
Betye Saar And Her Artstyle

Betye Saar was an artist and a black civil rights activist. Betye's art was more than just paintings it was her way of expressing the racism, sexism, and oppression she dealt with in everyday life as a black woman in the early 1900's. Betye was born July 30 1926 in Los Angeles California. She was the daughter of Jefferson Brown and Beatrice Brown and had two siblings. When she was only five her father, Jefferson Brown, died of a kidney failure. This forced her mother to move the family to Pasadena and take on work as a seamstress. She actually had moved down the street from Jackie Robinson. However her mother was so poor she recycled old materials as gifts that the children asked for, this inspired Betye to be an artist.

Betye grew up using this passion to create dolls out of old things since she had nothing due to the Great Depression that was occurring during the time of her childhood. She was also inspired by her trips to her grandmother's house in Watts. There she saw the work of a great artist Simon Rodia called the Watts Towers which are these intricate interconnected sculptures. In 1945 she began class as a printmaker and throughout college had experienced racism that she had to triumph over. After graduating, she married Richard Saar another art designer. The couple had three children before divorcing.

In the late 1960's she attended a John Cornell concert and was inspired to do assemblage art. This inspiration was driven even further after seeing the Watts riots which had the artists John Outterbridge and Noah Purifoy. After the assassination of Martin Luther King she made her first assemblage "The Liberation of Aunt Jemima". It was her way of participating in the movement considering that she was a mother of three and couldn't bare to leave them without a mother.

This initiated her artstyle using assemblage to counter common racial stereotypes during the civil rights movement. In 1974 she received a National Endowment for the Arts. Which paid for her trip to Mexico where she learned more on rituals and traditional art which became her artstyle after the civil rights movement had ended.

Betye Saar had many masterpieces throughout her career where she tried to change the thought processes on derogatory stereotypes and the first of those is "The Liberation of Aunt Jemima". In this assemblage she uses the gun and grenade not only to grab your attention but as a symbol of power fighting against the stereotype of cleaning and picking cotton. This is further driven by the Black Power fist skirt. This painting became her signature assemblage, In fact most of her assemblages are about the size of a box so that you can see any details in her work.