232. **Dancing at the Louvre, from the series The French Collection, Part I; #1**

Faith Ringgold. 1991 C.E. Acrylic on canvas, tie-dyed, pieced fabric border

- **Article at Khan Academy**
  - “Marcia and her three little girls took me dancing at the Louvre. I thought I was taking them to see the Mona Lisa. You’ve never seen anything like this. Well, the French hadn’t either. Never mind Leonardo da Vinci and Mona Lisa, Marcia and her three girls were the show.” (Willa Marie Simone, *Dancing at the Louvre*)
  - about breaking the rules, and having lots of fun while doing it.
  - Combining representational painting and African-American quilting techniques with the written word, *Dancing at the Louvre* is the first in Ringgold’s series of twelve “story quilts” called *The French Collection*.
  - Ringgold’s story-quilting technique is important to meaning in her work. She creates the central image using acrylic paint on canvas, reflecting her knowledge of western art history in both style and subject matter, and surrounds it with a patchwork cloth border that includes her hand-written text. She then uses traditional quilting methods to sandwich a layer of batting by stitching the decorative front to the plain cotton backing.
- 73.5 x 80 inches
- The series tells the fictional story of Willa Marie Simone, a young black woman who moves to Paris in the early 20th century. Told through text written around the margin of each quilt, Willa Marie’s adventures lead her to meet celebrities such as Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse, Josephine Baker, Zora Neale Hurston, Sojourner Truth, and Rosa Parks on the road to becoming an artist and businesswoman.
- Drawing on her own struggle for recognition in an art world dominated by European traditions and male artists, Ringgold uses this narrative format to literally rewrite the past by weaving together histories of modern art, African-American culture, and personal biography. This practice reflects the shift toward postmodernism in art of the 1980s and 1990s. In deliberate contrast to Modernism’s emphasis on autonomy and universal meaning, artists like Ringgold highlighted the implicit biases in accepted forms of art, especially in their treatment of race and gender. Characteristic is her use of appropriation, narrative, biographical references, and non-Western traditions. Through these devices, Ringgold offers an alternative to the European and masculine perspectives that are prevalent in art history.
- **Quilt (associated with women’s domestic work)**
  - quilt making has historically been important to maintaining female relationships. Quilting is often done collectively, allowing women time to gather and have conversations away from men or others outside their community. Young girls watch and participate in the activity in order to learn family stories, cultural background, shared knowledge, and technical skills associated with their maternal and domestic roles.
  - Although quilts are common in a number of cultures, Ringgold’s African-American heritage recalls their historical role, especially within the Underground Railroad, to communicate codes and hidden messages that remain unrecognized by outsiders to the community.
- Typical of much postmodern art, Ringgold’s work appropriates recognizable imagery and alternative artistic practices to offer critical cultural commentary. She challenges us to consider expectations of gender and race, as well as traditional expectations and values of what art might be. Through image and text, Ringgold rewrites history to make a place for women like herself in its historical development.
- The transformative power of Ringgold’s message led her to translate her work into picture books for children. Her first *Tar Beach* (1991), based on a 1988 story quilt in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, received the 1992 Caldecott Honor Award. She has since published several others including *Aunt...*