

GATHIE FALK

3 Sculptures



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About the Work

From the earliest days of her career, Gathie Falk has found her inspiration and her subject matter in everyday objects and life. A shoe, a cap, a piece of fruit, a flower, a sidewalk. A home, a garden, a neighbourhood, a picnic with friends, a walk on a starry night. These are just a few of the objects, places, and people that have inspired and sustained her art for more than half a century. It's no coincidence that Falk conceived her mature art practice in the age of funk and pop art. The 1960s were a time of great experimentation in subject matter and in media. The traditional boundaries between art forms were becoming blurred, and artists drew their subject matter from a broad range of sources—advertising, the street, the store, and the very personal world of everyday life.

Falk's commitment to handcrafted sculptures was first seen in her ceramics. This is a creative medium with a long and time-honoured connection to everyday life: the creation of bowls, cups, and plates that are handled and eaten from at every meal and in virtually every culture. Falk's interest in ceramics quickly shifted from the traditional to the avant-garde in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when she began

building elaborate environments for her ceramic sculptures and devising complex performances that used ceramic objects as props. It was during this time that the artist first started to present her "fruit piles." These enigmatic sculptures are composed as piles of fruit, some as small as eight, others as large as 196, but always in a pyramidal shape. In her early exhibitions, Falk mounted the piles on clear Plexiglas plinths so that the fruit appeared to hover in space, adding to their uncanny presence as familiar objects seen in a new and surprising way. Soon after, she turned her attention to the fabrication of ceramic shoes—nine black boots, eight blue running shoes, one green banker's shoe—often displayed in glass bookcases. Then, at the turn of the century, Falk seized on the baseball caps that had by that time become a common cultural presence. What is it, she seems to ask, that makes these banal objects so very personal and yet so ubiquitous? How might they, in their very own way, remind us of the rich range of meaning held by everyday objects?

900 Oranges, one of Falk's three new public artworks, offers an endearing variation on her art of the late 1960s. In a public setting, this sculpture becomes a beacon to those who walk along the sidewalk, a landmark for those who need direction, and a pleasant reminder of a commonplace fruit that is a uniquely magical treat. A line of *18 Pairs of Blue and White Running Shoes* and a cluster of *10 Baseball Caps* offer this same opportunity: we may choose to recognize a simple, everyday encounter that brightens our day, or we may pause for just a moment to consider the uncanny power of an embodied everyday presence.

— Bruce Grenville

Bruce Grenville is Senior Curator at the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Opposite *10 Baseball Caps*, 2020. Photo: Blaine Campbell

Above *18 Pairs of Blue and White Running Shoes*, 2020 (detail). Photo: Blaine Campbell



About the Artist

Gathie Falk has been an active and renowned member of the Vancouver art community for more than sixty years. Recognized equally for her sculptures, paintings, performances, installation art, and, more recently, her public artworks, Falk has sustained a rich artistic career that has been celebrated in exhibitions across Canada. For her remarkable work she has received the Governor General's Award, the Audain Prize, the Order of Canada, and the Order of British Columbia.

Born in 1928 to a Russian settler family in Manitoba, Falk moved several times before settling in Vancouver in 1947. She trained as a public-school teacher in the 1940s and taught for thirteen years. In the late 1950s, she began to study art through summer school and night courses, leaving teaching in 1965 to devote herself to art full-time. This was the beginning of an extraordinary career in visual art that continues to the present day. Falk's art speaks of a life filled with liveliness, wonder, transformation, and change embodied in the guise of the everyday.

Above Gathie Falk. Photo: Blaine Campbell

The City of Vancouver Public Art Program commissions artworks and supports critical artistic explorations that reflect on the complexities of place, publics, and culture. The program prioritizes artist-centred approaches and respectful relations in pursuit of the vision of a city where the work of artists is integrated into daily life. Artworks are commissioned by the program for public sites and through private development rezoning requirements. Vancouver's public art collection includes over 300 artworks created since the program began in 1991. Learn more about the program and other public artworks at vancouver.ca/publicart. Sign up for Arts and Culture information at vancouver.ca/culture.



10 Baseball Caps, 2020, **18 Pairs of Blue and White Running Shoes**, 2020, and **900 Oranges**, 2020, are located at 4963, 5033, and 5077 Cambie Street, Vancouver, British Columbia, and were commissioned by Washington Properties as part of their participation in the City of Vancouver's Public Art Program for Private Development.

Cover image *900 Oranges*, 2020. Photo: Blaine Campbell

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10 Pairs of Blue and White Running Shoes, 2020. Photo: Blaine Campbell

