

WE WANTED A REVOLUTION

BLACK RADICAL WOMEN 1965–85

This exhibition (which was on view at the Albright-Knox in 2018) focused on Black women artists during the 1960s, '70s, and '80s. It was an important, and at times tumultuous, period for those working to increase equality in the art world and in society in general. The works of art and ephemera (a word for historical documents) in this exhibition reflect what the artists did to build and create space for Black women in a field often dominated by white male artists.

Objective

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



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

Activity

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

With materials available to you, have children draw themselves. After they have completed their self-portraits, explain what the word “identity” means. Explain that the works of art in *We Wanted a Revolution* were by **Black women artists** who used those three specific words to identify themselves. Many of the artists in the exhibition also identified as friends, sisters, mothers, daughters, activists, community organizers, and leaders. Ask children to think of words that describe their own identities.

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

Vocabulary-Building Exercise

Self-Portrait:

A portrait of an artist created by that artist



Identity:

The distinguishing characteristic or personality of an individual



Self-Identity:

Awareness of oneself as an individual

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

- Ask children to choose their favorite artwork from *We Wanted a Revolution* from the images found here: www.albrightknox.org/wwar. Ask them to explain why they chose that as their favorite.
- Encourage children to make a poster to raise awareness for something they care about, like the women in the photograph at left by Jan van Raay.
- Create a fashion-design project inspired by the image of Jae Jarrell's *Ebony Family*, ca. 1968, and *Urban Wall Suit*, ca. 1969 (found at www.albrightknox.org/wwar). Ask children to make or draw a piece of clothing to represent who they are.
- Go over the definition of the word “radical.” Ask children why they think that word was used to describe the Black women artists whose works were featured in *We Wanted a Revolution*.
- Show children the image of Dindga McCannon’s *Revolutionary Sister*, 1971 (found at www.albrightknox.org/wwar). Look at how the figure is standing, and have children try to mimic her pose with their own bodies. Ask: Do you feel strong in this position? How do you stand when you want to feel powerful, like a warrior? What do you call this position?

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

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