

Clothing and Memory

Grades 4-6 Activity Guide

Inspired by artworks from the RMG's Permanent Collection



Gathie Falk, *Agnes*, 2000-2002, varnish and acrylic on papier-mâché. Purchased with the assistance of a Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance Grant, 2002



Tom Hodgson, *Portrait of a Shirt*, 1957, oil on canvas. Purchase 1971.



ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Gathie Falk

Gathie Falk's parents immigrated to Canada from Russia to escape religious and ethnic persecution for being German-speaking Russian Mennonites. She was born in Saskatchewan, her father died shortly after her birth. Her family moved around a lot, she found music as a comfort and eventually took up drawing. At 16 years old, she left school (completing her diploma via correspondence) to do factory work and eventually became an elementary teacher. During that time she also studied painting, drawing and design. By the 1960s, Falk was thinking a lot about what was considered meaningful or beautiful. Gathie Falk became known for her artworks inspired by and celebrates the ordinary, everyday objects such as fruit and shoes.

She chose to make the objects look beyond ordinary but precious artifacts or icons. She would encase them in cabinets or display them on tall pedestals. Her artworks also often deal with opposites; life and death, light and shadow, beauty and ugliness, growth and decay.

Tom Hodgson

Tom Hodgson was one of the members of the Painters Eleven. He was born in 1924 and grew up on Center Island, Toronto and had a cottage in Peterborough. He was an active child, taking part in sports and Saturday morning art classes with Group of Seven member, Arthur Lismer. Hodgson's early art work was of realistic watercolour depictions of nature, painted from memory and from life. He would later turn to semi-abstract and then pure abstracts during his work with the Painters Eleven.

Painters Eleven was formed in 1954 and included Jack Bush, Oscar Cahen, Hortense Gordon, Tom Hodgson, Alexandra Luke, Jock Macdonald, Ray Mead, Kazuo Nakamura, William Ronald, Harold Town, and Walter Yarwood.

ABOUT THE ARTWORKS

Although Gathie Falk’s sculptures were often made out of clay, this dress (as part of a series of dresses called *Traces*) is made out of paper mache. She would paint and glaze the surface to transform the “ordinary” material into something ornate looking. She created a story about each of the dresses. She imagined them as objects found in various closets across the country, each standing up on the floor. The owner had either passed away or moved away, leaving the clothes behind.

This painting, *Portrait of a Shirt* by Tom Hodgson was apparently inspired by an event. Hodgson found himself in a bathroom somewhere that had a bright pink wall. As he looked at his reflection in the mirror he thought the colour combination of that bright background with his yellow, red and black striped shirt created a terrible composition. After returning home he thought some more about the image created in the mirror and decided to work the composition out on canvas and came up with this final artwork. What do you think?

DISCUSSION PROMPTS/ACTIVITY

Ask students to consider the images without telling them the title or what it could be. What do they notice?

- What is similar?
- What is different?
- Which artwork do they prefer and why?
- What materials did each artist use to make their artworks?
- Why do you think Gathie Falk chose a dress to represent a person?
- Why has Hodgson not included himself wearing the shirt?
- What object would you use to represent yourself or someone you know?
- Do you have an item of clothing that holds special meaning to you?

What does memory have to do with art making? Both artists have used the idea of memory in different ways. Explain.

DRAWING CHALLENGE

Ask students to list everyday objects and write each word down onto a piece of

cardstock or a recipe card.

Discuss the word still life. What does it mean?

A still life is defined as a painting or drawing of an arrangement of objects, typically including fruit and flowers and objects contrasting with these in texture, such as bowls and glassware.

Pick a random grouping of those cards and encourage students to create a still life based on the word on the cards. Encourage students to try to recall details about the objects, consider colour, shapes, texture of each everyday item. Students can select different cards to create other random still life artworks. Finally, ask students to create an abstracted version of their still life, maintaining one of the elements of art, ie. lines, colour, shape.

MATERIALS NEEDED

1. Paper
2. Pencils
3. Markers/ Pencil crayons or other colouring materials

EXTENDED LEARNING IDEAS

What's in a name?

Did you know?

Agnes was the name of a popular Christian saint, Agnes of Rome, which encouraged its wide use. Agnes was the third most popular name for women in the English speaking world for more than 400 years.

Encourage students to research the history of their names. What does it mean? Is it a popular name in Canada? Is it a popular name in another country? Is their first/middle name been passed down from one family member to the next?

What name would you give *Portrait of a Shirt*?



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