



Children's Museum of Manhattan

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Faith Ringgold helps to launch 'Raising Citizens' at CMOM

By **STEPHON JOHNSON**
Amsterdam News Staff

"The fourth of July has become more of a celebration of the hot dog than the Declaration of Independence," said Andrew Ackerman, director of the Children's Museum of Manhattan (CMOM). "We think there's a spirit in the country right now of retuning to volunteerism and family."

Coming up this weekend, in time for the holiday, CMOM launches its "Raising Citizens" program, a yearlong series of education programs designed to teach kids about the country they call home. All six American-related holidays are celebrated in "Raising Citizens" (Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Presidents' Week and Memorial Day), with each fea-

turing a central theme that ties into the nature of a democracy and Americans

"American Dream Quilt," the first program of the series, features Faith Ringgold, the internationally acclaimed author and artist. She'll be at the museum from 5 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. as part of CMOM's "Target Free Friday Night." Ringgold, whose work is included in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Studio Museum in Harlem and in countries all over the world, touched on Friday night's events.

"It's another opportunity to reach children," she said. "It's important to do it through art because the ability to create visually is something children come to the world with. It's a gift

from God that needs to be nurtured and carefully developed."

Development in the arts is something that Ringgold holds dear, especially with children when they transition into young adulthood. She feels that is the time to emphasize the arts. But natural human behavior and public schools systems across the country make that an uphill battle. "Children around the age of 10 or 12 lose [their artistic inquisitiveness]," said Ringgold, who is known for painted quilts that combine art, quilted fabric and storytelling. "They begin to feel self-conscious about spontaneous creativity and they're afraid of exposing themselves, so they don't become as interested in art as they get older.

"If it's not nurtured when they're little, it affects their whole life," said Ringgold. Ackerman agrees.

"As the schools move away from the arts, the children lose their ability to thrive," said Ackerman. "We've lost so much potential in our children." With "Raising Families," CMOM hopes to tackle the arena of children and the arts, along with teaching them about what makes America the country that it is. For example, what makes a person an American?

"I think that an American person is one who relates to the values of freedom of speech and freedom," said Ringgold. "We are in a continual struggle to achieve the goals set down by the Declaration of Independence at a time when slavery was going on and women weren't allowed to vote.

"Jefferson and company were setting down a life course for America," she said. "Other coun-

tries wanted to emulate this. It's an appropriate goal."

With the feeling among many of the elder statesmen that the younger generation doesn't appreciate America, Ackerman hopes that "Raising Families" gives native-born children the same feeling that non-native adults get when they come to this country.

"Because the families who visit this institution are as diverse as this city, I'm kind of reminded to get out of myself a little bit," said Ackerman. "Immigrants always remind me of why they came to America. I feel like I'm being chastised for not being more appreciative," laughed Ackerman.

So how do we understand American ideals and responsibilities? "Art is the best way," said Ringgold. It starts this weekend.