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ARTNEWS

GEOFFREY FARMER WILL REPRESENT CANADA AT THE 2017 VENICE BIENNALE

BY Andrew Russeth

What a time to be Canadian. Just a few weeks ago the nation elected the handsome, young leader of its Liberal Party, Justin Trudeau, to be its prime minister, and late last night he welcomed newly arrived Syrian refugees in Toronto. Now news comes from the north that the nation has tapped the excellent Geoffrey Farmer to represent it at the 2017 Venice Biennale.

Farmer, who was born in 1967 and works in Vancouver, has made his name with sculptures that he makes by carefully slicing images out of books and magazines and affixing them to thin sticks. Shown in arrangements that range from just a few pictures to sprawling installations, his works are variously intimate, whimsical, and deeply moving, and often all those things at once.

At Documenta 13, in Kassel, Germany, in 2012, Farmer offered up a masterpiece, titled *Leaves of Grass*, which featured images snipped from LIFE magazines spanning the years 1935 to 1985. Arranged on sticks as a dense forest along a 124-foot-long platform in the city's Neue Galerie, it presented a stunning, impossible-to-digest history of the 20th century.

Farmer has also made larger, deceptively simple sculptures with anthropomorphic and kinetic characteristics, like those that appeared in his superb one-person exhibition "Let's Make the Water Turn Black," which appeared at the Migros Museum in Zurich, Nottingham Contemporary, the Kunstverein Hamburg, and the Pérez Art Museum Miami, in 2013 and 2014. (It was one of the finest shows I saw last year. In April, the ICA Boston will bring Farmer's work stateside for a survey of his paper works.)

Kitty Scott, curator of modern and contemporary art at the Art Gallery of Ontario, is serving as curator of the Canada's pavilion, and selected Farmer. Josée Drouin-Brisebois, senior curator of contemporary art at National Gallery of Canada, in Ottawa, is on board as the pavilion's project director.

"Some of the most complex and extraordinary works to emerge on the Canadian scene over the last ten years were made by Geoffrey Farmer," Marc Mayer, the director and CEO of the National Gallery, said in a statement. Hear, hear! Though I would be fully confident replacing the phrase "the Canadian scene" in that quote with "the entire international art scene."



Installation view of Geoffrey Farmer's *Leaves of Grass* at the Neue Galerie at Documenta 13, in Kassel, Germany.