



TEACHER RESOURCE GUIDE
FOR GRADES 9–12

LEARN ABOUT

**CLOTHING
AND FASHION**
through the art of
GATHIE FALK

ART CANADA INSTITUTE | **INSTITUT DE L'ART CANADIEN**



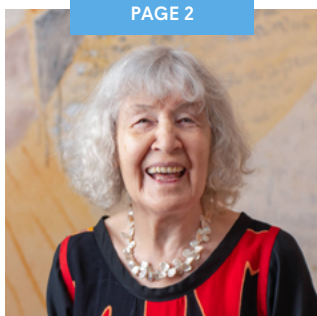
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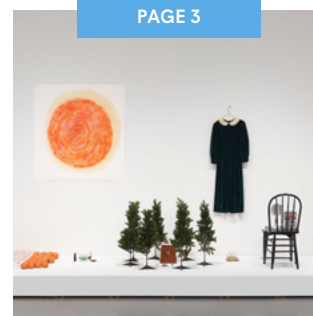
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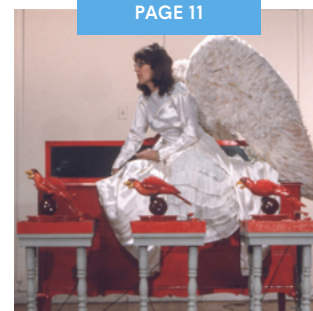
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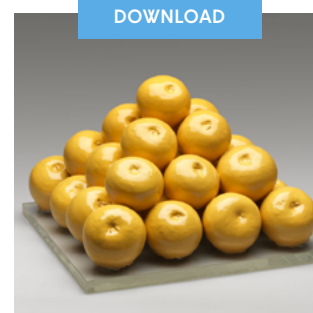
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

READ ONLINE



GATHIE FALK: LIFE & WORK BY MICHELLE JACQUES

DOWNLOAD



GATHIE FALK IMAGE FILE

RESOURCE OVERVIEW

This teacher resource guide has been written to complement the Art Canada Institute online art book [Gathie Falk: Life & Work](#) by Michelle Jacques. The artworks within this guide and images required for the learning activities and culminating task can be found in the [Gathie Falk Image File](#) provided.

Gathie Falk (b.1928) is one of the most celebrated contemporary artists in Canada, continually applauded for the experimental ways that she expresses herself through painting, sculpture, installation, and performance. A key thread in her work is her elevation of the everyday through the extraordinary treatment of ordinary objects, as well as her careful examination of the world around her. Within her oeuvre, Falk has consistently returned to the representation and recreation of clothing, asking viewers to think about personal apparel in new and surprising contexts. Using the artist's creative take on dress as a point of inspiration, the activities in this guide explore concepts related to fashion and garment design, including identity and self-fashioning; the historical context of clothing; and clothing and personal expression. The ways in which we communicate ideas of time, place, and self-expression through clothes will be explored, and students will have the opportunity to think deeply about their own personal identities through a reflection on clothing choices and the design of fashion items.

Curriculum Connections

- Grades 9–12 Visual Arts
- Grade 10 Clothing
- Grades 11–12 Understanding Fashion
- Grade 12 Fashion Industry

Themes

- Canadian art
- Fashion
- Identity
- Self-expression
- History of clothing



Fig 1. Installation view of *Gathie Falk*, 2002, at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Teaching Exercises

The exercises in this guide explore the theme “Clothing and Fashion” as represented in artworks by Gathie Falk.

- Learning Activity #1 – Clothing and Personal Agency ([page 4](#))
- Learning Activity #2 – A Sense of Style: Building Historical Context ([page 6](#))
- Culminating Task – Footwear Facsimiles: Cultivating Creative Design ([page 9](#))

A Note on Using This Guide

Throughout this guide, students will be asked to reflect on their personal identities and how these are expressed through clothing. Classroom conversations may be personal, and may ask students to express and reflect publicly with their peers. It is important to ensure that a class community of respect has been established prior to these activities, and that clear standards of positive actions and words towards peers have been communicated. It is important that teachers carefully consider the impact of the activities on their specific group of students before embarking on this work.

WHO WAS GATHIE FALK?



Fig 2. Gathie Falk in 2019.

Gathie Falk was born on January 31, 1928, in Alexander, a small town in Treaty 2 territory, 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. Their passage to Canada was paid with credit provided by the Canadian Pacific Railway. Cornelius Falk died of pneumonia in November 1928, less than a year after the birth of his daughter.

After her father's death, **Falk and her family lived nomadically**, seeking the support of Mennonite communities throughout Manitoba, Ontario, and Saskatchewan. As a young girl, Falk was drawn to the arts: in particular, to music. She initially saw herself pursuing a career as a singer. However, her hopes were dashed in 1944 when, at the age of sixteen, Falk was forced to find full-time work

in order to help pay back her family's debts owed to the Canadian Pacific Railway.

Falk and her family relocated to British Columbia in 1946. Upon moving to Vancouver, Falk worked in a luggage factory, sewing the pockets inside of suitcases. She completed her high school education by correspondence and enrolled in a one-year teaching certificate program at her mother's encouragement. As an elementary school teacher, Falk was able to pursue additional training in art instruction. She took drawing and painting courses through the Department of Education at the University of British Columbia, eventually completing a fine arts degree.

In 1965, Falk took what would become a permanent leave from teaching elementary school **in order to focus on making art**. She produced a series of paintings heavily influenced by [German Expressionism](#) that formed the content of her first solo exhibition. She also started a ceramics studio and fully invested herself in sculpture. Her first major professional success as an artist came in 1968 when she exhibited *Home Environment*, an [installation art](#) piece created from screen-printed wallpaper and sculptures of household items.

Throughout her career, Falk has produced works across media that venerate ordinary, household objects and environments. While Falk is considered a pioneer of performance art in Canada—producing fifteen [performance artworks](#) between 1968 and 1972—she is known primarily for her innovative work in the [still life](#) genre. Her serialized compositions of everything from fruit (as in *30 Grapefruit*, 1970) to footwear (as in *Single Right Men's Shoes*, 1973) have raised her profile as an artist and provided opportunities to exhibit internationally.

The first retrospective of Falk's work was organized in 2000 at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Three years later, Falk received a prestigious Governor General's Award in Visual Arts. In 2013, at the age of eighty-five, Falk received the Audain Prize for Lifetime Achievement in the Visual Arts. Falk remains active in the studio, producing new paintings and regularly mounting shows of new and old works.



Fig 3. Gathie Falk, *Home Environment*, 1968. In this room-sized installation, Falk combines found objects with her ceramic renderings of domestic items.



Fig 4. Gathie Falk, *Single Right Men's Shoes: Bootcase with 9 Black Boots*, 1973. Falk's ceramic works possess elements of the still-life genre.



Fig 5. Gathie Falk, *30 Grapefruit*, 1970. Works in her "Fruit Piles" series were inspired by the arrangements of fruit Falk saw every day at the greengrocers in her neighbourhood.



Fig 6. Gathie Falk, *The Banquet*, 1963. This painting showcases many formal hallmarks of German Expressionism, such as its use of colour and distorted sense of space.

NATIONAL & WORLD EVENTS



Fig 7. A.C. Leighton, *Canadian Pacific to Canada*, c.1920. The Canadian Pacific Railway was critical in promoting immigration to the Prairies.



Fig 8. Façade of the Vancouver Art Gallery.



Fig 9. Homemade Canada Flag, made by Walter Lyons and Clothilde Boulay Lyons, 1965. Walter Lyons and his mother Clothilde made this flag to decorate their family porch on Dominion Day.



Fig 10. Joyce Wieland, *O Canada*, 1970. Wieland produced this artwork in response to "O Canada."

Métis leader Louis Riel leads the Red River Resistance, which culminates in the creation of the province of Manitoba.

1869
-70

Treaties 1 and 2, the first of the 11 Numbered Treaties negotiated between 1871 and 1921, are signed.

1871

The federal government passes the Dominion Lands Act to encourage agricultural settlement of the Prairies.

1872

A wave of approximately 21,000 Mennonites emigrating from Russia settle in Western Canada, the majority receiving credit provided by the Canadian Pacific Railway.

1920s

1928

The Vancouver Art Gallery is founded.

1931

1939
-45

More than one million Canadians serve in the Second World War, a global conflict that results in an estimated 70–85 million fatalities.

1946

1957

The new Canadian flag, featuring the Maple Leaf design, is officially adopted on January 28, 1965.

1965

1967

"O Canada," the Canadian national anthem, is officially approved in 1967.

1968
-72

1980s
-90s

2000

2013

GATHIE FALK'S LIFE

Gathie Falk is born in Alexander, Manitoba, on January 31, 1928. Her father, Cornelius Falk, dies of pneumonia eleven months after his daughter's birth.



Fig 11. Gathie Falk in a dress of her own design sewn by her mother, Winnipeg, c.1940.

Falk and her mother move to British Columbia following the end of the Second World War. They first settle in Yarrow, a small Mennonite community outside of Chilliwack, before moving to Vancouver.



Fig 12. Gathie Falk (far right) with co-workers at a Winnipeg packing plant, c.1945. Falk's first job after leaving high school was at Macdonalds Consolidated, a food wholesaler.

Falk begins taking summer and evening art courses through the Department of Education at the University of British Columbia. She later pursues a degree in fine arts, specializing in ceramics.

Falk produces a series of performance works that help raise her profile as an artist. She begins to exhibit widely across Canada and the United States.



Fig 13. Gathie Falk, *A Bird Is Known by His Feathers Alone* (performance props), 1968. Falk incorporated musical elements into this and many of her performance works produced in the late 1960s.

Falk continues to produce a number of acclaimed painting series and high-profile sculptural commissions.

The first retrospective of Falk's work, *Gathie Falk*, opens at the Vancouver Art Gallery.

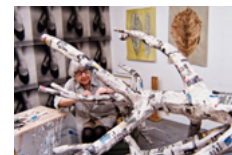


Fig 14. Gathie Falk in her studio working on *Winter Tree*, 2012.

Falk wins the Audain Prize for Lifetime Achievement in the Visual Arts.

LEARNING ACTIVITY #1

CLOTHING AND PERSONAL AGENCY

How can clothing empower identity? Through her work in ceramics, sculpture, papier mâché, and painting, Gathie Falk has returned to the evocative presentation of clothes again and again—and, in many of these works, a human “wearer” is nowhere to be seen. Paradoxically, this representation of clothing on its own—draped on the side of a couch; placed carefully in wooden cabinets; suspended eerily in time—leads to careful considerations of the characters and circumstances being conjured by the garments themselves. In this activity, students will examine Falk’s evocative attire in order to consider the signifiers of identity contained within them. Students will then extend this thinking to their own experiences by exploring a personally resonant piece of clothing from their own lives.

Big Idea

Identity and Clothing

Learning Goals

1. I can use my critical thinking and creative skills to analyze a piece of artwork and make specific observations.
2. I can use proper terminology when discussing the art I see.
3. I can use artwork to build understanding and inspire questions about the world around me.



Fig 15. Gathie Falk, *Home Environment*, 1968. Rooted in the everyday and yet strangely surreal, this installation helped establish Falk’s career focus on responding to her environments.

Materials

- [Gathie Falk Image File](#)
- [Gathie Falk: Life & Work](#)
- “Who is Gathie Falk?” biographical information sheet ([page 2](#))
- Whiteboard
- Sketchbook
- Pencils, erasers

Process

1. As a starting point, engage students in an exploratory sketching exercise. Ask students to sketch an outfit or piece of clothing that makes them feel confident, empowered, and like they are expressing an aspect of their authentic selves. As a guideline, ask students to sketch the clothing items, but not the human body.
2. Once students have completed their sketches, have them engage in a “Think, Pair, Share” exercise with another classmate, using the guiding questions below:
 - a. What did you sketch and why?
 - b. How do these clothing pieces make you feel?
 - c. How does the clothing you wear impact your ability to navigate your daily tasks?
 - d. How do these pieces communicate messages about your personal identity?
 - e. How do these clothing pieces meet your personal and physical needs?
 - f. Are there similarities or differences in themes or items of clothing chosen by you and your discussion partner?

Learning Activity #1 Continued

3. Introduce Gathie Falk using the biographical information sheet. Engage students in a discussion summarizing the key aspects of Falk's life to further help them understand her practice and her contributions to contemporary art.

4. Next, project the following images for the class:

- *Soft Couch with Suit*, 1986
- *Dress with Candles*, 1997
- *Dress with Insect Box*, 1998
- *Antony*, 2001
- *My Work Shirt*, 2016

As each image is projected, lead students in an active critical discussion of Falk's work using the guiding questions below:

- a. What do you see?
- b. What materials were used for these works?
- c. What time period do you think is being represented in these works? What makes you say that?
- d. Why do you think she chose to portray the clothing without the human body?
- e. How does the presentation of the clothing without a body affect how you view this work? How would it change the work if a human form was present?
- f. How do these works comment on fashion, clothing, and identity?
- g. Who do you think would wear these clothes? What makes you say that?
- h. Why do you think the objects are included in some of these works?

5. As a concluding step, have students engage in independent study and reflection by reading the Key Work entries for *Dress with Insect Box*, 1998, and *Soft Couch with Suit*, 1986, in *Gathie Falk: Life & Work* by Michelle Jacques. Ask students to write a short reflection on how their perception of these works has changed after reading more about them. Guiding questions might include:

- a. Have your viewpoints and thoughts on Falk's work changed after you learned more about the context of this work? Why / Why not?
- b. How might we be inspired by Falk's art pieces as we move forward?
- c. What new learning or questions do you have after reviewing your initial sketches and Falk's work?



Fig 16. Gathie Falk, *Soft Couch with Suit*, 1986. Like many of Falk's paintings featuring chairs and discarded clothing, this work explores the symbolism of domestic forms.



Fig 17. Gathie Falk, *Dress with Candles*, 1997. Subtle variations in the colouration of this dress were added with paint, making it seem more lifelike.



Fig 18. Gathie Falk, *Dress with Insect Box*, 1998. Falk's series of papier mâché dress sculptures imagines the lives of women who might have worn them.



Fig 19. Gathie Falk, *Antony*, 2001. This sculpture's form is shaped around the presence of a wearer despite the absence of a body.



Fig 20. Gathie Falk, *My Work Shirt*, 2016. This painting features a rendering of the shirt Falk wears while painting.

LEARNING ACTIVITY #2

A SENSE OF STYLE: BUILDING HISTORICAL CONTEXT

One of the most powerful effects of Falk's depictions of clothing is their ability to conjure specific times and places—and communicate important personal connections to people in her life. In many cases, the apparel evokes a remembered past, with references to styles and cuts that are often years removed from the creation of her artwork. Style is, indeed, a time-based phenomenon, and the emergence and re-emergence of clothing trends, designs, and characteristics can tell us so much about historical iterations of daily life. In this activity, students will look closely at Falk's work in order to document specific elements represented in the styles being shown; research a specific time and place where the styles were commonly worn; and propose a historically accurate full ensemble through sketching, annotation, and a close consideration of style, cut, and materials.

Big Idea

History of Fashion in the Twentieth Century

Learning Goals

1. I can use my critical thinking and creative skills to analyze a piece of artwork.
2. I can identify elements of cut and style as they relate to the history of fashion.
3. I can follow professional expectations in the sketching, annotation, and presentation of fashion.
4. I can use technical terminology in my discussion of fashion and related topics.

Materials

- [Gathie Falk Image File](#)
- Printed or online fashion history research materials
- Sketchbook and pencils/sketching materials



Fig 21. Gathie Falk, *Green Running Shoes*, 2019. Unlike most of Falk's other sculptures, made from clay or papier mâché, this sculpture was made with bronze.



Fig 22. Gathie Falk, *Lucy*, 2021. The dress depicted here has a high collar and is painted in a vibrant sky-blue hue.

Learning Activity #2 Continued

Process

1. Display or share physical copies of the following works from the Image File:

- *Green Running Shoes*, 2019
- *Lucy*, 2021
- *Veneration of the White Collar Worker*, 1973
- *Agnes (Black Patina)*, 2000–01
- *The Problem with Wedding Veils*, 2010–11
- *Small Purse*, c.1970
- *Soft Chair with Pants and Hammer Heads*, 1986

Have an open class discussion based on the following guiding questions:

- In what time or place do you think these clothes may have been worn?
- What elements do you notice that lead you to make these guesses?
- Does the historical context of the garment match the date when the art was created?
- What effect does the use of garments from decades past have on your experience of the artwork?
- What does it make you feel? How would it feel to see more contemporary styles presented in this way?
- What materials do you think these artworks are made of?
- What fabric or material would a real garment like this be made of?

2. Building on the discussion, sketches, and reflection responses of Activity 1, discuss how the use of clothing and style can be used to communicate identity and personal history. As examples, highlight the use of stones and a wedding veil in *The Problem with Wedding Veils*, 2010–11, or the use of a black dress to evoke the experience of mourning in *Agnes (Black Patina)*, 2000–01.

Mention that these works relate to specific events in the artist's life (a troubled marriage and the loss of a friend). Draw connections between the styles shown and elements of early and mid-twentieth century fashion (broad pin stripes, scalloped collars, puffed sleeved dresses).

3. Next, have students select a specific work from those shared in step 1. Ensure that they have access to a copy of this image for close examination of the artwork and style being presented. Students will carefully examine the image and make notes of specific stylistic elements present in their selection.



Fig 23. Gathie Falk, *Veneration of the White Collar Worker*, 1973. This work was produced as part of a commission for the Department of External Affairs building in Ottawa.



Fig 24. Gathie Falk, *Agnes (Black Patina)*, 2000–01. A black dress is standard attire to wear to a funeral because the colour black symbolizes mourning.



Fig 25. Gathie Falk, *The Problem with Wedding Veils*, 2010–11. At almost six feet tall, this sculpture critiques cultural expectations of women as brides.

Learning Activity #2 Continued

4. Students will then research twentieth-century fashion in Canada and draw connections between specific elements seen in their artwork, and decades or movements found in the historical record. Students should be provided with class resources (print or online) for historical context in fashion.
5. Have students develop a full outfit incorporating the garment shown in Gathie Falk's artwork. This outfit should be based on the historical research they have completed and should represent an outfit that may have been worn at a specific time and place. Students should make note of the style, cut, and materials that would be present at this time and in this place.
6. Students will sketch their design, using techniques learned in class, and annotate their sketches with important choices based in their historical research. Sources of information should be identified in a format of the teacher's choosing. The final design will show a careful analysis of the elements shown in Falk's artwork, a representation of this garment in a believable ensemble, skill in fashion sketching, and evidence of specific historical research.



Fig 26. Gathie Falk, *Small Purse*, c.1970. This sculpture resembles an opened purse.



Fig 27. Gathie Falk, *Soft Chair with Pants and Hammer Heads*, 1986. This painting features a pair of men's trousers folded and placed upon a plush living room chair.

CULMINATING TASK

FOOTWEAR FACSIMILES: CULTIVATING CREATIVE DESIGN

Shoes are a repeated motif across much of Gathie Falk's work. As she notes, "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." From boots to sneakers to sandals, evoking the materials, structures, and personalities expressed through footwear is one of the most fascinating aspects of her practice—all the more intriguing because of their creation as glistening, glossy ceramic objects. In this culminating task, students will study the artist's creations. Inspired by this work and through their understanding of clothing and fashion, students will then design their own footwear, communicating their vision through sketching and the creation of a ceramic version of their shoe. Students will produce written statements to accompany their design, articulating its connection to personal identity and historical and contemporary fashion.

Big Idea

Identity and Design

Learning Goals

1. I can use my critical thinking and creative skills to analyze a piece of artwork.
2. I can use the elements and principles of design to communicate a message.
3. I can explain my artistic choices and the symbolism used in my work.
4. I can use proper terminology when discussing the art I see.
5. I can talk about my work and the work of my peers using proper visual arts terminology.

Success Criteria

To be added to, reduced, or changed in collaboration with students.

1. Written work is thoughtful, clear, and edited.
2. Composition: You demonstrate a thorough understanding of how to express specific fashion design ideas through sculpture and prototyping.
3. Materials / tools (pencil crayons, pastels, collage, etc.): Artwork is created with care. You work slowly and submit your best work.
4. Artist statement and documentation of creative process show specific decisions made with reference to personal design decisions and broader understanding of fashion design.

Materials

- [Gathie Falk Image File](#)
- [Gathie Falk: Life & Work](#)
- "Who is Gathie Falk?" biographical information sheet ([page 2](#))
- Clay (self-drying, or pottery)
- Acrylic paint
- Sketchbook and/or canvas
- Paper

Process

1. Introduce Gathie Falk using the biographical information sheet included in this guide.



Fig 28. Gathie Falk, *Single Right Men's Shoes: Bootcase with 6 Orange Brogues*, 1973. The glazing of these shoes compels the viewer to notice fine details like the stitching or signs of wear.

Culminating Task Continued

2. Project *Eight Red Boots*, 1973; *Single Right Men's Shoes: Blue Running Shoes*, c.1973; and *Standard Shoes, The Column* (detail), 1998–99. As each work is presented, engage students in a critical discussion using the guiding questions below:

- What style of shoe is included in this work?
- What materials were used to create this artwork?
- What materials are typically used in the design and creation of shoes?
- How do the materials and design impact the wear and tear of shoes?
- What styles are worn in different situations?
- What employment practices mandate a specific type of shoe for employee safety? What are some examples of design features that protect feet?
- How do the shoes we choose to wear share aspects of our own personal style with the world around us?
- What shoe collecting cultures exist? What propels shoe collecting culture?
- How does shoe collecting culture connect people?
- What are some of the styles of shoes you are familiar with?
- When thinking about your shoes, or the shoes you would like to own, what draws you towards them? What do you like about them? How do these shoes resonate with your own personal style?

3. Inform students of the design challenge. They will be tasked with creating a clay shoe that speaks to their personal identity through chosen colours, design features, and additional materials. Please note, the teacher can decide whether they will be using a kiln or self-drying clay for this project.

4. Students will engage in the creative process and complete a series of sketches before finalizing their design. They should also research specific styles and document historical influences that impact their chosen designs. Students should also think about how their shoe designs might appeal to consumers. Students should receive feedback and finalize what specific style they would like to create.

5. Provide students with time to create their ceramic shoe design. Shoes should be created to a consistent scale decided for the class by available materials and display space. As students create, engage them in dialogue and discussion about their work. Provide feedback and document the creative process. Provide opportunities for students to give each other feedback through gallery walks, during which they share where they are at in their design process.

6. Once the ceramic shoes are created, invite students to write an artist statement sharing their design choices, style influences, intended use of the shoe, and how their personal identities are shared and communicated through the final product. Students should also share specific examples of what they are proud of in their designs, and what areas could be strengthened through further research or practice. If desired, ask students to imagine that the shoe design has been approved for production. Invite students to create a document outlining how they would bring this style to production. In their design plan, they should think about the materials and potential environmental impacts of their design and the production process.

7. If timing permits, invite students to create their own gallery installation in the school to share their final products with the school community.



Fig 29. Gathie Falk, *Eight Red Boots*, 1973. Part of Falk's series *Single Right Men's Shoes*, this work was exhibited at the Canadian Cultural Centre in Paris in 1974.



Fig 30. Gathie Falk, *Standard Shoes, The Column* (detail), 1998–99. This work is part of a larger sculpture designed to look like a stack of shoe boxes.



Fig 31. Gathie Falk, *Single Right Men's Shoes: Blue Running Shoes*, c.1973. Shaped for only the right foot, these ceramic shoes are showcased like a display in a shoe store.

HOW GATHIE FALK MADE ART: STYLE & TECHNIQUE

Here are a few of the important artistic concepts that characterize the art of Gathie Falk. For more information, see the [Style & Technique chapter](#) of *Gathie Falk: Life & Work* by Michelle Jacques.

STILL LIFE AND EXPERIMENTS WITH PAINTING

Falk's earliest works are a series of still-life paintings of flowers, vases, jugs, plates of food, and other domestic scenes. Dating to the early 1960s, these paintings are notably Post-Impressionist in their subject matter, composition, and style. By the mid-1960s, Falk's choice of subject matter had expanded beyond still-life compositions to include architectural spaces, figures, and landscapes. Works like *The Waitress*, 1965, model the artist's emerging intense and emotionally driven style, one that Falk acknowledges was influenced by the distorted use of colour and senses of scale and space found in the works of [German Expressionist](#) painters. Though Falk would move on from painting in this manner, her interest in still life has remained consistent across her interdisciplinary practice.

CERAMICS AND SERIES

Falk uses clay to create ceramic sculptures of everyday objects, often approaching her subject matter in the manner of an icon. Seriality is a major component of her most iconic works, such as *196 Apples*, 1969–70, which displays a glistening pyramid of red fruit on a ceramic and Plexiglas stand. This aspect of her practice has led some critics to draw comparisons with Pop art and its ironic worship of consumerism. However, Falk has resisted this reading. While her works are produced in series, the artist embraces the many outcomes that occur in the process of firing her works. Irregularities such as discoloured glaze or misshapen forms individualize the objects in her series.

VENERATION OF THE ORDINARY

According to author Michelle Jacques, “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.” For Falk, the ordinary is never banal, but rather an occasion to reflect upon the extraordinary in everyday life. Falk's work with ceramics plays a key role in her rendering of reality, though the ordinary is a concern she has worked through in many different media. Her breakout installation *Home Environment*, 1968, is a large-scale example of the artist's approach to venerating ordinary life, for it combines found pieces (such as armchairs sourced from a thrift store) and handcrafted pieces (such as ceramic renderings of domestic items like a TV dinner) in a single work.

CHOREOGRAPHING PERFORMANCE ART

Between 1968 and 1972, Falk produced around fifteen works of performance art—what she referred to as “Theatre Art Works”—that have solidified her role as a pioneer of performance art in Canada. Through performance, Falk was able to combine her artistic practice with her first love of music, often documenting these works as “scores” rather than as scripts. She referred to her process of conceptualizing performance pieces as a kind of choreography involving the use of materials and the space in which the performance is enacted.



Fig 32. Gathie Falk, *The Waitress*, 1965. This painting pictures a woman serving coffee to a group of diners.



Fig 33. Gathie Falk, *196 Apples*, 1969–70. Consistent in size, Falk's apples are distinct due to the colouration of the glaze, which represents different degrees of texture, ripeness, and bruising.



Fig 34. Gathie Falk, *Red Angel*, 1972. In this performance, Falk, wearing a long white gown and oversized wings, is accompanied by parrots singing “Row, Row, Row Your Boat.”

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Supplementary Materials Provided by the Art Canada Institute

- The online art book *Gathie Falk: Life & Work* by Michelle Jacques: <https://www.aci-iac.ca/art-books/gathie-falk/>
- [Gathie Falk Image File](#) with artworks and images related to this guide.
- “Who Was Gathie Falk?” biographical information sheet ([page 2](#))
- Timelines of national and world events and Gathie Falk’s life ([page 3](#))
- “How Gathie Falk Made Art: Style & Technique” information sheet ([page 11](#))

GLOSSARY

Here is a list of terms that appear in this resource guide and are relevant to the learning activities and culminating task. For a comprehensive list of art-related terms, visit the Art Canada Institute’s ever-growing [Glossary of Canadian Art History](#).

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.

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.

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.

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.



Fig 35. Gathie Falk, *Still Life with UBC Jug*, 1962. Falk considers this painting one of the earliest she produced without input from her teachers.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

The following external resources can be used to augment the learning activities and materials provided by the Art Canada Institute. They are to be used at the teacher's own discretion.

"Gathie Falk: Revelations, Virtual Curatorial Talk," McMichael Canadian Art Collection (YouTube video)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QS8H5CAiZJk>

"The Definition of Art," The Art Assignment (YouTube video)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b2VpNx5ZxSA>

Bata Shoe Museum
<https://batashoemuseum.ca/>

"Abstract: The Art of Design," *Tinker Hatfield: Footwear Design* (Netflix documentary episode)
<https://www.netflix.com/title/80057883>

Articles of Interest, Radiotopia ("a show about what we wear," produced and hosted by Avery Trufelman)
<https://open.spotify.com/show/6XKe8xy5P16OLrkBW9oz0k>

"A History of Shoes," Victoria & Albert Museum
<https://www.vam.ac.uk/shoestimeline/>



Fig 36. Gathie Falk, *26 Blood Oranges*, 1970. Falk's fruit sculptures remind us of the artfulness and the careful labour behind such delectable displays.

FIGURE LIST

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Cover Image: 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. Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Gift of J. Ron Longstaffe (83.41.a-i). © Gathie Falk.

Fig 1. Installation view of *Gathie Falk*, 2002, at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Courtesy of the Visual Resources Collection, National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives, Ottawa. Photo credit: NGC.

Fig 2. Gathie Falk in 2019. Photo credit: Tom Gould.

Fig 3. Gathie Falk, *Home Environment*, 1968, ceramic, paint, flock, varnish, polyester resin, silkscreen print, paper, Plexiglas and steel, 244 x 305 x 305 cm. Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Acquisition Fund, Gift of Abraham Rogatnick, Gift of Douglas Christmas (86.32). © Gathie Falk.

Fig 4. Gathie Falk, *Single Right Men's Shoes: Bootcase with 9 Black Boots*, 1973. Clay and mixed media, 192.4 x 17.2 x 88.9 cm. Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery. Photo credit: Rachel Topham Photography.

Fig 5. Gathie Falk, *30 Grapefruit*, 1970, ceramic, glaze, 32 x 49.5 x 49.5 cm, Vancouver Art Gallery. Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Endowment Fund (70.112). © Gathie Falk.

Fig 6. Gathie Falk, *The Banquet*, 1963, oil on canvas, 91 x 122 cm. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: Rachel Topham Photography.

Fig 7. A.C. (Alfred Crocker) Leighton, *Canadian Pacific to Canada*, c.1920, lithograph, 101.5 x 63.5 cm. 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.

Fig 8. Façade of the Vancouver Art Gallery. Courtesy of the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Fig 9. Homemade Canada Flag, made by Walter Lyons and Clothilde Boulay Lyons, 1965, Gift of Ken Lyons. Canadian Museum of History, Gatineau (2016.10.1, IMG2016-0279-0001).

Fig 10. Joyce Wieland, *O Canada*, 1970, lithograph in red on wove paper, 57.4 x 76.4 cm. © National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Photo credit: NGC.

Fig 11. Gathie Falk in a dress of her own design sewn by her mother, Winnipeg, c.1940. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of Gathie Falk.

Fig 12. Gathie Falk (far right) with co-workers at a Winnipeg packing plant, c.1945. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of Gathie Falk.

Fig 13. Gathie Falk, *A Bird Is Known by His Feathers Alone* (performance props), 1968. Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund and purchased with the financial support of the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance Program (2000.17.a-IIIIII). © Gathie Falk.

Fig 14. Gathie Falk in her studio working on *Winter Tree*, 2012. Photo credit: SITE Photography.

Fig 15. Gathie Falk, *Home Environment*, 1968, ceramic, paint, flock, varnish, polyester resin, silkscreen print, paper, Plexiglas and steel, 244 x 305 x 305 cm. Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Acquisition Fund, Gift of Abraham Rogatnick, Gift of Douglas Christmas (86.32). © Gathie Falk.

Fig 16. Gathie Falk, *Soft Couch with Suit*, 1986, oil on canvas, 124.5 x 199 cm. Private collection. Courtesy of the Vancouver Art Gallery. © Gathie Falk.

Fig 17. Gathie Falk, *Dress with Candles*, 1997, papier maché with acrylic and varnish, 91.5 x 61 x 61 cm (approx.). Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (39892). © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: NGC.

Fig 18. Gathie Falk, *Dress with Insect Box*, 1998, papier mâché, acrylic paint, varnish, 90 x 60 x 55 cm. Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Acquisition Fund (98.63). © Gathie Falk.

Fig 19. Gathie Falk, *Antony*, 2001, papier mâché, paint, 68.6 x 73.7 x 19.1 cm. University of Lethbridge Art Collection, gift of Mr. Jim Coutts, Nanton, Alberta, 2010 (2010.48). © Gathie Falk.

Fig 20. Gathie Falk, *My Work Shirt*, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 76.2 x 61 cm. Private collection. Courtesy of Michael Gibson Gallery, London. © Gathie Falk.

Fig 21. Gathie Falk, *Green Running Shoes*, 2019, bronze, 29.2 x 24.1 x 12.7 cm, Edition of 9. Courtesy of Equinox Gallery, Vancouver. © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: Equinox Gallery.

Fig 22. Gathie Falk, *Lucy*, 2021, papier mâché, 81.3 x 55.9 cm. Courtesy of Equinox Gallery, Vancouver. © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: Byron Dauncey.

Fig 23. Gathie Falk, *Veneration of the White Collar Worker*, 1973, ceramic on panel, 74.9 x 97.2 x 5.1 cm. Private collection. Courtesy of Equinox Gallery, Vancouver. © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: Equinox Gallery.

Fig 24. Gathie Falk, *Agnes (Black Patina)*, 2000–01, bronze, 94 x 71 x 17.8 cm. Collection of Equinox Gallery, Vancouver. © Gathie Falk.

Fig 25. Gathie Falk, *The Problem with Wedding Veils*, 2010–11, papier mâché, rocks, 180.3 x 162.6 cm. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of Equinox Gallery, Vancouver. © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: SITE Photography.

Fig 26. Gathie Falk, *Small Purse*, c.1970, glazed clay, 15.2 x 14 x 11.4 cm. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of Michael Gibson Gallery, London. © Gathie Falk.

Fig 27. Gathie Falk, *Soft Chair with Pants and Hammer Heads*, 1986, oil on canvas, 121.9 x 106.6 cm. Collection of J. Sergei Sawchyn. Courtesy of Michael Gibson Gallery, London. © Gathie Falk.

FIGURE LIST

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Fig 28. 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, Vancouver. © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: SITE Photography.

Fig 29. 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.). Collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (18157). © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: NGC.

Fig 30. 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). 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.

Fig 31. Gathie Falk, *Single Right Men's Shoes: Blue Running Shoes*, c.1973, glazed earthenware, 101.5 cm x 105.4 cm x 16.1 cm. Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Gift of J. Ron Longstaffe (83.41.a-i). © Gathie Falk.

Fig 32. Gathie Falk, *The Waitress*, 1965, oil and soya on Masonite, 76 x 91.5 cm. Courtesy of Equinox Gallery, Vancouver. © Gathie Falk.

Fig 33. 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. Courtesy of the Vancouver Art Gallery. © Gathie Falk.

Fig 34. Gathie Falk, *Red Angel*, 1972 (performance documentation at Western Front, Vancouver, 1977), 35 mm slide. Collection of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Morris/Trasov Archive. © Gathie Falk.

Fig 35. Gathie Falk, *Still Life with UBC Jug*, 1962, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 91 cm. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: Rachel Topham Photography.

Fig 36. Gathie Falk, *26 Blood Oranges*, 1970, glazed ceramic, 40.6 x 25.4 x 20.3 cm. Private collection. Courtesy of Equinox Gallery, Vancouver. © Gathie Falk. Photo credit: SITE Photography.