

FAITH RINGGOLD

(b. 1934)

Wedding on the Seine, 1991

acrylic on canvas, tie-dyed, pieced fabric border

74 x 89 inches

From the Series: "THE FRENCH
COLLECTION PART 1: #2"



This is one of the most important Faith Ringgold story quilts in private hands. The work of art tells the story of the fictional artist Willia Marie Simone's marriage to a Frenchman named Pierre. In the image, Simone appears to be fleeing the ceremony and throwing her bouquet into the Seine River. Simone is running away from Pierre because she believes her elopement with him will interfere with her dream of becoming an artist. The story is outlined in fourteen panels: seven on the top, and seven on the bottom.

1. *You could say, I ran comme un dératé, like a bat outta hell. There was only one thing I could think about. Get out of this church and get some air. Never mind what this crowd thinks about it. Run, girl, run. To the river fast as you can. And get rid of these damn flowers and this wedding veil and train. What is this, a funeral?*
2. *I've only been in Paris 6 months. I came to be une artiste, not a wife. I don't even know the language. Pierre is American born with French parents, so he speaks l'Anglaise et le Français parfaitement though he loves everything American, le plus noir que possible. But what about his family and his friends?*
3. *There is something in the way they look at me, as if to say: How did you get so far away from home, l'enfant? Will you become civilized, or will you remain just a beautiful savage dressed in a Paris frock? The French believe they are the unique civilization. But what about the Bastille, the Nazi collaboration, the Haitian and Algerian revolutions?*
4. *They will kill with a glass of wine raised for a toast. Vive la France! And you will be just as dead as if you had your throat cut in some back alley in Harlem over 25 cents and a bottle of beer. Is it because I am a little black girl from Harlem that I don't believe their charade?*
5. *Why did I marry this Frenchman? I hardly know him. He's more than twice my age, and white. We have very little in common. Il sera un bon mari. Il est très riche et généreux. They all said. "You will be very happy with him, my dear. His family has been in Paris for three generations. He is practically French."*
6. *The wedding procession was hot on my heels. Pierre was holding up the rear puffing and blowing. Ne l'arrêtez pas d'aller! Elle reviendra. Elle est le mienne maintenant. "Let her go. She'll come back. She's mine." I ran even faster. "Pierre will make you a great husband," someone yelled at me. But will he leave me alone? Or will he make me over into his shadow?*

- 7 *Could I be une artiste and a wife? "Take a studio in Paris or in our chateau in the South," Pierre said. But I don't even know if I can paint. Now I may never find out. I ran even faster down the narrow streets to the Ile de la Cité past the Notre Dame Cathedral and on to the Pont-Neuf, overlooking the Seine.*
- 8 *I could have run forever. The wedding procession was gaining on me. I had to make a statement. Something more than "I obey" and "I do." Cause I don't, I won't! I hurled my bouquet into the river and it landed on the Bateaux Mouche and the crowd of tourists looked up and applauded me with Vive la France!*
- 9 *I made my statement. Would it be the last I'd make? Oh God, don't let me sink like those flowers. I want to live a life of making art, not babies and dinners and beds. I looked back at my wedding procession. They stood frozen, waiting for my next move. Pierre was in front now. An aging man, résolu.*
- 10 *What does Pierre know about me and the way I was raised in our little tiny apartment in Harlem? Does he understand what my mother and father sacrificed to give me the little they gave me? Does he know that as meager as our life was it was beautiful, and that we loved each other as if we were rich?*
- 11 *What do I know about Pierre's family and his life in the Fifth Avenue town house he was born in New York City? Who was the pretty black girl who changed his diapers and took care of him? Did she look like me? When he is holding me and telling me how much he loves me, is it memories of her that make his voice tremble as it does?*
- 12 *Will our children be French? Or French speaking coloreds? And why have I waited till it is too late to ask these questions? Is it because the answers are not as important as amour? For whatever reason, I know he loves me. It may be because I am black that he loves me. But that's no reason to run away.*
- 13 *Later I learned that Pierre had a serious heart condition with only a few years to live. No wonder I never had to put up with a mistress. He had assez d'amour seulement pour moi. We were together-death do we part Not much time for art or anything else but being with Pierre, and two babies- one a year and then ...*
- 14 *I was again on the Seine, without flowers, applause, or a wedding procession in hot pursuit. I was remembering our wedding day. They were right all the time- Pierre was un bon mari. But would he leave me alone? Could I do my art? Within just three years Pierre died, leaving me alone with my art and two babies."*