

Gathie Falk

Blue Running Shoes, 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
VAG 83.41a-i



Photo: Trevor Mills, Vancouver Art Gallery

Gathie Falk

Blue Running Shoes, 1973



Image source:

http://www.protocol.gov.bc.ca/protocol/prgs/obc/2002/2002_Falk.jpg

Artist's Biography

Nationality: Canadian

Born: 1928-01-31, Alexander, Manitoba, Canada

Gathie Falk makes paintings, sculptures, installations and performance works, of and with objects relating to her domestic environment. Furniture, clothing, shoes, flowers, vegetables, and plumbing fixtures have all recurred as imagery through Falk's many different media, and have all been inflected by her strong religious convictions. Born into a Mennonite family, and a believer in Christian values, Falk creates art that expresses her veneration of the ordinary—her awe and respect for the materials and processes of everyday life.

Falk was born in 1928 in Alexander, Manitoba and has lived in Vancouver since 1947. She came to a career in the visual arts in her mid-thirties, after initial studies in music and 12 years spent as a primary school teacher. Although painting has been her principal medium since 1978, her early reputation was established as a performance artist and ceramic sculptor.

For her first exhibition of ceramic sculpture, held in 1968 at the Douglas Gallery, Vancouver, Falk recreated an entire living room, *Home Environment*. She furnished it with altered found objects and ceramic replicas of domestic articles, juxtaposed in disconcerting ways. (Two ceramic "fish" are placed on the armrests of an old easy chair, which has been painted pink, and a headless, trussed chicken is deposited in a bird cage.) The commonplace subjects and absurdist sensibilities of *Home Environment* and other early works seem to align Falk with the traditions of the Pop, Surrealist and Dada movements. However, an ongoing struggle for Falk has been freeing her art from interpretations of womanly domesticity.

Another important installation, *Herd One*, 1974-75, is composed of 24 painted wooden horses suspended by transparent wire about a foot above the ground. Cut out of plywood and painted on both sides, the sculptures are two-dimensional versions of the play horses children ride on carousels and in supermarkets. They are transformed in subtle ways into stampeding dream creatures—frightened, fleeing wild. Here, the friendly and familiar strangely coincide with the unknown and uncontrollable.

Source: "Gathie Falk," *Vancouver Art Gallery Collection*. Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1993.

Artistic Context

Nationality: Canadian

Training: University of British Columbia, Vancouver

Peers: Joyce Weiland; Aganetha Dyck; Betty Goodwin; An Whitlock

Group: 20th century; 21st century

Provenance: donated by J. Ron Longstaffe in 1984; the artist

Subject: common objects; domestic environment

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Other works in the Vancouver Art Gallery Collection

Gathie Falk
Still Life by Numbers, 1970
stoneware
Gift of Gary R. Bell
VAG 70.6 a-b

Gathie Falk
Home Environment, 1968
clay, acrylic paint, polyester resin, metal
Gift of Douglas Christmas, Vancouver
VAG 70.109 a-c

Gathie Falk
14 Rotten Apples, 1970
earthenware
Endowment Fund
VAG 70.110

Gathie Falk
26 Oranges, 1970
earthenware
Endowment Fund
VAG 70.111

Gathie Falk
30 Grapefruit, 1970
earthenware
Endowment Fund
VAG 70.112

Gathie Falk
4 Spectators
earthenware
Vancouver Art Gallery Women's Auxiliary Gallery Shop Funds
VAG 73.26 a-e

Gathie Falk
Boot Case with Terrace Towel, 1976
pencil on paper
Vancouver Art Gallery Women's Auxiliary Shop Funds
VAG 76.3

Gathie Falk
Boot Case with Nine Black Shoes
earthenware
Vancouver Art Gallery Women's Auxiliary Gallery Shop Funds
VAG 76.4 a-j

Gathie Falk
Piece of Water: President Reagan, 1981
oil on canvas
Funds donated by the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts
VAG 81.7

Gathie Falk

Blue Running Shoes, 1973

Gathie Falk
Herd I, 1975
wood

Purchased with donations from Mr. and Mrs. W. Pitts, Mr. and Mrs. Peter Paul Saunders, Mrs. Gordon R. Southam, Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Stewart, Interior Designers Institute of British Columbia and Canada Council Matching Grant
VAG 82.9 a-x

Gathie Falk
Theatre in B/W and Colour: Alberta Spruce & Streamers in B/W, 1984
oil on canvas
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund
VAG 86.30

Gathie Falk
Theatre in B/W and Colour: Alberta Spruce & Streamers, 1984
oil on canvas
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund
VAG 86.31

Gathie Falk
Home Environment
found objects
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund
VAG 86.32.1-15

Gathie Falk
Pieces of Water: Libya, 1981
oil on canvas
Gift of J. Ron Longstaffe
VAG 86.202

Gathie Falk
Theatre in B/W and Colour: Bouquets in B/W, 1983
oil on canvas
Gift of J. Ron Longstaffe
VAG 86.203

Gathie Falk
Lawn in Three Parts
oil on canvas
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund
VAG 87.108 a-c

Gathie Falk
Nine Lightbulbs on Dish
ceramic clay, paint, and varnish
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund
VAG 90.7

Gathie Falk
Home Environment, 1968
low-fired clay, acrylic paint, and polyester resin
Anonymous Gift
VAG 90.48.3 a-b

Gathie Falk
Michaelmas Daisies, 1962
oil on composition board
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund
VAG 90.50

Gathie Falk

Blue Running Shoes, 1973

Gathie Falk
Saddle with Bird, 1975
ceramic clay, paint
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund
VAG 90.55

Gathie Falk
Bootcase with 1 Shoe with Roses, 1973
glazed ceramic
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund
VAG 91.34.1

Gathie Falk
American Flag, 1971
painted ceramic
Gift of Mrs. Sallye Fotheringham
VAG 91.34.6

Gathie Falk
White Sewer Pipe, 1970
ceramic
Gift of Mrs. Sallye Fotheringham
VAG 91.34.7

Gathie Falk
Red Saddle with Roses, 1974
ceramic
Gift of Mrs. Sallye Fotheringham
VAG 91.34.8

Gathie Falk
June 1992, For a Wall, 1991
oil on canvas
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund
VAG 91.53.1 a-dd

Gathie Falk
Venice Sink with Postcards from Marco Polo: #6, 1990
oil on canvas
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund
VAG 91.53.2

Gathie Falk
Games and Things: Home Environment, 1968
ink on paper
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund
VAG 93.6

Gathie Falk
Synopsis B
ceramic
Gift of Evelyn Springer
VAG 94.48.1 a-b

Gathie Falk
The White Dress, 1992
lithograph on paper
Gift of Mr. Milton Woensdregt
VAG 94.64.27

Gathie Falk

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Gathie Falk
North Shore Roses, 1992
lithograph on paper
Gift of Mr. Milton Woensdregt
VAG 94.64.28

Gathie Falk
Neat Cuts No. 6, 1992
oil on support
Gift of J. Ron Longstaffe
VAG 97.58.1

Gathie Falk
Neat Cuts No. 16, 1993
oil on canvas
Gift of J. Ron Longstaffe
VAG 97.58.2

Gathie Falk
Nice Table with Crocuses & Details
oil on canvas
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. William Bie
VAG 97.66 a-c

Gathie Falk
Dress with Insect Box
papier-mache, acrylic paint, and varnish
Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund
VAG 98.63

Gathie Falk
Cabbage (from Hanging Cabbages Environment)
ceramic
Gift of Dr. Margaret G. Norman
VAG 99.4.1

Gathie Falk
Beautiful Tigers
on paper
Gift of Dr. Margaret G. Norman
VAG 99.4.2

Gathie Falk
Vancouver Talk
screenprint on paper
Gift of Dr. Margaret G. Norman
VAG 99.4.3

Gathie Falk
A Bird is Known by its Feather's Alone
Performance Props
VAG 2000.17 a-lllllll

Gathie Falk
Vancouver Talks
screenprint on paper
Gift of the Commission General's Office, Expo '86
VAG 2001.25

Gathie Falk

Blue Running Shoes, 1973

Gathie Falk
40 Oranges, 1969
ceramic
Bequest of Joan Lowndes
VAG 2001.36.11

Gathie Falk
Hard-Edge Still Life from Art School Teaching Aids Series
clay, acrylic paint, polyester resin
Bequest of Joan Lowndes
VAG 2001.36.12

Gathie Falk
Chaussures du Pied Droit Pour Hommes
lithograph on paper
Bequest of Joan Lowndes
VAG 2001.36.13

Gathie Falk
Hey diddle diddle
lithograph on paper
Bequest of Joan Lowndes
VAG 2001.36.14

Gathie Falk
Bells and Whistles
silkscreen on paper
Bequest of Joan Lowndes
VAG 2001.36.15

Gathie Falk
Picnic with Black Dog and Clock
ceramic and paint
Gift of J. Ron and Jacqueline Longstaffe
VAG 2003.4.19

Gathie Falk
Four Crows in a Box
oil on canvas
Gift of J. Ron and Jacqueline Longstaffe
VAG 2004.4.20

Gathie Falk
Low Clouds
paint on wood
Gift of Peter Hendrie
VAG 2004.16.2 a-?

Gathie Falk

Blue Running Shoes, 1973



Bibliography

Selected View: The Longstaffe Collection 1959-1984

Publication

[transcription]

GATHIE FALK *BLUE RUNNING SHOES*

FALK, Gathie

Born: Alexander, Manitoba 1928. Canadian.

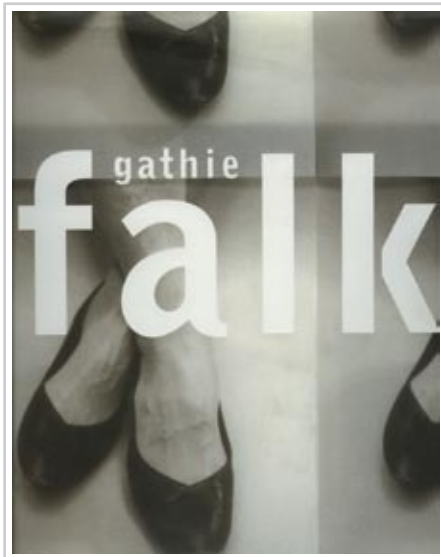
Studied: University of British Columbia.

Collections: Vancouver Art Gallery; Canada Council Art Bank; Rothmans Art Gallery; Art Gallery of Ontario; Art Gallery of Greater Victoria

BLUE RUNNING SHOES

n.d. glazed earthenware in wooden case

99.7 x 104.7 x 16.2cm. VAG 83.41



Gathie Falk

Publication

[transcription of excerpt]

Single right Men's Shoes: Blue Running Shoes, 1973, glazed ceramic, glass and coloured varnish on wood, 101.5 x 105.4 x 161 cm, Vancouver Art Gallery, 83.41a-i, Photo by Teresa Healy, Vancouver Art Gallery

But, of course, everyday life extends beyond the home and, in the early 1970s, Falk took inspiration from the window display of a shoe store. What caught her attention was an open fronted case of men's single shoes, but what leapt into her head was a series of sculptures. "In my mind I saw a bootcase, many bootcases, like china cabinets, full of precious objects," Falk wrote. After some experimenting, she chose to make a series out of repetition, using one style of shoe three, four, six, eight or nine times within each glass fronted "bootcase." Throughout the series of Single Right Men's Shoes, she evolved seven different styles of footwear, based on the shoes of friends (Tom Graff's zippered ankle boots, Glenn Allison's running shoes, Salmon Harris's brogues) with the addition of four traditional styles (bluchers, spectators, banker's shoes and patent leather shoes). She was striving for ordinariness, even "restraint," but with her usual sense of contradiction she finished many of her ordinary shoes in extraordinary colours: orange, green, candy apple red. And she also reversed the retail display convention, turning the shoes around so that the public or "cosmetic" outside of the shoe faced away from the viewer and the private or "emotional" instep side was exposed.

The bootcases themselves, painted with strong colours that reiterate or complement the colour of the shoes, are integral, just as the pyramids were to the Fruit Piles. Initially, Falk found a glass fronted tool cabinet in a secondhand store and added shelves and glossy paint. For the rest of the series, she had cases custom built in different sizes and configurations. As with the fruit, all the shoes are similar, but none are the same. Either glazed or painted, they are less luscious than the fruit but are more literal and more expressive in their form and

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finish. Falk's objects are individual, each bearing what she calls "the mark of the human body" in its creases, bulges and flesh and bone undulations. The shoes clearly have been worn, but not to the point of broken down sentimentality. As with the shirts and suit coats, she uses the shoes to represent human beings. This is one of her great gifts: the ability

to depict ordinary beings through their ordinary apparel. At the same time, she bestows an iconic character upon this, well, pedestrian wear.

Falk produced some seventeen bootcases, which she first exhibited in a group show at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1973. (These boots were made for walking: they were later exhibited in Victoria, Toronto and New York, and in a solo show at the Canadian Cultural Centre in Paris.) Critic Joan Lowndes lavished praise on the artist's abilities "to transform the banal into the beautiful" and "to invent variations on her them." In the same installation, Falk also exhibited *18 Pairs of Red Shoes with Roses*, a long line of ceramic men's shoes and boots, in pairs, encompassing all her different styles. (She gave visual coherence to the piece by finishing every shoe in luminous red and placing a rose decal on the inside of each heel.) Set in a long line directly on the floor and running at an angle across the gallery, these shoes provoke different feelings from those of their case-mounted fellows. They're more humble but at the same time more surreal, more mysterious, even a little ominous. They speak of a bodily presence but look more abandoned, somehow, than the shoes in the cases. *18 Pairs* has formal precedents in a line of single ceramic apples which Falk had earlier constructed, and in the lines of shoes that evolved in her performance pieces. The first of these, she improvised during her initial workshop with Deborah Hay, asking participants to remove their shoes, then arranging them in a line while counting out the floorboards between each shoe. The second, she developed as a formal element in *Skipping Ropes* and *18 Pairs* make a strange association of the homely with the holocaustic. What has become of them men who wore these shoes? Again, Falk evokes presence through absence, and absence through presence—through the material evidence of the ordinary.

Further Reading

Birnie Danzker, Jo-Anne et. al. *Gathie Falk Retrospective*. Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1985.

Bogusky, Alf, and Tom Graff. *Night Skies: Gathie Falk*. Lethbridge: Southern Alberta Art Gallery, 1980.

Lind, Jane. *Gathie Falk*. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1989.

Rosenburg, Ann. *Gathie Falk: Beautiful British Columbia Thermal Blanket Series*. Vancouver: Equinox Gallery, 1985.

Rosenburg, Ann. "Gathie Falk Works." *The Capilano Review*. 24 (1982): 4-62.

Rosenburg, Ann. "Life Imitates Art for Fascinating Falk." *The Vancouver Sun. Saturday Review*. (October 5, 1991): D1.

Gathie Falk

Blue Running Shoes, 1973

Exhibition History

Exhibitions at the Vancouver Art Gallery

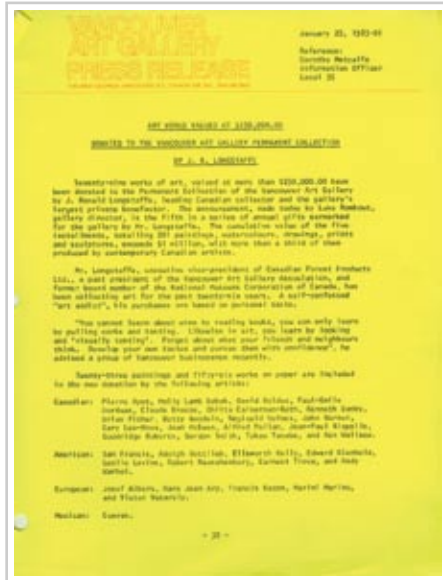
J. Ron Longstaffe Collection. January 11, 1985 - February 24, 1985.

From the Collection: Gathie Falk. August 8, 1990 - October 8, 1990.

Gathie Falk. February 12, 2000 - June 4, 2000.

Determined Pursuit: Highlights from the Longstaffe Collection. February 28, 2004 - May 16, 2004.

75 Years of Collecting: British Masters, Group of Seven and Pop Icons. February 4, 2006 - May 14, 2006.



Archival History

Press Release

Miscellaneous History
1983-01-25

[transcription]

VANCOUVER
ART GALLERY
PRESS RELEASE

1145 WEST GEORGIA, VANCOUVER, B.C., CANADA V6E 3H2 (604) 682-5621

January 25, 1983-01

Reference:
Dorothy Metcalfe
Information Officer
Local 35

**ART WORKS VALUED AT \$250,000.00
DONATED TO THE VANCOUVER ART GALLERY PERMANENT COLLECTION
BY J. R. LONGSTAFFE**

Seventy-nine works of art, valued at more than \$250,000.00 have been donated to the Permanent Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery by J. Ronald Longstaffe, leading Canadian collector and the gallery's largest private benefactor. The announcement, made today by Luke Rombout, gallery director, is the fifth in a series of annual gifts earmarked for the gallery by Mr. Longstaffe. The cumulative value of the five installments, totalling 201 paintings, watercolours, drawings, prints and sculptures, exceeds \$1 million, with more than a third of them produced by contemporary Canadian artists.

Mr. Longstaffe, executive vice-president of Canadian Forest Products Ltd., a past president of the Vancouver Art Gallery Association, and former board member of the National Museums Corporation of Canada, has been collecting art for the past twenty-six years. A self-confessed "art addict", his purchases are based on personal taste.

Gathie Falk

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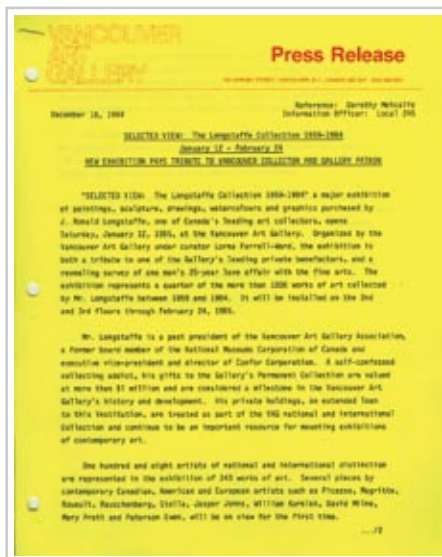
"You cannot learn about wine by reading books, you can only learn by pulling corks and tasting. Likewise in art, you learn by looking and 'visually tasting'. Forget about what your friends and neighbours think. Develop your own tastes and pursue them with confidence", he advised a group of Vancouver businessmen recently.

Pellan, Jean-Paul Riopelle, Goodridge Roberts, Gordon Smith, Takao Tanabe, and Ken Wallace.

American; Sam Francis, Adolph Gottlieb, Ellsworth Kelly, Edward Kienholz, Leslie Levine, Robert Rauschenberg, Earnest Trova, and Andy Warhol.

European: Josef Albers, Hans Jean Arp, Francis Bacon, Marini Marino, and Victor Vasarely.

Mexican: Cuevas.



Press Release

Miscellaneous History
1984-12-18

[transcription of excerpt]

VANCOUVER
ART
GALLERY

Press Release

750 HORNBY STREET, VANCOUVER, B.C. CANADA V6Z 2H7 (604) 682-5621

Reference: Dorothy Metcalfe
Information Officer: Local 245

December 18, 1984

SELECTED VIEW: The Longstaffe Collection 1959-1984

January 12 - February 24

NEW EXHIBITION PAYS TRIBUTE TO VANCOUVER COLLECTOR AND GALLERY PATRON

"SELECTED VIEW: The Longstaffe Collection 1959-1984" a major exhibition of paintings, sculpture, drawings, watercolours and graphics purchased by J. Ronald Longstaffe, one of Canada's leading art collectors, opens Saturday, January 12, 1985, at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery under curator Lorna Farrell-Ward, the exhibition is both a tribute to one of the Gallery's leading private benefactors, and a revealing survey of one man's 25-year love affair with the fine arts. The exhibition represents a quarter of the more than 1000 works of art collected by Mr. Longstaffe between 1959 and 1984. It will be installed on the 2nd and 3rd floors through February 24, 1985.

Mr. Longstaffe is a past president of the Vancouver Art Gallery Association, a former board member of the National Museums Corporation of Canada and executive vice-president and director of Canfor Corporation. A self-confessed collecting addict, his gifts to the Gallery's Permanent Collection are valued at more than \$1 million and are considered a milestone in the Vancouver Art Gallery's history and development. His private holdings, on extended loan to this institution, are treated as part of the VAG national and international Collection and continue to be an important resource for mounting exhibitions of contemporary art.

One hundred and eight artists of national and international distinction are represented in the exhibition of 243 works of art. Several pieces by

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contemporary Canadian, American and European artists such as Picasso, Magritte, Rouault, Rauschenberg, Stella, Jasper Johns, William Kurelek, David Milne, Mary Pratt and Paterson Ewen, will be on view for the first time.

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Mr. Longstaffe admits there has been no systematic approach to the development of his collection, apart from his personal commitment to support Canadian artists. Financial manageability and access to the works were the only restrictive factors for what is regarded as a collection of national importance, built assiduously and judiciously.

"You cannot learn about wine without pulling corks and tasting," Mr. Longstaffe recently advised a group of Vancouver businessmen, adding, "It is the same with art. Forget what your friends and neighbours think. Develop your own tastes and pursue them with confidence."

An illustrated catalogue has been produced for this exhibition and includes an essay by Lorna Farrell-Ward, Mr. Longstaffe's personal experiences and reminiscences as a collector, a list of works and artists biographies. It will be on sale in the Gallery Shop.

The exhibition is funded by the Government of British Columbia through the B.C. Cultural Fund and the B.C. Lottery Fund.

A list of all artists represented in the exhibition is attached.

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