

Early Works (1962 – 1965)

Born in New York City in 1930, Faith Ringgold was raised in the wake of the Harlem Renaissance and spent her childhood immersed in a thriving community of musicians, artists, writers, and thinkers. Beset by respiratory illnesses that interrupted her schooling, she found comfort at home in art. Later she enrolled at the City College of New York, but was barred from majoring in visual arts on the basis of her sex. Refusing to let this limit her artistic ambition, Ringgold eventually completed her master's degree in arts education and began a nearly twenty-year teaching career in New York City public schools.

When not teaching, Ringgold continued to develop her painting practice. Her early canvases reflect a nuanced understanding of omnipresent tensions between Black and white Americans. The artist's suspicion of the motivations of white people in their dealings with the Black community finds expression in *They Speak No Evil* (1963) which depicts six white men with wide, hollowed-out eyes staring at the viewer in a manner both mundane and unsettling. *Mr. Charlie* (1964) takes its name from the pejorative catch-all used by African Americans to describe a domineering white man. In Ringgold's portrayal, Mr. Charlie's air of benevolence is tempered by a cold gaze that belies the truth.