

## JOHN RAMSAY GALLERY

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### THE GROUP 'A TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY EXHIBITION'

GATHIE FALK, WENDY HAMLIN, GLORIA MASSE  
AND JOHN CLAIR WATTS

MAY 8 - 30, 1998

A group can be an assembly of objects or creatures brought together by commonalities of content or class, a kind of family, lot, or batch. When people group in smaller or larger numbers they might become a congregation, coterie, troop, or gang.

This group of four - Gathie Falk, Wendy Hamlin, John Clair Watts and Gloria Masse - evolved naturally out of a class Falk was teaching in 1975/76 over twenty years ago in the BFA program of the University of British Columbia. Although there were a dozen students learning to make ceramics and sculpture under her tutelage, the three found themselves often lingering with their instructor over coffee, sitting apart from the others. At this point, perhaps, they were a covey, a brood under the guidance of an artist/mentor who has achieved international fame as the creator of highly original works in clay and other mediums. (for example, *Single Right Men's Shoes* of 1973 shown at the Vancouver Art Gallery and at the Canadian Cultural Center in Paris in 1974 and *Herds 1 and 2*, at the National Gallery of Canada in 1975 in an exhibition called "Some Canadian Women Artists") But maybe they were also, at this time, a gaggle - a wild and noisy flock drawn together by a capacity for joyous noise and the ability to fly, as artists, in the face of convention.

Wendy recalls that without meaning to, they excluded others and became a clique even before the first year of their acquaintance was over and that the basis for their bond, then and now, was a passionate commitment to art and a shared sense of humour - in fact, not only did they laugh about the same things, but they "laughed when others were not laughing". For her, the most important moment in the development of the four's on-going relationship was the first invitation to Gathie's home/studio on third avenue, that afforded an insight into a lifestyle that was an eye opener to a mind that had already been expanded by Falk's teaching and example. For Gloria, the evolution from casual coffee-times to a twenty year long espousal including regular meetings and communication was a natural thing and remains "the most natural thing", because there is still a mutual bond in art and that love of laughter. And John? He was happy to be the guy in the group and, at first, the sculptor counterpart to Falk, whereas Masse and Hamlin have always principally been painters.

As Falk recalls, all three were in her 1975/76 class which was, ostensibly, a course in ceramics and sculpture although she did encourage students to work in any medium. In the next year only John and Wendy were enrolled but by then the four had become fast friends.

They have been in touch over these past twenty years, meeting often as many times a twice a month in their various studios in Vancouver or elsewhere for joint 'crits', goodies, gossip and mirth, often hearing letters or receiving phone calls from a member who was unavoidably absent. Although they have, when possible, seen each others exhibitions they have only shown twice as a group - here at the John Ramsay Gallery in 1998 and at the Roundhouse in 1990 at "Artropolis 90: Lineages and Linkages" In that exhibition, a gleeful group portrait - similar in spirit to the one reproduced in the John Ramsay Gallery invitation - spoke eloquently of the group's ease and pleasure in the world they jointly share. The four have been "there for each other" through thick and thin with a depth of commitment and wealth of emotion that would put most marriages to shame.

Even though there is togetherness, and even though occasionally their processes or themes coincide, this group of four, unlike the Group of Seven never had a unified agenda, So at John Ramsay's (as at Artropolis) the diversity is more remarkable than the similarity.

Because I am also one of Gathie's intimate friends - our relationship goes back to 1965 - I have been privileged to know the other members of the group for over twenty years and have followed their careers closely. But until April 21, 1998, when I conducted a group interview, I had never been invited to one of their meetings.

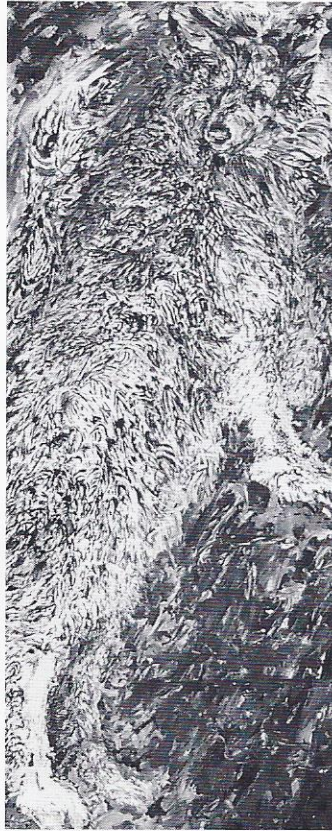
Ann Rosenberg  
Critic, Curator

## GLORIA MASSÉ

b.1942 (Gibsons)

In 1988, my first pack of wolf studies began. Armed with a bag of dated symbols, revelations from contemporary naturalists, etc., I defied the dictum that says one must paint what one knows. Fortunately, this first attempt was seen by someone who led me to a first-hand experience. I was privileged to touch and feed wolves accustomed to humans and to see and hear a wild pack by night and day. When I walked in their woods, I consciously "saw" only tracks, scat and dens, for they were one with the stuff of the landscape. No doubt their image was read by some part of me, as it can be, unconsciously, by all of us. We have all seen things we don't "know" we've seen.

*Wolves of Moss, Leaves and Bark*  
(detail triptych)  
acrylic on canvas  
59" x 24" each panel  
Photography: Gloria Massé



## GATHIE FALK

b.1928 (Vancouver)

*There Are 21 Ships and 3 Warships in English Bay* is part of a series called *Hedge and Cloud*. The series is about two sculptural elements—one natural; the other, part natural, part man-made—and the dynamics of their relationship to each other in a neutral, but much affected space.

In a different space at a different angle is the diary, the statement that one day there are 9 ships in English Bay and the next day there are 17. The top part of each work is a painting of sculpture while the bottom is a sculpture made out of a painting. One cherry stick grounds the whole.

I'm certain that the narrow panel came about because of the many paintings of Gloria Massé which are inventions involving numerous painted panels bolted together.

*There Are 21 Ships and 3 Warships in English Bay*  
oil on canvas  
7' x 5'  
Photography: Gathie Falk





## WENDY HAMLIN

(Spain)

The *Virgens* of Seville (pronounced *beer-hens*) are numerous, revered and, for the most part, weeping. During *semana santa* (Easter), they are paraded through the streets on *pacios* and the processions continue for seven days and nights.

The *Virgens* are meant to encompass the ideal Spanish beauty. They are young, vulnerable and compassionate, but they also exude sensuality. The entire ritual of *semana santa* almost negates true religiosity. It's become instead a pagan spectacle of image worship with dramatic chanting for the favourite statues.

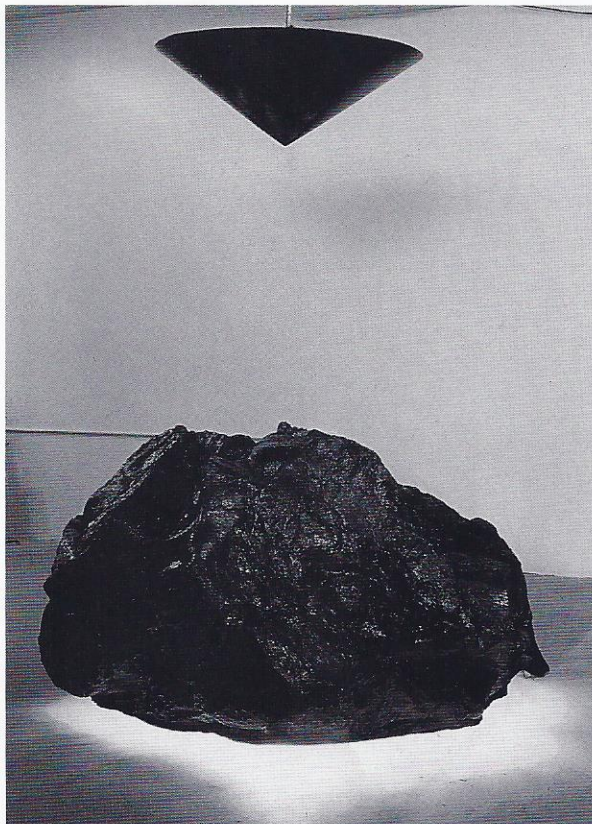
To the natives of Seville, my paintings are sacrilegious, not because of their sensuality or even because the images are unclothed, but simply because they're different from what they know.

*La Virgen de la Estrella*

oil on canvas

39" x 32"

Photography: Donna Hagerman



## JOHN CLAIR WATTS

b.1948 (Vancouver)

Wendy Hamlin, Gloria Massé and Gathie Falk. They are a mirror of both the past and present, a constant throughout my history as an art maker. One of the reasons I started making art was because I was searching for tangible evidence of communication between people. One of the reasons I continued to make art was because of the very real and human support of these three friends.

My piece is called *Nexus (Link)*. My intention was to infer a shared energy between two objects, objects that are together yet separate.

*Nexus (Link)*

(work in progress)

fibreglass, stainless steel

14' x 5' x 5' approx.

Photography: J. Clair Watts