

# GATHIE FALK WORKS

VOLUMES 1 AND 2



*I want to make cabbages precisely  
because they are not exotic.*

— GATHIE FALK



# GATHIE FALK WORKS

VOLUME 1

EDITOR FOR THIS ISSUE

Ann Rosenberg

ASSISTED BY

Bill Schermbrucker

Dorothy Jantzen

Aaron Steele

STUDENT ASSOCIATE

*The Capilano Review is published four times a year from Capilano College, 2055 Purcell Way, North Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.*

*We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of The Canada Council, the Capilano College Humanities Division, the Capilano College Student Society, the Government of British Columbia through the B.C. Cultural Fund and Lottery revenues.*

*The Capilano Review is a member of the Canadian Periodical Publishers' Association and COSMEP. Microfilm editions and reprints are available from University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan.*

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*Printed in Victoria, British Columbia, by Morriss Printing Company Ltd.*

*Second Class Registration Number 4593*

*ISSN 0315-3754*

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Number 24

1982

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COVER

Gathie Falk

## Ann Rosenberg / PREFACE

Gathie Falk was born in Alexander, Manitoba, to Mennonite parents. Her father, who died when she was an infant, had moved to Canada to escape the consequences of the Russian Revolution. Although he was very musical and could easily have worked as a teacher, he chose the simple life of a farmer. Gathie moved with her two older brothers and widowed mother frequently. While she remembers being poor, she never felt deprived. There was always enough to eat, clothes to wear, toys to play with. The houses where they lived were always neat, clean and pleasant. As a child, she dreamed of becoming an artist, a musician, a writer, a movie star, a nurse, a doctor, a dancer, a missionary.

She studied music seriously. Her over-eagerness to excel coupled with a self-conscious nervousness undermined her success in music. She had a brief encounter with children's Saturday morning art classes. Due to pressing family circumstances, at 16 she began work in Winnipeg as a packer for Safeway. After coming to Vancouver in 1947, she worked in a factory, sewing pockets into suitcases. To this job she attributes her high tolerance for hard, repetitious work. She left factory employment a few years afterwards when, with some reluctance and mixed success, she became an elementary school teacher.

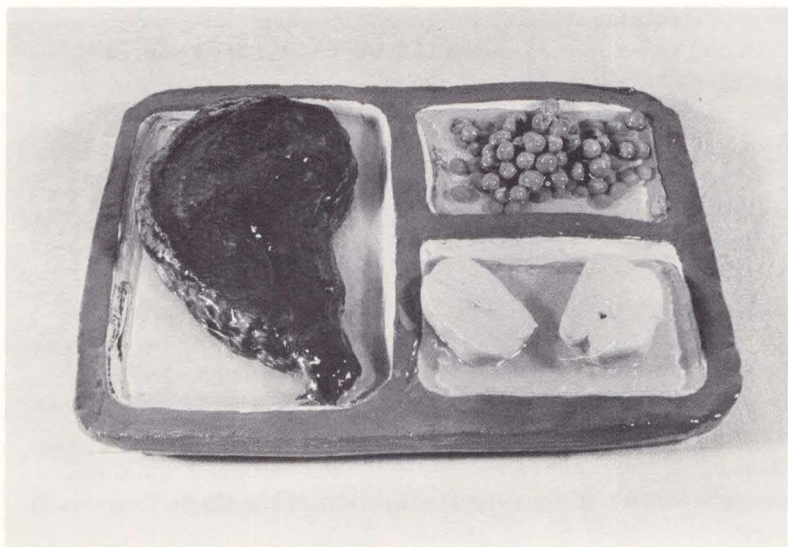
By 1962, she'd taken several painting courses from Jim MacDonald at the University of British Columbia's Department of Education. In 1964, she began to study pottery and sculpture at the same institution under Glenn Lewis. In 1965, she took a gamble many would fear to take. She quit her secure teaching job in order to immerse herself in art.<sup>1</sup>

She lived first on her pension funds, against the advice of cautious friends. When that money was gone, she rented out the main floor of her house and lived in her basement for a year. She began to exhibit; her painting and her pottery were selling.<sup>2</sup> Apart from teaching three years at U.B.C.'s Studio Art Program, Falk has lived, ever since, with economical grace from the products of her home studios.

## HOME ENVIRONMENT

By 1965 Falk was independently painting, working towards her first one-person show at the Canvas Shack. In the same year she continued her formal studies in ceramics that she'd begun in 1964. Glenn Lewis taught her how to make pottery and he encouraged her to make objects in clay. By 1967, having lost interest in completing her Bachelor of Education Degree (U.B.C.), she began to work in earnest on small, mixed media pieces, her first important sculptures.

She was living and working that summer in the basement of her East Vancouver house. The oil cans and exposed electrical wires in her studio environment became visual sources. She made oil can/oil spout works and ceramic telephones with bundles of wire coming out of them, and also clay gift boxes with ribbon rosettes, ceramic eggs, TV dinners, gaming boards, mated and mateless shoes. These and other items had the look of souvenirs gone awry.





Many of these small works were combined with others for Falk's first one-person exhibition at the Douglas Gallery on Davie Street, 1968. The show, called *Home Environment*, brought together diverse created objects into domestic unity. Real furniture given special surface treatments (candy-apple car lacquer, pink flocking) and hand-made ceramic, metal and plexiglas tables, chairs and nightstands served as podia for the small ceramic sculptures. The result was that wherever one looked in the exhibition space there were fresh, unfamiliar, still lifes.

A large "Sally Ann" easy chair was transformed into a monumental sculpture. First, it was drenched in gallons of shrimp-pink enamel paint which hardened the chair with an impervious skin. Then it was dignified by a canopy over the chair back — a common suitcoat stiffened in the pink paint and delicately herring-boned when the enamel was dry. This canopy hovered there like a ghostly male presence. It was the kind of drapery one finds over the thrones of royal or papal figures in traditional painting. Where one would have anticipated two protective doilies on the chair arms in real life, Falk placed instead two brown, iridescent, formidable clay fish. Finally, on the seat were several ceramic sandwiches that made sure the viewer would not follow an impulse to sit down on this once useful piece of furniture.

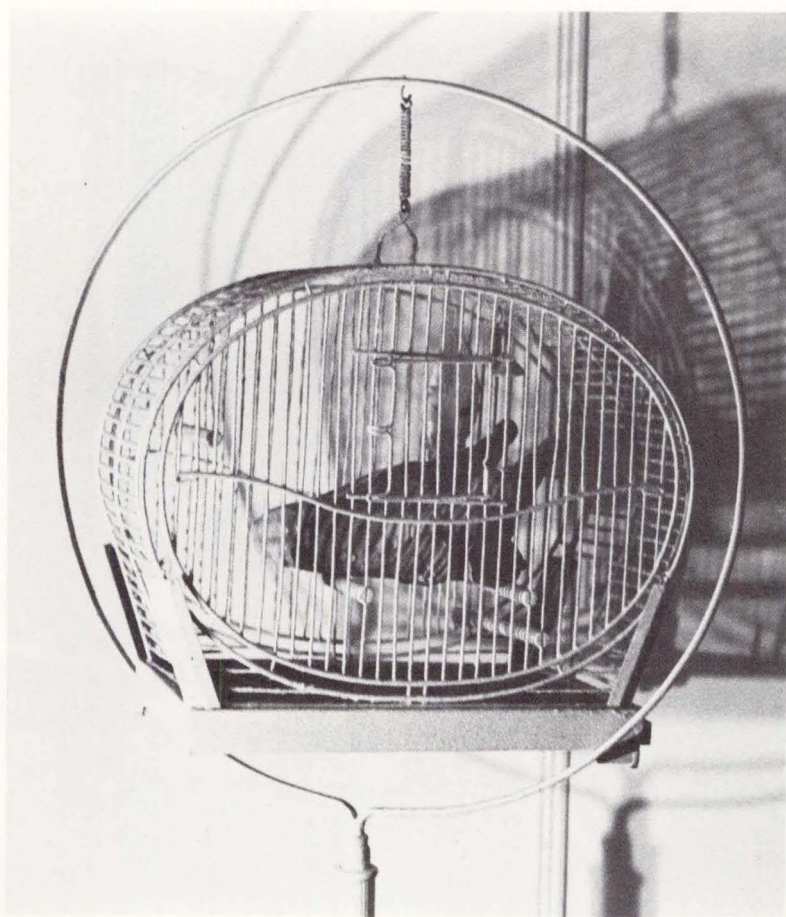
For an alcove in the Douglas Gallery, Falk made silk-screened shrimp-pink wallpaper and set into this area an old-fashioned bird cage on a stand. It, too, was painted pink and flocked to give it a fuzzy surface. Inside was a pink ceramic carcass of a roasting chicken.

The chair and the cage compositions suggest the effortless way Falk built up from several manageable parts a large-scale sculptural image.

Real life objects (found or created) were typical material in mid-sixties art. It was the period of Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg and Claes Oldenburg's rise to fame. "Pop Art" and "Funk" were two handy critical terms. Like Oldenburg in particular, Falk did not intend the contrast of the "beautiful and ugly" as a philosophical dialectic. Rather she understood in a basically human way that "in life, the uglies and the lovelies live side by side at odds and unresolved."<sup>3</sup> At the same time, she gave ordinary things the power to disturb. Marguerite Pinney wrote of the *Home Environment* show:



"Falk offers us a 'preserved' home. Not an environment in the encompassing sense, yet the number and extraordinariness of the ordinary objects capture and invade the space. It is their very unaesthetic familiarity which provides the shock value. A freezer is complete with frozen dinner, excremental peas and carrots, frozen water. The occupant of a . . . birdcage is revealed to be a headless, eviscerated, flesh coloured chicken. . . . With grim humour, Falk invests her sterile objects with the implications of a biological life cycle, gruesomely related to our own."<sup>4</sup>



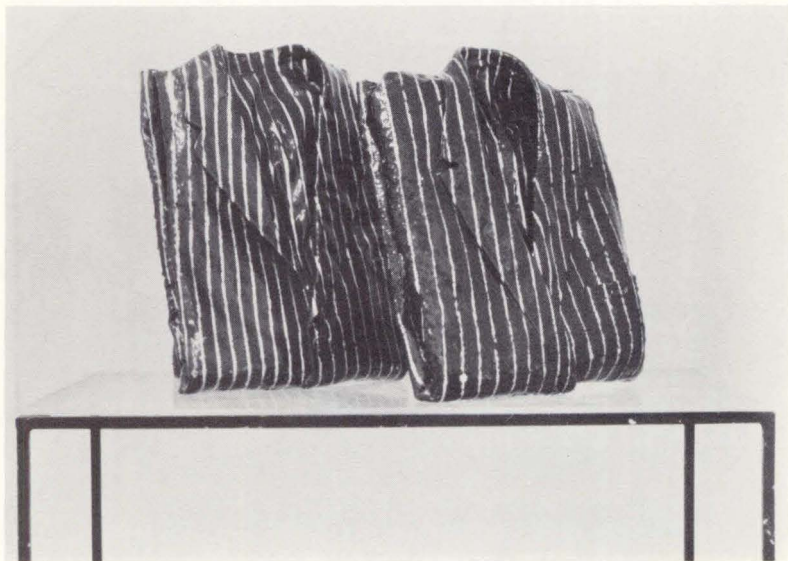


## FRUIT PILES & OTHER WORKS

In 1969 there was a show at the Newport Art Museum, Newport Beach, California, that imported a revised version of *Home Environment*.<sup>5</sup> By 1970 Falk was seeing the potential within the diversity of her interests for the development of short series. The horrific and the ugly that had been part of her early aesthetic began, increasingly, to give way to her admission of the beautiful.<sup>6</sup>

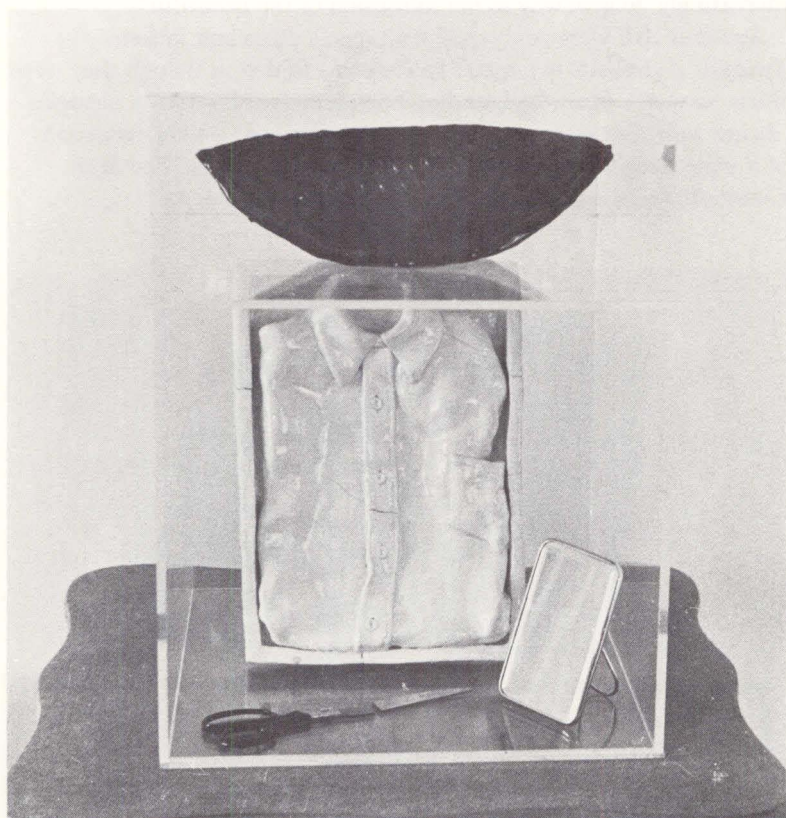
*Synopsis A-F* were concerned with men's shirts and jackets.

*Synopsis A* presents two men's sports coats folded as though they were shirts just back from the laundry. They are placed within a plexiglas 'shrine' as if they were portraits on a mantelpiece — twin evocations of a male image, omniscient in black and silver stripes. The *Man Compositions* also paid tribute to masculine costume.





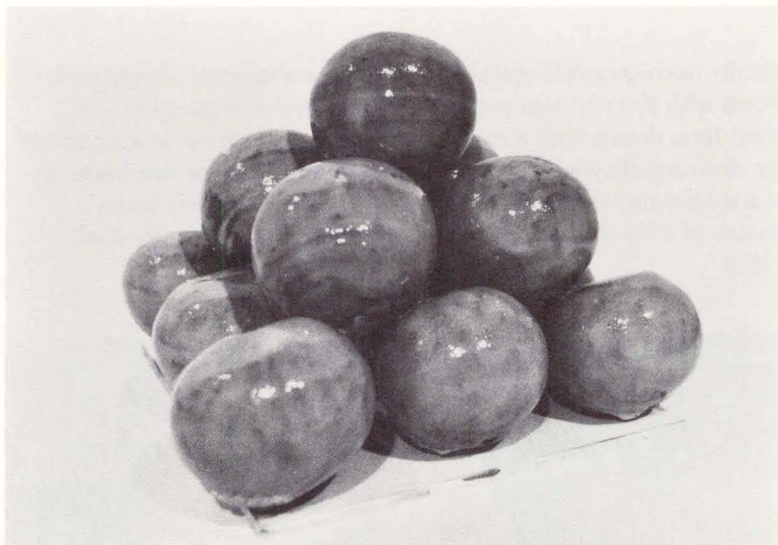
*Man Composition No. 2* combined tiny, found-object, girls red shoes with an encircling white man's ceramic belt within a clear plexiglas box. Another built up hierarchically within a clear box: a mirror set like a portrait to the right, broken scissors in front; behind, a porcelain folded shirt in a porcelain box positioned like a portrait; above (on its own shelf) where art logic expects angels there is a gleaming dark red watermelon slice. This sculpture, now destroyed, conveys power beyond its modest scale.



Finally in the masculine realm, were several drawings of men's shirt fronts with ties set at an angle. The shirts were composed of fine black lines drawn with a ruler; there were no outlines. At least one of the drawings showed the front buttons and the curved side openings of a shirt simultaneously. These images anticipated the ceramic murals of 1971-73, *Veneration of the White Collar Worker* Nos. 1 & 2.



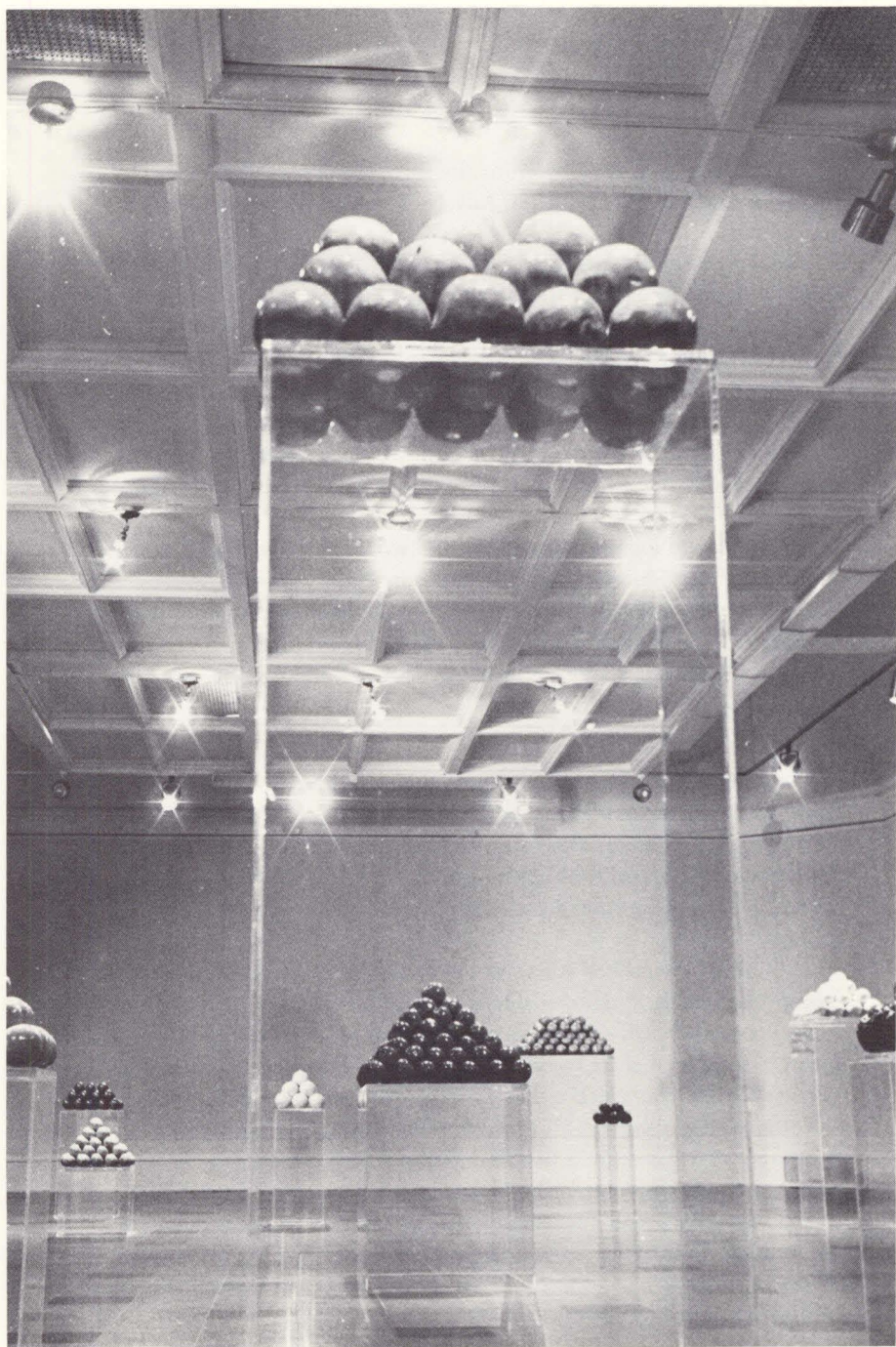
The impulse that led to the *Fruit Piles* came in the Fall of 1967. Falk was "walking as usual by the grocer's on the corner, saw the fruit and admired it." It struck her "that the shape was very sculptural and that the units [within the] triangle were individually organic. . . . She determined then to make a pile of apples." She like everyone, was "pleased with the results."<sup>7</sup>



In the making of this series which extended over three years, Falk put her ceramic skills to task. In the fruit piles — pyramids of grapefruit, oranges, apples — the individual fruits were hand thrown on the wheel to a "by feel" appropriate uniform size. Each began as a "closed" cup which was rolled, patted and dented into the necessary shape. The grapefruit, for example, were run over a screen to give them a texture like citrus dimples. Most of the fruit piles were glazed with commercial glazes in bright clear colours. However, in the largest of the pyramids — *196 Apples* — through the firing process some of the apples did not turn out the expected candy-apple red. This saved the piece from being "merely pretty." The apples in the middle are orangey, some are greyish, some almost black, a fact which lent "strength" to the piece.<sup>8</sup>

In 1969, she exhibited a work called *69 Grapefruits* at the Douglas Gallery — a scatter of dozens of ceramic grapefruit over the wooden floor.







As Falk wrote in preparation for the show *29 Pieces* presented with Glenn Lewis's *Closets* in June/July 1970 at the Vancouver Art Gallery:

"Each [piece of] fruit has a blossom and stem end, and dents and grain as when bought at the Supermarket, but for all that, it is not fruit: the colour is off, it is visibly hollow, it has a musical ring when you tap it, and most important, you can't eat it."

"Mounted high on clear plexiglas bases, the piles are aloof, rather etherial apparitions. Seen close or fondled, they are homely to the eye, sympathetic to the hand. This union of opposing qualities, the mundane and the unearthly, is not something I strive for but simply recognize."<sup>9</sup>

According to Richard Simmins, the two-person exhibition in which the *Fruit Piles* figured prominently produced a "mixed reaction." He wrote, "Falk's monumental piles of ceramic fruit are equated with the mundane — instead of which they are a veneration of the commonplace. . . ." This artist is conscious of making the ordinary mysterious."<sup>10</sup>

Related to the *Fruit Piles* in their ability to deliver to the viewer pure visual pleasure were several of the *Art School Teaching Aids* included in *29 Pieces*. The most sober of these was the first made. In it, the fruit pieces and the cloth were glazed in tones of grey. The fruit pieces were numbered to suggest that endless rearrangement is possible, although in truth the only perfect arrangement is the one shown here. Two other *Aids* were Cezanne-like compositions with compotes and fruit, deliciously oil-painted in "Renoir" colours and with vigorous brushwork impasto. One had an overcoat of polyester resin to give its surfaces a shimmering glaze-like finish. *Hard-Edge Teaching Aid* combined a black bottle with pristine white cloth and crisply cut apple-halves and tulips. White paint was applied to bisquited clay to create a porcelain effect. The apple skins were painted candy-apple red; the bottle and the stamens, dense black. Then everything was varnished with resin. If kiln-fired glazes had been used, none of the colour-edges would have remained distinct. Here as in the other *Aids*, painting was necessary to ensure the proper visual result, the required control.



These works recalled Falk's days as art student and teacher, no less than did the more art historical *Memento Mori Aids* that were part of the same series. The pieces whose titles translate into "Remember you must die," included the skulls and candles appropriate to their 17th Century still life source. They were, however, composed more for their potential beauty than for their funereal meaning.<sup>11</sup>

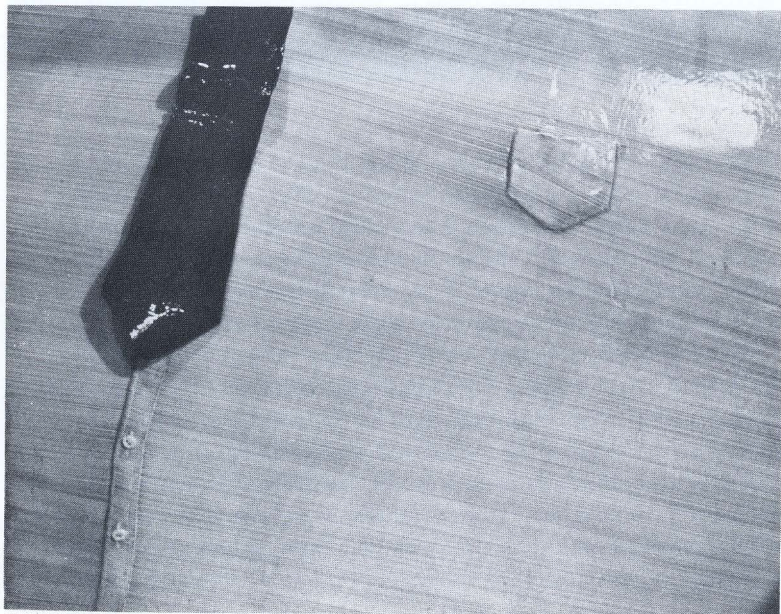
29 Pieces featured twenty-one *Fruit Piles*, several members of the *Art School Teaching Aid Series* and some other still-life compositions. It was supplemented by a slide show of the objects from Home Environment and recently completed works like the *Cherry Baskets*, that were not physically present in the exhibition. However diverse the overall contents were, the visual effect was very coherent — piles of fruit elevated on a plexiglas podia in a large gallery; several Aids and other works set on plywood shelves, mirrors behind, in a smaller one.



## VENERATION OF THE WHITE COLLAR WORKER NOS. 1 & 2

In 1970, Falk moved from East Vancouver to her present house in Kitsilano — a fact that would later influence her art. She was intensely involved in Performance Works (Issue 25), and she was starting two new major series, *Table Settings* and *Single Right Men's Shoes*. In 1971, she received a commission for a new Department of External Affairs building in Ottawa, a pair of ceramic murals called *Veneration of the White Collar Worker Nos. 1 & 2*.

The murals monumentalize in clay the simple, strong imagery of the pen on paper shirt drawings previously described. For two long years, this commission took much of her time. With typical efficiency, Falk managed to finish it months before the Lester B. Pearson Building was ready to receive it in 1973. The two series mentioned and other ceramic works, provided her relief from the ever-present responsibility of the *Venerations*.



To make each of the 48 panels for the two murals, these procedures were followed. First Falk prepared the clay by treading on it in an old bath tub, then rolling it with her hands as though kneading dough. She stored the prepared clay in bins. For each shirt image she took out an appropriate amount of clay and rolled it into six pieces so that it would be easier to handle in the kiln. When suitably dry, the clay pieces were fired. After firing the pieces were reassembled onto a piece of plywood — fixed down and glued together with a porridge-like mixture of glue and filler. When the adhesive material was dry, it was sanded to create as smooth a working surface as possible. Each panel weighed approximately 50 pounds.

For all the shirt fronts in *Veneration . . . No. 1*, these additional processes took place. Two coats of white paint were applied and onto this surface Falk drew hundreds of black lines running diagonally and at slightly different angles on either side of the shirt opening and over the pocket. Although she had hoped to use felt pen, the ink disappeared into the surface. All the lines, then, were made in india ink with a special pen. One mistake would have ruined an entire shirt front. There are no mistakes, although it was exceedingly difficult to draw on the undulant surfaces. When this task was finished, the shirts were coated with polyester resin.

For each of *Veneration . . . No. 1*'s shirts, Falk made a ceramic tie of slightly different length, though similar in shape: some with tie clips, some without. After kiln firing, these were hand-painted in slightly different tones of red so that when in place in Ottawa, the red ties would create a subtle spectrum effect in the first mural.

In *Veneration . . . No. 2*, the extra procedures were fewer, but no less exacting. There were no pieces to add, because the pens in the pockets were part of each sculpture and, apart from the two white ground coats, no further surface preparation was necessary before the appropriate colour from a blue spectrum was applied. After much discussion about method, Falk reached an efficient solution to the distribution of hue in the mural. She arranged the shirts of mural No. 2 on her back lawn in the order of their Ottawa placement. She selected a bright blue for the 12th panel and, mixing white with the blue, she created ever lighter tones working backward to an almost white for the 1st shirt; working forward from 12, she mixed black into the blue and ended the spectrum with an almost-black shirt, the 24th.



For several of her major pieces, Falk has employed assistants although she is always very careful to do all of the essential artistic labour herself, and much of the scutwork. She is concerned that she is perceived as manually/technically capable, equal to a man in the ability to carry out a physically demanding task. In the case of such arduous processes that the *Venerations* entailed, she wisely chose to hire some help: Glenn Allison, Salmon Harris, Elizabeth Klassen and Tom Graff. Glenn and Salmon painted on the spectral blues, once chosen, and the polyester varnishes. Later Elizabeth and Tom helped to remove with sanders the pools of resin that collected after glazing at the shirts' edges on the plywood backings — a difficult and discouragingly lengthy task. They went to Ottawa to assist in the installation of the murals, which are still a subject for discussion among the users of the cafeteria where they are housed. *Veneration* . . . No. 1 achieved a notoriety of sorts by being lampooned in a cartoon in *The Ottawa Citizen*, April 19, 1973.







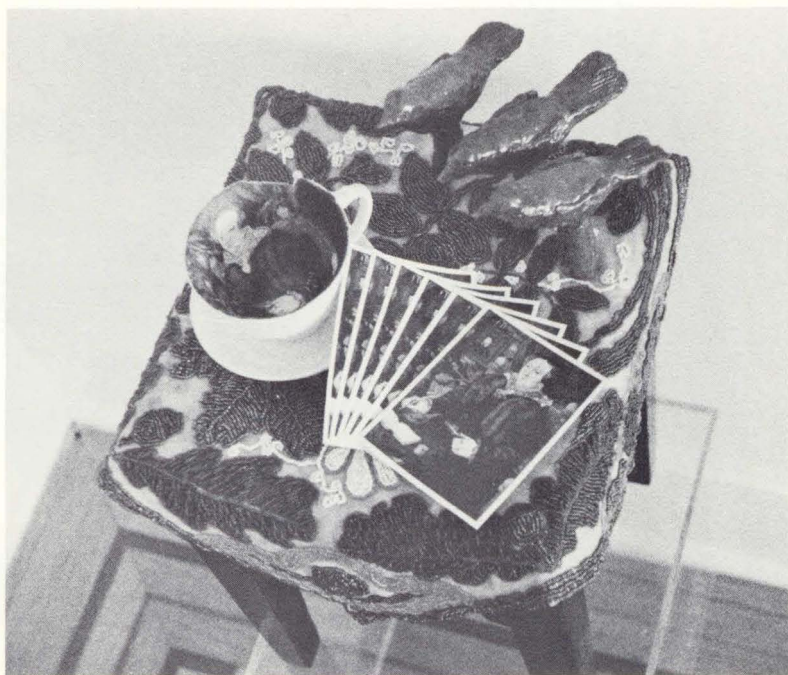


## TABLE SETTINGS

The *Table Settings* were another way of satisfying Falk's basic urge to create compositions. Whether it's laying the table or putting things on her dresser, her head "naturally goes" in the direction of making still lifes.<sup>12</sup> The *Art School Teaching Aids* and the *Fruit Piles*, however, were extrapolations from familiar arrangements in art and life, whereas the *Table Settings* (1970-74) are like the rather surrealist combination of objects in the *Man Compositions*.

Falk judged that the *Settings* did not have the "one glance impact of the *Fruit Piles*. . . ." They must be viewed as "compositions of some intricacy, and each one must be looked at by itself." She felt that they were "not in any way integrated with each other."<sup>13</sup>

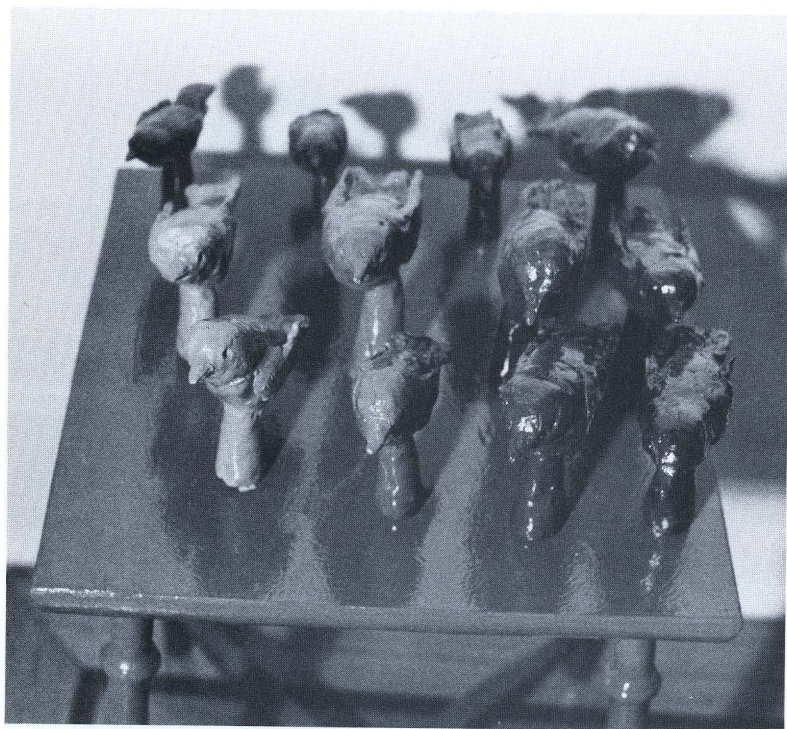
Six works in all comprise the series. Each of the found-object tables used as podia for the settings is different in shape, colour and texture, though all are small. Five of the tables have cups or glasses on them; three have birds; two have acorn motifs; one has insects real and ceramic, set in resin trays; three have flowers or a flower motif.





The *Table Setting* illustrated is the most sumptuous of all. The subtly golden table is covered by a beaded cloth that Falk painstakingly embellished with acorn leaves and flowers. On top rests a hand of cards, each a representation of the portrait of *Madame Dacre* owned by the National Gallery, Ottawa. In the hand-thrown cup is a painted replica of the portrait. Three hand-made birds in green attend the arrangement. This work is unusually opulent and represents a visual complexity that Falk was at that point beginning to move away from.

Only one *Table Setting* had the simplicity and directness of the *Shoe Series* Falk was working on at the same time. In it a flock of green and grey birds is organized in neat rows on a green table.



Her difficulty with the *Table Settings* can be understood in the way she chose to exhibit them at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre of Queen's University, Kingston, and at the University of Guelph in 1972. In a move reminiscent of a section of her performance work, *A Bird Is Known by His Feathers Alone* where Falk sits within a circle of Christmas trees (Issue 25), she placed the sculptures within a similar setting. She set two plastic trees between each and called the 'integrated' work, *Five Table Settings in a Setting of Christmas Trees*.<sup>14</sup>

It is characteristic of Falk to be diverse in her interests; she is typically working on (or thinking about) more than one project. Big themes like still life composition, lesser themes like picnics, major motifs like flowers, shoes, birds, lawns, fruit (used often), minor motifs like dogs, bees, flame (used infrequently), a general painterliness of handling (whatever the medium), a love of overgloss (applied sheen), a gift for colour (always), an interest in spectrums (sometimes), a straight-to-the-point manner of titling hold everything together no matter what the ebb and flow, albeit never too tightly. Between 1970 and 1974, Falk was probably enjoying two development processes simultaneously — widening out, moving in as many directions as possible, even into the highly complex arena of performance art where she was making major contributions (Issue 25), and pulling in, tightening structure and form as she learned more and more about exhibiting art. The Christmas-tree-in-between gesture in the *Table Settings* show is a move towards unification and coherence. Individual members of all the series she has engaged in thereafter are linked together more tightly than are the *Settings*. Perhaps the elegance of subtle variation and extension through repetition was what she learned, essentially, through the hard labour of *Veneration of the White Collar Worker*.

For the performance work, *Red Angel* (1972), she assembled five identical, kinetic still lifes. Each base is a grey table with slender legs. On each table there is a red-lacquered phonographic turntable, on top of one is placed a red ceramic apple; all display strident looking souvenir-shop parrots. Singly or together, at rest or in motion, the parrots have a visual directness touched slightly by the bizarre that is characteristic of the best of Falk's work (Issue 25).

## SINGLE RIGHT MEN'S SHOES

The idea for the *Single Right Men's Shoes* in 1970 was initiated, like the *Fruit Piles*, by the visual trigger of a real life event. Falk saw a glass-doored display case full of men's shoes in front of a shoe store. In her mind she envisioned "a boot case, many boot cases, like China cabinets full of precious objects."<sup>15</sup>

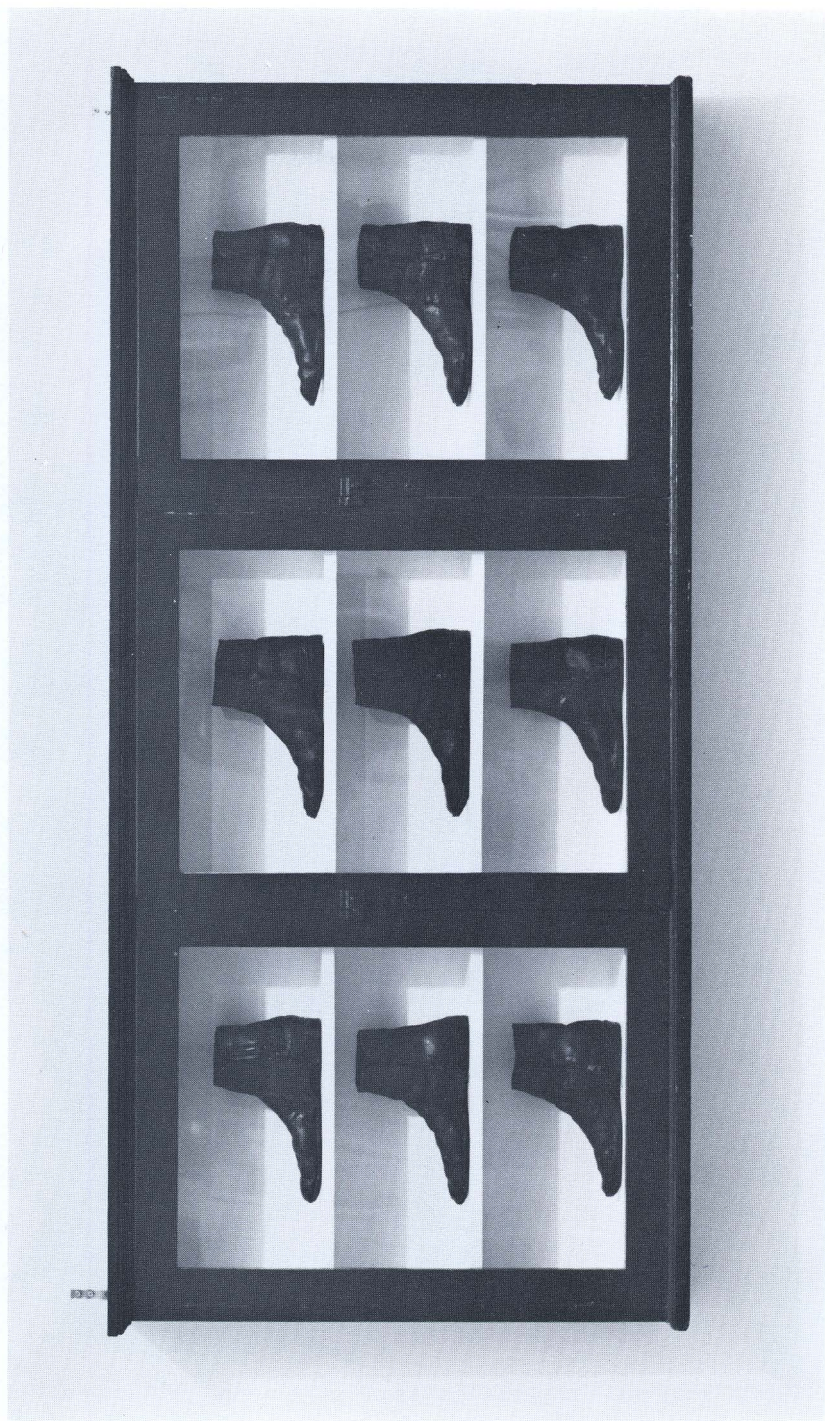
This led to the purchase of a suitable found object cabinet and the making of the right number of dark grey right ankle boots to fill it, modelled on one lent to her. The boots all faced one way, revealing not the outside of the shoe which is the part one typically sees, not the side which usually carries the adornment or is considered by shoe designers as the visually better side, but rather the instep, the vulnerable part of the shoe with the seams and zippers, the parts that are typically hidden.

The boot paradigm was not taken apart to make a pattern; it was simply looked at and copied in the medium of clay. After firing, each boot was painted grey.

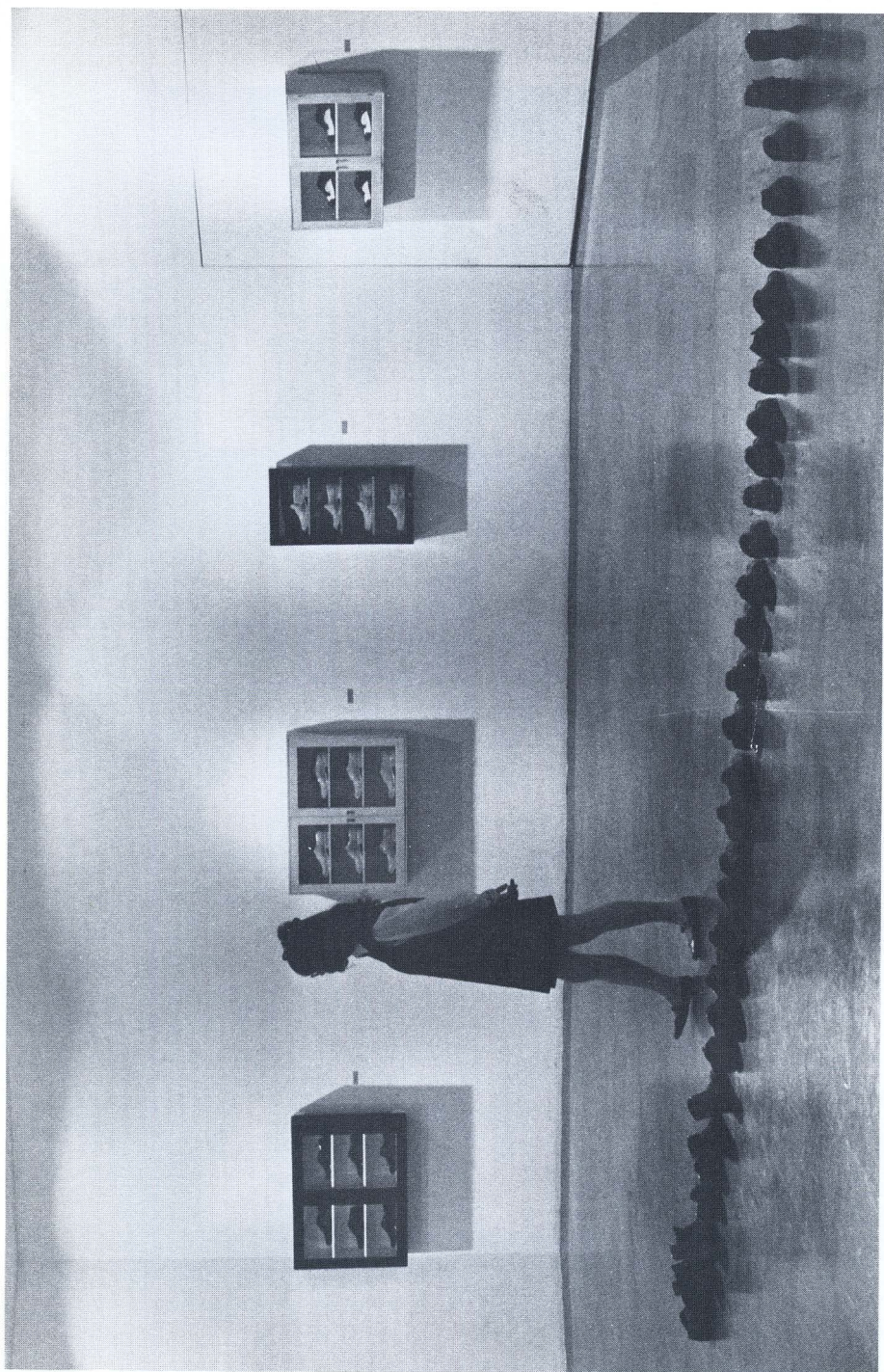


To fulfill her vision of the many boot cases required, Falk could not rely upon finding a suitable number of glass-doored cabinets, so she commissioned Max Dean to make her appropriate cases, differing in size, to contain the shoes and boots that she had in mind. The choice of contents was of great concern. She did not want to make anything that was "merely fashionable for the moment: all the shoes [were] classics or quite common derivations of the classics. The Runner, the Brogue, the Spectator, the Ankle Boot will return over and over











again in modified forms.”<sup>16</sup> There were fifteen boot cases in all, and some other spin-off pieces like *18 Pairs of Shoes* which derives from another kind of real life impulse, from the fact of seeing the row of shoes and boots created in her performance piece called *Skipping Ropes* (Issue 25).

The boot cases and “attendant works” had a good deal of exposure in exhibitions. Some sculptures from the *Single Right Men’s Shoe Series* were shown in the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto, and in the New York Cultural Centre in 1973. All were exhibited in the *Pacific Vibrations* show at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1973 and in *Pacific Libations*, at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria. All the boot cases and the *18 Pairs* went to Paris for a one-person exhibition at the Canadian Cultural Centre in 1974. The National Gallery purchased *18 Pairs*; the Vancouver Art Gallery bought the first boot case. A private collector, on the other hand, owns the encased ruined shoe that needed saving by a garland of roses where an “odd strawberry forces its way into the scene.”<sup>17</sup>

In her review of the *Pacific Vibrations*, a large group exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery, Joan Lowndes gave the artist special praise:

“Falk’s ceramic shoes, which occupy a whole gallery . . . prove her ability to transform the banal into the beautiful. Her environment constitutes an eloquent defence of the object, an experience of such rich, lustrous colour that it seems to soak into one’s very pores.

“What could be a more unlikely candidate for ‘A thing of joy forever’ than a man’s single, blue right running shoe? Yet a group of eight [runners] on highly varnished red wooden shelves in a gleaming black wooden case affords a visual feast comparable to a Cezanne still life. Falk’s power to invent variations on her theme confirms her stature. This summation of three years’ work is a tour de force.”<sup>18</sup>

The chief colours in the exhibition were red, white, grey, and black. However, the blue of the running shoes, the dark forest green of a case containing grey brogues, and a beige case with beige shoes and an orange case with orange shoes, created variety in hue. Although some of the shoes were flocked, most were given a high

gloss overglaze. And the cases, though built by Dean, were finished by Falk to a high degree of surface perfection. In the majority, the vibrant shiny colour was achieved in this manner. The cases and shoes were prepared with white undercoat then over-painted in oil pigment infused into varnish, coat after coat, layer after layer, until the desired luminosity was attained. The subtle impasto and variation of colour produced proves again that Falk, even when intent on sculpture, never abandoned the interests of a committed painter.

## HERDS NOS. 1 & 2

Unlike many artists, Falk is not motivated in what she chooses to do by the prospect of commercial success. She could have made more bootcases and sold them, but there were no others that she wanted to make. Over the years, she could have sold many apple piles had she wished to produce them. Although she will occasionally undertake a small commission if the idea is not at odds with her current interests, on the whole her art is self-motivated.

Perhaps because of her positive, undeviating nature and undoubtedly because she had confidence in her ideas and in her work, she always supposes that whatever she undertakes as a serious project will be shown. She is more interested in having public than private gallery exposure and without having to pursue contacts in any fashion, she has typically as many requests for works to show (sometimes more) than she can readily fulfill. She has preferred not to be tightly affiliated with commercial dealers. After the Ace Gallery (Canada) Ltd. ceased in 1970 to have a stable of local artists, Falk was sometimes associated with the Bau-Xi Gallery and Artcore. She has recently made commitments with the Equinox and with the Isaacs Gallery (Toronto). Mostly, however, she conducts her own business affairs.

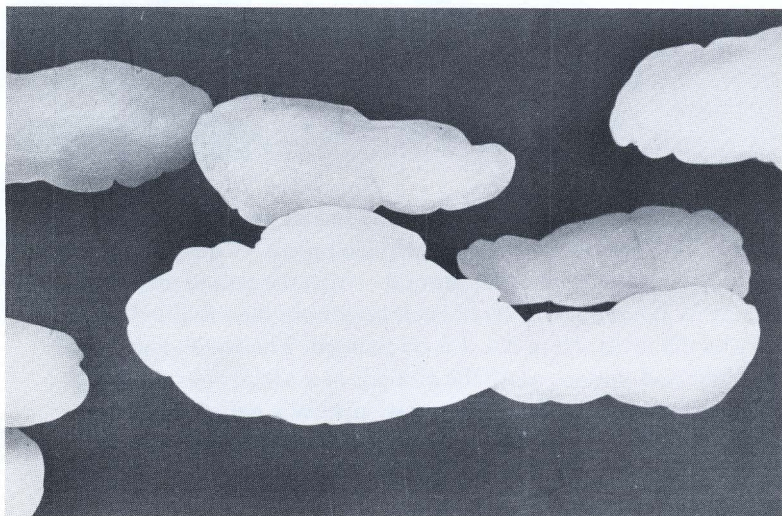
All the series she had made to the end of 1973 could be shown as a whole or in part; individual items or clusters from several series could be sent to group exhibitions. Unlike her earlier endeavours, *Herds Nos. 1 & 2* could not be readily subdivided. Each was a unit; each required a large room. Like *18 Pairs . . .*, which was unlikely to find its way into a private collection because of its dimensions, the *Herds*



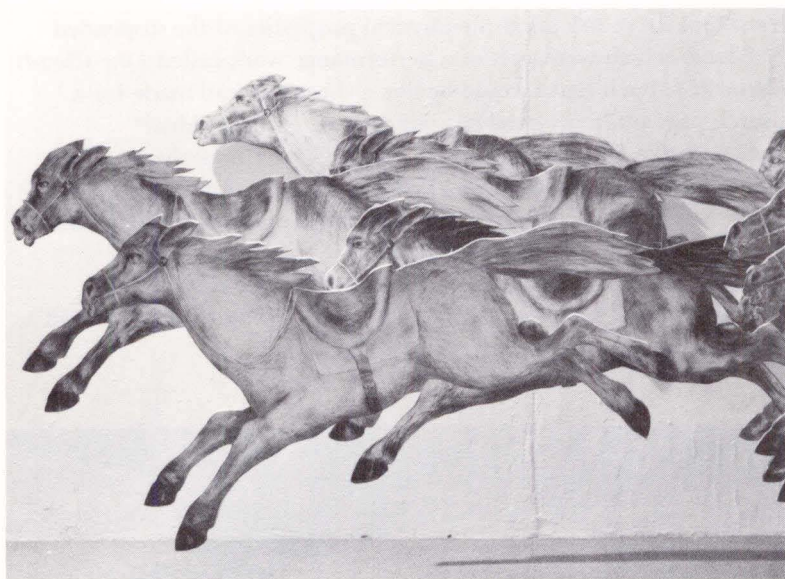
were conceived of in museum scale without Falk having any showing space in mind. She made *Herd*s because she was compelled by a forceful idea. The details of where and when to exhibit them she left to chance.

Falk is very specific about the generation of *Herd*s. The horse image came from a small grey-dapple, carousel-type horse of the type used in a Safeway store to amuse the children for ten cents. Such a horse appeared in a Tom Graff Theatre Piece called *Canada Family Album*, in September 1973. The idea of a herd of them was with her all winter, prodded by the butchers' sheep she saw in the Peoples' Art Show at the Vancouver Art Gallery, Winter 1974. Eventually the *Herd* took on in her mind the physical properties of the suspended *24 Clouds* which were part of a performance work called *Low Clouds* (Issue 25). Each horse would be like a sheep she had made for a church pageant, a plywood cut-out painted on both sides.<sup>19</sup>

As with the *Veneration* murals and the *Boot Cases*, the work was arduous and repetitious. It was Falk's pre-occupation for the years 1974-75. There are 24 horses in each herd, a number selected perhaps because of the *Clouds*, perhaps because of the mural shirts. Twenty-four units multiplied by one already quite substantial dimension (78.7 x 124.5 x 1.9 cm) produces a sculpture on a grand scale. Two dozen is a nice number, a crowd.

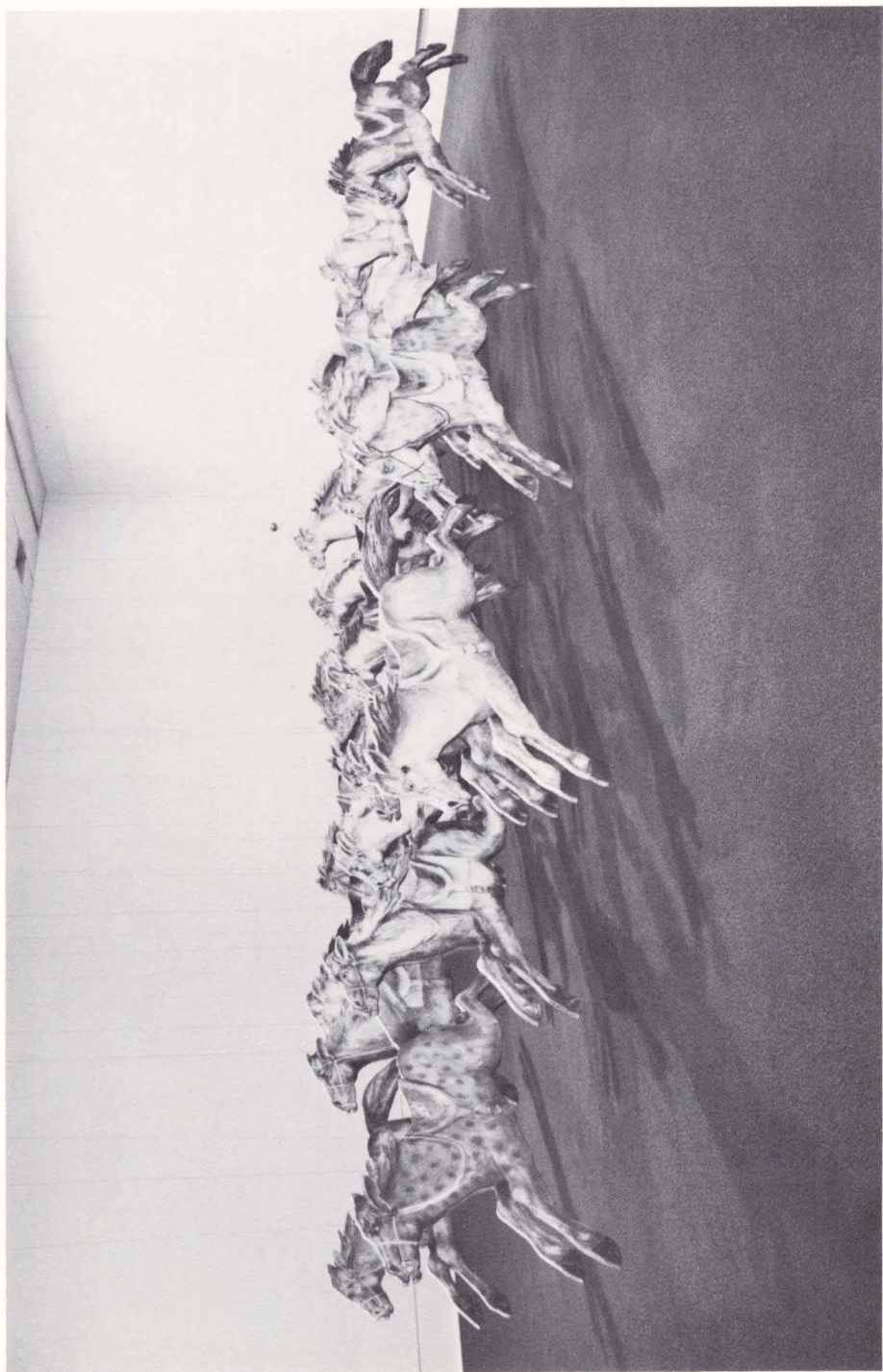


The horses in both herds have these features in common. Each was jigsawed out of  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch plywood to an approximately equal size, but the stretch of the neck, the flare of the mane and tail, the thickness of the legs and the size of the hooves, the look in the eyes varied in each. Each horse has a saddle belted over a cloth; each wears a bridle and bit. Each has a lead that is not fastened to the bit, but to a place below the ear where all the straps come together. This arrangement, an unreality, does not stem from a human desire to save the horse's mouth, nor from lack of research, but from the fact that had 24 leads come down from 24 mouths, it would have "cluttered up the landscape."<sup>20</sup>



For obvious reasons, the individualized horses were cut out by Falk herself. The preparation of each plywood piece — the sealing, filling and the painting on of white ground — was the task of assistant Jeremy Wilkins. The horses of each herd were then finished on both sides by the artist. *Herd No. 1* is oil painted. The horses vary widely in colour and pattern as do the animals of a Merry-go-round. *Herd No. 2*'s horses are boldly and expressionistically defined in pencil, creating, overall, a ghostly image which she judged as "more interesting [to herself] than was the painted image."<sup>21</sup> She saw the silver-grey horses as a large cloud.









The details for installation of the *Herds* was also firmly preconceived in the artist's mind. Each herd should hang in a separate white room. Each horse should be suspended on invisible plastic line, so that it hovered about a foot off the ground. The 24 horses of the herd should be arranged in an oval formation at the centre of the exhibition space, so that they could be walked around. She probably could not have anticipated the electrifying effect the *white* herd, especially, produces in the viewer. It is like encountering another worldly stampede. Each horse leaps forward front legs stretched ahead, back legs flung open, tail and mane tossing, nostrils flaring. 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.

*Herd No. 2* was shown first in the Burnaby Art Gallery in 1975. *Herds Nos. 1 & 2*, along with *Saddles*, were Falk's contribution to a well-publicized exhibition at the National Gallery, called *Some Canadian Women Artists*.<sup>22</sup> Falk performed her theatre works on the weekend after the opening (November 21-23, 1975). The program, repeated twice, comprised: *A Bird Is Known by His Feathers Alone*, *Chorus*, *Red Angel*, *Ballet for Bass-Baritone* and *Low Clouds*, the piece that contributed visually to the concept for *Herds* (Issue 25). The National Gallery purchased *Herd No. 2* and circulated it along with drawings Falk made in 1976 on a National Gallery Tour of the provinces (1976-77). This exhibit was shown at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, at the Rodman Hall Arts Centre in St. Catharines, Ontario, at the Musée de Québec, and, finally, at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria.



## SADDLES

It is understandable that Falk, after completing several major works where the repetition of a unit was an essential exercise — 48 shirt fronts, dozens of right men's shoes, 48 horses — should find release in a return to diversity. In 1974-75 as she worked on the *Herds*, she was making a series of ten ceramic sculptures called *Saddles*.

In notes retained for a communication with Mayo Graham, curator of the *Some Canadian Women Artists* exhibit, Falk states that the *Saddles* were not generated from the same source as the *Herds*. They were inspired, rather, by Alvin Balkind's *Chairs* show at the Art Gallery of Greater Ontario (1974) in which Falk as one of many participants submitted her first *Saddle*. In the *Saddles* there is a return to all the things that have interested her for a long time: "eggs (nest is new) ; birds (big bird is new) , roses, cups, bees (doilie is





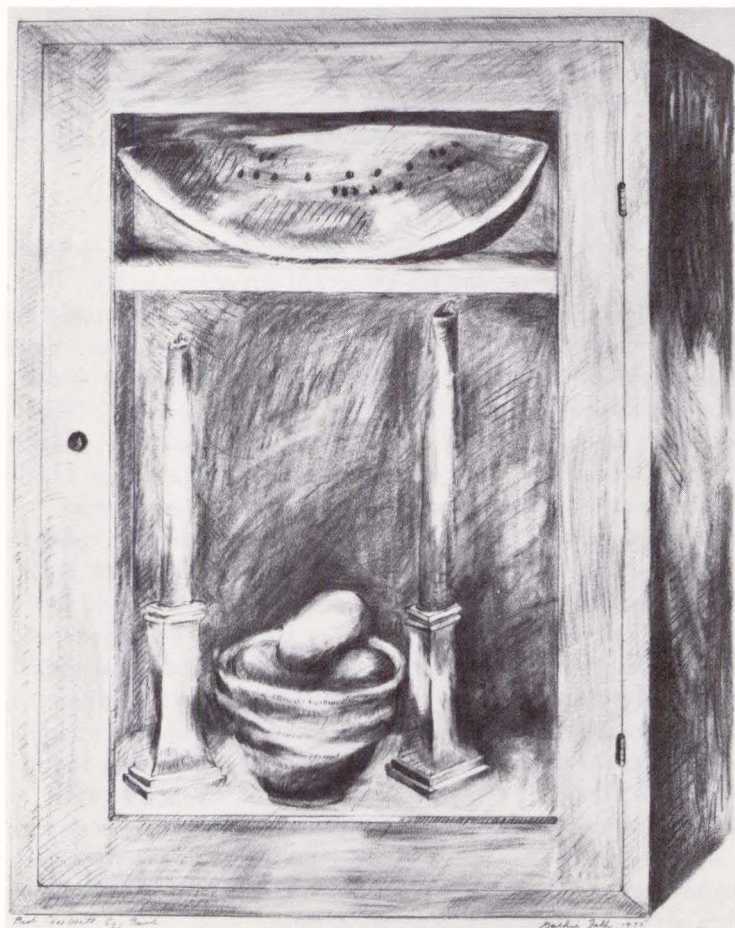
new)." When she first envisioned and made them after a trip to Paris, "they were highly decorated, Paris-influenced, small English saddles," — all but one of these "broke in the first firing" . . . ; when she made a fresh start, "they turned out differently and stronger. . . ." <sup>23</sup>

Although a slightly different shape in all the works, the saddle form as resting place for still life arrangement gives a visual unity to the series that is tighter than the tables in the *Table Settings*, but not quite as uniform as the one the cabinets provided for *Boot Cases*. The *Saddle* illustrated here is Falk's favourite. It is grey with the upper edges decorated with an orderly file of yellow and black bees. A pile of cups and saucers rests with seeming precariousness on top. They are creditable imitations of the Fry's Cocoa cups the artist owns and they are stacked in the way she stacks them on the open shelves of her kitchen.

For some time Falk had been aware of the object theme connections that could be established throughout her work, now she was beginning to understand her choices in this regard as the presentation private symbols, developed from personal experience. In an interview with Art Perry in 1976, some of the conversation centred on cups. In response to the question concerning the kinds of objects that are dealt with in the *Drawings* exhibit, Falk responded: "Again clocks, boot cases, eggs, many cups — Fry's chocolate cups, — also the old clover [leaf ones]." <sup>24</sup> She went on to explain that she didn't realize that such things had become symbols until she had "used them, maybe, a dozen times." When asked earlier in the interview about the origin of the drawings, she said that they went "back through the horses . . . back to a drawing of a cup as a portrait on clay and back further to *Portrait of a Cup* in a frame on paper." The sequence of events she was referring to included knowledge of a now-destroyed *Table Setting* that portrayed one of her everyday-use favourite cups, a found object, (like the clover cups, and the Fry's cups) not hand made. Just as she would choose certain kinds of cups to own and to represent, so also is she conscious of the styles of cups she would make as a potter or make for her art. Cups of all kinds are central to the everyday ceremonies of tea or coffee taken in company or alone. They are a personal symbol for her, as the experiences as a potter, a maker of vessels, is peculiar to her own life.

## 39 DRAWINGS

Falk exhibited a suite of 39 *Drawings* at the Bau-Xi Gallery in 1976. Joan Lowndes' review states, "There is a Chardin-like quality in her reverence for . . . humble everyday things. . . . She transforms them into icons. A plant between salt and pepper shakers, a night clock centred above a shelf of apples assume hieratic solemnity . . . these are sculptural drawings which derive from Falk's ceramics. One medium feeds another. . . . Her drawing of a man's single right black and white oxford [in a boot case] was reproduced on an elegant poster for her show at the Canadian Cultural Centre in Paris in 1974. Since that time she has framed all her drawings of still life in boot cases."<sup>25</sup>



This drawing represents one of Falk's hand-thrown vessels, typical of the pottery she made in the late 60's. The drawn bowl "contains" ceramic eggs just as the real bowl in real life does when it sits beside her stove or when it becomes part of one of the spontaneous still lifes that Falk makes and remakes in her own domestic environment. Placed between candlesticks in the drawing, the bowl's meaning is elevated through the context of religious and art history associations and it is part of an artwork generated out of Falk's own art.

The eggs in the bowl have for her obvious and inobvious personal meaning; they are among her private symbols used over and over again. One of her earliest childhood memories is of the feel of the egg she was given each afternoon to take to the store to exchange for candy. Eggs were some of the first things she made as a ceramics student because they are such beautiful things, such perfect shapes. Eggs and eggcups (real and ceramic) figure in the performance work *Some Are Egger Than I* (Issue 25) where they are arranged; played with, eaten, killed. In *Orange Peel* (Issue 25) they are wrapped; in *Drink to Me Only* (Issue 25) they form a pile that gets bigger and bigger. In *Low Clouds* (Issue 25) they are artfully sliced, then eaten. On a mundane level, she eats an egg almost every day for breakfast. At Easter she is likely to colour eggs, just as many of us do.

Her use of eggs in her life and art is more pragmatic than highly symbolic. They have seldom to do with fertility, with Easter, or the Goose That Laid the Golden Egg. They are a part of daily life (as food, as home still life). But they are also, occasionally, things to perform with, to use ceremonially in an unprecedented, very personal manner, or to sculpt, paint or draw.

And even the drawing of them is personal. Falk favours a not slick, not renaissance perfect type of illusionism. She uses an eraser to create areas of light and shadow and the overall impression of surface sheen, apparent in most of her artworks.

## PICNICS

The history of *Picnics* goes back to 1970 when Falk devised a theatre piece that was based mainly on the slide documentation of six picnics, all participated in by the same two people who went through exactly the same ritual with artificial grass, cloth, and food (Issue 25). Strange things came out of the picnic basket and the events took place in some odd locations, on the sidewalk, in front of a bank, for example. Later, she had the idea of presenting "rectangular, neatly



cut sods of grass in polyester resin."<sup>26</sup> This idea led to the ceramic sods that are the unifying device in *Picnics*.

*Picnics* contain, in general, the items associated with this familiar occasion — watermelons, cups and saucers, plates, fruit, even dogs. In individual pieces, the items are given an uncommon twist. In one, a ferocious/benign grey dog guards/regards a potted camellia bush as though he were the dog who listens to "His Master's Voice" in the old ad for victrolas. In another, there is a scatter of golf balls over four grey fish; in another, a bundle of yellow-beige fish are tied together with a blue ribbon, which as Falk says is "not in reality what you do with [such] objects."<sup>27</sup>









In several picnics, there is the threatening beauty of fire — a birthday cake, a pile of yellow leaves, the interior of a cup, a pile of cushion-like hearts on a plate — flaming. The impulse to use fire as a motif came to Falk through a story told by a friend, in which a birthday cake caught on fire when taken outside, the candles burning down to the cake in seconds. The sculpture that resulted is boxed and surrounded by an oil-painted sky. Several boxed picnics form a series within the series and lead, conceptually, to other series that follow *Picnics*.

All the *Picnics* actualize figments of Falk's imagination. No more nor less than any of the works, they are based upon ideas that come to her from real or inner resources, "like splats of bird droppings from above, unexpected, unearned."<sup>28</sup>

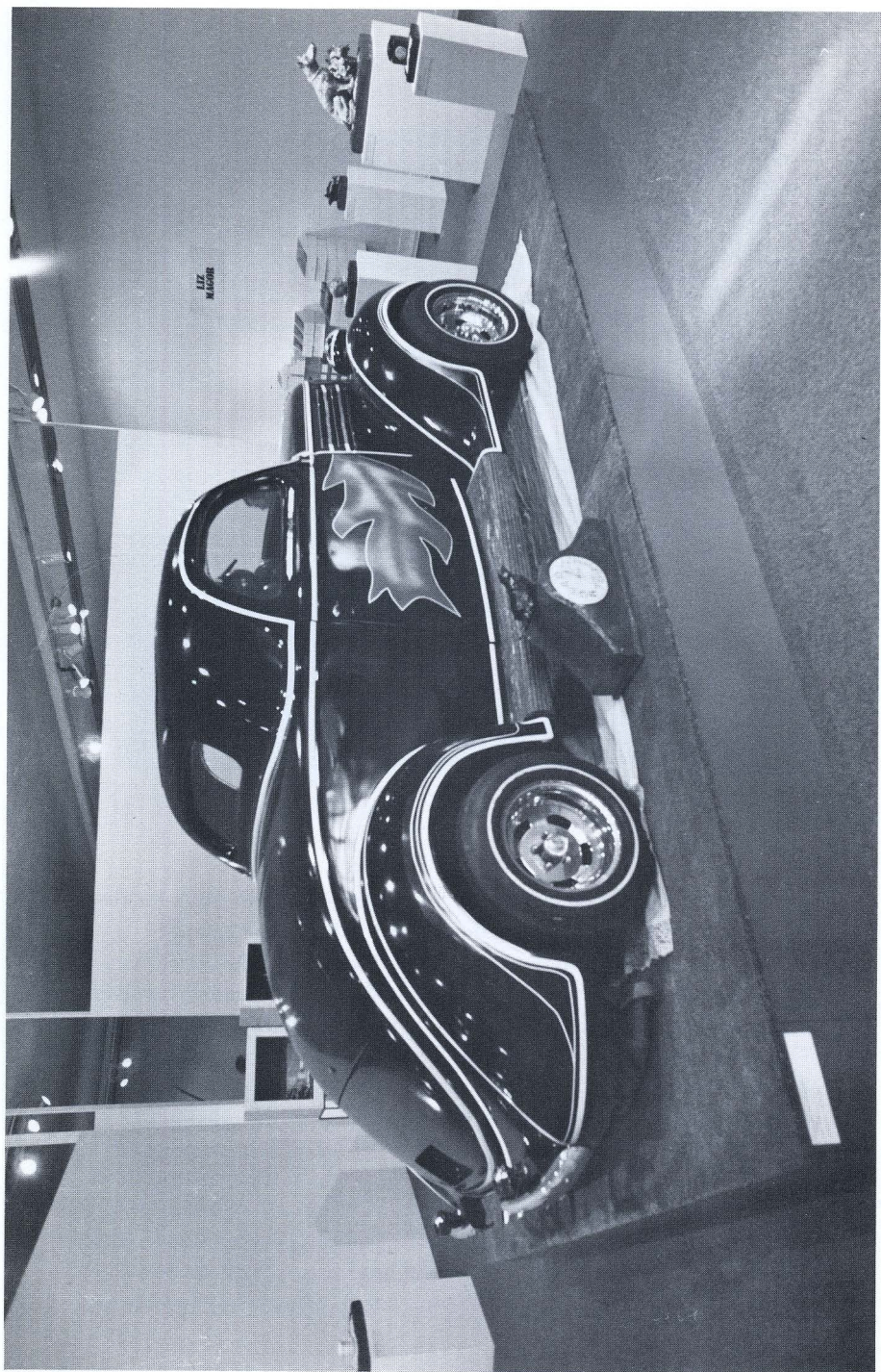




As Falk told Alvin Balkind before he assembled her *Picnics* for the Vancouver Art Gallery Show called *Four Places* (1977), in all instances, she sees a mental picture first, an image in her mind, then proceeds to do something with it. The colour, the techniques involved, she would work out later. In the fish picnics, for example, she discovered that a nail head pushed into the wet clay fish, made very effective scales.<sup>29</sup> Here, as in other series, she achieves the exact colours she needs by painting on bisquited clay with acrylic paint.

The central feature of a picnic tableau in *Four Places* was a 1936 Ford Coupe with flames painted on its sides which happened to be in Falk's possession at the time. It was beautiful in itself. When stuffed with ceramic watermelons, elevated on a podium covered with a turf of artificial grass on a giant "tablecloth" and surrounded with ceramic still life elements, it dominated Falk's domain in *Four Places*.



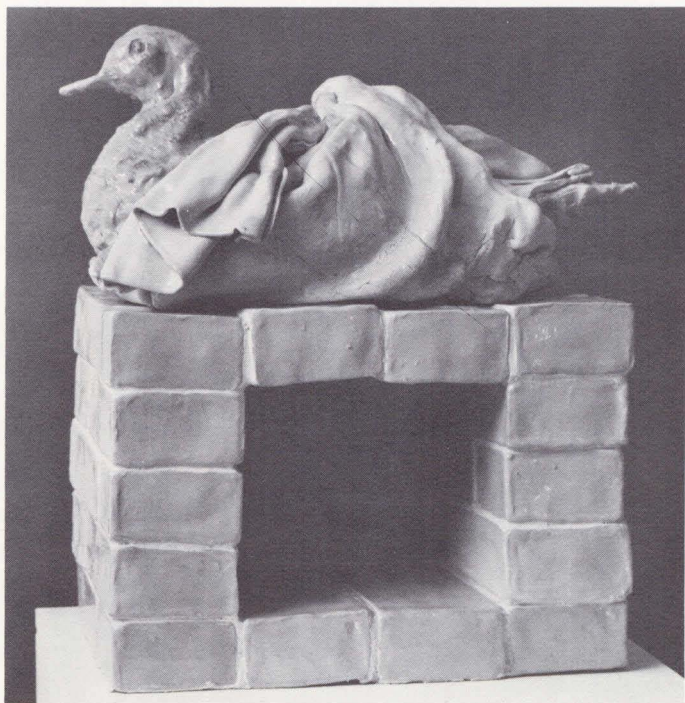




## KITSILANO DUCK & CLUES TO IT /

*Kitsilano Duck*, 1977, is a bird wrapped in a cloth, sitting on top of a brick box. It is shrimp pink, except where fortuitous firing turned the duck a duck-like grey. Its drapery alludes to three flags Falk made in 1972; the duck itself was presaged by a 1976 drawing called *Boot Case with Kitsilano Duck*; the box on which it rests harkens back to the sky boxes of the *Picnic* series.<sup>30</sup>

The works that attended *Kitsilano Duck* were *clues* to some associations *Kitsilano Duck* carried for the artist. *Clue to Kitsilano Duck*, for example, is a white duck wrapped in a green and white version of the Canadian flag, a reference to a maple-leaf-on-paper flag made for Tom Graff's Citizenship Party. In *Gold Plated Clue to Kitsilano Duck* a similar flag is draped over a golden brick box which is a gilded version of the one in *Kitsilano Duck*. These self-referential, cleverly titled works were included in *For the Birds* at U.B.C.'s Fine Arts Gallery, 1977 and Gathie Falk's one person show at the Edmonton Art Gallery, 1978.







## 150 CABBAGES

For Artcore Consultants in 1978, Falk mounted a two-part exhibition. Upstairs in the showing rooms were two murals and some other paintings in the *Border* theme that signalled Falk's return to her first medium, painting; on ground level, the environment *150 Cabbages* was installed.

The one hundred and fifty cabbages were made leaf by leaf, bisquited, fired. Then they were deliciously painted in subtle shades of green and coated with urethane. When on exhibit they were suspended by string from the ceiling at heights just above and below eye level. In the centre of the space was a green dresser with a tall mirror, hand-painted, then varnished to the same lustrous, rococo greens of the vegetables. The mirror was tilted slightly forward; the drawers contained bundles of paper Kleenex. The floor of the entire room was covered with a foot-thick layer of beach sand.

The Cabbage Room depends on a number of sources, including: a 17th Century Spanish still life by Cotán that, surprisingly, represents a suspended cabbage and apple: the performance piece by Falk called *Low Clouds* (Issue 25), where the leaves of a real cabbage are sewn together by machine; a very fine *Picnic* with a cabbage set on a white doily. It could be understood as an environmental piece on a grand scale like the *Picnic with 1936 Ford Coupe*, or as a performance work where the spectators' reactions as they walked among the cloud/cabbages, walked over the sand, regarded their lower bodies in the mirror, opened and closed the dresser drawers were choreographed into the work. The idea was modified for the *Issues in Clay* exhibition at the University of Alberta and at the Alberta College of Art, Calgary, 1981.

In *Hanging Cabbages* (the revised piece), 40 cabbages were suspended over a low box (3.05 x 4.27 m in plan) filled with sand. The dresser stood, as before, mirror tilted, at the centre. No walking on the sand was permitted.



## EAST AND WEST BORDERS

*East Border in 4 Parts* and *West Border in 5 Parts* were shown first together, at Artcore. These murals present prospects of the artist's front yard derived from photographs she took in order to remember every square inch of her garden.<sup>31</sup> *East Border's* first painting



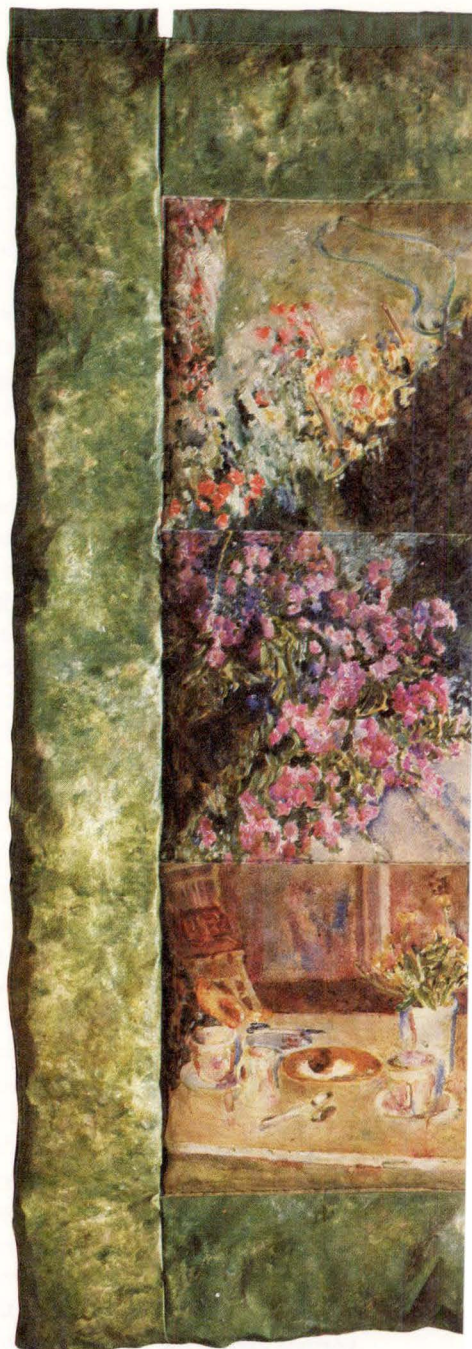


represents the beginnings of the border comprised of luxuriant summer flowers that is the mural's main subject and the neighbour's house, visible beyond. The next painting's imagery includes some that is contained in the right portion of the first, but it shows more of the centre of the border. The third, similarly, repeats part of the centre portion of the border and offers new details of what lies to the right. In the final "frame," the last foxgloves of the border are repeated and the front yard's Christmas tree is introduced. In its sense of re-examination and repetition, *East Border* fits in well with everything Falk does. But in representing several views that can only be understood and properly appreciated after extended examination, she includes/implies here the element of time.

*West Border in 5 Parts* presents a similar examination of the Christmas tree hedge, the tulips that are planted beneath, the neighbour's houses across the street. Here there are deep cast shadows, whereas the lawn of *East Border* is sunbleached, almost white. The specific light of *West Border* was of special interest to Falk. She described it as peculiar to "late afternoon in April when you can see halos around bushes," when the "tulips are almost transparent and rather flat . . . an eerie and benign half hour; and also ordinary."<sup>32</sup>

The individual panels of each mural are separated from each other by nine inches, when hung, giving the effect of an overlapping *but extended* image of something commonplace yet as worthy of scrutiny as the landscapes of a multipanelled altarpiece. As Falk said, "if you don't know what your front walk looks like, you are not likely to know much about the pyramids."<sup>33</sup>

*Lawn in 3 Parts* and some other two or one unit works were painted between 1978 and the completion of *Beautiful British Columbia Multiple Purpose Thermal Blanket* in 1981. The subjects are sometimes drawn from Falk's own environment — her garden, her front steps, her dog on the sidewalk in front of her house; many are substantially based on her own snapshots of the Kitsilano neighbourhood gardens. In some of the paintings grass is almost, or completely, the theme. It is represented in a loose, painterly way that strives to make the brushwork, the handling of the colour field of various greens the true subject of the work.









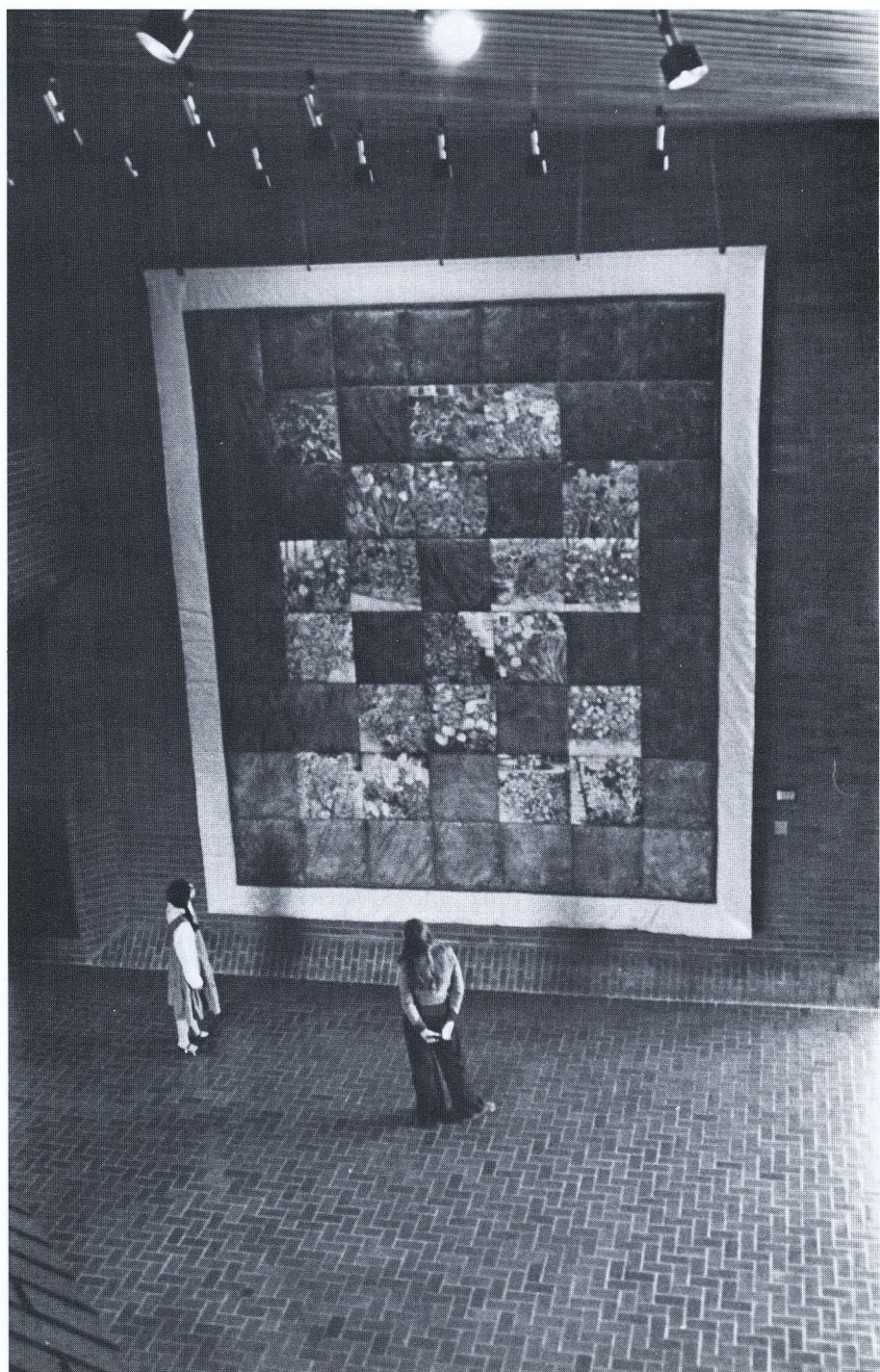
## THERMAL BLANKETS

The first *Thermal Blanket* was commissioned for the brick foyer of the B.C. Credit Union Building, Vancouver. This large mural (4.9 x 5.5 m) installed in 1979, is composed of 56 oil-on-canvas panels stitched quilt-fashion within a generous, salmon-pink border. The quilt format was chosen because the artist needed a grid and a way to make a heavy-handed version of a painting that had to be big and soft to suit the foyer. *Beautiful British Columbia Multiple Purpose Thermal Blanket* is literally thermal inasmuch as the heavy canvas segments that comprise the whole were laboriously sewn over construction-grade, fibreglas insulation, a method that required the assistance of Elizabeth Klassen, Gloria Masse, Wendy Hamlin, Salmon Harris, Joey Morgan, Cindy Masse, and others. It silences the all-brick reception area and warms it with its heft, subject matter and colour.

Many of the panels represent grass and they are arranged spectrally within the blanket, giving visual variety and a sense of shifting light that is in keeping with the numerous vignettes from anyman's garden.

Before making more blankets, she began a new suite of paintings called *Night Skies*. But she knew that she had to explore the blanket idea further and eventually produced eight in an eight-foot-square format. As in the mural, photographs are the source of the figurative panels; grass panels are sometimes included; there is a grassy border stitched around each. What is new is the inclusion of many images of her closest friends, and in fact each *Thermal Blanket* title is extended John, Huyen, Jeremy, Alfred, and Ann.

I am that Ann and I remember the day the picture of me was taken, in a dress that's Gathie's favourite. Neither she nor I knew that a blanket would result. My image is central to an arrangement of still life and flowers, based on a composition of photographs the artist thought worked together in terms of colour and pattern. This work, like others in the series, has a Bonnard-like delicacy of handling, and a sense for odd perspectives similar to his.





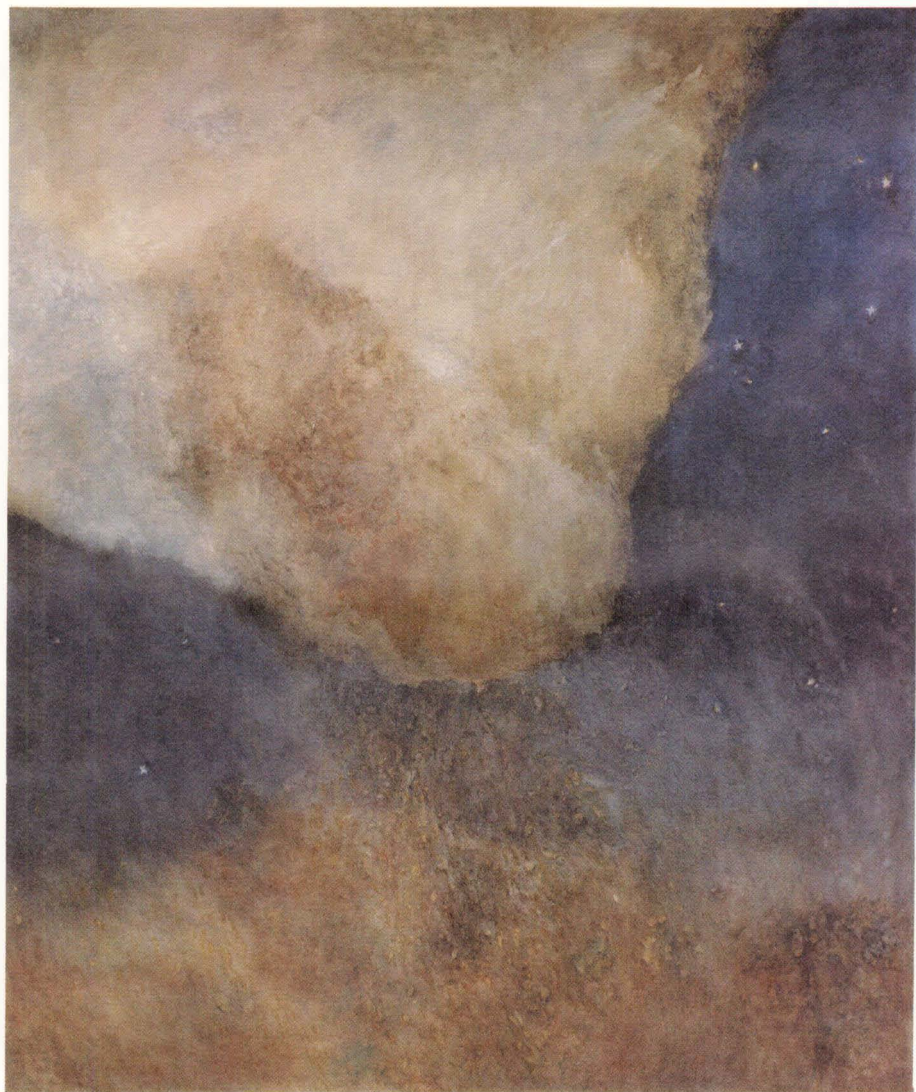
My painted portrait looks like the photo from which it is derived, but it is a more excellent likeness of my spirit at its happiest, an aura not apparent in the photograph. This painted portrait is how Gathie would like me to be, always. This is how she would like everyone to be.

Gathie, who reads novels, knows that character and personality are revealed and transformed in such everyday settings. At the dining room table, in the kitchen, in real life or literature, we learn to love or we learn to hate over tea and cakes. The sociability represented by these blankets represents what she experiences in life elevated into a state of consistent joy within the gardens of a contemporary Eden.

*Thermal Blankets* were shown first at the Equinox Gallery in 1981 and then, along with *East Border* at the Norman MacKenzie Art Gallery (University of Regina) and at the Nickle Arts Museum (University of Calgary) in 1981.

Alluding to the *Multiple Purpose* and *Thermal* in the title of the B.C. Credit Union mural, Falk wrote that alternate uses for the blankets are: "hanging them outside the house on the sides or the roof, both as decoration and insulation. They can be put on the lawn in the summer to provide a carefree covering, or on the garden in winter for cosmetic reasons . . . Two of them would make an attractive and very warm tent. . . . For those to whom money means nothing, they could be folded and used as sleeping bags."<sup>34</sup> She likes to laugh, and humour of a slightly off-beat kind is characteristic of her work.

While she recognizes that there is humour, she has said that if that's all she wanted, she'd have become a cartoonist.<sup>35</sup> And to those people who think she must have a lot of fun making her work, she has this reminder: "Nobody in or out of his right mind would put himself to so much trouble unless he were driven by forces outside his control."<sup>36</sup>





## NIGHT SKIES

The *Night Sky* series was begun in 1978 as she worked on the credit union *Blanket* mural; it continued to build through the period when Falk was making the blanket portraits. Five were shown at the Harbourfront Gallery in Toronto in 1979. All twenty-two were presented at the University of British Columbia's Fine Arts Gallery; the majority of them at the University of Southern Alberta at Lethbridge, and the Glenbow Museum in Calgary — three one-person exhibitions in 1980. That there are so many, so large paintings on a single subject shows how hard she will work to exhaust/complete the vision she has in her mind. Somewhere in the middle of making them she thought there might be fifteen, a number sufficient to show even in a large space. In the end there were almost two dozen, and even after the U.B.C. showing Falk thought that someday soon she would make more.

The *Night Skies* have a formal/technical relationship with the grassy panels in the paintings of the *Borders* period, and the lawn sections in the credit union mural. They are the artist's impressions of the sky at night over a city; an art historical association might be the blue, star-embellished ceiling of Giotto's Arena Chapel in Padua.<sup>37</sup> They represent the many-coloured aspect of skies at night and range from pale turquoise to intense cobalt blue. They are enlivened by brownish/pinkish clouds the colour of human flesh, and sprinkled with a scattering of five-pointed stars. The search for the right stars was difficult. In the end she chose to make them sharp and distinct, like stars from a package, like stars that appear in smitten heroines' eyes.

## PIECES OF WATER

*Pieces of Water* is the last series Falk has completed. It continues the painterly interests of *Night Skies* and, like the *Skies*, it hovers between representation and pure abstraction.

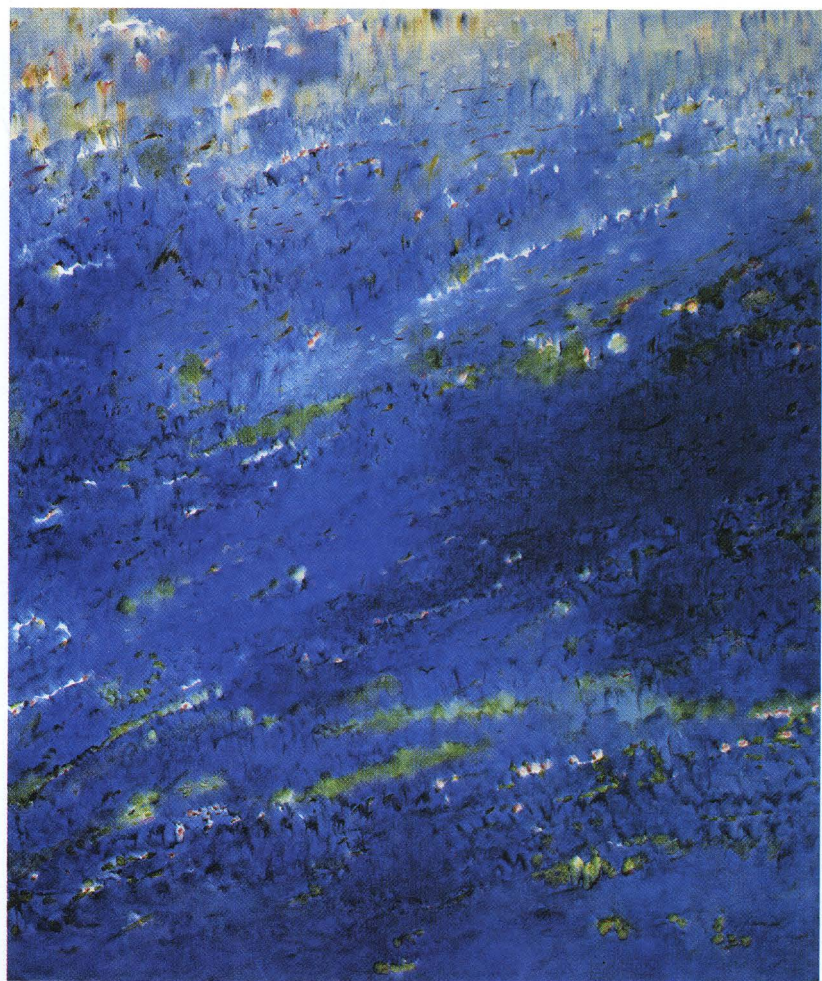
Only after a year of painfully unhappy painting did Falk "work out a vocabulary of marks and shapes that were satisfying." By that time, she'd set herself certain limits: "the water would be moving from the top left to the bottom right . . . the marks used would not represent waves in a realistic way but would be mostly transparent, with no white paint used anywhere to indicate white or to lighten a too dark surface." These paintings were not intended as realism, but, as she said, there is nothing she could do with paint that one might not see "out there some time on that ever changing surface" of the ocean.

In this series we are brought in touch again with Falk's Kitsilano environment which has been the source of her painted imagery since the *Borders* of 1976. If Falk's major combining theme is still life; the secondary theme established in her paintings is landscape.

Of course these large *Water* paintings, each approximately 1.85 x 1.65 m, especially when shown together like an extended mural beg comparison with Monet's *Water Lilies*' panoramas. But the effect the 'mural' had at the Equinox Gallery in Vancouver and at The Isaacs Gallery in Toronto when shown in 1981, was of something less continuous, more spectral in its concern, ranging from cobalt-blue dominated panels to ones where pearl grey and lilac hues were emphasized. Further, the imagery is non-specific. There are no waves, no flora, no *equivalents* to water lilies. It is as though Falk "took a long sharp knife and cut down into the ocean to lift out a piece, almost a square . . . and . . . painted the top surface of this piece of water."<sup>39</sup>

The titles too, distinguish her sensibility from that of 19th century Monet. *Pieces of Water*, like *Thermal Blankets*, have subtitles: *Libya*, *Squamish Highway*, *Constitutional Agreement*, *President Sadat* . . . etc. These refer to the dominant news item of the day(s) Falk was involved in the individual *Pieces of Water* panels.





At the moment, Falk is starting a series that will probably be called *Cement Sidewalks*. Unlike *Night Skies* and *Pieces of Water* but like *Borders*, it is derived from snapshots of moments in the Kitsilano landscape when the shadows of trees and plants extend over pavement, when the cement blushes pink in the late afternoon, nudging borders of grass and flowers. Flesh pink, *shrimp pink*, like the enamel-hardened chair of Home Environment.

There is symmetry and continuum in all of Falk's art that is admirable. In reading Issue 25, it will be clear that almost everything she has done — even work involving people as elements in a moveable still life — falls into place in a complex *oeuvre*.

This article describes only major works and major series. It does not include reference to many fine individual pieces that lie outside this purview.

— A.R.

## FOOTNOTES/

<sup>1</sup> This is a corrected version of biographical material in: Ann Rosenberg, "Gathie Falk and the Ceramic Cabbages," *Interface IV* 5 (June 1981), 55.

<sup>2</sup> For a reproduction of an early Falk painting see: "Fifty Years of Art," a rev. of the B.C. Society of Artists Centennial exhibition, *The Vancouver Sun*, 21 April, 1967. For a reproduction of Falk with her pottery see: "The Potters' Art at Hycroft Sale," *The Province*, 19 November, 1966.

<sup>3</sup> Ann Rosenberg, "About Art," a rev. of Home Environment by Gathie Falk, *The Vancouver Sun*, 23 August, 1968.

<sup>4</sup> Marguerite Pinney, "Vancouver in the Galleries," *artscanada* 122-123 (October/November 1968), 37.

<sup>5</sup> Susan Ginsburg, "The New Art of Vancouver," *artscanada* 138-139 (December 1969), 55.

<sup>6</sup> Alvin Balkind interview with Gathie Falk, January 1977.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Simmins, "No. 1," a rev. of 29 Pieces by Gathie Falk, *The Vancouver Sun*, 3 July, 1970.

<sup>8</sup> Alvin Balkind.

<sup>9</sup> Gathie Falk's personal file of exhibition notes and statements.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*



- <sup>13</sup> Exhibition notice for Gathie Falk, *Centre culturel canadien*, Paris, 1974.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>18</sup> Joan Lowndes, "Schools are out for West Coast Artists," a rev. of Pacific Vibrations, *The Vancouver Sun*, 10 October, 1973.
- <sup>19</sup> Gathie Falk's personal file.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>22</sup> Mayo Graham curated this excellent exhibition. Consult the selected bibliography for reference material.
- <sup>23</sup> Gathie Falk's personal file.
- <sup>24</sup> Art Perry, "Gathie Falk: A Bronze Watermelon a Year," *Pacific Times*. (Now defunct.)
- <sup>25</sup> Joan Lowndes, "Gathie Falk's Drawings: Icons from the Commonplace," a rev. of 39 Drawings by Gathie Falk, *The Vancouver Sun*, 1 March, 1976.
- <sup>26</sup> Gathie Falk's personal file.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>29</sup> Alvin Balkind.
- <sup>30</sup> Gathie Falk's personal file.
- <sup>31</sup> Tom Graff, "Gathie Falk at Artcore," *YVR* 5 (December 1978-January 1979), 6.
- <sup>32</sup> Gathie Falk's personal file.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>35</sup> Alvin Balkind.
- <sup>36</sup> Gathie Falk's personal file.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*





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*bibliography*: prepared by Steven Harris



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*Pair of Shoes*, 1968, ceramic in polyester resin. *photography*: Glenn Allison





# GATHIE FALK WORKS

VOLUME 2

EDITOR FOR THIS ISSUE

Ann Rosenberg

ASSISTED BY

Bill Schernbrucker

Dorothy Jantzen

Aaron Steele

STUDENT ASSOCIATE

*The Capilano Review is published four times a year from Capilano College, 2055 Purcell Way, North Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.*

*We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of The Canada Council, the Capilano College Humanities Division, the Capilano College Student Society, the Government of British Columbia through the B.C. Cultural Fund and Lottery revenues.*

*The Capilano Review is a member of the Canadian Periodical Publishers' Association and COSMEP. Microfilm editions and reprints are available from University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan.*

*We are always pleased to receive good material, especially from artists we haven't published before, but we cannot take responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. Manuscripts should be submitted to the Editor, and must be accompanied by a self-addressed envelope and Canadian postage to ensure return.*

*Printed in Victoria, British Columbia, by Morriss Printing Company Ltd.*

*Second Class Registration Number 4593*

*ISSN 0315-3754*

# THE CAPITANO REVIEW

Number 25

1982

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COVER

*Red Parrot* Gathie Falk



## Ann Rosenberg / PREFACE

For years Gathie Falk has been filing notes and clippings regarding her performance art in a brown paper bag, a cardboard box and manilla folders. Together with extant photographs and slides, these materials have proved to be a very complex record of her endeavors in the theatre art field.

The scripts presented here are for her major *Performance Works*.<sup>1</sup> Some had been completely written out and needed few changes before publication. They established the style for others that were recreated for *The Capilano Review*. Set reconstruction is based on sketches, photographs, and on the lists of objects transported to theatre events.

Gathie Falk's article that follows, the commentary of "Views & Reviews," that runs throughout this special issue, and the "Epilogue" provide context and some theoretical basis for the *Performance Works*.

Gathie Falk / A SHORT HISTORY OF  
PERFORMANCE ART AS IT INFLUENCED  
OR FAILED TO INFLUENCE MY WORK



When I was introduced to performance art in 1968 I had just settled into a career of making sculptures. I was making sculptures of men's coats folded like shirts and standing up like portraits. I put 69 ceramic grapefruit all over a gallery floor, and I placed a ceramic roasting chicken into a pink-flocked birdcage.

My introduction to performance art was made by Deborah Hay, a New York artist whose roots were with Merce Cunningham's contemporary dance, and who in 1968 was doing performances with artists like Rauschenberg. To my gratified surprise she gave my work as an incipient performance artist a great big stamp of approval. Since this discipline was a new one to me I needed this approval. I also got a big wad of satisfaction from the fact that this new work was closely related to my sculpture and that, paradoxically, I had learned an entirely new language without much bother.

From my perspective, to make a performance piece is to put together, or 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 a piece works in a linear way with one event following another (*A Bird is Known by His Feathers Alone*, 1972); sometimes the choreography is worked out like a fuque in music with one event beginning close upon the heels of another, and a third event intertwining with the first two. The anthology of music is apt. One of my works, *Red Angel*, 1972, is like a rondo, with theme A followed by theme B, followed by theme A.

The events, or themes, I like to use are, guess what, activities of ordinary everyday living: eating an egg, reading a book, washing clothes, putting on makeup, cutting hair, together with slightly exotic events such as shining someone's shoes while he is walking backwards singing an operatic aria, sewing cabbage leaves together, smashing eggs with a ruler as in playing croquet, making a painting out of lipsticks, powder, and perfume, measuring and graphing my cat's tail as it is projected on different gallery walls, moving a hundred oranges across a floor with a prone body while a hundred cocktail glasses are moved in the opposite direction by another prone body, sawing popsicles in half and using them as weapons of assault and defence, along with plastic flowers in the back pocket.

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 outrageous. Not so. The activities I used belonged together in that mysterious way that all things in every strong work belong together, with neither too much nor too little of anything. I was not fighting the battles of the Dada artists, in fact, I wasn't fighting any battles: just doing, creating, with different materials, the things I also made with more traditional materials.

The new material was people, used not in the conscious way of dance nor in the narrative way of theatre, but in a way only a visual artist would find natural.

Making a performance piece, for me, also meant trying not to bore people to death. A lot of tolerance, concentration, "a new way of looking," as Steve Paxton called it, is required from the audience of performance art. The least the artist can do is not intentionally bore the hard-working audience.

People who undoubtedly influenced my work in the sixties were visiting artists from New York, Deborah Hay, Steve Paxton, Yvonne Rainer. The



work of each of these people was definitely related to a new careful examination and perception of the natural movements that people reiterate in their daily activities. Each deferred also to slightly idiosyncratic interpretations of those movements, for instance, Deborah Hay's filling a corner with people, relates to filling an elevator.

While these artists had something in common they were also very different from each other. Yvonne Rainer leaned towards dance, while Hay's and Paxton's works encompassed a wider range of analogy, much of that material being verbal. Hay gave you a punch in the stomach quite often, while Paxton's work flowed more gently to a conclusion without a climax.

There was other work piped in: the piano-axer, chicken-killer, pig's blood-thrower. My work was not much affected by this artist since I'm the kind of person who feels that a good stripper can be more effective in the way he/she removes a glove than how he/she takes off everything.

Another person who affected my work was my friend, Tom Graff, who does exotic, baroque, complicated performance works. To the uninitiated they sometimes look like musical reviews with a lot of explainable visual stuff. These people don't know that Graff is using entertainment itself as a subject for his work, bashing it around till it comes out a different shape but with some pieces still recognizably there.

Graff's work made me think about using songs and dances in my work. In *Red Angel* I used *Row, Row, Row Your Boat*; I used *Drink to me Only With Thine Eyes* in a piece called *Drink to Me Only* (1972); *Low Clouds* (1972) had a dance-like movement of clouds. I also began making sculptures intended chiefly to be used as props. And I wrote some music to the lyrics, *Name, Age, Sex, Racial Origin* for a piece called *Chorus* (1972). This work took me well into the seventies.

Simultaneous with my first strong sculptural and performance experiences, influential critics were telling us that art no longer hung on walls, that Concept art was the only way to go, and that if we wanted to look at something it must be documentation of said Concept art, or, a few years later there was the new thing called performance art or video art. Both the new performance art and video art were closely related to Conceptual art. Instead of inviting people of divergent talent to participate it dictated a narrow dogma of restraint and minimalism.

The result of this cultural revolution was that the painters kept on painting, sculptors kept on doing what they do, and some of us flamboyant Performance artists went our naughty ways.

Now that Performance art has gained a firm place of respectability in the art world I hope that there will be room for all kinds of individuality, for if it keeps on being bound by rules and formulas, we will soon see it on the shelf of London Drugs packaged in a squeezable tube.

As for me, why did I stop doing Performance art about four years ago? Well, when you get older you get tired of lugging around heavy boxes, looking in vain for a round dishpan in a major Canadian city and teaching a new crew to crow.<sup>2</sup>

## Gathie Falk, Ann Rosenberg, Aaron Steele / VIEWS & REVIEWS

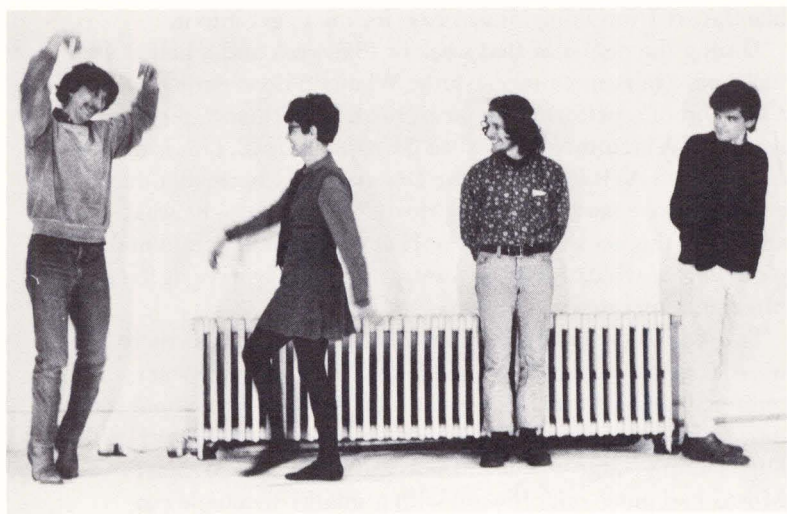
*The commentary that begins here is based on an interview conducted at Gathie Falk's house in Kitsilano on Monday, June 21, 1982. It is augmented elsewhere in the text with materials taken from Falk's archives and with fragments from pertinent reviews. The speakers are identified by initials.*



GF The invitation to attend Deborah Hay's workshops came to me via Doug Christmas.<sup>3</sup> He said, "I want you to be in this workshop with this dancer from New York." I said, "I'm no dancer, I've never danced in my life." He said, "That doesn't matter, and this is the exercise you're to come prepared with." It was to *make a piece that lasted one minute*. But I didn't know what a *piece* was. I knew what a minute was. Of course, I'd heard about happenings, but she didn't call it a happening. What I knew

about happenings was what I saw being done around here — people were collected with many materials of different kinds and they were told to go ahead and use those materials in various original ways, if possible. These events were very boring for the spectator; only of interest to the participants. So when this was called a *piece*, I had to think very hard about what to do.

I thought that if I took a turntable and I put an apple on top of it in the middle and I put something around it in the middle and if I unwound it for one minute by turning my body to make it turn, that would be a piece. Or if I did that for half of the time and then unwound for half a minute, that might be O.K. But I couldn't figure out the logistics. So, I ended up with a turntable alright (it was candy apple red) and with a ceramic apple. I did *something* but it was wrong because it didn't last a



minute. What I did wasn't very interesting. But nobody won in that first round. Bodo Pfeifer, Glenn Lewis, Michael Morris, Anna Gilbert, Helen Goodwin and all her dancers, Evelyn Roth and other visual artists attended. None of us did that first exercise right.

I remember that the next thing Deborah asked us to do was to make a piece that was structurally based on the sound of our



voice. Then I began to have a glimmer about what she wanted. I asked everyone to take off his shoes and put them in a pile. (I knew by then that she wanted to know, "When was the beginning, when was the end?" There was to be no shuffling into the beginning slowly or indecisively.) So, I collected everybody's shoes, put them into a pile and I said, "It begins *now!*" I took one shoe over to a floorboard — we were at Intermedia — I counted ten floorboards and put down the next shoe, and so on.<sup>4</sup> I could see, I was getting to the wall before I ran out of shoes, so before I got to the wall I turned the corner and pretended I was counting floorboards. But I was petering out then, because the spaces were becoming smaller. Then I went to the far end of the space at the head of all the shoes and I said "The piece is over."

She thought that was wonderful. And I knew that there had to be something interesting about a piece, or unusual, a beginning and an end, some structure. I was launched. Because it was so like the art I was doing, it was easy for me to get into it.

During the period of that week or that week and a half, I used the shoes again, more successfully. What I'd done earlier was just a little bit of a performance piece, not a performance piece by itself. I invented the piece called *Skipping Ropes*. This is how it came about. As it happened, we couldn't use Intermedia that evening, so we met at Michael Morris' old house — he was away. On this occasion Deborah Hay said, I want you to make a piece half of which is told as a story. She usually gave us ten or fifteen minutes to figure it out.

So I walked around the place, opened a drawer and there were some skipping ropes. Then I saw D'Arcy Henderson's ceramic banana. It had fingermarks on it so you could hold it as though it were a musical instrument, a flute. And there was a huge picture frame — one of those wide ones that Michael Morris had made out of metal with a smaller rectangle cut within it. It was dark blue. Then I walked through the kitchen and out the back door and I saw their old Christmas tree — a small one, with all the needles gone. Just a brown Christmas tree. Then I started working on it. I'd had in my mind the night before as I was driving somewhere, the phrase "Name, Age, Sex, Racial Origin." (Sometimes when you're involved in activities like these, little things crop up, but you're not sure how to use them.) So as I was starting, I wasn't entirely sure what I was going to do in the end, it wasn't entirely worked out but it

worked itself out as I did it. I wouldn't normally work this way, but remember, I only had ten minutes.

It went this way, as I recall. I'd given the participants their instructions and told them to wait outside the door of the house until a certain signal. The audience was seated on the living room couch. I'd set the picture frame parallel to the door and I'd suspended the three skipping ropes tied together as a line from the ceiling, slightly diagonally in relation to the frame. I walked to centre stage. I had the banana and the Christmas tree on the floor. I began by telling the story.

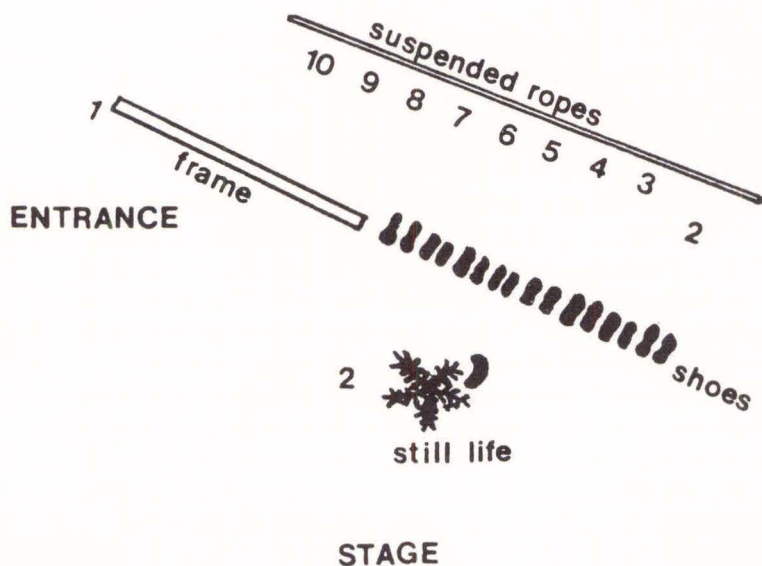
"Everybody is at the bottom of the hill. Slowly they walk up the hill and, at the middle, they meet a man playing on his banana. Each person bows and continues on his way. Later, there is a Christmas tree. Each person takes a needle, puts it between his teeth, continues on his way. Finally, they arrive at the door over there."

Then I stood up and walked to the head of the line, near the skipping ropes. The others came in, singly. Each walked through the frame, removed his shoes, set the shoes in a row beside the frame, took up a position facing me, hanging from the ropes as though they were on the bus. So, you had the line of shoes and the line of the ropes and a line of people. When they were all in, all hanging there, I shouted, "THESE ARE YOUR ORDERS. WHEN YOU HEAR THE GONG SAY YOUR NAME, AGE, SEX, RACIAL ORIGIN; WHEN YOU HEAR THE GONG SAY YOUR NAME, AGE, SEX AND RACIAL ORIGIN! I REPEAT, WHEN YOU HEAR THE GONG GIVE YOUR NAME, AGE, SEX, RACIAL ORIGIN."

Now, this came as a total surprise to the participants as well as to the audience. And, even as I said it, I didn't know what I was going to do for a gong. I just didn't know what I was going to do, but it worked in my mind and just saying it over and over again, it got softer. So I repeated it, repeated it, repeated it until it was a whisper and then it was gone. I stopped, I relaxed, everyone relaxed. Deborah and the others thought the piece was wonderful. Everytime I rehearsed it and even at the performance, she said when I started to shout, her heart was still beating. Of course, the piece that came from this is *Skipping Ropes* and the "name, age, sex, racial origin" phrase became the chant for *Chorus*.

## SKIPPING ROPES

3 skipping ropes tied together  
plastic fishline to suspend them  
a picture frame just large enough to get through  
an artificial Christmas tree  
a ceramic banana, a real banana or  
a piece of ceramic watermelon  
1 leader  
1 person to hold the frame  
5 to 10 people





CAST: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9...12 (*maximum*)

*ACTION:*

1 enters with a large picture frame. She places it at left centre stage and holds it erect throughout the performance. (It is just big enough to get through without touching it, but one must be careful, crouching a little as one goes through.) Behind the frame the skipping ropes suspended-in-a-line are visible making a diagonal at eye level.

2 enters through the door and moves to centre front stage where there is the still life — the artificial Christmas tree, the real or ceramic banana or the ceramic watermelon slice. She tells this story:

“Everybody is at the bottom of the hill. Slowly they walk up the hill in single file and, at the middle, they meet a man playing on his banana (or watermelon).” *She demonstrates.* “Each person



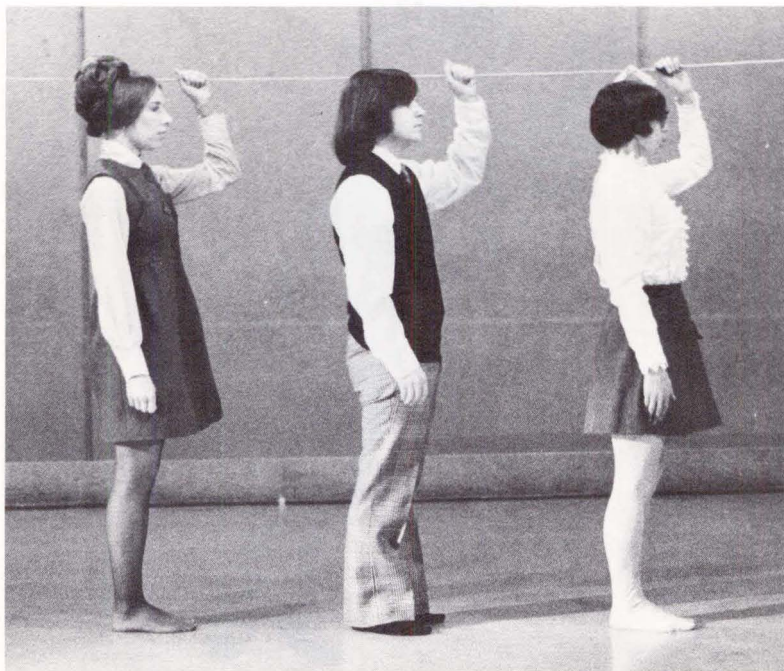
bows and continues up the hill. Later, there is a Christmas tree. Each person takes a needle and puts it between his teeth." *She demonstrates.*

"Finally, they arrive at the door over there." *She points to the entrance to the room.*

2 walks to the end of the skipping ropes, stage right, and stands near them facing the entrance.

The participants who have been standing outside the door enter, singly. 3 comes in, removes his/her shoes and places them neatly at the right edge of the picture frame. 3 walks through the frame, bending carefully so that the frame is not touched. 3 walks over to the ropes and holds a position on them as though he/she were riding a bus, facing 2 who is standing nearby.

4 5 6 7 8 9 etc. enter singly and, having arranged their shoes methodically in a diagonal line beside the first pair proceed to the ropes. They hang there as though on a bus, facing 2.



2 moves from her position near the ropes to the line of shoes to the right of the frame. She silently counts them as though she were a foreman of a factory who is mildly interested in *who is present*. 2 moves back to her position at the head of the skipping rope line, having come through the frame as the others did. Facing the line of people holding the ropes, she yells:

“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.”

She repeats and repeats this order, 15 times or more, getting softer and softer each time (almost imperceptively) until, finally, the phrase which has become a whisper is mouthed inaudibly on her lips.

There is no gong. When 2 has stopped moving her lips, she relaxes. All relax. They exit.

*SKIPPING ROPES* was first performed at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1968.

## / VIEWS & REVIEWS cont'd

*GF* When I do this as a performance piece, the number of people varies, I like to have at least five and no more than ten. They wear their ordinary shoes — some may wear rubbers, but they take them off (whatever they are) right there on the stage area, undo their laces . . .

*AS* There are some political implications there . . .

*GF* 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 . . .

*AS* But in a heavier sense, gas chambers . . .

*GF* Yes, also that.



AS Sending people through, taking their clothes off . . . while somebody else is playing a banana . . .

GF Yes, it starts off so gently with this nice lady telling this gentle story . . .

AS Yes, a real heartbreaker! So if you're not consciously looking for a moral or anything didactic, what are you looking for?

GF I can look, but I can't *put in*. That's the point. I can *get out*, but I can't put in a moral or story . . .

AS So, actually it's a kind of sculpture through time/space?

GF Everything one does has a feeling to it, an emotion. For instance, a pile of apples, it makes a perfect shape, a pyramid shape. It's not a real pyramid, but it reminds me of a pyramid. . . . A calm shape, *perfect*. Every unit is an apple which is a material that can rot, can disintegrate, is emotional in its being not hard, but being soft and undulating, having a soft surface to it hence having all those emotional qualities — even a stem end, a beginning and an end. That's all inherent in this one sculpture — calm things, emotional things. I feel those things when I look at it. You can feel them or feel some of them. But I hadn't really intended to do that when I made the apple pile, I just knew it was a good thing to make. And that's how the performance pieces work.

Different people get different things out of them and some people just get laughs.

And, of course, the row of shoes in *Skipping Ropes* led to the sculpture I did of the 18 pairs of shoes arranged diagonally in a line in the *Single Right Men's Shoes Series* (1971-73).

Each day of the festival something was done. The "score" announced time, place and people involved; the audience occurred at random. One event was only seen by two people, another was walked through and over by noon-hour crowds in the main hall. Two answers in different keys to the question, "What is performance?"

One day Helen Goodwin had a long line of people move slowly along the outside wall of the Student Union Building until it disappeared slowly through the doors. This frieze animated in "slow motion" showed up the arbitrariness of our time sense, as did Glenn Lewis' Rice Krispie piece. Lewis sat at a piano smoking a cigarette, his arms falling on the keys between puffs. This provided timing and orchestration for the emptying of eighteen boxfuls of Rice Krispies over the floor . . .



Gathie Falk's theatre pieces are more elaborate. To describe them fully would take time and do less than justice to their weird dramatic tension and surreal atmosphere. Briefly in one, a ceramic watermelon and a small plastic Christmas tree sat on the floor to be transformed as they became part of a story recited by the artist. Meanwhile about a dozen people came through an empty picture frame behind, took off their shoes and set them in a row.

These people then took up their places, formally and carefully holding onto a suspended skipping rope. Finally Gathie Falk intoned in a shout that became a whisper, "When you hear the gong say your name, age, sex and racial origin," over and over. This piece creates time scale within itself, it also makes a lot of allusions to our experience outside of it using scale, perspective and sound . . .

Charlotte Townsend, "About Art," rev. of *Skipping Ropes*, by Gathie Falk and *Rice Krispie* by Glenn Lewis, *The Vancouver Sun*, 2 July, 1966.

# A BIRD IS KNOWN BY HIS FEATHERS ALONE

tape recorder

tape with a canary whistling *O Danny Boy!*

white paper roll, white kitchen table

round wash basin, camera

chair, can of syrup, spoon, mirror with stand

stool

3 lipsticks in different hues

powder & puff, perfume & atomizer

7 artificial Christmas trees in a large box

purse with comb, scissors, mirror, and a reading from *B.C. Teacher*

100 cocktail glasses, 100 maraschino cherries

100 ceramic oranges or orange-painted real oranges

masking tape, tacks

5 people

*CAST:* 1 2 3 4 5

*ACTION:*

1 comes on stage carrying a towel, soap, a basin of water. She puts the water and soap on table to right stage and stands behind it, servant fashion, holding the towel over her arm. A tape recording of a canary singing *O Danny Boy!* is turned on off-stage.

2 enters, goes to the table, takes the towel from 1 in order to begin this ritual which is repeated 5 times:

*dry face, wet face, pin back hair, soap face, remove glasses, roll up sleeves, rinse off, put glasses back on, roll down sleeves, take pins from hair.*

1 folds towel and places it over her arm after each use.





2 moves to chair where mirror, spoon and syrup are placed and sits on the stool behind, facing audience. 2 applies syrup to her face like make-up.



1 moves, as 2 begins, to far left middle stage and faces centre front stage.

2 applies the syrup slowly, with great care to leave no spot on face untouched. *O Danny Boy!* is turned off. 2 takes the syrup can and having walked over to the table stage right, studies the wash basin upon it and begins to make an abstract expressionist painting on it. She throws syrup from the spoon at the basin from each of the four corners of the paper that's under the table. She finishes her work with one dynamic throw over all.





1 approaches the table and picks up the camera beside the wash basin as if to take a picture of the abstract expressionist painting. Instead she advances to the audience and takes a picture of them. 1 & 2 exit (see p. 28).

*(This is the first part of A BIRD IS KNOWN BY HIS FEATHERS ALONE performed along with other materials — see VIEWS & REVIEWS below — first at an Intermedia Concert at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1968). It was revised in 1972 for a performance at the Vancouver Art Gallery to include the following parts:*



\* \* \*

3 comes on carrying lipstick, powder & puff in his back pockets. He advances to the paper sheet attached to the back wall of the performance space. He makes a large, light drawing of lips and proceeds to fill in the area with colours (3), working very carefully. He smooths out the whole thing into a large, soft-edged circle of red resembling a target. He dusts it over with the powder & puff he has in his pocket. He squirts it with the perfume atomizer and exits.

When 3 is busy with the powder & puff, 2 returns to the stage, clean-faced and with a large box containing 7 artificial Christmas trees and carrying a handbag containing scissors, a mirror, a comb and a reading. 2 makes a circle of the Christmas trees at stage left. 2 sits at the centre, opens purse, takes out the toilet items, cuts her hair while considering the results in the mirror.



2 removes the reading from her purse and in a matter-of-fact voice reads the following passage from the December 1960 issue of *B.C. Teacher*:

"I belong to the 'tie-regardless' group but I am certain you will agree that suitable dress for male teachers extends beyond the wearing of a tie.

"My basic tenet is that teachers belong to a professional group and at all times they should dress like professional people. There are acceptable standards of dress for doctors, lawyers and other professionals and these should be the unquestionable standards for teachers.

"In my opinion, taking them as a group, there are no better dressed men than lawyers, and teachers should be in the same class. By 'better dressed' I am not referring to the price tag of the suit. With a little care a fellow can be just as well dressed in a moderately priced suit as in the most expensive one.

"Thus my first requirement is a well-pressed suit or jacket and slacks combination. And of course, a dress shirt and tie and suitable well-kept shoes. For hot weather there are short sleeved shirts.

"In the hot weather I would permit the neck button of the shirt to be loosened with the tie also loosened but I would insist on a tie being worn. Only in excessively hot weather would I permit coats to be removed.

"There is no place in school for a sports shirt. Never. The open-neck flannel shirt is inexcusable.

"I would set the same standards of dress for out-of-school functions. Some teachers who are always well-dressed at school seem to lower the standard when attending teachers' meetings. I consider such meetings part of the teachers' professional activity and the professional standard of dress should apply. Of course, teachers should be suitably dressed for participation in sports activities but for business gatherings business dress should be worn.

"In my opinion, the principal should set a high standard of dress at all times and should insist that his staff meet these standards, even to the extent of having courteous but frank discussions where these become necessary.

"I have concentrated on the men's dress but I would insist upon similar high standards for the feminine members of the staff. I expect them at all times to wear well-cared-for clothing and suitable shoes. Just as I insist on ties for men for school, I insist that the ladies always wear hose.

"All teachers, male and female, both in and out of school should dress in such a way that they are considered well-groomed."

2 stays on stage, at rest.

\* \* \*

4 comes on stage and lies down to the left of the cocktail glasses. He moves the glasses across the stage with his body, herding them carefully but inevitably leaving some behind as he does, and spilling out cherries as he goes. He remains prone throughout.

\* \* \*

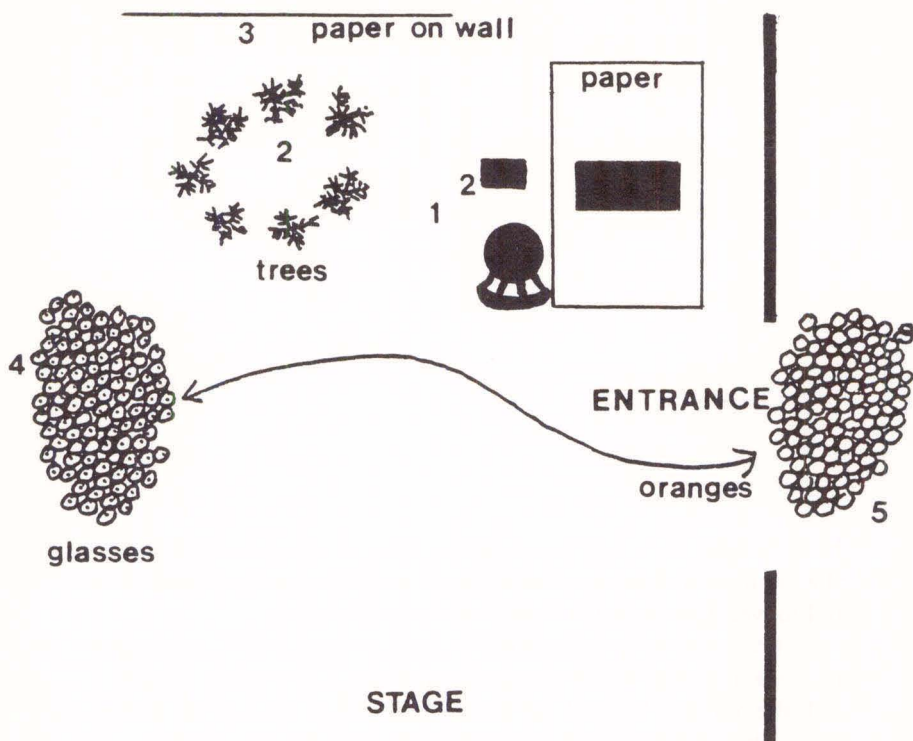




After 4 begins, 5 — who is outside the room — counts to 20 (silently). She lies down beside the ceramic or painted oranges outside the door and moves them with her body into the gallery space.

As 4 & 5 move slowly and deliberately past each other, each carries away some of the other's wares. Cocktail glasses & cherries mingle with the oranges. When 4 has brought his glasses through the exit to right, when 5 has taken the oranges to the left wall, the piece is finished. All exit.





## / VIEWS & REVIEWS cont'd

GF In later versions of this piece, I removed this camera part, thinking it was too precious.

\* \* \*

*In the interview, Falk spoke about the generation of the A BIRD IS KNOWN BY HIS FEATHERS ALONE piece. It occurred soon after the Deborah Hay workshops.*

GF About six months later, Intermedia had a night at the Vancouver Art Gallery, and there I did the first version of *A Bird is Known by His Feathers Alone*. The first part was with syrup and washing my face etc.; the second part used the stairs that John Neon had constructed in the gallery as part of an exhibition. He

went East after that. Anyway, these stairs were a musical sculpture that played a scale up one side and down the other. We were asked to use the stairs and so the middle part involved them. The middle part was like a rondo — there were people jumping on the bottom; others jumped on the next stair and so on, so that part was quite musical. And then people came out from a black-shrouded space at the end of the stage, carrying things and going over to the sculpture at different speeds. One of them dragged a hundred pound bag of clay, ‘plunk plunk plunk’ up the stairs, very heavily. Another person raced across them carrying a moose’s head and Glenn Allison had to carry my refrigerator tray full of water very careful not to spill any, and he didn’t. Then I remember that a whole group of people went over it, talking all at once. And I think some people came from one end as others came from the other. And at one point there was a circle of people at the top and they all rolled down.

AR Well, *that* part must have impressed me a lot, because I wrote about it as though it were a sacrifice.

GF Michael Morris thought it was very masochistic of me to do what I did . . .

AR After they had taken their goodies to the top, they got to roll off and kill themselves. It struck me as being heavy.

GF Well, Michael thought so too . . .

AR So this piece started off with the syrup and the musical stairs . . .

GF Then the end happened on the other side. I did up my hair with clay, some curly things made of metal shavings that I stuck into the clay in front of a mirror. There was a cake with alcohol that I lit in the end. There was a large frame near the front of the stage with curtains hung on it. There was a show mirror standing on the floor; somebody used a rotary sander when I was doing my hair. I thought the middle part was very good but, of course, without Neon’s stairs it couldn’t be done again. I didn’t think the last part with the cake and the clay in my hair was very good, so I took those parts out and added the parts published here.

AR Here’s the list of materials for the first performance of the *A Bird is Known* . . . from your archives:



white paper, basin, soap, towel, syrup & spoon, mirror, chair, table, camera, canary tape, six 50 pound bags of clay, a coat, 4 refrigerator trays, a moose head, 4 six foot ladders, a large plastic sheet, a large mirror & stand, a metal box & stand, clay, comb, scissors, a table, metal shavings, sander & paper, pudding & liquor, arch, reading, plastic curtain, black tape, matches

and an excerpt from my review of it which sure leaves a lot of detail out:

Gathie Falk directed the next playlet and again used the stairway as a focus for comment about contemporary life. From under an enormous green plastic tent appeared singly performers who mounted the stairs in various guises. One carried a brimful water-tray; another ran struggling to put on a coat. All appeared several times in the same sequence and also joined in groups to mount the stairs.

But in the end the stairs were transformed by Miss Falk into a more profound symbol. In a rapid sequence they appeared like an Aztec sacrificial altar with kneeling supplicants, then the supplicants tumbled down to apparent destruction . . .

Ann Rosenberg, "It's Happening at Art Gallery," rev. of *A Bird is Known by His Feathers Alone*, by Gathie Falk, *The Vancouver Sun*, 26 October, 1968.

GF Yes, and there's also a review of the piece as I usually perform it:

In *A Bird is Known by His Feathers Alone*, some irony about makeup and dress seems . . . intended. Falk standing in front of a basin of water performs her ablutions backwards. . . . She then dips a big spoon into a can of Rogers' Golden Syrup and ladles it all over her face, licking it appreciatively now and then.

Meanwhile Tom Graff smears a sheet of paper with cold cream, marks it with lipstick and pats on the powder.

This piece ends with a choreography for objects, as participants from the corners of the stage, inching along on their backs, push ceramic oranges and plastic cocktail glasses filled with real cherries towards and past each other. The scattering of oranges, glasses and squashed cherries as they finish is a study in process and randomness. . . .

Joan Lowndes, "But Whose Face Was the Egg on?" rev. of *A Bird is Known by His Feathers Alone*, by Gathie Falk, *The Vancouver Sun*, 9 February, 1972.

# GIRL WALKING AROUND SQUARE ROOM IN A GALLERY (Film)

super 8 film loop of girl walking

projector

revolving table on timer

*CAST OF FILM: 1 person, an ordinary girl in ordinary clothes*

*ACTION OF FILM:*

In the film, the girl walks in silhouette, constantly. It was shot so that she is perpetually at middle distance in the centre of the frame. The middle part of the sequence was reproduced over and over again so that she moves continuously in the proper way. The projector is mounted on a turntable set up with a timer so that the action looks natural and right. The image is projected above ground level so that she is walking, literally, around the walls of a square room. This film, a performance document, can be a theatre piece in its own right. (Werner Aellen filmed it to Falk's specifications.)

# GIRL WALKING AROUND SQUARE ROOM IN A GALLERY (Performance)

super 8 film loop of girl walking

projector

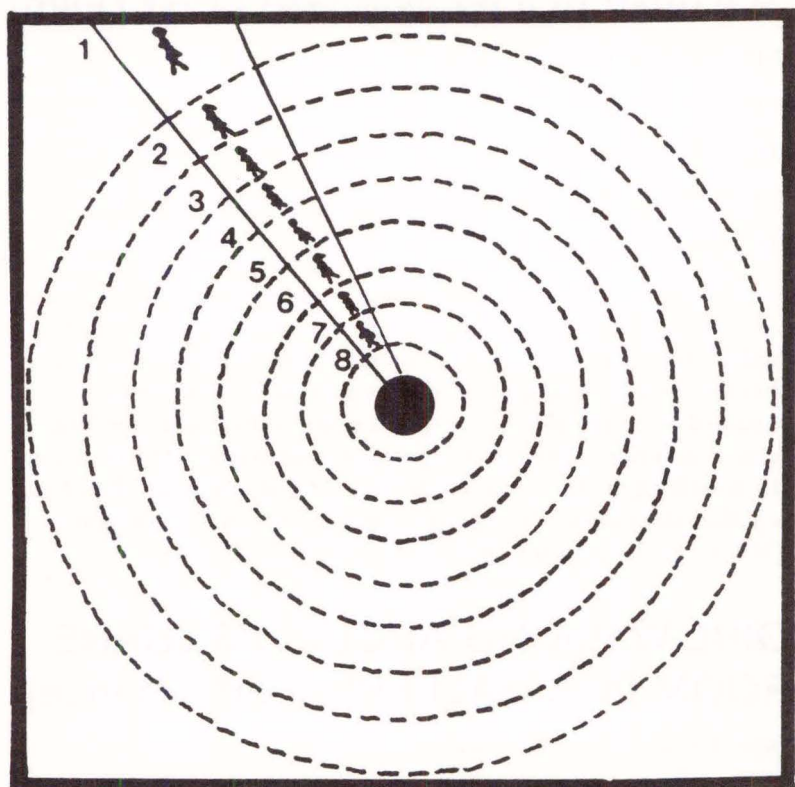
revolving table on timer

many people

*CAST OF PERFORMANCE: Girl walking on film, 1 2 3 4 5 etc.*

*ACTION OF PERFORMANCE:*

The film is set in the way described above to project continuously (if necessary) throughout the duration of an exhibition. The performance begins when one person, dressed in his or her ordinary clothes, takes up a position near the wall to walk in step with the filmed woman. After he/she has circuited the room, another person joins the first and walks around the room.



Others join the first two, singly, after each complete circuit with the walking girl. More and more people are added towards the centre. As the performers occupy more and more space within the gallery, the audience has to move to accommodate their movements.

Finally, the line of figures is a constantly turning diagonal moving record-like around a central spindle. At this point, the walkers "fill" the gallery and the spectators have, in a sense, been swept from the room.

**GIRL WALKING AROUND SQUARE ROOM IN A GALLERY**  
*(Film & Performance) was shown/performed in an Intermedia Show called Electrical Connection at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1969.*



## / VIEWS & REVIEWS cont'd

GF Almost all the people in my pieces, like the girl in the film are ordinary people wearing ordinary clothes . . . I'd tell them to wear their ordinary clothes so they wouldn't come in something outrageous and I usually wore the clothes I always wore when performing. I used to work in a dark red jumper, rather short. . . . I wore men's shirts. What I wore at home, I wore on stage.

AR Just as in your art you use real ordinary objects or make replicas of them, so in your theatre works you use ordinary movements and ordinary structures. There's simple counting systems like zero to twenty or vice versa; the time/space between moves will get shorter or more lengthy. . . . In my mind as I read the scripts, it is clear to me what you are trying to do, but do you think the audience perceived this sense of timing?

GF I have no idea, I've never watched my pieces, except for *Ballet for Bass-Baritone* which I wasn't in. . . .

AR Did Deborah Hay give you any instruction on timing?

GF No, I think my sense of timing came from counting the floorboards in the shoe-piece I described earlier. . . . I'm a practical person. I know it's easier to count than to look at a watch.

## SOME ARE EGGER THAN I

hot plate & cooking pot

6 soft-boiled eggs

white paper

red table & red velour cushion

6 golden egg cups with gold eggs

a spoon, knife, white napkin & salt & pepper shakers

1 white egg cup

a small white bowl

a brown paper bag

6 uncooked eggs  
2 dozen ceramic eggs in a variety of colours  
a broom & a ruler  
a white shirt with a frill at bottom for dress  
a red tie, white knee socks  
black Chinese shoes  
a projector  
a slide screen  
1 person

*CAST: 1 person (female)*

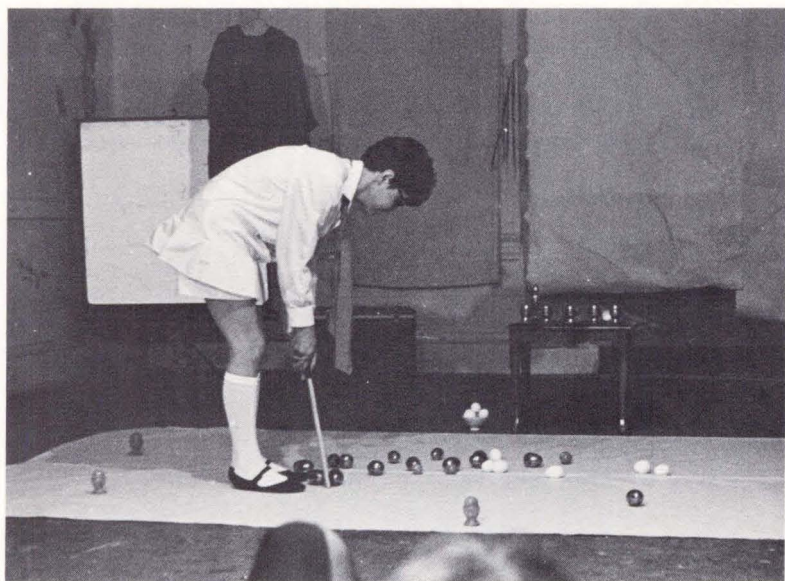
*On the floor is a large piece of white paper. Just behind the paper is a candy-apple red, cane-topped low table. Behind the table on the floor is a red velour pillow. On the table at the front in a line are 6 golden ceramic egg cups with gold eggs in them. Behind them is a white egg cup, a knife, a salt shaker, a white napkin. Beside the white paper, leaning against the wall are a broom and a ruler. Near the front of the paper, stage left, is a brown paper bag.*

**ACTION:**

The person enters in a white dress made from a man's shirt, ruffle added to the bottom. She wears a red tie, white knee socks, black Chinese shoes. She is carrying a bowl with six eggs, previously cooked to the soft-boiled stage off-stage. She puts the bowl down near the table. She goes to the brown paper bag and tips it over so that in one gesture the eggs within — a mixture of golden, black, brown and grey ceramic eggs — roll with real uncooked eggs over the paper. This is done carefully so that none break.

Then she sits down behind the red table on the cushion. She takes one of the eggs from the white bowl, cuts off the top with the knife in one stroke, puts salt on it and eats it.

When the 1st egg is finished, she goes to left stage, picks up the ruler and lines up one of the ceramic eggs with one of the real eggs that have rolled from the bag onto the paper. She plays croquet, hitting at the egg as often as is necessary until it is broken. Sometimes the ceramic eggs will rattle over the floor during this action, sounding quite vicious. Sometimes one will hit the wall; sometimes some will roll into the audience.



When an egg has been broken in the game, she replaces the ruler and returns to the table to eat another egg.

When the 2nd egg is consumed, she retrieves the ruler and moves back onto the white paper once more to play croquet, eggs rolling, "mallet" swinging until another uncooked egg is shattered. She replaces the ruler and returns to the table to eat the 3rd egg.

After that, she retrieves the ruler and plays croquet until another egg splatters on the floor. She replaces the ruler once more, returns to the table and takes the 4th egg from the bowl. Instead of eating this egg, she opens it and spoons its contents onto the table top so that the white and the yolk seep through the caning.

She moves to left stage and this time picks up the broom instead of the ruler. She herds the eggs that have strayed off the paper back onto it, as though they were victims she doesn't much care for. She ignores the eggs that have rolled into the audience. She replaces the broom, picks up the ruler and bashes at another egg until it breaks. She returns the ruler.



She sits at the table again and breaks the 5th egg on the table top. She takes up the ruler again and plays croquet until another egg splatters. She replaces the ruler.

She returns to the table, sits down and looks at the golden eggs. She puts out her hand towards the far left cup, pulls it back, as if she's changed her mind. Then she picks up the golden cup to the far right and exchanges it for the one at far left as though she were moving chess pawns. Now she eats the 6th soft-boiled egg, then, swinging her ruler for the last time, she breaks, kills a final egg .



\* \* \*

In the majority of performances of *Some Are Egger than I* slides were projected as background. They show Gathie Falk wearing a long robe and swimming goggles progressively covered with eggs that have been broken against her face and body. She seems to smile, but she is grimacing in pain. She is like a person in front of a firing squad.

*SOME ARE EGGER THAN I* was first performed at the New Era Social Club in 1969. It was revised after the Eighty Eggs performance at the Ace Gallery (see *VIEWS & REVIEWS* below) to include slides.

## / VIEWS & REVIEWS cont'd

GF I'd already performed *Some Are Egger than I*, when I was asked by Douglas Christmas to be the performer in his theatre piece, *Eighty Eggs*. It happened on the occasion of a Sunday morning opening of a Glenn Lewis show at the Ace Gallery (November 31, 1969).

In the piece, I was standing against the wall as though facing a firing squad. Then one egg was thrown at me, then slowly more and more eggs were thrown until I was covered with eggs.

One might not think that eggs would hurt when they're thrown at you, but they do hurt. And I know that the people that were supposed to be throwing them at me didn't really want to hurt me, so they were trying to throw them *around* my body rather than *at* my body. But Doug said, "Hit her! Hit her!" So they did.

Some of the pictures look as though I'm laughing and Doug said later, "The pictures are good, but you shouldn't have grinned." And I said, "I wasn't smiling, that was a grin of pain." It really did feel like being in front of a firing squad.

In the revised edition, I used the slides as large projections behind me. They are supposed to end as I finish the performance. And once, at a noon-hour concert at the Vancouver Art Gallery, I did something else with the piece (1972). I did everything as indicated in the script here, but at the end of the work I walked out of the room, changed into the red velour robe that I wore during Doug's *Eighty Eggs* piece where the audience couldn't see me. I returned to the gallery having squashed a whole pile of eggs into my hair. I walked through the gallery directly to the washroom to get the eggs off me. I did that only once. Once was enough.

A lot of my work turns out like this. I don't intend it to be violent or pleasant, or romantic or whatever, but it ends up being something like that. . . . But I'm not making a statement . . . the mood, there just happens to be a mood attached to the work of art.

# CROCHETED GEODESIC DOME WITH SOUND TRACK BY BUCKMINSTER FULLER

dresser with tall mirror

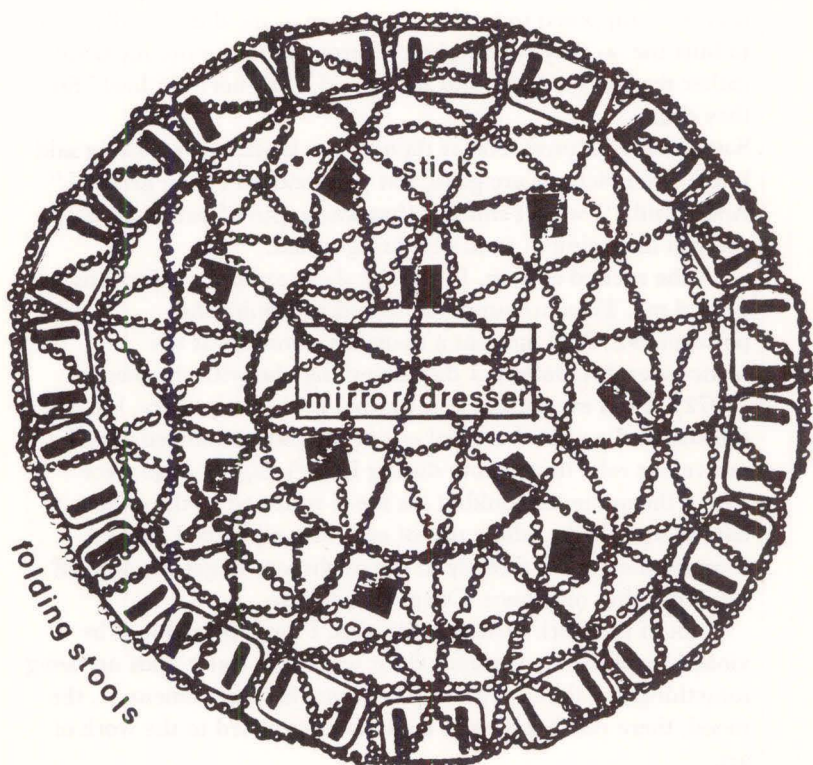
some long sticks as fragile supports

some folding stools

parcel string

tape of Buckminster Fuller talking about the role of the artist

1 person





*CAST: 1 person who can crochet using arms and hand as hook.*

*The tall mirror dresser is the support for the highest part of the dome, the folding stools for the lowest; sticks are used as necessary in the construction of the soft dome that drapes over the area.*

**ACTION:**

The crocheter begins the task at the periphery, using a circle of folding stools as the understructure for the base of the dome. She tucks the system of triangles she crochets with her arm and hands under and over the stools as she goes. Around and around, pulling the system higher and higher supporting parts of it with sticks as it seems necessary until finally it is completed over the highest part of the dresser.

This activity takes three long days beginning sometime in the morning and continuing until late afternoon with people coming and going, watching then leaving. And it feels like a long time because the crocheter is listening to that Buckminster Fuller tape over and over and over again. He's mumbling on about artists being like scientists; he's trying to make them feel good, by saying they're like scientists.

**CROCHETED GEODESIC DOME WITH SOUNDTRACK BY BUCKMINSTER FULLER** *was first performed at the University of British Columbia's Festival for the Contemporary Arts in 1970.*

## **ACT I: SCENE 1 & 2 (BEFORE & AFTER)**

fur stole

sweater

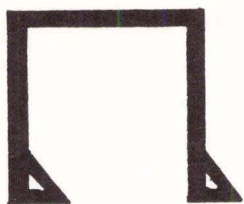
show horn

a volleyball, string bag & rope

36 balls

36 oranges

post & beam construction in 2 x 4's, 90" x 90"



90" x 90" blanket

nails

pins

3 prs. glasses

9 prs. runners for people

9 prs. white ankle socks & shorts for people

10 people

## ACT I: SCENE 1 (Before)

*CAST: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10*

*1 & 2 must be of equal height. They cannot reach each other over the frame. 7 has a volleyball fastened at his waist on a rope and held in a string bag when not in use. 8 has a watch. 2 3 4 have glasses in their pockets. 1 is wearing ordinary clothes; 2 . . . 10 wear running shoes, white socks & shorts.*

### *ACTION:*

1 stands in front of the blanket-covered frame, back to audience while audience assembles. From the pile of objects to left 1 selects a fur stole as the piece begins.

1 pushes the stole with great difficulty over the frame;

2 pushes back the stole with great difficulty;

1 pushes a child's shoe with great difficulty over the frame;

2 pushes back the child's shoe with great difficulty;

1 pushes a hat with great difficulty over the frame;

(waits 7 seconds);

2 pushes a shoehorn with great difficulty over the frame

(waits 7 seconds);

1 pushes a scarf with great difficulty over the frame

(waits 3 seconds).

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



1

In this part of the piece 1 is visible to the audience. 2's actions are known to the audience but he/she is concealed behind the blanket. 3 4 5 etc. are invisible and unknown to audience. In the interchange of objects described none are thrown over the frame.

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 suddenly throw a lot of balls and oranges over the frame. 1 exits.

3 4 5 6 (still concealed from audience) fold up the blanket from the bottom and fasten it with pins, creating a 1-foot gap at floor level. The feet of 2 . . . 10 are now visible.

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 practice volleyball with the ball 7 has tethered at his waist. The ball is never to hit the ground, but it may be bounced on its rope above the frame. The audience sees the players' ankles below; sometimes hands above. 8 watches the time and after 2 minutes (approximately) he begins wrestling and the others do likewise, always keeping the ball from view.

8 watches the time. After 2 minutes he straightens and the others do likewise. 8 begins to mouth *O Canada*. When all have begun to mouth *O Canada*, 2 walks around to the front of the curtain. 3 follows after 3 seconds to stand behind 2. All follow, forming a square.



8 9 10

5 6 7

2 3 4

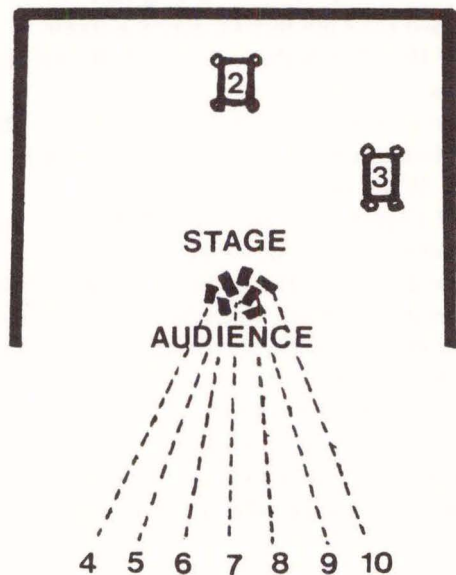
When 2 3 4 have finished *O Canada* (at different times), they wait 3 seconds, pull the glasses from their pockets, put them on casually, then straighten to attention. They stand for five seconds, take off the glasses, relax and hand them back to 5 6 7. (These movements are not simultaneous.) 5 6 7 put on the glasses, straighten to attention, wait 5 seconds, remove glasses, relax, hand them to 8 9 10. 8 9 10



put on glasses, straighten to attention, wait 5 seconds, take off glasses and relax. When 10 relaxes, he waits 5 seconds and casually exits. All exit with him.

Lights out. The frame, oranges and balls are removed.

## ACT I: SCENE 2 (After)



*CAST: 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10*

*1 (in ordinary clothes) is not in this part. 2 . . . 10 wear running shoes, white socks & shorts as in previous scene.*

### *ACTION:*

2 comes on stage riding on a dolly in a kneeling position. Beside 2 on dolly is a picnic basket containing paper napkin, coke, a glass, a bottle opener and a tie. 2 stops at centre stage, sits cross-legged on the dolly, opens the coke, pours it into a glass, takes out the tie and begins tying. 2 ties it so it will not knot and continues to try to fail throughout performance.

3 enters after 2's second attempt to tie the tie. 2 enters on a dolly in a standing position, using his foot as though on a scooter. Beside him on the dolly is a bag of flyers. 3 stops at the centre of the first wall and throws a flyer newspaperboy-fashion at it. 3 moves on the dolly to the next wall, throws a flyer and so on to the next. 3 continues moving and throwing throughout the piece, always trying for a long trajectory.

After 3's third throw, 2 moves back stage right on his dolly and continues to tie and retie the tie.

After 3's sixth throw, 4 & 10 who have been seated at either corner in the back row of the audience stand up and throw a flyer at centre stage trying for long trajectories. They throw flyers every 20 seconds, but not necessarily together.

After 4 & 10 have thrown 12 flyers, the others who have been sitting in the back row stand up and throw a volley of flyers simultaneously at centre stage. They sit down.

4 & 10 continue to throw flyers at centre stage until they have thrown 15. They sit down.

When 3 has thrown 18 flyers at the wall, he exits on his dolly.

When 3 has gone, 2 turns towards the audience and moves on his dolly to a spot behind the scatter of flyers at centre stage. 2 ties and reties his tie 3 more times, puts the picnic back in the basket and exits.

Lights fade.

*ACT 1: SCENE 1 & 2 (Before & After) was first performed at the Intermedia Domes show at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1970.*

## / VIEWS & REVIEWS cont'd

GF Every week we'd have a rehearsal at Intermedia for this piece, and it went quite well except that people had a hard time remembering what to do. But I'd written out the instructions quite carefully so they could remember. We rehearsed also at the Vancouver Art Gallery, but we couldn't use the room where the performance was to take place because people were making domes in there. So when we performed it, one of the problems was that the height of the ceiling there was lower than in the rooms we'd practiced in. They couldn't get such a large trajectory and so the flyers fell short and hit people in the front

rows, rather than landing at centre stage as planned, so it was less than perfect. . . .

Now maybe *Act 1: Scene 2* doesn't seem that interesting, but in my mind it was like a sculpture of things that are thrown in a curve, that come down in a straight line — these actions happening against the three walls and, finally, into the centre of the stage. I saw this as a piece of moving sculpture. But it didn't pan out. Even the guy on the dolly didn't do it right, he sort of flung them at the wall, *plunk*. There was no trajectory. The review by Christopher Dafoe indicates that he thought the whole thing was quite awful or, at least, he didn't have the background to appreciate what was going on.

Everybody seemed to be doing his own thing at the Intermedia show at the Vancouver Art Gallery Thursday night.

The special event, part of a week of cultural merry making at the gallery was billed as "Seven Acts: Media Theatrical Performance," and so, being interested in things theatrical, I turned up at the gallery at the appointed hour of eight.

Nothing much happened until close to 8:30. After what seemed like a rather long wait, some people in laundry-bag athletic outfits came out and pushed various objects over a tall screen.

Later balls and fresh fruit came over, hitting some members of the audience. Jolly good fun.

Then, in a richly dramatic episode, a boy with a *Sun* carrier's bag threw rolled up newspapers against a wall. He was pelted with objects from the back of the room. The plot thickened.

We all rose and moved into another room . . . [etc. & finally] . . . I slipped out into the rain, forgetting my umbrella. The program was only half over, but I was replete. All play and no work makes Chris a dull boy.

Christopher Dafoe, "Zap! Fruit in Your Face at Intermedia Happening," rev. of *Act 1: Scene 1 & 2* by Gathie Falk, *The Vancouver Sun*, 23 May, 1970.

GF I wrote this letter that I've still got in my files; it was published in the *Sun*: The middle part is a good explanation of what I had in mind for *Act 1: Scene 1 & 2*.<sup>5</sup>

One thing is certain [in these kinds of performances] there is no plot, no story & no self-conscious movement as in most dance. Movement, however, is very important. There is usually little to look at, so the looking has to be keener. Steve Paxton does a piece which involves a crowd of people standing still for 3-5 minutes at a time & who change their positions very slowly during that time, not self-consciously. . . .

Much of my piece called *Act 1* on Thursday was dance in the same way: completely natural movement of a body against a curtain, trying to push something over it & finding that very difficult. Later, there was movement of



legs & sometimes a ball, then wrestling bodies, then the mouths & then the glasses routine where each person stood at attention while wearing them.

The first scene was tied to the second one by the falling balls & oranges theme. The flyers thrown against the wall made quite circular arcs like the falling balls. The flyers thrown from the back of the room made semi-circular arcs. I had sound in mind here too, the plop of the *Sun* carrier's flyers against the swoosh of the flyers from the back. I did not wish the flyers from the back to hit any of the audience, but hoped to make the audience feel at least slightly threatened by them & definitely surprised by the first ones.

In mood this piece, to me, was both funny and tragic: games . . . (volleyball) changing to a wrangling mass of struggling people, [changing] into a motley crew of regimented people. (No politics intended.) And then the picnic on a dolly island with the poor man unable to tie his tie & the innocuous flyer boy . . . the hand grenade atmosphere later on.

My pieces are mostly structured like traditional music (as is also a lot of dance): Theme A, Theme A, Theme B, Theme C, Theme D, Theme E, Theme A, Theme A, Theme F. In most of my pieces there are fewer themes, but it seemed to me these themes flow into each other quite smoothly; there is always a joining link.

My second piece, *Act VI*, which you missed seeing was also a performance piece, but more in the form of conceptual art. I dare not explain the other events since I did not originate them. . . .

Theatre pieces, or Happenings, have been around for a while. Alan Kaprow did his *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* . . . in 1959. Loosely connected with Intermedia in Vancouver, a group of artists have been doing them for the last 2 years. I am not sorry you attended your first event of this nature last week; I am only sorry that you came ill-prepared. . . . I hope you will become more interested in this form of art & be a front-row viewer quite soon.

GF I believe there was also a reply published by Dafoe.<sup>6</sup>

AR Act VI of the Intermedia evening was the *Cat Piece*.

## CAT PIECE

projector

the wall (or walls) of a

room or gallery

1 slide of a cat (full length)

piece of paper or pad

pencil

ruler

masking tape

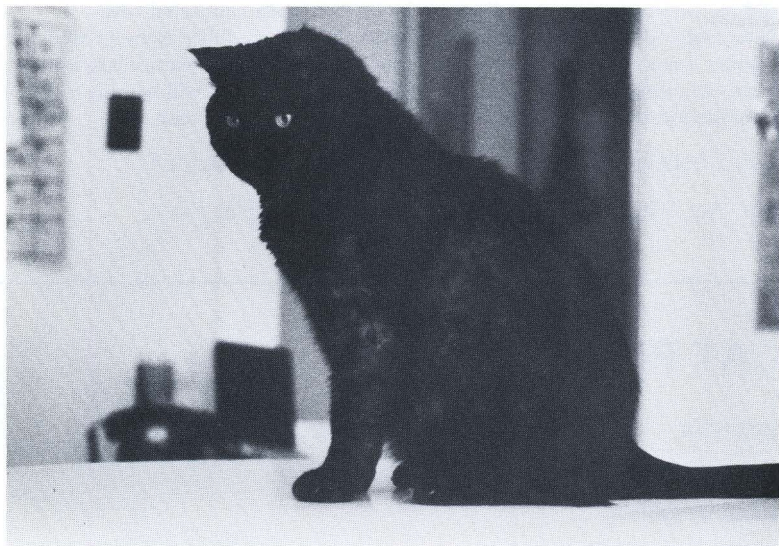
1 person

*CAST: 1 person*

*In this piece the projectionist/measurer must project an image of a cat on the wall five times, so that each time the image has a different dimension. He/she may perform it in one room using one wall or more than one wall or in several rooms.*

**ACTION:**

The projector is moved to the 1st position. The lights are dimmed, the cat image turned on. The projectionist goes to the wall and measures the length of the whiskers of the cat with a ruler and writes those measurements down.



The projector is moved to the 2nd position and the cat image is projected on a different scale. The projectionist makes careful measurements with his ruler and records the length of the cat's tail.

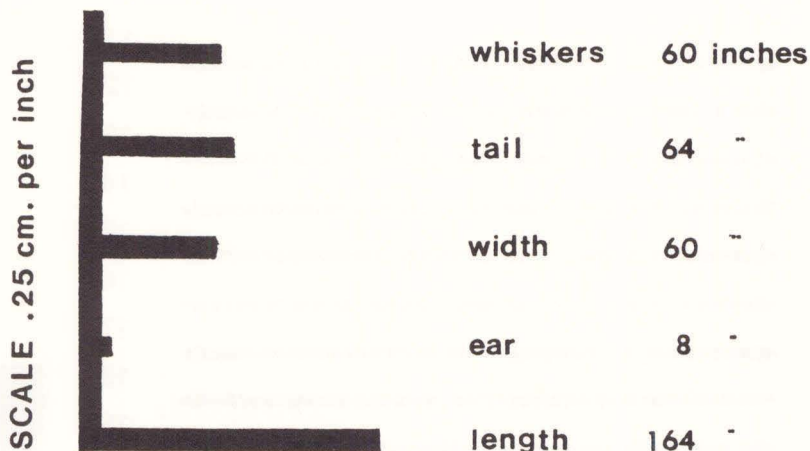
The projector is moved to the 3rd position and the width (fatness) of the cat in this scale is recorded.

The projector is moved to the 4th position and the size of the cat's ear in this scale is recorded.

The projector is moved to the 5th position and the length of the cat in this scale is recorded.

The projectionist then moves to a suitable place — the floor of a gallery — and using his notes and his ruler makes a meticulous bar graph indicating the precise (but absurd) variable measurements of his "cat" with masking tape.

(The graph reproduced is accompanied by measurements made during an actual performance).



**all measurements were  
multiplied by four**

*CAT PIECE* was first performed as *Act VI* at the Intermedia Domes show at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1970.



# DRILL

popsicles

plastic flowers

saw

table

aluminum foil

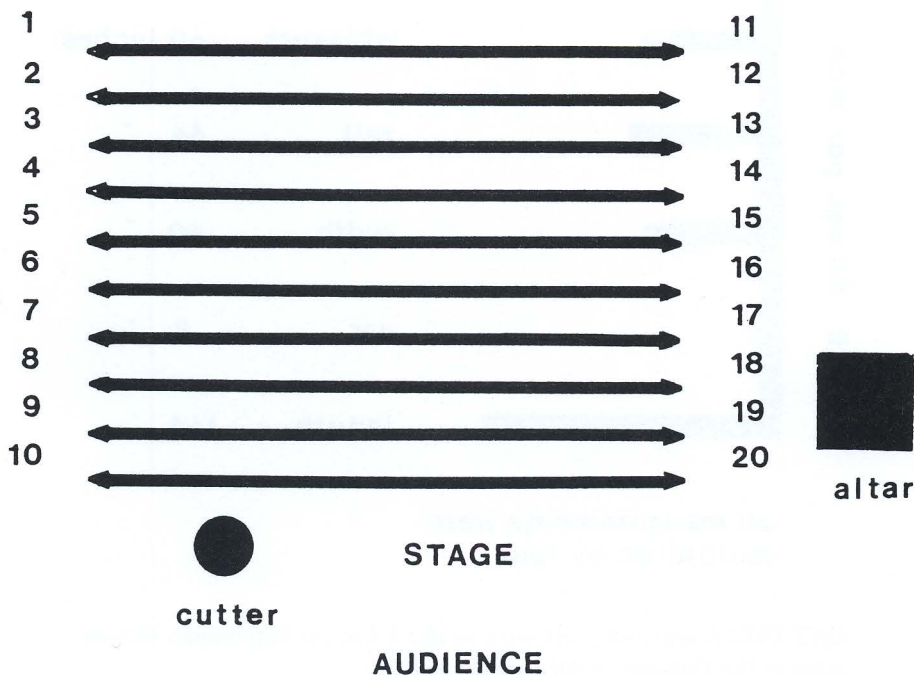
candles

styrofoam

shoe polish

rag

many people



*CAST: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 etc; matched by 11 12 13 ... etc.*

**ACTION:**

In part one of this piece, two rows of performers face each other from extreme ends of the stage. They advance towards each other, popsicles in hand like swords, plastic flowers drooping from their hip pockets. They come at each other, but they do not duel as they pass. They repeat this interchange more than once. It is a kind of dance.

When they have reached the sides of the stage a final time, the performers form a single line and approach, singly, a man who cuts their popsicles in half with a saw.



Tall white candles inserted into an aluminum-foil-covered base on an altar-like table are lit by a girl. The participants come singly to the table and insert their popsicles in front of the candles.



In the second part, the participants take off their shoes and put them in a pile. Then they line up in two rows, as though they were a chorus. 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.

*DRILL was performed at the University of British Columbia's Fine Arts Gallery, Summer 1970.*



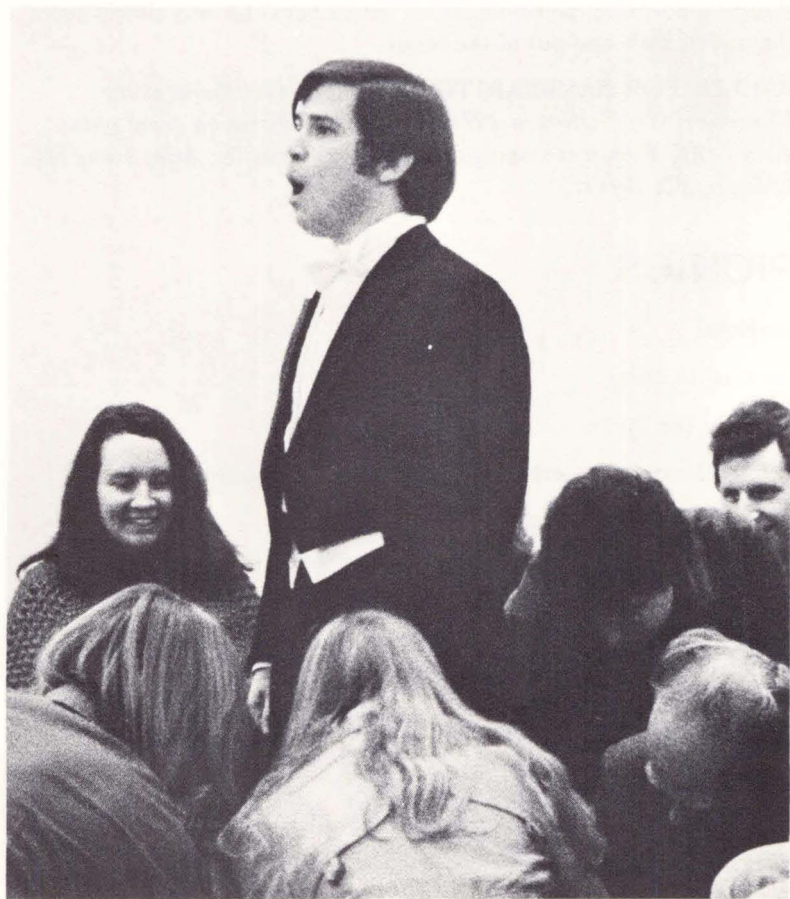
# BALLET FOR BASS-BARITONE

## *CAST:*

1 bass baritone, participants with shoe polish and rags

## *ACTION:*

Lights go up. The audience looks at the back of a man dressed in a tuxedo. He is facing the wall. There is the sound of a beautiful aria sung in a bass-baritone voice. The man inches back from the wall, as slowly as he can. It soon becomes clear to the audience that he is the source of the music, that he is the singer.



He continues with his aria and, at a certain stage, a person comes from the audience, kneels beside him and begins to shine his shoes with polish and a rag. Soon he/she is joined by another shoe-shiner, and another. The cluster at his feet resembles flies buzzing, and the shiners follow him, polishing, as the singer backs his way slowly down the middle aisle and out of the room.

BALLET FOR BASS-BARITONE *was first performed at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1971 during a collaboration event with Tom Graff. Tom was singing Stravinsky's Pulcinella, Aria, Scene III, "Allegro alla Breve."*

## PICNICS

projector

6 sets of 15 slides

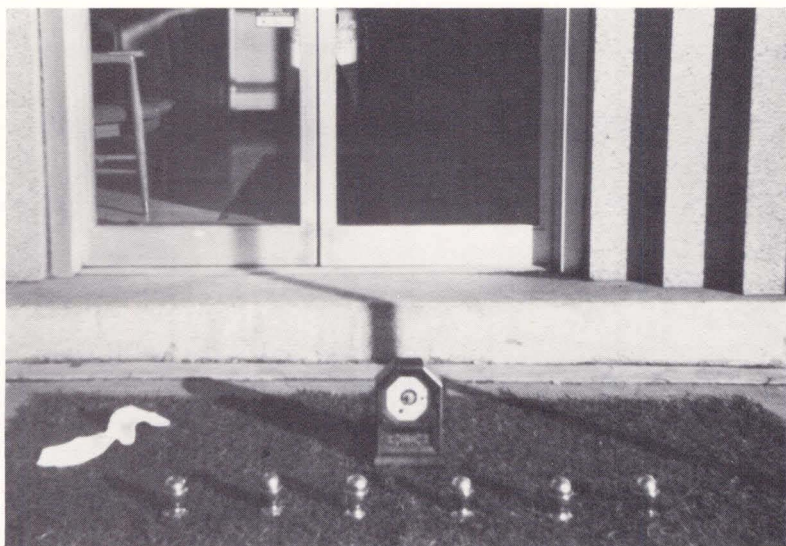
1 person (or 2)

*CAST: 1 woman (Gathie Falk); 1 man (Tom Graff)*

*ACTION:*

These materials record picnic/still-life performances at six different sites:

- (1) in an I.G.A. store
- (2) in Gathie's backyard
- (3) in Gathie's livingroom
- (4) on the sidewalk in front of a bank
- (5) in a plastic flower shop
- (6) in the Vancouver Art Gallery in front of Segal's *Execution*



Each of the 15 slides for a set was carefully preconceived. Hence the *Picnic* on each site was as meticulously planned as a performance work and involved the transportation and arrangement of still-life and edible objects, as theatre pieces do. The lists below are the instructions for two of the *Picnics'* slide sequences:

*Picnic in Front of Segal's Execution in the Vancouver Art Gallery:*

1. Carry in grass & basket. 2. Grass on grass. 3. Tablecloth on grass.
4. 2 people & picnic basket & table cloth on grass. 5. Open Basket.
6. Play violin. 7. Add pop bottles. 8. Add salt & pepper & glasses.
9. Pour pop. 10. Add black olives. 11. Eat Sandwiches. 12. Bring out case. 13. Open case with tulips inside. 14. Look at camera & smile.
15. A still life, without people and rather different than expected is arranged & photographed.

*Picnic in a Plastic Flower Shop:*

1. Carry in grass & basket. 2. Grass on grass. 3. Tablecloth on grass.
4. 2 people & picnic basket & tablecloth on grass. 5. Open basket.
6. Bring out syrup can. 7. Add pop bottles & sandwiches. 8. Add salt & pepper & glasses & teaspoon. 9. Pour pop. 10. Add black olives.
11. Eat sandwiches. 12. Bring out parchesi board. 13. Play parchesi.
14. Smile. 15. Create Still Life.



These slides may be shown as a performance or they they may also be accompanied by a real picnic/still-life event taking place as they are shown.

PICNICS *was first performed at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1971.*

## / VIEWS & REVIEWS cont'd

The history of the *Picnic Series* (sculpture) goes back to 1970 when I devised a theatre piece that was mainly based on the slide documentation of six picnics, all participated in by the same two people who went through exactly the same ritual [on each site] — points of difference were the strange things that came out of the picnic basket and the fact that each picnic was celebrated in a different location. — G.F.

## CAKE WALK ROCOCO (with Tom Graff)

15 footlights with candles  
old-fashioned lamp table with shelf below  
phonograph turntable & extension cord  
tape recorder & tape  
a large dresser drawer  
a round cake, bowl of icing, a knife & plastic life-sized fruit  
a long, pale-blue satin ribbon  
a cut-out Chinese garland, or a string of paper dolls  
2 suitable peasant Rococo costumes  
3 people

*CAST: A Rococo peasant couple, a person in the audience*

*At the front of the stage are 15 footlights arranged in a semi-circle large enough to dance in but small enough to bring illumination to the dancers. Each footlight is made from a tin can, top removed and cut through the centre vertically. The half-bottom in each serves as a resting place for a white candle concealed within. When lit the candles provide the yellow light of Rococo theatre and a romantic mood for the dance.*

**ACTION:**

The footlights have been lit before the action begins.

The dancers enter, the man leading in his partner, arm around her waist. When they reach centre stage they strike a pose like figurines on top of a music box. The woman is turned by the man who at the end of this short sequence drops a handful of artificial leaves upon her hair.

Off-stage, the pre-recorded music begins. The first part is a Minuet-like Adagio by Tellemann. The dancers dance keeping their movements within the semi-circle of lights and, as much as possible, parallel to the audience. There is much curtsying and bowing. The walking is done with toe tapping to the six beats then, heel down to take another step at the end of each bar. These movements are choreographed with great seriousness, but to suit the abilities of non-dancers.

When the Minuet is over, the man brings the lamp table to centre stage close to the drawer that contains the cake and icing. He tucks a string of paper dolls under the phonograph turntable which rests upon the lamp table. He unfurls it gently and stands near the table, stage right. Facing the audience, he strikes this pose: he holds the garland overhead with his right hand; his left hand is on his hip; his left leg is bent so that his left toe rests on his right front calf. He tries to hold this position until the last moments of the performance, resting and repositioning his leg as necessary.

As the man readies the table and poses, the woman finishes her dance. The music changes to a collage of old and new music and the woman moves to the drawer and takes the blue ribbon from it. She places it over the turntable. She removes the round cake from the drawer and places it on top of the turntable over the ribbon. She takes a knife from the drawer and cuts the cake in half, placing the



upper half on the shelf below the lamp table. She brings the bowl of icing and proceeds to ice the lower half of the cake in a domestic manner. She puts the top layer on top and ices it. She returns to the drawer for the plastic fruit and creates a still life arrangement on the cake top using icing, where necessary, as glue. Then, just at the finish of the music when the decorating is complete, she ties the ribbon over top in a grand bow.

The music changes again to something ominous and majestic — the last orchestral moments of Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*. The woman, being careful not to disturb the fruit, cuts a piece of cake. She holds the cake in her hand and looks to the audience. The performer in the audience comes forward to accept the slice of cake. The music is glorious.

When the music becomes calmer, the woman turns on the turntable and the cake goes round and round. At the right moment near the end of the tape, the man relaxes. He moves over to the woman and leads her ballet-fashion from the stage.

*CAKE WALK ROCOCO* was first performed at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1971.



## / VIEWS & REVIEWS cont'd

The several pieces clustered here (*Ballet for Bass-Baritone . . . Cross Campus Croquet*) are works that are associated with Gathie Falk and Tom Graff. *Picnics* and *Ballet for Bass-Baritone* were designed by Falk, the latter with Tom in mind as suitable performer. *Cake Walk Rocooco* is a collaboration piece in which the dance portion is Tom's invention; *Picnics* was a *simultaneous* conception. A favourable review of a collaboration evening described the finale, *Cake Walk Rocooco*, as a "bravura piece of witticism . . . [that] managed to create a double look at the art creation process — spoofing it but taking it quite seriously."

Lloyd Dykk, "Wildly Indulgent Pieces of Theatre," rev. of performances by Gathie Falk and Tom Graff, *The Vancouver Sun*, 4 February, 1971.

While Gathie toured extensively with Tom in 1972 presenting individual and joint works at many centres, she has made no new performance art of her own since that year and has not toured her own work since 1977. Tom, meanwhile, continues creating, in the genre and will take his *O Kanada* to Berlin, Fall 1982.<sup>7</sup> — A.R.

## CROSS CAMPUS CROQUET (with Tom Graff)

a campus

croquet hoops and mallets painted white

a set of croquet balls all white but two

a set of croquet balls in rainbow colours on a tray

a white or multicoloured kitchen table

2 kitchen chairs painted white

many plastic tulips

35 men's ties made of lining silk in 35 colours  
a picnic basket containing white & black food & drink  
tails for the man's costume  
black coat, white stockings, black patent leather strappy  
shoes & white silk scarf for the woman's costume  
2 people

*CAST: 1 man, 1 woman*

*A croquet game is set up on the grass of a campus. The wickets are placed symmetrically around a white kitchen table and two chairs. Plastic tulips are planted among the wickets and under the table. One of the chairs has 35 silk ties tied to its back that flutter in the wind. A picnic basket containing black and white food (olives, yogurt, milk) is on the table; a tray containing rainbow coloured balls is beside the table.*

#### ***ACTION:***

A man and a woman in formal black and white costume, having arranged all the necessary props on a grassy lawn, begin this special croquet game. They play from left to right non-competitively. When they have reached the table in its first position, they sit down, open the picnic basket and have a bite or two of the food therein. They do not speak to each other. If they need to communicate, a note is passed. When the first picnic is finished, they play from left to right again. At the end of this first game, the man or the woman takes one of the multicoloured balls from the tray and throws it forward from the last wicket to the right to determine the next position for the table, the picnic, and the continuing game. They play this way until they have reached the desired cross-campus goal unless weather prevents this accomplishment.

*CROSS CAMPUS CROQUET was performed once at the University of British Columbia in 1971.*



## RED ANGEL

red buffet

5 tables

5 record players

5 parrots & 5 apples

extension cord with 5-plug adaptor

tape recorder & tape

old washing machine

water

laundry soap

wash basket

stool

wings



belt for wings

white dress

grey dress

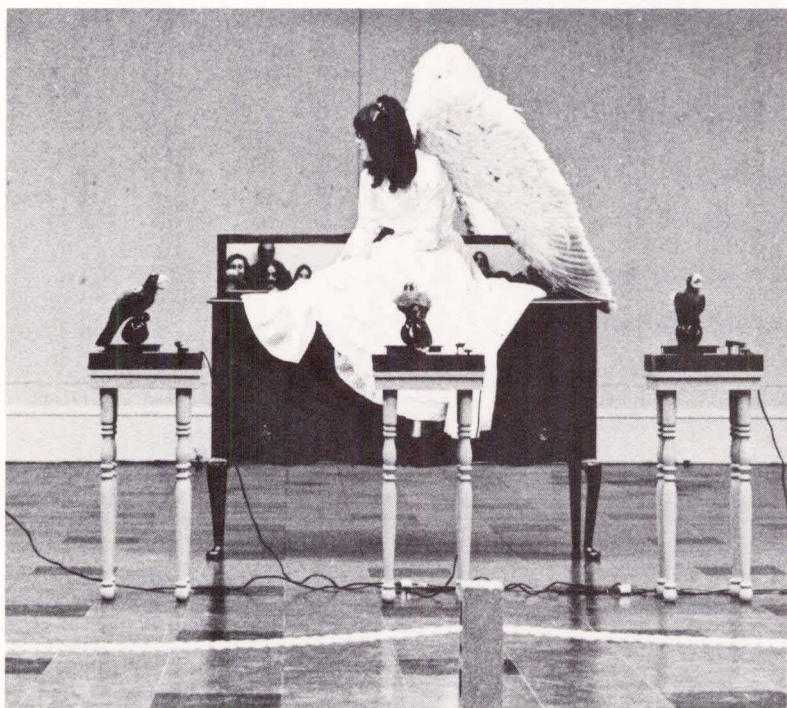
3 people

*CAST: 1 person (Gathie Falk), 1 washwoman, 1 technician*

**ACTION:**

Lights turn up to:

white or light-walled stage area in a room or gallery. In the middle of the stage area is a large candy-apple red buffet with a low mirrored back. A woman is seated on the buffet with head and back in profile. She wears a white satin dress with lace down the front skirt. Her bare foot is visible (toes). She is also wearing large wings made of chicken feathers over foam rubber. There are long feathers on the tips and outer edges and finer ones over the rest of the wings.



In front of the buffet is a row of 5 identical grey tables 30 inches high. They stand about 2 feet apart and a yard from the buffet. Exactly fitting the top of each table is a red turntable. On each turntable is a dark red ceramic apple and on that is a red parrot with an open yellow beak. All the parrots face right, as the winged woman does.

Movement begins between 5 and 7 seconds after lights go up.

The first parrot begins to turn on the turntable as he sings *Row, Row, Row Your Boat*. The second parrot turns and sings the second









part of the round, and so on, till all parrots have begun. The winged woman sings the 6th part. As each parrot finishes the song it stops turning.

When she has finished the song she waits 4 seconds and slowly stands on the buffet. The parrots are facing all directions.

She stands tall for a few seconds, then raises her hands to the back of her neck and undoes the buttons of her dress. She slides it down her shoulders. She unbuttons the sleeve buttons and pulls the sleeves off, revealing the top of a shiny grey satin dress down lower. The wings bounce a bit as she steps out of the dress. She hangs the white dress over her left arm and stands tall again in the middle of the buffet, in long grey satin, and white wings.

After about 4 seconds a rumble is heard to stage right and an old-fashioned wringer-washer appears, pushed by a woman wearing an ordinary skirt and blouse. She trundles the washing machine in front of the parrots to stage left (about 15 feet from the buffet). She retraces her steps to her entrance and fetches a wash basket, a carton of soap, and a small white stool. She places the stool and the wash basket behind the wringer, sets down the soap and plugs in the washing machine. She walks over to the buffet, takes the white dress from her arm, returns with it to the washer, puts it in with a dash of soap and starts the washer. She stands quietly, but relaxed, as she washes the dress (a few minutes).

She stops the machine, pulls up the wet dress, and puts it through the wringer. She lets it drop in the basket, picks up the basket and the soap, and leaves walking in front of parrots once more.

The woman in grey satin and wings stands for 4 seconds after the other woman's exit, then slowly sits down in her previous position on the red dresser. Parrot number one begins to turn and sing *Row, Row, Row Your Boat*. Parrot number 2 follows etc., until all 5 parrots and the winged figure have sung the song.

Three seconds and lights out.

*RED ANGEL was first performed at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1972.*

## / VIEWS & REVIEWS cont'd

The *Red Angel* performance has been published most often and is Falk's most visually arresting theatre piece. The entire script is recorded in a book called *Performance*.<sup>8</sup> The Western Front Society owns a video production of it.<sup>9</sup> This video was shown at *Festival 82: A Celebration of Women in the Arts* in the performance area organized by Christina Estable.<sup>10</sup> The visual success of *Red Angel* is alluded to in the criticism that follows, although the review misunderstands the dramatic intent of the artist who is not interested in creating high drama or comedy with performance art. — A.R.

... A tremendous amount of work was involved here in props and costumes, Five stuffed parrots perched on ceramic apples sit on red silk tables. Falk, in a white gown and with wings like those in a Botticelli Annunciation, sits on top of a red sideboard. The parrots whirl around as though each one were singing *Row, Row, Row Your Boat* which Falk completes in the sixth voice.

But this deliciously comic conceit needs to be further developed, either through more repetition, variations in speed or crescendo effect. *Red Angel* never took flight.

Joan Lowndes, "But Whose Face Was the Egg on?" rev. of *Red Angel* by Gathie Falk, *The Vancouver Sun*, 9 February, 1972.

## DRINK TO ME ONLY (Film)

super 8 film

projector

tape

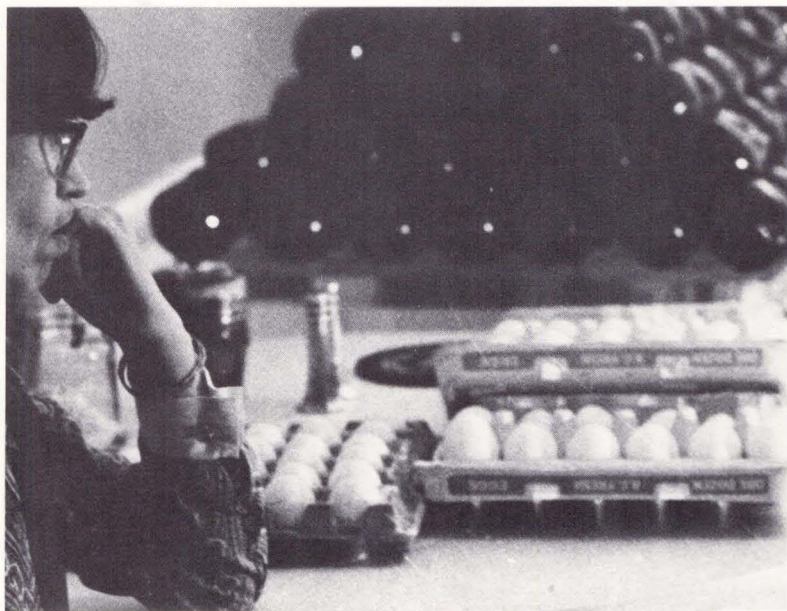
*CAST OF FILM: 1 person singing "Drink to me Only" as described.*

### *ACTION:*

This is a performance film. The movie camera swivels from the performer (Gathie Falk) to a white chair with a slightly hollow black leather seat. She sings, "Drink to me only with thine eyes and I will pledge with mine." The camera records the empty chair. She sings the same line as the camera records her; the camera moves to the

chair and now on the seat there is one white egg. She repeats the line and when the camera swings to the chair there are two eggs. Another repeat; three eggs. Another repeat; there are four eggs. She sings the next line, "And leave a kiss within the cup, and I'll not ask for wine." The camera swings back to the chair to find five eggs and so on through nine. She sings the next line of the song five times in the same way and every time the camera swings to the chair to find more and more eggs until after the last repeat of the last line the song and egg pile are finished. (Each line of the song is sung on one breath which, from time to time, makes for some bad singing.)

This work is based on repetition and addition of materials. The chair is filmed first empty. One egg is added and so on after each line is repeated. After the addition of the 12th egg, however, numerical honesty ceases and more eggs than one are added at the end of each sung line so that a *nice* pile of eggs on the chair is the final visual.



*DRINK TO ME ONLY* was first screened at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1972. It was sometimes called *Three Part Invention or Home Movie #1*.



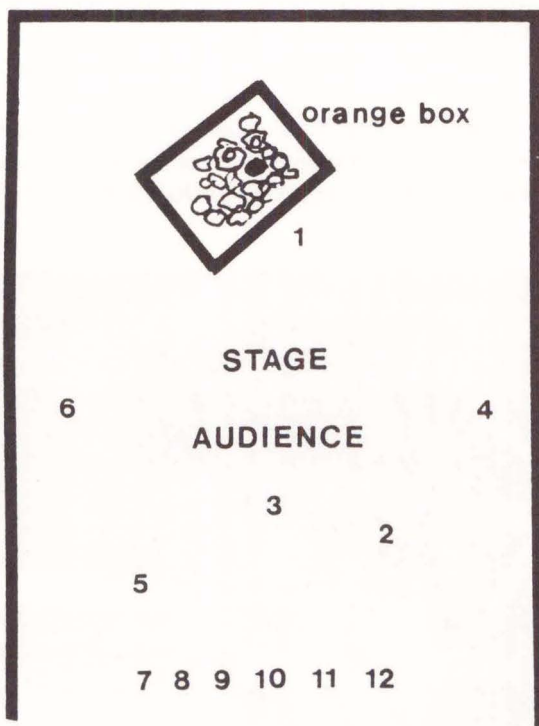
# ORANGE PEEL

orange box & orange papers

3 dozen eggs

11 people with cameras & 55 flash bulbs

1 other person



*CAST: 1 (subject) 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 (photographers)*

*ACTION:*

At centre stage is a mandarin orange box full of orange papers. A person comes in, carrying 3 dozen eggs. She sits on the floor near the box. She opens the box, wraps an egg carefully and puts it into the box. After the third egg is wrapped:

- 2 kneels in the audience & flashes twice.
- 3 kneels in the audience & flashes twice.
- 4 stands in the audience & flashes once.
- 5 sits & flashes once.
- 6 moves close to the orange box to take many close-ups.

In the back row 7 8 9 10 11 12 stand up & flash simultaneously. They move forward through the audience wherever they can, flashing all the time. All converge on the orange box and use up the rest of the flashes. They exit.

The person on the floor wraps two more eggs, then exits.

ORANGE PEEL *was first performed at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1972.*

## / VIEWS & REVIEWS cont'd

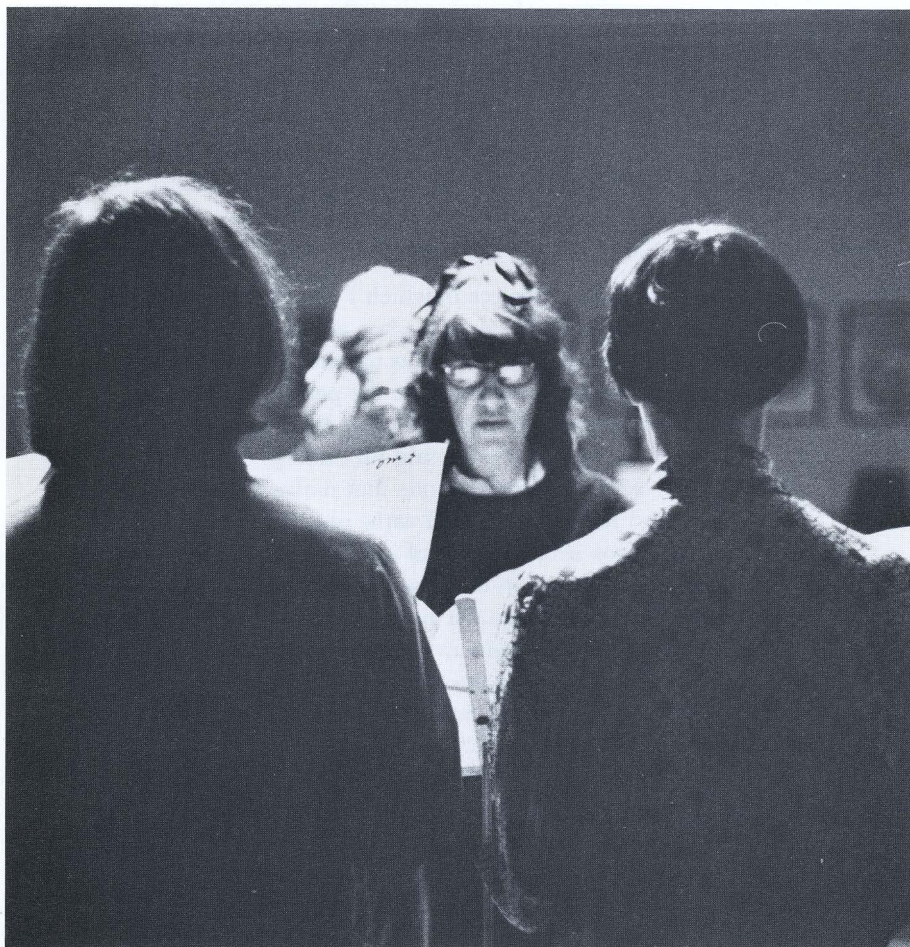
AS Do your pieces ever have a message?

GF There is only one theatre piece in which I was trying to teach a lesson. First of all I should say that when anyone does a performance piece and somebody gets up and takes a picture with a camera, it's very maddening to the performers because everyone's attention swivels from the stage to the person who's using the camera. So I've usually said no cameras during performances except a stationary one that makes no noise, etc. Anyway, when I made this piece, I came onto the stage which had this orange box in the middle of it, bringing with me several boxes of eggs. I sat down on the floor, started wrapping the eggs and after a while someone in the audience got up with an enormous camera, a press camera, and came close to where I was and took a picture, then another person got up and took a picture and so on. One of our friends who was in the audience and knew how I felt about pictures being taken got very worried and wondered what Tom Graff might do — Tom is a person who always does something about things. And this friend kept looking at Tom and wondering why people were being allowed to do this, to take pictures. Tom, of course, wasn't doing anything about it, he just sat there in the back row. And then finally the whole back row of the audience got up with their

Instamatic cameras, walking forward, snapping pictures, then the person knew that it was alright, it was part of the piece.

Perhaps at times there is a tendency to satire. The piece called *Orange Peel* is a deadpan comment on the disruption that can be caused by flashlight photos taken during a performance. While Falk . . . wraps [the photographers] advance en masse, enter the performance area, obliterate the performer and take over with their own fast-paced light show. . . .

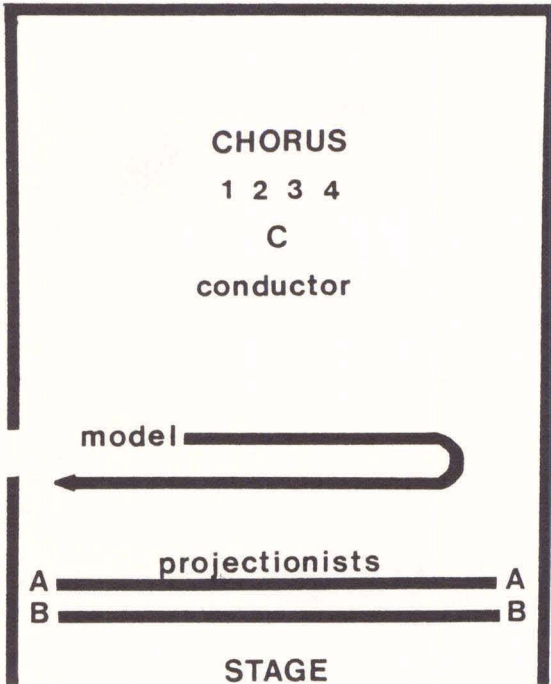
Joan Lowndes, "But Whose Face Was the Egg on?" rev. of *Orange Peel* by Gathie Falk, *The Vancouver Sun*, 9 February, 1972.





# CHORUS

- 20 ordinary costumes
- 10 car & truck slides
- 2 tea carts on wheels
- 2 projectors
- 11 ironing boards
- 12 people



*CAST: CHORUS 1 2 3 4; CONDUCTOR C; MODELS (5 people each appearing 4 times = 20); A & B projectionists.*

**ACTION:**

Chorus comes out, takes up positions indicated (1 2 3 4) facing the audience. Conductor follows and, back to audience, leads them in a complicated fugue-like chant using hand for baton. The words are: "NAME, AGE, SEX, RACIAL ORIGIN," said loud or soft, together, in parts, in unison according to this score. There are 4 parts for 4 voices. 1 & 2 are equivalent to soprano & alto; 3 & 4, to tenor & bass. They remain stationary throughout the chant and they leave the stage, conductor following, whenever it is finished.

[illegible][illegible]

1		A		N	S	S	R	O	R	O	R	O			N			N	N	N	N
2					N	S	S	R	O	R	O	R	O			N			A	A	A
3	S			N	A	S	S	R	O	R	O	R	O		N			S	S	S	R
4	N					S	S	R	O	R	O	R	O	R	O	R	O	R	O		A

f f quietly f

[illegible]

The models wait backstage. At the count of 20, after the chant has begun,

Model 1 comes out holding a dress to her shoulders, moves to centre right stage doing what models do, sashaying, showing off the detail of a sleeve, etc. At the turn, when her back is to the audience, she swings the garment to her back, then to the front as appropriate, as she returns the way she came. Model 2 comes out and does the same routine.

As model 2 leaves, projectionist A moves a car slide in his projector on the tea wagon past the model. It moves from stage left to right at medium speed. It is projected on the wall behind the Chorus and *on* the Chorus in passing.





Model 3, Model 4 come out and do the model routine.

Projectionist B moves a car slide on his tea wagon from stage right to left at slow speed, coping with the projector cord as he goes.

Model 5, Model 6 come out and do the model routine.

Projectionist B moves car slide from left to right at medium speed.

Model 7, Model 8 come out and do the model routine.

Projectionists A & B move car slides simultaneously from right to left, *fast*.

Model 9, Model 10 come out and do the model routine.

Projectionist B moves car slide from left to right and back to left, *fast*.

Model 11, Model 12 come out and do the model routine.

Projectionists A & B move car slides from left to right, one following the other at medium speed.



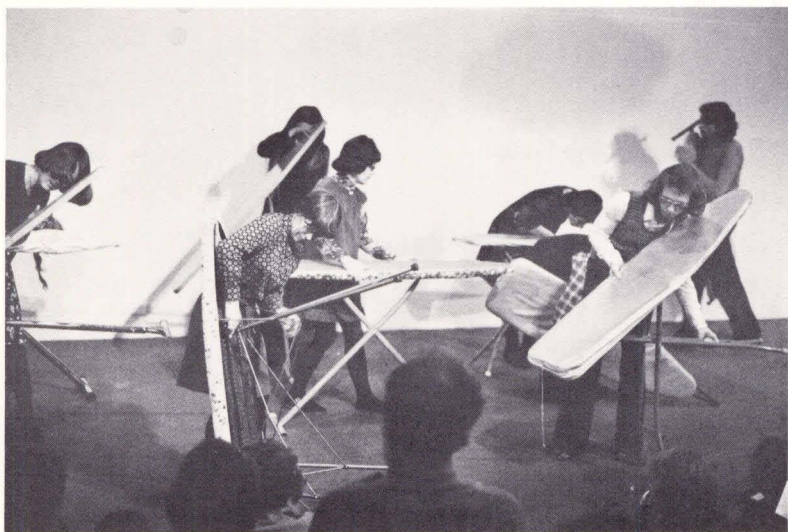
Models 13, 14 & 15 come out simultaneously and model.

Projectionists A & B move car slides from right to left following each other. First one goes slowly; then the second one passes it.

Model 16 is followed by Models 17 18 19 20 coming in, doing the same routine, exiting.

\* \* \*

When stage is clear, 11 people come on with 11 ironing boards. They set them up at right angles to the stage in this pattern.



They leave.

\* \* \*

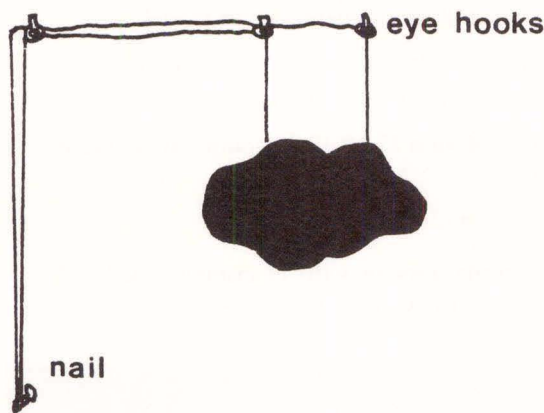
When all 11 are backstage, they wait 8 seconds. They come back. They take down the ironing boards and exit.

*CHORUS was first performed at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1972.*

# LOW CLOUDS

25 clouds

hanging apparatus



plastic fish line

nails, hammer & eye hooks

masking tape

4 office desks & 1 treadle sewing machine

5 chairs

4 books, 4 hard-boiled eggs, 4 knives

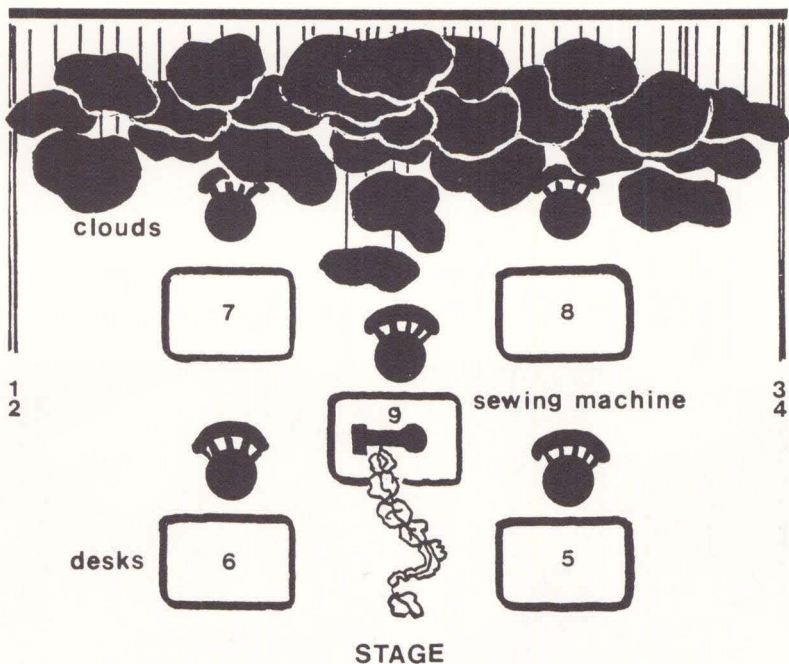
1 fresh cabbage (large)

9 people

*CAST: CLOUD PANELISTS 1 & 2 stage left, 3 & 4 stage right;  
DESK OCCUPANTS 5 6 7 8; SEWING MACHINE OPERATOR  
9.*

*Above the 4 desks that will be occupied by 5 6 7 & 8, above the sewing machine that will be used by 9 — hang 24 meticulously painted clouds of different shapes. Panelists 1 2 3 & 4 stand ready to operate the pulleys that will raise and lower the clouds on invisible strings during the cloud ballet. One small grey cloud's pulley is marked so its operator can give it special treatment.*





### *ACTION:*

1 2 3 4 lower the clouds from their highest positions, individually from left to right. (After the 5th cloud is lowered to middle position, 5 6 7 & 8 enter. After the 15th cloud is lowered, 9 assumes her place at the sewing machine.)

1 2 3 4 move all the clouds down 2 feet from middle position, simultaneously.

1 & 2 move left half of clouds to top (4 feet) simultaneously.

3 & 4 move right half of clouds to top (4 feet) simultaneously.

1 & 2 move left half of clouds down (4 feet) simultaneously.

3 & 4 move right half of clouds down (4 feet) simultaneously.

1 & 2 move left half of clouds up (2 feet) simultaneously.

3 & 4 move right half of clouds (unexpectedly) down 2 more feet to 6 feet below ceiling, just over desks.

1 2 3 4 bring clouds together at middle position simultaneously.

Panelist in charge of small grey cloud lowers it 2 feet below the rest.

1 2 3 4 spread the clouds out — adjust them individually high, medium, low.

1 2 3 4 bring the lowest clouds up to middle position and exit.





Near the beginning of the action, after the 5th cloud is lowered, 5 6 7 & 8 enter. Each goes to a desk, sits down on the chair provided, opens the drawer to the right. Inside the drawers are directions, a book, a hard-boiled egg and a knife. 5 6 7 8 take out books and directions simultaneously and shut the drawers. All follow 5 as he opens the book, counts (silently) to 20, turns a page, counts (silently) to 19, turns a page, counts (silently) to 18 and so down to zero.

5 6 7 8 open right hand drawers at 5's lead, take out eggs and knives. They peel and slice the eggs carefully, trying to finish when 5 does. They all leave the sliced eggs on the desks, then reach in for the books, first placing there the knives and the shells. Following 5's lead, they open their books at the back, counting 1 (silently) then turning a page, 2 (silently) then turning a page, 3 (silently), etc. until they have reached 20. (These actions are simultaneous.)

5 6 7 8 now exchange desks, books in hand. 5 gets up, moves counterclockwise to desk occupied by 6. 5 takes 6's chair, sits down, counts to 5 (silently) while reading book as 6 moves over to replace 7 in a similar way. This action continues until each reader has occupied every desk. They put away the books, simultaneously, and exit.

\* \* \*

When Cloud 15 was let down as action began, 9 entered carrying a large cabbage. The cabbage must be very fresh, very crisp. She takes up her seat at the old-fashioned, treadle sewing machine. She removes a large leaf and sews it through the middle and without cutting the thread she sews another leaf through the middle, and so on, creating an ever-lengthening garland that trails in front of the machine onto the floor. 9 continues this action after 5 6 7 & 8 have left the stage, stitching on a final two or three leaves. She exits.

*LOW CLOUDS was first performed at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1972.*



## / VIEWS & REVIEWS cont'd

- AS The whole thing of *happenings* is that they're sort of spontaneous. They're not supposed to be, but when you hear about them . . .
- GF They sound spontaneous, but they aren't that spontaneous. . . . Anyway, my performance is not spontaneous.
- AS Yes, the works may have looked and sounded spontaneous, but they were really contrived.
- GF That's right, *controlled*. . . . You can program these things so that you don't know what will happen exactly, as for example when things are going to happen simultaneously, and if you program the people so that they will do something until it is finished, every time it will be/end a little differently. . . . For instance in *Low Clouds* four people come in, sit down, open their drawers, open the pages simultaneously, and they do practice that so that they can do it together. But it doesn't matter if they have completed their whole program at the same time every time. The clouds are going up and down while the people at the desks are doing what they are doing — two programs operating independently at slightly different rates. They don't have to *mesh in*.
- AR In response to what is seen, there's this nervous laughter, a particular sound like "hmnnn, hnnnt," that you get in theatre events of any kind on occasion, but in theatre pieces this laughter seems to continue sporadically throughout. It's a kind of laughter that makes you think, "what am I doing here and what are these people doing? If this is art, then why am I laughing?" And, of course, some of the things that happen are truly funny. I laughed when you began to sew the cabbage.
- GF Sure, well it's the surprise that makes you laugh . . .
- AR Yes, but when you continued to sew it and made the garland, it's not funny anymore, it's beautiful.
- AS If theatre art is time-space collage sculpture, what part does the audience play?
- GF It plays the same role as an audience for sculpture or painting, except they can only see it once.



## Ann Rosenberg / EPILOGUE

In the scripts presented, the objects that are properties in each performance are emphasized so that one may detect not only an overlap of material content in the theatre works — fruit, flowers, trees, eggcups & cups, shirts & ties, tables & turntables — but also notice that these same motifs unite all of Falk's art. As in the sculpture from the *Picnic Series* where golf balls are interspersed with herring on a grass podium, the logic of a moment within a *Performance Work* depends, similarly, upon the overturning of the expected or the dislocation of the commonplace. Real oranges are tossed over a net like balls or rolled by a prone body over the floor. The situation in *Chorus* where the litany, "Name, Age, Sex & Racial Origin," is orchestrated through nuances of rhythm and tone is similar to the pile-on effect of the shirt-forms in *Veneration of the White Collar Worker Nos. 1 & 2*. The clouds of *Low Clouds*, originally an independent sculpture, led visually to *Herds Nos. 1 & 2* and the two versions of *Cabbage Room*. Where in the scripts an action is repeated but extended, one encounters the same kind of amplification of time and space that the *Border Paintings* and *Thermal Blankets* intend.

Performance and ceremony are integral to Falk's lifestyle and art; the picnic in life is a unifying theme.

Touring the pieces was no picnic. The difficulty of teaching "new crews to crow" is not the only reason that Falk has not performed her works since 1977. Neither relegating the packing and unpacking of props to her efficient stage manager, Elizabeth Klassen, nor delegating to her the task of finding or baking round cakes in unfamiliar places alleviated for Falk the nervous strain of "having it all come together, of making it *work*. Only at the National Gallery in Ottawa in 1975 were the curators and staff sensitive to the special needs of performance artists and crews. Typically the group would arrive and discover that there was little opportunity for rehearsal. Once there was a room where all the materials could be arranged in the day, but there was no light in the room by night and so everything had to be brought on stage by feel. These situations were "tests to the friendships" of the persons involved.



There was also the question of audience response. The Vancouver audiences were the best because of the exposure they had to multi-media events and theatre art through the festivals of art at the University of British Columbia, through Intermedia events. At sophisticated places like A Space in Toronto, Falk might be challenged for not doing something New-Yorkish, what the artists there expected; during some Gallery performances audience restlessness indicated non-comprehension of the form. Viewers needed to have a firm background in the non-linear, non-literal forms of contemporary art to appreciate what they were seeing. Klassen said there were "always moments of predictable laughter — when the white dress was washed in *Red Angel*, when the first leaf was sewn in *Low Clouds*." Few people, however, knew what to say about the works. Klassen recalls with fondness the comment of an old lady who saw the *Cat Piece* at a home for the elderly. She said, "Nice whiskers. S o o L o o n g . Imagine that!" That woman could enter fully into the absurd logic of performance art.

*Performance Works* challenge the imagination of the viewer no less than art uninvolved with movement or people does. This issue of *The Capilano Review* offers a thorough survey of one artist's contribution to a field of contemporary art that deserves historical preservation and critical attention.

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

GATHIE FALK is known principally as a maker of ceramic (and mixed media) sculptural objects and recently for her impressionistic paintings of gardens, still lifes, skies, water and (at this moment) cement sidewalks. Her works may be found in all the usual major public collections: Art Bank, Canada Council, National Gallery, Art Gallery of Ontario, University of Lethbridge, etc. She has participated in almost 50 group shows and has staged over a dozen one-person shows. Her art career, which began when Falk was in her mid-thirties in 1968, has been enormously productive and has made her a high profile figure in the Canadian art community. In addition to making art, she has also performed art.

ANN ROSENBERG teaches Fine Arts (History) at Capilano College. She has a special interest in local art and architecture. Her first novel, *The Bee Book* was published by The Coach House Press, Toronto in 1981. Since 1971 she has been visual media Associate Editor of *The Capilano Review*. With Issue 26, she will become the Editor of the magazine.

## IMAGES /

Gathy Falk. *photography*: Tom Graff

Gathie Falk's living room. *photography*: Tod Greenaway

Glenn Lewis, Gathie Falk et al., at Intermedia. *photographer*: unknown

Gathie Falk plucking Christmas tree in *Skipping Ropes*. *photography*: Nomi Kaplan

*Skipping Ropes* "bus riders" in unknown gymnasium. *photography*: Nomi Kaplan

Gathie Falk and Glenn Lewis performing Glenn's *Rice Krispie Piece* at Intermedia, 1969. *photographer*: unknown

Gathie Falk and Elizabeth Klassen in *A Bird . . .*, at the Vancouver Art Gallery, 1972. *photography*: Nomi Kaplan

Gathie syringing her face in *A Bird . . .* *photography*: Nomi Kaplan

Gathie throwing syrup in *A Bird . . .* *photography*: Nomi Kaplan

Gathie among the Christmas trees, Tom Graff behind in *A Bird . . .* *photography*: Nomi Kaplan

Salmon Harris beside the cocktail glasses in *A Bird . . .* *photography*: Nomi Kaplan

Salmon Harris mingling cocktail glasses with Anna Gilbert's oranges. *photography*: Nomi Kaplan

Gathie Falk playing egg croquet in *Some Are Egger . . .* at the New Era Social Club, 1969. *photography*: Michael de Courcy

Gathie Falk in Douglas Gallery performance, *80 Eggs*, 1969. *photography*: Douglas Christmas

Cat (Bundy) full length. *photography*: Gathie Falk

Popsicle choreography in *Drill* at Fine Arts Gallery, University of British Columbia, 1970. *photography*: Peter Hulbert

Candle altar in *Drill*. *photography*: Peter Hulbert

*Ballet for Bass-Baritone*, 1971, at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Tom Graff singing. *photography*: Judi Osburn

Still life in front of a bank, image 15 from *Picnic 4*. *photography*: Vincent Trasov

Gathie Falk icing; Tom Graff attending in *Cake Walk Rococo*. *photography*: Vincent Trasov

Final picnic in *Cross Campus Croquet* at U.B.C. Faculty Club, 1971. *photography*: Vincent Trasov

Gathie Falk performing *Red Angel* at the Vancouver Art Gallery, 1972. *photography*: Marian Penner Bancroft

*Red Parrot* prop for *Red Angel*. *photography*: Gathie Falk.

Gathie posing for *The Vancouver Sun*. *photography*: Glenn Baglo

Elizabeth tending eggs during *Drink to Me Only* filming. *photography*: John Buckley



Gathie Falk leading Chorus in *Chorus* at the Vancouver Art Gallery, 1972.  
*photography*: Nomi Kaplan

Glenn Lewis modelling in *Chorus*. *photography*: Nomi Kaplan

Tea cart projectionists in *Chorus*. *photography*: Nomi Kaplan

Ironing board arranging at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 1975.  
*photography*: National Gallery

*Low Clouds* at the Vancouver Art Gallery, 1972. *photography*:

Marian Penner Bancroft

*graphics*: Ann Rosenberg

## FOOTNOTES /

<sup>1</sup> *Performance Works* is chosen as the umbrella title for the scripts because it ties them in with but distinguishes them from the *Art Works* of Issue 24.

<sup>2</sup> Gathie Falk, "A Short History of Performance Art as It Influenced or Failed to Influence My Work," *artscanada* 240-241 (March, April 1981) 12-14 is reprinted here with the permission of *artscanada*.

<sup>3</sup> In the late 60's, the Douglas Gallery was the vanguard exhibition space in Vancouver. Associated with it on a more or less casual basis were artists like Glenn Lewis, Michael Morris, Gathie Falk, Bodo Pfeifer, Brian Fisher, Iain and Ingrid Baxter (N.E.Thing Co. Ltd.). By 1970, Douglas Christmas had purchased The Ace Gallery (Los Angeles) and he began to deal major American artists. The Douglas Gallery became The Ace Gallery (Canada) Ltd. It is now located at 418 West Georgia. Glenn Lewis lives at the Western Front Lodge which for many years has been a centre for video and performance art.

<sup>4</sup> In the late 60's Intermedia was a place where artists, film makers, dancers, and musicians came together to explore possibilities for expression in interdisciplinary activities. It was located near the Beatty Street Armouries.

<sup>5</sup> For an informative survey of the range of work and theory in the genre, consult: A. A. Bronson and Peggy Gale, eds. *Performance by Artists* (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1979).

<sup>6</sup> More extensive research may still locate Falk's letter and Dafoe's response in *The Vancouver Sun*.

<sup>7</sup> Tom Graff's performances depend more upon sound and words (especially music), upon elaborate costume and props than do Falk's. The middle section of *O Kanada* is a revised version of the only performance work Graff has published. Tom Graff, "Why Can't Men Cry?" *The Capilano Review*, 11 (1977), 61-75.

<sup>8</sup> A. A. Bronson and Peggy Gale, eds., *Performance by Artists*, "Red Angel."

<sup>9</sup> This video is retained at Western Front Lodge, Vancouver.

<sup>10</sup> There was also an evening of performance by women, July 16, 1982, at Robson Square.

\$6.00

ISSN 0315-3754

## *Coming Soon*

Fiction by

Sue Laver, John Harris, James Dunn

Poetry by

D. F. Barbour, bp Nichol, Monty Reid

Translations by

Dora Fitzgerald

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