



GATHIE FALK

Life & Work

By Michelle Jacques

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A photograph of Gathie Falk, an elderly woman with short, curly white hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a black long-sleeved top with a vibrant red and yellow abstract pattern. A necklace of white, shell-like pendants hangs around her neck. Her hands are clasped in front of her. The background is a large, abstract painting with soft, blended colors of yellow, orange, and grey.

BIOGRAPHY

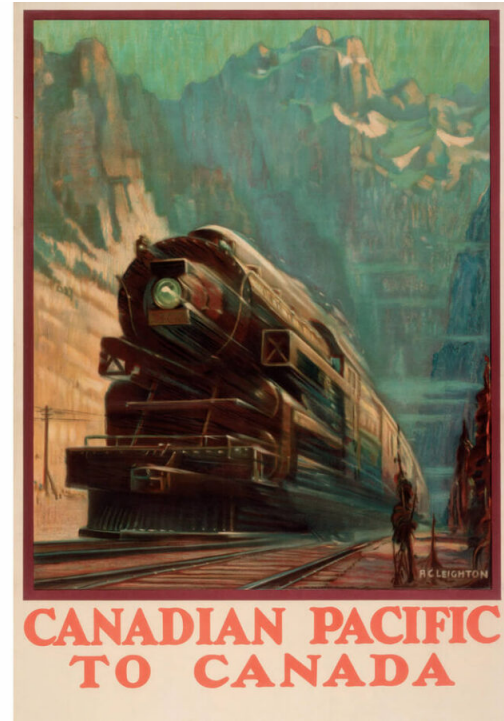
One of Canada's most acclaimed living artists, Gathie Falk (b.1928) imbues ordinary objects and everyday rituals with qualities of the sublime. From humble beginnings in Manitoba, she has become a leading figure in Vancouver's artistic community and received international recognition for her painting and ceramic sculpture, as well as her pioneering work in installation and performance. Now in her nineties, Falk continues to produce and exhibit regularly, enjoying critical and popular success for work that has never veered from her playful, purposeful, and unapologetically personal vision.

CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

Although Gathie Falk's itinerant early years were marked by loss and poverty, they were also buoyed by art, community, and religious faith. She was born on January 31, 1928, in Alexander, a small town in Treaty 2 territory, just west of Brandon in southern Manitoba. Her parents, Cornelius and Agatha Falk, were German-speaking Mennonites who had immigrated to Canada in 1926 with their two sons to escape Communist persecution in Russia. Just three years after they left, many of the Mennonites who had stayed behind were either exiled to Siberia or killed.

Falk's family had owned property and a business in Russia, and land acquisition would have been easy in the Prairies due to an agreement made between the Canadian government and leaders of the Mennonite community in Russia. In 1872, the year after Treaties 1 and 2 were signed, the federal government passed the Dominion Lands Act, which was a law aimed at encouraging agricultural settlement of the Prairies. Cornelius Falk, however, wittingly chose to forgo the opportunity to own land in Canada. A gifted musician who played the violin, sang, and was a choral director, he was asked to teach music at a college in the United States, but he refused that too. Instead, he chose to labour for other farmers in his new homeland.

Cornelius Falk's decision to pursue a less materialistic and more spiritual existence resulted in extreme hardship for his family when he died of pneumonia in November 1928, less than a year after his daughter's birth and barely two years after arriving in Canada. After Falk's father died, her childhood became somewhat nomadic; her mother, now reliant on the support of the community in order to keep her family housed, clothed, and fed, moved Gathie and her older brothers, Jack and Gordon, from one Mennonite community to another throughout Manitoba, Ontario, and Saskatchewan, seeking support wherever she could find it.



LEFT: Gathie Falk's parents, Agatha and Cornelius Falk, Russia, c.1914, photographer unknown. RIGHT: A.C. (Alfred Crocker) Leighton, *Canadian Pacific to Canada*, c.1920, lithograph, 101.5 x 63.5 cm, UBC Library, Vancouver. Canadian Pacific Railway played a critical role in promoting immigration to the Prairies.



GATHIE FALK

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Growing up poor meant being resourceful and learning how to make new things out of the old. While the household Falk grew up in wasn't necessarily artistic, it was certainly crafty and creative. In her 2018 memoir, *Apples, etc.*, Falk recounts how she made her first doll's dresses when she was still a toddler, using scissors, cloth, and string. She also describes begging her mother and brother to draw pictures of human forms for her and having a good enough critical eye—despite her tender age—to recognize the failures of their artistic attempts.¹



LEFT: Gathie Falk in a dress of her own design sewn by her mother, Winnipeg, c.1940, photographer unknown. RIGHT: Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1930s-1940s, postcard.

By the time Falk was a teenager, her family was living in Winnipeg. Her brothers had left school to help support the family. She was a good student with evident creative talent, and at age thirteen, her grammar school teacher recommended her for Saturday morning art classes. Falk recalls taking the bus downtown to "a civic building on Vaughan Street that had a museum in the basement [the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature], an auditorium on the main floor, and an art gallery on the top floor [the Winnipeg Museum of Fine Arts, now the Winnipeg Art Gallery]."²



LEFT: Diorama of an Elk depicting rutting season in Riding Mountain National Park, Parklands Gallery, Manitoba Museum, Winnipeg. RIGHT: Paul Gauguin, *Arearea*, 1892, oil on canvas, 74.5 x 93.5 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Her early training there included drawing from the displays of taxidermy animals in the natural history museum and art history lessons structured around reproductions of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings. Falk recalls that it was an image of a Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) painting featuring a reddish-orange dog that turned her off of these lessons once and for all—the unrealistic palette was too far outside the realm of her teenage desire for pragmatic rendering.

MOVING WEST IN SEARCH OF WORK

Despite her talent, Falk did not envision becoming an artist at this stage of her life. Like her parents, she loved music—especially singing. Around the time that she denounced her extracurricular art lessons, she was recognized for her vocal skill in her church choir performances, and she was active in a local Mennonite girls' club. She began singing lessons, and an anonymous patron funded her instruction in conducting and theory.

She saw herself pursuing a career in music, but in 1944 her hopes were dashed. At age sixteen, just after Falk had completed grade nine, her family was informed that they had to pay back a debt they owed to Canadian Pacific for their steamship passage from Russia to Canada. Both of her brothers had moved away from home by then, and her mother did not speak English and was of poor health. The responsibility fell to Falk to leave school in order to find full-time work.

After a false start as a nanny in the summer of 1944, Falk found a job at the packing plant of Macdonalds Consolidated, a food wholesaler. She would work there, packaging foodstuffs to be sold at supermarkets, for the rest of her time in Winnipeg. To counter the monotony of long hours on the warehouse floor, Falk led rousing singalongs with her co-workers. While “filling cellophane bags with raisins, dates, brown sugar, peas, beans, and chocolate rosebuds,” the women sang hopeful songs of love and laughter.³

It was distressing for Falk to leave school—she was a good student and saw education as her ticket to a more comfortable and fulfilling life. Thankfully, a year after joining the working community, she discovered that she could complete high school by correspondence. In order to balance her studies and her job, she had to give up her music lessons, although she continued to sing in the church choir.



Mennonite Girls' Club, Gathie Falk seated far right, Winnipeg, 1944, photographer unknown.



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Gathie Falk (far right) with co-workers at a Winnipeg packing plant, c.1945, photographer unknown.

In 1946, when Falk was eighteen, she and her mother, along with her brother Gordon and his wife Edith, all moved to British Columbia, joining her brother Jack and his wife Vera, who had found a home in Vancouver after the Second World War. Falk and her mother were unsettled for the first while, staying in the living room of Mrs. Falk's cousins in Yarrow, a small Mennonite community, and then renting a room in the house next door. In this rural setting, Falk picked berries and worked in a poultry processing plant to support herself and her mother.

The town of Yarrow is now a semirural suburb of Chilliwack, but when Falk moved there with her mother, it would have borne quite a resemblance to a Mennonite community in Russia. It was essentially a self-sufficient village—all of the businesses and amenities were owned and operated by Mennonites, who continued to speak in the German dialect that formed the foundation of their heritage. In the shadow of a war fought against Germany, the non-Mennonite inhabitants of the region responded to this with fear and suspicion.



Ernie H. Reksten, *Vancouver—Looking North on Granville St.*, 1958, photograph, City of Vancouver Archives. This photograph of Granville Street captures downtown Vancouver when Falk was a young woman.

The Mennonite community in Yarrow had provided a safe landing for Falk and her mother, but in the spring of 1947, following a short stint when Falk worked as a hotel waitress in Chilliwack, they moved to Vancouver to be closer to family and have access to better job opportunities. Their means were still extremely limited—they lived in two rented rooms at East 25th Avenue and Fraser Street—but Falk was happy to be in the city with its many amenities. Its “bright lights and busy sidewalks” were enchanting to her.⁴ She and her mother joined a nearby church, which provided them with friendship, community, and purpose, thus easing their transition to their new setting.

Falk’s first employment in Vancouver was at a luggage factory, where it was her job to sew the pockets inside of suitcases. She had been sewing her own clothing since she was a youngster in Winnipeg, but it was difficult to become skilled on the industrial equipment. “It seemed as if I broke hundreds of needles,” she has said.⁵ However, she eventually mastered the machine and even earned herself the nickname “Speed.” As Robin Laurence notes, curators and critics later saw this job “as formative to her capacity for detailed handiwork and repetition within the context of artmaking,” qualities that can be seen in *Three Cabbages*, 1978.⁶



Gathie Falk, *Three Cabbages*, 1978, ceramic, 17.8 x 17.8 x 17.8 cm, Weisz Family Collection.

When the foreman moved on to another luggage factory, he encouraged Falk to follow. She learned some hard lessons about the work world at the second factory—it wasn't unionized; therefore, raises were not forthcoming and the women were paid less than the men. Nonetheless, Falk stayed in the job, tenaciously completing her high school diploma by correspondence at the same time.

RELUCTANT TEACHER

To her delight, Falk was able to join a church choir and resume her music lessons in Vancouver. Her mother purchased a used violin for her as a gift for her first Vancouver Christmas, and she began lessons with Walter Neufeld (1924-2004), an acclaimed musician and conductor with Mennonite roots very similar to Falk's. She also studied music theory with Neufeld's brother Menno, an accomplished choirmaster.



LEFT: Walter Neufeld (left) and his brother Menno, date unknown, photographer unknown. RIGHT: Walter Neufeld with the Neufeld Junior String Orchestra, Abbotsford, B.C., 1963, photographer unknown.

Music was Falk's first love, and she imagined herself becoming a successful violinist. She did so well in her first year of lessons that she was advanced to grade five. Unfortunately, during the next two years, it became evident that she had perhaps started her training too late, and after poor performances in her grade five and six violin exams, she abandoned her study. She would not be the professional musician she dreamed of becoming.

Both Falk's mother and violin teacher recognized that she was disheartened about not being more successful with the violin and that she was increasingly despondent about her factory job. They encouraged her to pursue teaching as a career, a prospect she initially described as being "unspeakably dreary."⁷ In need of a change, however, she enrolled in a one-year teaching certificate program at the Provincial Normal School in Vancouver in 1952. Participants

learned the how-tos of teaching primary school, and the program also offered refresher instruction in core subjects—including art.

In 1953, Falk took on her first teaching post at a school in Surrey. She was disappointed to find that at a salary of \$1,800 a year, she was making less than she had at the luggage factory, and she found it challenging to support herself and her mother on the meagre income. She purchased a house with money borrowed from—and promptly paid back to—a woman from their church, but she sold the house to buy a car and became a renter again. Falk recalls having a good relationship with her principal, who admired the artistic achievements of her students, but she ended up quitting the Surrey post—she feared that the district school inspector would demand her dismissal once he realized that she had not marked any of the work she had assigned to her students.⁸ In 1954 she joined the staff of the Douglas Road Elementary School in Burnaby, remaining there until 1965.



Gathie Falk (far right) with her first elementary class, Surrey, B.C., 1953, photographer unknown.

Falk attended a summer program that provided additional training for teachers in 1955 and 1956; she took courses in academics as well as in design, drawing, and painting. The art instruction was led by William D. West (1921–2007), a Victoria-based artist and high school teacher whose approach involved a combination of modernist principles and fundamentals of form. Although West's aesthetic was less emotive than the German Expressionism to which Falk was drawn at this time, his inclination toward depicting natural and built landscapes using reduced, geometric shapes would have provided her with the building blocks for the powerful compositions she sought to create. Falk's interest in experimenting with form is evident in early works such as *The Staircase*, 1962.



LEFT: William D. West, *Ten-Mile Point*, 1952, watercolour on paper, 56.8 x 77.3 cm, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria. RIGHT: Gathie Falk, *The Staircase*, 1962, oil on Masonite, 78.7 x 99.1 cm, Collection of the artist.

In 1956 Falk met Elizabeth Klassen, a fellow teacher who came from a background that was remarkably similar to her own. Klassen was also of Mennonite heritage; she had been born in Russia in the same year as Falk, prior to her family's immigration to Elie, Manitoba, in 1929. Like the Falks, the Klassens experienced hardship in the Prairies and eventually moved to British Columbia in search of a better life. Klassen also laboured in working-class positions before attending Normal School, and she acquired her Bachelor of Education by attending summer school sessions while teaching. They formed an instant bond.

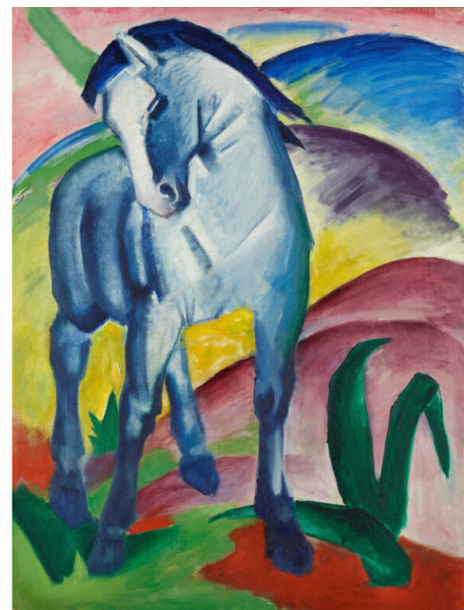
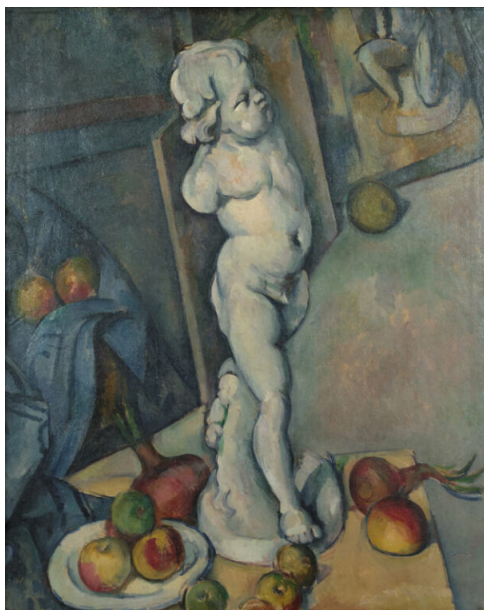
The two women have remained lifelong friends, and Klassen's support was foundational to Falk's creative development. Falk once admitted that "the last thing I ever wanted to be was a teacher," but she would become very accomplished, recognized for her skill in providing instruction in art, literature, and particularly music.⁹ While she entered the profession "unwillingly, gritting my teeth," Falk now acknowledges the payoff from her decade spent teaching. It not only provided her with a steady income but also the opportunity to have an impact on students with whom she would one day reconnect. As she quips in her memoir, "No suitcases have come back to talk to me, and not one Safeway bag filled with beans."¹⁰

APPRENTICE ARTIST

Ultimately, Falk's pursuit of teaching was what prompted her return to practising visual art, as in order to get a university degree and upgrade her teaching status, she began taking summer and evening art courses in painting and drawing through the Department of Education at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in 1957.

As a painter, she found herself drawn to the distorted visions of reality produced by the German Expressionists—despite non-figurative American Abstract Expressionism being more popular at the time—and sought to always

"create a concrete image that was recognizable."¹¹ She had no interest in "pretty pictures" and instead intended to "paint strong works."¹²



LEFT: Paul Cézanne, *Still Life with Plaster Cupid*, c.1894, oil on paper on board, 70.6 x 57.3 cm, The Courtauld Gallery, London. RIGHT: Franz Marc, *Blaues Pferd I*, 1911, oil on canvas, 112 x 84.5 cm, Lenbachhaus, Munich.

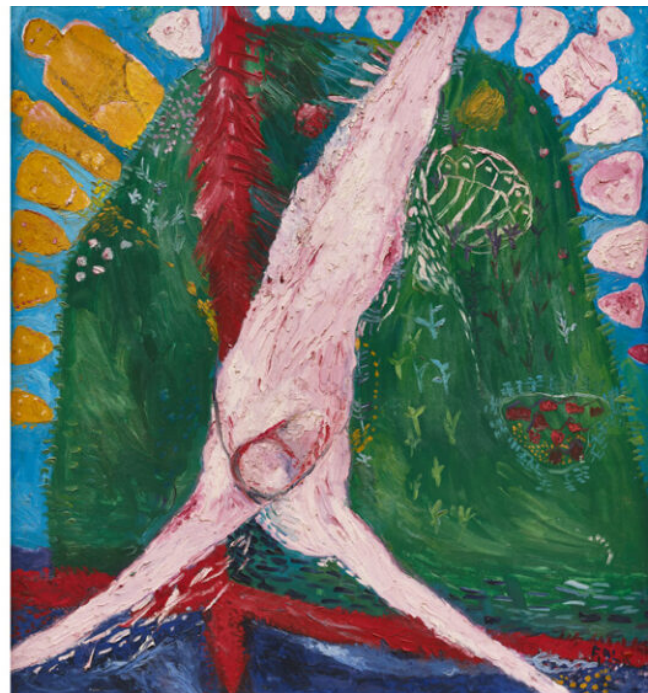


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The first public presentations of Falk's artwork would take place shortly after her enrolment at UBC—she contributed paintings to the B.C. Annual Exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1960 and the Northwest Annual Exhibition at the Seattle Art Museum in 1961. The following year she attended the Seattle World's Fair, where she would have seen the work of the American Abstract Expressionists, including Jackson Pollock (1912–1956) and Mark Tobey (1890–1976), and European modernists such as Paul Gauguin (1848–1903) and Franz Marc (1880–1916).

In 1964 there was a further opportunity to see iconic works of art by European artists, including modernists Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), Henri Matisse (1869–1954), and Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), and Renaissance artists Andrea Mantegna (1431–1506) and Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), in the exhibition *The Nude in Art* at the Vancouver Art Gallery. In 1965, Falk went to Europe for the first time. Many of Falk's works from the early to mid-1960s, such as *St. Ives*, 1965, and *Crucifixion I*, 1966, bear the mark of her art historical and geographic travels.



LEFT: Andrea Mantegna, *Lamentation over the Dead Christ*, c.1483, tempera on canvas, 68 x 81 cm, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.
RIGHT: Gathie Falk, *Crucifixion I*, 1966, oil on Masonite, 132 x 121.6 cm, Collection of the artist.

Hard-edge painting, Op art, and Pop art were in vogue at the time, but Falk bucked the trends followed by her peers to pursue Expressionism instead. "I'd done enough factory work in my life," she has said of her distaste for the aforementioned movements. "I wasn't interested in mimicking a machine."¹³

At this time, Falk was still working on her degree at UBC. She had moved from the Bachelor of Education program to a fine arts in education degree. Her confidence as an artist was steadily growing as she learned how to create balance in a composition and make “a broad and meaningful brushstroke.”¹⁴ She had been taking studio and art history classes, studying with Lawren P. Harris (1910–1994), James Alexander Stirling MacDonald (1921–2013), Jacques de Tonnancour (1917–2005), Audrey Capal Doray (b.1931), David Mayrs (1935–2020), and Ron Stonier (1933–2001), but upon changing programs, she began studying ceramics with Glenn Lewis (b.1935).¹⁵



Glenn Lewis, *Peanut Serving Bowl*, 1972, and Michael Morris, *Peanuts*, 1972, both glazed ceramic, 15 x 18.8 x 7 cm and 48 ceramic peanuts, Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

Lewis had apprenticed with the renowned British studio potter Bernard Leach (1887–1979) in Cornwall, England, and while he did teach his students to produce functional ceramics, he also taught ceramic sculpture. Falk has acknowledged the importance of Lewis’s emphasis on being open “to an awareness of the forms and rituals of everyday life” on her career.¹⁶ Under his tutelage, she has said that she and her fellow students were turned into “more thinking people” who learned how to pay attention to the “art of daily living.”¹⁷ It was while studying with Lewis that Falk made her first individual ceramic shapes: “a leg, shoes, boots, a suit coat.”¹⁸ Ordinary objects such as these would later become one of her artistic signatures, appearing in works like *Eight Red Boots*, 1973, *Soft Couch with Suit*, 1986, and *Standard Shoes, The Column*, 1998–99.



Gathie Falk, *Standard Shoes, The Column (detail)*, 1998-99, papier mâché, acrylic paint, varnish, and cardboard boxes, 139.7 x 21 x 33.7 cm (overall), Oakville Galleries.

A TURN TO CERAMICS AND PERFORMANCE

In 1965, Falk made a withdrawal from her pension fund and took a leave from teaching in order to focus on making art. A few years earlier, in 1962, she had bought her second house: a wartime bungalow on East 51st Avenue near Fraser Street, with a down payment borrowed from her friend Elizabeth Klassen and a second mortgage arranged through the B.C. Teachers' Federation. Owning the house enabled her to manage financially through this transition, as she could rent out her spare room, or even the whole main floor, for extra income. Through economical living, Falk never had to go back to teaching elementary school, although she would later teach visual art part-time at UBC in 1970-71, and again from 1975 to 1977.¹⁹

She began to make the paintings that would become the content of her first solo exhibition in 1965 at the Canvas Shack in Vancouver. In his review of the exhibition, David Watmough affiliated Falk's paintings with German Expressionism, the movement that she herself acknowledged as an important touchstone—the distorted colour, scale, space, and forms of the style influenced works such as *The Banquet*, 1963, and *The Waitress*, 1965. In a statement that now seems incongruous with Falk's practice, the critic noted, "Whenever the human figure occupies a central place in Miss Falk's compositions, her canvases seem to spring to life—in a manner that her still lifes and domestic scenes rarely do, in spite of the vitality and raw energy of her palette."²⁰

In the summer of 1965, Falk started a ceramics studio with a classmate, Charmian Johnson (1939-2020). In 1967, Falk received a short-term grant from the Canada Council for the Arts, and she and Johnson built a 4.5-square-metre gas kiln in Falk's garage. That year, Falk also became a member of the Intermedia art collective and a part of the stable of artists at Douglas Gallery (later renamed Ace Gallery) in Vancouver.

At this point she had become fully invested in sculpture, saying, "My ideas for paintings became sculptures instead."²¹ Her first major professional success came with the 1968 show *Living Room, Environmental Sculpture and Prints*, in which she exhibited *Home Environment*, filling the Douglas Gallery with an installation created from screenprinted wallpaper and framed prints on the walls, as well as sculptures of household items—some, such as a pink armchair, made from repurposed thrift-store finds, and others, such as a package of ground beef, fashioned from clay. Between 1967 and 1970, she worked on three ceramic sculpture series: *Fruit Piles*, 1967-70; *Art School Teaching Aids*, 1967-70 (among them *Art School Teaching Aids: Hard-Edge Still Life*, 1970); and *Synopsis A-F*, 1968; as well as the *Shirt Drawings* series, 1968-70.



Gathie Falk, *The Banquet*, 1963, oil on canvas, 91 x 122 cm, Collection of the artist.



Gathie Falk, *Art School Teaching Aids: Hard-Edge Still Life*, 1970, clay, acrylic paint, polyester resin, 21 x 50.5 x 36 cm, Vancouver Art Gallery.

In 1968, her dealer, Douglas Christmas, enrolled Falk in a workshop led by Deborah Hay (b.1941), a member of the Judson Dance Theater, an experimental collective of dancers, composers, and visual artists who performed at the Judson Memorial Church in New York. Hay's workshop was co-hosted by the Douglas Gallery, Intermedia, UBC, and the Vancouver Art Gallery. Falk discovered that she had an affinity with performance art—it provided her with a means to explore the images and themes that interested her, with the added elements of movement, sound, and time. "The performance process felt very natural," Falk has said. "It was like music."²² She produced her first works of performance art, including *A Bird Is Known by His Feathers Alone*, later in 1968.



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Gathie Falk, *A Bird Is Known by His Feathers Alone* (performance props), 1968, Vancouver Art Gallery.

A Bird Is Known by His Feathers Alone was a complex work with a variety of props and costumes and a serpentine choreography of actions: Falk washing her face and applying Rogers Golden Syrup to it; artist Tom Graff (active from the 1970s), Falk's friend and sometimes performance partner, creating a large drawing with cold cream, lipstick, and powder; and other performers using their prone bodies to push plastic cocktail glasses filled with cherries and ceramic oranges across the stage.

This piece was first presented as part of *Chromatic Steps*, an Intermedia exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery in October 1968. In 1969, New York-based performance artists Yvonne Rainer (b.1934) and Steve Paxton (b.1939), both of whom were also affiliated with the Judson Dance Theater, came to the Vancouver Art Gallery and Intermedia; Falk took part in their performances and workshops as well.

Falk would create some fifteen performance artworks—or Theatre Art Works as she called them—between 1968 and 1972, including *Girl Walking Around Square Room in a Gallery*, 1969, notable for its

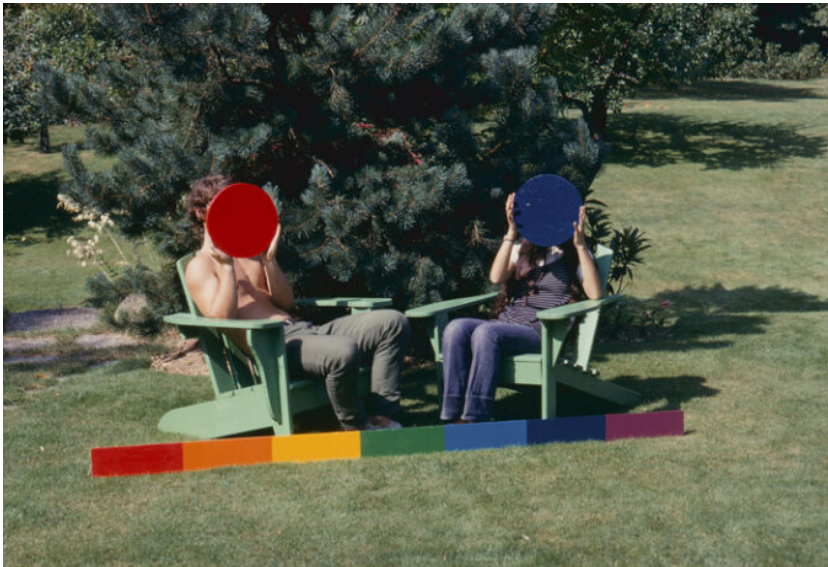


LEFT: Gathie Falk, *Red Angel*, 1972, performance documentation at the National Gallery of Canada, 1975, photograph by Nomi Kaplan. RIGHT: Gathie Falk, *Red Angel* (detail of performance props), 1972, red buffet, five tables, five record players, five parrots, seven apples, pair of wings, white dress, grey dress, Eaton's Viking wringer washing machine, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

innovative combination of performance and projected film, as well as the better-known *Some Are Egger Than I*, 1969, and *Red Angel*, 1972. She continued performing her artworks until 1977.

The use of projection in *Girl Walking Around Square Room in a Gallery* seems unique in Falk's practice. However, Falk revised *Some Are Egger Than I* after its first performance so that it included a slideshow backdrop depicting her being pelted with eggs in *Eighty Eggs*, 1969, a Douglas Christmas theatre piece. In her performances, as in her ceramic works, Falk "liked to use ordinary, everyday activities; eating an egg, reading a book, drinking tea, washing [her] face, putting on makeup, cutting hair."²³ The sense of ritual in her daily life carried over into what she expressed in her work.

In his introduction to the book *Performance au/in Canada 1970-1990* (1991), author Clive Robertson traces the origins of Canadian performance art to the Hay, Paxton, and Rainer workshops in Vancouver. He also acknowledges that of the people who participated in them—in addition to Falk, well-known Canadian artists Glenn Lewis, Jorge Zontal (1944-1994), Helen Goodwin (1927-1985), and Michael Morris (b.1942) also took part in the workshops—it was Falk and Zontal whose subsequent performance work showed the greatest affinity to the form practised by their instructors.



LEFT: Michael Morris, *Rainbow Picnic*, 1970-71, 35 mm slide, Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver. RIGHT: Gathie Falk, *Red Angel*, 1972 (performance documentation at Western Front, Vancouver, 1977), 35 mm slide, Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

Falk's presentation of Theatre Art Works at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1972 drew the attention of art critic Joan Lowndes. Writing on *A Bird Is Known by His Feathers Alone*, Lowndes noted that "the scattering of oranges, glasses and squashed cherries as they finish is a study in process and randomness."²⁴ In hindsight, Falk thinks that her audience "didn't know what to make of them."²⁵ Robertson, however, argues that "Falk's complex works are to Canadian performance art what Lisa Steele's [b.1947] and Colin Campbell's [1942-2001] early work was for video: dauntingly sophisticated and confident, work that other artists, knowingly or not, would re-cycle."²⁶

MENSWEAR AND MARRIAGE

Falk continued to work in ceramic sculpture and drawing in a number of series that take menswear as their primary subject: the ceramic Synopsis A-F, 1968; Shirt Drawings, 1968-70; and the ceramic and found object Man Compositions, 1969-70. She has said that during this period she was "focused on the symbolic possibilities of men's clothes, the presence and power they represented."²⁷ She participated in exhibitions such as the 5th Burnaby Print Show, 1969, and *Works Mostly on Paper*, 1970, at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston.



Gathie Falk, *Veneration of the White Collar Worker*, 1973, ceramic on panel, 74.9 x 97.2 x 5.1 cm, private collection.

She exhibited widely across Canada and in the U.S. In 1971 she was commissioned to produce two large-scale ceramic murals for the cafeteria of the Department of External Affairs building in Ottawa; in response to this invitation, and with a nod to the menswear-focused work she had just completed, she would install *Veneration of the White Collar Worker #1* and *Veneration of the White Collar Worker #2*, 1971-73, two wall-sized works comprising twenty-four ceramic panels representing variations on men's shirt fronts with ties.

Prior to the completion of this major work, Falk's mother, who had been living at Valleyview, a residence for geriatric psychiatric patients in Coquitlam, died of a heart attack in 1972. Falk's relationship with her mother had been complex, and she had been largely responsible for her mother's care since she was teenager when her older brothers left home.

After her mother's death, Falk stopped creating new performance artworks (although she would continue performing the works conceived between 1968 and 1972 until 1977). With more time and freedom, she was able to devote herself more fully to producing in the studio, and in 1972-73 she created one of her best-known ceramic sculpture series, *Single Right Men's Shoes*, which she would go on to exhibit, for the first time, at the Canadian Cultural Centre in 1974 during a month spent in Paris.



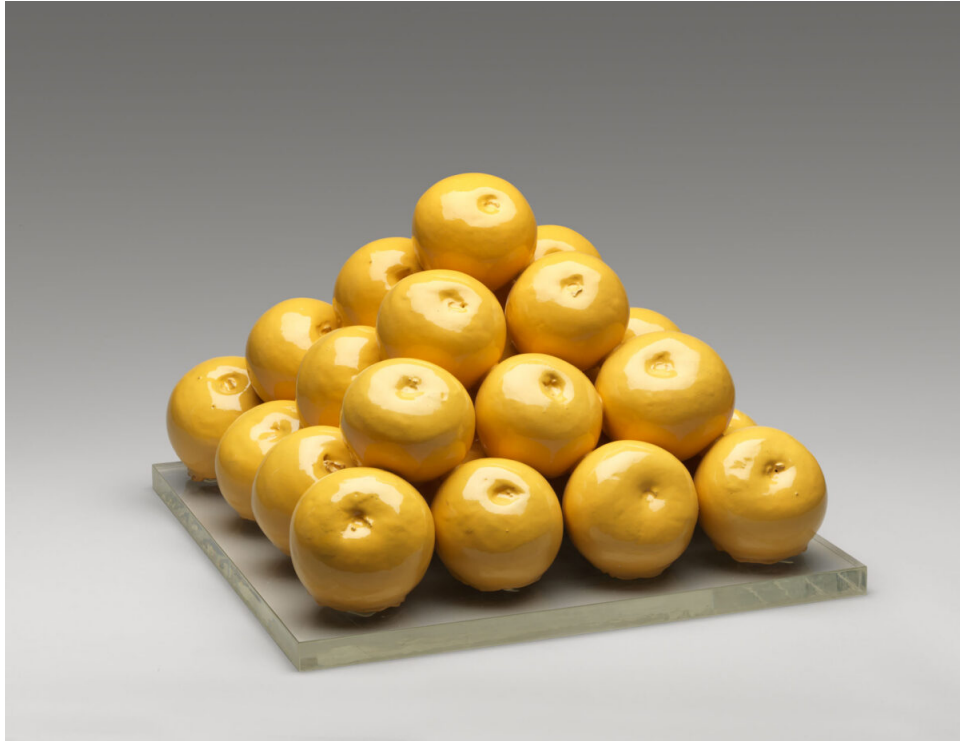
Gathie Falk, *Single Right Men's Shoes: Bootcase with 6 Orange Brogues*, 1973, glazed ceramic, painted wood, and glass, 70.2 x 94.9 cm, Collection of Equinox Gallery.

It was during this busy time in 1973 that Falk entered into a relationship with prison inmate Dwight Swanson. He had heard Falk being interviewed on the radio and had written her a letter. Falk had done work in prisons through a Vancouver Art Gallery program that connected artists with incarcerated individuals and had performed in them with her church choir, so it was perhaps not surprising that Swanson's letter led to Falk corresponding with and eventually visiting him in prison.

While Falk recounts that her friends were anxious about her burgeoning relationship and her ultimate marriage in November 1974 to a career criminal (who was twenty years her junior), she rationalized the decision by stating, quite simply, that she loved him. However, she also admits that "agreeing to marry him was probably not a rational decision, but once I'd made it, I stuck to it stubbornly."²⁸ Swanson's behaviour during their short-lived marriage was erratic, and he would soon relapse into his criminal behaviour. Falk and Swanson separated after just eight months and formally divorced in 1979.

Throughout the 1970s, Falk continued her exploration of ceramic form in a number of series that provided her with the platform to manifest the fantastic imagery that she saw in her mind's eye. The series were all essentially variations on the still life, an artistic genre that had been central to her practice since her earliest days as an artist.

While works like *Fruit Piles*, 1967–70, and *Single Right Men's Shoes* possess elements of the still life, as compositions built from numerous iterations of the same object, they become singular despite their multiplicity. It is in series like *Art School Teaching Aids*, 1967–70; *Table Settings*, 1971–74; *Picnics*, 1976–77; and even *Saddles*, 1974–75—ceramic sculptures that relinquished iconic structure for a more complex, varied composition—that we see Falk's hearkening back to the *Still Life* paintings, 1962, which she considers her earliest work produced outside of the influence of a teacher.



Gathie Falk, *30 Grapefruit*, 1970, ceramic, glaze, 32.0 x 49.5 x 49.5 cm, Vancouver Art Gallery.

The *Picnics* series was premised in an interest that had first appeared in a 1971 Theatre Art Work also entitled *Picnic*. Falk has said that she “sometimes think[s] of [Picnics] as nice head stones” and that “they express a lot of the emotion related to the time of [her] husband’s trials and imprisonment.”²⁹ He had owned a black 1936 Ford business coupe with yellow and red flames painted on its doors. The vehicle became a key element in the trials that saw Swanson imprisoned again, and according to Falk, its decorative flames recurred as a motif in the *Picnics* series, as can be seen in *Picnic with Birthday Cake and Blue Sky*, 1976. The ceramic *Picnics*, which also include *Picnic with Clock and Bird*, 1976, *Picnic with Red Watermelon #2*, c.1976, and *Picnic with Fish and Ribbon*, 1977, garnered much praise from curator Ann Rosenberg, who called them “a perfect marriage of technical competence and visual force.”³⁰



Gathie Falk, *Picnic with Fish and Ribbon*, 1977, glazed ceramic with acrylic and varnish, 20 x 33.7 x 27.8 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

In the opening lines of her introduction to the catalogue for *Gathie Falk Retrospective* mounted at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1985, director Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker writes, "Many critics have viewed Falk's work as engaged in exclusively female if not feminist art. Falk rejects such interpretations pointing out, for example, that the still life is, 'the fodder of almost every [major] artist.'"³¹ Of course, the inclination toward the still life as subject has come with the tendency for interpreters of Falk's work to associate it with either the metaphors of bounty and life or those of decay and death associated with the genre.

There is certainly an element of a philosophy for living in Falk's inclination to represent the things around her, for as she has noted, "I feel that unless you know your own sidewalk intimately, you're never going to be able to look at the pyramids and find out what they're about. You're never going to be able to see things in detail unless you can look at your kitchen table, see it and find significance in it—or the shadow that is cast by a cup, or your toothbrush. Seeing the details around you makes you able to see large things better."³² Falk's commitment to seeing the details around her own home can be seen in many projects from the late 1970s and early 1980s, including *Border in Four Parts*, 1977-78, and the Cement series, 1982-83.



LEFT: Gathie Falk, *Cement with Fence #1*, 1982, oil on canvas, 198 x 123.2 cm, Collection of the artist. RIGHT: Gathie Falk, *Cement with Grass #1*, 1982, oil on canvas, 198 x 123.2 cm, Collection of the artist.

SUCCESS AND A NEW MILLENNIUM

Late in 1977, after a hiatus of eleven years, Falk began to focus on painting once again. She was inspired after seeing frescoes by Giotto (1266/67–1337) during a month-long trip to Venice. Her first series after the return—the Border paintings, 1977–78—were depictions of the edges of the gardens at her own and her neighbours' homes. This approach of taking an intimate view of some subsection of a landscape, without providing any points of reference or context, would become a recurring strategy in Falk's next series, *Night Skies*, 1979–80, and *Pieces of Water*, 1981–82. In her memoir, *Apples, etc.*, Falk describes the conceptual premise at the core of the latter project: "I had the idea that each painting would depict a big chunk of water, which I had cut out of the sea with a long, sharp knife. The compositions are tilted up, so that shimmering colour fills the canvas, with no visible shore or horizon line."³³



LEFT: Gathie Falk, *Piece of Water: President Reagan*, 1981, oil on canvas, 198 x 167.8 x 4 cm, Vancouver Art Gallery. RIGHT: Gathie Falk, *Pieces of Water #10–El Salvador*, 1982, oil on canvas, 198.2 x 167.4 cm, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria.

With painting now the medium of choice, in 1978, when Falk received a commission from the B.C. Central Credit Union to create a mural for the foyer of their administration building, she produced *Beautiful British Columbia Multiple Purpose Thermal Blanket*, 1979, a gigantic painted quilt (although Falk prefers the description “sculpted painting”). Falk would go on to create two more important public art projects: *Diary*, 1987, commissioned by architect Arthur Erickson for the Canadian Embassy in Washington D.C.; and *Salute to the Lions of Vancouver*, 1990, for Canada Place in Vancouver.

Curatorial, critical, and market interest in Falk’s work can be traced back to 1967, when she began to show with the Douglas Gallery. There has been obvious excitement for each new inventive phase of her development since that point, but it was in the early 1980s that serious attention took hold of her practice. In 1982 she exhibited the *Pieces of Water* series at Equinox Gallery, Vancouver, and Isaacs Gallery, Toronto. She had been showing with Equinox Gallery since 1981 and is still part of its stable. As Isaacs had approached Falk about



Gathie Falk, *Salute to the Lions of Vancouver* (detail), 1990, stainless steel, 6.7 m, Canada Place, Vancouver.

representing her when she exhibited *Fruit Piles* in Vancouver back in 1970, but at the time she said no; it was finally in the early 1980s that the relationship between the two was formalized.

Also in 1982, the *Capilano Review* produced a double-issue special edition dedicated to Falk's work; the following year she began working with curator Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker on the Vancouver Art Gallery retrospective exhibition that would open two years later. In 1985, Falk was included in *British Columbia Women Artists, 1885-1985*, curated by Nicholas Tuele at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, the same institution that would, in 1985, produce and tour an exhibition of her new paintings created between 1978 to 1984.

Painting dominated Falk's production throughout the 1980s and 1990s, with new major series emerging every year or two and some series containing as many as twenty or thirty canvases: *Borders*; *Night Skies*; *Pieces of Water*; *Cement*, 1982-83; *Theatre in B/W and Colour*, 1983-84; *Chairs*, 1985; *Soft Chairs*, 1986; *Support Systems*, 1987-88; *Hedge and Clouds*, 1989-90; *Venice Sinks with Postcards from Marco Polo*, 1990; *Development of the Plot*, 1991-92; *Clean Cuts*, 1992-93; *Constellations*, 1993; *Nice Tables*, 1993-95; *Heads*, 1994-95; and *Apples*, 1994-96. Around 1997-98, she returned to working in sculpture and installation, later commenting "After I had devoted some eighteen years straight to painting, a new idea dropped into my head. What I saw, fully formed, was a sculpture of a woman's dress..."³⁴ The papier mâché *Dresses*, 1997-98, became a new series, as did *Standard Shoes*, 1998-99.



LEFT: Gathie Falk, *Support System with Michaelmas Daisies #1*, 1987, oil on canvas, 213.3 x 152.4 cm, private collection. RIGHT: Gathie Falk, *Venice Sink with Postcards from Marco Polo #13*, 1990, oil on canvas, 106.7 x 106.7 cm, private collection.

In order to accommodate this remarkable wave of production throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Falk had constructed a purpose-built structure behind her home—a 1920s Craftsman house in Kitsilano that she had moved to in 1970—in 1983. A few years later, Falk decided to build a new house that she would design to meet her specific needs, which would include spaces to create and store work and “the social part of the main floor” consisting “of a great room.”³⁵ She purchased property in East Vancouver and moved to her custom-built residence in 1989, at long last finding a sense of rootedness. She lives there to this day, surrounded by her art, her garden, and her friends.

In 1999, the Musée régional de Rimouski in Quebec mounted *Gathie Falk: Souvenirs du quotidien* and the Vancouver Art Gallery invited Falk to develop a major retrospective exhibition to open in February 2000. In her memoir, *Apples, etc.*, Falk noted that she wasn’t expecting a lot of attention in the new millennium—she had, after all, turned seventy-two in January 2000. However, the work, opportunities, and acknowledgements kept coming.



In fall 2000, Equinox Gallery in Vancouver supported the production of an important series of cast bronze sculptures at the foundry of well-known Canadian sculptor Joe Fafard (1942–2019). Inspired by the light and landscape of the foundry’s Prairie setting, Falk called the series *Agnes*, after the Saskatchewan-born abstract painter Agnes Martin (1912–2004); *Agnes (Black Patina)*, 2000–2001, illustrates a connection between this body of work and the *Dresses* series, 1997–98. Falk continued her sculptural expression with series and installations such as *Portraits*, 2001; *Shirting*, 2002; and *Dreaming of Flying, Canoe*, 2007, executed in papier mâché, a medium she had learned to use while teaching.

LEFT: Gathie Falk, *Dress with Boy*, 1997, papier mâché, acrylic paint and varnish, 83.8 x 63.5 x 45.7 cm, private collection. Falk’s *Dresses* series was a highlight in her 2000 retrospective at the Vancouver Art Gallery. RIGHT: Gathie Falk, *Agnes (Black Patina)*, 2000–2001, bronze, 94 x 71 x 17.8 cm, Collection of Equinox Gallery.

Falk had received the Order of Canada in 1997; in the 2000s, the awards continued with the Order of British Columbia in 2002; the Governor General’s Award in Visual Arts in 2003; and the Audain Prize for Lifetime Achievement in the Visual Arts in 2013. Upon receipt of the Audain Prize—at which point Falk was eighty-five years old—she told her audience that she hoped the prize did not mark her career’s end.



Gathie Falk in her studio working on *Winter Tree*, 2012.

LIVING LEGACY

Falk continues to be active in the studio, producing new paintings and regularly mounting shows of new and old works at Equinox Gallery, Vancouver, where she has been showing since 1982, and Michael Gibson Gallery, London, Ontario, at which she started showing in 2013.

In 2015, Falk mounted *The Things in My Head* at Equinox Gallery; it was the largest exhibition of her art since the Vancouver Art Gallery's retrospective, *Gathie Falk*, in 2000. While it was presented in the setting of a commercial gallery, *The Things in My Head* approached the structure of a retrospective, bringing together seventy works spanning the course of Falk's six-decade career from private and public collections.



Installation view of *The Things in My Head* at Equinox Gallery, Vancouver, 2015.



GATHIE FALK

Life & Work by Michelle Jacques

In 2018, with the support of Robin Laurence, a long-time advocate of Falk's work and an independent writer, critic, and curator based in Vancouver, Falk released *Apples, etc.: An Artist's Memoir*. This publication is an anecdotal unfolding of stories in Falk's charming yet matter-of-fact voice; she deftly weaves together tales of her life before and after her entry into Vancouver's art scene. In 2022, the McMichael Canadian Art Collection created a career-spanning survey of Falk's work entitled *Gathie Falk: Revelations*.

Throughout her career, Falk has pushed against the tendency of curators and critics to invoke her Mennonite upbringing and beliefs and her generally compelling biography as foundational to her imagery. While *Apples, etc.* marries the artist's recounting of her personal experiences with anecdotes about the conception and production of some of her key works, Falk always follows her own counsel and does not make any specific links between the real-life experiences she shares and the images that she returns to again and again. However, the adjacency of her autobiography to the personal descriptions of her work creates the opportunity for readers to sense how life inevitably informs the work poetically, if not causatively. In Gareth Sirotnik's 1978 article for *Vanguard*, "Gathie Falk: Things That Go Bump in the Day," Falk recognized an affinity between her religion and the simplicity and control of her work, noting that "if you have a strong religion, you're disciplined for life."³⁶



GATHIE FALK

Life & Work by Michelle Jacques



Gathie Falk in 2019, photograph by Tom Gould.



Active since the 1960s, Gathie Falk has achieved renown for creating significant works across diverse media, including painting, sculptural ceramics, installation, public art, and some of the first works of performance art in Canada. Falk's interdisciplinary work is always identifiable as uniquely hers through the individuality of her hand and her characteristic exaltation of the everyday. She has built a distinctive visual language formed of a personal vocabulary of quotidian items, such as apples, eggs, fish, furniture, and clothing. Through devices such as repetition and the juxtaposition of odd pairings, she finds revelatory new modes of expression.

HOME ENVIRONMENT 1968



Gathie Falk, *Home Environment*, 1968

Ceramic, paint, flock, varnish, polyester resin, silkscreen print, paper, Plexiglas and steel,
244 x 305 x 305 cm

Vancouver Art Gallery

Home Environment is a room-sized installation that combines found objects with Gathie Falk's ceramic renderings of domestic items. Thrift-store armchairs are flocked and painted pale pink; one has a ceramic men's jacket and tie strewn on the back and a large ceramic fish resting on each arm. Other pieces of found furniture—a sideboard, dresser, piano stool, and occasional table—are painted grey, flocked, or lacquered red. A birdcage on a stand is painted pale pink, which is the predominant colour of the room thanks to silkscreened wallpaper decorated with repeated images of dinner on a plate. A found metal frame and parts made of glazed ceramic form a dining chair and television table. Falk also fashioned a ceramic phone, a radio, a TV dinner, and furniture. There are framed prints on the walls and clothing—such as a pair of folded men's suit jackets and a pair of women's shoes encased in resin—on display. First presented to the public in the artist's 1968 exhibition at Vancouver's Douglas Gallery (later renamed the Ace Gallery), *Living Room, Environmental Sculpture and Prints*—retitled *Home Environment* at the time of Falk's 1985 retrospective at the Vancouver Art Gallery—was, arguably, the work that established her reputation as a serious artist

working with a visual language and concepts that were on par with some of the most avant-garde artists of the day. Though she had started her career as a painter, she had begun working in ceramic around 1965 and with the creation of *Home Environment*, she became known for her work in this medium.

Ann Rosenberg, writing for the *Vancouver Sun* upon the opening of the exhibition, heeded those interested in art not to miss it, insisting that they would be “losing out on a fresh experience offered by an artist who has put every ounce of creativity into a first one-[person] show.”¹ Falk was subsequently invited to mount a version of *Home Environment* in *The New Art of Vancouver* at the Newport Harbor Art Museum, Balboa, California, and at the art gallery of the University of California at Santa Barbara in 1969. As Falk herself notes, with the exhibition of this work at Douglas Gallery, “[she] was launched.”²

When Falk created *Home Environment*, Pop artists Claes Oldenburg (b.1929) and George Segal (1924–2000) had already achieved recognition for their environmental installations, such as Oldenburg’s *Bedroom Ensemble*, 1963, and Segal’s *The Butcher Shop*, 1965. The American Pop artists had wide influence, and Falk would have been familiar with the movement through exhibitions such as *11 Pop Artists: The New Image at the Fine Arts Gallery* (now the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery) at the University of British Columbia in 1967.

In 1968, Falk’s work would have stood apart for its combination of found and handcrafted pieces. While her decision to work in this way was very personally motivated, and she has distanced herself from the label of feminist art, her incorporation of ceramic and everyday items into her installations is in keeping with feminist strategies. Many artists in the 1960s used found objects and craft to challenge art world hierarchies, including Faith Ringgold (b.1930), Joyce Wieland (1930–1998), and Yayoi Kusama (b.1929). Despite Pop’s positioning of itself in opposition to the definition of high art, art world hierarchies persisted in the work of Falk’s male peers.

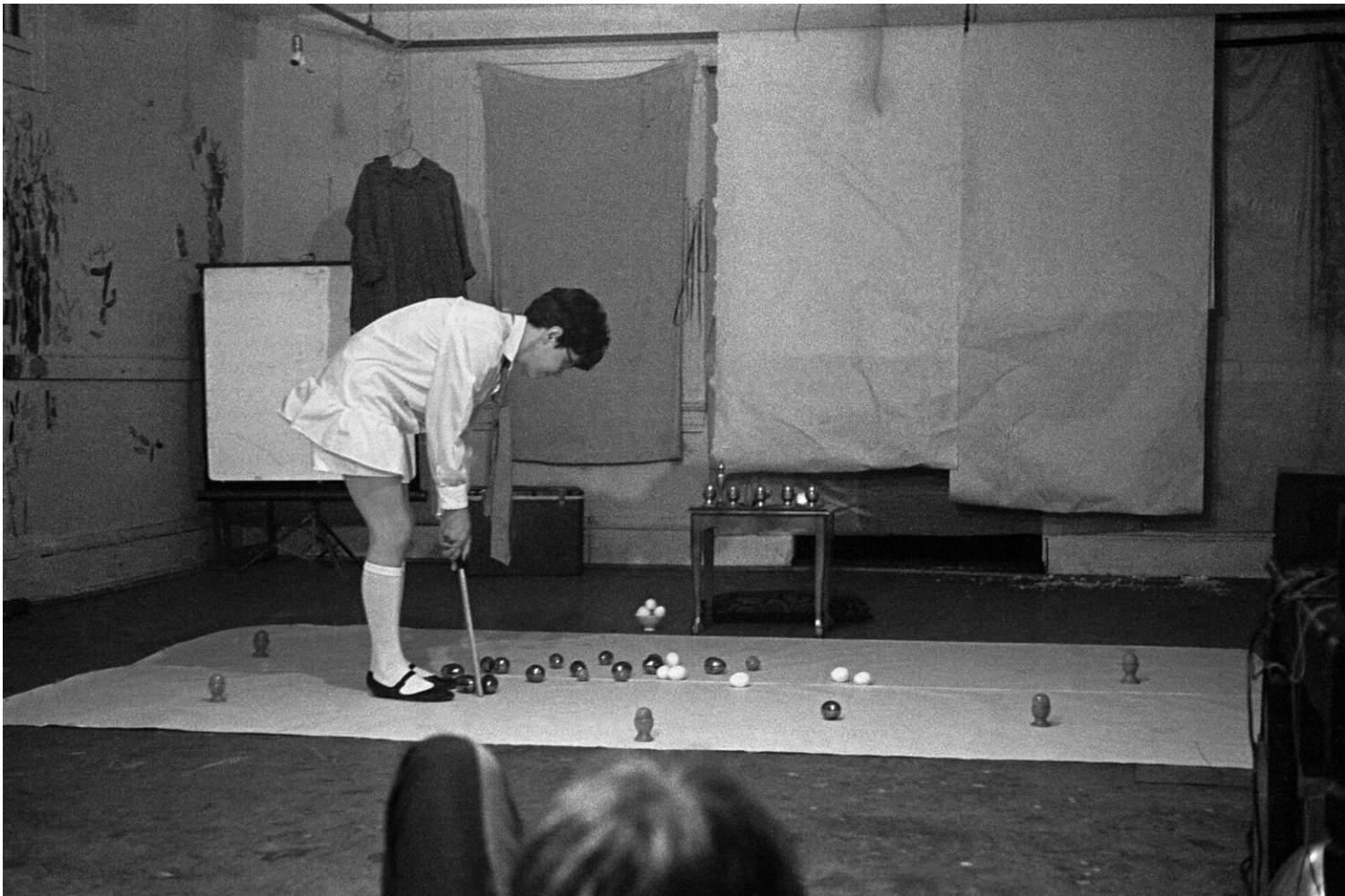
Falk has described her intuitive process: “It originates in my surroundings, in my house, in my garden, my neighbourhood. More importantly, it jumps out of my imagination.”³ The combination of the everyday and the imagined results in an element of the surreal, and Falk has noted that the iconic artwork *Object*, 1936, by Meret Oppenheim (1913–1985) resonated with her.

The room-sized installation, or environment, would appear again in Falk’s oeuvre, with works such as *Herd I*, 1974–75, and *150 Cabbages*, 1978, but *Home Environment* is also fundamental in that some of its elements would come to be recurring images in her interdisciplinary production. Men’s clothing is represented in works such as *Single Right Men’s Shoes: Blue Running Shoes*, c.1973, and *Antony*, 2001; fish appear in *Picnic with Fish and Ribbon*, 1977; and armchairs feature in *Soft Chair with Pants and Hammer Heads*, 1986, and *Chair with Plastic Christmas Tree*, 1985.



Gathie Falk, *Antony*, 2001, papier mâché, paint, 68.6 x 73.7 x 19.1 cm, University of Lethbridge Art Collection.

SOME ARE EGGER THAN I 1969



Gathie Falk, *Some Are Egger Than I*, December 31, 1969
Performance at the New Era Social Club, Vancouver
Photograph by Michael de Courcy

Gathie Falk's *Some Are Egger Than I* was first performed in 1969 at the New Era Social Club (an informal artists' society in Vancouver from the late 1960s until 1972), beginning with the artist sitting atop a black and red pillow. Other props included a red table with a bowl of cooked eggs, and raw and gold ceramic eggs scattered on the floor. When the action began, Falk chose an egg, put it in an egg cup rimmed in gold, and ate it, before picking up a ruler that she used to bat a ceramic egg across the floor in the direction of a raw egg, which would then smash. These activities were repeated in order until all of the real eggs were eaten or broken. In later performances of this work, presented after Falk was documented participating in the Douglas Christmas piece *Eighty Eggs*, 1969, an interdisciplinary element was introduced, with slides of Falk—wearing a long gown and work goggles while being intermittently pelted with raw eggs—projected behind this live activity. Falk had been experimenting with performance art since she participated in a workshop led by Deborah Hay (b.1941) in 1968, and *Some Are Egger Than I* became one of her well-known creations.

Eggs are a recurring element in Falk's work. They feature in other performances—in *Orange Peel*, 1972, they are wrapped; in *Drink to Me Only*, 1971, they are piled up; in *Low Clouds*, 1972, they are sliced and consumed. They also appear in other works, such as the ceramic *Two Egg Cups with Single Egg*, date unknown. While there can be an impulse to associate Falk's use of eggs with Christian symbology because of her Mennonite faith, interpreting them as symbols of fertility, resurrection, or eternal life, what they mean to Falk, she has insisted, is personal rather than universal. She has recounted the early childhood memory of being given an egg every afternoon to take to the store to exchange for candy. Eggs were among the first things she made when studying ceramics because she liked their shapes. They are objects that feature in her daily life, and she finds beauty in them.



Gathie Falk, *Two Egg Cups with Single Egg*, date unknown, ceramic, 9.5 x 11.4 x 5.7 cm, Collection of Andrea Margles.

While Falk's work in performance can seem incongruous with the rest of her oeuvre, the visual and physical structure of *Some Are Egger Than I* makes it clear how all of her work is aesthetically and compositionally linked. Just as in her painting and ceramic work, in this piece we are presented with elements that walk a fine line between metaphor and banality. Falk has retrospectively described this piece, produced at the height of the Vietnam War, as a kind of "war game"—she sees the calm consumption of the cooked eggs interspersed with rounds of her ruler smashing the defenseless raw ones as analogous to the detachment with which military leaders approach battle.¹

In "To Be a Pilgrim," art critic Robin Laurence notes the rarity of this direct politicism in Falk's work, suggesting that the only other time it occurs in her mature practice is in the Hedge and Cloud series, 1989-90, in which the artist documents the ships she had seen anchored in Vancouver's English Bay on her daily walks with her dog, as can be seen in *There Are 21 Ships and 3 Warships in English Bay*, 1990. Falk, who is a pacifist as per her Mennonite beliefs, was dismayed that among the barges, freighters, tugboats, and cruise ships were U.S. Navy warships carrying nuclear weapons, and in the series she calls attention to the military presence amid the otherwise benign activity of the natural harbour.²

There is at least one other political work in her oeuvre—in her 2018 memoir *Apples, etc.*, Falk recounts making a 2-metre-tall ceramic sculpture entitled *The General Explaining Why He Had to Use Napalm*, 1965, while studying with Glenn Lewis (b.1935). It stood outside the University of British Columbia education building for several months, providing Falk with an outlet for her anti-war sentiments that suited her temperament better than demonstrating.³



Gathie Falk, *There Are 21 Ships and 3 Warships in English Bay*, 1990, oil on canvas, wood, 234.0 x 152.3 cm, Vancouver Art Gallery.

196 APPLES 1969–70

Gathie Falk, *196 Apples*, 1969–70
Ceramic and Plexiglas stand, 40.6 x 88.3 x 66.7 cm
Promised gift of the artist to the Vancouver Art Gallery

The fruits in Gathie Falk's ceramic *196 Apples* are stacked in a pyramid, much like one would see at a fruit stand; she describes them as "part organic form, part geometric structure."¹ Each of the 196 apples was first thrown on the wheel and then shaped by hand and glazed individually. All were stacked and fired together so that the pile would be bonded by the glaze. The methodological arrangement of the individual apples, which are consistent in size (in order to achieve the balance of the pyramid), is offset by the fact that each piece of fruit is in part handmade and is further made distinctive in the coloration of its glaze. Falk would choose either bright red or dark red glaze for the various apples, and further variation came about accidentally in the firing process and was embraced by Falk to represent different degrees of texture, ripeness, and bruising.

The Fruit Piles series—and particularly the piles of apples—constitutes perhaps the fundamental Falk image. She began working on the series in the late 1960s, making it of the same vintage as *Home Environment*, 1968. While repetition and the serial form are recurring devices in Falk's practice, the Fruit Piles, in their orderly, systematic arrangements, are somewhat unique. Over the course of the

three years that Falk worked on this series, she created dozens of piles of ceramic apples, oranges, and grapefruits. The largest and most iconic of these works is, undoubtedly, *196 Apples*, which reveals the very particular way in which Falk used the language of ceramic sculpture. Finding a balance between beauty and ugliness is important to her, and this kind of aesthetic tension manifests quite remarkably in this work.

Responding to the arrangements of fruit that she saw every day at the greengrocers in her neighbourhood, Falk has said she was inspired to transform those ordinary displays into something more beautiful and captivating. The Fruit Piles are at the core of what Falk has described as “the veneration of the ordinary.” Apples and other fruit would appear in Falk’s work over the course of her career, as in the ceramic Picnics series, 1976–77, or the Nice Tables paintings, 1993–95. Eventually she trained her attention on the subject in painted form in the Apples series, 1994–96.

In a review of the first presentation of the Apples at Equinox Gallery, Vancouver, in 1997, art critic Robin Laurence drew the following revealing words from Falk: “Apples are something that people can dream about and find a great life force in. They’ve got blood and guts and flavour and juice... [t]he apple is just infinitely intricate and infinitely beautiful.”²



Gathie Falk, *Apples*, 1994, oil on canvas, 121.9 x 121.9 cm, private collection.

RED ANGEL 1972



Gathie Falk, *Red Angel*, 1972

Performance at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, in 1975

Photograph by Nomi Kaplan

Gathie Falk began creating performances in 1968, and *Red Angel* was one of her last. It conveys Falk's interest in exploring musical strategies. Featuring a woman, five parrots, and a washing machine, it is essentially devised in rondo form—a musical composition that alternates between a principal refrain and contrasting episodes.

The parrots, sitting atop ceramic apples attached to turntables, and Falk, wearing a long white gown and oversized wings, sing "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" in the overlapping, repeated arrangement that is recognizable from childhood. Falk is the last to add her voice to the round. At the close of the song, Falk removes her white dress, revealing a grey satin one underneath. A second woman rolls in a wringer washing machine and proceeds to wash and wring out the white dress before leaving the stage. The piece concludes with a second performance of the parrots and Falk singing the round. This A-B-A pattern of the three scenes is the rondo form. *Red Angel* was first presented as part of an evening of performance work at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1972, but it was not filmed at that time. It was recorded when Falk re-performed the piece at Western Front, Vancouver, on May 1, 1977.

Red Angel is premised in a surprising combination of images: stuffed parrots, ceramic apples, turntables, red silk tablecloths, evening gowns, and enormous angel's wings. Falk's choices might be interpreted as absurd, but she denies purposeful flagrancy. She has said, "To some spectators it seemed that all this effort was made with a view to toppling the usual order of things or that the aim was outrageousness. Not so. The activities I used belonged together in that mysterious way that all things in every strong work of art belong together."¹

When Falk first performed the piece, critic Joan Lowndes, typically a great fan of hers, acknowledged how much work had gone into the props and costumes, but she felt that it "never took flight."² Yet, in its action, Falk's reliance on the musical form gives the piece a particular shape—the rondo, or round—that makes the work easy to describe. It is perhaps for this reason, despite Lowndes's early critique, that it has become Falk's most published performance.

A Bird Is Known by His Feathers Alone, 1968—an earlier Falk work, made just six months after she attended a workshop by choreographer Deborah Hay (b.1941) of the Judson Dance Theater, New York—was more complex in its use of props and costumes and quite serpentine in the choreography of its actions. These actions included Falk washing her face and applying Rogers Golden Syrup to it; artist Tom Graff (active from the 1970s), Falk's friend and sometimes performance partner, creating a large drawing with cold cream, lipstick, and powder; and other participants using their prone bodies to push plastic cocktail glasses filled with cherries and ceramic oranges across the stage. While *Red Angel* has a score that is premised in a certain clarity despite the absurdity of the actions, Lowndes described the earlier piece as "a study in process and randomness."³



Gathie Falk, *Red Angel*, 1972, performance at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1972, photograph by Glenn Baglo.

EIGHT RED BOOTS 1973



Gathie Falk, *Eight Red Boots*, 1973

Red-glazed ceramic in painted plywood and glass cabinet, 101.2 x 105.7 x 15.5 cm (cabinet); boots: 17 x 28 x 10 cm each (approx.)

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

In *Eight Red Boots*, Gathie Falk displays eight ceramic versions of men's leather zippered ankle boots in a wooden display case with four shelves and two closed glass doors. Each shoe is shaped for the right foot, without a left shoe to accompany it, and positioned to reveal the inner side so that we see the instep and lowered zipper of each boot. It is the sort of display one might expect to see at a shoe store or a cobbler, except for one unusual detail: the boots are made of ceramic and glazed a deep, rich red, and the wooden display case is painted to match.

After the Fruit Piles series, the ceramic shoes in cabinets are arguably Falk's most recognizable works. *Eight Red Boots*, in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada, is particularly well known. Shoes are a recurring element in Falk's work: they were central to *Skipping Ropes*, a performance she created in 1968; they recur in ceramic form throughout her oeuvre; and they appear, repeated, in the monumental photo-based work *Crossed Ankles*, 1998. As Falk noted in her autobiography, "From the first time I had used shoes, in my 1968 workshop performance, I understood their homely power, their ability to symbolize human presence and also human enterprise—tasks undertaken, distances walked—in an unpretentious way."¹



Marilyn Levine, *John's Mountie Boots*, 1973, ceramic and mixed media, 16.2 x 67 x 50 cm, MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina.

Because the shoes in *Eight Red Boots* are not conceived as pairs, we are prompted to think about their absent wearers. While the serial presentation of similar shoes should achieve the Pop art pursuit of memorializing consumer objects, Falk's personalization of the shoes, through the evocation of their missing owners, as well as her use of hand-built clay, results in a work of art that is situated in the quotidian but is anything but.

Calgary-born, California-based artist Marilyn Levine (1935–2005) was also producing shoes from clay at precisely the same time that Falk created this work. While the two women may not have known each other, they had a mutual association with the Funk art movement through their practices of sculptural ceramics. Comparing Falk's men's shoes with those produced by Levine—such as *John's Mountie Boots*, 1973—it becomes evident how important it is to look to a more inflected telling of art history in order to contextualize Falk accurately. But it also shows how Falk uses colour, repetition, and display to create works that make the ordinary extraordinary, rather than settling on the *trompe l'oeil* approach to depicting the everyday preferred by Levine.

BORDER IN FOUR PARTS 1977–78

Gathie Falk, *Border in Four Parts*, 1977–78
Oil on canvas, 213.2 x 197.8 cm each
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

Gathie Falk's *Border in Four Parts* is a quadriptych painted in oil on canvas. Each of the four panels is more than 2 metres tall and a little less than 2 metres wide; overall, the work is grand in scale. It represents the eastern boundary of the garden at Falk's home. The image on each panel overlaps with that on the next—this is not one image divided into four but a series of interconnected views that progress along the garden's edge. The composition is rendered in fairly high detail so that the viewer gets the clear sense that they are witnessing something that has been painted from life. The application of paint is light in touch and the palette is pale, giving the impression that we are witnessing a site that is bathed in sunlight.

In 1968, Falk turned her focus to ceramic sculpture and performance art, and these artistic languages would be central to her practice for the next ten years. In 1977 she returned to painting, creating *Border in Four Parts* and the related *Border* series, 1977–78, depictions of the edges of the gardens at her own and neighbours' homes. Falk worked from a series of Instamatic photographs, framed so that the content of each snapshot overlapped with that of the next. Using this methodology, Falk ensured that she captured every detail of the entire border.

While her painting style is personal, merging impressionistic and expressionistic vocabularies, in terms of her decisions about content, not a centimetre of the observed landscape was omitted. Moving from left to right, each of the panels builds upon the previous, adding detail to the content introduced in the one prior while adding new information about the unfolding scene. There is, then, a strong element of time in the serial composition of the *Border* series—the multiple canvases not only expand the size of the composition, they add dimension. This was obviously important to Falk, who infuses each work in this series with details of the interaction of light and colour that convey what time of day Falk's eye—and camera—was moving across the border of her garden.



GATHIE FALK

Life & Work by Michelle Jacques

The accounting of her close-at-hand world—her garden, her home, her neighbourhood, and the firmament or ocean seen on a daily walk—would become an ongoing source of imagery, providing Falk with untold subjects for subsequent series: *Thermal Blankets*, 1979–80; *Night Skies*, 1979–80; *Pieces of Water*, 1981–82; *Cement*, 1982–83; and later, *Hedges and Clouds*, 1989–90. In each of these bodies of work, we see how Falk transforms the everyday into the singular through her commitment to the veneration of the ordinary.



Gathie Falk, *Border in Four Parts* (detail), 1977–78, oil on canvas, 213.2 x 197.8 cm each, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

BEAUTIFUL BRITISH COLUMBIA MULTIPLE PURPOSE THERMAL BLANKET 1979



Gathie Falk, *Beautiful British Columbia Multiple Purpose Thermal Blanket* (detail), 1979
Oil on canvas, 56 squares mounted over fibreglass insulation on canvas backing, 550 x 490 cm
Kamloops Art Gallery

Asked to produce a work that would warm up the brick wall of the lobby of the new credit union building in Vancouver, Gathie Falk created *Beautiful British Columbia Multiple Purpose Thermal Blanket*. It is composed of fifty-six oil-on-canvas panels stitched together in an eight-row, seven-column grid. The work is extremely large at 5.5 metres tall and nearly 5 metres wide. Each canvas square is sewn over fibreglass insulation so that it is puffy, depicting a different patch of lawn or garden witnessed by Falk during her daily walks with her dog.

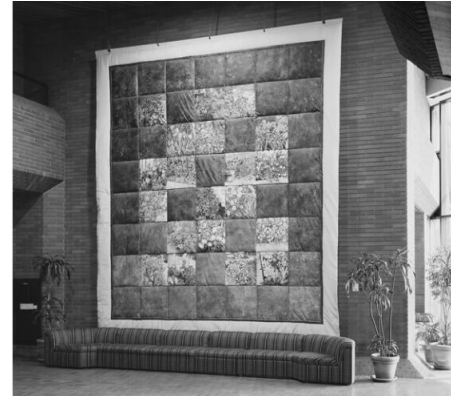
Many of the squares represent deep-green patches of lawn—these occupy the perimeter of the blanket as well as the diagonals that extend across the composition from lower left to upper right. The remaining squares, placed

somewhat irregularly, boast more detailed, articulated images of a variety of flower beds witnessed by Falk on her walks. A border of salmon pink surrounds all of the squares.

This was Falk's second commission for a public artwork—the first, *Veneration of the White Collar Worker #1* and *Veneration of the White Collar Worker #2*, 1971–73, was created for the cafeteria at the Department of External Affairs in Ottawa. *Beautiful British Columbia Multiple Purpose Thermal Blanket* represents Falk's way of achieving monumental scale while meeting the client's request for a work that would "warm up" the space. The garden subject brings colour, light, and life to the corporate setting. The construction of this piece was so laborious that it required the assistance of many friends.¹



LEFT: Joyce Wieland, *Reason over Passion*, 1968, quilted cotton, 256.5 x 302.3 x 8 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. RIGHT: Gathie Falk, *Beautiful British Columbia Multiple Purpose Thermal Blanket*, 1979, installed in the foyer of the B.C. Central Credit Union.



The format of this work, although named a thermal blanket by Falk, is, of course, reminiscent of quilts by Joyce Wieland (1930–1998), such as *Reason over Passion*, 1968, and *The Water Quilt*, 1970–71. Like these precedents, Falk's monumental stitched composition elevates a mode of making typically relegated to the realm of craft, or women's work, to the realm of high art. As Wieland did, Falk also relied on the collaborative methods of the sewing circle to execute her work. Interestingly, the sewing circle was an important aspect of Mennonite life. Women in the community would come together regularly to sew clothing and bedding to be distributed through service organizations to those in need.

While *Beautiful British Columbia Multiple Purpose Thermal Blanket* was a work that responded very specifically to the requirements of a commissioning client, elements of Falk's composition would define the next phase of her work. She would go on to create a series of smaller floral thermal blankets, such as *Beautiful B.C. Thermal Blanket—Gloria*, 1980, and the subjects of flowers and gardens would emerge again and again over the course of her career. In the smaller variants of *Thermal Blanket*, Falk introduces elements of still life and figurative portraits to personalize the compositions, although she maintains that the significance of the works is greater than their association with her friends.



GATHIE FALK

Life & Work by Michelle Jacques

NIGHT SKY #16 1979



Gathie Falk, *Night Sky #16*, 1979
Oil on canvas, 157.5 x 120.7 cm
Collection of Ivan Fecan and Jae Kim

There are twenty-two canvases in the Night Skies series, one of the first that Gathie Falk created following her return to painting in 1977 after an eleven-year hiatus. In *Night Sky #16* Falk's facility with the subject is clear, as subtle, misty colour, light in some areas, dark and somewhat acrid in others, mottles the midnight blue field of colour, creating depth, atmosphere, and mystery with a remarkable economy of visual articulation. While other canvases in the series veer into more complex depictions of what the night sky contains, this work possesses a handful of five-pointed stars and just enough variation in colour and form to render the subject identifiable and spark the viewer's imagination. Though the subject is, in theory, simple in appearance—a dark ground speckled with points of light—Falk's approach to the composition was far from facile.

As art critic Robin Laurence describes, each of the images in the series is built on top of an extremely complex ground of underpaint composed of cross marks in yellow ochre, raw umber, ultramarine blue, phthalo blue, green, alizarin crimson, and raw sienna.¹ This is overlaid with a combination of thinned ultramarine blue and umber that Falk slapped onto the canvas so as to avoid creating a brush trail on her surface. The effect has its roots in all-over abstraction, although many of the Night Skies possess elements of figuration—some subtly so in the points of twinkling stars, and others more obviously so—with clouds and other atmospheric effects interrupting the darkness.

Falk has described the Night Skies—and the series that followed it, *Pieces of Water*, 1981–82—as “personal realism, because they represent [her] personal and emotional response to [her] environment.”² Of course, this statement, made in connection with such a specific moment in her practice, would not be out of place as a description of most of Falk's work. In her intimate analysis of Falk's oeuvre, “To Be a Pilgrim,” Laurence describes how a poodle, given to the artist by her husband while their short marriage was in full decline, forced Falk to engage with the world beyond her house and garden. One night, while out for a walk with the dog, she looked up at the sky, which had always fascinated her, and heard the words, “Paint the sky! Paint the night sky!”³

In a 1984 interview with Nicholas Tuele, then curator at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Falk stated, “It always seems to me that I can never get everything said in one painting. If I do one painting it always leads to other ways of doing a similar kind of thing, and so I just keep on working until either there is a show, which stops me and then another show coming up after that which has to be different...”⁴



LEFT: Gathie Falk, *Night Sky #6*, 1979, acrylic on canvas, 197.5 x 167.6 cm, private collection, Mississauga. RIGHT: Gathie Falk, *Heavenly Bodies Again #20*, 2016, oil on canvas, 121.9 x 121.9 cm, Collection of the artist.



GATHIE FALK

Life & Work by Michelle Jacques

Falk would revisit the subject of the night sky in two subsequent series, Heavenly Bodies, 1999-2005, and Heavenly Bodies Again, 2015-16. While the later works tend to include more conspicuous celestial elements, they are even less connected to the appearance of reality than the first series on the topic.

THEATRE IN B/W AND COLOUR 1984



LEFT: Gathie Falk, *Theatre in B/W and Colour–Bushes with Fish in Colour*, 1984
Oil on canvas, 198.2 x 167.4 cm
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa



RIGHT: Gathie Falk, *Theatre in B/W and Colour–Bushes with Fish in B/W*, 1984
Oil on canvas, 198.2 x 167.4 cm
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

In Gathie Falk's *Theatre in B/W and Colour–Bushes with Fish in Colour* and *Theatre in B/W and Colour–Bushes with Fish in B/W*, each canvas depicts sixteen potted bushes that are rounded in shape. In the first, the bushes are green, covered in pinkish-red buds, and contained in terracotta pots. They recede in a grid outlined by the criss-cross divisions of a grey, tiled ground. In between the middle rows of plants runs a line; twelve small grey fish hang from the cord by their mouths. All is repeated in grisaille in *Bushes with Fish in B/W*. Although both versions possess shadows that extend diagonally from each plant, in the black and white version they are particularly prominent and theatrical.

Perhaps because of her long history of performing with choral groups, Falk had never been inclined, as so many other performance artists are, to make an explicit distinction between her work and theatre. In fact, she and artist Tom Graff (active from the 1970s), her friend and collaborator, used the phrase "Theatre Art Works" to describe their performances.

Eleven years after she created her final performance in 1972, Falk began this series, using the word “theatre” in the titles to denote both the dramatic moments and the anticipation inspired by the tensions inherent in the juxtapositions of the items depicted in the pairs of paintings. They are linked in intention and effect to Falk’s performance works, which similarly played on the collocation of uncannily married material elements, which one could easily imagine as the subjects of the paintings in the Theatre in B/W and Colour series: Popsicles and candles in *Drill*, 1970; stuffed parrots and angel wings in *Red Angel*, 1972; eggs and flashbulbs in *Orange Peel*, 1972.

In spring 1977, Falk travelled to Venice with Graff and their friend Elizabeth Klassen (b.1928). On a day trip to Padua, she saw frescoes by Giotto (1266/67–1337) in the Arena Chapel, noting that her “urge to paint was reborn ... after a hiatus of eleven years.”¹ In 1983 she dismantled the 4.5-square-metre gas kiln that had occupied most of her studio since she and ceramicist Charmian Johnson (1939–2020) had constructed it there in 1967.

The removal of the kiln made room for Falk to work on larger-scale painting series. The first works she made in her transformed studio were the Theatre in B/W and Colour paintings. Of these works, Falk has noted that “the theatre actually, I think, refers mostly to what I do during the summer that really has nothing to do with the painting.... I go out in my tiny little front garden and I watch everything grow... a sort of hourly little changes in growth. And so I watch things come up from seed and come to a climax and then denouement and that’s like theatre. But... the effect is painted sculpture.”²

Just as Falk’s performances capitalized on the potential of connecting her viewers to an experience that played on the relationship between the corporeal and the illusory, the juxtaposition of black-and-white and colour versions of the same image similarly evoke a tension that kindles a vacillation between her viewer’s processing of the real and imagined origins of the objects depicted in the paintings.



Gathie Falk, *Theatre in Black and White and Colour: Light Bulbs with Grass*, 1984, oil on canvas, 199.7 x 169.5 cm, Macdonald Stewart Art Centre Collection, Art Gallery of Guelph.

MY DOG'S BONES 1985



Gathie Falk, *My Dog's Bones*, 1985
Bones, cord, Alberta spruce, and enamel paints, 309 x 109 x 109 cm
Collection of the artist

My Dog's Bones includes 690 real bones—collected by Gathie Falk and her friends and laboriously cleaned by the artist—suspended from a ceiling grid using butcher's twine. They hover above sixteen small spruce trees in pots arranged in a square on the floor—a recurring visual element that had previously appeared in works such as *A Bird Is Known by His Feathers Alone*, 1968, and the Theatre in B/W and Colour series, 1983–84. When the work was installed, Falk painted shadows of the bones on the walls and the trees on the floor such that they intermingled with the actual shadows cast by the work.

This installation was created in response to an invitation to be in *Aurora Borealis*, a groundbreaking group exhibition organized by the Montreal International Centre of Contemporary Art in 1985 that brought together thirty Canadian artists to create installations in approximately 4,000 square metres of unused basement retail space in Place du Parc, Montreal. The year prior, Falk had created a work with the same title in the Theatre in B/W and Colour series. While *My Dog's Bones* explored the formal and conceptual implications of juxtaposing bones and Christmas trees, it is also one of the frankest examples of Falk's use of found objects.

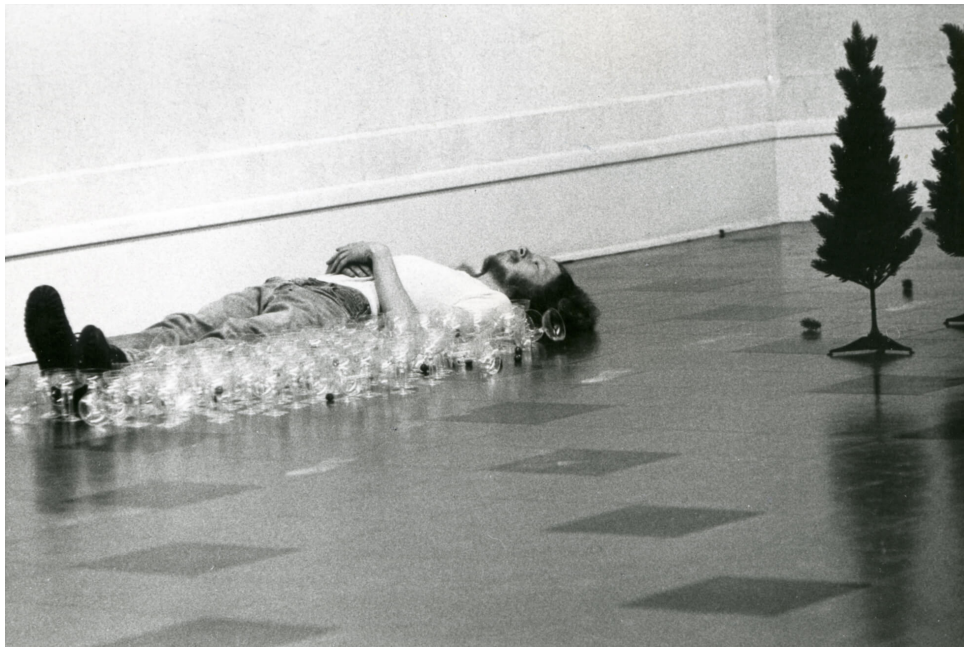


GATHIE FALK

Life & Work by Michelle Jacques

The interplay of two and three dimensions and real and represented elements results in a work that is at once banal in its physicality and preternatural in its mingling of the real and imagined. Art writer Jane Lind has comprehensively described the evolution of this piece, from the artist's mental image of making porcelain dog bones with handles (so that they would be easier to pick up than her poodle's chew bones, which she was constantly finding lying around the house) to the decision to use real bones and the arduous amount of work that led to the installation's creation.¹

My Dog's Bones is a very direct manifestation of the ways in which Falk's observation of daily life translates into creative imagery in her work.



Gathie Falk, *A Bird Is Known by His Feathers Alone*, 1968, performance at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, in 1972.

SOFT COUCH WITH SUIT 1986

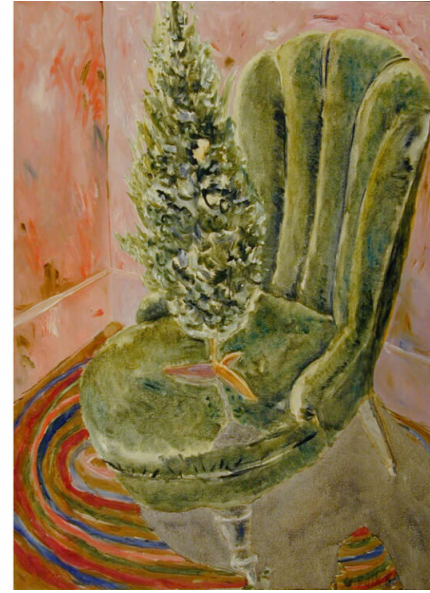


Gathie Falk, *Soft Couch with Suit*, 1986
Oil on canvas, 124.5 x 199 cm
Private collection

At 2 metres wide, *Soft Couch with Suit* by Gathie Falk is a large painting in which almost the entire span of the canvas is occupied by a salmon-pink couch with a prominent but ambiguous decorative pattern adorning the upholstery. It has golden-yellow shapes on the face of each arm—perhaps intended to depict wooden insets—and is set against what appears to be an outdoor background: there is a blue expanse, perhaps a body of water, at its base, and the green of what might be a lawn at its back. In front of the couch is a small, elongated bush. However, what really shares the stage with the couch is a grey men's suit. It gives the impression that it is sitting down from the manner in which it hangs from a clothesline suspended above the couch.

Working with the subject of wooden chairs in the *Chairs* series of 1985 allowed Falk to explore the intricate tracery of shadow and light. Meanwhile, *Soft Chairs*, the series that she turned her attention to in 1986, represents an exploration of the sculptural volume of upholstered furniture and symbolic connotations of their plush, comfortable forms. Falk has said, "All that lacework on the legs and backs probably urged the subconscious to direct my attention to a bulkier object. During the painting of the forty chairs, the blurry, bulky image became the strongly-sculptured soft chair."¹

Soft Chairs, like Chairs, hearkens back to Falk's breakthrough work, *Home Environment*, 1968. Falk describes the series originating with a cloudy image in her mind. In retrospect, she came to understand the upholstered furniture as embodying the narrative of the working-class aspiration to own furniture emblematic of comfort and financial stability. She noted that "above all else, this living-room suite meant there was a father in the house."² In *Soft Couch with Suit*, the notion of household economic security is emphasized through the hint at the father's presence represented by the inclusion of the pinstriped attire that seems to be approaching a state of repose on the settee.



LEFT: Gathie Falk, *Soft Chair with Pants and Hammer Heads*, 1986, oil on canvas, 121.9 x 106.6 cm, Collection of J. Sergei Sawchyn. RIGHT: Gathie Falk, *Chair with Plastic Christmas Tree*, 1985, oil on canvas, 106.5 x 76.6 cm, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria.

While the Soft Chairs series has come to be quite clearly interpreted within this narrative of domesticity and fiscal dependability, it is also important to consider "the blurry, bulky image" that appeared in Falk's mind's eye even before she settled on the soft chair as her subject. As art critic Robin Laurence shares in "To Be a Pilgrim," paraphrasing Falk's thoughts from an undated artist's statement, "[Falk] also, for reasons she can't entirely explain, is 'thrilled' by the bulky presence of bushes, hedges and trees... 'Bulk seizes me... the substantial weight, the massiveness, the shape.'"³



GATHIE FALK

Life & Work by Michelle Jacques

DRESS WITH INSECT BOX 1998



Gathie Falk, *Dress with Insect Box*, 1998
Papier mâché, acrylic paint, varnish, 90 x 60 x 55 cm
Vancouver Art Gallery

At 90 centimetres tall, *Dress with Insect Box* by Gathie Falk is a petite frock made of painted and varnished papier mâché. The form has been built up in the medium so that the dress appears as though there is a body present; the absent body is an unidealized one, and the dress is a little old-fashioned with its high, rounded collar and elbow-length puffed sleeves. Falk has used her considerable abilities as a painter on the surface of the dress—there are subtle variations in the coloration, as if she were rendering the three-dimensional object in the two dimensions of paint on canvas. At the front base of the dress, two cuts have been made so that a small rectangular section folds up to form a shelf, on which sits an insect box containing six hand-formed moths with their wings in various positions.

In 1997, after twenty years of focusing on painting, Falk returned to three-dimensional works with a series of papier mâché dresses. Each one possesses a shelf at its front hem and is titled according to what is presented on the ledge: *Dress with Candles*, 1997, for instance, includes four papier mâché candles, which hearken back to the flames found in some sculptures from Falk's *Picnics* series. *Dress with Insect Box* also speaks to recurring imagery in Falk's practice. She has described the insect box as containing "what has died to make it more palatable—a more lovely thing."¹

The dresses allude to the human figure without it being present and bear an obvious connection to her ceramic shoes of the 1970s. In an essay for Falk's 2000 Vancouver Art Gallery retrospective catalogue, curator Bruce Grenville astutely points out the recurring incidence in Falk's work of "a surrogate that is uncanny in its ability to convey a bodily presence."² Among these surrogates he names the dresses and the shoes, of course, but also the skin of her fruit and the surface of her sidewalks.³



Gathie Falk, *Dress with Candles*, 1997, papier mâché with acrylic and varnish, 91.5 x 61 x 61 cm (approx.), National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.



GATHIE FALK

Life & Work by Michelle Jacques

The Dresses series, then, which seems to be a bit of a departure in Falk's trajectory at this point, is another expression of the trace of the sentient through the manifestation of an inanimate object. The dresses were conceived as an element to be included in *Traces*, Falk's September 1998 exhibition at Equinox Gallery, Vancouver. The other works in this show included paintings, boxed shoes, prints of a pair of women's feet, ankles crossed, and a table of small objects—some of them ceramic.

As is the case with much of Falk's work, the dresses had first appeared to her as a strong mental image—including the shelf at the hem of the dress. She then set out to find the best solution for creating what she had imagined. While her first inclination was toward ceramic, she realized that would make the sculptures too heavy, and eventually she settled on papier mâché, purposefully using pages of the *Vancouver Sun* and noting that there are "a lot of people in those pieces." The dress and the objects held on its shelf, such as the insect box, are intended, according to Falk, to sit in "meaningful tension" with each other.⁴

DREAMING OF FLYING, CANOE 2007

Gathie Falk, *Dreaming of Flying, Canoe*, 2007
Papier mâché, acrylic paint, 60 x 456 x 68 cm
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

Gathie Falk's *Dreaming of Flying, Canoe* is a papier mâché canoe made to scale. At first, it appears to have been painted in a flat off-white, but upon closer inspection, it is revealed that Falk applied a varied palette ranging in shades from cool to warm white so that, under the proper lighting, the surface appears to be iridescent. The material of the canoe has an irregular surface and seems delicate in nature despite its 4.5-metre length. The artist has, quite remarkably, managed to maintain something of the lightness of the paper, despite the process of hardening integral to the medium. The canoe rests on two wooden trestles.

Falk worked on this canoe for two years. It was an intense process of trial and error to create a work of this scale and delicacy out of papier mâché, especially when it is noted that the artist achieved her result without the use of an underlying armature. When Falk made a second canoe years later—*Dressed Canoe*, 2014—she was able to apply what she had learned from *Dreaming of Flying, Canoe* and complete it in just three months.¹ Falk's insistence on making *Dreaming of Flying, Canoe* without an internal structure made her endeavour difficult and lengthy, but the end result possesses a poignancy of form that might have been lost otherwise. The lanky, extruded vessel has a certain anthropomorphism, with a textured surface akin to wrinkled skin.



Gathie Falk, *Dressed Canoe*, 2014, papier mâché, 45.7 x 317.5 x 35 cm, installation view of *The Things in My Head* at Equinox Gallery, 2015, photograph by SITE Photography.

The title of the work, however, dates back to Falk's childhood. Paintings of moths that accompanied the canoe in Falk's 2007 exhibition at Equinox Gallery, Vancouver, also titled *Dreaming of Flying*, were inspired by dreams she had as a child, and the idea to build a papier mâché canoe came from seeing her nephew's canoe. She hung a cluster of small mirrors, which gently rotated, above the papier mâché sculpture. As Falk describes in the artist's statement for the exhibition, she had recurring dreams about flying when she was younger, but they ceased when she started making art, perhaps because it was "another kind of flying."²

Dreaming of Flying, Canoe is unique in scale among the works that Falk has produced in later life. It possesses a physical quality that critics, such as Robin Laurence, have related to the fragile, aging body.³ With a sculpture like this, produced in Falk's eightieth year, it is difficult to resist the assumption of the presence of metaphor, despite the artist's resistance to such readings of her art.

ABSTRACT 4 2018



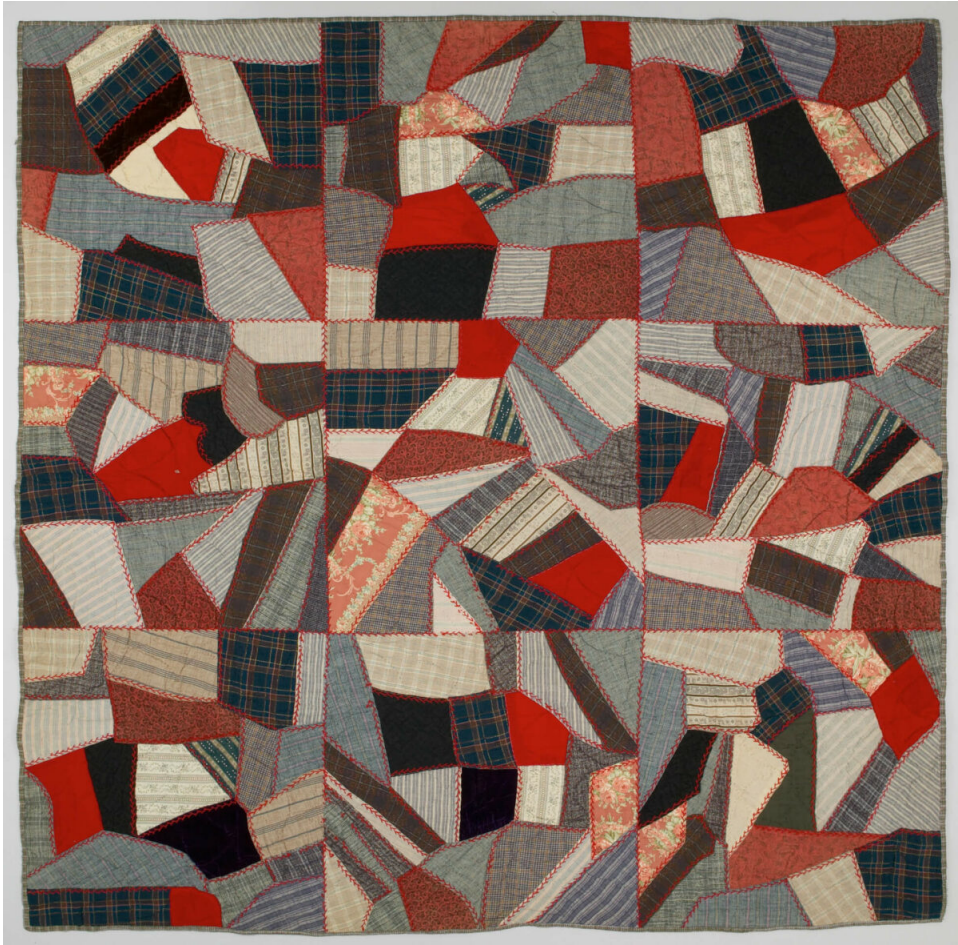
Gathie Falk, *Abstract 4*, 2018
Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 76.2 cm
Collection of the artist

On initial viewing, Gathie Falk's composition *Abstract 4* seems planar and geometric; on closer observation, the shapes are completely irregular and obviously drawn by hand. Within a square frame, Falk has divided the surface into twelve undulating horizontal bands that each contain a patchwork of colourful triangles, trapezoids, and oblongs.

Falk's abstract composition seems familiar at first and reads almost as a free-hand rendering of unidentified hard-edge source paintings. Executed in oil paint, the colours mixed with white to lighten them, the palette is an exercise in tonal variation and also seems to celebrate Falk's legacy as a colourist. The red of apples and boots, the greens and blues and blacks of gardens and night skies, and even the whites of the pedestals that provided a foundation for her sculptures are evident in her colour choices for *Abstract 4*.

In 2019, Falk had an exhibition of new work at Equinox Gallery, Vancouver. The show included bronze sculptures of running shoes and an orange pile, and a series of abstract paintings. These canvases seem like an entirely new direction in Falk's work, but in fact they do hearken back to the abstracted imagery of the series *Night Skies*, 1979-80, and *Pieces of Water*, 1981-82. They also reflect the artist's history of working in repetition, as the overall patterning is achieved by abutting similar geometric shapes. Painted in Falk's ninety-first year, the series demonstrates that she remains committed to creative exploration and pushing forward the formal and stylistic parameters of her artistic production.

While Falk has not alluded to such a connection, there is a clear visual relationship that exists between these paintings and quilt work, with the obvious handmade-ness and inclination toward a patchwork rather than the hard edges of much geometric abstraction.



Unknown artist, *Crazy Quilt*, c.1890, cotton and wool: machine pieced, quilted, and embroidered, 193 x 376 cm, Textile Museum of Canada, Toronto.

An abstract background featuring a deep blue, textured surface. Scattered across this surface are numerous small, white, irregular speckles and flecks, some of which are slightly larger and more concentrated in certain areas, creating a starry or textured effect.

SIGNIFICANCE & CRITICAL ISSUES

Gathie Falk's practice embodies ideas, principles, imagery, and ways of engaging with the world that are unwaveringly part of her philosophy of being. Her careful and deliberate approach makes plain the simple beauty and elegance of daily rituals and commonplace objects. She applies discipline to interdisciplinarity and draws on surreal collisions of unorthodox elements to manifest the spectacular visions she sees in her mind's eye. Grounded in her surroundings, she often includes her friends and neighbours in her work, and she is an influential and stalwart figure in the Vancouver art community.

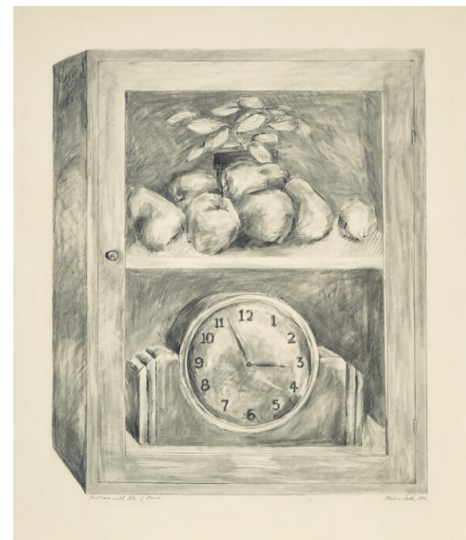
THE VENERATION OF THE ORDINARY

The overlooked aspects of daily life provide Falk with a wealth of inspiration, and she treats them with a sense of special significance in her work. She credits artist Glenn Lewis (b.1935), her ceramics teacher at the University of British Columbia in the 1960s, with first introducing her to what he termed “the art of daily life.” Falk once characterized her approach as the “veneration of the ordinary,” but later she pushed against people’s tendency to equate the ordinary with the banal, putting forward this query: “By the way, I painted the ocean; I painted the night skies, quite a few times. Is that ordinary? Or is that extraordinary? A piece of the ocean—is that ordinary?”¹

Falk’s axiom describes an elevated appreciation of the so-called ordinary things around her. Reviewer Joan Lowndes recognized this when, in reference to the suite of Falk’s 39 *Drawings* exhibited at the Bau-Xi Gallery in Vancouver in 1976, she compared the artist’s work to that of eighteenth-century French still-life master Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin (1699–1779), noting that in Falk’s “reverence for... humble everyday things... she transforms them into icons”²—an interest evident in works such as *Bookcase with Pile of Fruit*, 1976.



LEFT: Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin, *Jar of Apricots*, 1758, oil on canvas, 57.2 x 50.8 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. RIGHT: Gathie Falk, *Bookcase with Pile of Fruit*, 1976, pencil on paper, 78.1 x 65.4 cm, private collection.



Falk has noted, “Most of my work is a good deal removed from reality, but it undoubtedly has roots in my daily living.”³ This is not as pithy a description as “veneration of the ordinary,” but perhaps it is more fitting. Falk describes her *Night Skies*, 1979–80, and *Pieces of Water* series, 1981–82, as paintings that might be considered as “personal realism, because they represent my personal and emotional response to my environment.”⁴ She is quite right to assert the extraordinariness of these subjects.

Falk has been connected to Pop art, the movement that started in the 1950s and incorporated imagery from popular culture in a fine art context, due to the affinities between her breakout installation *Home Environment*, 1968—which included ceramic renderings of domestic items, such as a TV dinner—and works such as *Bedroom Ensemble*, 1963, by Pop artist Claes Oldenburg (b.1929). However, Oldenburg and his peers were motivated by an interest in infusing high art with popular mass culture, while Falk was interested in making art about the things she was personally connected to. Distancing herself from the movement, she has written, “What I made, and still make, is more personal and less slick—more modest, I believe, and more obviously handmade.”⁵ Falk’s touch is evident in works such as *Cherry Basket*, c.1969, and *Small Purse*, c.1970.



LEFT: Gathie Falk, *Cherry Basket*, c.1969, glazed clay, 19 x 19 x 19 cm, Collection of the artist. RIGHT: Gathie Falk, *Small Purse*, c.1970, glazed clay, 15.2 x 14 x 11.4 cm, Collection of the artist.

Falk's *Fruit Piles*, 1967–70, and *Single Right Men's Shoes*, 1972–73, were in some ways prompted by her interaction with mass production and its retail outlet; however, her connection to the merchandise was not made through the lens of consumerism but instead through her routine experiences of her home, garden, neighbourhood, and friends. The everyday was a resource and inspiration for her work.

Falk's friend and collaborator Tom Graff (active from the 1970s) has described how the veneration of the ordinary infused her performance work. "As she sets up a tableau or sculptural stage, there is a kind of contingent system which touches all sides," he said. "Body and props are one, if you will. Even the stage is not a platform, it is an integral element, part of the collections of things and milieu."⁶ This approach is what has enabled Falk to move from one medium to another so effortlessly, as it offers a philosophy for conceptualizing and making work that is rooted in the artist's experiences and her audience's easy identification with them. In Falk's art, many motifs reappear in different media—for instance, shoes appear in the performance *Skipping Ropes*, 1968, the sculpture *Eighteen Pairs of Red Shoes with Roses*, 1973, and the silkscreen *Crossed Ankles*, 1998, to name only a few projects.



LEFT: Gathie Falk, *Skipping Ropes*, 1968, performance at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, in 1975, photograph by Mayo Graham. RIGHT: Gathie Falk, *Eighteen Pairs of Red Shoes with Roses* (installation detail), 1973, red-glazed ceramic with decals, 16.5 x 584.2 x 30.5 cm installed, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Because she turned away from teaching, it is difficult to argue that Falk has had direct aesthetic or stylistic influence on subsequent generations—she stopped teaching elementary school in 1965, and she returned to the profession only briefly in 1970–71 and 1975–77 when she taught visual art part-time at the University of British Columbia.⁷ Yet, it is inarguable that in her commitment to “the art of daily life” she has contributed to the creation of a kind of space that has allowed art and life to merge in extraordinary ways. Numerous Vancouver artists—among them Derya Akay (b.1988), Zoe Kreye (b.1978), and the collective Matriarchal Roll Call (formed in 2014)—now inhabit that space, working in interdisciplinary ways that make perfect sense in the wake of Falk.

DISCIPLINE, INTERDISCIPLINARITY, AND SERIES

Falk’s work of the 1960s and early 1970s was clearly inspired by her observation of collections of items in retail settings—one need only look to her pyramids of apples in *Fruit Piles*, 1967–70, or neatly arranged boots in *Single Right Men’s Shoes*, 1972–73. Contrary to the tendency emerging at the time in the Pop art movement to incorporate the methods of mass production that would have so readily connected to her choice of subject, Falk’s works are executed in a manner that evokes the artist’s hand and her relationship to the things she depicts. Her goods read not as neutral commodities but as objects that Falk has a connection to.

In *196 Apples*, 1969–70, for instance, each piece of fruit was similar but unique. “For most of the sculptures I’ve made I have wanted to have soft, undulating surfaces,” Falk has written. “I wanted them to look as though they were alive: living breathing objects. Clay is the best thing for that.”⁸ The exercise of executing the *Fruit Piles* series, and other works of intricate conception or composition—whether in performances, such as *Red Angel*, 1972, or installations, such as *My Dog’s Bones*, 1985, or *Herd I*, 1974–75—are testaments to the discipline with which Falk carries out her practice.

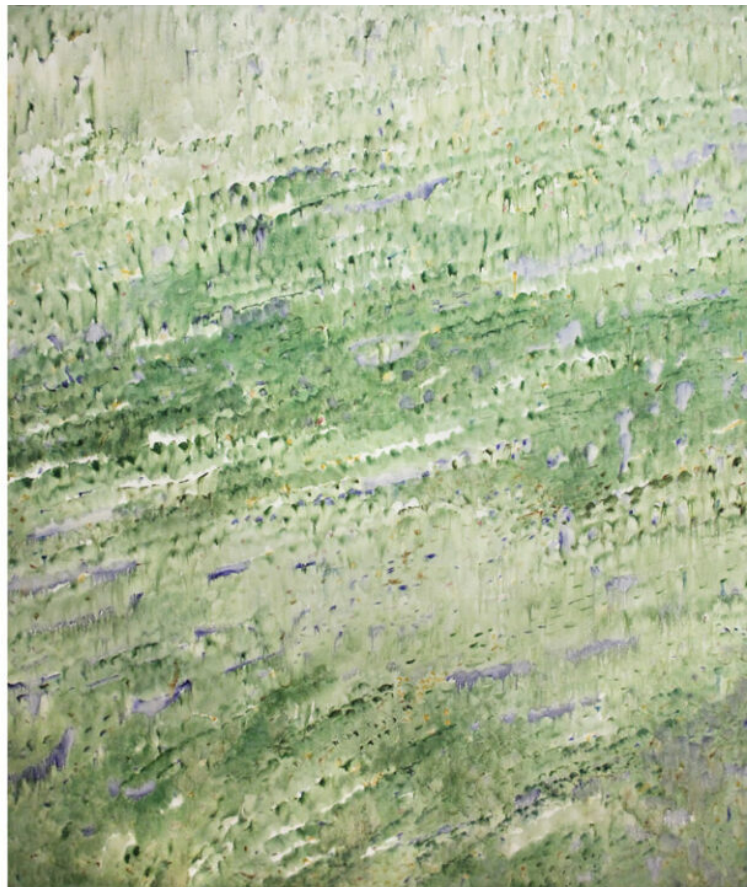


Gathie Falk, *Single Right Men’s Shoes: Blue Running Shoes*, c.1973, earthenware, glaze, wood, glass, paint, 101.5 x 105.4 x 16.1 cm, Vancouver Art Gallery.

Falk's discipline in the studio is also evident in her paintings, such as the Theatre in B/W and Colour works, 1983-84, which she consistently created as part of a series. Insight into the commitment at the root of Falk's inclination to work in the serial format is evident in a recorded conversation from 1984 between the artist and then curator of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Nicholas Tuele. Falk notes, "It always seems to me that I can never get everything said in one painting. If I do one painting it always leads to other ways of doing a similar kind of thing, and so I just keep on working until either there is a show, which stops me and then another show coming up after that which has to be different..."⁹

The degree of Falk's focus and commitment to her subjects became very clear when she moved away from performance art and ceramics and returned to painting in 1977, first with the Border series, 1977-78; then Thermal Blankets, 1979-80; Night Skies, 1979-80; Pieces of Water, 1981-82; and so on.

Sometimes, as in the Border series, which depicts the edges of her and her neighbours' gardens, the multiple format enables an investigation into an image too expansive to be reduced to a single canvas. At other times, as with the Pieces of Water series, in which Falk paints the surface of rectangular segments of the ocean as seen on her daily walks, the sequential structure reflects Falk's desire to communicate her ongoing relationship with the subject matter. Both Night Skies and Pieces of Water essentially became series of series, as Falk would return to the subjects of the skies at night and the ocean again later in her career.



LEFT: Gathie Falk, *Night Sky #3*, 1979, oil on canvas, 193 x 154.9 cm (framed), private collection. RIGHT: Gathie Falk, *Pieces of Water #3: Parliament Bells*, 1982, oil on canvas, 196.8 x 167.6 cm, private collection.

The discipline with which Falk commits to these large or serial projects has meant that she usually works with one medium or another at a time, but the result of her facility with different materials means that she has constantly built up new vocabularies with which to describe the mental imagery that drives all of her work. Hence, while much is made of the 1977 resignation of her performance practice and return to painting, Falk has continued to work in a range of mediums, including ceramic, papier mâché, cast bronze, and photography, as her ideas demand.

There has long been a strong narrative of interdisciplinarity in the Vancouver art community, and one of its threads traces back to Intermedia, the artists' association founded by Jack Shadbolt (1909–1998) and Glenn Lewis in 1967, of which Falk was an active and enthusiastic member. A powerful presence of interdisciplinary artists remains in the city—among them Carol Sawyer (active from 1990), Laiwan (b.1961), and Cindy Mochizuki (b.1976)—who have emerged from Vancouver's institutions of formal cross-medium training (namely Simon Fraser University's School for the Contemporary Arts, in the case of these artists) and the informal spaces of community learning established by Falk, Lewis, Shadbolt, and their peers.



LEFT: Carol Sawyer, *The Scholar's Study: Still Life*, 2018, single channel video (6:57), Collection of the artist. RIGHT: Cindy Mochizuki, *105 Chrysanthemums* (detail), 2016, mixed media installation, Collection of the artist.

COLLABORATION AND COMMUNITY

The kind of collaboration and community engagement so readily recognized as an artistic medium today was started from necessity in the 1960s and 1970s, when Falk was first launching her career. Artist-run centres and practices emerged as artists searched for ways to support each other in making and showing work. When Intermedia, a non-profit society that provided Vancouver artists with an interdisciplinary meeting place, was founded in 1967, Falk became deeply involved.

It was through Intermedia that much of Falk's performance work was developed and presented to an audience; these programs often took place at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Falk's ceramics teacher and friend Glenn Lewis was a founding member of Intermedia, and she also met and became good friends with other artists during this period, such as Tom Graff, Michael Morris (b.1942), Glenn Allison (active from the 1960s), and Salmon Harris (b.1948). Falk not only created her own performances with her peers, but also participated in their works, such as Lewis's *Rice Krispie Piece*, 1968.



Glenn Lewis, *Rice Krispie Piece* (with Gathie Falk at left), 1968, performance, Beatty Street, Vancouver.

After a few years of taking continuing studies painting courses while earning a living as a teacher, Falk extracted herself from classes in 1962, asserting that she no longer wanted someone standing behind her telling her what to do. She did, however, very much want to belong to a community of artists. She had been raised in a setting where friendship and social life came to her through her church, but increasingly her close friends were to be found in the art world, as she began exhibiting her work and developing relationships with teachers, mentors, fellow artists, collaborators, dealers, critics, writers, and collectors.¹⁰

While much of Falk's work is produced in her studio by her hand alone, she has always executed certain projects with the aid of her friends. For instance, in the summer of 1971, Falk set off on a cross-country train trip with her friends and fellow thrift-store devotees Tom Graff and Elizabeth Klassen, with the intention of visiting second-hand stores across Canada. In her 2018 memoir *Apples, etc.*, Falk describes how they approached their travels as a kind of Conceptual art project, even though she notes that they did not think of it as such at the time. In every store they visited, they searched for the best, worst, and most engaging objects, documenting their finds and taking snapshots of themselves in front of each shop.¹¹



Gathie Falk and Tom Graff in front of a thrift shop, Saskatoon, 1971, photograph by Elizabeth Klassen.

Graff and Klassen have remained close friends with Falk, and while Falk is an artist with a singular vision, it is important to recognize how many individuals, particularly these two, have been integral to her work in certain ways.

Graff is a Vancouver-based artist, writer, and curator. He and Falk were regular collaborators in their performance work: *Cake Walk Rococo*, 1971; *Cross Campus Croquet*, 1971; and *Ballet for Bass-Baritone*, 1971, were all performances that Falk developed with Graff. *Ballet for Bass-Baritone* occupies a unique place in Falk's performance art repertoire—it is the only piece that she has been able to observe as an audience member, as she does not perform in it. Graff, a professionally trained singer, is the central figure in the piece—the action includes his inching backwards across the stage, dressed in a tuxedo and singing “Allegro alla breve” from Igor Stravinsky's *Pulcinella*, as people emerge from the audience, one by one, and begin to polish his shoes with rags. It was Graff who, in 1971-72, curated a



Gathie Falk and Tom Graff, *Cake Walk Rococo*, 1971, performance, Vancouver Art Gallery, photograph by Vincent Trasov.

seven-artist, fifty-two-venue cross-country performance art tour in which Falk participated. While the physical demands of that national tour ended Falk's commitment to performance art and refocused her energies on producing art in her studio, her interest in collaboration persisted.

Klassen was a fellow teacher whom Falk met at summer school, which she attended to upgrade her qualifications, in Victoria in 1956. Although Klassen is not an artist, she has been integral to several of Falk's works in a hands-on way and has shared a living space with Falk for much of the time since their first meeting—first in 1970–73, when Falk, Klassen, and Graff all shared a house; and then in the late 1980s, when after Klassen's surgery for colon cancer left her cancer-free but with nerve damage and limited mobility in her right hand and arm, she moved in with Falk permanently.

In addition to contributing to the laborious group sewing project that Falk invoked in order to finish *Beautiful British Columbia Multiple Purpose Thermal Blanket*, 1979, for the lobby of the B.C. Central Credit Union in Vancouver, Klassen also participated in various performance art pieces and was part of the team that travelled to Ottawa with Falk to install *Veneration of the White Collar Worker #1* and *Veneration of the White Collar Worker #2*, 1971–73. The two women share a home together, and Falk's memoir, *Apples, etc.*, is dedicated to Klassen.



Gathie Falk, Glenn Allison, and Elizabeth Klassen installing *Veneration of the White Collar Worker #2*, 1973, at the External Affairs Building, Ottawa, photograph by Tom Graff.

Much of this collective activity can be understood in the traditional sense of an artist hiring studio assistants who also happen to be part of their circle of friends. However, through Falk's involvement with Intermedia, she became

engaged with the more process-driven collaborative practice that is now common in Vancouver and across Canada. She participated in many Intermedia projects, including the three exhibitions the group presented at the Vancouver Art Gallery between 1968 and 1970. In response to *The Dome Show*, their final exhibition there, *Province* writer James Barber noted, "Every day there has been some community involvement and despite the criticism of the gallery by the old guard, who claim that the Gallery is going to the dogs, that its approach to art, its involvement of art with the life process, caters only to a small minority. There are figures which prove them wrong."¹² Falk then was an early participant in the unresolvable struggle between avant-garde artists and museum traditionalists that is a mainstay to the cultural sector—in many places, yes, but also very much so in the city of Vancouver.

30★★★★The VANCOUVER SUN: Sat., Aug. 29, 1970



SURROUNDED BY BLUE TAPE are some of the 71 delegates to the international convention of art critics now meeting in Vancouver. Film crew bound

the group in front of the Art Gallery while the critics' arrival was recorded by other media. The convention began Aug. 17 in Montreal.

—Brian Kent Photo

MORRIS

CALLBOARD

Andy 72

38
50

Glenn Lewis and Michael Morris, *Taping of the Critics*, 1972, lithograph on paper, 53.8 x 53.8 cm, edition 38/50, Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver. In this radical performance, Lewis and Morris—both participants in Intermedia—taped international art critics together on the steps of the Vancouver Art Gallery.

THE UNCANNY

"For me, art is totally a working out of personal images," Falk has said.¹³ Inspired by her surroundings, her creations usually originate as visions in her imagination, which she then figures out how to make in real life. Often, the results contain elements of the absurd, surreal, or uncanny.

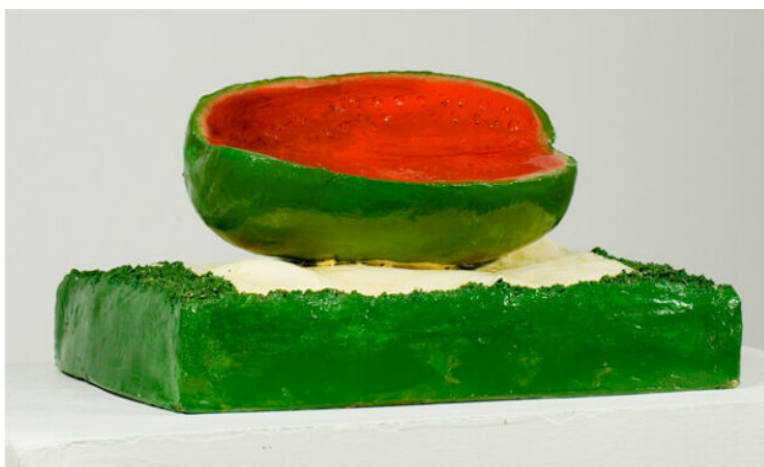
A concept described by psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud in a 1919 essay as "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar," the uncanny was an experience that greatly interested the Surrealists.¹⁴ Perhaps the most iconic Surrealist work is *Object*, 1936, by Meret Oppenheim (1913–1985): a fur-lined teacup, saucer, and spoon that creates an unsettling effect by replacing the smooth, manufactured surfaces of porcelain and silverware with the mammalian cover of gazelle hide. Falk acknowledges this as a work that inspired her.



Meret Oppenheim, *Object*, 1936, fur-covered cup, saucer, and spoon, 7.3 cm (overall height) x 10.9 cm diameter (cup), 23.7 cm diameter (saucer), 20.2 cm long (spoon), Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Falk's inclination toward the uncanny was evident in her breakthrough installation *Home Environment*, 1968, made manifest through the combination of real household objects—painted pink—and elements rendered in clay. It also emerges in Falk's performance work, such as *Red Angel*, 1972, in which lavish elements (a long white gown and feathered angel wings) are set against more homely ones (a wringer washer, record players, and slightly comical sculptural parrots). The uncanny is also at the foundation of the Theatre in B/W and Colour series, 1983–84, which is premised in the pairing of unexpected elements: rose trees and light bulbs, cabbages and ribbons, armchairs and rocks.

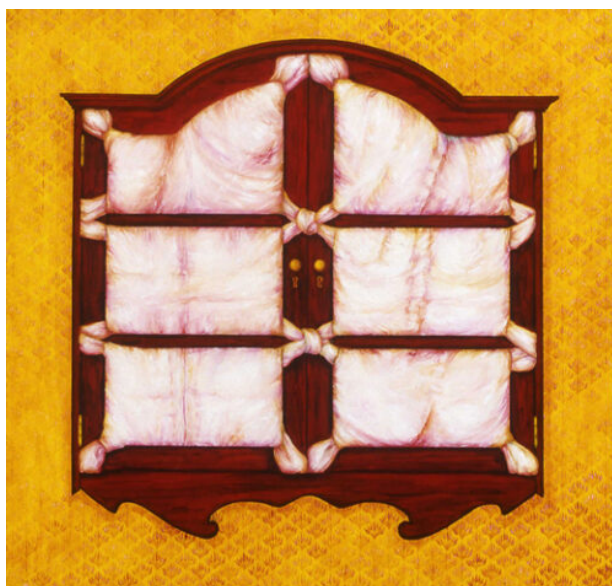
For her participation in the 1977 exhibition *Four Places: Allan Detheridge, Gathie Falk, Liz Magor, An Whitlock* at the Vancouver Art Gallery, Falk filled her estranged husband's flame-painted 1936 Ford coupe with ceramic watermelons and exhibited it alongside works from her new ceramic series, *Picnics*, 1976–77.



LEFT: Gathie Falk, *Picnic with Clock and Bird*, 1976, glazed ceramic, paint, and varnish, 21.6 x 22.9 x 27.9 cm, Collection of Equinox Gallery. RIGHT: Gathie Falk, *Picnic with Red Watermelon #2*, c.1976, ceramic and acrylic, 20.3 x 45.7 cm, AMS Permanent Collection, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.

As art critic Robin Laurence noted in a Vancouver Art Gallery publication from 2000: "Some of the objects in the picnics are the quintessence of ordinary: watermelons, lemons, green bottles, eggs, cakes. Some are oddly incongruous with the picnic theme: clocks, crowns, cabbages, high-heeled shoes, a stack of fat red, cartoon-style hearts. And some, in their unexpected juxtapositions, create a mood of gallows humour and death-in-life surreality: golf balls sprinkled like monstrous peppercorns on three dead fish; a black bird lying dead atop a red mantel clock; a grey dog like a tomb figure guarding an offertory pot of pink camellias; a teacup whose contents are engulfed in enormous flames."¹⁵

We can look to Falk's history of group shows to find artists with whom she shares concerns, such as Liz Magor (b.1948), whose juxtaposition of incongruous objects, such as the cast mitten and real cigarettes of *Humidor*, 2004, or the cast rocks and real cheese puffs of *Chee-to*, 2000, have been placed alongside Falk's works. A more direct connection can be found in the series *Gathie's Cupboard*, 1988-98, by Jane Martin (b.1943), in which Martin used a precise drawing style and inclination toward depicting flesh to create paintings, drawings, and prints in ode to Falk.



LEFT: Jane Martin, *Gathie's Cupboard*, *Polyptych* (panel 2), 1998, oil on canvas, 91 x 95 cm, Collection of the artist. RIGHT: Liz Magor, *Humidor*, 2004, polymerized gypsum, cigarettes, 28 x 15 x 10 cm, edition of 6, Kamloops Art Gallery.

RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL, AND FEMINIST BELIEFS

With the emphasis Falk places on the ritual of daily life, and the recurrence of apples, eggs, fish, and other Christian symbology in her art, it is tempting to interpret a connection between her religion and her work. However, she has steered viewers away from this method of decoding.

In "Statements," a text compiled from a series of interviews conducted by Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker with the artist in April 1985, Falk clarified her position: "I decided I would try to be a Christian, rather than try to paint illustrations of Christian teachings. If you have something serious to say, you should be clear about it; if you paint it, it's not likely that you will be very clear. Something important should be said in words: you should write it or talk it. Better yet, you should live it."¹⁶



Gathie Falk, *14 Rotten Apples*, 1970, ceramic, Plexiglas, 19.1 x 28 x 25 cm, Vancouver Art Gallery.

Falk's spiritual principles are most evidently manifested in her work through her veneration of the everyday and her commitment to collaboration and community. There are a few moments in Falk's artistic production when she incorporates overt political commentary—such as the "war game" analogy in *Some Are Egger Than I*, 1969, and the daily enumeration of warships in English Bay for her Hedge and Clouds series, 1989–90. But there always exists a connection to Falk's day-to-day experience that allows these tough subjects to sit comfortably within the rest of her oeuvre.



Installation view of *Gathie Falk*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 2002. With the *Hedges and Clouds* series, Falk brings together the natural landscape with images of the ships that she saw anchored in the harbour near her home.

There are some works that possess a subtler metaphorical hint at Falk's underlying socio-political concerns. In the early performance *Skipping Ropes*, 1968, one of the participants says to the others, "These are your orders. When you hear the gong say your name, age, sex, and racial origin; I repeat, when you hear the gong say your name, age, sex, and racial origin." Four years later, the words "name, age, sex, racial origin" would be chanted in a four-part fugue during a performance entitled *Chorus*, 1972.

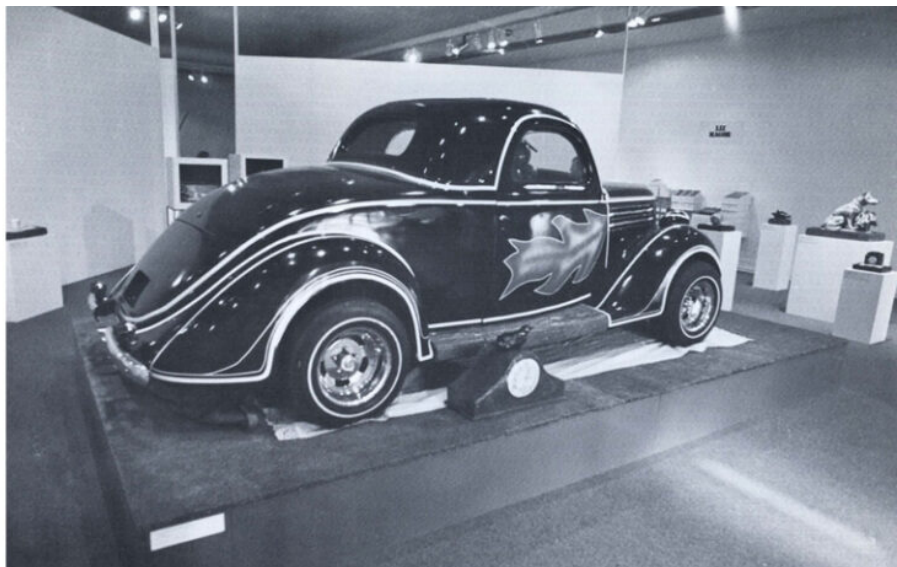
In a conversation about *Skipping Ropes* in the 1982 *Capilano Review*, writer Ann Rosenberg suggests, "There are some political implications there," and Falk responds, "Well, sure there are. In any of my pieces there can be undertones or overtones of various kinds. Political, what's done to us, the orders we get, the forms we have to fill out, the information that has nothing to do with anything, things like that." Rosenberg nudges Falk, saying, "But in a heavier sense, gas chambers..." and Falk replies, "Yes, also that."¹⁷ In *Apples, etc.*, Falk recalls her nightly childhood invocations, which included saying prayers for the Jewish people who were being persecuted in Nazi Germany and the Mennonites who were being kidnapped and murdered in Russia under Stalin.¹⁸



Gathie Falk, *Skipping Ropes*, 1968, performance at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, in 1975.

Other works possess equally strong depictions of Falk's lived experience and its expression in metaphor. In several of her sculptures from the series *Picnics*, 1976–77, ceramic flames are an inexplicable element of her alfresco "meals," emerging from teacups, a birthday cake, and a pile of maple leaves. Falk ties the recurring flames back to a memorable anecdote a friend shared with her about a birthday cake catching fire. She also associates them with the childhood memory of helping her mother to burn off dead winter grass so that new grass would grow in its place, which could be seen as a symbol of purification and regeneration.

Falk's ex-husband Dwight Swanson, who had caused her such pain in a short time, had driven a Ford coupe with flames painted on the doors; when he reoffended, the image of the flames was used as evidence against him in his trial, thus ending their marriage. Falk exhibited the coupe and the *Picnics* in *Four Places: Allan Detheridge, Gathie Falk, Liz Magor, An Whitlock* at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1977. It is difficult not to see the flames as representative of pain and destruction—the antithesis of the notions of purity and rebirth. Falk has maintained that she doesn't intentionally insert messages in her work, although sometimes they emerge regardless.



LEFT: Gathie Falk, *Picnic with Birthday Cake and Blue Sky*, 1976, glazed ceramic with acrylic and varnish in painted plywood case, 63.6 x 63.4 x 59.7 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. RIGHT: Gathie Falk, Ford coupe and *Picnics*, 1976–77, installation view, *Four Places: Allan Detheridge, Gathie Falk, Liz Magor, An Whitlock*, at the Vancouver Art Gallery, 1977, photograph by Joe Gould.



Falk seems to have held a similar opinion about where her feminist ideals belonged. In the fall of 1984, Nicholas Tuele, curator at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria at the time, interviewed Falk while he was preparing the exhibition *British Columbia Women Artists, 1885–1985*. He posed a question about whether she felt she faced particular concerns as a woman artist. Falk responded that she “didn’t have any more concerns about that than [she] did about other things in life” and acknowledged that in her art career, she had had many opportunities. She went on to note that she was “a feminist from the word go, even when there was no such word.”¹⁹ From a young age she recognized that the world treated women unfairly—it was she rather than her brothers who bore the brunt of caring for their mother. Although she did not adhere herself to the term, Falk acknowledged that of course she shared feminist concerns about women’s rights and freedoms.

Just as Falk’s imagery and ideas are not wholly free of Christian inflection, given how much her work is inspired by pictures that come to her in her mind’s eye, so too does a feminist life inevitably affect her art. The incorporation of craft processes such as ceramic or the papier mâché of the *Dresses* series, 1997–98, and *The Problem with Wedding Veils*, 2010–11, into the language of fine art; the recurring images of domestic items, like furniture, table settings, and clothing; and the inclination toward depicting nature—not an epic or sublime kind of nature, but fruit, flowers, water, and skies—can all be seen as feminist artistic strategies.



GATHIE FALK

Life & Work by Michelle Jacques



Gathie Falk, *The Problem with Wedding Veils*, 2010-11, papier mâché, rocks, 180.3 x 162.6 cm, Collection of the artist.



GATHIE FALK

Life & Work by Michelle Jacques

Whether it is consciously evoked or not, Falk's work is infused with many of the strategies used in feminist art to challenge patriarchal assumptions about what deserves to be included in the realm of high art. Falk, like artists such as Joyce Wieland (1930-1998), Betty Goodwin (1923-2008), and Irene Whittome (b.1942), chose images and processes that allowed her to explore the personal, along with other gender issues. As such, Falk and her peers broadened the definition, scope, and potential of art in this country, setting the stage for many subsequent generations of feminist and otherwise politically driven artists.



STYLE & TECHNIQUE

The evolution of Gathie Falk's singular style is directed by her remarkable facility with a variety of artistic languages—painting, ceramics, performance, and installation—and a deep belief in the importance of the ordinary. Her painterly and compositional prowess, which she developed from the early stages of her artistic practice under the influence of the emotive distortion of German Expressionism, has come to define the quality of her work. Always seeking to find the art of daily living, she embraces the imperfection, texture, and personal meaning contained in the handmade and is guided by content found in her observed world.

PAINTING LIFE

Falk considers the 1962 Still Life paintings of flowers, vases, jugs, plates of food, and other domestic elements—such as *Still Life with UBC Jug* and *The Blue Still Life*—to be the earliest works she produced independently of teachers. The paintings of this moment are notably Post-Impressionist in their subject matter, composition, and style. It is interesting that an artist so recognized for her work in ceramics, performance, and installation would be, at her core, a painter.

Falk tells a childhood story that suggests she had an eye for good drawing at a very young age. When she was three, she insisted that her mother draw a picture of a woman for her. Unimpressed with her mother's initial attempt—a series of unarticulated vertical lines—young Falk coached her through the missing elements, asking for a head, arms, feet, and chickens to complete the scene. Her exasperated mother soon gave up, declaring, "That's the last drawing I will ever make for you!" It was clear Falk would have to look beyond home to find artistic instruction.

She took drawing and painting classes on and off from childhood into her early thirties, though she was often interrupted by work and other obligations. While it was her ceramics teacher Glenn Lewis (b.1935) who helped to mobilize Falk's professional career, she has described the lasting impact of her studies with painting instructor J.A.S. MacDonald (1921–2013), who taught primarily through giving assignments and then offering individual critique, and Roy Oxlade (1929–2014), a British artist with whom she studied painting in Burnaby Central Secondary School's evening class program. She recalls that Oxlade forbade his students from using colour, insisting instead that they use a monochromatic palette to explore brushstroke, abstraction, and the successful depiction of three-dimensional form on a two-dimensional surface.

By the mid-1960s, Falk's choice of subject matter had expanded beyond still-life compositions to include architectural spaces, figures, and landscapes. It is in works from these years, such as *The Waitress*, 1965, that Falk began to explore a more intense and emotionally driven style. "Despite the times, I was more interested in German Expressionism, which was figurative, than in American Abstract Expressionism,"¹ she has said. She found that the distorted colour, scale, space, and forms of German Expressionism provided a suitable language for transferring what she saw in her mind's eye to canvas.



Gathie Falk, *Still Life with UBC Jug*, 1962, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 91 cm, Collection of the artist.



LEFT: Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Sitting Woman (Dodo)*, 1909, oil on canvas, 112 x 114.5 cm, Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich.
RIGHT: Gathie Falk, *The Waitress*, 1965, oil and soya on Masonite, 76 x 91.5 cm, Collection of the artist.

Most of Falk's work of this nascent period is in private collections or remains with the artist—this is perhaps why it is a lesser-known aspect of Falk's oeuvre, or it may be under-acknowledged because it is so much easier to situate Falk's early ceramic sculptures and performance art in the predominant practices of the time. While some of the artists Falk associated with through the Vancouver-based artist's association Intermedia—Michael Morris (b.1942) and Roy Kiyooka (1926–1994), for instance—also had painting practices, their engagements with the medium are more in keeping with the predominant inclinations of the day, leaning as they do, in spite of their Conceptual art underpinnings, towards hard-edge, geometric abstraction.

In 1977, Falk travelled to Venice, Italy, with her friends Elizabeth Klassen and Tom Graff (active from the 1970s). From there, they visited the Scrovegni Chapel—also known as the Arena Chapel—in Padua, a building that is well known as the site of a remarkable fourteenth-century fresco cycle by Florentine artist Giotto (1266/67–1337) that depicts the life of the Virgin Mary, the life and Passion of Christ, and the life of Joachim. Venice, and Giotto's frescoes, would remain in Falk's subconscious, emerging in a range of ways some years later; the immediate effect, though, was a desire to return to painting. That year, Falk stopped remounting her performance artworks.

When she returned to painting, it was with a style that differed from her Post-Impressionist and German Expressionist inclinations of the 1960s. Take *Border in Four Parts*, 1977–78, for instance, an early project from her Border series, 1977–78, in which she created sequential paintings that honed in on just the edges of the gardens at her home and those of her neighbours. There is an emphasis on observation and intimacy, and the obvious point of reference in art history would be Impressionism, due to Falk's use of the snapshot view and everyday subjects.



GATHIE FALK

Life & Work by Michelle Jacques

While her interest in working in series has long been established, in the Border paintings she introduces, with great subtlety, a shifting and unfolding of time and viewpoint that speaks to her personal and extended relationship with her garden, as well as with those of her neighbours. As art critic Robin Laurence has noted, "Falk was so pleased with the result that she repeated the photographic and painting process in *West Border in Five Parts*, and then in *Lawn in Three Parts*."²



Gathie Falk, *Lawn in Three Parts*, 1978, oil on canvas, 236.5 x 372 x 4.7 cm, Vancouver Art Gallery.

Falk's interest in still life has remained consistent across the span of her painting practice. Her work looks at the ordinary through a new lens in order to see the commonplace anew. While the earliest series executed when Falk returned to painting in the late 1970s—the Border series; *Night Skies*, 1979–80; *Pieces of Water*, 1981–82; and *Thermal Blankets*, 1979–80—can be most clearly understood within the trajectory of the landscape genre, with the *Theatre in B/W and Colour* series, 1983–84, she for all intents and purposes returns to still life, using a pared-down selection of ingredients. Some are typical to the genre, such as fish, fruits, and flora; others are part of Falk's unique personal language, such as streamers, bows, chairs, and light bulbs.



LEFT: Gathie Falk, *Pieces of Water: Royal Wedding*, 1981, oil on canvas, 198.1 x 167.6 cm, Collection of Mayberry Fine Art.



RIGHT: Gathie Falk, *Development of the Plot III: #1 The Stage is Set*, 1992, oil on canvas, 228.6 x 160 cm, Collection of the artist.

With the Theatre in B/W and Colour works, Falk employed a compositional structure that exploited her inclination toward repetition and the grid. A decade later, with *Nice Tables*, 1993–95, a series of triptychs, she continued her investigation of architectural, illusionistic, and pictorial space begun with the Development of the Plot works, 1991–92—surreal, theatrical compositions that feature repeated elements including a man in an overcoat, dogs, wooden chairs, flowers, disembodied arms, light bulbs, and a double staircase—but also dug into the potential of the still-life subject.

While each painting in the *Nice Tables* series uses the same basic format—a table on a patio between two planar posts and a wall—the items on and around the table change. The objects Falk selects are generally typical of the still-life genre—fruit, bowls, cups and saucers, vases of flowers, pitchers, trays—but they are combined and contextualized in a manner that emphasizes her penchant for the uncanny.



Gathie Falk, *Nice Table with Earthshifter and Details* (triptych), 1995, oil on canvas, 124.4 x 229.8 cm, Kelowna Art Gallery.

Since 2010, Falk has returned to still-life painting in full force; the scale of such works and the availability of the things she includes in these compositions are accessible to an artist in her tenth decade. In Falk's case, this is not a withdrawal from making work that pushes her interests forward but rather a reinforcement, consolidation, and even augmentation of a direction long established in her practice.

Falk's home and the objects in her daily life act as the source material for these new paintings. She has reconstructed intimate details from her own existence: a carefully set table with cake, coffee, and tea; a portrait of her painting work shirt hung on a simple, yellow wooden chair; laundry slowly drying on an outdoor washing line; and a perfectly presented box of delicious cinnamon buns.

Through these paintings, Falk celebrates simple pleasures, elevating ordinary objects and appreciating the joy and love she feels for the things and people in her life.



LEFT: Gathie Falk, *Cinnamon Buns I*, 2017, acrylic on canvas, 40.6 x 50.8 cm, Collection of Rob Bell and Diane Walker. RIGHT: Gathie Falk, *My Work Shirt*, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 76.2 x 61 cm, private collection.

SENSING CERAMICS

Falk uses clay to create ceramic sculptures of everyday objects. In some cases she approaches her subjects as elemental and iconic, as with the stacks of apples and oranges in her *Fruit Piles*, 1967-70, and the cases of sneakers and boots in *Single Right Men's Shoes*, 1972-73. In other instances she approaches the clay in a more painterly manner, creating more intricately conceived tableaux, such as *Art School Teaching Aids*, 1967-70—assemblages of objects inspired by different art historical moments—and *Table Settings*, 1971-74, and *Picnics*, 1976-77—Falk's imaginative conceptions of fantastical indoor and outdoor repasts.



LEFT: Gathie Falk, *Picnic with Clock and Egg Cups*, 1976, ceramic with acrylic and varnish, 27.5 x 36 x 28 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. RIGHT: Gathie Falk, *Picnic with Clock and Tulips*, 1976, glazed ceramic, paint, and varnish, 19 x 25.4 x 31.8 cm, Collection of the artist.

Falk's execution of her ceramic works operates somewhere between the beautiful and the crude. Apples, oranges, boots, brogues, and even Chuck Taylor high tops achieve a certain kind of exquisiteness through Falk's use of richly coloured glazes and ordered methods of presentation. However, she also appreciates the potential of clay to read as skin, holding in its surface pocks, wrinkles, and dimples, and it is in this emphasis on the potential of ceramic to read as unpolished that Falk finds her particular voice.

In the 1960s, when Falk embraced ceramic sculpture as a language of expression that would be central to her practice, there was significant activity happening around the genre in the Bay Area and Davis, California, where the ceramic movement was known as California Funk, and in Regina, Saskatchewan, with the Regina Clay movement. Interestingly, there was a Canadian artist who travelled between the two locales at the time, Marilyn Levine (1935–2005), who was known for making items of clothing, including shoes, out of clay. Levine's work was included in the exhibition *Ceramics '69* at the Vancouver Art Gallery at a time when Falk was avidly engaged with that institution.



Marilyn Levine, *Untitled (Cap)*, 1970, clay, 11 x 21.5 x 22.7 cm, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria.

When Falk took up her study of pottery, her teacher at the University of British Columbia, Glenn Lewis, had deep roots in functional ceramics traceable to studios in the United Kingdom—he had trained at the famed studio of Bernard Leach (1887–1979) in St. Ives and with Canadian potter John Reeve (1929–2012) in Devonshire. Lewis was committed to training his students in a manner that emphasized the conceptual foundations of pottery and eliminated the barriers between art and craft. Over just a few years, Falk made an impressive move from producing paintings rooted in early twentieth-century traditions to creating conceptually driven ceramics on par with some of the most radical work in the medium.

Falk evades direct alignment with any school or movement, including Funk, yet she shares the belief in the elevated role of clay and her ceramic work demonstrates many of the other qualities of Funk, such as the inclination toward clay's sculptural potential and emphasis on humour, engagement, autobiography, and found and everyday objects.

Falk's clay objects are built by hand, or, in the case of the elements that comprise her Fruit Piles, are hand-thrown on the wheel and then closed, rolled, and formed to the desired shape. When she produced the components of *196 Apples*, 1969–70, many of the apples turned orange, grey, or almost black

instead of red in the firing process. Falk accepted this result and incorporated the discoloured apples into the pyramid. She felt that this imbued a greater strength to the piece, elevating it above the merely pretty and providing a better approximation of the realities of the world, where the beautiful and the ugly so often exist side by side.



Gathie Falk, *26 Blood Oranges*, 1970, glazed ceramic, 40.6 x 25.4 x 20.3 cm, private collection.

That said, there is lusciousness to the surface treatment of her fruit and men's shoes that is irresistible. In other ceramic series like *Art School Teaching Aids*, *Table Settings*, and *Picnics*, for instance, Falk used acrylic paint rather than glazes to colour the work so that she could maintain control over the surface effects. The outcomes of her decisions are ceramics that move beyond our material expectations of the language of pottery.

COMPOSING PERFORMANCE ART

The period from 1968 to 1972, when Falk created her performance artworks, was early enough in her emergence as a visual artist that the memory of music—her first creative love—was still strong. She connected the influence of the American performance artists who visited Vancouver from New York's Judson Dance Theater in the late 1960s—Deborah Hay (b.1941), Yvonne Rainer (b.1934), and Steve Paxton (b.1939), all of whom came from backgrounds in dance and choreography—to her early training in music.

Falk has noted that "To make a performance piece is to... choreograph, or compose, a work of art that has a beginning, an end and a middle, with, preferably, but not necessarily, a climax or several climaxes. Sometimes... the choreography is worked out like a fugue in music, with one event beginning

close upon the heels of another and a third event intertwining with the first two. The analogy of music is apt. One of my works, *Red Angel*, is like a rondo with theme A followed by theme B, followed by theme A.”³

Falk’s commitment to performance art was brief within the span of her lengthy career, and her activity in this realm might seem incongruous with the paintings and objects for which she is so well known.

However, for her, it was another useful means to represent the images she saw in her imagination, and she is to be celebrated for creating some of the earliest works of performance art in Canada.

While performance art tends to be based on the premise that the work has to be experienced to be known, there is some quite remarkable documentation of Falk’s performances. Her friend and long-time collaborator Tom Graff produced a video of the ones that were mounted as part of Falk’s 1985 retrospective at the Vancouver Art Gallery, and his essay from that exhibition’s catalogue, “Notes, Anecdotes, and Thoughts on Gathie Falk’s Performance Art Work,” was reprinted in *Caught in the Act: An Anthology of Performance Art by Canadian Women* (2004).



Gathie Falk, *Red Angel*, 1972 (performance documentation at Western Front, Vancouver, 1977), 35 mm slide, Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.



Gathie Falk, *Red Angel*, 1972, performance props and video, installation view, Equinox Gallery, Vancouver, in 2015, photograph by SITE Photography.

The musical foundation of certain performances, such as the aforementioned *Red Angel*, is one recurring theme. Some of the works incorporate musical elements in a very direct way, at times in the form of taped recordings, such as the canary whistling “Danny Boy” in *A Bird Is Known by His Feathers Alone*, 1968, or the adagio by Georg Philipp Telemann and the finale from *Götterdämmerung*—the final piece in Richard Wagner’s Ring Cycle—that bookend *Cake Walk Rococo*, 1971. There are other works in which Falk included live musical recital—she herself sings Johnny Cash’s “Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes” in the performance film *Drink to Me Only*, 1971, and in *Ballet for Bass-Baritone*, 1971, a collaboration with Graff, Graff sings “Allegro alla breve” from Igor Stravinsky’s *Pulcinella*.

Even when Falk’s performances do not include music per se, they often include musically inspired structures. Many of her pieces are documented in scores that were included in a 1982 *Capilano Review* feature on her work, an invaluable resource that also includes excerpts from critical reviews and commentary from the artist. While Falk typically referred to her creations as Theatre Art Works, that they are documented as scores rather than scripts is indicative of their origins in the principles of the Judson Dance Theater artists. She had also, of course, been deeply committed to the strong Mennonite choral tradition, and the chorus structure recurs in her performances.

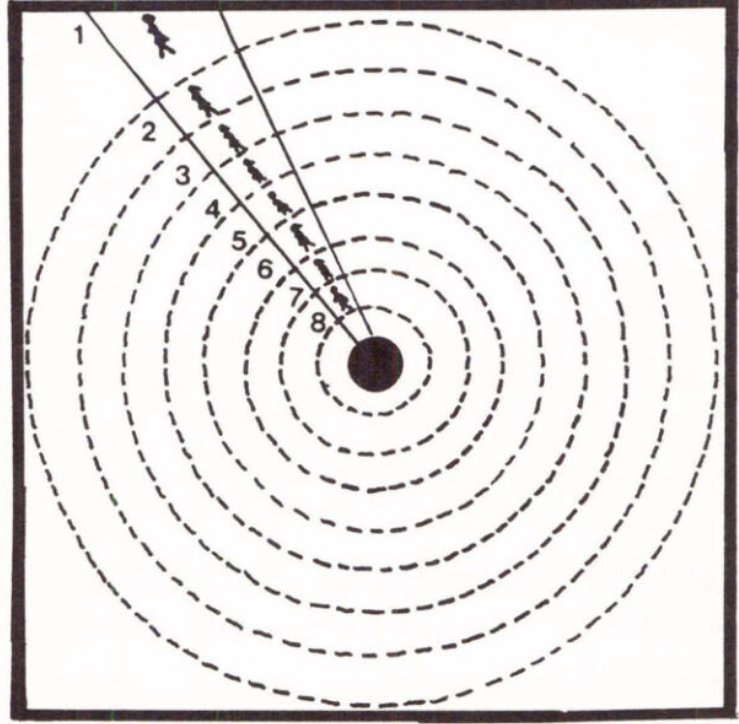
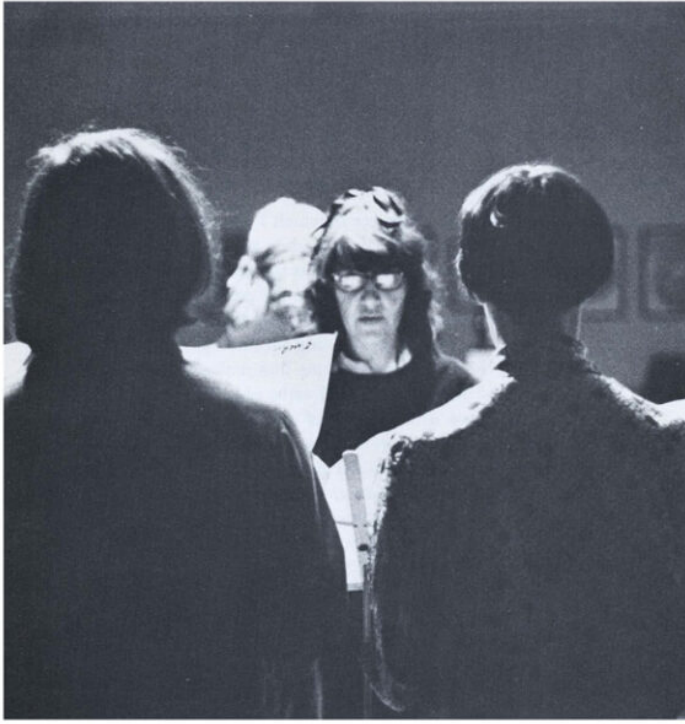


LEFT: Gathie Falk, *Ballet for Bass-Baritone* (Tom Graff singing), 1971, performance at the Vancouver Art Gallery, photograph by Judi Osburn. RIGHT: Gathie Falk, *Chorus*, 1972, performance at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, in 1975.

In *Girl Walking Around Square Room in a Gallery*, 1969, the title aptly describes the action of the film version of the work: it is presented with the projector mounted on a turntable at the centre of the room so that the walking girl is projected onto all of the walls. In the live version of the work, a chorus of live performers accompany the projected girl, walking with her as she moves.

In the interview conducted with Falk for the *Capilano Review* feature, co-author Aaron Steele asked, "If [you say that] theatre art is time-space collage sculpture, what part does the audience play?" Falk responded, "It plays the same role as an audience for sculpture or painting, except they can see it only once."⁴ A work such as *Girl Walking Around Square Room in a Gallery* suggests that at times Falk enjoyed taking advantage of the opportunity to force a more active response from her viewers.

Of course, there was the work actually entitled *Chorus*, 1972, a performance that includes a group of twelve people led through a fugue-like chant—"name, age, sex, racial origin"—by a conductor, which they sing in four parts for four voices. It is worth noting here that Mennonite hymns are traditionally performed in four-part harmony.



LEFT: Gathie Falk, *Chorus*, 1972, performance at the Vancouver Art Gallery, photograph by Nomi Kaplan. RIGHT: Gathie Falk, *Girl Walking Around Square Room in a Gallery* (diagram of choreography), 1969, film and performance at the Vancouver Art Gallery.

While there is no music included in the work *Drill*, 1970, which was first presented at the University of British Columbia's Fine Arts Gallery (now the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery), the concluding action involves the many performers lining up in two rows "as though they were a chorus," according to Ann Rosenberg. "The leader of the chorus shines their shoes while the chorus members at various times and in various ways say what they had for dinner."⁵

EVOKING ENVIRONMENTS

The imagery from Falk's performances would bleed into her other work. Additionally, while she produced no more performance art after 1972, and stopped performing altogether by 1977, she continued to explore composing images in space through the creation of installations—or environments—that extended her interest in making art that was experiential as well as visual.



LEFT: Gathie Falk, *Home Environment*, 1968, ceramic, acrylic paint, polyester resin, metal, 244 x 305 x 305 cm, Vancouver Art Gallery, installed at the National Gallery of Canada, 2002. RIGHT: Gathie Falk, *Home Environment* (detail), 1968, ceramic, acrylic paint, polyester resin, metal, 244 x 305 x 305 cm, Vancouver Art Gallery, installed at the National Gallery of Canada, 2002.

This thread in her oeuvre can be traced back to the pivotal piece *Home Environment*, 1968. While that early project took as its foundation a familiar locale—a domestic space—in installation work produced after her engagement with performance, there emerged an approach that was akin to much of the performance work, which Falk has said could be described as “time-space collage sculpture.”⁶

This assertion of a compound artistic genre is just as applicable to works such as *150 Cabbages*, 1978, which combined ceramic cabbages—meticulously constructed from individual ceramic leaves—suspended from kitchen twine, a bed of sand covering the entire gallery floor, and a mirrored dresser with drawers full of facial tissues that somehow evoke ideas of human presence and the passage of time. *150 Cabbages* is an installation that has something else in common with performance—only those who saw its initial presentation at Artcore, Vancouver, got to experience the full work, as when it was dismantled, the cabbages were sold individually. It has only been recreated and remounted in very reduced form.



Gathie Falk, *150 Cabbages*, 1978, mixed media, installed at Artcore, Vancouver, 1978, photograph by Jim Gorman.

Prior to *150 Cabbages*, Falk had spent an extended period of time creating *Herd I* and *Herd II*, 1974–75, two distinct installations each composed of twenty-four painted plywood horses suspended above the ground. The manner in which images would occupy Falk’s mind for extended periods before inspiring a particular work is well documented with this piece. A coin-operated mechanical horse had been included in a work by Graff called *Canada Family Album*, 1973. Falk envisioned a herd of them at the time of Graff’s performance, and she decided to create them as plywood cut-outs, suspended like the clouds in *Low Clouds*, 1972.

Falk worked with an assistant, Jeremy Wilkins, who sealed and filled the plywood forms and applied the white ground, but Falk cut out every single horse herself and painted each one on both sides to be unique and individual within the crowd. Each herd was to be hung in its own separate room, suspended on invisible wire about 30 centimetres from the ground with enough room for viewers to walk around them. As Ann Rosenberg wrote, Falk “probably could not have anticipated the electrifying effect the *white* herd, especially, produces in the viewer. It is like encountering an otherworldly stampede.... Slight air currents cause some herd members to tremble at all times, increasing the nervous, energized quality of an apparition of 24 animals caught, momentarily, in the act of flying from the room.”⁷



Gathie Falk, *Herd I*, 1974-75, wood, 71.9 x 129.5 x 2.0 cm, Vancouver Art Gallery.

It has been some time since Falk, who is now in her nineties, could meet the physical demands of the production of works such as *Herd I* and *Herd II*, 1974-75, or the public artworks *Veneration of the White Collar Worker #1* and *Veneration of the White Collar Worker #2*, 1971-73, the two wall-spanning ceramic murals created for the Department of External Affairs building in Ottawa, and *Beautiful British Columbia Multiple Purpose Thermal Blanket*, 1979, the enormous, quilt-like sculpted painting commissioned by the B.C. Central Credit Union in Vancouver. Although these latter works are not encompassing in their three-dimensionality, as they are wall mounted, they nevertheless possess a monumentality and difficulty of production that is similar to the installation work.

It is no longer feasible for Falk to manage large and multiple components of an installation. However, it is interesting to examine how in recent years, in order to create her gallery shows—such as *Heavenly Bodies*, 2005; *Dreaming of Flying*, 2007; and *The Things in My Head*, 2015, all at Equinox Gallery in Vancouver—she has taken to pulling together works from across time and projects to be put together in new configurations, creating evocative environments within the gallery space.



GATHIE FALK

Life & Work by Michelle Jacques



Installation view of *Gathie Falk*, 2002, at the National Gallery of Canada.



WHERE TO SEE

The works of Gathie Falk are held in public and private collections in Canada and internationally. Although the following institutions hold the works listed below, they may not always be on view.

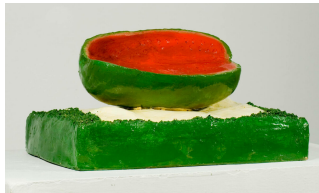


GATHIE FALK

Life & Work by Michelle Jacques

AMS PERMANENT COLLECTION, UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

6133 University Boulevard
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
604-822-2901
ams.ubc.ca



Gathie Falk, *Picnic with Red Watermelon #2*, c.1976

Ceramic and acrylic
20.3 x 45.7 cm

ART GALLERY OF GREATER VICTORIA

1040 Moss Street
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada
250-384-4171
aggv.ca



Gathie Falk, *Pieces of Water #10-El Salvador*, 1982

Oil on canvas
198.2 x 167.4 cm



Gathie Falk, *Chair with Plastic Christmas Tree*, 1985

Oil on canvas
106.5 x 76.6 cm



GATHIE FALK

Life & Work by Michelle Jacques

ART GALLERY OF GUELPH

358 Gordon Street
Guelph, Ontario, Canada
519-837-0010
artgalleryofguelph.ca



Gathie Falk, *Theatre in Black and White and Colour: Light Bulbs with Grass*, 1984

Oil on canvas
199.7 x 169.5 cm

ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO

317 Dundas Street West
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
416-979-6648
ago.ca



Gathie Falk, *Red Angel* (detail), performance, 1972; video, 1977

Video; performance props: red buffet, five tables, five record players, five parrots, seven apples, pair of wings, white dress, grey dress, Eaton's Viking wringer washing machine
Variable dimensions



GATHIE FALK

Life & Work by Michelle Jacques

CITY OF VANCOUVER

999 Canada Place Way
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

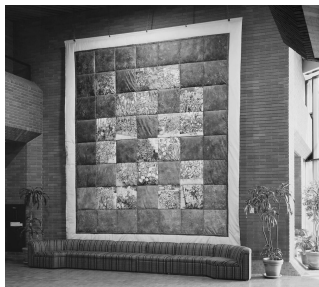


Gathie Falk, *Salute to the Lions of Vancouver*, 1990

Stainless Steel
6.7 m

KAMLOOPS ART GALLERY

101-465 Victoria Street
Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada
250-377-2400
kag.bc.ca



Gathie Falk, *Beautiful British Columbia Multiple Purpose Thermal Blanket*, 1979

Oil on canvas, 56 squares
mounted over fibreglass
insulation on canvas backing
490 x 550 cm



GATHIE FALK

Life & Work by Michelle Jacques

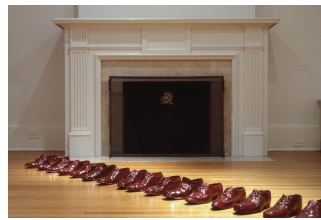
NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA

380 Sussex Drive
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
613-990-1985
gallery.ca



Gathie Falk, *Eight Red Boots*, 1973

Red-glazed ceramic in painted plywood and glass cabinet
101.2 x 105.7 x 15.5 cm (cabinet); boots: 17 x 28 x 10 cm each (approx.)



Gathie Falk, *Eighteen Pairs of Red Shoes with Roses*, 1973

Red-glazed ceramic with decals
16.5 x 584.2 x 30.5 cm



Gathie Falk, *Picnic with Birthday Cake and Blue Sky*, 1976

Glazed ceramic with acrylic and varnish in painted plywood case
63.6 x 63.4 x 59.7 cm



Gathie Falk, *Picnic with Fish and Ribbon*, 1977

Glazed ceramic with acrylic and varnish
20 x 33.7 x 27.8 cm



Gathie Falk, *Border in Four Parts*, 1977-78

Oil on canvas
213.2 x 197.8 cm each



Gathie Falk, *Theatre in B/W and Colour—Bushes with Fish in Colour*, 1984

Oil on canvas
198.2 x 167.4 cm



Gathie Falk, *Theatre in B/W and Colour—Bushes with Fish in B/W*, 1984

Oil on canvas
198.2 x 167.4 cm



Gathie Falk, *Dress with Candles*, 1997

Papier mâché with acrylic and varnish
91.5 x 61 x 61 cm (approx.)



Gathie Falk, *Dreaming of Flying, Canoe*, 2007

Papier mâché and acrylic paint
60 x 456 x 68 cm



GATHIE FALK

Life & Work by Michelle Jacques

OAKVILLE GALLERIES

1306 Lakeshore Road East
Oakville, Ontario, Canada
905-844-4402
oakvillegalleries.com



Gathie Falk, *Standard Shoes, The Column (detail)*, 1998-99

Papier-mâché, acrylic paint,
varnish, and cardboard boxes
139.7 x 21 x 33.7 cm (overall)

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA MUSEUMS

3-20 Rutherford South
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
780-492-5834
www.ualberta.ca/museums/index.html



Gathie Falk, *Beautiful B.C. Thermal Blanket-Gloria*, 1980

Oil on canvas, fiberfill
240 x 240 cm



GATHIE FALK

Life & Work by Michelle Jacques

UNIVERSITY OF LETHBRIDGE ART GALLERY

4401 University Drive
Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada
403-329-2666
artgallery.uleth.ca

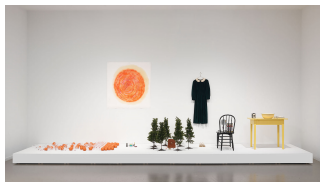


Gathie Falk, *Antony*, 2001

Papier mâché, paint
68.6 x 73.7 x 19.1 cm

VANCOUVER ART GALLERY

750 Hornby Street
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
604-662-4700
vanartgallery.bc.ca



Gathie Falk, *A Bird Is Known by His Feathers Alone (performance props)*, 1968

Dimensions variable



Gathie Falk, *Home Environment*, 1968

Ceramic, paint, flock, varnish, polyester resin, silkscreen print, paper, Plexiglas and steel
244 x 305 x 305 cm



Gathie Falk, *196 Apples*, 1969-70

Ceramic and Plexiglas stand
40.6 x 88.3 x 66.7 cm



Gathie Falk, *Art School Teaching Aids: Hard-Edge Still Life*, 1970

Clay, acrylic paint, polyester resin
21 x 50.5 x 36 cm



GATHIE FALK

Life & Work by Michelle Jacques



Gathie Falk, *14 Rotten Apples*, 1970

Ceramic, Plexiglas
19.1 x 28 x 25 cm



Gathie Falk, *Single Right Men's Shoes: Blue Running Shoes*, c.1973

Earthenware, glaze, wood, glass, paint
101.5 x 105.4 x 16.1 cm



Gathie Falk, *Herd I*, 1974-75

Wood
71.9 x 129.5 x 2.0 cm



Gathie Falk, *Lawn in Three Parts*, 1978

Oil on canvas
236.5 x 372 x 4.7 cm



Gathie Falk, *Dress with Insect Box*, 1998

Papier mâché, acrylic paint, varnish
90 x 60 x 55 cm



NOTES

BIOGRAPHY

1. Gathie Falk with Robin Laurence, *Apples, etc.: An Artist's Memoir* (Vancouver: Figure 1 Publishing Inc., 2018), 1-3.
2. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 4.
3. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 6.
4. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 14.
5. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 9.
6. Robin Laurence, "To Be a Pilgrim," in *Gathie Falk* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., 2000), 24.
7. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 10.
8. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 14.
9. Gathie Falk, "Statements," in *Gathie Falk Retrospective* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1985), 13.
10. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 15.
11. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 15.
12. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 16.
13. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 16.
14. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 16.
15. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 15.
16. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 27.
17. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 17.
18. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 18.
19. Laurence, "To Be a Pilgrim," 30-31.
20. David Watmough, "The Canvas Shack: Falk Art Strong in Human Focus," *Vancouver Sun*, September 9, 1965, 43.
21. Laurence, "To Be a Pilgrim," 19.
22. Laurence, "To Be a Pilgrim," 34.



23. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 34.

24. Joan Lowndes, "But Whose Face Was the Egg On?" *Vancouver Sun*, February 9, 1972, 43.

25. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 70.

26. Clive Robertson, "Performance Art in Canada 1970-80: Tracing Some Origins of Need," in *Performance au/in Canada, 1970-1990*, ed. Alain-Martin Richard and Clive Richardson (Quebec and Toronto: Les Éditions Intervention and Coach House Books, 1991), 12.

27. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 115.

28. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 124.

29. Falk, "Statements," 17.

30. Ann Rosenberg, "Vancouver: The Four Voices of Four Places," *Artmagazine* (May/June 1977): 21-22.

31. Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker, "Gathie Falk," in *Gathie Falk Retrospective* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1985), 13.

32. Falk, "Statements," 18.

33. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 145.

34. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 165.

35. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 159.

36. Gareth Sirotnik, "Gathie Falk: Things That Go Bump in the Day," *Vanguard* (February 1978): 8.

KEY WORKS: HOME ENVIRONMENT

1. Ann Rosenberg, "About Art," *Vancouver Sun*, August 23, 1968, 22A.

2. Gathie Falk with Robin Laurence, *Apples, etc.: An Artist's Memoir* (Vancouver: Figure 1 Publishing Inc., 2018), 24.

3. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 20.

KEY WORKS: SOME ARE EGGER THAN I

1. Gathie Falk with Robin Laurence, *Apples, etc.: An Artist's Memoir* (Vancouver: Figure 1 Publishing Inc., 2018), 70.

2. Robin Laurence, "To Be a Pilgrim," in *Gathie Falk* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., 2000), 109.

3. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 18.



KEY WORKS: 196 APPLES

1. Gathie Falk with Robin Laurence, *Apples, etc.: An Artist's Memoir* (Vancouver: Figure 1 Publishing Inc., 2018), 83.
2. Robin Laurence, "Painter Eyes the Everyday Apple," *Georgia Strait*, April 17-24, 1997, 51.

KEY WORKS: RED ANGEL

1. Gathie Falk, "Statements," in *Gathie Falk Retrospective* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1985), 16.
2. Joan Lowndes, "But Whose Face Was the Egg On?" *Vancouver Sun*, February 9, 1972, 43.
3. Lowndes, "But Whose Face Was the Egg On?" 43.

KEY WORKS: EIGHT RED BOOTS

1. Gathie Falk with Robin Laurence, *Apples, etc.: An Artist's Memoir* (Vancouver: Figure 1 Publishing Inc., 2018), 99.

KEY WORKS: BEAUTIFUL BRITISH COLUMBIA MULTIPLE PURPOSE THERMAL BLANKET

1. Ann Rosenberg, "Gathie Falk Works," *Capilano Review* 1 and 2, no. 24 and 25 (1982): 50.

KEY WORKS: NIGHT SKY #16

1. Robin Laurence, "To Be a Pilgrim," in *Gathie Falk* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., 2000), 76.
2. Gathie Falk, "Statements," in *Gathie Falk Retrospective* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1985), 19.
3. Laurence, "To Be a Pilgrim," 76.
4. Nicholas Tuele interview with Gathie Falk, Fall 1984, typewritten transcript, artist file, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1.

KEY WORKS: THEATRE IN B/W AND COLOUR

1. Gathie Falk with Robin Laurence, *Apples, etc.: An Artist's Memoir* (Vancouver: Figure 1 Publishing Inc., 2018), 141.
2. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 3.

KEY WORKS: MY DOG'S BONES

1. Jane Lind, *Gathie Falk* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Limited, 1989), 17-19.

KEY WORKS: SOFT COUCH WITH SUIT

1. Gathie Falk, "Soft Chairs" (New York: 49th Parallel Centre for Contemporary Canadian Art, 1987), par. 7. Artist's statement in brochure for the 1987 exhibition *Gathie Falk*.
2. Falk, "Soft Chairs," par. 5.



3. Robin Laurence, "To Be a Pilgrim," in *Gathie Falk* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., 2000), 100.

KEY WORKS: DRESS WITH INSECT BOX

1. Gathie Falk, quoted in Bruce Grenville, "Dress with Insects," in *Gathie Falk* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., 2000), 125.

2. Grenville, "Dress with Insects," 121.

3. Grenville, "Dress with Insects," 121.

4. Falk, quoted in Grenville, "Dress with Insects," 122.

KEY WORKS: DREAMING OF FLYING, CANOE

1. Gathie Falk with Robin Laurence, *Apples, etc.: An Artist's Memoir* (Vancouver: Figure 1 Publishing Inc., 2018), 196.

2. Gathie Falk, artist's statement for *Dreaming of Flying*, Equinox Gallery, Vancouver, 2007.

3. Falk, artist's statement for *Dreaming of Flying*.

SIGNIFICANCE & CRITICAL ISSUES

1. *A Window Looking In*, episode 1, "Gathie Falk," directed and written by Eric Hogan and Tara Hungerford, aired 2010, on Knowledge Network, <https://www.knowledge.ca/program/window-looking/short/e1/gathie-falk>, 1:01-1:17.

2. Joan Lowndes, quoted in Ann Rosenberg, "Gathie Falk Works," *Capilano Review* 1 and 2, no. 24 and 25 (1982): 36.

3. Gathie Falk, "Statements," in *Gathie Falk Retrospective* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1985), 19.

4. Falk, "Statements," 19.

5. Gathie Falk with Robin Laurence, *Apples, etc.: An Artist's Memoir* (Vancouver: Figure 1 Publishing Inc., 2018), 20.

6. Tom Graff, "Notes, Anecdotes and Thoughts on Gathie Falk's Performance Art Work," in *Gathie Falk Retrospective* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1985), 63-67.

7. Robin Laurence, "To Be a Pilgrim," in *Gathie Falk* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., 2000), 30-31.

8. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 18.

9. Nicholas Tuele, interview with Gathie Falk, Fall 1984, typewritten transcript, artist file, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1.



10. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 169.
11. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 54.
12. James Barber, "After the Intermedia Party: The Art Gallery Will Never Be the Same," *Province* (Vancouver), June 1, 1970, 11. Barber reported that the exhibition attracted 4,600 people during its first week.
13. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 20.
14. Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, 217-256, 219.
15. Laurence, "To Be a Pilgrim," 65, 69.
16. Falk, "Statements," 17.
17. Rosenberg, "Gathie Falk Works," 77.
18. Falk with Laurence, *Apples, etc.*, 202.
19. Tuele, interview with Gathie Falk, 6.

STYLE & TECHNIQUE

1. Gathie Falk with Robin Laurence, *Apples, etc.: An Artist's Memoir* (Vancouver: Figure 1 Publishing Inc., 2018), 16.
2. Robin Laurence, "To Be a Pilgrim," in *Gathie Falk* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., 2000), 71.
3. Gunda Lambton, "Gathie Falk: A Giver of Gifts," in *Stealing the Show: Seven Women Artists in Canadian Public Art* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 70.
4. Ann Rosenberg, "Gathie Falk Works," *Capilano Review* 1 and 2, no. 24 and 25 (1982): 138.
5. Rosenberg, "Gathie Falk Works," 110.
6. Rosenberg, "Gathie Falk Works," 138.
7. Rosenberg, "Gathie Falk Works," 33.



GLOSSARY

abstract art

Also called nonfigurative or nonrepresentational art, abstract art uses form, colour, line, and gestural marks in compositions that do not attempt to represent images of real things. It may interpret reality in an altered form, or depart from it entirely.

Abstract Expressionism

A style that flourished in New York in the 1940s and 1950s, Abstract Expressionism is defined by its combination of formal abstraction and self-conscious expression. The term describes a wide variety of work; among the most famous Abstract Expressionists are Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, and Willem de Kooning.

Art Gallery of Greater Victoria

Opened in 1951, the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria (AGGV) on Vancouver Island is the largest public art collection in British Columbia. With strengths in Canadian and Indigenous works, the gallery also holds a significant collection of Asian art. Its permanent displays include the work of Emily Carr, a celebrated artist from Victoria, and its gardens feature an authentic Japanese Shinto shrine.

artist-run gallery/centre

A gallery or other art space developed and run by artists. In Canada these include YYZ and Art Metropole in Toronto, Forest City Gallery in London, Western Front in Vancouver, and formerly Véhicule Art Inc., Montreal, The Region Gallery, London, and Garret Gallery, Toronto. Not-for-profit organizations, these centres exist outside the commercial and institutional gallery system. They aim to support the production and exhibition of new artworks, dialogue between artists, and avant-garde practices and emerging artists.

assemblage

An assemblage, collage, or bricolage is a three-dimensional artwork created from found objects. The term “assemblage” was first used in the 1950s by the French artist Jean Dubuffet to describe his butterfly-wing collages; it was popularized in the United States in reference to the work of the American artists Robert Rauschenberg and Jim Dine.

avant-garde

From the French for “vanguard” or “advance guard,” avant-garde entered discussions about art in the early nineteenth-century work of the socialist thinker Henri de Saint-Simon, who believed that artists had a role to play in building a new society. The meaning of “avant-garde” has shifted over the years, referring to artists in relation to their times rather than to a particular group of artists working at a specific time in history. It connotes radicalism and rejection of a status quo and is often associated with work that is provocative and confrontational.



Canada Council for the Arts

A Crown corporation created in 1957 by the parliamentary Canada Council for the Arts Act. The Canada Council exists to encourage art production and promote the study and enjoyment of art in Canada. It provides support to artists and arts organizations from across all artistic disciplines, including visual art, dance, music, and literature.

Canadian Cultural Centre, Paris

Founded in 1970 by Canada's Department of External Affairs, the Canadian Cultural Centre in Paris hosts lectures, film screenings, exhibitions, concerts, and special events. The centre's aim is to strengthen ties between France and Canada by sharing diverse and innovative Canadian culture through partnerships and collaborations.

Cézanne, Paul (French, 1839–1906)

A painter of arguably unparalleled influence on the development of modern art, associated with the Post-Impressionist school and known for his technical experiments with colour and form and his interest in multiple-point perspective. In his maturity Cézanne had several preferred subjects, including his wife, still life, and Provençal landscapes.

Chardin, Jean-Baptiste Siméon (French, 1699–1779)

A French painter renowned for his genre scenes and still lifes. His lowly subject matter was at odds with the Rococo style that prevailed in the Paris of his day, yet he was a star of the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture and his works were in high demand around Europe. Chardin never left Paris; his knowledge of art derived solely from what he was able to see in his city.

Christmas, Douglas (b.1944)

Los Angeles-based art dealer Douglas Christmas has worked with many esteemed artists, including Gathie Falk. At seventeen years old, Christmas opened Douglas Gallery in Vancouver, which became a centre where Vancouver artists could show their work alongside famous New York artists, such as Donald Judd and Robert Rauschenberg. In 1967 Christmas opened a Los Angeles location, renamed as Ace Gallery.

Conceptual art

Traced to the work of Marcel Duchamp but not codified until the 1960s, "Conceptual art" is a general term for art that emphasizes ideas over form. The finished product may even be physically transient, as with land art or performance art.

de Tonnancour, Jacques (Canadian, 1917–2005)

A painter, photographer, and entomologist inspired by nature and vibrant Brazilian landscapes. De Tonnancour's landscape and figure paintings were influenced by the Group of Seven, Goodridge Roberts, and Pablo Picasso. As a member of the short-lived Prisme d'yeux group (1948-1949), he opposed the Automatistes. In 1982, he stopped painting and began to study insects. De Tonnancour was named to the Order of Canada in 1979 and to the National Order of Quebec in 1993.



Doray, Audrey Capal (Canadian, b. 1931)

A multimedia artist working in electronics, film, painting, and printmaking, Montreal-born Capal Doray arrived in Vancouver in the late 1950s. Through her involvement in the multidisciplinary art space New Design Gallery and her position as an instructor at the Vancouver School of Art, she became part of the transformation of the city's art scene in the postwar period. She is married to fellow artist Victor Doray.

Dürer, Albrecht (German, 1471–1528)

A German printmaker, painter, and theorist active during the Renaissance. Dürer is best known for his intricate woodblock prints, which transformed the medium into a respected art form like sculpture and painting. One of the most prominent figures of the Northern Renaissance, Dürer travelled to Italy and played a significant role in the exchange of artistic knowledge between northern and southern Europe. He is recognized for his religious prints and paintings, accomplished portraits and self-portraits, and treatises on perspective and human proportions.

Equinox Gallery

Founded in 1972 by Elizabeth Nichol, Equinox Gallery, located in East Vancouver, presents contemporary art and photography. Featuring ten exhibitions a year, the gallery represents a mix of senior and emerging artists and artists' estates. Equinox Gallery is committed to promoting the work of Canadian artists to help them earn international recognition.

Expressionism

An intense, emotional style of art that values the representation of the artist's subjective inner feelings and ideas. German Expressionism started in the early twentieth century in Germany and Austria. In painting, Expressionism is associated with an intense, jarring use of colour and brush strokes that are not naturalistic.

feminism

Encompassing a wide range of historical and contemporary philosophical and political perspectives, feminism can be broadly understood as the belief that men and women should be socially, politically, and economically equal. In the West, a small number of women writers first began to question women's inferior social status, particularly in matters of marriage and education, in the Renaissance. By the nineteenth century, prominent feminists in Britain, the United States, and Canada were championing the idea of women's suffrage. The twentieth century has seen an expansion of feminist thinking to consider how race, class, work, sexuality, and a broader understanding of gender impact how different women experience inequality and shape the social justice goals of feminist movements around the world.



figurative

A descriptive term for an artwork that depicts or references recognizable objects or beings, including humans. Figurative art is often representational and takes source material from the real world, although its subjects may be overlaid with metaphors and allegory. The term arose in popular usage around the 1950s to describe artwork in contrast with the Abstract Expressionist movement as well as nonfigurative and non-objective art.

found object

A found object can be any object—natural or fabricated, whole or fragmentary—taken up by an artist and integrated into an artwork. Artists working with found objects may focus on particular types or styles, personal or cultural meaning, or formal elements in choosing what to include in their work. An example is Picasso's *Bull's Head*, 1942, made of a bicycle seat and handlebars.

Fresco

An ancient painting technique that is often used to create wall murals. After a section of a wall is covered in wet plaster, paint is applied. As it dries, the paint absorbs into the plaster and becomes a permanent part of the wall. This technique was notably used in the Italian Renaissance by masters such as Giotto and Michelangelo.

Funk Art

An American art movement originating in California in the 1960s in response to the high-mindedness of Abstract Expressionism. Funk art's figurative works may appear crude and irreverent. The movement combined unusual techniques and materials—significantly ceramics—often incorporating found objects from consumer culture into its cartoonish aesthetic. The name "Funk" was derived from "Funky," a jazz music term which indicates the unconventional.

Gauguin, Paul (French, 1848–1903)

A member—with Vincent van Gogh, Georges Seurat, and Paul Cézanne—of the group of painters now considered the Post-Impressionists, Gauguin is known for his use of colour and symbolism and for his daring compositions. The paintings he made in Tahiti, representing an idealized "primitive" culture, are among his most famous.

General Idea (Canadian, active 1969–1994)

A prolific, provocative, and socially critical artist collective comprising of AA Bronson (Michael Tims, b.1946), Felix Partz (Ronald Gabe, 1945–1994), and Jorge Zontal (Slobodan Saia-Levy, 1944–1994). General Idea formed in Toronto out of the countercultural scenes of the experimental free school Rochdale College and Theatre Passe Muraille. Their conceptual projects included those associated with Miss General Idea and series dealing with the AIDS crisis. The collective founded *FILE* in 1972 and the artist-run centre Art Metropole in 1973. (See *General Idea: Life & Work* by Sarah E.K. Smith.)



German Expressionism

A modernist movement in painting, sculpture, theatre, literature, and cinema. Expressionism's birth is often traced to 1905, when Die Brücke (The Bridge), a group of Dresden painters, broke with the practices and institutions of the academy and bourgeois culture, declaring themselves a "bridge" to the future. Another bold new group, Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider), formed in 1911, focused more on the spiritual in art. Significant Expressionist painters include Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Franz Marc, and Egon Schiele.

Giotto (Italian, 1266/67–1337)

An acknowledged master of the early Italian Renaissance who was equally celebrated in his own day: critics including Dante praised the naturalism of his pictures and considered him to have revived painting after a centuries-long slump. Among his most spectacular achievements is the fresco cycle decorating the walls of the Arena Chapel, Padua.

Goodwin, Betty (Canadian, 1923–2008)

A Montreal-based artist whose work expressed a concern for the delicate and ephemeral qualities of life. Goodwin used sculpture, printmaking, painting, and drawing to bring attention to the natural characteristics of found objects. Themes of absence and loss define her work, which has earned her several national awards including the Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts and the Order of Canada (2003).

Graff, Tom (Canadian, active from the 1970s)

A curator, writer, voice coach, and artist known for his performance art. His company, Tom Graff Exhibitions, works with galleries across Canada, and focuses on the promotion and development of Canadian art. In the 1970s, Graff was a frequent collaborator with Vancouver-based artist Gathie Falk.

Grisaille

Grisaille is a painting technique wherein an artist uses a palette of grey to create a monochromatic image. By this method, paint is carefully layered to produce highlights and shadows, resulting in an image that may appear like a colourless statue. Grisaille can also function as an underpainting or foundation over which coloured paint is later applied, or as a model for an engraving.

hard-edge painting

A technical term coined in 1958 by the art critic Jules Langsner, referring to paintings marked by well-defined areas of colour. It is widely associated with geometric abstraction and the work of artists such as Ellsworth Kelly and Kenneth Noland.

Harris, Lawren P. (Canadian, 1910–1994)

The eldest son of Lawren S. Harris of the Group of Seven, Lawren P. Harris was best known as a landscape and, later, abstract painter. As an official war artist during the Second World War he documented the Italian front. From 1946 to 1975 he was the director of the School of Fine and Applied Arts at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick, where he worked to popularize modern art in the Maritimes.



Hay, Deborah (American, b.1941)

A highly conceptual and experimental dancer and choreographer who has often worked with largely untrained dancers, though she herself trained with the luminaries Merce Cunningham and Mia Slavenska. Hay has written four books on her artistic practice and experiences as a dancer, most recently *Using the Sky: A Dance* (2015).

Impressionism

A highly influential art movement that originated in France in the 1860s, Impressionism is associated with the emergence of modern urban European society. Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and other Impressionists rejected the subjects and formal rigours of academic art in favour of scenes of nature and daily life and the careful rendering of atmospheric effects. They often painted outdoors.

installation art

Mixed-media constructed environments that are often temporary and site-specific. The term originated in the 1970s and marked a shift from the aesthetic, isolated art object to considering its context in everyday life as the source of meaning. Installation art is not merely to be looked at but to be felt as a presence in space by the viewer.

Intermedia, Vancouver

A short-lived non-profit organization established in 1967 to encourage Vancouver's budding art scene and artistic community. Intermedia, which initially went by the name Intermedia Society, hosted exhibitions, workshops, seminars, and gatherings with the support of federal arts agencies. It became an important meeting place for artists and a site of creative exchange, spawning various West Coast artistic and literary movements before ceasing operations in 1972.

Kiyooka, Roy (Canadian, 1926–1994)

Born and raised in the Prairies, Japanese Canadian artist Roy Kiyooka studied under Jock Macdonald at the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art (now Alberta College of Art and Design) in Calgary from 1946 to 1949. A regular presence at the Emma Lake Artists' Workshops, the avant-garde painter developed a hard-edge abstract style. In the 1960s, Kiyooka experimented with a wide range of media and was a central figure in the Vancouver art scene.

Landscape Painting

The representation of natural scenery, including rivers, mountains, forests, and fields, landscape painting emerged as a genre in Chinese art in the fourth century. In Europe, landscapes began as background elements in portraits or other figurative paintings, becoming subjects in their own right around the sixteenth century.



Levine, Marilyn (Canadian, 1935–2005)

Born in Alberta, Levine was one of Canada's most recognized ceramic artists. Her highly realistic work, which is associated with the Funk art movement, returns to subjects such as leather handbags, briefcases, and clothing. Her sculptures mark the passing of time by intricately recording the aging of leather and removing the presence of the objects' owners. Her work is held in important public collections in Canada and the United States.

Lewis, Glenn (Canadian, b.1935)

A British Columbia-based artist and educator who has worked in ceramics, photography, performance, and sculpture. An active member of the avant-garde art scene in Vancouver during the 1960s, Lewis curated the Performance Art Program at Western Front, an artist-run centre he co-founded in Vancouver, and taught art and performance at the University of British Columbia. His interdisciplinary work probes the relationship between conventional objects and art.

Magor, Liz (Canadian, b.1948)

A Vancouver-based artist best known for sculptures made of cast and found objects. Magor investigates materialism and consumerism and explores how we assign value to everyday objects by presenting them in new contexts. Inspired by an interest in the covert, Magor's creations dim the lines between imagination and reality. The recipient of many national and international awards, Magor also had a distinguished teaching career at the Emily Carr University of Art and Design.

Manitoba Museum

Previously known as the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, the Manitoba Museum was founded in 1965 and is the province's largest not-for-profit institution of culture and science. Located in Winnipeg, the centre features a planetarium and galleries dedicated to science and to Manitoba's heritage. The collections, including archeology, ethnology, history, and the Hudson's Bay Company collection, amount to more than 2.6 million individual holdings.

Marc, Franz (German, 1880–1916)

A founder of Der Blaue Reiter (the Blue Rider), an association of German Expressionist artists, Marc was a painter and printmaker. His work, which features animals as embodiments of mystical energy, became increasingly abstract. He was killed in combat in the First World War.

Martin, Agnes (American/Canadian, 1912–2004)

An abstract painter known for her restrained canvases featuring grids and stripes in serene hues, Martin worked between Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism, adopting the latter's formal language without emptying it of emotional resonance. Martin immigrated to the United States in 1931 and developed her artistic style in the creative circles of New Mexico and New York City. (See *Agnes Martin: Life & Work* by Christopher Régimbal).



Matisse, Henri (French, 1869–1954)

A painter, sculptor, printmaker, draftsman, and designer, aligned at different times with the Impressionists, Post-Impressionists, and Fauvists. By the 1920s he was, with Pablo Picasso, one of the most famous painters of his generation, known for his remarkable use of colour and line.

McMichael Canadian Art Collection

Located in Kleinburg, Ontario, the McMichael is a public institution dedicated to Canadian and Indigenous art. Founded in 1965, the museum was built around Robert and Signe McMichael's collection of works by the Group of Seven and their contemporaries. The permanent collection now holds more than 6,500 artworks. The gallery is also the custodian of the Cape Dorset archive. In addition to the museum, the grounds feature hiking trails, a sculpture garden, and Tom Thomson's shack—the artist's former home and studio.

modernism

A movement extending from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century in all the arts, modernism rejected academic traditions in favour of innovative styles developed in response to contemporary industrialized society. Modernist movements in the visual arts have included Gustave Courbet's Realism, and later Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, and Cubism and on to abstraction. By the 1960s, anti-authoritarian postmodernist styles such as Pop art, Conceptual art, and Neo-Expressionism blurred the distinction between high art and mass culture.

Morris, Michael (British/Canadian, b. 1942)

A versatile artist who has worked under multiple pseudonyms (including Marcel Dot and Marcel Idea) and in media from paint to video. Morris often works collaboratively and has emphasized the importance of artists' networks throughout his career. Exemplifying this tendency is the Image Bank, a system for the exchange of information and ideas between artists, which he co-founded with Vincent Trasov in 1969. He (as Marcel Dot) was crowned Miss General Idea in 1971 in *The 1971 Miss General Idea Pageant, 1971*, an elaborate performance General Idea staged at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto.

National Gallery of Canada

Established in 1880, the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa holds the most extensive collection of Canadian art in the country as well as works by prominent international artists. Spearheaded by the governor general, the Marquis of Lorne, the gallery was created to strengthen a specifically Canadian brand of artistic culture and identity and to build a national collection of art that would match the level of other British Empire institutions. Since 1988 the gallery has been located on Sussex Drive in a building designed by Moshe Safdie.

Op art

A style of abstract art that was developed in the 1950s and 1960s, primarily by Victor Vasarely and the British artist Bridget Riley. It aimed to produce an intense visual experience through the use of severe colour contrasts and hard-edge forms.



Oppenheim, Meret (German/Swiss, 1913–1985)

The artist Meret Oppenheim began her career among the Paris Surrealists in the 1930s. She was the muse and model for several of Man Ray's photographs and created a piece, *Object*, 1936, a cup, saucer, and spoon covered in fur, that became an archetypal example of the movement's aesthetics and was the first work by a woman artist to be acquired by the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. After a twenty-year pause in her career, during which time she distanced herself from the Surrealists, Oppenheim began to make art again in the 1950s.

papier mâché

A material traditionally used to create small objects and sculpture, composed of wet pulped or shredded paper mixed with a binding agent, such as glue or tree resin. It hardens when baked or air-dried. Papier mâché is now extensively used in packaging.

performance art

A genre of art presented live and in which the medium is the artist's body in time. The performance may involve multiple participants, as well as the audience. Performance art originated in the early twentieth century with movements like Dadaism and Futurism and found wider prominence in the 1960s and 1970s after the decline of Modernism. Common themes of this genre concern the dematerialized art object, ephemerality, the artist's presence, anti-capitalism, and the integration of art with life.

Picasso, Pablo (Spanish, 1881–1973)

One of the most famous and influential artists of his time, Picasso was a prominent member of the Parisian avant-garde circle that included Henri Matisse and Georges Braque. His painting *Les Femmes d'Alger*, 1907, is considered by many to be the most important of the twentieth century.

Pollock, Jackson (American, 1912–1956)

Leader of the Abstract Expressionist movement, best known for his drip paintings of the 1940s and 1950s. Pollock is also closely associated with action painting, in which the act of painting is gestural and the artist approaches the canvas with little notion of what he or she will create.

Pop art

A movement of the late 1950s to early 1970s in Britain and the United States, Pop art adopted imagery from commercial design, television, and cinema. Pop art's most recognized proponents are Richard Hamilton, David Hockney, Andy Warhol, and Roy Lichtenstein.

Post-Impressionism

A term coined by the British art critic Roger Fry in 1910 to describe painting produced originally in France between about 1880 and 1905 in response to Impressionism's artistic advances and limitations. Central figures include Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, and Vincent van Gogh.



Rainer, Yvonne (American, b.1934)

An avant-garde dancer, choreographer, and filmmaker. After moving to New York in the late 1950s, Rainer became one of the principal organizers of the Judson Dance Theater, which served as a centre for avant-garde dance throughout the 1960s. Rainer introduced a Minimalist form of dance that emphasized the variety of movements the body could produce rather than the expression of emotion or drama. In the 1970s, Rainer began creating experimental feature films exploring personal and socio-political concerns.

Regina Clay

A Canadian art movement based in Regina, Saskatchewan, in the 1960s and 1970s. In these decades, Regina became a centre for ceramic production and creative expression. Regina Clay artists, such as Joe Fafard and Marilyn Levine, used the medium to resist modernism and fight for the place of ceramics as a worthy sculptural medium. The movement aimed to address reality through imagery based on personal experience.

Renaissance

The term used since the nineteenth century to refer to the Western art historical period from approximately 1400 to 1600. The Renaissance is associated with the return to classical style in art and architecture, following the medieval period.

Shadbolt, Jack (Canadian, 1909–1998)

Primarily known as a painter and draftsman, Shadbolt studied art in London, Paris, and New York before returning to British Columbia. He taught at the Vancouver School of Art from 1945 to 1966, becoming the head of the school's painting and drawing section. Major influences include Emily Carr and Aboriginal art of the Pacific Northwest.

Steele, Lisa (Canadian, b.1947)

A Toronto-based video, performance, and installation artist who has played a crucial role in the development of video art. Since 1983 Steele has collaborated solely with Canadian artist Kim Tomczak. Their work explores the human body, often showing the physical changes wrought by age and disease. Steele's best-known solo work is the video piece *Birthday Suit: Scars and Defects*, 1974, in which she identifies and explains each scar on her body on the occasion of her twenty-seventh birthday.

still life

The still life is an important genre in Western art and includes depictions of both natural and manufactured objects. Often used to emphasize the ephemerality of human life in the *vanitas* and *memento mori* paintings of the seventeenth century, the still life was at the bottom of the hierarchy of styles established by the French Academy.



Surrealism

An early twentieth-century literary and artistic movement that began in Paris, Surrealism aimed to express the workings of the unconscious, free of convention and reason, and was characterized by fantastic images and incongruous juxtapositions. The movement spread globally, influencing film, theatre, and music.

Tobey, Mark (American, 1890–1976)

An abstract painter whose work was influenced by Cubism and Chinese calligraphy and frequently evoked his Baha'i faith. Tobey's all-over "white writing" paintings of the 1930s to the 1950s were developed independently of Abstract Expressionism. He lived in Seattle for many years and was associated with the Northwest School.

triptych

A triptych is an artistic work in three panels or parts. It may refer to a suite of relief carvings or paintings, or to a series of three literary or musical works meant to be considered together as reflections on a single theme.

trompe l'oeil

French for "deceives the eye," *trompe l'oeil* refers to visual illusion in art, especially images and painted objects that appear to exist in three dimensions and even aim to trick the viewer into thinking that they are real. Common examples are the painted insects that appear to sit on the surface of Renaissance paintings, and murals that make flat walls appear to open into spaces beyond.

Uncanny

A term associated with Sigmund Freud's 1919 essay "Das Unheimliche," which described the uncanny as an anxious, strange, or uncomfortable feeling brought on by familiar objects in unexpected contexts. Artists associated with the Surrealist movement often drew on the uncanny by rendering recognizable objects in irrational ways. The concept continues to inspire artists who harness the power of the unfamiliar in their work.

Vancouver Art Gallery

The Vancouver Art Gallery, located in Vancouver, British Columbia, is the largest art gallery in Western Canada. It was founded in 1931 and is a public, collecting institution focused on historic and contemporary art from British Columbia, with a particular emphasis on work by First Nations artists and, through the gallery's Institute of Asian Art, on art from the Asia Pacific Region.

Western Front, Vancouver

A Vancouver artist-run centre founded by eight artists in 1973. A locus of innovative artistic activity throughout the 1970s and 1980s, it played a key role in the development of interdisciplinary, ephemeral, media-based, performance, and electronic art. It remains an important centre for contemporary art and music.



Wieland, Joyce (Canadian, 1930–1998)

A central figure in contemporary Canadian art, Wieland engaged with painting, filmmaking, and cloth and plastic assemblage to explore with wit and passion ideas related to gender, national identity, and the natural world. In 1971 she became the first living Canadian woman artist to have a solo exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa. (See *Joyce Wieland: Life & Work* by Johanne Sloan.)

Winnipeg Art Gallery

Established in 1912, the Winnipeg Art Gallery has the world's largest public collection of Inuit art; it displayed Inuit sculpture for the first time in December 1953, and began systematic purchases for its permanent collection in 1957. In 1960 the gallery made a serious commitment when it purchased 139 major pieces from George Swinton. Over the years, the gallery's Inuit art collection has grown to its present size of close to 13,200 works largely through the donation or purchase of large collections, including the enormous 4,000-piece Jerry Twomey Collection received in 1971. The gallery's other primary collections are dedicated to Canadian historical and contemporary art, decorative art, and contemporary Canadian photography. It has moved several times in its history but has been in its current location since 1971.



SOURCES & RESOURCES

Gathie Falk emerged to critical acclaim in 1968 on the occasion of her exhibition *Living Room, Environmental Sculpture and Prints* at the Douglas Gallery (later renamed Ace Gallery) in Vancouver, when she was forty years old. Now in her nineties, she continues to exhibit, showing new paintings as well as remounting past work. Most notably, she has been the subject of retrospectives at the Vancouver Art Gallery, in 1985 and 2000, and at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinburg, Ontario, in 2022. Many articles and books consider her work in ceramic sculpture, installation, painting, and performance, and in 2018 she



GATHIE FALK

Life & Work by Michelle Jacques

penned a memoir, *Apples, etc.*, with art critic Robin Laurence. She is represented by Equinox Gallery in Vancouver and Michael Gibson Gallery in London, Ontario.



LEFT: Installation view of *Development of the Plot* series, National Gallery of Canada, 2002. RIGHT: Installation view of *Border in Four Parts*, 1977-78, National Gallery of Canada, 2002.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

1967	<i>Gathie Falk</i> , Odalesque Gallery, Victoria.
1968	<i>Living Room, Environmental Sculpture and Prints</i> , Douglas Gallery, Vancouver.
1974	<i>Single Right Men's Shoes</i> , Canadian Cultural Centre, Paris.
1976-77	<i>Herd Two & Drawings</i> , National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.
1978	<i>Gathie Falk</i> , Edmonton Art Gallery.
1980	<i>Gathie Falk: Night Skies</i> , University of British Columbia, Fine Arts Gallery, Vancouver. Travelled to Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge; and Glenbow Museum, Calgary.
1985	<i>Gathie Falk Paintings 1978-1984</i> , Art Gallery of Greater Victoria. Travelled to the Art Gallery of Hamilton; Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, Halifax; Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen's University; and Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon. <i>Gathie Falk Retrospective</i> , Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver.
1987	<i>Gathie Falk</i> , 49th Parallel: Centre for Contemporary Canadian Art, New York.
1994	<i>Recent Works by Gathie Falk</i> , Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba, Brandon.
1999	<i>Gathie Falk: Souvenirs du quotidien</i> , Musée régional de Rimouski.



GATHIE FALK

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2000	<i>Gathie Falk</i> (retrospective exhibition), Vancouver Art Gallery. Travelled to the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; Norman MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina; Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax; Montreal Museum of Fine Arts; Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa; Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton.
2002	<i>Gathie Falk: Visions</i> , Kelowna Art Gallery.
2004	<i>Gathie Falk/Apparel</i> , Evergreen Cultural Centre, Coquitlam.
2014	<i>Gathie Falk: Paperworks</i> , Burnaby Art Gallery.
2022	<i>Gathie Falk: Revelations</i> , McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg.

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1968	<i>Younger Vancouver Sculptors</i> , University of British Columbia Fine Arts Gallery, Vancouver.
1969	<i>Electrical Connection</i> (Intermedia show), Vancouver Art Gallery. <i>The New Art of Vancouver</i> , Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Beach, California. Travelled to the Art Galleries, University of California at Santa Barbara.
1970	<i>The Dome Show</i> , Vancouver Art Gallery. <i>Survey/Sondage</i> , Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. <i>Works Mostly on Paper</i> , Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston.
1975	<i>Some Canadian Women Artists</i> , National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.
1976	<i>West Coast Waves</i> , Winnipeg Art Gallery.
1977	<i>Clay as Sculpture</i> , Alberta College of Art Gallery, Calgary. <i>Four Places: Allan Detheridge, Gathie Falk, Liz Magor, An Whitlock</i> , Vancouver Art Gallery.
1982	<i>Greg Curnoe, Paterson Ewen, Gathie Falk, Ron Moppett</i> , Norman MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina.



GATHIE FALK

Life & Work by Michelle Jacques

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- 1985** *Atmospheric Synthesis: Paterson Ewen, Otto Rogers, Gathie Falk, David Bierk*, Art Gallery of Peterborough.
- Aurora Borealis*, organized by the Montreal International Centre of Contemporary Art.
- British Columbia Women Artists, 1885-1985*, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria.
-
- 1995** *Survivors, In Search of a Voice: The Art of Courage*, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.
-
- 1997** *Transient Moments: Vancouver & the Performance Photograph*, Presentation House Gallery, North Vancouver.
-
- 1999** *Making It New! (the Big Sixties Show)*, Art Gallery of Windsor. Travelled to the Glenbow Museum, Calgary.
-
- 2000** *ABCs of Pop Art: America, Britain, Canada, Major Artists and Their Legacy*, Florida State University Museum of Fine Arts, Tallahassee.
- Art BC: Masterworks from British Columbia*, Vancouver Art Gallery.
-
- 2001** *Portraits: Unsettled Subjects*, Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, Halifax.
-
- 2017** *"Cr  er    rebours vers l'exposition": The case of Aurora Borealis*, VOX, Montreal.
-
- 2018** *Beginning with the Seventies: GLUT*, Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.
- Intervention: 31 Women Painters / 31 Femmes Peintres*, McClure Gallery, Montreal.
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- 2019** *Cosmos: Erik Olson, Gathie Falk, Margret Nazon*, Glenbow Museum, Calgary.

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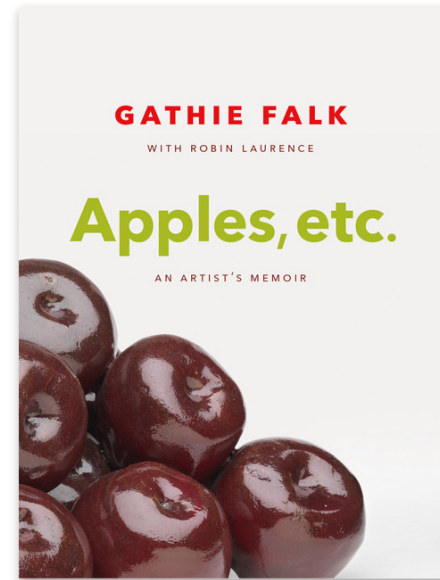
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Cover of *Apples, etc.*, by Gathie Falk with Robin Laurence (Figure 1 Publishing, 2018), featuring Gathie Falk's sculpture *14 Rotten Apples* (detail), 1970.



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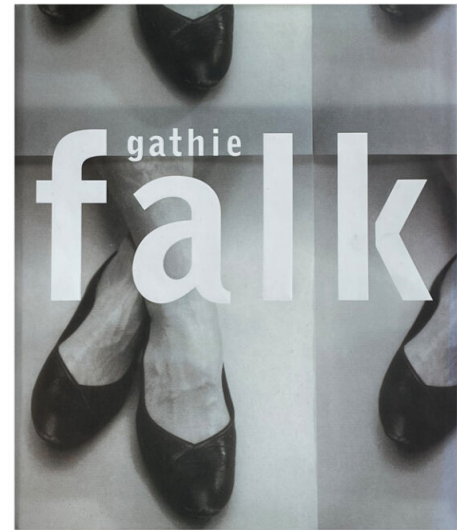
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LEFT: Cover of *Gathie Falk: Revelations*, edited by Sarah Milroy (McMichael Canadian Art Collection and Figure 1 Publishing, 2022), featuring Gathie Falk's sculpture *14 Grapefruits* (detail), c.1970. RIGHT: Cover of *Gathie Falk*, by Robin Laurence, Bruce Grenville, Ian M. Thom, Mayo Graham, and Sarah Milroy (Douglas & McIntyre, 2000), featuring Gathie Falk's silkscreen *Crossed Ankles* (detail), 1998.



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Cover of "Gathie Falk Works" by Ann Rosenberg, *Capilano Review* 1 and 2, no. 24 and 25, 1982.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MICHELLE JACQUES

Michelle Jacques is the Head of Exhibitions and Collections/Chief Curator at Remai Modern, Saskatoon. Recent and upcoming projects at Remai Modern include *Ken Lum: Death and Furniture* (2022) and *Denyse Thomasos: just beyond*, both co-organized with the Art Gallery of Ontario, and *The Middle of Everywhere*, an exploration of the art of the Great Plains collaboratively developed by the Remai Modern curatorial team. Previously, she was Chief Curator at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria (AGGV), where she was responsible for guiding a curatorial and education program linking contemporary practices, ideas, and issues to the gallery's historical collections and legacies. At the AGGV, she facilitated projects with a range of contemporary artists; co-curated major retrospectives of the work of Anna Banana and Jock Macdonald; and developed a series of installations that used the AGGV's collection to evoke cross-temporal and cross-cultural conversations. Before moving west, she held roles in the Contemporary and Canadian departments of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; was the Director of Programming at the Centre for Art Tapes in Halifax; and taught courses in writing, art history, and curatorial studies at NSCAD University, University of Toronto Mississauga, and OCAD University. She is currently the Vice-President of Inclusion and Outreach with the Association of Art Museum Curators.



"I have long been compelled by the incredible multiplicity of Falk's practice. Whether she is working in painting, ceramic, performance, sculpture, or installation, there is a drive, an allusion, a substance to the work that renders her work irresistible. Falk's work is almost always recognizable through the open way she reveals her hand and shares her seminal pictorial inventory. Yet, she has excelled in such a multitude of mediums that her practice almost defies definition."



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From the Author

I am deeply indebted to Anna Hudson and Sara Angel for seeing me as the right person to take on this exploration of Falk's work. My own understanding of Falk is rooted in the writing of the many art historians, critics, and curators who have engaged with her practice over the course of her long career, and I am especially grateful for the foundational insights and overviews provided in the work of Robin Laurence, Jane Lind, and Ann Rosenberg. The words and images on these pages would not have been possible without the kind and committed support of Jocelyn Anderson, Rosie Prata, and Monique Johnson. My deepest gratitude is, of course, reserved for Gathie Falk, who is just as remarkable as her work.

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Gathie Falk, *Single Right Men's Shoes: Blue Running Shoes*, c.1973. (See below for details.)

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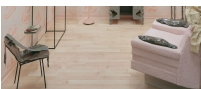
Biography: Gathie Falk in 2019. (See below for details.)



Key Works: Gathie Falk, *196 Apples*, 1969-70. (See below for details.)



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Style & Technique: Gathie Falk, *Home Environment*, 1968. (See below for details.)



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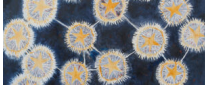
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Sources & Resources: Gathie Falk, *Night Sky #6*, 1979. (See below for details.)



Where to See: Gathie Falk, *Single Right Men's Shoes: Bootcase with 6 Orange Brogues*, 1973. (See below for details.)



Credits: Gathie Falk, *Heavenly Bodies Again #20*, 2016. (See below for details.)

Credits for Works by Gathie Falk



Abstract 4, 2018. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of Equinox Gallery. © Gathie Falk.



Agnes (Black Patina), 2000-2001. Collection of Equinox Gallery, Vancouver. © Gathie Falk.



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Art School Teaching Aids: Hard-Edge Still Life, 1970. Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Gift of Joan Lowndes (2001.36.12). © Gathie Falk.



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Ballet for Bass-Baritone (Tom Graff singing), 1971, performance at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Photo credit: Judi Osburn.



The Banquet, 1963. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of McMichael Canadian Art Collection. © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: Rachel Topham Photography.



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Beautiful British Columbia Multiple Purpose Thermal Blanket (detail), 1979. Collection of the Kamloops Art Gallery. Courtesy of the Vancouver Art Gallery. © Gathie Falk.



Beautiful British Columbia Multiple Purpose Thermal Blanket (installed in the foyer of the B.C. Central Credit Union), 1979. Collection of the Kamloops Art Gallery. Courtesy of the Vancouver Art Gallery. © Gathie Falk.



A Bird Is Known by His Feathers Alone (performance at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, in 1972), 1968. Visual Resources Collection, National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives, Ottawa.

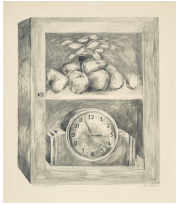


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Border in Four Parts (detail), 1977-78. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (23188.1-4). © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: NGC.



Cake Walk Rococo (with Tom Graff, performance at the Vancouver Art Gallery), 1971. Photo credit: Vincent Trasov.



Cement with Fence #1, 1982. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of Equinox Gallery. © Gathie Falk.



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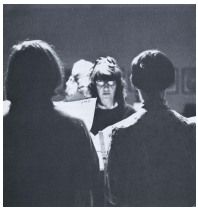
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Cherry Basket, c.1969. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of Michael Gibson Gallery. © Gathie Falk.



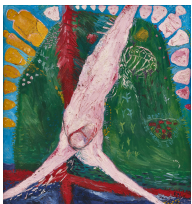
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Chorus (performance at the Vancouver Art Gallery), 1972. Photo credit: Nomi Kaplan.



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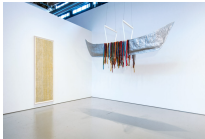
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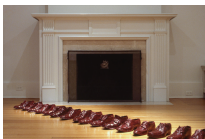
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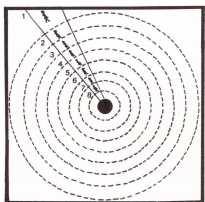
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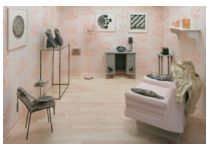
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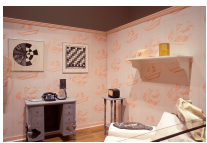
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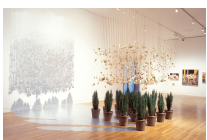
Home Environment, 1968. Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Acquisition Fund, Gift of Abraham Rogatnick, Gift of Douglas Christmas (86.32). Installation view of *Gathie Falk* at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 2002. Courtesy of the Visual Resources Collection, National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives, Ottawa. © Gathie Falk.



Home Environment, 1968. Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Acquisition Fund, Gift of Abraham Rogatnick, Gift of Douglas Christmas (86.32). Installation view of *Gathie Falk* at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 2002. Courtesy of the Visual Resources Collection, National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives, Ottawa. © Gathie Falk.



Lawn in Three Parts, 1978. Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Acquisition Fund (87.108.a-c). © Gathie Falk.



My Dog's Bones (installed at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, in 2002), 1985. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of the Visual Resources Collection, National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives, Ottawa. © Gathie Falk.



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My Work Shirt, 2016. Private collection. Courtesy of Michael Gibson Gallery. © Gathie Falk.



Nice Table with Earthshifter and Details, 1995. Collection of the Kelowna Art Gallery, purchased with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance program, 2002. © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: Yuri Akuney, Digital Perfections.



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Night Sky #16, 1979. Collection of Ivan Fecan and Jae Kim. © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: Heffel Fine Art Auction House.



150 Cabbages, 1978. Installation view at Artcore, Vancouver. Courtesy of Equinox Gallery. © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: Jim Gorman.



196 Apples, 1969-70. Promised gift of the artist to the Vancouver Art Gallery. Courtesy of the Vancouver Art Gallery. © Gathie Falk.



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Picnic with Birthday Cake and Blue Sky, 1976. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (18772). © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: NGC.



Picnic with Clock and Bird, 1976. Collection of Equinox Gallery, Vancouver. © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: SITE Photography.



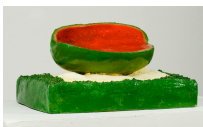
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Picnic with Clock and Tulips, 1976. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of Equinox Gallery, Vancouver. © Gathie Falk.



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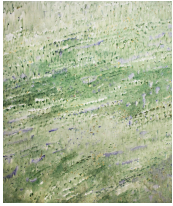


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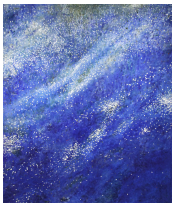
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Pieces of Water #3: Parliament Bells, 1982. Private collection. Courtesy of Michael Gibson Gallery. © Gathie Falk.



Pieces of Water #10—El Salvador, 1982. Collection of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Women's Committee Cultural Fund & Canada Council Matching Funds (1983.066.001). © Gathie Falk.



Pieces of Water: Royal Wedding, 1981. Collection of Mayberry Fine Art. Courtesy of Michael Gibson Gallery. © Gathie Falk.



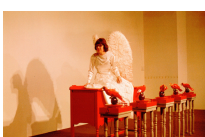
The Problem with Wedding Veils, 2010-11. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of Equinox Gallery. © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: SITE Photography.



Red Angel (performance documentation at Western Front, Vancouver, 1977), 1972. Collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Morris/Trasov Archive. © Gathie Falk.



Red Angel (performance documentation at Western Front, Vancouver, 1977), 1972. Collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Morris/Trasov Archive. © Gathie Falk.



Red Angel (performance documentation at the National Gallery of Canada, 1975), 1972. © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: Nomi Kaplan.



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Red Angel (performance documentation at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1972), 1972. © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: Glenn Baglo.



Red Angel (performance props), 1972. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Purchase with assistance from the Estate of P.J. Glasser, 2016 (2016/171). © Gathie Falk.



Red Angel, 1972. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Installation view of *The Things in My Head* at Equinox Gallery, Vancouver, 2015. Courtesy of Equinox Gallery. © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: SITE Photography.



Salute to the Lions of Vancouver (detail), 1990. Canada Place, Vancouver. © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: Nikki M. Quintal.



Single Right Men's Shoes: Blue Running Shoes, c.1973. Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Gift of J. Ron Longstaffe (83.41.a-i). © Gathie Falk.



Single Right Men's Shoes: Bootcase with 6 Orange Brogues, 1973. Collection of Equinox Gallery, Vancouver. © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: SITE Photography.



Skipping Ropes (performance at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, in 1975), 1968. Visual Resources Collection, National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives, Ottawa. Photo credit: Mayo Graham.



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Skipping Ropes (performance at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, in 1975), 1968. Visual Resources Collection, National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives, Ottawa.



Small Purse, c.1970. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of Michael Gibson Gallery. © Gathie Falk.



Soft Chair with Pants and Hammer Heads, 1986. Collection of J. Sergei Sawchyn. Courtesy of Michael Gibson Gallery. © Gathie Falk.



Soft Couch with Suit, 1986. Private Collection. Courtesy of the Vancouver Art Gallery. © Gathie Falk.



Some Are Egger Than I (performance at the New Era Social Club, Vancouver), December 31, 1969. Photo credit: Michael de Courcy from the Intermedia Catalogue.



The Staircase, 1962. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of Michael Gibson Gallery. © Gathie Falk.



Standard Shoes, The Column (detail), 1998-99. Collection of Oakville Galleries, purchased with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance Program, the Corporation of the Town of Oakville and the Elizabeth L. Gordon Art Program of the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation, 2000 (2000.03). © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: Isaac Applebaum.



Still Life with UBC Jug, 1962. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection. © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: Rachel Topham Photography.



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Support System with Michaelmas Daisies #1, 1987. Private collection. © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: Heffel Fine Art Auction House.



Theatre in B/W and Colour - Bushes with Fish in B/W, 1984. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (29516.2). © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: NGC.



Theatre in B/W and Colour - Bushes with Fish in Colour, 1984. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (29516.1). © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: NGC.



Theatre in Black and White and Colour: Light Bulbs with Grass, 1984. Macdonald Steward Art Centre Collection at the Art Gallery of Guelph, purchased with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, 1984 (MS1984.109). © Gathie Falk.



There Are 21 Ships and 3 Warships in English Bay, 1990. Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Gift of the Artist (2007.25.1a-b). © Gathie Falk.



30 Grapefruit, 1970. Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Endowment Fund (70.112). © Gathie Falk.



Three Cabbages, 1978. Weisz Family Collection. © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: Heffel Fine Art Auction House.



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26 Blood Oranges, 1970. Private collection. Courtesy of Equinox Gallery. © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: SITE Photography.



Two Egg Cups with Single Egg, date unknown. Collection of Andrea Margles. Courtesy of Cowley Abbott, Toronto. © Gathie Falk.



Veneration of the White Collar Worker, 1973. Private collection. Courtesy of Equinox Gallery. © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: Equinox Gallery.



Venice Sink with Postcards from Marco Polo #13, 1990. Private collection. © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: Heffel Fine Art Auction House.



The Waitress, 1965. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of Equinox Gallery. © Gathie Falk.

Credits for Photographs and Works by Other Artists



Arearea, 1892, by Paul Gauguin. Collection of the Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Photo credit: Google Art Project.



Blaues Pferd I, 1911, by Franz Marc. Collection of the Lenbachhaus, Munich. Photo credit: Google Art Project.

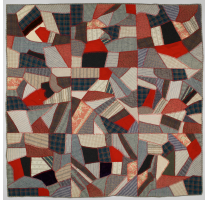


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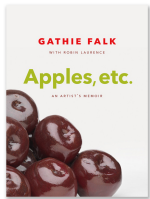
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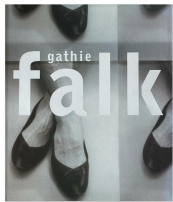
Canadian Pacific to Canada, c.1920, by A.C. (Alfred Crocker) Leighton. Wallace B. Chung and Madeline H. Chung Collection, University of British Columbia Library, Vancouver (CC-OS-00391). Courtesy of the University of British Columbia Library Rare Books and Special Collections.



Crazy Quilt, c.1890, by an unknown artist. Collection of the Textile Museum of Canada, Toronto, from the Opekar / Webster Collection (T94.0380). Courtesy of the Textile Museum of Canada.



Cover of *Apples, etc.* (Vancouver: Figure 1 Publishing, 2018). © Figure 1 Publishing.



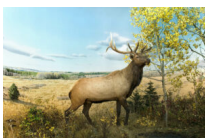
Cover of *Gathie Falk* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., 2000). Reprinted with permission from the publisher.



Cover of *Gathie Falk: Revelations* (McMichael Canadian Art Collection and Figure 1 Publishing, 2022). © McMichael Canadian Art Collection.



Cover of "Gathie Falk Works" (*Capilano Review* 1 and 2, no. 24 and 25, 1982). © The Capilano Review.



Diorama of an Elk depicting rutting season in Riding Mountain National Park. Courtesy of the Manitoba Museum. © Manitoba Museum, Winnipeg, MB.



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Gathie Falk (far right) with her first elementary class, Surrey, B.C., 1953, photographer unknown. Courtesy of Gathie Falk.



Gathie Falk, Glenn Allison, and Elizabeth Klassen installing *Veneration of the White Collar Worker #2*, 1973. Photo credit: Tom Graff.



Gathie Falk and Tom Graff in front of a thrift shop, Saskatoon, 1971. Courtesy of Figure 1 Publishing. Photo credit: Elizabeth Klassen.



Gathie Falk in 2019. Photo credit: Tom Gould.



Gathie Falk in a dress of her own design sewn by her mother, c.1940. Courtesy of Gathie Falk.



Gathie Falk in her studio working on *Winter Tree*, 2012. Photo credit: SITE Photography.



Gathie Falk's parents, Agatha and Cornelius Falk, c.1914. Courtesy of Gathie Falk.



Gathie Falk with co-workers at a Winnipeg packing plant, c.1945. Courtesy of Gathie Falk.



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Gathie's Cupboard, Polyptych (panel 2), 1998, by Jane Martin. Collection of the artist. Courtesy Copyright Visual Arts-CARCC, 2022. © Jane Martin.



Humidor, 2004, by Liz Magor. Collection of the Kamloops Art Gallery. Courtesy of Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver. © Liz Magor. Photo credit: Richard-Max Tremblay.



Installation view of *Border in Four Parts* in *Gathie Falk* at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 2002. Courtesy of the Visual Resources Collection, National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives, Ottawa.



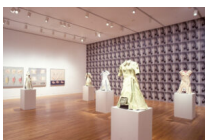
Installation view of *Development of the Plot* series in *Gathie Falk* at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 2002. Courtesy of the Visual Resources Collection, National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives, Ottawa.



Installation view of *Four Places: Allan Detheridge, Gathie Falk, Liz Magor, An Whitlock* at the Vancouver Art Gallery, 1977. Photo credit: Joe Gould.



Installation view of *Gathie Falk* at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 2002. Courtesy of the Visual Resources Collection, National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives, Ottawa.



Installation view of *Gathie Falk* at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 2002. Courtesy of the Visual Resources Collection, National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives, Ottawa.



Installation view of *The Things in My Head* at Equinox Gallery, Vancouver, 2015. Courtesy of Equinox Gallery. Photo credit: SITE Photography.



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Jar of Apricots, 1758, by Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Purchase, 1962 (61/36). © Art Gallery of Ontario.



John's Mountie Boots, 1973, by Marilyn Levine. Collection of the MacKenzie Art Gallery, Regina (1973-12 a&b). Photo credit: Don Hall, courtesy of the MacKenzie Art Gallery.



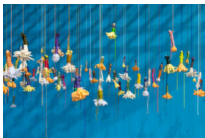
Lamentation over the Dead Christ, c.1483, by Andrea Mantegna. Collection of the Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. Photo credit: Wikimedia Commons.



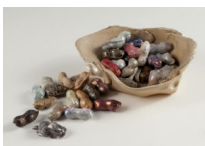
Mennonite Girls' Club, Winnipeg, with Gathie Falk seated far right, 1944. Courtesy of Gathie Falk.



Object, 1936, by Meret Oppenheim. Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York (130.1946.a-c).



105 Chrysanthemums (detail), 2016, by Cindy Mochizuki. Collection of the artist. © Cindy Mochizuki. Photo credit: SITE Photography.



Peanut Serving Bowl and Peanuts, 1972, by Glenn Lewis and Michael Morris. Collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, purchased with support from the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance program, 2014 (MT.014.03). © Glenn Lewis. © Michael Morris. Courtesy of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery.

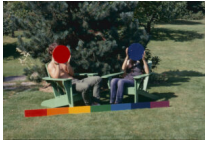


Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1930s-40s. Courtesy of Hip Postcard.



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Rainbow Picnic, 1970-71, by Michael Morris. Collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, purchased with support from the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance program and the Morris and Helen Belkin Foundation, 2016 (BG4875). © Michael Morris. Courtesy of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery.



Reason over Passion, 1968, by Joyce Wieland. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchased 1970 (15924).



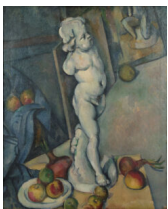
Rice Krispie Piece, 1968, by Glenn Lewis. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of Glenn Lewis.



The Scholar's Study: Still Life, 2018, by Carol Sawyer. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of Carol Sawyer. © Carol Sawyer.



Sitting Woman (Dodo), 1909, by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. Collection of the Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich. Photo credit: Wikimedia Commons.



Still Life with Plaster Cupid, c.1894, by Paul Cézanne. Collection of the Courtauld Gallery, London. Photo credit: Google Art Project.



Taping of the Critics, 1972, by Glenn Lewis and Michael Morris. Collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Morris/Trasov Archive, gift of Bob and Mary Steele, 1993 (BG10369). © Glenn Lewis. © Michael Morris. Courtesy of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery.



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Ten-Mile Point, 1952, by William D. West. Collection of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Anonymous Gift (1952.012.001). Courtesy of the AGGV.



Untitled (Cap), 1970, by Marilyn Levine. Collection of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Gift of Robert Hayes (1999.001.004). Courtesy of the AGGV.



Vancouver—Looking North on Granville St., 1958, by Ernie H. Reksten. City of Vancouver Archives (2010-006.161).



Walter Neufeld and his brother Menno. Courtesy the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online.



Walter Neufeld with the Neufeld Junior String Orchestra, Abbotsford, B.C., 1963. P15652 Courtesy of The Reach Gallery Museum, Abbotsford.

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