woman that he's holding here. She has just returned from Africa, and she's going back.

[00:20:59.09]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: She is?

[00:21:00.03]

FAITH RINGGOLD: As a missionary. She has graduated from, I think, either Fisk or Spelman. And the mother and father of the young minister are both college graduates, both having gone to Atlanta University, I believe. And her father, the young woman that he's holding here, the young missionary woman—her father went to Fisk, and sang with the Fisk Jubilee Choir abroad. And he's kind of like an actor type. He's a suave young man of the world. And the mother is also a very suave young woman of the world who had a daughter out of wedlock. Her.

[00:21:55.95]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: She was born out of wedlock.

[00:21:56.94]

FAITH RINGGOLD: This girl was born out of wedlock.

[00:21:59.76]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Not of this guy.

[00:22:00.27]

FAITH RINGGOLD: By him. Yes, by him. And they never got married, though. They never got married, which was a terrible no-no. Terrible no-no. And they dared not to. So they were thought of as being really shameless, hussy type of people, bad people. But she wears Paris original dresses, and she's just a unique kind of woman, a free spirit. An original feminist, shall we say, in the early 1900s. And there were those women. There's always been those people who say, hey, you know, I'm doing it this way, no matter what you say.

[00:22:40.80]

She had to drop out of Fisk because she was pregnant. Because one had to pay a price. They're had to be some punishment. You know, we're kind of getting back into that again, this period of our lives with all this problem about abortion. The idea of punishing people for straying away from society's values. They must be punished. Aside from what you get anyway, they want to impose more. [Laughs.] They gotta get more punishing. But up until the '60s, one was severely punished for any kind of deviation at all. You got punished hard. [Laughs.]

[00:23:34.56]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Although, the daughter did become a missionary, so I guess she was just reacting a little bit.

[00:23:39.00]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. Yeah, she's reacting. Well, also she's paying penance.

[00:23:47.13]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: For them?

[00:23:48.00]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, penance for them. Right. And the storyteller's daughter is a very good girl. She just works. In fact, the reason why she didn't come to the picnic is because she just worked so hard. Cooking, and she cooked the breakfast for the seniors, the old people who they brought to the picnic. And they had to have food cooked for them. And she also made this banner. She made the banner. So she just did everything.

[00:24:22.29]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, and then she couldn't make it.

[00:24:23.79]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And then she just couldn't make it. So it's just one of duty, heavy duty, which was what it was. Everybody had their duty, and you had to perform your duty to your family, to your community, to your church. My God, to everybody.

[00:24:48.27]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Well, what's interesting about these, too, is that then you have this sense when you know the story of—anything, I mean, it's always true in life when you look at something, you don't always know immediately what all the story is. And then you've got this sort of unfolding of it and it's interesting. With all these people, it's not what it appears, or it's not only what it appears.

[00:25:08.19]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, uh-uh [negative]. No.

[00:25:10.90]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And I love how the tablecloths are all these different—or cloths—are all different patterns. And it kind of relates to the quilts.



[00:25:18.97]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, that's another thing, too. When there was a picnic, you made it colorful. You brought all these tablecloths. You put a blanket down and then you put a tablecloth on top of the blanket.

[00:25:29.38]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative], I see.

[00:25:30.07]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And made everything very pretty. You brought dishes from home. No paper stuff. All pretty dishes from home. And people went from group to group and ate something.

[00:25:41.92]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that's interesting.

[00:25:43.06]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, that was the style. I mean, that was the style when I was a child in the '30s, '40s, even.

[00:26:07.93]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. [Pause.] Then you have a Michael Jackson.

[00:26:09.91]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, this is "Who's Bad," done in 1988, too. And I just was very, very impressed with the visually powerful way in which color was used in his video. And I wanted to use some of that in a painting. Also I was very impressed with his being a great performer and his message. And how somebody connected to the show business world could manage to say something so powerful in the context of creating this very commercial form of art.

[00:27:08.45]

And I thought, hey, you know, he's bad. And I know what he's trying to say here in terms of all these kind of hoodlum guys who he constantly plays against. He's trying to establish a different kind of manhood, not one that has a knife or a gun or is in an alley shooting up drugs or whatever. He's trying to do something that appears to me has been missing in our society for a long time. What is a man? What the hell is a man? What is being manly? What's it all about? I don't think many men understand that a lot of the stuff that they're telling us is being a man, is not.

[00:28:02.85]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right.

[00:28:04.47]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I mean what we get from looking at television is that being a man is shooting somebody and being able to knock somebody through a wall. And Michael Jackson has—and I think he's done it in his own life, as well.

[00:28:19.82]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, well that's the image he projects outside of the videos.

[00:28:24.57]

FAITH RINGGOLD: I mean, his own world. Yeah. I think that is what in his way he is saying.

[00:28:34.29]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: How did you—I didn't mean to interrupt you—but how did you mean in

his life?

[00:28:37.53]

FAITH RINGGOLD: In his life, through his image, through the making of his face over, through his kind of androgynous look, he's saying, you know, I don't agree with you that being a man is this.

[00:28:52.07]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: It's not the only way.

[00:28:53.64]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It's not the only way to be a man. No.

[00:28:55.58]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: It's not even the right way.

[00:28:56.94]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It's not even the right way. It's not even the right way. He becomes his art. He has become his artistic expression. And so I wanted to pay tribute to that. And I did it with that piece.

[00:29:12.42]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. And that's interesting because these figures are really big, all coming out and very active and everything. That's a different kind of piece for you.

[00:29:25.07]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:29:25.43]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And then the names of things down here are what? All kinds of figures, Black—

[00:29:28.10]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, it's Martin Luther King. It's all the people who are really bad, you know? Who you ever can think of in America or otherwise who's really bad, I put them all down there. Because that's what he's trying to say. This stuff that you're doing, that's not bad.

[00:29:44.62]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I see. Yeah.

[00:29:45.73]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That's not really bad. Anybody can do that. Anybody can beat somebody up, or knife them, or shoot them, or hang out on a corner and talk this crap. Anybody can do that. That's not bad. What's really bad is changing the world, doing something that will affect millions of people and make them feel better about themselves, make life better for all of us. That's bad. So I wanted to pay some tribute to him. We're still in the process of getting him to see that.

[00:30:19.06]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Really? It's that hard to get him to see something?

[00:30:22.79]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, you know, when you're that famous, who knows what you see, ever? I had heard that he had seen it, but I mean, you know, who knows? Anyway, it'll be traveling

in my retrospective. Now this is a piece that I did, a tribute to Martin Luther King. And incidentally, he's one of the most difficult people I ever painted in my life.

[00:30:51.91]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, you mentioned that.

[00:30:53.59]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Very, very hard to paint Martin Luther King.

[00:30:57.10]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's interesting.

[00:30:58.00]

FAITH RINGGOLD: My daughter, Michele—this represents our most recent collaboration. She wrote the words. It's called "Dream 2: King and the Sisterhood." And it's about the women who have been left out of the history of the women's movement.

[00:31:24.84]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Or the history of the Black movement?

[00:31:27.01]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, the history of the Black movement. Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, the one who sat on the bus, Rosa Parks. I think those are the three main ones that I have included here. And then I put Coretta King in, but she's not left out because she's savvy. She's there. She's alive, too. The rest of these—no, wait a minute.

[00:32:00.78]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Rosa Parks is.

[00:32:01.38]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Rosa Parks is alive, too. But Rosa Parks has never been allowed, I would say, to take center stage.

[00:32:14.10]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Credit.

[00:32:15.12]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Because she is the movement. She did it. She inspired Martin Luther King to give his life—that's what she did by refusing to get up. And she is a fabulous, powerful, strong woman. I mean, I have heard her speak. I've been in her presence. She's wonderful.

[00:32:43.87]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, I've seen her on TV.

[00:32:45.00]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, just absolutely wonderful, even today. But I think that if you try to find a picture of these women, or try to find information about any of them, you have a little trouble.

[00:32:56.19]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So you're calling it "Dream 2," not because there's another piece like this, but because it's another version of the dream.

[00:33:02.34]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right. It's the dream he may not have had that we had, that the women will get to be all they can be the next time around. This time around.

[00:33:19.97]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You collaborated with your daughter on something fairly recent?

[00:33:23.39]

FAITH RINGGOLD: She wrote—yeah, that was '80—um—

[00:33:26.09]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: '88, it says here.

[00:33:26.60]

FAITH RINGGOLD: '88. I edited it. [Laughs.] She said I'm a good editor.

[00:33:33.17]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah?

[00:33:33.77]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah.

[00:33:34.22]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Well, that's good.

[00:33:34.79]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, you know, you can edit other people's work. [Laughs.] She wrote this piece, and it was very, very long. It still is long. And I edited it. And she really liked it a lot. She said I was a good editor.

[00:33:50.24]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, that's good.

[00:33:50.93]

FAITH RINGGOLD: She gives me compliments now and then.

[Door buzzer sounds.]

[Laughter.]

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:34:00.62]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Have you had a very fruitful relationship with critics?

[00:34:06.30]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I think so. I think so. I think that that's been a good relationship. And I don't have a lot to complain about there.

[00:34:15.92]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: No?

[00:34:17.99]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It has not been a problem for me.

[00:34:20.90]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Mostly people have interpreted you the way you would like it?

[00:34:23.24]

FAITH RINGGOLD: People have interpreted me in interesting ways, sometimes in ways I never thought of. But it's okay. I mean, I can see what they're talking about. I mean, I don't totally agree with it. But then I don't get uptight about them thinking exactly the way I'm thinking. I'm saying, "Oh, well, that's a way you could look at that." That's how you could see it in another way.

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:34:48.25]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay. Oh, that. Critics. Yeah, all right. Maybe we'll drop that and go back to the—

[00:34:51.62]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, yeah, because I don't really have a lot to say about that.

[00:34:54.36]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. Okay. The Lucy Lippard thing that was the chapter in her book *From the Center*, had that been written—was that a reprint of something that was an article?

[00:35:04.54]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That had been written for *Ms.* magazine and it had been edited somewhat. Some pieces had parts of it that are not included in the *Ms.* part of it that are included in the book.

[00:35:23.82]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Probably didn't work.

[00:35:24.42]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, that would be one problem. There have been people who wanted to say things that their editors have not allowed them to say.

[00:35:34.35]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah. That's interesting.

[00:35:37.71]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So that happens, but it's not because of the writer. It's because of the nature of getting things published.

[00:35:47.46]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Yeah. And otherwise, you do have people who've written about you more frequently in catalogs, and things like that.

[00:35:55.47]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, like Thalia and Moira.

[00:35:58.62]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Whole names here?

[00:35:59.82]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Thalia Gouma-Peterson, who wrote about me in my catalog for Bernice's show in '88 and is writing about me and my retrospective. She wrote about me for *Arts*

magazine in '88, a very long article. And Moira is also writing for my retrospective.

[00:36:26.16]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's Moira Roth?

[00:36:27.27]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Moira Roth, yes, from Mills College in Oakland, California. So yeah, that's great. And I certainly—and then there are other people, too. But it would be nice to have more people. It would be nice to have more people. But I have gotten a lot written. And I'm very happy about that. They're all women, by the way, mostly.

[00:36:59.80]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that's interesting.

[00:37:01.18]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, it is. [Laughs.]

[00:37:02.89]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: How about even in the newspaper, in reviews and things like that?

[00:37:05.72]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Well, in the reviews it will be whoever is writing for that particular journal or newspaper, magazine, or whatever. But generally speaking, it's women. All over the country, it's women.

[00:37:22.27]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Well, your work was more maybe associated with the feminist movement a little bit in the past. I mean, now it seems to me maybe people just haven't caught up with it yet or something like that.

[00:37:32.68]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, it would be nice to have more men. Except for Amiri Baraka wrote a beautiful piece. He wrote a beautiful piece, which I really love. It got published one place. It was supposed to be in my catalog for the Studio Museum, but he got it to them too late for them to put it in. So it doesn't appear there. But it is included in some other places. We got it published some other places.

[00:38:16.12]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Let's see. Just to go back to the quilts real quickly, because I'm not sure we've ever had it on tape about the children's book that you're going to be doing on the Tar Beach. We've been talking about it.

[00:38:25.75]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, right. Well, they're going to use—I'm having "Tar Beach," which is a painting—a quilt, a story quilt that I did in 1988, is going to be published as a book by Crown Publishers. And they are using the exact story, which is wonderful. So I have no story to write.

[00:39:00.24]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Will they reproduce it the way you wrote it, handwriting, do you think? Or are they going to type it?

[00:39:04.35]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Now then I don't know.

[00:39:05.48]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You're going to work that out.

[00:39:05.79]

FAITH RINGGOLD: On the dummy they just used some clippings from the poster. So it is that way. I don't know about that. But it will be a picture book. There'll be 12 pictures that I have to do. And the words will go on the pictures to make the book. Because it's a picture book.

[00:39:36.20]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's exciting.

[00:39:36.95]

FAITH RINGGOLD: It's going to be a fun thing to work on. I'm just waiting on the signing of the contract. I met this young woman at the Studio Museum. They have a quilt show there that I'm in. And she came up to me and she said, "Oh, I love your work. My name is X and I love your work. And I am at present typing up your contract at Crown Publishing." And I hugged her and kissed her and made Barbara hug her and kiss her. And baby Faith hugged her. I mean we all just hugged this woman, because it's about hurry up and wait, right?

[00:40:15.47]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, I know. That's great. The quilt show that's traveling, is that the Afro-American story quilts? Or is that—

[00:40:26.83]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Okay, now which quilts do you mean?

[00:40:27.77]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: The one you just mentioned at the Studio Museum?

[00:40:29.53]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, yes, that is going to travel. Now that is, yes.

[00:40:32.80]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: But that started there, though.

[00:40:34.64]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, it started at Williams College.

[00:40:36.73]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's the Williams College one? Okay.

[00:40:38.14]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. And in it is my Williams quilt.

[00:40:40.33]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that's what I wanted to ask.

[00:40:41.80]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And "Tar Beach" and "The Dinner Quilt."

[00:40:46.51]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's great, I have to go see that.

[00:40:48.10]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. "The Dinner Quilt" is there, too.

[00:40:50.62]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: It's there now?

[00:40:52.78]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So they have three of mine.

[00:40:54.31]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Those are three great ones.

[00:40:57.55]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Oh, but it's a great exhibition, a wonderful exhibition.

[00:41:02.08]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Is it historical, also?

[00:41:04.06]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, it is. It goes all the way back. There was some slave quilts there. It's wonderful. It's just so strong and so powerful.

[00:41:11.65]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's great. So that just opened up.

[00:41:13.36]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes. I think the quilt medium, or the—I want to see and participate in the movement, the struggle. I'm always involved with movement struggles. So the one I see myself involved in right now is the quilt movement. And I'm very interested in seeing that medium take its place, because I think that many of the women and/or men who created quilts were the forerunners of so-called Modern Art. I mean, they worked in abstract ways long before the painters ever did, you know? And their work is just it's just so moving and so wonderful. And the way they have been able to maintain the art form through all these years with no attention.

[00:42:21.56]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, that's true. Maybe that's why, because you can have too much, and then—

[00:42:27.66]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Maybe. But I mean to do work of that quality—Because usually if artists don't get the attention, the work doesn't develop. These people actually developed without getting any notice. Except that they do get another kind of notice, they get family notice.

[00:42:48.75]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Family, and among themselves.

[00:42:50.10]

FAITH RINGGOLD: That's right. Among themselves and among their families they are very well noticed. So maybe that's adequate. Whereas us as so-called fine artists don't get that. Unless we get public recognition, our families don't recognize us.

[00:43:10.89]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that's an interesting point. They don't care about the public recognition.



[00:43:17.43]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No. The family recognizes it.

[00:43:19.86]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, that's interesting. So it would be a great thing to unite those, which is what you do.

[00:43:23.29]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Wouldn't it? I'd love to do that. Well, I don't know if I do that.

[00:43:26.11]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: You do, sort of.

[00:43:27.16]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Get that together, make that one thing.

[00:43:29.74]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. Now just to get on to the weight loss quilt, you incorporated photographs, or silkscreens of photographs, is that right? Or what are they?

[00:43:40.58]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, etchings.

[00:43:41.50]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Etchings?

[00:43:41.89]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Photo etchings.

[00:43:43.09]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Photo etchings?

[00:43:43.69]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. And that's before. It would be '86.

[00:43:46.57]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, that's right. Okay.

[00:43:47.56]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, it would be in 1986. Isn't it there?

[00:43:49.99]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: It's here in black and white. I don't know. Oh, yeah. Here it is.

[00:43:53.35]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No. That's "Change 2."

[00:43:56.20]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, all right.

[00:43:56.89]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Maybe I don't have it, because I wasn't as carefully getting all my docu—

When I joined the gallery, the problem was I was no longer in charge of my archive in the way that I needed to be.

[00:44:18.70]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So there's a little period in there—

[00:44:20.04]

FAITH RINGGOLD: There's a little period in there where some things are missing, because I was not taking care of things as much as I should have.

[00:44:28.88]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right. And now they've taken over.

[00:44:30.38]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And now I have taken over [laughs] so that I get my pictures off the top. And they get what's left because there are a lot of pictures I don't have. Like where's the "Change" group? You don't see it there, do you?

[00:44:48.92]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I don't see it.

[00:44:49.85]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, that's '85. It's got to be in '86. You've got a slide, but you don't have anything else.

[00:44:55.71]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: I don't even know if I see the slides.

[00:44:57.86]

FAITH RINGGOLD: There's got to be a slide there.

[00:44:59.21]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Oh, yeah, this is it, here.

[00:44:59.87]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah, there's a slide there, but that's it. See? And that's because in a feverish mailing of stuff to everybody—which Bernice does, which is wonderful—she sends it out, and it's gone. And a lot of people do not return these things.

[00:45:23.01]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah, right. And you don't always have copies.

[00:45:25.23]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. So there you are. Now that's changed, too. See, I have it.

[00:45:29.73]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: So for both of these—yeah, that adds a sort of a new thing with the black and white photo etching being in there.

[00:45:39.52]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yeah. So this one is lithograph.

[00:45:43.02]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: This one's lithograph?

[00:45:43.84]

FAITH RINGGOLD: This is litho.

[00:45:45.13]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: They look like newspaper. It looks sort of newspaper-ish. It looks kind of interesting.

[00:45:48.46]

FAITH RINGGOLD: This is photo-litho. Photolithography. The first one was photo etching.

[00:45:58.95]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And just one thing. There's an Alice—

[00:46:01.62]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Okay. That's for a show Bernice did called "Alice and Look Who Else," or something of the sort. And so I made up this story about this little Black girl who falls down the rabbit hole in the park up the street there in Harlem, and goes through all these experiences with these people who don't believe she's Alice. Because they said they've seen Alice, and she don't look like her.

[00:46:36.60]

And furthermore, they want her to teach them how to dance. And she says she doesn't know how to dance, but since they're abusing her so and she'd like to get the hell out of there— and she wants to send a message to her mother to come and get her. But the animals there have eaten up all the stamps and the paper, and it's just a mess there, you see?

[END OF TRACK AAA\_ringgo89\_6392\_m]

[00:00:05.77]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Okay, it's October 18, the second tape, Faith Ringgold.

[00:00:09.98]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And so she—the rats or the mice have a monopoly on the fax machines. They run the fax machines.

[00:00:21.75]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Yeah?

[00:00:22.52]

FAITH RINGGOLD: But what they want from her is to teach them how to dance like Michael Jackson. And they'll let her fax this information. This kid doesn't know how to dance. [They laugh.] But she's decided that she'd just as well go ahead and teach them because what difference does it make?

[00:00:39.28]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: They rats don't know about it anyhow.

[00:00:39.85]

FAITH RINGGOLD: They don't know the difference. And so they're jumping around, talking about who's bad and who's bad. [Laughs.] And, well, she's standing on this book, this pile high of books, stack of books, of Alice in Wonderland, trying to avoid being snapped at by the rest of the animals who, from time to time, decide they'd like to eat her. [They laugh.]

[00:01:10.06]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: That's great. Need a bigger picture of it. Yeah. That's neat. Oh, it

reminds me a little bit of—what do you—do you like Robert Colescott's work?

[00:01:26.50]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Yes, yes, I do.

[00:01:31.27]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: And then the Williams—the quilt, you did a quilt. Was that for Williams, or just for the show or—

[00:01:37.35]

FAITH RINGGOLD: No, that was a commission for Williams College.

[00:01:40.74]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

[00:01:41.91]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And it will travel with them, and then it will be part of their permanent collection.

[00:01:50.67]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Right, so—

[00:01:51.54]

FAITH RINGGOLD: And the story commemorates one hundred years of Blacks graduating from Williams College. Williams College is actually—

[Side conversation:] Whoa, you scared the hell out of me.

[Laughter.]

[00:02:09.09]

Williams College is actually three hundred years old, but Blacks have only been going there for one hundred years. And so I also included some of the history behind the two hundred years before they were included because there was a woman who tried to get her son in before that. And I—this is also very surrealistic, this story. I just bring everybody back to this picnic that they're having in celebration of Gaius Bolin. And, in fact, I bring Gaius Bolin back, too.

[00:02:48.58]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: He was the first—

[00:02:49.81]

FAITH RINGGOLD: He was the first to graduate.

[00:02:51.18]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

[00:02:51.80]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So I bring them all back.

[00:02:54.19]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: It's all based on being surreal, but it's based on things—

[00:02:56.98]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Based on facts.

[00:02:57.67]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: —you did research about.

[00:02:58.81]

FAITH RINGGOLD: Right, because I did a lot of interviews with the students and everything.

[00:03:06.60]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Okay. All right. Well, that sounds—I think that's  
—

[00:03:12.00]

FAITH RINGGOLD: So how are you doing?

[Recorder stops; restarts.]

[00:03:16.71]

CYNTHIA NADELMAN: This is the end of the Faith Ringgold tapings.

[END OF TRACK AAA\_ringgo89\_6393\_m]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]