



Cracked Wheat by Shary Boyle

Speaker: Sequoia Miller, Chief Curator & Deputy Director

Audio Tour Transcription

Welcome to the Gardiner Plaza! I'm Sequoia Miller, Chief Curator and Deputy Director, and I'm here to talk about the sculpture *Cracked Wheat* by Toronto-based artist Shary Boyle. *Cracked Wheat* is a 7-foot-high vase standing on two childlike bronze legs. It leans forward in a playful, almost cartoonish way, seeming to offer us a gesture of greeting. The artist chose a typical vase form to highlight how virtually every culture in the world makes containers out of clay.

Ceramics is a truly global material that touches all of us, both literally and metaphorically. Ceramic vessel, from the most rare and precious to the most mundane, also reference the human body, with neck, belly, legs, and feet. Pots help sustain us by holding water and food, while also reminding us that we ourselves are containers.

On the front of the sculpture, we see a floral spray. Rather than luxurious blossoms though, we're looking at wheat. The image comes from a pattern called "Canadian Wheat" found on mass market pottery made in Collingwood, Ontario in the 1960s. The artist enlarged the pattern from an actual vintage plate, and if you look closely, you can see the scratch marks of someone's utensils carried forward from the original. In some ways, the pattern represents an ideal of what it meant to be a Canadian in the 1950s and 1960s—wholesome, everyday, and sustainable. Yet the vessel has been broken, and, lovingly put back together, helping us think about the ways Canadian identity has and continues to be taken apart and reconfigured.

When making the sculpture, Boyle in fact fabricated each element separately and then assembled them onto a metal frame. The seams are prominent, a nod to the Japanese tradition of *kintsugi*, where damaged ceramics are mended and the repair gets highlighted with gold

lacquer, rather than hidden. The artist seems to suggest that our flaws are what make us human, and that we are always in a state of reshaping ourselves.

The bronze legs also point to a traditional practice in ceramics, one in which Europeans would surround early Chinese porcelains in elaborate gilded mounts, called *ormolu*. These mounts heightened the value of the porcelain and made them look like more familiar object types. In this case, the ormolu legs help lend the form its jaunty air.

Cracked Wheat arrived on the Gardiner Plaza in 2018 after a national competition, generously sponsored by La Fondation Emmanuelle Gattuso. I love how the work honours the history of ceramics, while also capturing its popular spirit and the way the medium helps us understand who we are as people. It embodies artist Shary Boyle's way of making the everyday seem strange, giving us a new perspective on ourselves and helping to welcome everyone to the Gardiner.

Thanks for listening! Hope you check out the other artworks on the Plaza.

Artwork credits:

Shary Boyle (Canadian, 1972-)

Cracked Wheat, 2018

Stoneware, steel, fiberglass, resin, foam, bronze

Commissioned for the Gardiner Museum to celebrate Canada's Sesquicentennial in 2017.

Artwork Commissioned by La Fondation Emmanuelle Gattuso Project Supported by the City of Toronto

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