

CASEY KAPLAN  
525 WEST 21ST STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10011  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

*This exhibition is part of the Barbican's Season Dancing around Duchamp*

barbican

**Geoffrey Farmer**  
**The Surgeon and the Photographer**

**The Curve, Barbican Centre, London UK**  
**26 March – 28 July 2013**  
**Media View, Monday 25 March, 10am – 1pm**

Supported by Arts Council England.

Shown for the first time in its completed form, Geoffrey Farmer presents *The Surgeon and the Photographer* for his first major exhibition in a UK public gallery. Constructing 365 handpuppets from book images clipped and glued to fabric forms, Farmer will populate *The Curve* with this recently completed puppet calendar. In 2009, on rumour that a well known second-hand book store in Vancouver would soon be closing, Farmer acquired several hundred books, which he used to create the collaged forms. The figures are arranged in small and large groups, suggesting crowds or processions, portraits of days and months through the 90-metre long space. *The Surgeon and the Photographer* opens in *The Curve* on 26 March 2013

Geoffrey Farmer said: *The bookstore in Vancouver resembles a ruin. It is lawless, a labyrinth of book piles and collapsing pyramids. One day while flipping through a book there I had a simple thought about its relationship to my hand. I thought perhaps this relationship might also apply to the images it contained. That is when I started to construct the hand puppets. At the end of the gallery, Farmer projects a newly commissioned, computer-controlled montage, Look in my Face; my name is Might-have-been; I am also called No-more, Toolate, Farewell.... The montage is comprised of selected whole images, before being cut to construct the figures. The images are matched to a sound library and organized by both chance and predetermined categories.*

Jane Alison, Senior Curator, Barbican Art Gallery, said: *I am delighted that Geoffrey Farmer is presenting this poignant installation for the first time outside North America. Drawing on the radical and playful legacy of Dada and Neo-Dada, 'The Surgeon and the Photographer' is a perfect addition to our Barbican-wide cross-arts season 'Dancing around Duchamp'.*

Inspired by the important yet unfinished project *Memory Atlas* by cultural theorist and art historian Aby Warburg, *The Surgeon and the Photographer* is part of a trilogy of works including *The Last Two Million Years* (2007) and the recent *Leaves of Grass* (2012) exhibited at *dOCUMENTA(13)*, featuring images cut from a *Reader's Digest* encyclopaedia and *LIFE* magazines, respectively. The title of the work refers to a part of Walter Benjamin's seminal essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in which the magician is compared to the painter and the surgeon is compared to the cameraman.

Farmer's process-orientated approach, which is both intuitive and research-based, draws on storytelling, dreams, popular culture, literature and theatre. His work is influenced by the sculptural, collage and assemblage traditions of Hannah Höch and Robert Rauschenberg as well as the element of chance as employed by John Cage, Merce Cunningham and Marcel Duchamp.

Geoffrey Farmer was born in 1967, in Vancouver, British Columbia. He started his studies at the San Francisco Art Institute and graduated from the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in Vancouver in 1992. Farmer is part of a prominent community of artists based in Vancouver, including Stan Douglas, Ian Wallace and Jeff Wall. He has had recent solo exhibitions at Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater (REDCAT), Los Angeles (2011), The Banff Centre, Alberta (2010) and Witte de With, Rotterdam (2008), among others.

Forthcoming exhibitions include a solo project at the Migros Museum in Zurich this May and a major exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 2014. He is represented by Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver, and Casey Kaplan Gallery, New York.

## **SPECIAL EVENTS**

### **Experimental Collage Film (PG\*)**

**Bruce Conner and Arthur Lipsett + introduced by Geoffrey Farmer**

**Tuesday 26 Mar, 7pm**

#### **Cinema 2**

Informed by Dada, Surrealism and Duchamp's found objects, Bruce Conner (1933 – 2008) was a pioneer in the field of found-footage films. This programme includes a selection of his work and that of Canadian found footage maestro Arthur Lipsett (1936 – 86). The films will be introduced by Geoffrey Farmer, who will discuss their influence on his own practice.

### **Dada Puppet Workshop**

Sat 27 April, 12 – 3.30pm

Fountain Room, Level G

Free family workshop where you can create and film your own photo-collage hand puppets, and get inspired by the 365 puppet-like figures in Geoffrey Farmer's exhibition in The Curve gallery. Suitable for ages 5 and over. Children must be accompanied by an adult.

This event is presented in conjunction with Framed Film Club's screening of Kooky, the feature film of a lost toy that comes to life (see website for details).

## **DANCING AROUND DUCHAMP**

Major season of events at the Barbican, February – June 2013

Featuring Richard Alston Dance Company | Samuel Beckett | John Cage | Cheek by Jowl | Merce Cunningham | Marcel Duchamp | Geoffrey Farmer | Eugène Ionesco | Alfred Jarry | Jasper Johns | Philippe Parreno | Rambert Dance Company | Robert Rauschenberg | Théâtre de la Ville | Robert Wilson

**Dancing around Duchamp** is a major multi-disciplinary season of events across visual art, dance, theatre, film and music. The season orbits around the legendary figure of Marcel Duchamp and the Art Gallery's major new exhibition The Bride and the Bachelors: Duchamp with Cage, Cunningham, Rauschenberg and Johns organised by the Philadelphia Museum of Art in association with Barbican Art Gallery. A uniquely Barbican offering, it brings together key figures of the avant-garde with a shared Dadaist or absurdist sensibility who changed the course of 20th-century art: Samuel Beckett, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Marcel Duchamp, Eugène Ionesco, Alfred Jarry, Jasper Johns, and Robert Rauschenberg, along with a host of contemporary practitioners that continue their radical legacy. Showcasing work by different generations of artists and performers – precursors, collaborators and artists either inspired by or with a clear affinity to Duchamp's work – the season allows audiences to explore the many threads that connect them and to journey among the absurd, the subversive, the provocative and the darkly humorous.

**CASEY KAPLAN**  
525 WEST 21ST STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10011  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

**GEOFFREY FARMER**  
*Let's Make the Water  
Turn Black*

May 23–August 18, 2013  
Opening: May 22, 2013, 6–8pm

Production on Display  
May 7–21, 2013

**MIGROS MUSEUM**  
**für Gegenwartskunst**

AN INSTITUTION OF THE MIGROS CULTURE PERCENTAGE

**PRESS RELEASE**  
**ZÜRICH, MARCH 26, 2013**

The artistic practice of Geoffrey Farmer (b. Vancouver, 1967; lives and works in Vancouver) integrates forms of collecting and scholarship employed by cultural historians, and draws on a diverse repertoire. After extensive research, the artist builds collections that unite aspects of visual art, literature, music, politics, history, and sociology, and crystallize in sprawling theatrical installations. Echoing a 1968 composition by Frank Zappa, from which it also borrows the title, Farmer's *Let's Make the Water Turn Black*—produced especially for the Migros Museum of Contemporary Art—presents an improvised chronology of the American musician. Choreographed sculptures on a stage coalesce into a multifaceted and atmospheric work that unfolds over the course of the day.

Between 7 and 21 May, in the context of Production on Display, the Migros Museum of Contemporary Art is allowing visitors to have a glimpse of a work in production. During the opening hours the public is invited to observe the run-throughs and rehearsals to learn more about the content and technical aspects of the emerging installation.

Farmer's first Swiss solo exhibition at the Migros Museum of Contemporary Art presents the sculptureplay *Let's Make the Water Turn Black*, which is based on the chronology of the American musician and composer Frank Zappa; the title quotes a piece written by Zappa in 1968. The mechanical performance—an ensemble of computer-controlled sculptures installed on a low platform—interprets and revisits selected scenes from Zappa's chronology in a sequence coordinated with the time of day and the museum's opening hours. The work journeys Zappa's life over the course of a day, reaching its conclusion, his death, with the closing of the museum each day. The individual kinetic objects that make up the installation simultaneously function as acoustic modules in the overall composition; sound recordings represent individual periods and events in Zappa's life. Farmer approaches the biography of his subject with a technique that echoes William S. Burroughs's method of the cut-up as well as Zappa's own principles of avant-garde composition, of mixing and layering diverse acoustic levels and arranging sonic spectra in kaleidoscope-like ensembles—and shares these artists' delight in frequent disruptions.

For the sculpture, the artist draws on the influences of *Musique concrète* on Zappa's work and has created a sound library that functions chronologically over the course of the day. Composed of selected clips, field recordings and archival material, it contributes to the atmosphere of a quasi-theatrical performative moment: an assemblage of "objets trouvés" on a low stage enacts a mechanically propelled choreography while also performing, as though it formed a single instrumental body, an hours-long cyclical sound installation. However disconcertingly spectral, automaton-like, and atmospheric this sculptural performance may seem in its invocation of Frank Zappa's spirit, it rigorously hews to Farmer's meticulously structured storyline.

In 2013, Geoffrey Farmer contributed his *Leaves of Grass* (2012) to Documenta 13; in 2011, he participated in the 15th Istanbul Biennial. His work has been on display in numerous solo shows at REDCAT, Los Angeles, the Casey Kaplan Gallery, New York (both 2011), and other venues, as well as the Witte de With, Rotterdam, and the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (both 2008). Geoffrey Farmer's art was first shown in Switzerland in 2011, when he contributed to the project *The Garden of Forking Paths*, initiated by the Migros Museum of Contemporary Art.

CASEY KAPLAN  
525 WEST 21ST STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10011  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

## CANADIANART

“Heather, Rosemary, *Geoffrey Farmer Discusses His Big Documenta Hit*, <http://www.canadianart.ca>”

## Feature

### Geoffrey Farmer Discusses His Big Documenta Hit

Neue Galerie, Kassel June 9 to September 16, 2012

By Rosemary Heather



Geoffrey Farmer *Leaves of Grass* 2012 Installation view at Neue Galerie Kassel Courtesy the artist and Catriona Jeffries Commissioned and co-produced by dOCUMENTA (13) / photo Anders Sune Berg

POSTED: AUGUST 30, 2012

Geoffrey Farmer’s *Leaves of Grass* is one of the big hits of dOCUMENTA (13). Toronto critic Rosemary Heather caught up with the Vancouver artist by email to ask about the inspirations, processes and resonances behind the astonishing work—which, as Farmer noted, ended up surprising even himself.

**Rosemary Heather: There’s quite a story behind the making of *Leaves of Grass*. The work features a great number of figures cut out from the pages of *Life* magazine that have been mounted on dried-grass sticks. Someone told me there were 30,000 figures, but you have amended that, saying it’s closer to 16,000, which is still a huge number. Can you tell me a bit of the backstory here?**

Geoffrey Farmer: The collection of *Life* magazines came from the Morris/Trasov Archive. They (Michael Morris and Vincent Trasov) knew that I had been working with image collections, and about three years ago they asked if I might be interested in it. There were approximately 900 magazines in the collection, spanning five decades, from 1935 to 1985. In the beginning, *Life* was a weekly; in 1978, it became a monthly. So we had a lot of magazines from the 30s, 40s and 50s. We had fragments—a few pages—from 1935, and then complete copies after that. This includes the first issue that had Time co-founder Henry Luce as publisher; he bought it in 1936 and changed it to a photojournalistic format. The last issue we had, from 1985, was on AIDS.

In Kassel, the work is displayed on the second floor of the Neue Galerie in the loggia, which is a long, sculptural corridor with huge arched windows overlooking the park. The view brought to mind the miniaturization of the world. I was already thinking about how photography has a tendency to make sculpture, and I liked this in relationship with the loggia. The piece is in chronological order and is displayed on a 124-foot table, which is viewable from both sides. There are 16,000 figures, and each figure has two sides. Although the image arrangements may appear chaotic, I took great care in their placement.

During my studio visit with dOCUMENTA (13)’s curator, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, we talked about Paul Klee’s drawing *Angelus Novus* and Walter Benjamin’s essay “On The Concept of History.” I showed her a film made in 1961 by Arthur Lipsett, *Very Nice Very Nice*. In it, he uses images from *Life*, as well as found film footage and sound clips, all montaged together. It contained a quality I wanted to find for the piece. I mentioned to Carolyn that he committed suicide a few weeks before his birthday in 1986. She was curious as to what was happening in the world around the date of his death. So we were looking at timelines, and I began to think about chronology as a composition.

It was a gruelling project, but I wanted to be transformed by the experience. In the last few months, we had about 90 volunteers helping us. We had quotas to keep. We worked in shifts. There was a small group of us who, in the end, I think, were working 20-hour days. I was amazed at the generosity of everyone working on the piece. It was a communal experience. A lot of conversation happens when you are sitting together working around a table. If someone didn't agree with the image selection or strongly felt an image should be included, they would hold the image up for a vote. We had meals together, a fantastic cook and friend came in to make lunches and dinners. I wasn't expecting the piece to grow in the way that it did.

There is another story, though, that I want to mention because I think it relates in a broader sense.

When I was very young, my teacher asked us each to bring a leaf to class. She then got us to place the leaf on a piece of paper. Above the paper was a metal screen stretched over a wooden frame. She lowered the frame, and then she gave us a toothbrush dipped in gouache paint to rub on the screen. When I rubbed the toothbrush over the screen, it sent out a fine spray of paint over the leaf and the paper. Then she lifted the screen, and then lifted the leaf off of the paper. Even though she was holding the leaf in her hand, it still appeared on the paper. This deeply shocked me.

When I first saw William Fox Talbot's early leaf-photo experiments, I recognized them as being linked to this early experience. When I read Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, I also had this recognition. Absence existing simultaneously within presence.

RH: Your anecdote brings to mind a certain uncanny quality the work has. When the figures are cut out from the magazine and brought together again in the amalgamated form, the first thing you notice is the discrepancy in scale between them. This suggests their lost context (the scale that naturalizes each figure within its photo) and makes apparent the essential strangeness of the photographic format, which you evoke in your answer above. So is the work just an expression of a relationship you have always had with photographs, or is something else going on?

GF: I think there are many things that are going on in this piece and I hope people get a sense of that. In one of the last issues of *Life*, I found a small image of Susan Sontag's book *On Photography*. It is about one centimetre by one centimetre. It appears at the very end of the piece, next to a tiny Lady Diana. I think, in some ways, the piece is dedicated to Sontag and to her writing. Not to say there is a warning there, but perhaps there is.

RH: So ideas about the work proliferate in the same way the figures seem to...this suggests why knowing their exact number is not important. There are enough of them to push the mind into the territory of something not previously experienced. Was this a goal you had in mind? Or did you set out to do one thing and in the end discover you had accomplished something else?

GF: I am not really conceptual. I don't think up a concept and then execute it. I learn through discovery and from direct contact with the material I am using. Even though the work might emanate out of an idea or interest and may have a horizon, I don't really know exactly what I am doing.

For example, the title partially came from the fact that I was using grass, in a literal way, to mount the images onto, but also because I was looking at Walt Whitman's use of writing cut-ups to make the poems for his book *Leaves of Grass*. He spoke about wanting to write a modern portrait of the United States, and I thought that the piece could be looked at as a kind of portrait. I also liked that the first *Documenta* was in 1955 as part of a horticultural show, and that it occurred on the 100-year anniversary of the publishing of *Leaves of Grass*. There was a special article in *Life* on Whitman in 1955, with pictures of his grave that are now in the piece. I also liked that the term "leaves" can refer to the pages of a book and to grass—to something without much value. I thought this related to the form of a magazine.

I didn't really consider what the effect of looking at so many images would have on me. At certain points in the project, I had a hard time sleeping. When I closed my eyes all I could see were images. I was going through 30 magazines every morning to make selections. And then we would see them again for cutting, again for the gluing, again for the sorting and then again for arranging.

I knew from the beginning that it was important the figures be placed in chronological order, and that their arrangement was important. It hadn't occurred to me that it would be a strange kind of history lesson. It was like a slow-motion flip-book.

It wasn't until we had finished making the work that I realized the piece is very much about factory life. Factory farming, the war factory, the death factory, the automobile factory, the Hollywood factory, the personality factory.... History emerging out of a factory. In the end, it takes on the appearance of a conveyor belt.

I was asked to pick a song that the viewer could then download as part of a *dOCUMENTA (13)* phone app. I chose *Over The Rainbow* as sung by Judy Garland in the movie *The Wizard of Oz*. American soldiers used to play it in Germany as a kind of anthem at the end of the war. In the movie, it is a hopeful song, but when listening to it and looking at the piece, it has another effect, making the piece, and history, feel like a very strange dream.

FULL LINK:

<http://www.canadianart.ca/features/2012/08/30/geoffrey-farmer-reveals-process-behind-documenta-13-hit/>

CASEY KAPLAN  
525 WEST 21ST STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10011  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Geoffrey Farmer  
b. 1967 in Vancouver  
lives in Vancouver

“Scharrer, Eva, *Das Begleitbuch / The Guidebook* dOCUMENTA (13),” exh. cat. p. 150-151”

Geoffrey Farmer has gained an international reputation for his theatrical narrative works involving staged mechanical plays that combine light and sound in continual flux and for sculptural collages and tableaux made up of images taken from a variety of illustrated books and journals. Yet his work spans many fields including drawing, video, photography, installation, sculpture and performance.

*Leaves of grass* (2012), the work on display at dOCUMENTA (13), consists of hundreds of shadow puppets that have been fabricated from photographs cut out from *Life*, the classic American illustrated news magazine. These magazines are drawn from five decades of the journal’s existence, from 1935 to 1985, when millions of Americans relied on *Life* for their view of the world. Farmer repurposes this obsolete news format-making use of a collection of magazines given to him by Michael Morris and Vincent Trazov of Vancouver’s Image Bank-via the manually intensive technique of photomontage. As his title suggests, both time (the photographic archive of the 20th century) and space (with the three-dimensional, sculptural activation of collage) are volatized in this work.

*Leaves of grass* is the final part in a trilogy of works including *The Last Two Million Years* (2007) and *The Surgeon and The Photographer* (2009). In *The Last Two Million Years*, Farmer cut up a Reader’s Digest book of the same title from the 1970s and re-introduced the two-dimensional images (drawings and photographs) of this overarching history into a three-dimensional world made up of a series of differently sized and shaped pedestals. Figures and objects from various cultures and times were displayed together in this miniature mash-up museum. During the exhibition *The Last Two Million Years*, Farmer commented in an accompanying and constantly mutating pamphlet on the dominance of and reliance on photography in the writing of history. Similarly, *The Surgeon and the Photographer* consists of more than three hundred puppets whose fabric torsos are adorned with accoutrements-animals, hats, glasses of wine- constructed from fragments of photographs cut out from books and magazines. Farmer uses these elements of our photographically mediated world to invent a theater for his new age whose cast is costumed in the photographic skin of the old.



Instructor makes silhouettes by moving model quickly across shadowgraph screen with a stiff wire.

Image detail from the magazine *Life*, May 1944

Farmer’s memorable works are rarely, if ever, exhibited the same way twice. Each exhibition or major work is a temporal event, a theatrical performance intended for a particular time and place, embedded within this methodology is a form of resistance and social commentary. Farmer’s process-oriented approach, which is both intuitive and research-based, is drawn from storytelling, dreams, popular culture, literature, and theater.

CASEY KAPLAN  
525 WEST 21ST STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10011  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

"Coming to Life," Frieze Magazine, May 2012, p. 151-157

# frieze

CONTEMPORARY ART AND CULTURE

NO. 147 MAY 2012



**GEOFFREY FARMER**

---

*Sculptors Discuss Sculpture*  
*Social Spaces: CAN ALTAY talks to*  
**DAN GRAHAM**  
*Project: MOYRA DAVEY*

# Coming to life

## Spirits and objecthood -Jan Verwoert on the 'Black Forest voodoo' of Geoffrey Farmer's mirages and micro-events

What if they move? If they start to wiggle like creatures, stir as if they had souls, or make sounds as though they could live and die - although you know they're just a bunch of objects - should you trust your eyes? For all you know, you might be hallucinating. Objects are not supposed to act like this. Even if they're automated they're not meant to be that animated. It's too scary. Or too funny. Or both.

The phenomenon of material animism is at the heart of Geoffrey Farmer's practice. And he taps into its numinous uncanny dimension as much as into its sometimes striking mundanity. His installation at REDCAT in Los Angeles in 2011, *Let's Make the Water Turn Black*, for instance, was a magical backstreet symphony of lost things: a vast array of objects arranged on a huge, white, low-level platform performed a ghostly choreography of (mechanically) animated motions, in the act of channelling the irreverent spirit of Frank Zappa summoned in the title eponymous with a 1968 Zappa song. There were many things on stage, some still, some, at particular times, momentarily springing to life in erratic motions: a stick, a stone, a pot, some coloured light bulbs, some plants, a photo of one guy kissing another on his boxers, a plank, a bulky shape covered by blankets the size of a baby elephant, a light, a rod, a box, a hammer, a figure in a cloak wearing a hat with a plant on top whose mechanical arm now and again hits a can with a light bulb, a record player, a chair intertwined with a silver-leaved branch and some large potato-shaped rock which, when its turn comes, takes a slow majestic bow. The computerized choreography - which runs to a pre-programmed one-hour cycle - turns diverse coloured lights on and off, plays sound files at set times and controls the motors that cause the objects to move. The audio recordings include a speaker announcing a performance by John Cage; the voice of the writer Kathy Acker reading poetry; a man calling for his mother, father, brother and sister; atmospheric sounds (recorded in the Walt Disney Concert Hall above the gallery); and the low death cry of an elephant, rising from a subwoofer inside the blanketed mass. One might also recognize the potato-shaped rock as resembling Isamu Noguchi's sculpture *'IO the Issei'* (1979) from the plaza of the nearby Japanese American Cultural and Community Center. It bows gracefully, but the mechanical arm making it do so generates quite a noise. Farmer collaborates with the artist Brady Marks on the electronics behind the sequencing of these numerous staged micro-events. It's a complex composition, yet the work isn't presented as a wonder of technology. On the contrary, its mundane materiality openly discloses its affinity to the simple mechanical charms of automated figurines on barrel organs, Glockenspiels or cuckoo clocks. It's just some shades darker. Think Black Forest voodoo. A lot happens on Farmer's stage, but an equal amount occurs in the mind of the beholder. There is no clear storyline to follow. Rather, mental images are evoked by the environmental changes in lighting, sound and movement. The overall experience of the piece thus approximates that of an apparition or a mirage: it's a vivid sensation. Yet the reality of what you see remains unverifiable - disturbingly so - as when subconscious memories resurface in dreams. You can never quite be sure that you're not just imagining things. Big Bird had this issue too. For years, he was the only character on the children's television programme *Sesame Street* (1969-ongoing) who interacted with Aloysius Snuffleupagus. Others never saw him and mocked Big Bird for holding on to what they thought was an imaginary friend. The blanketed bulk in Farmer's installation is dedicated to Snuffleupagus and to the synchronicity



between two events that took place in 1985: 'Snuffy' finally coming out on *Sesame Street* to meet the grown-ups on the show and let them know he was real - and Zappa speaking out in court against the policy of parental advisory stickers on album sleeves. A Muppet made commensurable with the laws of the parental reality principle, and a musician revolting against it!

One crucial characteristic of Farmer's work, however, is that no matter how eerily kaleidoscopic the sensations it generates, compositionally it remains materially concrete. The objects the artist employs retain their objecthood even - especially - at the moment in which their magical transformation takes place. By affirming the mundane as a medium of the miraculous, Farmer taps into a deeply animist sensibility: the capacity to perceive spirits as dwelling in all things. The artist Trisha Donnelly once succinctly explained the principle of West Coast spirituality to me in this sense as 'anti-materialist materialism',! This stance is also very much what gives Farmer's work its particular edge. While being unabashedly trippy, it roots its magic in the sheer physicality of things: in the crooked looks of objects and in the peculiar sounds they make when, say, a stick beats on a can. The manner in which the sublime and the profane are wedded is at once eerie and potentially comical. There is no church here, so the gods can laugh when, for example, the noise of the mechanical arm causing the fake Noguchi sculpture to bow sounds like a rubbish truck unloading.

Spirits, too, Farmer implies, experience life's daily cycle. *Let's Make the Water Turn Black* is cyclical: all events in the piece repeat in patterns. And, since their choreography is not scripted to build up to one climatic big bang, the work, while being overtly theatrical, is also deliberately anti-spectacular: the objects perform, they do odd jobs and then they rest again. The cycle is equally one of work as it is of leisure. As with genies and demons, they lie dormant until summoned. And doing so is also a question of the right timing. On Mondays, for example, the sixth book of Moses says that contact to a devil is best made at 10 am or midnight; on Thesdays, it's at 11 am or lam ...

Although there is some physical resemblance in this work to Jean Tinguely's sculptural apparatuses, Farmer's mechanic ensembles are operative while Tinguely's were designed to be dysfunctional. They are the demons of the working man running their own ghostly cottage industry. Let them close the factories: these spirits will continue their labours



eternally, refusing to leave the workshop. Are they cursed? Who knows? With Farmer's objects, it would seem entirely plausible that they rise after the gallery closes and, at midnight, perform a collective dance on the roof to the merry tune of 'Chim-Chim Cher-ee'.

This demonic work ethos is another key characteristic of Farmer's practice. Most of the objects used in installations such as *Let's Make the Water Turn Black* have been gathered by the artist from the streets of the city the work will be shown in. This seems to be as much a self-imposed rule as an opportunity for exploring new places. When I met up with Farmer in San Francisco, he set off afterwards on a collapsible bike to scout around town looking for stuff that he could use in his work. He exuded the same sense of purpose and anticipation as a nocturnal animal heading out into the night.

Often, Farmer takes on the role of the ghostly worker himself, altering his installations overnight. *God's Dice* (2010), for instance, staged at the Walter Phillips Gallery at the Banff Centre in Alberta, resembled a real-time enactment of the structural principles of *Let's Make the Water Turn Black* for the exhibition's duration. On a similar vast white platform, a different scene materialized each day, like a drama in of the imaginary Muppet mammoth. Part of the piece was a video showing moments of Farmer working on - and spending time in - the plane at night. Shot in night-vision, it looked like footage of ghosts caught on CCTV. What do ghosts labour over at night? They take care of what the dead leave behind. Earlier, for his 2005 exhibition 'A Pale Fire', Farmer crammed an exhibition hall in Toronto's Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery with truckloads of disused furniture. Piece by piece, he disassembled the furniture and fed it into a metal fireplace, suspended from the ceiling by its slim elongated chimney; the smoke rising over the gallery serving as a visible index of the fact that someone was performing the work of clearing out the city's closets.

But this is demons on the job. Farmer promises no cure to the maladies of civilization. Rather, he sides with all those whom civilization traditionally considers needy of treatment, adjustment or parental advice. And there are armies of them, of us. In *The Surgeon and the Photographer*

(2009), Farmer summons these demonic hordes in the form of hundreds of small paper cut-outs, each a collage of body parts from different sources, affixed to a stick like a shadow-play puppet: they form a queer swarm of pixies and witch doctors; too many for a single tribe, but wildly tribal in spirit. In *The Surgeon and the Photographer*, they take over the stage entirely; in bigger installations, however, they may appear like fairy insects in the shadow of larger objects. In *The Quasi-Cameraman (Make Picture of Kaleidoscope)* (2010), a tiny cosmonaut warrior guards a mast the size of a transistor radio antenna, on which multiple cut-outs and a page of poetry are attached like flags to a tree. Scale and proportion are strictly contingent on your readiness to imagine the mini as macro.

This transformation of small things into spirits is not just a game of make-believe, for Farmer: it's a magical material practice. This was further underscored in the artist's collaboration with Jeremy Millar on *Mondegreen* (2011) for the Project Arts Centre, Dublin. From 10:22am to 7:58pm (the gallery's opening hours were altered accordingly), a performer would work in the exhibition space, rather like a Foley artist, on interpreting a scripted series of small sound events with the help of all kinds of sculptural props, ranging from a box filled with stones (to walk on) to sticks, a whistle, a triangle and other tools for generating percussive effects. The script is based on a minutely detailed description of the day Farmer travelled up to meet Millar to discuss the piece. As in a Cagean listening exercise, the artist noted every environmental sound on his journey, and it is these which are reproduced in the performance. Unlike Cage's work, however, Farmer and Millar's project did not stem from an embrace of uninterrupted presence. Similarly transcribed - and rendered in the performance as, for instance, short text readings - are the slippages into reverie that are prone to occur when one tries hard to focus on the here and now, only to find one's thoughts all the more happily wandering off onto other things, people and places. Each day, the performer worked through a diurnal cycle in the body and mind of someone else, rendering Farmer's experience tangible through a vocal rendering and through noises produced by particular objects which sound like noises made by other things elsewhere.

What is special about Farmer's work is that it is as dedicated to the material culture of labour as it is to the transformative potential of magical practices and a demonic imagination. Implied in the ethos of his art is a defence of an intimacy with things created through labour, yet also a renunciation of the utilitarian mind-set of a worker who will only ever call a spade a spade and will accept no other realities. In Farmer's practice, the practical knowledge of what things are when you work with them is married to a liberating sense of wonder: that is the joy of seeing how things behave when you put them on stage, free them up to be whatever they could be and voice whatever memory clings to them. That's anti-materialist materialism, charged with all the wild magic it needs to take things to the next level. ~

CASEY KAPLAN  
525 WEST 21ST STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10011  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

# Art Review:

Summer 2011, p. 166

## GEOFFREY FARMER

*"Let's Make the Water Turn Black"*  
REDCAT, Los Angeles

The moment you step onto the concrete floor of the gallery from the REDCAT's carpeted lobby, it begins: a box of battered records, a glassed-in bulletin board of pictures, the doors into the main attraction painted a subtle yellow (which the programme tells me elliptically is the colour of 'Travis's shirt', identified by the curator as one of the perpetrators; a scrap torn from it is propped up on a stick against the wall just to the right of the entrance).

Once inside those doors, it's not entirely clear what's actually happening. There is a play composed of sounds and objects. The platform in the centre of the room is bathed in a spectral light - blue, green, red, lavender - that's kind of cheap and kind of beautiful, like you'd find in a dollar burlesque or a higher-browed theatre. There's a story here, but it's a story like a ball of snow rolling over and across the countryside, sucking up houses and fences and getting poked by trees that are uprooted and pulled in. Though disparate, each of the copious elements feels thoughtfully strange, part of the performance of the sculpture that runs about an hour (with an accompanying playbill-like programme/score). A collage of erumpent sounds and stories is speakered in here and there on the platformed stage, from John Cage being introduced in a decades-past lecture at the San Francisco Art Institute to exhibition curator Aram Moshayedi noodling with a harp during the installation.

Here's a short list of just a few of the many things that make up this staged sculptural tableau: a Mothers of Invention record titled *Freak Out!* (1966) on permanent silent revolution, potted plants and cacti, a shrouded figure hatted with a derby erupting flowers, a stick on the ground that mechanically arcs itself erect in the course of the performance, a battered parasol near a pair of Japanese slippers, sundry photographs from farmers hoeing a field to a bevy of gay porn - my favourite is taped on the back of a sizeable replica of an Isamu Noguchi stone copied from a nearby Lil' Tokyo plaza and pictures a man crouched in front of another fellow's tightly-whities, his mouth pressed against the pouch in front of him while the receiver's hand palms his head with a dirty tenderness.



*Let's Make the Water Turn Black*, 2011, installation view. Photo: Scott Groller Courtesy the Artist; Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver and Casey Kaplan, New York.

Sometimes these loose and poetical groupings look like the old jokes of performance art: just pile a bunch of weird stuff in a room and let things happen. But the artist, Vancouverite Geoffrey Farmer, eludes that facile reading with the weird precision of this evocative arrangement and its mechanical choreography. Even with the explicit press-released description of the artist attempting to evoke California counterculture in mind, I like letting the thing mysteriously play, just to watch this performance unfold as I circle the stage, making up my own meaning for what's going on. I feel a part of its live ness, the only living actor in this theatre of sounds and things.

-Andrew Berardini

CASEY KAPLAN  
525 WEST 21ST STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10011  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM



Szewczyk, Monika, "Geoffrey Farmer," *MOUSSE*, Issue #30, p. 48-57.



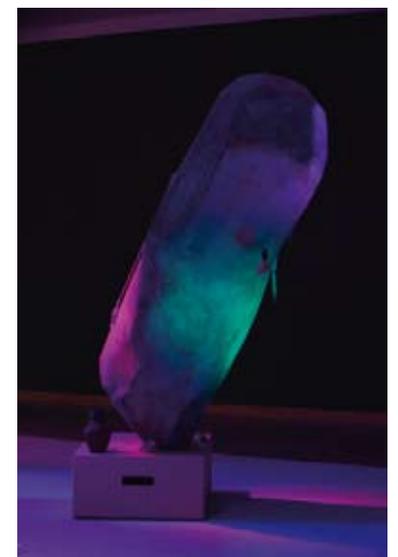
Geoffrey Farmer, *I am by nature one and also many, dividing the single me into many, and even opposing them as great and small, light and dark, and in ten thousand other ways*, 2010

Courtesy: the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York



CHARACTERS  
AND CHARACTERISTICS  
OF THE WORK  
By Monika Szewczyk

The Muppets. Do any fullgrown adults exist that are free of charming memories of those lanky puppets from America, with their eternally open red felt mouths? Canadian artist Geoffrey Farmer not only coopts the imaginary of Big Bird for his personal theater composed of installations and performances that radically alter the character of the gallery; he is also capable of triggering a genuine experience in viewers, plunging them into a vivid postminimalist nightmare...



## MOUSSE 30 ~ Geoffrey Farmer

*monika szewczyk:* Let's set the stage a bit for this interview Geoffrey: usually, I'd be expected to figure out "what makes you tick" as an artist, through a series of penetrating questions – and of course time and the clock are big factors for you so you could play along, play the clock, tick, and I'd watch (pardon the pun!) and mirror it all in words that end with question marks. But maybe we can start with a more specific problem, like an image (that will look really good on the newsprint paper that Mousse uses)... maybe something you still have questions about too and then we



This page and opposite – “Let’s Make the Water Turn Black”, installation view, REDCAT, Los Angeles, 2011. Courtesy: the artist; Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver; and Casey Kaplan, New York. Photo: Scott Groller

*geoffrey farmer:* This image is of a character that appeared in Let’s Make The Water Turn Black which was a sculpture play that I produced in Los Angeles at Redcat this year. It can also function as a clock. This shrouded figure with the tube protruding out of it, represents Aloysius Snuffleupagus, a Muppet from the children’s television program, Sesame Street. He is the imaginary friend of Big Bird. Well, he was imaginary up to 1985, then he became real. The first Snuffleupagus could be seen only by children and Muppets, and it was played by Jerry Nelson between 1971-1978 (until he hurt his back). The second Snuffleupagus, played by Martin Robinson became visible to adults as the writers of the show wanted children to feel that they would be believed if they told their parents something. There were some high-profile news stories in 1985 in the U.S. about alleged ritualistic Satanic sexual abuse in daycares. It was later referred to as a “panic”. The figure appears throughout the piece at various times as both real and imaginary. The piece occurs over the course of an hour and takes place in a darkened space on a large low platform. It loosely weaves together different narratives around the axis of Frank Zappa. At the same time that Snuffleupagus was becoming real, he was testifying in the Senate against Parents Music Resource Center. This was a group founded by Tipper Gore, who wanted record companies to put warning labels on albums that contain sexual or Satanic content.

*ms:* You mean Zappa testified or Jerry Nelson who played Snuffleupagus?

gf: Sorry I mean Frank Zappa, although Snuffleupagus could have been there if he hadn't become real. Elmo (another Muppet) did testify before the U.S. Congress once.

ms: This figure you chose is fascinating for me because I feel that – just as it recurs in the cultural history you describe – I've encountered him/her/it? in your work before, under certain different guises. Now that it is named Aloysius Sneffleupagus, and carries this explicit context you describe (which we are clued into through the title of your work – Let's Make the Water Turn Black – a song by Frank Zappa's band, The Mothers of Invention, that appeared on their 1968 Beatles-parody album We're Only in it for the Money) he acquires the character of a kind of historic, tragic hero.

I'd like to know more about the particular poetics and theatrics you're developing. First of all, I cannot help but rhyme Sneffleupagus with Oedipus – I think we're in the realm of an allegorical family drama, a kind of epic theatre on the order of Sophocles' "Theban Plays", but instead of Ancient Greece, it is set closer to home, in Southern California in the era of the Muppet Generation (that's us!). We move between Frank Zappa's "childhood" and The "Mothers" of Invention and they sing "let's make the water turn black" and we can keep in the back of our heads that they're "only in it for the money". This could be an all-American tale of shattered dreams but then the plot thickens. At least when I look at the script for your Let's Make the Water Turn Black...

01:00 – The doors are propped open by rocks.  
00:59 – Crack!!  
00:58 – A script treatment is put up by an angry man.  
00:57 – A green finger and a seagull hover over the black waters.  
00:56 – A green light is lit for those lost.  
00:55 – A record is placed on the turntable.  
00:54 – Travis caulks the stage, his shirt colour is chosen for the doors.  
00:53 – Frank Zappa at age 15, makes a telephone call to Edgard Varèse.  
00:52 – Clank! Klang!  
00:51 – Insertions, additions, recordings to reproduce a form.  
00:50 – Nose picking. Machine sounds.  
00:49 – Raisins are used to make the water turn black.  
00:48 – Black water makes alcohol.  
00:47 – Then blindness.  
00:46 – Darkness creates a Kabuki space.  
00:45 – In 1603 Okuni lifts up her dress in a dry riverbed.  
00:44 – The Villagers laugh when they see her bush. The Sun comes out of her cave.  
00:43 – This creates another day. Outside becomes inside.  
00:42 – The plaza is born.  
00:41 – Curtain are used as doors.  
00:40 – Two holes are cut out.  
00:39 – Two fans for eyelids.

00:38 – Scratch. Scratch.  
00:37 – A pink light appears and a stage is  
00:36 – A low tone. A high tone.  
00:35 – The clock continues to tick.  
00:34 – The characters are frozen like statues  
00:33 – Theatre emerges.

And that's just the beginning! Can you tell me about what is happening with Aloysius Snuffleupagus, as the script you wrote for the work is "performed"? What kind of theatre is emerging?

*gf:* Aloysius Snuffleupagus was kind of a troublemaker before he became real. Not in the way that Oscar the Grouch was (he puts ketchup in Big Bird's alarm clock every morning) but trouble in the way that the imaginary can be. He was deceptive. Difficult to describe to those who couldn't see him. Totally unreliable. Mythical. I was born about the same year that Sesame Street began airing. A lot of us were part of the experiment which, for the first time, used the recommendation of child psychologists in a feedback loop of constant analysis of children's responses to the episodes. Aspects of it have surfaced now and again in my work, like in Puppet Kit/Personality Workshop. In Let's Make The Water Turn Black, I was interested in the correlation of Zappa testifying and Snuffy becoming real. Things in the U.S. really began to shift at this point in time. In the piece Snuffy became a very abstract time-keeper, a narrator that can only communicate through elephant sounds. He was sort of off to one side of the platform and would appear and disappear. The shape concealed a huge subwoofer and speakers that could make very very deep sounds that you could feel in your body. Mournful sounds of an elephant dying.

I am not sure what kind of theatre this is that is emerging. When I first read your question I thought of the title of another work of mine, Finally The Street Becomes The Main Character. It has something to do with shifting between object and subject. Going back and forth. At first the child psychologist didn't want to show the human actors interacting with the Muppets as they felt it would confuse and mislead the children. But in the end it was more interesting to combine them. The piece itself functions like this. It is part puppet, part set, part instrument. It shifts back and forth. In terms of theatre perhaps it is more of a kind of space, like a théâtre; a place for collective viewing and observing.

*ms:* I'm really curious about this aspect of invisibility you mentioned earlier, or more precisely of bringing invisible things into appearance...

*gf:* When I was four I met Big Bird at an afternoon symphony event in Vancouver. It was backstage and he came over to meet us, and as he approached and leaned down to shake our hands I could quite clearly see a yellow screen and a face inside. There was also some fishing line holding one of his hands up

in place. It was a very creepy experience. I kept saying, “this isn’t Big Bird, this isn’t Big Bird!” and everyone was assuring me it was. Stranger was perhaps the sensation of not being sure if other people could see this face inside there.

*ms:* That’s horrifying! I used to think this experience of not seeing what everyone else sees was the quintessential experience of the immigrant, the alien, but I realize everyone must have this and if you’re not the immigrant it’s probably even more earth shattering somehow. It also makes me think of what Brecht called the *Verfremdungseffekt* (the distancing or alienation effect). But I’m not sure if we should consider this too quickly as a politically “liberating” force, as Brecht hoped. I asked you about the kind of theatre you were making because I get the sense when I see your work – very much so from the parade float of *Every Surface In Someway Decorated Altered, Or Changed Forever (Except The Float)*, for instance – that we are in the realm of something epic. Now, I may be projecting here – seeing something in the work that you don’t see. But maybe that compulsion to project is also part of the *théatron* you’re building. Still, I should specify: I don’t really want to subsume all your work into the definition of “epic theatre” that floats around the work of Piscator, Mayakowsky or Brecht and is the stuff of dramaturgical debate. I mean “epic” in a visceral way. In the end, Brecht grabbed at the term only until he settled on “dialectical theatre,” so “epic” was kind of abandoned and became an orphan. Maybe *The Muppet Show* is part of an unwritten history of this tradition of another kind of “epic theatre”. If one has not read or written this history, it might be difficult to reconcile your penchant for downright goofy gestures with another tendency: to bring in ancient associations and things that are full of pathos, *chronos* even. There is a strong sense of this in *The Last Two Million Years...*



The Quasi-Cameraman (Make Picture Of Kaleidoscope), 2010  
Courtesy: the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York

*MOUSSE 30 ~ Geoffrey Farmer*

*gf*: I don't know if I ever want those two gestures to be reconciled. In a piece like *The Last Two Million Years*, there is what you see and what you read. They don't necessarily match up. The small newsprint book that accompanies the piece has texts correlating numerically to the grouping of the historical cutouts. The texts are a mixture of a more subjective and sometime humours statements and historical description that have more pathos:

103. In our most desperate moment a small spider appears bearing good news.

104. My head caught on fire.

105. The Homosexuals in their fancy robes, walking an exotic bird which emerged from a tapestry.

106. Isaac Newton's reflector telescope.

107. None of our children survived the war.

I know you're talking about something slightly different. But these gestures have some correlation. In the *Redcat* piece, I wanted it to be like a kaleidoscope. Some parts are imaginary and others appear more like my meeting with *Big Bird* back stage. They tumble around together.

*ms*: I'm also curious, what do you think will become of *Let's Make The Water Turn Black* and *Aloysius Snuffleupagus* in the next say two years?



"The Vampire Of Coyacan And His Twenty Achichintles",  
installation view, Museo Experimental El Eco, Mexico City, 2010.  
Courtesy: Museo Experimental El Eco, Mexico City.  
Photo: Ramiro Chaves

*gf*: Not to harp on it, but Snuffleupagus should have stayed imaginary. I know it is important to have some collective agreements of what we see but it was a really anticlimactic and awkward when the adults finally saw him. It was sad... like killing an elephant. Elmo was holding onto his trunk so he couldn't get away and then the adults, with these bizarre expressions on their faces say: "Oh, he's real... we are sorry for not believing you for 15 years". Then they shake his trunk like it was a hand! It was terrible.

But to answer your question, there will be goofy things next to things full of pathos. Purposefully goofy, a kind that I feel I am extracting from the 1970s. The defying authority kind (self-authority as well). That is what interests me about the goofiness that is Frank Zappa. He was a very interesting character. He was a great experimenter and musical innovator. Interested from a very early age in Edgard Varèse and Musique Concrete. I'm not interested in goofiness as an ironic position, which to me is more about a kind of sardonic deferral. There has to be some sincerity to it. If there is an epic structure to the work it is perhaps that it is concerned with a kind of human materialism mixed with disparate elements. Someone living in a garbage can with something to say. I want to develop the score/script over the next few years and keep working on the sound recordings. It is complicated and takes some time as the lighting, movement of the objects and sounds are computer programmed. It is both generative and scheduled. Things happen at certain times throughout the day. There are technical issues to be solved. The piece as it exists now, is the reconstruction of a plaza in L.A, the one outside of the Japanese American Cultural Community Centre downtown. One of the problems we encountered was the noise from the mechanical moving parts. For example there is an Isamu Noguchi sculpture that is able to change positions. What we didn't realize was the amount of noise the mechanical arm that moved the sculpture would make. It was really startling. It sounded a bit like a dump truck. It made people laugh.

Laughter can sometimes be a double-edged sword...

*ms*: ...it takes a fine balance. There's just one last thing I am curious about, something that is somewhat related to the "technical issues to be solved": what do you see as the role of machines in your work and in the world? And does your notion of trying to play an instrument have something to do with how you think we (humans) should interact with machines?

*gf*: I want to be cynically optimistic (in the true sense of the term – cynic coming from canine). If I had to choose a machine to illustrate this, it would be one of those contraptions people make so they don't have to put their dogs down when their dogs lose the use of their hind legs. You know those little dog wheelchairs.

*MOUSSE 30 ~ Geoffrey Farmer*



Left and below – *Let's Make the Water Turn Black* (details), installation views, REDCAT, Los Angeles, 2011. Courtesy: the artist; Casey Kaplan, New York; and Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver



*I am by nature one and also many, dividing the single me into many, and even opposing them as great and small, light and dark, and in ten thousand other ways*, 2010.

Courtesy: the artist and Casey Kaplan, NY



*"The Vampire Of Coyacan And His Twenty Achichintles"*, installation view, Museo Experimental El Eco, Mexico City, 2010.

Courtesy: Museo Experimental El Eco, Mexico City.

Photo: Ramiro Chaves

*MOUSSE 30 ~ Geoffrey Farmer*



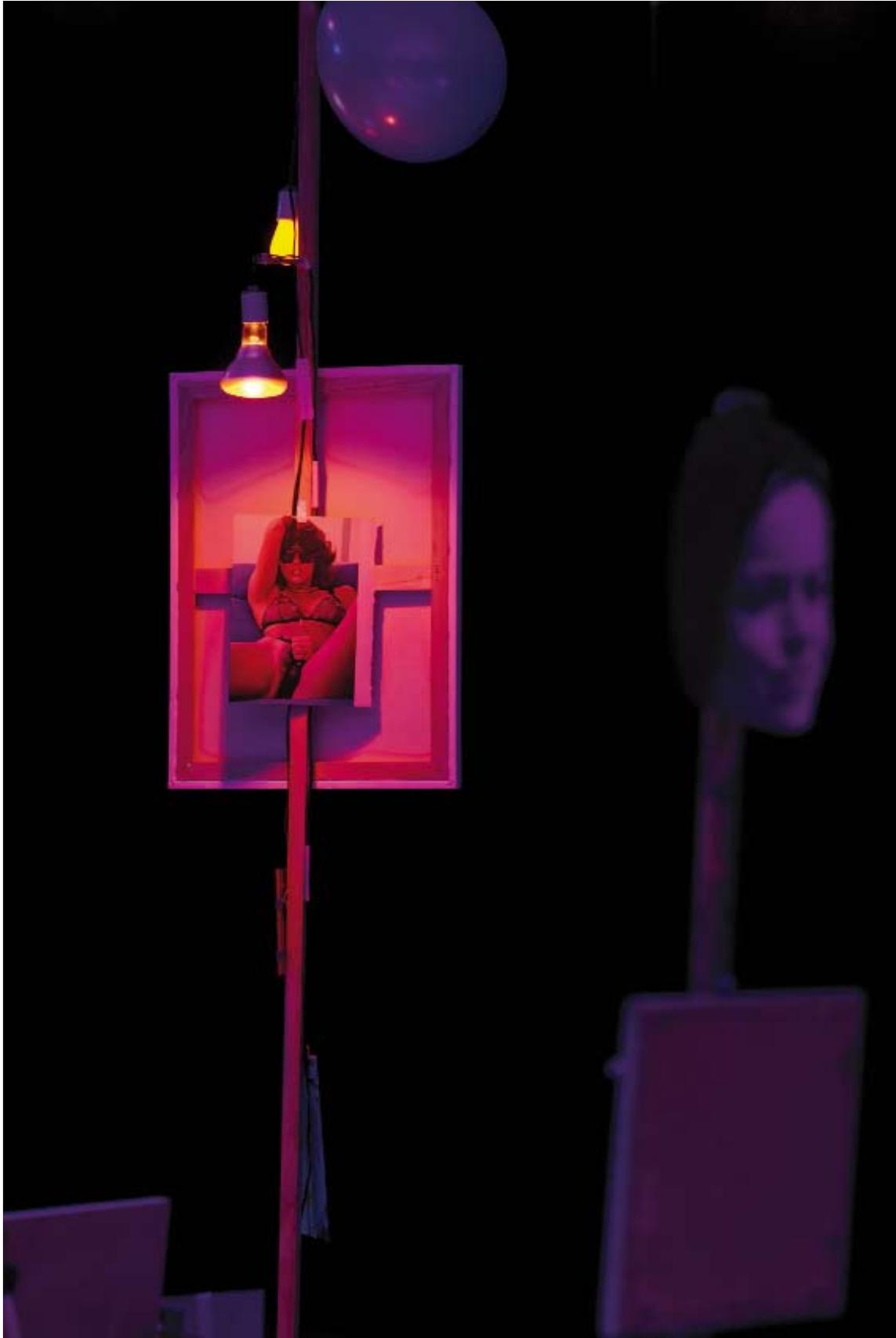
This page and opposite – Geoffrey Farmer and Jeremy Millar, “Mondegreen”, installation views, Project Arts Centre, Dublin, 2011. Courtesy: Project Arts Centre, Dublin



*MOUSSE 30 ~ Geoffrey Farmer*



*MOUSSE 30 ~ Geoffrey Farmer*



*Let's Make the Water Turn Black*, installation view, REDCAT, Los Angeles, 2011.  
Courtesy: the artist; Casey Kaplan, New York; and Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver

*MOUSSE 30 ~ Geoffrey Farmer*



This page, unless otherwise specified – *Airliner Open Studio*, installation view, Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver, 2006. Courtesy: Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver



*I am by nature one and also many, dividing the single me into many, and even opposing them as great and small, light and dark, and in ten thousand other ways*, installation view, Witte de With, Rotterdam, 2008. Photo: Bob Goedewaagen



CASEY KAPLAN  
525 WEST 21ST STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10011  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

# ARTFORUM

LOS ANGELES

## Geoffrey Farmer REDCAT

The stage is set and lights dimmed. Whenever you might have chosen to enter Geoffrey Farmer's complex theatrical environment *Let's Make the Water Turn Black*, 2011, the play had always already begun and you were late, again. Instead of actors, groups of various found objects and constructed props, magazine pictures, and mechanized sculptures, large and small, enacted the installation's protracted and looping drama on the sprawling light-gray platform that occupied the center of the darkened gallery.

Clustered in spotlight tableaux and dispersed according to far-reaching compositional schemes, sundry props colonized the stage—a potted plant made from paper; a stuffed pair of red-and-black striped socks; wine bottles (broken and intact); a tie-dyed shirt draped over an easel; speakers, boxes, bowlers, and top hats; a leafy tree branch with an owl-shaped wind chime; a chair and a mat; Japanese wooden sandals; a lantern next to a basket of colored lightbulbs, a pile of sticks lit from within like a campfire, and a turntable bearing the Mothers of Invention's 1966 debut album, *Freak Out!* There were a multitude of details to consider. Meanwhile, several larger elements constituted this absurd theater's core cast of character-sculptures, from a mysteriously faceless, board trunk to the dynamic star of the show, a monolith of faux rock the farmer modeled after Isamu Noguchi's stone sculpture *To the Issei*, 1983, a civic landmark located in a plaza some blocks away in Los Angeles's Little Tokyo. Luridly tinted blue, purple, and red by extreme astral lighting, the hunk stood erect and stolid, and idolatrous emblem of phallic hardness inanimate until its internal gear creaked and it began to lean, gradually tipping all the way over before jerking back to a vertical position moments later.

A stilted and syncopated kineticism of sporadically spazzing limbs and intermittently twitching bodies pervaded the entire setup, which was intricately wired with mechanized components and a circuit of colored lights embedded jewel-like onstage and hung from above. Meticulously choreographed, the programmed lighting synced with sequences of motorized actions and the varying decibel levels of a continuous sound track, injecting the scene with immersive sound effects, spare melodic passages, and monologuing voices that insinuated psychic and social drama. Hybridizing poetic verse and stage direction, the artist's



View of "Geoffrey Farmer," 2011.

accompanying program notes tersely codified the work's precise chronological progression of the visual, sonic, and oblique narrative cues, introducing interwoven references to John Cage, Kathy Acker, Merce Cunningham, Aram Moshayedi (the exhibition's curator, and Frank Zappa (after whose 1968 song this installation was named), while making explicit Farmer's primary fascination here with the spare, off kilter stylings of Kabuki theater.

Whatever elusive narrative tenuously connects Farmer's con-  
gregation of disparate players, it is too disjointed, elliptical, and obscure to be coherently parsed. Rather, attention gravitates toward the bewitching atmospheric conditions and charged trappings of staged performance, the lingering dreamlike sense that, as suggested in the play's voice-over narration, "a beautiful dramatization occurred." Tapping the simulacral vein of Duchamps's *Etant donnés* or theatricalized configurations by artists like Marc Camille Chaimowicz, Guy de Cointet, and William Leavitt, Farmer exquisitely realizes an elevated mode of rapturous reception both estranged from and magnetically attracted to the installation's concealed and unpredictable internal order, wherein everything seemingly unconnected is, in fact, recognized to be intimately in sync and fundamentally unified at an unseen core-level. Here pleasure resides, then, in the subtle dynamics of glowing and dimming lights—turn-ons and turn-offs—that register ebbs and flows of energy, instigating waves of dramatic tension both onstage and in the viewer. The room's calibrated darkness carries latent sexual possibility crystallized by the many homoerotic pictures clipped from flesh magazines and taped to the erogenous zones of objects populating the scenery. Kabuki, after all, has always been twinned with the sensual services of the brothel.

—Sarah Lehrer Graiwer

CASEY KAPLAN  
525 WEST 21ST STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10011  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Moser, Gabrielle, "Geoffrey Farmer: Playing Stateside," *Canadian Art*, March 17, 2011, < [http://www.canadianart.ca/online/reviews/2011/03/17/geoffrey\\_farmer/](http://www.canadianart.ca/online/reviews/2011/03/17/geoffrey_farmer/)>

# CANADIANART

## Geoffrey Farmer: Playing Stateside

CASEY KAPLAN, NEW YORK FEB 10 TO MAR 19 2011

by GABRIELLE MOSER



Geoffrey Farmer *Lost Dogs and Half-Eaten Apples* 2011 Courtesy Casey Kaplan / photo Cary Whittier

In his first solo exhibition in the United States, Vancouver-based artist Geoffrey Farmer brings his characteristic playfulness and canny knack for manipulating mundane materials to difficult themes of transformation, mutilation and mortality. Given the artist's prolific output in dozens of international venues over the past decade, the stateside solo show at Casey Kaplan seems long overdue. But if there is any exhibition fit to introduce Farmer's sprawling, infectiously curious approach to art-making to the uninitiated, it is the tightly selected "Bacon's Not the Only Thing That Is Cured By Hanging From a String."

In keeping with his previous projects, which saw Farmer mine the intuitive connections between everyday objects and

grandiose themes of time, history and philosophy, this new series of work unearths a rich network of references among avant-garde filmmaking, ancient Egyptian burial rituals and modernist poetry. *Pulling Your Brains Out Through Your Nose*, which opens the exhibition, features hundreds of photographed faces and objects cut out from fashion, news and pornography magazines. Taped together and suspended from bits of coat hangers unceremoniously shoved into the gallery drywall, the hanging forms evoke Surrealist collages but also call up a long history of mummification practices, meant to prepare the dead for passage into the afterlife. Fluttering delicately whenever a viewer passes them, Farmer's monstrous characters gesture towards human figures without cohering into intelligible beings.



Geoffrey Farmer "Bacon's Not The Only Thing That Is Cured By Hanging From A String" 2011 Exhibition view Courtesy Casey Kaplan / photo Cary Whittier

Mimicry and transformation also underpin the largest work in the exhibition, a series of 13 makeshift lampposts constructed from plywood, found objects and exposed light bulbs. Farmer is at his best when he is unapologetically playful, and the stand-out sculptural forms in the series are those that straddle theatrical whimsy and an eerie sense of foreboding. Given individual titles, such as *The Greeter* and *Little Feather*, the lampposts operate as mini-altars to forgotten objects that have been creatively appropriated to serve new functions. In *Tongue Standing Upright*, for instance, a plastic grocery bag becomes a suffocating lampshade, while in *Shadow and Grow* fabric, foam and cardboard are imaginatively placed to simulate a

willowy female form (recalling one of the artist's earliest and most memorable projects, "Catriona Jeffries Catriona," 2001). The series is inspired by Rainer Werner Fassbinder's 1978 film, *In a Year Of 13 Moons*, which follows the protagonist's tragic efforts to win the affections of another man by undergoing a not-wholly-convincing sex-change operation. The narrative of earnest but unsuccessful masquerading is perhaps a fitting metaphor for Farmer's artistic practice as a whole, which often makes seemingly impossible demands of humble objects.

The final gallery, which holds 10 distinct, small-scale works, most closely resembles Farmer's 2009 installation, *The Surgeon and the Photographer*, with dozens of miniature forms cobbled together from cutout photographs, clay, fabric and tape. On a low table, *Lost Dogs and Half-Eaten Apples* presents a procession of 29 puppet-like figures supported by wooden dowels, cardboard and pencils. Meticulously assembled, some of the characters even sport impossibly small LED lights, which twinkle intermittently atop open parasols and delicately presented rings.

Amid all this ornamentation, however, Farmer's work continuously refers to the passing of time and the ephemeral nature of our interventions into the world of objects. Even the title of the exhibition, drawn from an early-20th-century poem by forgotten British author Hugh Kingsmill, lends Farmer's arrangements a sinister undertone. "Like enough, you won't be glad, / When they come to hang you, lad," writes Kingsmill. "But bacon's not the only thing / That's cured by hanging from a string." Seen in this light, Farmer's new work offers more than a poetic narrative about the transformative possibilities of everyday materials, and instead meditates on the ways we try to cope with life's larger mysteries through the tools we have at hand.



Geoffrey Farmer "Bacon's Not The Only Thing That Is Cured By Hanging From A String" 2011 Exhibition view Courtesy Casey Kaplan / photo Cary Whittier

CASEY KAPLAN  
525 WEST 21ST STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10011  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

# The New York Times

ART IN REVIEW

## GEOFFREY FARMER

By ROBERTA SMITH

Published: March 10, 2011

*Casey Kaplan*  
525 West 21st Street  
Chelsea  
Through March 19

In his American gallery debut the Canadian artist Geoffrey Farmer seems fairly obsessed with the sculptural possibilities of photographs, which he explores by cutting images from magazines and lodging them in space using several charming methods. The show's opening gallery contains a large installation piece whose title — “Pulling Your Brains Out Through Your Nose” — refers to the method by which the dead are prepared for mummification. It consists of numerous clusters of three or four cutout images of various figures, faces, masks, artifacts and the occasional animal that have been taped together and then suspended on wires protruding from the wall. It is as if the cobbled-together figures of Surrealist exquisite-corpse drawings have been liberated from their pages and hung out to dry. (They often evoke the work of Nancy Spero, an interesting debt.)

The second gallery makes a wonderful, stagelike first impression, with a glade of 13 crudely improvised lampposts made from wood, metal and bare light bulbs. To these various cutout images, found objects and shelves have been affixed. The more disparate works in the final gallery include two in which the images are attached to chunks of foam, and, in the case of an impressive piece titled “Lost Dogs and Half-Eaten Apples,” stuck into pedestals of hand-shaped clay. The effect is Miróesque.

There is a definite poetry and magic to Mr. Farmer's work, which like that of Sara VanDerBeek and Goshka Macuga, seems bent on excavating existing images in order to fuse collage and assemblage into a fresh cultural commentary, a kind of post-postmodernism. But while Mr. Farmer's efforts are initially intriguing, their general arrangements can feel formulaic, even though the mode of presentation often remains more engaging than the specific images. There is not always enough incentive to look more closely.

A version of this review appeared in print on March 11, 2011, on page C26 of the New York edition.



CARY WHITTIER/CASEY KAPLAN  
“The Life Cycle of Picture-Making” (2011), by Geoffrey Farmer,  
at Casey Kaplan.

CASEY KAPLAN  
525 WEST 21ST STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10011  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Wilson, Michael, "New York: Geoffrey Farmer," *artforum.com*, February 2011, < <http://artforum.com/picks/section=nyc#picks27646>>

# ARTFORUM

## New York

### Geoffrey Farmer

CASEY KAPLAN

525 West 21st Street

February 10 - March 19, 2011

In his suggestively titled US debut, "Bacon's Not the Only Thing That Is Cured by Hanging from a String," Canadian artist Geoffrey Farmer plays the damaged and delicate against the faux architectural, employing a collage logic that, while stylish, happily never settles into a comfortable groove. Known for a mercurial refusal of fixity and completion—many of his works are designed to change over the course of their public lives—Farmer produces objects and installations that rope found images and forms into a dance of shifting reference and formal tension. In this exhibition, the Vancouver-based artist shows extracts from one distinct series alongside a number of other individual works, all of them colored by a likable feeling for the sheer fun of shoving one thing up against another.



Geoffrey Farmer, *Pulling Your Brains Out Through Your Nose*, 2011, printed material, cut coat hangers, tape, dimensions variable.

Occupying the main gallery is a forest of hand-built lampposts purportedly inspired by a line from Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *In a Year with 13 Moons* (1978) concerning the satellite's apocryphally deranging effect on mental health. Each painted wooden post is decorated with a selection of found and adapted bits 'n' bobs and topped with a colored bulb. No individual component is particularly distinctive, yet the whole set feels rather spooky and—appropriately—slightly unhinged. *Pulling Your Brains Out Through Your Nose*, 2011, installed in the gallery's first room, is a cluster of precariously taped-together magazine clippings suspended from chopped-up coat hangers. Again, the artist employs research (his allusion here is to mummification) as a springboard into something altogether more plastic and poetic than the term generally suggests.

--Michael Wilson

**CASEY KAPLAN**  
525 WEST 21ST STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10011  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**GEOFFREY FARMER**

**BACON'S NOT THE ONLY THING THAT IS CURED  
BY HANGING FROM A STRING.**

EXHIBITION DATES:

FEBRUARY 10 – MARCH 19, 2011

OPENING:

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 6 – 8 PM

PRESS PREVIEW WITH THE ARTIST:

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 5 PM

GALLERY HOURS:

TUESDAY – SATURDAY, 10 AM – 6 PM

Casey Kaplan is pleased to announce the exhibition Geoffrey Farmer, "Bacon's Not The Only Thing That Is Cured By Hanging From A String." This will be Farmer's first solo exhibition both at the gallery and in the United States.

Farmer is known internationally for his projects that transform and alter over the course of their exhibitions. His installations are composed of diverse materials and various working methodologies that are rooted in research and in response to site. Farmer creates conceptual works with poetic narratives, often combining his interests in the material production of the art object with theories of psychology and dramatic presentation.

Central to this exhibition, Farmer presents a new series of thirteen illuminated lamp posts interspersed throughout the space. The lamp posts hover between the architectural and figural, as each is comprised of found objects, photomontage materials, props and a light source. The wood posts developed out of Farmer's interest in Rainer Werner Fassbinder's, "In a Year with Thirteen Moons" and its opening text:

"Every seventh year is a year of the moon. Certain people, whose existence is influenced mainly by their emotions, suffer from intense depressions in these moon years. This is also true to a lesser degree of years with thirteen new moons. And when a moon year is also a year with thirteen new moons, it often results in inevitable personal catastrophes..."

Along with this series, Farmer will also present a large-scale photomontage wall work titled, "Pulling Your Brains Out Through Your Nose," which makes reference to the Egyptian mummification process of extracting the brain in order to preserve the body. A multitude of images, cut from various printed sources, are suspended from cut coat hangers and inserted directly into the gallery wall.

In the series, "Lost Dogs and Half-Eaten Apples," Farmer presents smaller figural works displayed on a low table. Made mostly of clay, wire, bricolage, and lights, these maquette-like pieces read and reference as unusual types of puppets or Kachina dolls. Images are inserted directly into the clay forms, accentuating the materiality of the printed image and their ability to transform, by illusion, into three-dimensional form.

Geoffrey Farmer is currently based in Vancouver. Past solo exhibitions include: Walter Phillips Gallery, The Banff Centre, Banff Alberta (2010), Museo Experimental El Eco, Mexico City, Mexico (2010), Witte de With, Rotterdam, The Netherlands (2008), and the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, Quebec (2008). Farmer will open, "Let's Make the Water Turn Black," on March 5th at the REDCAT in Los Angeles after completing a month long residency there. The artist will also be participating in the Istanbul Biennial opening September 17 and will have a major solo exhibition planned to open at the Vancouver Art Gallery, Canada in 2013.

FOR FURTHER EXHIBITION INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT MEAGHAN KENT AT THE GALLERY, MEAGHAN@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

THE GALLERY WILL HAVE EXTENDED HOURS ON MARCH 4, 2011, FROM 6-8PM, TO LAUNCH THE PUBLICATION, *DRAWING ROOM CONFESSIONS* INCLUDING ITS LATEST ISSUE #2: *JASON DODGE*. FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE VISIT: WWW.DRAWINGROOMCONFESSIONS.COM

NEXT GALLERY EXHIBITION: JONATHAN MONK, *YOUR NAME HERE*, MARCH 24 – APRIL 30, 2011

GALLERY ARTISTS: HENNING BOHL, MATTHEW BRANNON, JEFF BURTON, NATHAN CARTER, MILES COOLIDGE, JASON DODGE, TRISHA DONNELLY, GEOFFREY FARMER, PAMELA FRASER, LIAM GILLICK, ANNIKA VON HAUSSWOLFF, CARSTEN HÖLLER, BRIAN JUNGEN, JONATHAN MONK, MARLO PASCUAL, DIEGO PERRONE, JULIA SCHMIDT, SIMON STARLING, DAVID THORPE, GABRIEL VORMSTEIN, GARTH WEISER, JOHANNES WOHNSEIFER

CASEY KAPLAN  
525 WEST 21ST STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10011  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Herbert, Martin, "Now See This - Geoffrey Farmer," *Art Review*., January/February 2011, p. 29-30

**Geoffrey Farmer** (*Casey Kaplan, New York, 10 February – 19 March, www.caseykaplangallery.com*) tends to start with something epic and then, improbably, make it bigger. The Vancouver-based slow-burner previously worked up an installation, collaged over the course of the show's run from images in a musty *Reader's Digest* encyclopaedia covering 'the last two million years'; elsewhere he's exhibited a kit for transforming oneself into the Hunchback of Notre Dame and, in the recent *Every Letter in the Alphabet* (2010), dedicated a year to commissioning, gathering and producing a wide range of texts for distribution around his home city. In Farmer's hands, the epic models we create of the world at once spin towards irrelevance and – through his and our modulations turn the exhibition format into a space to rehearse an endless refusal of finality.



from top: Geoffrey Farmer , *You Will Not Know About Me*, 2010, mixed media, dimensions variable, unique (installation view), *Huckleberry Finn*, 2010, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Art, San Francisco, photo: Johnna Arnold, courtesy the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York

CASEY KAPLAN  
525 WEST 21ST STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10011  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

“Geoffrey Farmer, Artist to Watch,” *The Art Economist*, Vol. 1/Issue 1 - January 2011, p. 77



**Geoffrey Farmer. *The Surgeon and the Photographer*, 2009 (detail)**  
365-puppet figures, fabric, found images, metal stands,  
each figure approximately 18 x 5 x 5 in. (45.7 x 12.7 x 12.7 cm),  
Courtesy of Catriona Jeffries Gallery.

## GEOFFREY FARMER

### ARTIST TO WATCH

Geoffrey Farmer was born in 1967 in British Columbia and lives and works in Vancouver. He uses found objects (from such dissimilar sources as *Reader's Digest* and airplane fuselage), videos, drawings and photography to create complex installations that he tends to change afterhours through the run of the exhibition. For Farmer, the process of installing the work is just as important as the finished product. Therefore, to satisfy his interest in the process, he alters his installations on a nearly nightly basis. He has recreated entire airplane cabins and household bathrooms as a restaging of the basic into something artistic and theatrical.

His most recent and successful works (that could fit in any collectors home or gallery space) are his sculptures that merge photos, fabric and prints joined on foamcore and mounted on metal armatures—creating something more akin to collage than assemblage. Displayed as single pieces or many grouped together (at times numbering into the hundreds), he creates a field of abstracted figural forms.

In 2008, Witte de With (Rotterdam) presented Farmers first major solo exhibition in Europe. Subsequent solo exhibitions have been held at LAXART, a mid-career survey at Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, The Drawing Room (London), Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art (Sunderland) and Contemporary Art Gallery (Vancouver). Farmer has also participated in Biennales in both Sydney and Brussels, as well as in group exhibitions at the Tate Modern, ICA Boston and CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts. Most notably he was included in *Creamier' Contemporary Art in Culture: 10 Curators, 100 Contemporary Artists, 10 Sources*—the fifth edition of Phaidon Press' *Cream* series that spotlights 100 emerging artists from around the world.

Farmer studied at the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in Vancouver and at the San Francisco Art Institute and is represented by Catriona Jeffries Gallery in Vancouver.

CASEY KAPLAN  
525 WEST 21ST STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10011  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

The Art of Tomorrow. Edited by Laura Hoptman, Yilmaz Dziewior, Uta Grosenick, Distanz, Verlag, Germany, 2010. 122-125

122

## GEOFFREY FARMER



1967 geboren in Vancouver, Kanada, lebt und arbeitet in Vancouver  
**1967 born in Vancouver, Canada, lives and works in Vancouver**

**2008** 16th Biennale of Sydney—Revolutions—*Forms That Turn*  
**2008** Brussels Biennial 1—*Show me, don't tell me*

www.caseykaplangallery.com  
www.catrionajeffries.com

*Theatre of Cruelty*, 2008  
Props, found objects, fabric,  
computer-controlled LED lighting system,  
speakers, framed photographs  
Dimensions variable

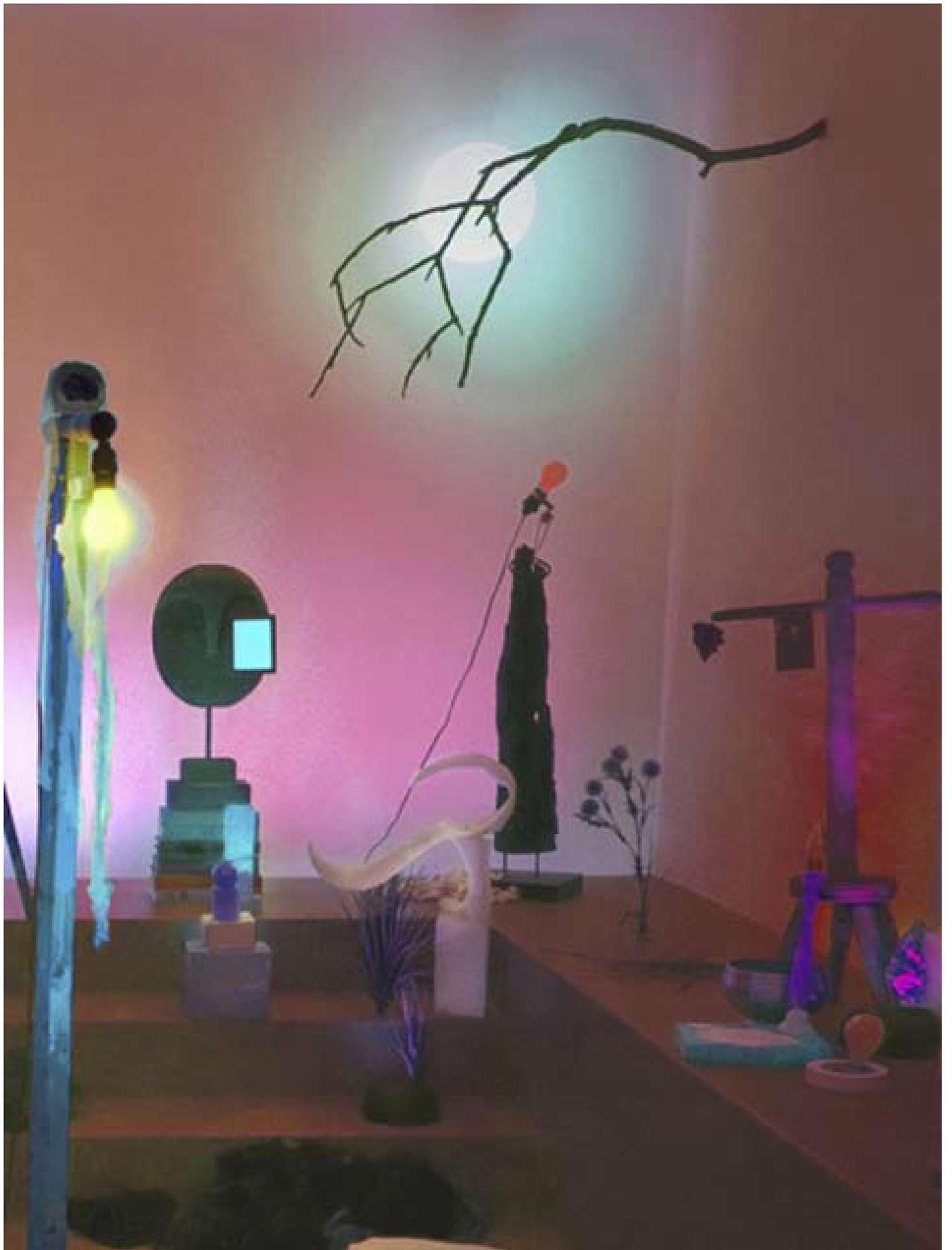
Das Werk von Geoffrey Farmer ist unter anderem durch seinen zutiefst prozessualen Charakter geprägt—der Künstler gibt dem Prozess und Projekt auf programmatische Weise Vorrang vor dem Objekt und dem finalen Ergebnis. Anders formuliert, könnte man behaupten, dass das Wesen von Farmers künstlerischer Praxis in einer Destabilisierung sämtlicher Vorstellungen des Wesens liegt, das ein einzelnes, begrenztes Objekt umfassen könnte. Dieses Interesse am Prozess und am sprunghaften Charakter aufgeführter oder inszenierter Ereignisse bedeutet für gewöhnlich, dass ein Betrachter, der eine Ausstellung von Farmers Werk nur einmal sieht, lediglich einen flüchtigen Blick auf die erzählerische Entwicklung seiner Kunst erhascht; sehr oft kehrt der Künstler, sofern es die Umstände erlauben, an den Ort der Konzeption, Kreation und Ausführung zurück, um sein Werk sanft, aber bestimmt auf seinem Weg der ständigen Transformation zu leiten, sodass der teilnehmende Betrachter (um eine berühmte Äußerung von Heraklit zu umschreiben) nie zweimal dasselbe Environment betritt. So überrascht es nicht, dass die ästhetische Gesamtwirkung dieser labyrinthischen, stets veränderlichen Environments oft an Wucherungen, Streuungen, Versenkungen und Fragmentierungen denken lässt; sie offenbart eine tiefe Faszination durch Bricolage (Bri-Collage wäre der treffendere Begriff), Handwerk und die verblüffenden Artefakte der alltäglichen Objektwelt. Doch im Unterschied zu vielen Künstlern seiner Generation, die im Rahmen derselben allgemeinen Ästhetik arbeiten, sind Farmers Installationen stets streng choreografiert und folgen einem präzisen Drehbuch.

Ein narrativer Aspekt, der einige seiner bekannteren Galerieausstellungen kennzeichnete, war der des Ehrengelichts oder der Prozession: Ein festlich geschmückter Prunkwagen bildete das zentrale Element seiner Ausstellung in der Catriona Jeffries Gallery 2004; ein ähnliches Element flächendeckender Ornamentierung tauchte in seinem *Airliner Open Studio* (2006) wieder auf; und das Motiv des Marsches, diesmal in wirklich großem Maßstab, fand sich in der Ausstellung *The Surgeon and the Photographer* 2009 wieder, wo ein vielköpfiges Arrangement von 365 Figuren aus Papier und Stoff zu sehen war, das unter der sprichwörtlichen Flagge von Aby Warburgs "Mnemosyne-Atlas" marschierte ein Aufstand von Form und Figuration, der von Warburgs originellem Sinn für antihierarchisches visuelles Denken erfüllt war.

One of the defining characteristics of Geoffrey Farmer's work is its profoundly processual character—the artist's programmatic prioritisation of process and project over object and end result. Putting it differently, we might say that the essence of Farmer's practice is located in the destabilisation of all ideas of essence as contained in a singular, finite object. This interest in process and in the mercurial nature of the performed or staged event usually means that a one-time visitor to an exhibition of Farmer's work catches no more than a fleeting glimpse of his art's narrative unfolding; very often, the artist will return, for as long as circumstances allow, to the site of conception, creation, and execution to gently but decidedly guide his work along a trajectory of constant transformation, so that the viewer-participant (to paraphrase a famous Heraclitean sound bite) never steps into the same environment twice. Not surprisingly, the overall aesthetic effect of these labyrinthine, ever-changing environments is often one of sprawl, scatter, immersion, and fragmentation, revealing a deep fascination with bricolage (bri-collage would be the more appropriate term), craft, and the bewildering artifice of the quotidian object-world. Yet in contrast to many artists of his generation who operate within the parameters of the same general aesthetic, Farmer's installations are always tightly choreographed and follow a very precise script.

One narrative aspect that has informed some of his more high-profile gallery exhibitions is that of the cortege or procession: the festively adorned parade float was the central element in an exhibition at Catriona Jeffries Gallery in 2004; a similar element of all-over ornamentation returned in his *Airliner Open Studio* (2006); and the motif of the march, this time on a truly massive scale, appeared again in his 2009 exhibition *The Surgeon and the Photographer*, which featured a multitudinous arrangement of 365 paper and cloth figures marching under the proverbial banner of Aby Warburg's 'Mnemosyne Atlas' a riot of form and figuration animated by Warburg's original spirit of anti-hierarchical visual thought.

Dieter Roelstraete



## GEOFFREY FARMER

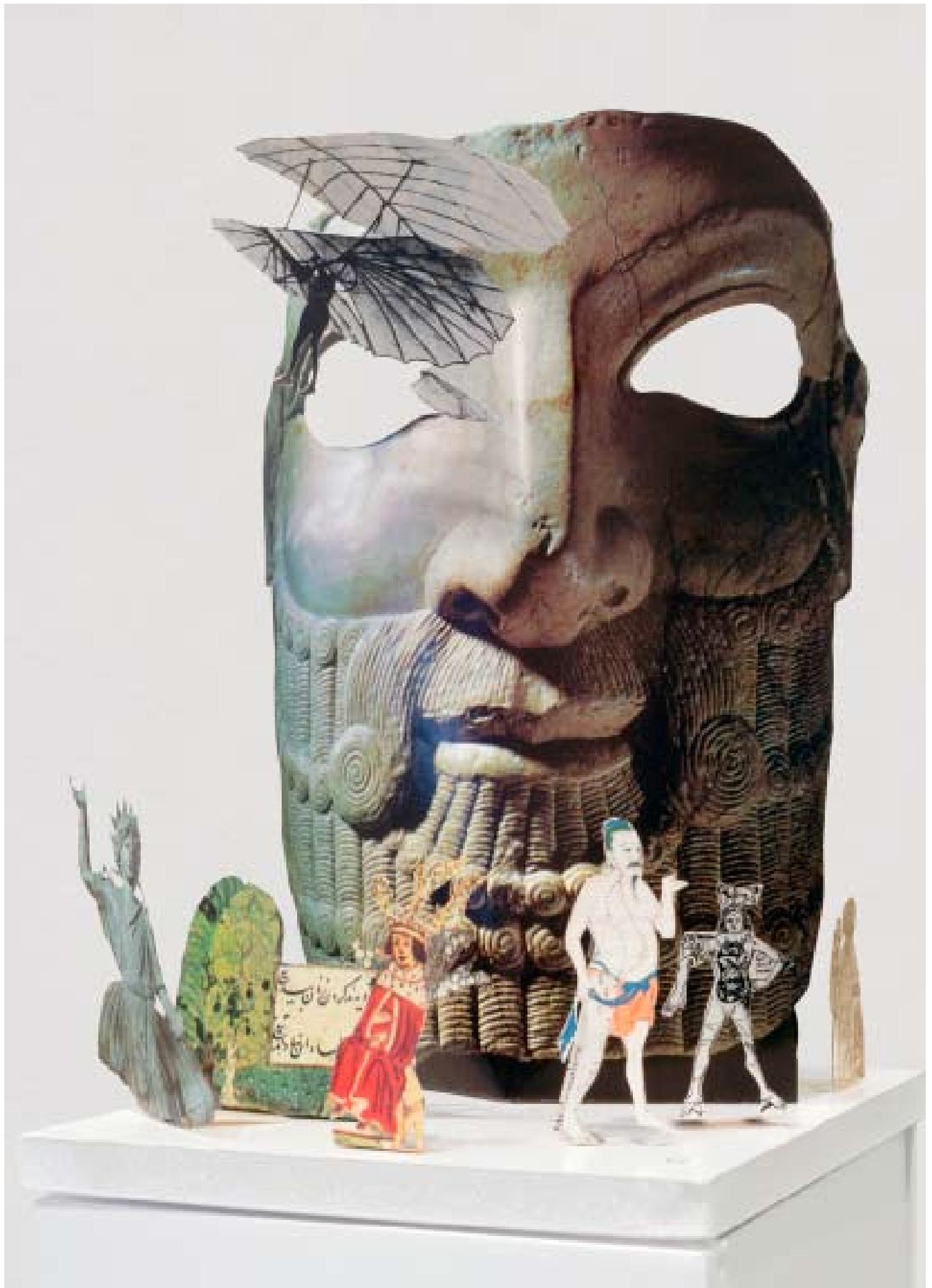
*The Surgeon and the Photographer, 2009*

365 puppet figures, fabric, found images, metal stands  
45 x 13 x 13 cm (each figure)  
Installation view, Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver

*The Last Two Million Years, 2007*

Foamcore plinths, Perspex frames and cut-outs from the history book *The Last Two Million Years*  
Dimensions variable





CASEY KAPLAN  
525 WEST 21ST STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10011  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

# Geoffrey Farmer

## **Dust Flower, Controller Of The Universe, Goat Mother, Heads Of The Dark, The Wonder Of Our Faces.**

First of all this is how it begins: The sound of clicking, a rose coloured light.

Then the sound of a bell. .. the lights dim on and off. The stained glass curtain rises to the sound of a flute; there is a small black stork at centre stage.

Light cue: Blue.

This is the stork that survived the war. It slowly lifts its wing, revealing a bright fuchsia coloured fabric, and then there is the distant sound of an elephant crying which is silenced by the sound of a bomb exploding. Berlin, 1941. There is a long pause of silence and then the audience is revealed: coughing, crumpling paper etc ...

All forms seen on the stage are acting and sculptural - making historical and psychological references. During the performance a stagehand is slowly dismantling the set. A text appears briefly; Architecture Being Viewed From A Sociological Point Of View or something along those lines.

The dialogue is divided into four 'nights' or colours. The narrator appears in black perhaps, she can't be seen, but as the wing of the stork lowers, there is a woman somewhere played by my Japanese friend Rika, just like in my dream. She is wearing a mask, and with a strong Japanese accent states:

This is how I got the name of The Vampire Of Coyoacan. (there is the sound of creaking).

It is sometimes difficult for the audience to understand- what she is saying or it is somehow veiled, this could be achieved by a deep rumbling sound. The din of a city.

It is the War of the Nineteen Fifties in Mexico City, the backstabbing drama, rumors the tensions... I had been working with several specific buildings here, intervening with them. I made holes, two of them, which then became a mask. I peered out. This taught me how to go

*Museo*

*Experimental*

*April 30th - June 27, 2010*

*El Eco*

beyond the myth of myself. It is sometimes difficult for the audience to understand what she is saying or it is somehow veiled, this could be achieved by a deep rumbling sound. The din of a city.

She continues:

In a sense I needed to become a form of architecture and in this way, I could begin the healing process, as before that time. I had no sense of my body. It was full of blood and organs but I had no access to them. I needed to enter into a building, to become a building. I wasn't a Vampire then. I had no emotions. I could only paint the walls, I couldn't enter into them. I created illusionary spaces this way, illusionary histories. A religion. This isn't to say that I believe in God. I don't. My Goat Mother killed him. This is how the Universe began.

It created a fold in time, like this crease ...

She points to this poster. (sound of thunder)

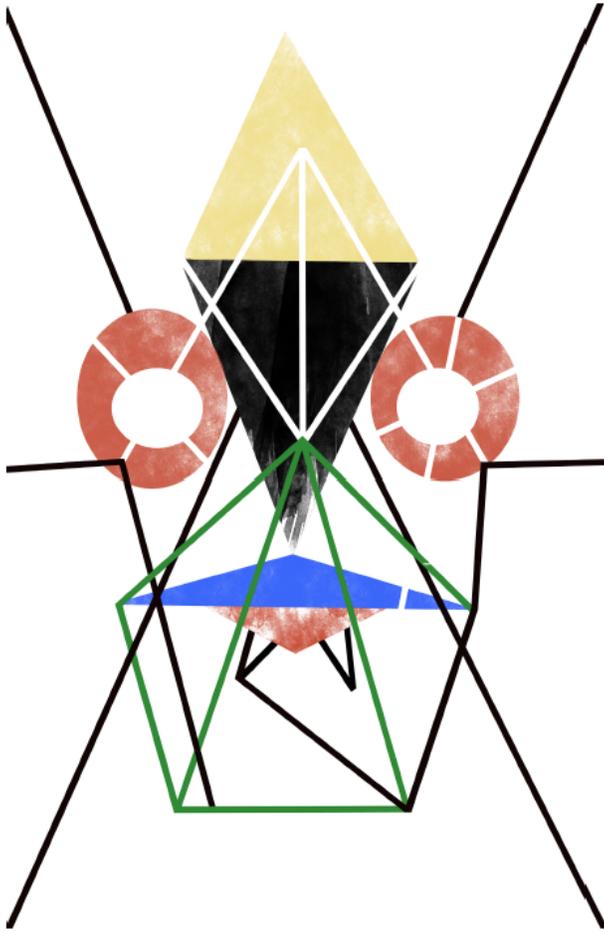
The crease separated me from my biography, between my eyes and my mouth, my words and my thoughts, creating a distancing effect. This allowed a new form of language to erupt like music, and it swamped me over, totally. An absolute work, a total work. Tears, emotions, these holes... I can only communicate this now in a formalized sense of language.

A wooden mallet is rhythmically struck.

She pokes her fingers through the poster, creating eye-holes.

They formed the lines that would become the plans for this building, just like Tlaltecuhltli body was torn in half to form the earth and the sky.

She gestures around, and objects are brought to the stage and set up which takes 20-30 minutes. During this time she casually interacts with the audience asking them questions about their lives.



But how can you change? Suppose you don't like change, suppose it is very clean, and there is no change in appearance. Suppose you weren't born by Hippie parents, by a Goat Mother, perhaps you were born in the mountains under a pile of rifles. Then...it must be imagined in a play, a script/manifesto written to create doubling, good and evil, between the source, and the hard form of the material world. Between pineapples and chewing gum, masks and invites, the industrial and the organic. I understood rationally: Vampires were considered a cure to flatness Flatness had come to define late-Modernist in Mexico. I brought homosexuality to the city I wanted to free the servants, the slaves, and the working class. It didn't, it only caused more war, more suffering, more religion and more superstition. Then because of this, they outlawed the Muralist, the Gourd Drums of The Goat Mother. They forbid people from returning to the mysterious and sacred sites. But hope was not lost, the black Stork still survived and at certain times of the year, drumming could be heard, nobody knows from where it comes and small children are still told the story of the elephant and how the universe emerged from its eyes the moment it died.

At this point, she walks off the stage and flips an electrical switch. The performance begins. Some see blood, some see stones, costumes, bodies dyed black, an elephant in a frying pan, food left for idols, objects from popular culture, rocks and pots.

Geoffrey Farmer was born in 1967 on Eagle Island, British Columbia, Canada and currently lives and works in Vancouver, British Columbia. He studied at the San Francisco Institute of Art from 1991 to 1992 and the Emily Carr College of Art and Design in 1993. Farmer has forthcoming solo exhibitions at LA > ART, Los Angeles and the Dunlop Art Gallery, Regina, Canada and has had recent solo presentations at the Witte de With, Rotterdam (2008), Musée d'art contemporain de Montreal (2008), The Drawing Room, London (2007) and The Power Plant, Toronto (2005). Farmer's recent group shows include, Sculpture as Time: Major Works. Recent Acquisitions, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (2009), Vuelo Fuera de Tiempo / Flight Out of Time, Museo de la Ciudad de Mexico, Mexico City (2009), Le chant de la carpe, Parc St Leger Center for Contemporary Art, Pougues-Ies-Eaux, France. A major publication of Farmer's work was published in 2008 in conjunction with his retrospective exhibition at Le Musée d'art contemporain de Montreal.

CASEY KAPLAN  
525 WEST 21ST STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10011  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

# ARTFORUM

## Vancouver

**Geoffrey Farmer**

**1875 POWELL STREET AT VICTORIA DRIVE**

**November 15–November 14**

Geoffrey Farmer's yearlong project *Every Letter in the Alphabet*, 2009–10, examines two of his aesthetic preoccupations: language and performance. Farmer opened a storefront for the piece, which was commissioned by the city of Vancouver as part of a series of public artworks in conjunction with the 2010 Olympics. Farmer in turn commissioned twenty-six language-based works by twenty-six different artists, and the projects range from spoken-word performances to posters or signs, while the storefront acts as a public space and reading room. Each of these commissions, as one might have guessed, stands in for one of the twenty-six letters of the alphabet. Jeremy Shaw, for example, reprinted promotional posters from Expo '86, the World's Fair that Vancouver hosted in 1986. These reproductions were exhibited in *Every Letter* along with a vitrine displaying the fair's mascot, Expo Ernie. Other events that have taken place as part of the project include specifically commissioned performances, magazine launch parties, and simultaneous readings of seven translations of Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*.

*Every Letter* hovers among a series of recognizable contemporary art tropes but never lands on any—it is neither an artist-as-curator project nor a relational work. The storefront becomes a site for whatever language-based works may be presented, which recalls another thematic element of Farmer's work: the representation of performance. As such, *Every Letter* is ultimately a space that makes for an unlikely but compelling work.



View of "Every Letter in the Alphabet," 2009–10.

—Aaron Peck

CASEY KAPLAN  
525 WEST 21ST STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10011  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

MAY/JUNE 2010

# ART PAPERS



## GEOFFREY FARMER VANCOUVER

Vancouver artist Geoffrey Farmer's recent solo exhibition *The Surgeon and the Photographer* presents two ambitious works, the titular installation featuring 365 puppets, 2009, and *Look at my face: my name is Might Have Been; I am also called No More, Too Late, Farewell...(clock)*, 2010, a new video work that signals a new direction in Farmer's practice by way of its use of computer-controlled images and sound [Catriona Jeffries Gallery; January 29--March 6, 2010].

With a recent solo exhibition at Witte de With in Rotterdam and a mid-career retrospective at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, Farmer's multi-disciplinary practice, which encompasses installation, sculpture, photography, and video, is increasingly garnering recognition.

Farmer's work is often characterized for its complex integration of narrative from disparate sources into process-based projects that change over time. Although his work differs formally according to each project, Farmer often alters found objects by way of minimal or elaborate

interventions that range from decorative embellishment to comical assemblages. Despite its abundance of allusions to historical events, literary works or conceptual frameworks, Farmer's work doesn't hinge on the interpretation of these narratives. By emphasizing all the details, including the dark and contradictory ones, and intersecting multiple narratives through idiosyncratic relationships, Farmer creates a situation where the particular and the "grand gesture" of the all-encompassing narrative are given equal weight. For example, in *The Last Two Million Years*, 2007, Farmer clipped the figures from an illustrated history of the earth, a feature published by Reader's Digest, and assembled them in an elaborate, disorienting mise-en-scène. Viewing Farmer's work is more about accepting and experiencing the parts and wholes simultaneously than making sense out of them.

Along these lines *The Surgeon and the Photographer* combines notions of time, a sculptural interpretation of a given archive of books, and a theoretical relationship to Walter Benjamin's distinction between the roles of the artist and the photographer. The work is titled after the

seminal essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," where Benjamin makes a comparison between the painter and the magician--who interact with the body or the picture integrally--and the photographer and the surgeon--who cut into the body or the world and create fragments. The installation itself echoes this dialectic of fragment and total picture, as the sheer number of puppets makes it nearly impossible to view and consider each one individually, no matter how unique it appears. Attached to a metal armature and a simple fabric skirt, each puppet is made of elaborate paper cutouts of human and animal body parts and various props cut from photographs culled from books that Farmer acquired when he bought all the volumes in an entire section at a used book store.

Unlike Berlin Dada collage--perhaps best exemplified by the work of Hannah Höch--which sought to disrupt the seamless mediated image of capitalist print production by emphasizing the cut, Farmer's collaged puppets are about building rather than cutting. As such, each puppet is personified. Some have recognizable faces, like Martin Luther King or Brooke Shields, while oth-



ers hold signs such as “Gay is Good, Gay is Proud, Gay Liberation.” Another holds a baby with a printed t-shirt, proclaiming, “Prochoice kills babies.” In their abundance and persistence, these details offer a challenge to the viewer to acknowledge them as distinct parts, rather than synthesize them in order to draw an ultimate meaning.

The installation is also structured around abstract conceptions of time, as the puppets—one for each day of the year—are assembled on twelve groupings of plinths which are meant to refer to the months of the year. Ultimately, something affirmative emerges out of seeing the puppet mise-en-scene’s disorder, experimentation, and disagreement operate within Farmer’s ordered and timed universe. The differing political signs carried by the characters are merely parts in a larger intuitive experiment that intersects concepts and forms in an oblique mode of ordering.

Projected in a loop on the wall of the second gallery, *Look at my face: my name is Might Have Been; I am also called No More, Too Late, Farewell... (clock)*, initially appears to follow a tra-

jectory shared with many other contemporary artists who collect and assemble found images from the internet, such as fellow Vancouver-based artists Roy Arden and Steven Shearer. The video consists of a computer-controlled montage of images cued to change at the same time as a sound effect—gun shots, waves crashing, and so forth—is played. In terms of processes, however, *Look at my face...* is decidedly different from Arden and Shearer’s work. In his slide show of seemingly random images from the internet, *The World as Will and Representation*, 2007-ongoing, Arden acts as selector and arbiter of images. Likewise for Shearer, in his digital collages of internet images. By contrast, Farmer is working with an archive of preselected images. These images were purchased from the Morris/Trasov archive, many of them collected as part of Image Bank, which functioned primarily as a mail correspondence project begun in 1969 by Vancouver artists Vincent Trasov and Michael Morris. Farmer’s matching of sound effects with images casts him as a Foley artist who uses found objects to create the sound effects for a film as part of the post-production

process. This intervention de-emphasizes the individual status of each.

Future versions of the computer program in *Look at my face...* will continuously create different combinations of sounds and images, much as Farmer did himself in past works such as *Every Surface in Someway Altered, Decorated and Changed Forever (except the float)*, 2004, where he adapted the work over the course of the exhibition when the gallery was closed at night. This might be simply a necessary means for an artist with a proliferating exhibition schedule but it can also be interpreted as a personification of the computer program, which is given the role of the Foley artist in the alternate world that Farmer has created.

- Rachele Sawatsky

INSIDE FRONT COVER, ABOVE + OPPOSITE: Geoffrey Farmer, *The Surgeon and the Photographer*, 2009, 365 puppet figures, fabric, found images, metal stands, 60 wooden plinths, each figure approx. 45 x 13 x 13 cm (courtesy of the artist and Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver)

CASEY KAPLAN  
525 WEST 21ST STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10011  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Adler, Dan, "Geoffrey Farmer," *Artforum*, September 2008, p. 471

# ARTFORUM

## MONTREAL

### Geoffrey Farmer MUSÉE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN DE MONTRÉAL

Geoffrey Farmer's video *The Fountain People*, 2008, consists of footage of a fountain located in front of an escalator, most likely in an upscale shopping center. While waiting for some narrative to commence, and perhaps for the titular characters to appear, one must make do with the banal sight of spouting water, the dull glow of lights underwater, and the sedating stream of Muzak. In the accompanying installation, the two typewritten pages affixed to the wall provide little interpretive guidance but allude to strange aquatic forces that covertly watch, surround, and transform in ways analogous to the workings of a pervasive culture industry; according to these texts, the more folks ingest and bathe in this replenishing source, the more powerful "they" (presumably the fountain people) become. Despite its deadpan reductiveness, the work summons a number of associations, perhaps the strongest being to Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* and its narrative of a communist conspiracy to fluoridate the bodily fluids of the American people.

A suitable introduction to a mid-career retrospective, organized nonchronologically and with wit by the museum's Pierre Landry, *The Fountain People* provides a glimpse of the homogeneous, packaged, and polished cultural landscape—extending from malls to museums—that the artist has interrogated in myriad ways over the past two decades. Widely in evidence in Montréal was Farmer's fondness for, and inventive use of, provocatively humble and ephemeral materials, as seen in *Entrepreneur Alone Returning Back to Sculptural Form*, 2002, a sprawling sculptural installation in which packing, cleaning, and office materials are intricately and whimsically arranged and that, although only one of many works shown here, encapsulates his concerns. In this installation, an enormous disc made up of rows of blank yellow Post-its is adhered to the wall, the artist implying that the sheer laborious accumulation of identical and worthless motifs may in itself constitute an artistic statement. Crumpled bits of paper placed atop and around a trash can could signify a repeated failure to



Geoffrey Farmer,  
*Entrepreneur Alone  
Returning Back to  
Sculptural Form*,  
2002, mixed media  
Installation view,  
Photo: Guy L'Heureux

achieve creative fruition—or could delineate the bare-minimum requirement of professional sculptural competency.

Placed alongside this material (or refuse) in a corner, as if in temporary storage, is a cardboard box containing, among other items, plant sculptures composed of foil; the container is set atop a monitor on the floor playing a video of the artist irreverently producing the aluminum flora with his feet—a display of agility to be sure, but also a challenge to the fetishization of art objects. Hanging on the opposite wall is a piece of weathered newspaper with two eyeholes cut in it, as if it were a crude masquerade or a performance prop. A nearby component of the installation demonstrates the tensile strength of such everyday items as packing tape and paper cups, which are strung or glued together as bolstering devices, tripods, and columns—all texturally and chromatically enriched by scattered bits of pink tissue paper.

Such experimentation with the durability of materials exemplifies the process-based nature of Farmer's work, which at its best shows that even throwaway objects like plastic bags and masking-tape rolls can carry expressive gravitas. Farmer questions how and why we assign aesthetic value, in a way that is both biting clever and heartfelt.

-Dan Adler

Dhillon, Kim, "Geoffrey Farmer," *Frieze*, January/February 2009, p. 189

## Geoffrey Farmer



### Spacex, Exeter, Uk

There is a lot of art around that is about art, art-making and art history. I don't care for it any more than I care for reading books about grammar or literary theory. But with art history as his subject, as well as sources from literature and popular culture, Vancouver-based Geoffrey Farmer makes us question what we expect of art in the first place. His solo exhibition 'The Last Two Million Years' – his first in Europe – was organized by London's The Drawing Room and toured to the Northern Gallery of Contemporary Art, Sunderland, and then to Spacex in Exeter. The show made art-historical

**Geoffrey Farmer**  
**'The Last Two Million Years'**  
(detail)  
2007  
Mixed media  
Dimensions variable

discourses its starting-point but took us somewhere else entirely. Farmer leads us to question how we look at objects, and what meanings they elicit.

Farmer, the press release tells us, happened upon an encyclopaedia called *The Last Two Million Years* lying in the street, and this provided the inspiration for the show. Originally put out by publishing giant Reader's Digest in the 1970s, *The Last Two Million Years* isn't in high demand any more. (I purchased a copy from Amazon for 72 pence.) But Farmer's work

isn't just the result of chance: his text is selected and offers endless interpretations. Reader's Digest's attempt to encapsulate the history of the world in 500 pages was ambitious if not ridiculous, yet this exhibition – a myriad of images cut from its pages to make a collaged installation – reassembles history, creating a tension between truth and fiction. Accompanying the cut-out images with which Farmer constructed his own paper universe was a small booklet containing the titles of the works. It is unfinished at present; he changes and adds to it as the exhibition grows. The artist often does this, building in to his work a degree of openness, of instability, he doesn't consider works complete when they enter an exhibition. The exhibition marks one moment in the art work's life. The titles here range from a single word to a near page-long paragraph: many are found texts from the pages of *The Last Two Million Years*; others are his descriptions of the re-appropriated images. The encyclopaedia is at once the source and the condition for this project.

A cut-out of Mahatma Gandhi was taped onto a narrow, tall plinth in the foyer. Next to him was an animal depicted out of proportion. Titled with one of Gandhi's most famous quotes 'When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love has always won. There have been tyrants and murderers, and for a time they seem invincible, but in the end they always fall – think of it, always' this little Gandhi packs a conceptual, and political, punch. Hundreds more such instances follow. In the

main gallery, plinths are assembled to create a stage for the images to enact history on. Like animal crackers lined up on a child's table, the figures parade up an ascending platform guiding us through Farmer's interpretation of time. He intervenes and plays God in this puppet show of history: Native Americans paddle a dug-out canoe next to Viking ships. Elsewhere, the most infamous image of the Vietnam War, Phan Thi Kim Phuc running naked from a napalm bomb, is placed in front of an astronaut. Leeringly, the astronaut stumbles towards her. Scale is meaningless here: fleas carrying the bubonic plague dwarf figures cut from 15th-century Flemish paintings. Early flying machines leap off ancient masks. In this window of human history, stories we know in isolation collide in an abyss.

Which brings me to Aby Warburg. Born to a German banking empire, he is said, according to legend, to have sold the privilege of being the future head of the family in return for his brothers' promise to support him as a scholar until the end of his life. Having studied art history and archaeology in Bonn, Warburg is best known for his founding work in iconology and innovative knowledge montages. What made him so extraordinary as an art historian was his interest in the way that types of images recurred

across history, particularly as seen in his Mnemosyne Atlas, an archive of pin boards of juxtaposed images from across philosophy and image history. Of Warburg's assemblage of images and objects, Philippe-Alain Michaud writes: 'This is not a closed field of knowledge; it is a whirling, centrifugal field.'

This open system is where Farmer is so precise with his chaotic archive. The exhibition and the art work were one and the same here. A frontispiece of sorts hung at the entry to the main gallery. A mounted collage of text read: 'from a cloud of / *verfremdungseffekt* / the last two million years / inhabit / an almost inconceivably incomplete / system.' *Verfremdungseffekt*, a principle of historicization, is a process of emotionally distancing theatre audiences from the on-stage action. Coined by Bertolt Brecht, it points to Farmer's interest in reality and artifice. By making an encyclopaedia his medium, he constructs a complex discourse about the act of exhibiting, and of what we hope to gain by going through this scripted role of looking at objects for enlightenment. And in so doing, Farmer poses questions far beyond art; he questions how art incites knowledge production, and vice versa, on a much broader scale.

**Kim Dhillon**

CASEY KAPLAN  
525 WEST 21ST STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10011  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Milroy, Sarah. "The expressive potential of detritus." *The Globe and Mail*. 23 February 2008. R4.

# The expressive potential of detritus

In his Montréal show, Vancouver artist Geoffrey Farmer proves his reputation is well deserved, writes Sarah Milroy

---

## MONTREAL

---

For some time now, Vancouver artist Geoffrey Farmer has been on a career roll, with shows from Seoul to Stockholm, from Antwerp to Edinburgh, and even good old Toronto, where he took the stage at the Power Plant a few years back. That trajectory shows every sign of continuing. He has a solo show at the prestigious Witte de With in Rotterdam later this year, and will show new work as well at the Sydney Biennale.

At the ripe old age of 41, then, Farmer already has a big rep to live up to, and in Canada that tends to mean you're eligible for close and withering scrutiny. Relentless tall poppy harvesters that we are, Canadians like nothing more than to cut our best and brightest down to size.

Farmer's current show at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal is being mounted in this climate of skepticism with everyone wanting to see if Farmer has the goods. Well, it appears that he does, and what's more, he seems to be unfazed by all the fuss.

More than 1,000 people attended his opening a few weeks ago. What they discovered there was a selection of previous works and a few fresh, insouciant improvisations developed just for the Montréal show in the

days leading up to the opening. Farmer thrives on these sorts of cliffhangers. His large-scale installation for the Montréal Biennale last summer was one of the strongest pieces in that show, crafted from detritus found in the hallways and storage areas of the building in the last moments before the opening. Nobody, including him, knew if it would have the magic, but it did.

Working in video, sculpture, drawing and painting, Farmer works in the prevailing artistic language of his generation. In New York, the current exhibition *Unmonumental*, which inaugurates the newly relocated New Museum in the Bowery, is a zeitgeist show gathering together emergent work like Farmer's in which found objects and humble handmade gestures are partnered in lanky configurations that express a kind of pathos and delicacy—wobbly concatenations of scarcely controlled disarray. Rooted, ultimately in the assemblages of Picasso, the sly appropriations of Duchamp and the embrace of havoc and miscellany exemplified by the sculptural installations of Kurt Schwitters—all unfolding in the early decades of the 20th century—and moving onward through the likes of Robert Rauschenberg and Franz West and Jessica Stockholder. It's a sculptural tradition with an august history. In Farmer's practice, it has found its freshest Canadian apotheosis. The fragile, chaotic world he makes seems to hang together by

a thread, and in that tension lies its charm.

What makes it cohere is the artist's eye for subtle visual cues, arousing the viewer's discernment. One of Farmer's figure studies in the Montréal show consists of a vertical block of white Styrofoam seated in a white folding chair, a newspaper pinned open before it as if in the reading position. Using the leanest of means, the artist imbues the structure with enough personality to be entirely convincing. Another standing figure is made from leather scraps affixed to an upended broom. Here, as elsewhere, gesture is all.

One of Farmer's gifts is seeing expressive potential in material that most of us would pass by and his daring propensity for keeping the creative process open to the operations of chance. At times, he takes this to absurd extremes, as he did in the 2008 piece *Actor/Dancer/Carver*, (a work whose title wryly tips its hat to the traditions of tribal Northwest Coast art, one of many Vancouver art world in-jokes that pepper his artistic production). On the gallery floor, Farmer presents a large basket padded inside with large chunks of foam. A cycloptic eye hole is cut into the basket's side, and beside it on the floor are a set of wooden boxes for hands, and yellow rope to hobble the feet. (A diagram on the wall spells out the correct usage of these accessories.) On the video monitor alongside it

runs the video where it all comes together: a camera's eye view that serves as a document of the artist's halting progress through a Vancouver park decked out in this unlikely get-up, camera atop his head, unable to see where he is going. Watching, we see evidence of him running into trees and negotiating uneven terrain in what comes to feel like a poignant metaphor for life's uncertainties. Who knows what comes next?

Farmer brings the same random open-ended approach to history and accumulated knowledge in his compendious installation *The Last Two Million Years*, which he made by cutting up a large coffee table book about human history and affixing the little cut-out figures and objects he found therein to a white topography of plinths and pedestals in the gallery. (This is the work's second incarnation; it was shown last year at The Drawing Room in London.) Farmer comes up with fresh combinations, abandoning the traditional timeline and pairing modern men of science with prehistoric relics, the Elizabethans with the postmoderns. It's a highly personalized, eccentric tour of human endeavor, as customized to the artist's particular sensibility as an iPod playlist.

Farmer has created an appendix that annotates 100 of these images, distributed to gallerygoers in the form of a photocopied handout. These entries are by turns long and

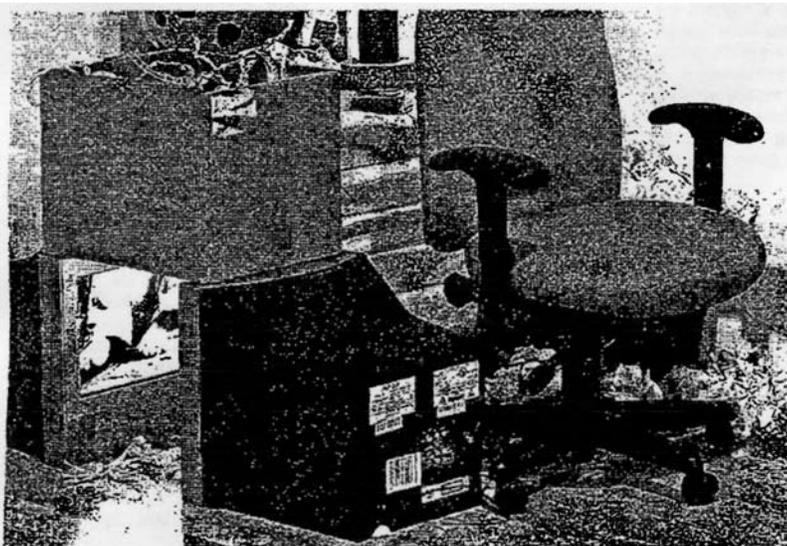
short, deadpan, declarative or witty. A lengthy explanation of French Revolutionary history, the back-story to David's famous painting *Death of Marat*, accompanies an image of the section of David's painting that bears the artist's signature and his dedication "à Marat." The notes to a photograph of bug-eyed Phoenician carved figures, however, reads only "Staring into the void." A historic photograph of an early light bulb is coupled with the words: "Nothing will ever be the same (from high above 35,000 feet these can be seen and appear to be glittering jewels)." The final object in the series is an assemblage combining a portion of the book's binding with a pair of feet exercised from the photograph of an ancient sculpture, presented together in a small, wallmounted Plexiglas box. The inscription reads "Headless, armless and legless, we pick ourselves up and march on." In these recombinations, he rekindles wonder.

Likewise, in his new video work *The Fountain People*, made for the Montréal show, Farmer takes as his visual subject the tacky mall fountain in the Complexe Desjardins, just across the street from the museum, imagining its vertical jets of water as ghostly water spirits, rising and

falling in unison in an eerie sci-fi scenario of the artist's imagining. "We are the fountain people," reads the hand-typed manifesto pinned to the wall. "We know who you are. From the beginning we have been gathering strength to begin our war...You marvel at our ability to transform." And the artist's ability, as well, conjuring a posse or shaggy water monsters—fast-morphing and mute and weirdly unforgettable—from such banal source material.

My favourite discovery there, though, was *Notes for Strangers* (1990), a series of written pieces he made on a miniature typewriter while riding the San Francisco streetcar during his student days. Using tiny sheets of paper, Farmer composed these missives and gave them away to the fellow travelers who inspired them, keeping only those letters he was unable to deliver because the passenger disembarked too soon. Quirky, poetic, and endearingly abrupt, they brim with fellow feeling. "I think you will understand this: Spanish Oranges," reads one. Call it food for thought.

>>Geoffrey Farmer continues at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal until April 20 (514-847-6226).



Originally a corporate commission, Farmer's work *Entrepreneur Alone Returning Back to Sculptural Form* (2002), seen here in detail, takes as its jumping off point the phenomenon of office ennui, presenting itself as a kind of rambling anti-monument to doodling, dawdling, and other covert acts of creative resistance. A video at the base reveals the artist making tin foil sculptures with his feet. GUY L'HEUREUX/COLLECTION DE JULIA ET GILLES OUELLETTE

“Deconstruction Junction,” *National Post*. 14 February 2008. p. B8-9

# AVENUE

*Questions & Artists*

## Deconstruction junction

Whether it's dropping the kids at school each day, taking an ironclad 10:45 coffee break or never missing Grey's Anatomy, routine defines us. So what do you do with an acclaimed artist, like Vancouver's Geoffrey Farmer, who destabilizes the everyday? If you're Leah Sandals, you talk to him about his first-ever survey show, on now at the Musee d'art contemporain de Montreal, and get him to tell you why he's so interested in taking things apart.

**Q** *Curators say your works critique conventional exhibition formats, so how do you manage being exhibited, especially in a format this big?*

**A** I've never said that I critique museological conventions. It's something others say. For example, Jessica Morgan, a curator at the Tate Modern, once wrote, "Geoffrey is an enemy of the museum." I think those ideas come from making art that alters over time or fuses together. That mutability often works in opposition to the stability a museum is trying to bring. But to my mind they depend on one another, even if they work against each other. And those tensions are in me, too. I think museological tendencies are an expression of a societal need to have a space

that represents a stable environment existing outside of the chaos of our lives.

**Q** *How would you describe your practice, then?*

**A** My work's research-based: I investigate something, and that leads to developing a project. Often the production of the work becomes the work. So, for example, there's a piece in this show where I removed a section of the floor and it was turned into paper pulp, which was then turned into a note on the wall. The museum becomes part of the work in a very tangible way.

**Q** *Your most recent work involved cutting out thousands of images from a Reader's*

*Digest book, The Last Two Million Years, and making a diorama. How did that happen?*

**A** I found this book in Vancouver. It was taken out of a free book box, probably because it was too heavy. And it looked like a slab of marble lying on the sidewalk, with gold embossing on it saying "The Last Two Million Years." It looked like an artwork even then! But I knew in some sense I was going to destroy it. So I had a sculptor in Vancouver make a replica of it in marble. The whole book is there, just reconfigured.

**Q** *Though your intent was to rework the idea of history, I'm wondering if you learned anything about history by going through the book.*

**A** I did. I hadn't realized our idea of history is so influenced by the invention of photography, the ability to look at different works of art from different eras side by side as depicted by photographic means. Small things struck me as well: the role of dogs, for example, or the amount of works through history that depict animals or the amount of history that existed in bare feet.

**Q** *Speaking of history, some of your works reflect personal experiences, like the semi-trailer sculpture that references a woman you once saw crushed by a truck.*

**A** Actually, I only remembered that incident while installing this exhibition. I had other reasons for making the work and have shown it elsewhere, but here I suddenly remembered an experience where I came across this woman's body just after she had been crushed by a tractor-trailer. Initially I'd conceptualized the piece as a ghost, because semi-trailers travel all over the country, barely seen, and didn't even think about the woman. In Vancouver you're taught to read theory and be aware of why you're making something. But I'm realizing there are some elements that are inexplicable, or that we can't control.



CASEY KAPLAN  
525 WEST 21ST STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10011  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Phillips, Dougal, ed. "Geoffrey Farmer." *Revolutions-Forms that Turn, Guide, Sydney: 2008 Biennale of Sydney*, p. 38

## GEOFFREY FARMER

Geoffrey Farmer is interested in the process of making things, and in the relationship between experience and imagination. He creates structures that transform and activate the gallery space and its visitors, incorporating objects that are often in a state of flux. *Cockatoo Clock (A Play)* is a fictional theatrical production imagined to take place within the walls of the Museum of Contemporary Art during the Biennale. The viewer can see only glimpses of the performance, which is, for the most part, hidden. Specially built sets are exposed and can be seen through openings in the museum's walls. The play was inspired by a found object; a small glass cabinet transformed into an imaginary clock and placed on a warehouse wall by an unknown Cockatoo Island worker. Reminiscent of avant-garde theatre, the play's form and content become the premise and means that allow the sets and props to become the main characters.



Geoffrey Farmer  
*A Pale Fire Freedom Machine, 2005* (detail)  
Rennie Collection, Vancouver  
Courtesy Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver  
Photograph Rafael Goldchain

CASEY KAPLAN  
525 WEST 21ST STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10011  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Bonacina, Andrew, "Entrepreneur alone returning back to sculptural form," *Uovo 13*, Torino, Italy, 2007,  
p. 254-281

# UOVO



**ANDREW BONACINA:** Airliner Open Studio, your recent show at Catriona Jeffries Gallery in Vancouver, contained many characteristic elements of your practice—from the making visible the processes of construction throughout the course of the exhibition and the treatment of the gallery as stage-set, to the use of handmade crafts as a form of set-dressing. How did this project begin and develop?

**GEOFFREY FARMER:** I had been working on a project, which was to take place on a commercial airline flight. During some of the research I found two brothers who had a 737 airliner set that they were storing out on their farm just outside of the city of Vancouver. I decided to go out to look at it and it ended up being quite an amazing place, an old mushroom farm with a huge covered outdoor area full of abandoned machines, boats and trailers, including this very mouldy airplane set which was just this unrecognisable pile of material right next to a bull in a pen. It had been used for filming in the 1980s and had been given to them as payment for a debt. The brothers let me borrow it if in return I would clean it up. So I decided to bring it to Vancouver and assemble it at Catriona Jeffries Gallery and use it as a kind of rehearsal space.

I liked the fact that the set was composed of real airplane parts as well as fabricated components. After cleaning and putting the set together on a raked platform, I began working on it during the night over the course of the exhibition, recording my actions. I then presented these the day after in the form of video works, sculptural configurations and drawings. It was a project in which ideas were being actively worked out in front of the viewer over the duration of the exhibition.

**I was interested in representing  
an oscillation between representation  
and abstraction**

**AB:** What type of actions did you perform for these video works?

**GF:** The first actions I recorded were of cleaning, very simple things like a hand appearing with a cloth. I also made a video of my hand appearing between two seats forming different shapes, faces and gestures; I was trying to make it not look like a hand. It was something I once did on a turbulent flight to entertain a child who was crying. I remembered it while I was cleaning and decided to re-enact it. I was interested in representing an oscillation between representation and abstraction. The video documentation began like this but by the end a narrative began to emerge.

**I think some works operate more consciously in a spatiotemporal way than others**

**AB:** These simple gestures for the camera make me think of the 1960s and '70s studio-based video practices of artists such as Bruce Nauman and Vito Acconci, where the private space of the studio is used to frame the actions later presented to the audience in the form of documentary video pieces. Were these an influence?

**GF:** There is phenomenological quality to these works that I like, a directness that is startling and deceptively simple. They opened up a new realm of inquiry for me as a student around questions of artistic process and activity. I also found this in works by artists like Cindy Sherman, Paul McCarthy and Robert Filliou. They were making manifest a thinking process and including it in different ways within their work. As well, at some point, there is a question about psychological make-up, and I really identified with this.

**AB:** In a sense, projects such as Airliner Open Studio see the studio transferred to the gallery and the exhibition space becoming a site of production. Has the time and space of the exhibition itself always been important to the way in which you work?

**GF:** I think some works operate more consciously in a spatiotemporal way than others. I have always included elements within my working process that illustrate my interest in a type of immediate context and how this might participate in the work's development and form. I think it should be OK to go back and rework. This is not to say that I am not also interested in more autonomous works that attempt to transcend context, but I tend to see work as temporary forms and I am interested in the progression of a work over time.



**AB:** A criticality of accepted positions and institutional frameworks is something that underpins much of your practice. In *Wash House: Even the foul dirt and putrid stains of your life know their fate!* (2004) for example, you installed a functioning laundry service for students inside the Charles H. Scott Gallery in Vancouver — a gesture which disperses the traditional relationship between the art object, its function, the institution and the audience.

**GF:** This piece was based on an idea I had about giving people the opportunity to perform a task in an historical setting. It is a piece that partially evolved out of my interest in Dr. Bronner's Magic Soap, which is a well-known soap here on the West Coast. Emanuel Bronner was a third-generation master soap-maker from a Jewish orthodox family in Heilbronn, Germany. He rebelled against his father and came to the United States in the 1920s; his parents and most of his family died in the Holocaust.



He began to make soap on the West Coast and included on his packaging these eccentric, verbose proclamations and statements, reflecting his spiritual and philosophical beliefs that we are “ALL-ONE”. Around this time I had also found a picture drawn in a Japanese internment camp in British Columbia of a “Wash House”, and I decided to recreate it within the gallery, plumbing it with a modern washing machine and dryer and a supply of Dr. Bronner’s soap. Anyone could sign out a key and use the appliances for two-hour time periods. For the most part, you couldn’t see into the shack, but you could hear the machines working if you came into the gallery. The poster replicated some of Dr. Bronner’s text, but its design was based on the poster put up around Vancouver in the 1940s informing the Japanese of their internment.

**AB:** Participation is more integral to an ongoing work such as *The Hunchback Kit*—a collection of “props” or objects that can be used in “conceptual adaptations” of Victor Hugo’s *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Is it your intention in this piece for the viewer to become a protagonist of the work?

**GF:** I think the viewer brings their knowledge, or imagined understanding of the narrative, which is then compared to the work presented. It has the function of conflating an imagined narrative with my own interpretation of the text or my transference of it onto the institution.

**AB:** So it relates more to the structures and institutional processes of the museum—a metaphor for the way in which narratives are constructed, etc?

**GF:** Yes, I believe it shifts dynamically between the way in which the viewer, artist and institution collaborate in the construction of narratives.

**AB:** In these more participatory projects, your role shifts necessarily between that of director and actor. To what extent is your own identity and personality enacted through the process or is this always deferred through other characters or alter-egos?

**GF:** I think the staging of these works illustrates a certain self-consciousness that surrounds these spontaneous acts. Although I never feel like I am acting or directing, I am always aware that I am. I think the relationship established in my work between my presence/absence and my spontaneously staged actions becomes a question about authenticity and the function of a work of art.

**AB:** The references you make in your work—to other artists, writers, and figures from popular culture—often provide you with an important framework for a project or an exhibition. Can you tell me a bit more about *Pale Fire Freedom Machine*, your 2005 project at The Power Plant in Toronto in which external referents were particularly visible.

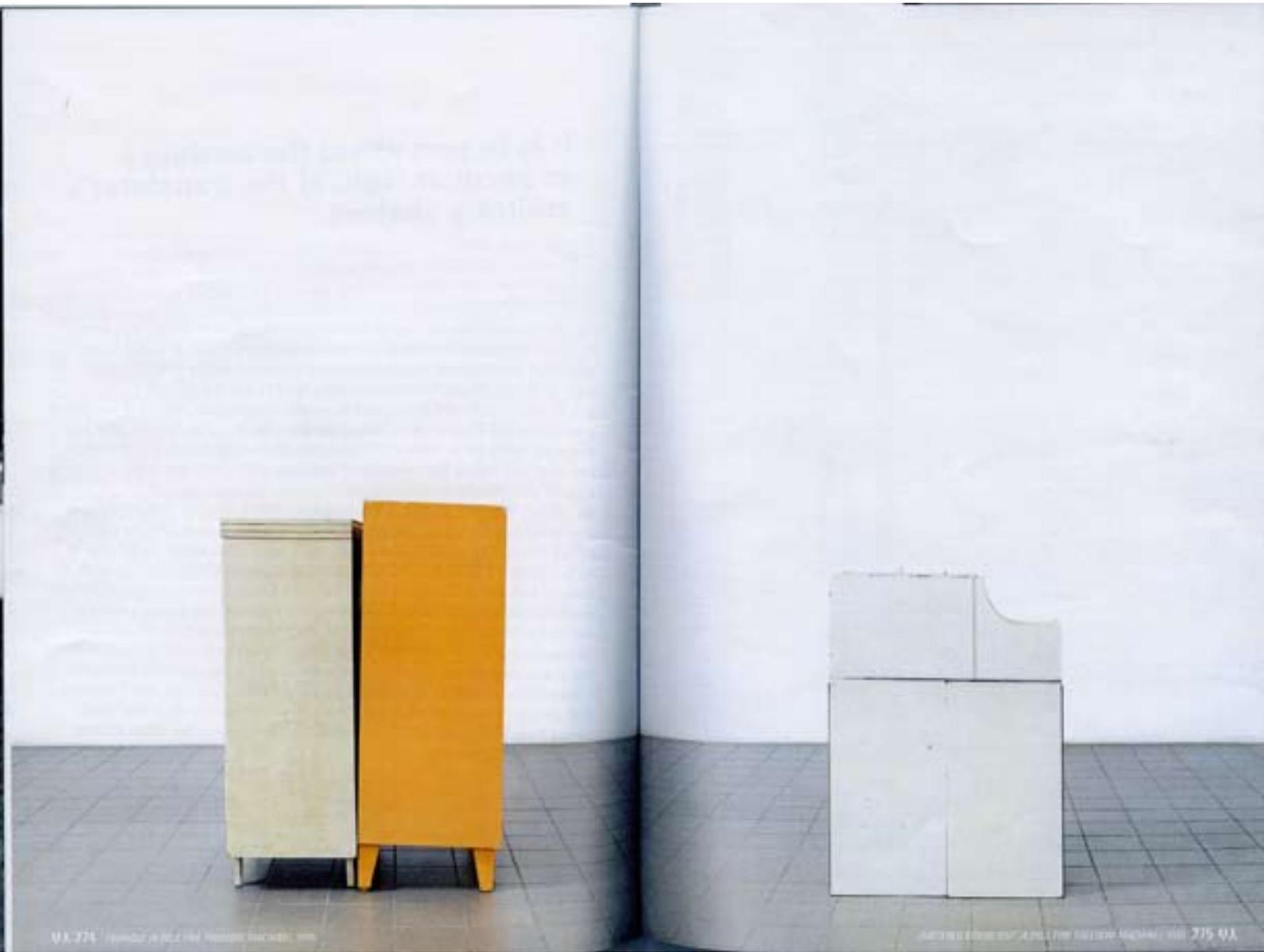
**GF:** In this work I began by collecting abandoned wooden furniture, which was then brought in and stored at the gallery. We built a small factory in which the furniture was stripped of its paint and varnish, broken up and burned in a fireplace within the gallery. The resulting soot was used to produce ink, used in turn by gallery visitors to produce stamped text work or an abstract image using a screen and pieces of furniture. Finally, the posters could either be buried or burned in the fire. The paper was to have contained wild flower seeds or to be used as fire starters. The text for one of the posters was originally found taped to the inside drawer of a found desk and it outlined some rules of order. They were rules for how to keep an orderly work place, but it also said things like, “The road to Hell is paved with badly laid stones”. In conceiving the piece I started with Vladimir Nabokov’s book *Pale Fire* (1962), which became a conceptual template in the making of a project in which I was in a sense re-making or adapting a work by the artist Xavier Veilhan titled *Le Feu* (1996) .

## **It is in part about the madness or peculiar logic of the translator's arbitrary choices**

**AB:** What was the significance of Nabokov's novel and its relationship to Veilhan?

**GF:** The significance of *Pale Fire* as an organizing structure is that it concerns unreliable interpretation or translation; it is in part about the madness or peculiar logic of the translator's arbitrary choices. Veilhan made *Le Feu* in 1996. It is an installation, as I understand it, in which visitors are invited to sit around a wood-burning fireplace in a gallery context. The fireplace Veilhan used was originally designed in 1968 by Dominique Imbert. Imbert was a Professor of literature and earned his Doctorate of Sociology at the Sorbonne before becoming a metal sculptor.

He jokingly refers to this particular fireplace, which was the first one he had ever designed, as "revolutionary" because of its ability to rotate 360 degrees. I think though that he must also be referring, tongue and cheek, to the year of its fabrication, 1968. I found the fireplace during some of my initial research on Imbert's website which stated that it had been the focus of several major exhibitions in contemporary galleries and museums. After recognizing Xavier's name in one of the photocredits, I soon realised that the photographs were actually documentation of Xavier Veilhan's installation. When I checked Veilhan's website there was no mention of Imbert. I thought it was a nice point of confusion. I had always wanted to do something with the novel *Pale Fire*, and I thought that perhaps this might be a good place to start. The title *Pale Fire* itself comes from Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* and refers to the moon robbing the sun of its light.





**AB:** This project was far more monumental than past projects, both in scale and in the tightly linked chain of references that thread through the project. Martin Kippenberger's *The Happy End of Franz Kafka's "Amerika"* (1994) seems to provide another artistic reference point. Was there a similar allegorical impulse embedded in *Pale Fire Freedom Machine*?

**GF:** I didn't produce it with a specific allegory in mind. I was interested in the idea of artistic appropriation and the idea of adaptation and translation. I also liked the idea of using an existing work and altering it to make a new work. I had always wanted to do a piece with furniture and this is partially based on something I remember reading in Marx's writing about chairs and tables dancing in the streets, about the seemingly magical quality of commodities because they contain the ghostly energies of the labour invested in their making. I am not sure if this is even true, if he wrote this, but it has always been in my mind that I attributed it to him.

**AB:** The furniture takes on almost anthropomorphic dimensions in this piece. Did your photographs of carefully grouped pieces of furniture come out of this work?

**GF:** Yes, I made portraits of some of the pieces of furniture before they were burned. It was a way for me to articulate how I was thinking about the furniture.

**AB:** Another large-scale project saw you making reference to the works of Charles Dickens in *The Blacking Factory* and *A Box With the Sound Of Its Own Making* at the Contemporary Art Gallery in Vancouver in 2002. While the enactment of your works can often be framed in the physical experience of the theatrical or cinematic, here you played more specifically with notions of artifice and its extension into the space of the gallery. Can you tell me a bit more about this project.

**GF:** This work consisted of fabricating a white semi-truck trailer, which was a scaled down version of the dimensions of the gallery space. I also hired a special effects company to blowout the windows of the smaller gallery space, which in effect was the shape of a box. It was titled, *A Box With The Sound Of Its Own Making*. This became a video work, which was projected inside that space. At the time I was very much interested in minimalism and specifically the works of Donald Judd and Robert Morris. I think this project acted in a mimetic way to help me work through what I understood to be the argument between their different working methodologies.

**AB:** Earlier you mentioned the influence of artists such as Cindy Sherman to your practice. You've also re-enacted seminal performances by female artists working at the height of the feminist "body art" movement of the late 1960s and '70s. Gender concerns are identifiable in much of your work. To what extent is the legacy of feminist art practice important to your work and to your own position in the sphere of art practice?

**GF:** I have always had an affinity with these works, and they became a point for me to understand how I wanted to position myself within my work. A lot of my instructors were women, and I think this has deeply influenced how I have conceived my work, and how I think it may function.

**AB:** Do you think that gender can still be used as an effective political strategy? Your early drawings are more overt in their use of gender as a subversive, tactic, but your use of elements of a "craft aesthetic" could also be read as a challenge to the typically feminised characterisation of certain domestic crafts.

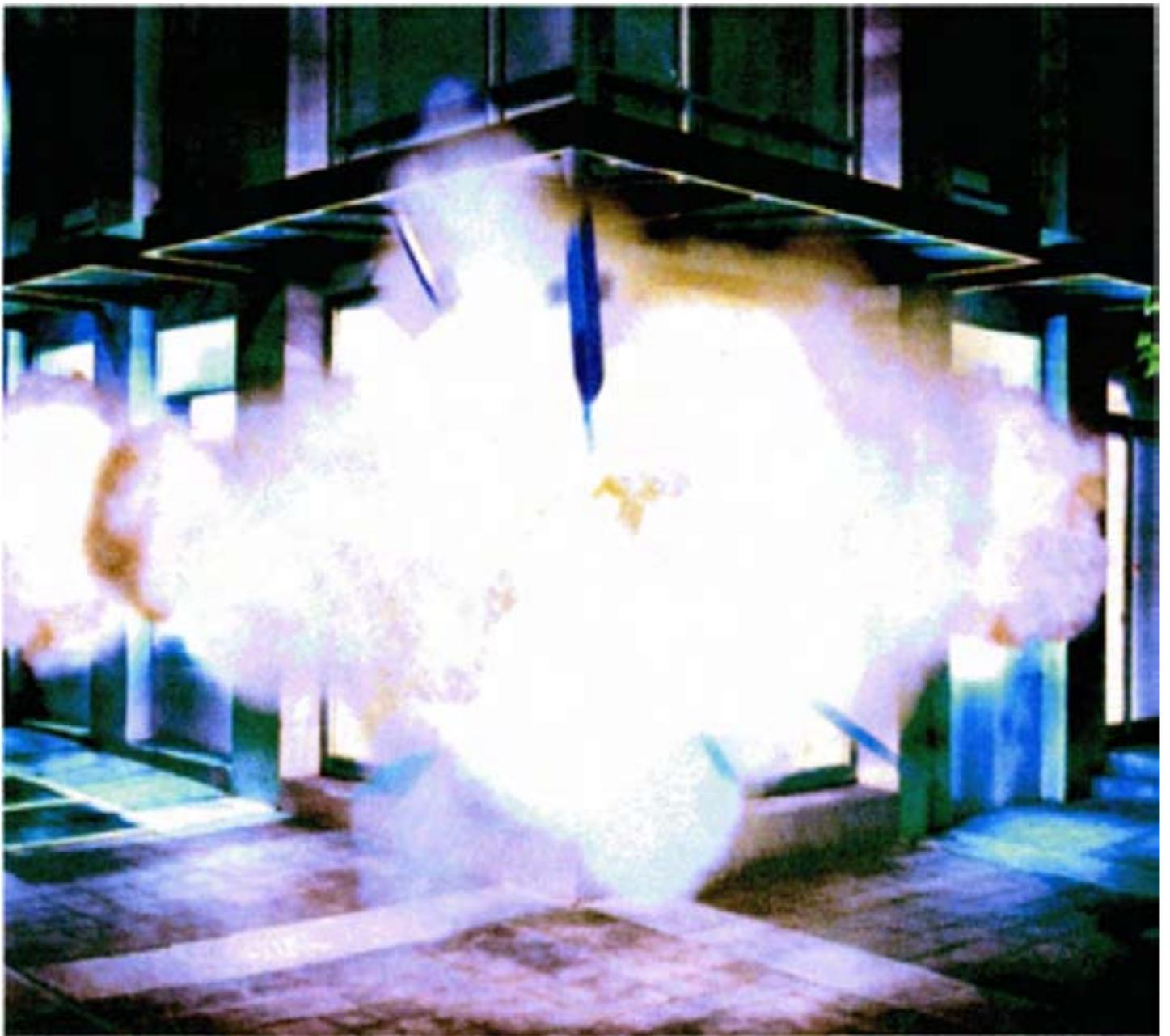
**GF:** I think an effective political strategy today is honesty. The problem with honesty is that it's tricky. One of my instructors at the San Francisco Art Institute, the late writer Kathy Acker, demonstrated this once to me in a writing assignment in which she asked us to write two texts—one we considered to be very honest and revealing and another that was a complete fabrication. Of course, when reading the works, the completely fabricated text ended up being, in a strange way, the most honest of the two.

**AB:** This space between a reality and a fabricated image of one has clearly remained a productive space for you to work in ...

**GF:** I think it is probably the space that we exist in most of the time.

**GEOFFREY FARMER** was born in 1967 in Vancouver, Canada where he lives and works. Recent solo exhibitions include at the Musee d'art contemporain de Montreal; The Power Plant. Toronto and Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver. Recent and upcoming group exhibitions include at Tate Modern, London; The Drawing Room, London and at the Art Gallery of Alberta, Canada.

**ANDREW BONACINA** is a writer and curator based in London.



CASEY KAPLAN  
525 WEST 21ST STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10011  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Adler, Dan, "Geoffrey Farmer at the Power Plant," *Art in America*. February 2006. p. 140

## TORONTO

### Geoffrey Farmer at the Power Plant

Vancouver-based Geoffrey Farmer is known for large-scale multimedia installations that provocatively engage the history and form of their architectural and institutional surroundings. Farmer's exhibition in Toronto—his most ambitious to date—was no exception: it inhabited its venue in a nuanced and intriguing way.

This installation was grounded firmly by the presence of an elegant, black steel fireplace designed by Dominique Imbert in 1968. It hung from the ceiling by a long, exposed flue. Known as the Gyrofocus, Imbert's was the first such design to rotate 360 degrees. The slow, panoptic turning of the sleek metallic heating unit contrasted with the rough surfaces and humble shapes of the used and beat-up wooden furniture that filled the vast gallery. Arranged in long rows were desks, commodes, chairs, tables, children's stools and more. These found objects were placed loosely in groups according to type, but the configurations seemed less worthy of specific attention as, for example, readymades meant to be contemplated as discrete sculptural forms, than as a sprawling terrain of raw material lying in wait. This sense became stronger as one realized that the furniture was being slowly and systematically dismantled and burned in the fireplace by gallery staff.

Recalling the venue's former function as an actual power plant, the regular combustion of furniture parts was only one step in a production process engaging the industrial heritage of the institution. In a



View of Geoffrey Farmer's Installation *A Pale Fire*, 2005: at the Power Plant

workshop located to the side of the gallery, ash from the fireplace was used to create two types of prints that visitors could take with them: one composed of abstract geometric shapes, the other featuring a list of slogans and rules to live and work by, such as "Our only asset is a tidy workplace." The furniture was dissected in another adjacent workshop. Meticulously placed on the wall, the tools of the trade—handsaws, clamps, rubber gloves, protective clothing, masks—had clinical and creepy connotations, enhanced by a storefront window that allowed visitors to imagine, or occasionally observe, the carnage as if it were an operating theater or natural history museum exhibit.

The title of Farmer's work, *A Pale Fire*, is a reference to Vladimir Nabokov's

1962 novel. But the literary reference—a regular feature of Farmer's work—seemed almost irrelevant as an interpretive key to the piece. More satisfying was the effort to consider the project as a conceptual study of collaborative labor: the workers sacrifice the worn and obsolete for the sake of artistic rebirth, in the form of ash-based ink on paper. The gallery visitors, the staff, the artist, the government agencies funding the institution—all were locked into an elaborate production process, bureaucratically rooted and designed to maintain order. We, the gallery visitors, dutifully took our list of slogans as we exiled.

-Dan Adler

CASEY KAPLAN  
525 WEST 21ST STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10011  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Burnham, Clint, "The plane wonder of it all," *The Vancouver Sun*, 11 November 2006, F2



The fuselage of a 727 jet (above), formerly used as a movie prop, undergoes changes (below) as Geoffrey Farmer comes and goes, raising innumerable questions about art and objects.

# The plane wonder of it all

**VIEWFINDER** | What Geoffrey Farmer is up to after-hours begins with a fuselage and flies off in all directions from there

**GEOFFREY FARMER**  
Catriona Jeffries Gallery  
274 East First St.  
Until Nov. 18

**BY CLINT BURNHAM**

I can't tell you what will be in Geoffrey Farmer's exhibition at Catriona Jeffries Gallery. At least, not exactly.

I have some idea — there will probably be an aircraft fuselage sitting in the gallery's main space, a fuselage that was cut apart for a film set, which Farmer discovered in a Fraser Valley barn and, with the help of a dozen Langara and Emily Carr students, cleaned up and moved piece by piece into the gallery. And there may be some videos and some drawings and some very, very abject kind of sculptures.

The reason I can't tell you precisely what you will see if you go down to the gallery today isn't that I haven't bothered to go and see the art myself. Rather, Farmer is mounting an exhibition of his work that is always in process.

But this isn't a performance—you won't see Farmer down there this afternoon. He comes into the gallery after-hours and makes a video, or does some drawings, leaving objects behind for the gallery staff to discover when they come to work in the morning. This process—and the starting-off point of the movie prop that is also a real object—connects with some of Farmer's earlier work.

Farmer is one of Vancouver's most inventive artists for his ability to work with everyday objects and make art that is both uncanny and beautiful

at the same time. He first came to prominence in 1998 in the *6: New Vancouver Modern* show at the University of B.C. Belkin gallery, along with Myfanwy McLeod, Ron Terada, Damian Moppett, Kelly Wood and Steven Shearer. Part of Farmer's contribution to *6* was a video of himself in the gallery after-hours, skateboarding, and engaging in an homage to *E.T.* and *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

In a 2001 exhibition called *Catriona Jeffries Catriona*, Farmer—besides donning a black wig to make him resemble, a bit, the gallery's co-owner —also engaged in process-based art, changing the specifics of the installation over the course of its exhibition.

So by the time I visited Farmer's current show, a week after it had opened, he had added three videos and a series of small drawings and assemblages to the exhibition.

I'll discuss what I think Farmer is up to in making work that changes—or is added to—but first of all, what about the fuselage itself? The airplane prop is almost exactly the dimensions of Catriona Jeffries' old space on South Granville (the gallery moved to its present location in Mount Pleasant this past summer). This fuselage is, by itself, a bravura form of "found" sculpture. It is both suspended from the gallery ceiling and resting on pallets on the floor. Cut from a 727 jet, the interior is authentic down to the plastic cards in the seat pockets.

Surrounding the fuselage are the detritus of all-nighter art making: a video of Farmer crunching a light bulb beneath his feet; drawings with pictures of airplanes glued on to a paper-towel tube; video monitors mounted on the rolling carts from which dinner is served in an airplane. The sculpture becomes the plinth and the artist becomes a goofy actor.



I looked at the gallery's website a couple days later, and Farmer had covered the fuselage with sheets of cut-out fabric, like a felt camouflage net: if one first thinks of Mike Kelley or Paul McCarthy in relation to Farmer's work here, then the German artist Joseph Beuys also seems apropos, given the importance of airplanes to Beuys' own mythology.

Checking in at the gallery a week later, a side of the fuselage had been removed, with a row of seats attached. Inside the plane was a dummy made from a camera tripod, with a papier-mache head in progress. Another video showed Farmer in the plane, from the neck down, doing party tricks with a broom.

There is also, finally, a tension in the work between, I think, two notions of what art is. Is it the fuselage, this great, cumbersome behemoth of the industrial age, here tamed, domesticated, institutionalized, but also defamiliarized, made weird? Is it art about the fuselage, which now has had three lives—as a plane interior, as a prop, and as a work of art? Is the fuselage, in all its sculptural rigour, what we are looking at?

Or is it the process with which Geoffrey Farmer is working on that fuselage, making art of it and around it? Is it the video-making and drawing and playing with the parts, and rearranging them—is that what the art work is? Is this art ephemeral, a rebuke to the commodification of art, to art as an object that is made to be sold?

Or is it both?

Perhaps what is most compelling about Farmer's work is his ability to steer between the Scylla and Charybdis of art as nothing and art as object. And this may be signalled by the fuselage being both suspended from the gallery ceiling and resting on the floor.

So Farmer's art contains, formally, the question of its own being and interpretation. It is both "free as the air" (ephemeral) and "grounded" (an object).

*Clint Burnham is a Vancouver  
freelance writer.*

