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GEOFFREY FARMER: *A WAY OUT OF THE MIRROR*
CANADIAN PAVILION, VENICE BIENNALE 2017
MAY 13 - NOVEMBER 26, 2017

A geyser of – Allen Ginsberg reading in Washington Square Park, 1966, book wide open, bearded, right hand in pocket and then myself as a student, curious, sitting on the edge of the fountain in the courtyard of the San Francisco Art Institute waiting anxiously for a John Cage performance to begin in 1991. A duvet freshly slept in by Karl after an LSD trip in the rock formations of the Maggi River, I had to drive us to the airport the next day. The memory of standing on a cliff on the edge of the Pacific Ocean spreading the ashes of an acquaintance who died of complications due to AIDS. Listening to Kathy Acker read Gertrude Stein's *Tender buttons* with Jay DeFeo's *The Rose* entombed in the wall behind her and the view of Alcatraz from that conference room. The discovery by my sister of photographs from 1955 of a collision between a train and my grandfather's lumber truck. The grandfather I never knew, whose death somehow was connected to this event, whose name I removed from my name at age 23. The death of an architect, the founder of BBPR, who died in the Gusen concentration camp. Gian Luigi Banfi. Ten years later the firm designed our Pavilion. A page from an epic poem that quotes an artist "the key is in the sunlight," page 33, *Kaddish*. Blessed, praised, glorified, exalted, extolled, water from Walden Pond. An image of a man penetrated by a wide variety of weapons like the ones found in Johannes de Ketham's *Fasciculus Medicinae*, Venice, 1491. A tortoise stool found in the coffee room of a foundry meant for the chief to sit on. Germaine Richier's *La Mante, grande* (1946 – 1951) as a self-portrait at age 18, when I didn't die like I thought I would. Pieces of metal removed from the ruins of Peter Pitseolak High School which burned down in Cape Dorset, Nunavut, and the promise I made to help rebuild its library. A livestock water trough that survived WWII in an open field in St. Gallen, Switzerland, given to me as a gift from a farmer. Masegni stones found by Luca, excavated in the Euganean Hills some as old as the 1600s. 20 minutes from August 15th, beginning at 2:00pm, the women set on fire on a train heading north and what Karl told me at 1am the night before about his father and what fathers can do and I understood too. Dug through the foundation of the pavilion using a shovel and pick-axe from WWI, bought from a museum 400 meters away. Dug into the Napoleonic rubble from the former Castello district, demolished in the 18th century to make way for the Giardini, and all the rubble piled up to create the hill where the pavilion sits. My restlessness, anxiety of never seeing the whole. The loss, the lost ones, hoping to escape, while I sat looking at my phone, not knowing and unable to help while they were drowning. My teared-up eyes of the news of Luca's death and the memory of the last cigarette I smoked of his next to the doorway soon to be punched out of the side of the pavilion. The garden behind butchered by the workers to make way for a deck that has yet to be built. The surprise of the metal fence put up at the last minute. The struggle for the removal of the Canada sign; if it is still on the front of the pavilion, I lost. The war reparation money in every brick. The 71 planks from my grandfather's accident printed using a lithographic process; at first I thought they were exclamation marks, and then later, peacock feathers. The myth of how the peacock got its coloured feathers by eating the poison berries of the garden. All this, as I stand here, looking out at the lagoon. All souls, all living, all gaseous, watery, vegetable, mineral processes, the fishes, the brutes, all nations, colors, barbarisms, civilizations, languages, all identities that have existed or may exist on this globe, or any globe, all lives and deaths, all of the past, present, future. This vast similitude spans them, and always has spann'd, and shall forever span them and compactly hold and enclose them. –Geoffrey Farmer

Geoffrey Farmer (b. 1967, Vancouver) lives and works in Vancouver, BC. His work has been exhibited internationally in solo exhibitions at venues such as Vancouver Art Gallery (2015); Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (2014); Kunstverein Hamburg (2014); Perez Art Museum, Miami (2014); National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (2014); Migros Museum, Zurich (2013); Mercer Union, Toronto (2013); Nottingham Contemporary (2013); Barbican Art Gallery, London (2013); and Witte de With, Rotterdam (2008). The artist has been featured in exhibitions at Steirischer Herbst, Graz, Austria (2015); Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond (2015); The Louvre, Paris (2015); KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2012); dOCUMENTA (13), Kassel (2012); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2012); Kumu Art Museum, Tallinn (2011); Zabludowicz Collection Curatorial Open 2011, London (2011); 12th Istanbul Biennial, curated by Jens Hoffmann and Adriano Pedrosa (2011); and CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco (2011). Farmer's work is included in the permanent collections of CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco; the Cleveland Museum of Art; Tate Modern, London; Vancouver Art Gallery; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; and the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

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Only Connect

ArtReview

How a violent collision forged Geoffrey Farmer's fountain for the Canadian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale

By Craig Burnett

In 1990 Geoffrey Farmer started writing notes to strangers on public buses. In those days, in Vancouver, buses issued paper 'transfers', a time-limit punched into its thin newsprint, which enabled passengers to change buses and continue their journey. Farmer rode the bus with an old typewriter on his lap, rolled the transfers into its creaky frame and tried to write a tiny note-poem for a stranger before he or she alighted. One of them read, 'I can see the dog you / are hiding in your bag. / I wish we were in Paris. / Thank You, / A Stranger'. The slumber of the daily commute was ruptured by a random act of empathetic weirdness.

Notes for Strangers, created while the artist was a student at Emily Carr College of Art & Design, heralded a set of ideas that Farmer has been working on for almost 30 years: ephemerality, chance encounters, connections across space and time, a desire to communicate. Yet, less than a year later, his worldview was changed completely: between 1990 and 1991 Farmer attended the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI). The models he'd encountered at art school in Vancouver, where detached intellection was prized above all else, were exposed as a particular, limited way to be an artist, rather than the only way. When I talked to Farmer about his plans for the Canadian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, it was not the pavilion or even the work that first came to his mind, but a series of vivid recollections of that transformative year.

In San Francisco, he heard Kathy Acker read, in a manner that he'd never heard anyone read, Gertrude Stein's Tender Buttons (1914). He saw John Cage perform in January 1991, a performance that was mostly silence punctuated by guttural noises; while he initially thought the performance was ridiculous, when Cage discussed it afterwards, his eloquence and openness changed Farmer's mind. He discovered William S. Burroughs's 'cut up' method. Tony Oursler taught a class; Allan Kaprow and Carolee Schneemann showed up. Amidst the aids crisis, he became immersed i n queer culture and history. He came out. He learned about the Venice Biennale, via a 1970 Artscanada magazine with a cover story on Michael Snow, Canada's representative at the Biennale that year. He heard Allen Ginsberg read, and watched astonished as the poet shifted from calm, discursive lecturer to rhapsodic bard. What I understood listening to Farmer discuss his experiences was that he came to understand that while you could be an artist of considerable intellect, that didn't mean you had to be dry. Intuition, language, emotion, performance, perhaps a hint of madness: that year in San Francisco gave him the permission to become himself – by becoming someone else.

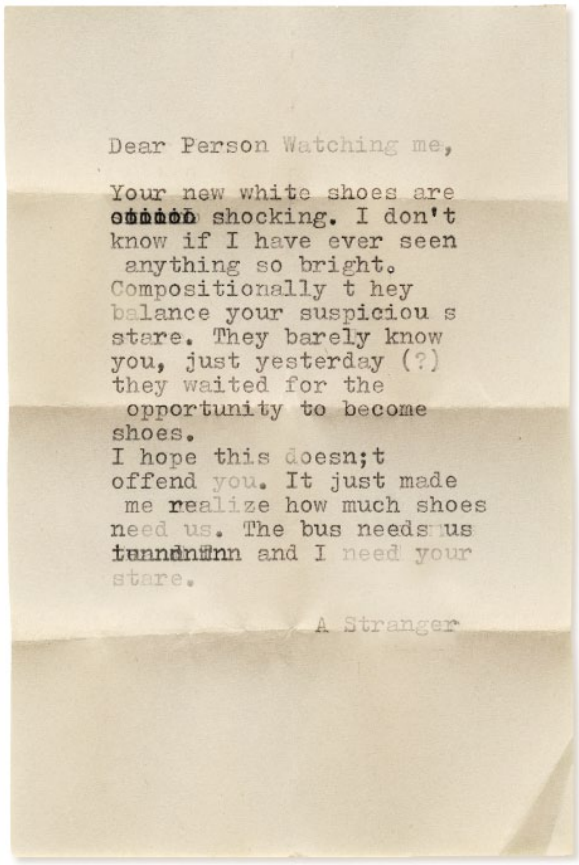
Farmer took the title for his pavilion, A way out of the mirror, from the Ginsberg poem 'Laughing Gas' (written in 1958, published in Kaddish and Other Poems, 1961): 'A way out of the mirror / was found by the image / that realized its existence / was only... / a stranger completely like myself '. Why Ginsberg? In part because of his memory of hearing him read in San Francisco, but the reference to the poet – and the 1958 date – are part of a larger network of connections and coincidences enacted in April 2016, just as he started thinking about ideas for the pavilion.

Farmer's sister emailed him two black-and-white press photographs, dated 1955, that she had found in the basement of their father's house. Both depict the aftermath of the same accident: a pick-up truck slammed against a railway-crossing sign, pushed there by a train, its cargo of timber spilled out across a bank of earth like the buckling floes in Caspar David Friedrich's The Sea of Ice (1823–4). In one of the photos, a train zips by behind the crash, getting on with the business of transporting goods. In the other, from a slightly different angle, a dumbstruck kid – anonymous, placed there by the photographer – looks blankly at the scene, a half-

eaten apple in his hand. There might have been no particular reason to pay much attention to the pictures – despite the voyeuristic melodrama of any accident, they are from bygone era, seemingly irrelevant. But it turns out that they had a profound personal connection to the artist: Farmer's paternal grandfather was behind the wheel of the truck. And though he walked away from the wreckage, he died a couple of months later from a heart attack. Farmer had never heard the story before, only the faint susurrations of past family trauma from his emotionally clenched father, a man prone to violent outbursts. The potent images had been languishing for decades, their story all boxed up.

For an artist whose raw material is found imagery, these long-dormant photographs were a boon. The press photographs became for Farmer what he calls a 'spring': the point of departure from which flowed a range of inchoate thoughts and feelings, both personal and political. A nexus of coincidences started to bubble up the more he meditated on the images, and he wanted to incarnate all those immaterial leaps between events and ideas into a new physical structure. Ginsberg was the first of many connections Farmer started to make: when the email arrived from his sister, he happened to be reading Ginsberg's Howl, which was written in 1955, the year of the accident. Turns out, in 1955, the students at SFAI had organised a reading of the poem. And this was also about the time that the Canadian Pavilion in the Giardini, a small hut of brick and angled glass, was being proposed (and eventually built in 1958, the year Ginsberg wrote 'Laughing Gas'). One of the founding members of its architects, Milanese firm BBPR, had died in Mauthausen concentration camp, and one of the practice's first postwar projects was a memorial – a gridded, geometric cube, with some similarities to the Canadian Pavilion – to the victims of German concentration camps. The Canadian Pavilion formed, moreover, part of the war reparations from Italy to Canada. The Giardini itself was born of war, with Napoleon razing a neighbourhood and rearranging the city at the end of the eighteenth century, the Canadian Pavilion atop a hill constructed from rubble, a residue of the Frenchman's brute violence. In the process of developing all of these connections, Farmer read Kaja Silverman's The Miracle of Analogy (2014); her ideas about found images, and the way in which photographs allow 'us to see that each of us is a node in a vast constellation of analogies', echoed many of his own thoughts about found photography and this project in particular. (Think of the immeasurable networks of found photographs the artist used in installations such as The Last Two Million Years, 2007, or The Surgeon and the Photographer, 2009–13.) Farmer had thus discovered the source of his ideas for the pavilion in a couple of old press photographs, at once anonymous and yet intimately connected to the very formation of his existence and identity.

It was the question of how to give these 'vast constellations' concrete form that drove Farmer's imagination. Farmer decided he wanted to create a public space that incorporated references to Ginsberg, San Francisco, architecture, poetry, transparency, protest and the history of his family.


Dear Person Watching me,

Your new white shoes are
[illegible] shocking. I don't
know if I have ever seen
anything so bright.
Compositionally t hey
balance your suspiciou s
stare. They barely know
you, just yesterday (?)
they waited for the
opportunity to become
shoes.
I hope this doesn;t
offend you. It just made
me realize how much shoes
need us. The bus needs us
[illegible] and I need your
stare.

A Stranger

Geoffrey Farmer, Notes for Strangers (detail),1989/1990, small typewriter, six typewritten notes on paper, transfer ticket, shelf with Plexiglas top, notes, 15 × 9 cm (each). Courtesy Catriona Jeffries,Vancouver

While he was at SFAI, he spent a lot of time at the fountain, a small octagonal structure with Moorish tiles. He thought of Ginsberg in Greenwich Village, and the fountain in Washington Square. He thought of his husband, who's from NYC, and his memories of that fountain, and again of Ginsberg, who, like him, had to leave his hometown to forge his identity anew. The fountains became metaphors for origin myths, oases of communal learning, pleasure and healing. He decided to combine the external shape of the San Francisco fountain with the high-shooting water feature from Washington Square, creating a hybrid water feature that, conceptually at least, spanned a continent. With the history of the pavilion's architects in mind, and their antifascist desire for openness and transparency, the artist will open up the pavilion to the Giardini, converting a cramped exhibition space into a public piazza. Thus the pavilion, and the hybrid fountain Farmer will create for the site, grew into a fusion of structures, a uniting of polarities, a memorial to a buried past and a spring of enlightenment.

But how could Farmer integrate the content of the photographs, the story of his family? Farmer knew that the planks of lumber that spilled from the truck were important. He decided to remake them, all 71, and incorporate them into the fountain. He cast facsimile planks in bronze, applied a print pattern and a patina to mimic wood, perforated them and devised a program to regulate the flow of water through the hollow bronze; he also punched holes in the ends of the planks so that water would spurt playfully from

the ends of their hard, geometric edges. His recreation of these long-forgotten strips of timber echoes the nature of the whole project: Farmer starts with an accident, and transforms the residue into a playful, flowing dance.

Another feature of the fountain will be a grandfather clock, an axe in its back, and from this structure the main jet of water will shoot 13 metres into the sky, matching the height of the Washington Square fountain. There is yet another element: a human-mantis figure, lifesize and cast in rough bronze, hunched like some sci-fi monster imagined by Giacometti, will sit in the centre of the fountain, a huge book on its lap, a pair of scissors jutting from its back.

Is it a figure of the artist? In the course of thinking about Farmer's work, even before I'd heard anything about the pavilion, a line from William Blake's 'Proverbs of Hell' (1790–93) kept coming to mind: 'The cut worm forgives the plow'. I had an image of the artist as one of those farmers (no pun here – just another coincidence) who, one day in the field, hits a cluster of ancient artefacts with his plow, then spends a life-time interpreting the objects. The photo- graphs of the accident are just such objets trouvés: unearthed by accident, portentous and strange, sending the discoverer on a hermeneutic quest. For Farmer, the press photographs allowed him to talk to his father about his grandfather, unlocking an episode of his family's history that was almost lost forever. His grandfather was a labourer, and both he and Farmer's father endured the tribulations of midcentury life in the raw landscape and economy of Vancouver in its rough becoming. These stories of suffering allowed the artist to empathise with his father, come to some comprehension of his rage and gruff aggression. The past is a plow that leaves its mark unintentionally, just getting on with its daily tasks. A train is an almighty force. A violent father an inescapable presence. A life smashed, dug up, reformed; a pavilion cut open. A fountain placed at its core, a source of life, a site of synthesis and gratitude. The cut worm forgives the plow.

Unknown Photographer (Collision), 1955, archival photographs. Courtesy the artist

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Mousse Magazine

CONVERSATIONS

Geoffrey Farmer "A way out of the mirror" at Canada Pavilion, Venice Biennale

Geoffrey Farmer interviewed by Lorenzo Benedetti

Lorenzo Benedetti: BBPR architects designed the Canadian Pavilion in 1958. It is an asymmetrical, complex, and discursive architecture that is continuing in a certain way in your proposal, where we assist in a collision between different elements: from personal references to a collective symbolic identity. Your participation at the 57th edition of the Biennale di Venezia seems to investigate the role of the place and its manifold meanings. What was the starting point?

Geoffrey Farmer: There is a sculpture of a tortoise in my project that is a copy of a wooden one I found in the coffee area of the Kunstgiesserei in St. Gallen, where I developed and made the work for Venice. It reminded me of a story attributed to a lecture that Bertrand Russell gave on the nature of our galaxy. At the end of the lecture a woman stands up and declares that the lecture was rubbish (Stephen Hawking wrote about it in *A Brief History of Time*). She then goes on to inform Russell that the world is really a flat plate supported on the back of a giant turtle. Russell asks her, "What the turtle is standing on?" and the women replies, "It's turtles all the way down!" The tortoise in my project is resting on the floor of the pavilion, with a book balanced on its back, and on top of this is an empty food can spewing water. In my mind, it is also linked to an illustration from Zakariya al-Qazwini's book *Marvels of Things Created and Miraculous Aspects of Things Existing*, which was written in the thirteenth century. When I arrived at the pavilion for the first time, I found a small sprout cracking out of its seed. It looked like a turtle with something growing out of its back. It was expanding into a greater being from a very small existence. I looked at the Canadian Pavilion, the trees sprouting out of it, the deep roots emerging out of the ground around my feet, and I realized that this tortoise, this pavilion, this site, this moment was the starting point of the project.

LB: The history of the Canadian Pavilion, as with all the pavilions in the Giardini, is a combination of many different layers, showing that elements like topography or architecture all have symbolic meanings translating the past in present form. Your presence seems to be about a kind of awareness of being in a highly symbolic place.

GF: What I discovered by digging a little around the pavilion is that it sits on the rubble of the former Castello quarter that was torn down by Napoleon. If you dig deeper than fifty centimeters, you need to have an archaeologist present. The Canadian Pavilion was paid for by war reparation money and designed by BBPR, a Milanese architectural firm whose founding member died in the Mauthausen extermination camp for being a resistance fighter. When the firm reestablished after the war, one of their first projects was a nonfigurative monument for the victims of the concentration camps. They designed the Canadian Pavilion ten years later, and it sits next to the German Pavilion, whose only renovation after the war was having the eagle and swastika removed. BBPR chose what many in Canada have interpreted as a kind of tipi design, which when you consider the genocide that occurred to the Indigenous peoples with the arrival of the Europeans, creates a very complicated and highly symbolic place.

LB: One of the starting points are some images of your grandfather's truck crash. The translation in an extended bronze installation and the use of water creates an interesting concept of anti-monumentality.

GF: I recently found these photographs of an accident he was involved in 1955. A train hit his lumber truck and hurled it down the track, spreading lumber planks in a chaotic arrangement. It is an image that also describes the economic and resource extraction occurring at that time in Canada. The discovery of the collision, and his death, explained a lot of the dynamics I experienced with my father. The physical violence I experienced as a child seemed connected to it and is perhaps why the photographs felt familiar to me. I began to understand the impact it had on my father's life, and unknowingly on mine. I began to understand the shame attached to his experience of poverty as a child, and my family's escape from poverty in Great Britain, and the impact of this migration on the people who had already been inhabiting North America for thousands of years. It's turtles all the way down.

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Art World

artnet news

5 Triumphant National Pavilions at the Venice Biennale, From Finnish Robots to Canadian Floods

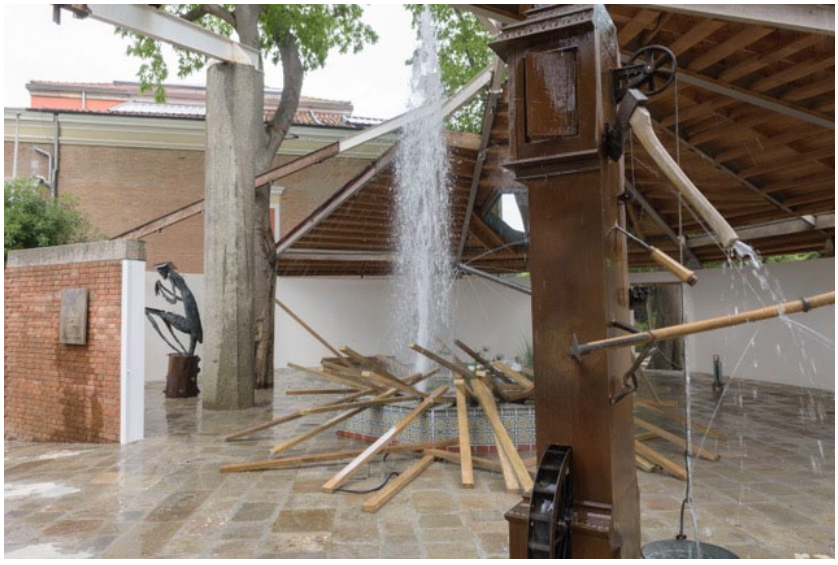
See which pavilions in the Giardini made the cut.

Lorena Muñoz-Alonso, May 10, 2017

If the Venice Biennale is the Olympics of the art world, then the national pavilions are the stadiums where countries unleash the best talent they have to offer. The 57th Venice Biennale held its official preview earlier today, and throngs of people lined up outside the Giardini to get an early glimpse of the much-anticipated national pavilion presentations. (A number of other national pavilions are housed in the nearby Arsenale.)

The wait didn't disappoint. This Biennale yields a group of strong and diverse presentations. The Instagram-friendly Korean pavilion was an early favorite—all neon signs and wacky interiors, courtesy of Cody Choi and Lee Wan. Other talked-about projects include Anne Imhof's brooding "Faust" at the German pavilion and Xavier Veilhan's sound installation and performance "Studio Venezia" at the French pavilion, curated by Christian Marclay and Lionel Bovier.

Overwhelmed by all the options? We've zipped around the Giardini and narrowed it down for you. Here are our picks of the five must-see national pavilions at the Giardini this year.



Installation view of Geoffrey Farmer's "A way out of the mirror" at the Canada Pavilion for the 57th Venice Biennale 2017. ©GeoffreyFarmer, courtesy of the artist. Photo Francesco Barasciutti.

3. Canadian Pavilion: Geoffrey Farmer
Those expecting a sprawling, detailed installation, like the one that propelled Farmer to art-world fame at Documenta 13, are in for a shock. In a neat departure from his signature style, the Canadian artist is literally causing a splash with his Venice presentation. He has routed several water sources—fountains, leaks, drips—into the pavilion. The building, which appears now almost in ruins, is actually undergoing a much-needed $3 million restoration. Farmer decided to face the challenge head-on and incorporate the shifting architecture into his project.

Unsuspecting onlookers erupted into laughter when they spotted a jet of water emerging from the center of the pavilion. But "A way out of the mirror" is actually grounded in tragedy, both in the artist's family history and the history of his country. Don't let the whimsical appearance fool you: death, catastrophe, and the passage of time are Farmer's main subjects.

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There She Blows: Geoffrey Farmer Builds a Geyser in the Canadian Pavilion

ARTNEWS

BY ***Andrew Russeth*** POSTED **05/09/17 9:29 AM**

ARTNEWS

Geoffrey Farmer's exhibition at the Venice Biennale, "A way out of the mirror," runs in, through, above, and around the Canadian pavilion. It is moving, strange, and a little frightening, and it is one of the best shows being presented in the Giardini this year.

The 60-year-old pavilion is currently undergoing restoration (it will be ready for the 2018 Architecture Biennale) and much of it is missing right now, including a good chunk of the roof, so the Vancouver-based artist was able to create a powerful fountain at its center that shoots up jets of water, soaking unsuspecting viewers and sending refreshing mist through the air. Water collects on the half-built roof and rolls down to the edges. It's lovely.

There is also a cast of a Germaine Richier sculpture of a huge praying mantis, *La Mante, grande* (1946–51), with a book balanced atop its head; a kind of grandfather clock-turned-waterworks that recalls a Jean Tinguely kinetic piece; and a number of brass versions of pieces of lumber scattered about. It is a surreal scene, made all the more surreal by the large tree that has long emerged from the ground inside the structure and gone through its roof. Now that tree is exposed to the elements.

Even after a fair bit of observation, the rhythm of the fountain is hard to discern, so you have to move through the pavilion carefully, alert to the possibility of a geyser. Once you navigate it, though, you are rewarded with a sunny balcony that features sneaky little views of the waters of Venice, as well as a poetic text by Farmer that explains the origins of the objects in the show—the lumber, for instance, is based on a photograph the Farmer found showing his grandfather's truck after being hit by a train in 1955, with lumber scattered across the ground.

The feeling of the show is of a work in progress, or even a life in progress. Farmer has collaged various moments from his life, and his family's life, alongside the history of the pavilion and the history of 20th-century art. This is a show about in-between moments, about how artists—and all people—piece things together, how we invent ourselves moment by moment. Intriguingly, if his text is to be believed, he wanted the show to be even more raw. He mentions at one point a "struggle for the removal of the Canada sign; if it is still on the front of the pavilion; if it is still on the front of the pavilion, I lost."

The sign is there. But hidden in the ground not far from it is a miniature geyser—a drinking fountain that shoots up from amongst pebbles if you place your feet just right.

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Geoffrey Farmer at the Venice Biennale: Through a glass, darkly

thestar.com

The celebrated Canadian artist opens his project at the Venice Biennale as a coming to terms with past traumas, personal and patriotic both

By **MURRAY WHYTE** Visual arts

Sat., May 13, 2017

Geoffrey Farmer is among Canada's best-known art world exports, so it's no surprise he'd be pegged to represent Canada at the Venice Biennale, opening Saturday. What might be a little surprising is Farmer's project: an explosive flaying of the Canada pavilion, with the roof torn off, the walls removed, and two-by-fours scattered hither and yon amid a perpetual shower from a gushing fountain at its core.

Nods to his best known works — meticulously crafted collages of images, clustered and arrayed with alarming density — are nowhere to be found. References to the array of works he's shown in Toronto in recent years — at Mercer Union, at the Art Gallery of Ontario and at Luminato — are slight to non-existent. In their place, a crouching, mantis-like cast bronze figure contemplates a book amid the downpour, while a grandfather clock sports an axe buried in its hide.

The figure, a teenage effigy of Farmer himself, marks the personal nature of the piece. Catalyzed by the artist's discovery of unpublished press images of his grandfather's death before he was born, when his lumber truck collided with a train in British Columbia, Farmer's installation, *A way out of the mirror*, is his way of dragging old family traumas — always looming, never discussed — out of the shadows and into the light.

In dismantling the pavilion, Farmer also rips the lid off our own country's traumatic dysfunction, just in time for our Canada 150 moment. We spoke to him in Venice on the eve of the opening.

It seems like every artist who represents Canada at Venice has had to wrestle with the confines of the building, and now you're living out every one of their fantasies by literally tearing it apart.

From the beginning I wanted the building to be part of the project and it just happened to be about to undergo a restoration. It was pivoting for me, really, that I was allowed to work with the building in the way. The project has really been about learning about my own past and my family's past, and understanding certain dramatic events that occurred — the collision, my grandfather's death — that were never really talked about. In some ways the project was about tearing the roof off, really, with my family around all of that, and the emotion and catharsis that go along with it.

The word I keep thinking of is rupture: something torn open and whatever's been trapped inside exploding outward. Is it too much to read that as a metaphor for what the country is experiencing, in this strange Canada 150 moment?

The building has the name "Canada" right there on it and, of course, nationhood is on everyone's mind right now. So I could look at the collision — because the project has so much to do with collision — that occurred 150 years ago. The history of conquering and destruction and trauma are definitely at the root of this project.

It's really compelling how your personal reconciliation story seems to mesh with a larger narrative unfolding about the country.

My grandfather, who I never knew and we never really talked about, never talked much to my father. They lived in poverty, he had a lumber truck and he had many different jobs. It was a very tough existence for my father, and then losing his own father, around 21 or 22, was hard. But for me, growing up as a gay kid in the '70s, was difficult. It all had to do with ideas of what a boy should be. I experienced a lot of violence, or threats of violence. It was the reason I became introverted and became an artist — I was always experiencing violence directed towards me from men. I had so much fear in dealing with those subjects; it loomed over me in such a way that it was hard for me to even consider talking to my own father about these things. And that's reflected in our country: we also want to avoid uncomfortable conversations or the admittance of guilt.

Sure, we're the nice colonials, right? That's our brand. But the 150th is becoming more and more an occasion to own up to difficult truths.

I think that Canada is changing, of course, as people start to express their anger and also their agency. You have artists who are transforming the culture through their work. With the pavilion, I guess I wanted people to experience it in a way that was full of that kind of potentiality. And release — this opening up of a narrative that's been closed for so long.
Canada is 150 years old, but it's a constructed nation, and we have to be conscious now and always that a terrible price that were paid for that to be possible. And that is something for me personally, that's important: Understanding the emotional power and necessity for emotion to be expressed around grief and trauma and anger – all of those things which are also part of our history.

Everything about this project seems almost like nothing you've ever done before.

I know! (Laughs) I felt from the very beginning that I wanted to use this opportunity to step into a new world. I think there was a point where my work was becoming so broad historically I started to think, "Where am I in this?" So this was almost like a collapse into myself — my own story, but also the story of Canada. I think the result is the work the exhibition as a way to cathartically process that — and also step away from it, to finally be free of it.

The piece is called "A way out of the mirror," and while I know you're fond of poetic aphorisms, that's not it at all here, is it?

No. Think of it this way: there's a new exit out of the pavilion, in the back. And to me, that was one of the most important aspects of what I wanted to do. It's all the work really hits for me: you can enter and you can leave, in a completely different way, and you can see all the way through it. For me, that's what "a way out of a mirror" is: getting beyond these ideas, shattering them and moving on to a new understanding.

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Geoffrey Farmer in Venice: A First Look

CANADIANART

Geoffrey Farmer's moving, personal installation at the Canada Pavilion confronts personal and national histories through the metaphor of water

MAY 10, 2017 BY ROSIE PRATA

At the Canada Pavilion, everything is exposed: architecture, history and emotion. Artist Geoffrey Farmer and curator Kitty Scott have created a spectacular, layered and complex work. The Nautilus shell–shaped building will soon undergo a $3-million restoration, to be completed in 2018. Farmer removed the facade, stripped all the glass and replaced the floor with Masegni paving stones. What remains of the original structure is its bare and twisted spiral skeleton, through which coruscating light scatters on an assortment of bronze sculptures.

A 30-foot geyser sporadically shoots out of a tiled fountain, kissing the green canopy of leaves above the roof before crashing down to drench the ground below and run down the sides of the pavilion. Timber planks, also of bronze, are placed willy-nilly in and around the fountain, like a spilled box of matches. Among the sculptures are a larger-than-life-size praying mantis reading a text, with a pair of scissors wedged into his carapace—a supposed avatar of Farmer himself. The insect wears another book on his head, like a hat.

Nearby, rivulets of water cascade from a grandfather clock that has been bludgeoned with an axe and burdened with various domestic objects, such as a bucket and a broom, and with various flora and fauna, such as a shell and mushrooms. A variety of orifices accent the space in the manner of a mystical babbling brook. Many “fountains” are alluded to here, from Rome’s majestic Trevi Fountain to crying eyes. At the National Gallery of Canada dinner for Farmer on Tuesday evening, the artist played a series of clips of deluges, reminiscent of clips he has been posting on Instagram, from the epic sinking scene from *The Poseidon Adventure*, to Beyonce’s “Formation” video.

The pavilion officially opened to the media today. I spoke to Geoffrey Farmer about how this project is his most personal yet, how a car crash in 1955 that his grandfather was involved in inspired him to conflate global and personal histories, and how tragedy and devastation are written not just in books, but also on our bodies, and how we must process this trauma through emotion. Through tears.

Farmer explains that the title, A way out of the mirror, comes from a book by Allen Ginsberg, Kaddish and Other Poems 1958–1960. The Kaddish is a Jewish prayer often said for a deceased loved one. It was not allowed to be given to Ginsberg’s mother, because she was in a mental hospital when she died—so he wrote his own. Farmer’s installation effectively begins with a plaque quoting page 33 of Ginsberg’s book. Some of the words are missing. In the passage, Ginsberg’s hospitalized mother tells her son that “the key is in the sunlight.”

“This project is about the death of my grandfather, whom I never knew,” says Farmer. Farmer became posthumously acquainted with his grandfather only a year ago, when his sister Elizabeth showed him press photos of a truck accident his grandfather was involved in—a collision with a train—just months before his death from related causes.

“The work is about collisions, and colliding moments in time and objects together, in one place,” says Farmer. At the NGC dinner, Farmer identified the photos as “the portrait of my birth as an artist.”

“[The installation] is also about the history of this place,” Farmer told me, “and the ruins we are standing in.” Napoleon tore down the Castello to make the Giardini, long-loathed by Venetians as a symbol of French occupation. “I also think about the rubble I stand on myself, as a Canadian, and the impact of what happened 150 years ago and how I am complicit in that,” Farmer says.

The pavilion was built with war reparation money; it’s in every brick. Farmer pays tribute to “the men and women who lost their lives during the Second World War, and also to the pavilion’s architects,” two of whom were interned in a concentration camp for being resistance fighters, and one of whom died in 1945.

“The building was always meant to be temporary,” says Farmer. “The definition of a pavilion is that it’s a temporary structure, but now that it is becoming designated as an architectural heritage site, I think [the new architects, descendants of the original architects] are very limited in terms of what they can do. It’s such an important building in Italian architecture, one of the few examples in Venice of North American architectural influence.

“The water [circulating in the installation] comes from a river outside of Venice. There is a movement to get people to start drinking out of the fountains and to stop using plastic bottles, because it’s become an environmental concern.” Farmer relays a statistic that, each year in Venice, more than 20 million tourists consume 13 million bottles of water.

“We define water by its location,” says Farmer, “but in itself it can be a river in one moment, tears the next; a dog can be drinking it; you could be washing your hair with it. That’s the thing I like about the idea of water, how universal it is and how it transgresses boundaries, and also creates boundaries. It plays such an important role, politically as well.

“Canada was founded on rubble,” said Farmer at Wednesday’s press preview. In a moving text he wrote for the installation, located at the back of the pavilion, he speaks of his “struggle for the removal of the Canada sign” at the entrance: “If it is still on the front of pavilion, I lost.” (The sign remains.)

“This project has made me understand that I am complicit in history and the events of the world,” says Farmer, “in ways that those touched by them directly are not.”

With files from David Balzer.

This article was updated on May 15 to indicate that the pavilion was opened up after direction from Geoffrey Farmer and Kitty Scott, and not because of the restoration project.

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MACLEAN'S

Geoffrey Farmer's tour de force at the Venice Biennale

The most inventive and exciting Canadian project at the art show in years

Sara Angel
May 10, 2017

Geoffrey Farmer, A way out of the mirror, 2017. Installation view at the Canada Pavilion for the 57th International Art Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia, 2017. © Geoffrey Farmer, Courtesy of the artist. (Francesco Barasciutti)

In 16th- and 17th-century Europe, amusing water features known as *jeux d'eau* became features of European Mannerist and Baroque gardens. For the sprawling grounds of his Hellbrunn Palace in Austria, Markus Sittich von Hohenems, the Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg, commissioned a series of pranks including a stone dining table through which conduits artfully shot surprise sprays on unsuspecting guests, startling their senses and transforming their environment.

About two years ago, after the Vancouver-born artist Geoffrey Farmer was chosen to represent Canada at the Venice Biennale, the prestigious international contemporary art exhibition that opens this week, he made a visit to the Giardini, the city's east-end garden that has housed the international fair since 1895. A vision of a jeux d'eau came to his mind. At first when he looked at the Canadian pavilion, where his Venice project would be installed, says Farmer, "A palm tree came to mind. Then I realized that it wasn't a palm tree, it was a 30-foot geyser."

This was the genesis for the most complex, inventive, and exciting Canadian project to be unveiled at the Biennale in years: a courtyard of sculptures that are biographically based and aquatically infused. As the 49-year-old Farmer explains, "Water is universal, permeable, and in constant movement. I wanted that to be flowing through my installation and bringing it to life."

The Biennale commission is a significant one for Farmer. Over the next months (the fair runs until November) an expected 500,000 visitors will arrive at the Giardini to view exhibits by the leading artists from more than 80 nations. While Farmer is already internationally renowned, he is best known for constructions of collage and works such as his epic paper composition Leaves of Grass, which received much fanfare in 2012 at Documenta, a 100-day-long international art exhibition held every five years in Kassel, Germany. The installation was comprised of an assembly of paper-doll-like objects—each one a figurine composed from cut-and-pasted images from Life—that the artist mounted to dried grass sticks so viewers could see magazines, as well as the wider world, in what he described as "a new, liberated way."
Now Farmer has moved to a much more challenging medium. Not only is he presenting a diverse range of cast-metal works for the first time in his career—each one with a unique size, function, and meaning—but he has also created a visionary space to showcase his creations. "Although Geoffrey has made performative assemblage sculpture before," explains Kitty Scott, both the project's curator and the Art Gallery of Ontario's curator of contemporary art, "he has never done so on such an emotional register at this monumental scale. Bronze too is a new material for him."

In order to create a stage for his waterworks, the artist completely transformed the Canadian pavilion, where this country's artists have shown their work at the Venice fair since 1952, removing its walls entirely, and the roof except for its beams, leaving only the skeleton of the original structure. (In large measure this was possible because the pavilion is slated for a major restoration once the Biennale closes.) Farmer also lifted the building's 70-year-old terrazzo floor and laid down an Italian stone that remains beautiful when wet, and is sufficiently toothed to offer visitors a slip-free surface to walk on. With no protection from the elements, the space once occupied by the Canadian pavilion has been transformed into a piazza, filled with an installation of sculptures. The backdrop of the new courtyard is a majestic view of Venice's serene lagoon and buildings in the distance, hidden from view until Farmer took down the pavilion's walls.

Farmer found the narrative for his compendium of fountains when his sister showed him two black-and-white press photographs from 1955 that she found in their parents' basement. The pictures were of his grandfather's truck, demolished after a collision with a train. Lumber, which had been piled in the back of the vehicle, was spread along the track; a fallen crossing sign rests on the truck's hood.

Not only were the images visually compelling to Farmer, they unlocked a family mystery. The artist knew nothing about his grandfather "because my father never spoke about him or the incident," he says. Yet somehow he sensed that the accident had changed his family's trajectory. During the harrowing crash, his grandfather's chest slammed against the steering wheel, the probable cause of a massive fatal heart attack a few months later. Soon after, Farmer's father went to work at a young age to help support his family. He carried the event with him throughout his life, passing it on to Farmer, the artist says, "through his silence."

Drawing on the imagery in the photos, Farmer created two-by-fours in brass, 71 in total, made to represent the lumber beams that he counted in the pictures of his grandfather's demolished truck. He designed each cast plank as a fountain, so that they all spray water, and then strewed them deliberately about the courtyard. "They evoke the collision, one that replicates the one that set his family on a course which created an intergenerational trauma," explains Scott.

The central component of Farmer's project is also biographical: an amalgamation of two water features that have been merged together: one modeled after the Moorish-tiled fountain at the San Francisco Institute of Art where Farmer went to school in 1991. Collaged to it is a duplication of the fountain in New York's Washington Square Park, which shoots upward. San Francisco was central to Farmer's coming of age. It was where he was taught by Kathy Acker, first heard the music of John Cage, was exposed to gay culture, and became deeply familiar with Allen Ginsburg, whose famous poem "Howl" was written in 1955, the year of his grandfather's accident.

In homage to both the beat poet and his own family, Farmer has titled his Venice installation *a way out of the mirror*, which is a line from Allen Ginsberg's poem, "Laughing Gas," published in the collection *Kaddish and Other Poems* (1958-1960). To underscore this dual reference, a brass plaque, about the size of a page, bearing the text of a page from Ginsberg's poem *Kaddish* (named for the Jewish mourning prayer) sits on the front of the Canadian pavilion. Ginsburg wrote the verse in 1956 after the death of his mother, Naomi, following a long mental illness. Farmer has constructed the work so that droplets of water emerge and trickle: a weeping poem.

Also in the courtyard is a bronze statue of a disproportionately large praying mantis based on one of Farmer's favorite works, the expressionistically rendered La Mante, grande by the prominent twentieth-century French sculptor Germaine Richier, who created a frightening, aggressive insect that takes the form of a human pose. In Farmer's version, the praying mantis wears one open book on his head and holds another in its arms, which drip with water. Says Farmer, the work is a portrait of himself as a teenager: "a period that we have all gone through when the body is so awkwardly transforming."

A pair of scissors that are lodged in the insect's back is also part of Farmer's praying mantis monument—a twin reference to the artist's cut-and-paste work with collage and a connection to one of the installation's other central pieces: a 13-foot-tall kinetic bronze sculpture called "The Wounded Man" which takes the form of a large grandfather clock. The sculpture is deceptively playful as water empties from it into a bucket and steam comes out of its top, akin to a Chitty-Chitty-Bang-Bangcontraption. Yet the work is far from child's play: weapons, including an axe and a spike, are cleaved into the timepiece.

"It's a portrait of my grandfather, my father, and myself," says Farmer, who found inspiration for the work in 16th-century medical illustration that aided surgeons in treating every form of bodily injury. "You can look at the Wounded Man, stabbed by all the instruments, and it is a site of trauma," explains Scott, "but also an identification with the AIDS body which was an inherent part of Geoffrey's life in San Francisco."

There are playful elements of sculpture in the courtyard, including a life-sized duvet cast in aluminum as well as a small fountain that takes the shape of a turtle. As well, more recent components of Famer's biography also comprise his Venice project. In 2015, after Peter Pitseolak High School in Cape Dorset was destroyed by fire, the artist travelled to Nunavut to help its students rebuild their library. He returned with pieces of metal rebar from the burnt-down building given to him by the community at his request. In Venice, Farmer placed them in a sculptural vessel modeled after an animal trough, an act he describes in the days leading up to Biennale's opening as "an empathetic understanding and bridge to other stories that aren't mine but that we as a nation must look at."

Farmer makes it clear that his impetus to deconstruct the Canadian pavilion came from one more such story. Plans for the building, designed by a Milanese architectural firm BBPR, as part of Italy's Second World War reparations to Canada, commenced in 1955 (yet another association with the timing of Farmer's grandfather's accident). In the decade before the building's construction, two of the firms' members were detained in labour camps because of their anti-Fascist resistance, with a fatal outcome for one of the pair. Farmer pays tribute to its architects and their history of loss by keeping the building's framework but presenting it in a new light.

This reverence is a critical component of Farmer's Venice installation. When asked about taking on the role
to represent Canada in the year of the country's 150th anniversary (also the year he'll turn 50) he replied that the honour "came with responsibility that you don't take on easily." Whereas with Leaves of Grass Farmer dismantled and reorganized pages from Life to liberate images into a new three-dimensional form, at the Biennale, he takes his cue from personal tragedy to breathe life into a commentary on humanity, and his country as well.

For decades the Canadian pavilion in the Venice Giardini has felt dwarfed and awkward, located between the Teutonic-columned German pavilion and the stately Neo-classical British pavilion. It has been described disparagingly as too small, and as a wigwam-like structure unsuitable to presenting art. But Farmer's re-conception of the space fits the zeitgeist of our nation, its ethos of openness and welcome. As for his sculptures inside it, like the timeless symbol of fountains, they offer a narrative of joy and sorrow, laughter and weeping; a celebration of Canada and one of its most thoughtful artists at a particularly important moment in time.

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theguardian

Venice Biennale 2017

Venice Biennale: slaps, drenchings and Dobermans on the prowl

The main show is a woolly walk through hand-wringing hippydom and flowerpot trainers. But elsewhere, the biennale bares its teeth in works of danger and daring

Curated by Christine Macel of the Pompidou centre, Viva Arte Viva begins in casual, insouciant style, but soon drifts off into a solipsistic trance of its own creation. Has Macel also been sleeping? It is now 2017. History is a nightmare and what would any of us do for a good night's kip? All the doubts and quibbles I have had over previous biennales are nothing compared with the qualms I feel wandering the nine sections of Macel's exhibition, including a Pavilion of Joys and Fears, a Pavilion of the Shamans, a Pavilion of the Dionysian (a celebration, we are told, of the female body and sexuality) and a Pavilion of Colours. The rubrics themselves feel as dated as much of the art...

I saw grown adults recoiling, not so much at the work, but at the wall panels. One explains that, in a world shaken by conflicts, wars and increasing inequality, we need to "reconsider the human being ... capable of building a new, free and fraternal world". Where is this world exactly and when will it appear? What about the here and now? Bringing many lesser-known artists to the biennale – 103 out of the show's 120 artists have never exhibited here before – Macel nevertheless appears almost wholly out of touch with the moment. Perhaps she is trying to provide a balm...

Geoffrey Farmer has destroyed the Canadian pavilion. A geyser erupts noisily through the demolished roof. The floor is a lumberyard of weeping timbers. I was drenched and so was the grandfather clock and the sculpture of Rodin's thinker, redone as a praying mantis in the style of French existentialist sculptor Germaine Richier. This is just the beginning of a work that involves Allen Ginsberg, Farmer's grandfather, New York's Washington Square, the Napoleonic wars, a Swiss water trough, and much besides. I'm soaked. I'm drowning. It's great...

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Geoffrey Farmer
The Care With Which The Rain Is Wrong
September 17 - November 12, 2017

Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin

Geoffrey Farmer explores the art, cultural and political history of humankind by continuously investigating their image reservoirs and narratives. Farmer meticulously collects images, objects and sounds of different subjects over long periods of time in order to assemble extensive installations that remain in a continuous state of transformation. Through the media of photography, video, sculpture, drawing and text Farmer explores how each field influences our perception and in which way the pictorial becomes a requisite and actor in our interpretation.

For the work 'Boneyard,' presented in the octagon of the Schinkelklause, Farmer transforms a collection of art monographs, Maestri Della Scultura, printed by the Milanese publishers and brothers, Fratelli Fabbri. Cutting each sculptural reproduction out, he places them, free-standing on a large circular plinth forming a network of free-association. From antiquity to modern times the narratives of the individual figures and personalities placed in the rotunda intertwine as they stand as witnesses of their time and world views. Working in the tradition of the literary cut-out, tarot, dice-rolling and astrology, Farmer creates groupings and an accompanying text which trace the history of political turmoil in Italy at the time of their printing during the "Years of Lead" (1968 – 82). It was during these years that the Fabbri brother's came under the radar of the Brigate Rosse, a left-wing paramilitary organization and were forced to flee Italy in fear of their lives.

Inside the glass pavilion, on the first floor, the artist presents 'Look in my face; my name is Might-have-been; I am also called No-more, Too-late, Farewell', a computer generated digital slide show, composed of a reservoir of over 17.000 illustrations – an archive, which Farmer continuously refines and expands. A wide spectrum of imagery taken from politics, ethnographic studies, anonymous portraits, as well as from fields such as business, lifestyle, and agriculture turn into an animation and restaging of history. A computer algorithm combines and synchronizes the images of the photographic archive with a collection of sounds into a hypnotic ever changing installation, creating a nearly overwhelming amount of impressions, while at the same time offering endless associative and connective possibilities: an historical and cultural journey through the world as it has been documented over the past 150 years.

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ARTNEWS

Details Announced for Geoffrey Farmer's Canadian Pavilion at the 2017 Venice Biennale

BY Alex Greenberger

Untitled (Collision), 1955. ARCHIVES OF THE ARTIST

For his Canadian Pavilion at the 2017 Venice Biennale, Geoffrey Farmer will once again return to his interest in the relationship between people and their pictures. In an installation titled A way out of the mirror, he will draw inspiration from a 1955 group of photographs showing a lumber truck that collided with a moving train.

Farmer has a personal connection to the photographs: his grandfather, who would himself later die in an accident, was present when they were taken. The Vancouver-based artist never knew that, however, until his sister emailed him the images last year.

The installation takes its name from an Allen Ginsberg poem—Farmer recalls holding a copy of Howl, Ginsberg's 1955 epic poem, when he opened his sister's email. Farmer also remembers listening to Ginsberg sing when, as a student at the San Francisco Art Institute in 1991, he first learned about the Venice Biennale.

"In his Venice project, Geoffrey once again finds a world enclosed inside an image and an image giving rise to a world," Kitty Scott, a curator of modern and contemporary art at the Art Gallery of Ontario and the organizer of the pavilion, said in a statement. (Scott worked with Josée Drouin-Brisebois, a curator of contemporary art at the National Gallery of Canada and the pavilion's project director.) "Personal memory and familial history flow into a broader stream of reflections on inheritance, trauma, and desire. The pavilion itself, colliding with the artwork, is transformed, opening to the outside as its architecture is reimagined in the guise of a fountain."

Farmer's past work has involved creating dense histories of the world using images. For Documenta 13 in 2012, he showed Leaves of Grass, a work that offered an exhaustive picture of nearly the whole 20th century in the form of clippings from Life magazine. His work was recently surveyed at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston.

Greenberger, Alex, "Details Annouced for Geoffrey Farmer's Canadian Pavilion at the 2017 Venice Biennale, Artnews, February 21, 2017

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THE INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART/BOSTON

EXHIBITIONS >

GEOFFREY FARMER

APR 13 – JUL 17, 2016 | PAUL AND CATHERINE BUTTENWIESER AND FOTENE DEMOULAS GALLERIES

Geoffrey Farmer, Boneyard, 2013. Paper cutouts, wood, and glue, dimensions variable. Installation view, Cut nothing, cut parts, cut the whole, cut the order of time, Casey Kaplan, New York, 2014. Photo Jean Vong. Courtesy the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York. © 2016 Geoffrey Farmer

Geoffrey Farmer (b. 1967, Vancouver) is best known for his installations and large-scale, sculptural photo collages. This immersive survey of the artist's recent major "paper works" presents room-sized installations composed of hundreds of small sculptures made of cutout photographs, fabric, and various supports. In these recent works, processions of figures assembled from fragments of book and magazine photography and illustration manifest the artist's interest in the cross-pollination of historical and vernacular imagery. Each spectacular composition begins to chart the historical contours of our image-saturated contemporary culture, and suggest the recurring cultural themes and formal patterns. Farmer uses movement, sound, animation, puppet characters, and a panoply of highly choreographed bodies and characters to investigate world history from the different angles of its photographic and sculptural accounts.

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The Boston Globe

ART REVIEW

Geoffrey Farmer's art at the ICA: Once you've seen it, you can't shake it

By Sebastian Smee
APRIL 14, 2016

Detail of Geoffrey Farmer's "Boneyard."

Modest prediction: A lot of people — teenagers, aunties, granddads, you name it — are going to come out of the Geoffrey Farmer exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art with a bit of an art crush.

I know I did. Even now, as I write at my desk just a few hours later, I can't seem to shake it.

What have I just seen? Three bodies of work — or really, three works — in three medium-size rooms, all by Geoffrey Farmer, an artist from Vancouver in his late 40s who recently was selected to represent Canada at the next Venice Biennale.

All three of the show's component parts are great to look at. But the first, in which Farmer has installed 365 handmade sculptures on a forest of tall plinths and on shelves stacked high on the wall, is by far the most impressive.

Smee, Sebastian, "Geoffrey Farmer's art at the ICA: Once you've seen it, you can't shake it", The Boston Globe (online), April 14, 2016

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ARTFORUM

JANUARY 2016

Geoffrey Farmer

ICA - INSTITUTE OF
CONTEMPORARY ART, BOSTON
BOSTON
April 13–July 31
Curated by Dan Byers

Geoffrey Farmer, Boneyard (detail), 2013, paper, wood, glue, dimensions variable. Photo: Jean Vong.

Geoffrey Farmer succinctly noted, some months back, "My work appears to me as wreckage"—articulating the formal-pileup effect of his exploded-collage installations, the air of obsolescence emanating from the vintage print media he uses so pointedly, and even the way his hundreds of Frankensteined cutouts swarm like the undead and stand at attention. He captures that intoxicating Benjaminian sensation that we experience when faced, like the angel of history, with the quantities of accretion and devastation that constitute the stuff of the archive and "progress." Monumental, room-size stagings of the miniature, including Boneyard, 2013, and The Surgeon and the Photographer, 2009–13, will be featured in this survey of Farmer's recent paper sculptures, a mostly medium-specific presentation with the notable exception of a computer-generated algorithmic slide show. An artist-driven publication, with a text by the curator, will accompany the exhibition.

— *Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer*

Lehrer-Graiwer, Sarah, "Preview: Boston: Geoffrey Farmer at the ICA", Artforum, Vol. 54, No. 5, January 2016, pg. 133

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ARTFORUM

POSTED DECEMBER 11, 2015

Geoffrey Farmer will Represent Canada at 2017 Venice Biennale

Geoffrey Farmer has been nominated to represent Canada at the Venice Biennale in 2017. Farmer has selected Modern and Contemporary Art at the Art Gallery of Ontario Carol and Morton Rapp Curator Kitty Scott to organize the Canadian pavilion.

Over the course of his twenty-year career, Farmer has had exhibitions at the Migros Museum of Contemporary Art in Zurich; the Louvre in Paris; Documenta 13 in Kassel; the Tate Modern in London; and the Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal, among other exhibitions and institutions.

"Geoffrey Farmer will represent Canada at 2017 Venice Biennale", Artforum (online, December 11, 2015

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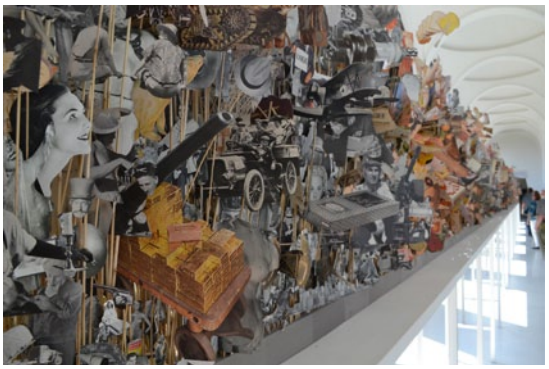
ARTNEWS

GEOFFREY FARMER WILL REPRESENT CANADA AT THE 2017 VENICE BIENNALE



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

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."

Russeth, Andrew, "Geoffrey Farmer will represent Canada at the 2017 Venice Biennale", ArtNews (online), December 11, 2015

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FEATURES

Geoffrey Farmer's Salvage Economy

BY AMY LUO

Geoffrey Farmer is used to looking back. The Vancouver artist is something of an archaeologist: he surveys cultural terrains for images, text and sound, and presents the artifacts in evocative ways that trigger both recognition and estrangement. In 2012, Farmer attracted international attention at Documenta 13 with Leaves of Grass, a 124-foot stretch of an installation composed of Life magazine cut-outs spanning six decades and 1,005 issues in 16,000 figures. On home turf in 2013, Farmer was awarded the prestigious Gershon Iskowitz Prize in recognition of his significant contribution to the visual arts in Canada. Presented with the opportunity to exhibit at the Art Gallery of Ontario as part of the honour, Farmer installed computer-programmed light and audio systems in the gallery's Henry Moore Sculpture Centre, staging a series of choreographed vignettes that jolted the plaster sculptures from their calcified gravity.

This year, Farmer's mid-career survey at the Vancouver Art Gallery called on him to tackle his own past. This involved confronting an accumulation of 15 years' worth of works, many of them elaborate multimedia installations, and some process-based with shifting form. The

Geoffrey Farmer, The Surgeon and the Photographer (detail), 2009. Courtesy Catriona Jeffries Gallery/ Casey Kaplan, New York. Photo: Rachel Topham.

show's title, "How Do I Fit This Ghost in My Mouth?", articulates this daunting task, but in that question is also a glimmer of the ethos of wonder that sparks Farmer's artmaking. For the most part, says Farmer, past work looks like a pile of wreckage, but the litter holds a few nice surprises, and even encouragement for future work.

AL: Your works and exhibitions often have playful and allusive titles. Can you talk about the title of your survey show, "How Do I Fit This Ghost in My Mouth?"

GF: There is a story about the library of the Warburg Institute, when it was in Hamburg in the 1920s, that when you asked for a book, they would give it to you, but they would also give you three or four others that were considered friends of your book. To me, this expresses a kind of cosmological thinking that feels similar to my process of conjuring up a title. I think of the titles as something that will govern the material that constitutes the work, as if the components were like celestial objects. I look for a title that creates the right atmospheric conditions to create an electricity to spark the engine of the work. I sometimes describe it as the sound of an engine starting. That is when I know it's the right title. "How Do I Fit This Ghost in My Mouth?" appeared spontaneously in a sketch one day. It felt humorous, but it is also deeply intentional and expresses the way I am imagining text stepping forward in my work. It is a proposition of my engagement and has to do with the active process I have undertaken in remembering the work for the survey. I want it to feel personal and I want it to represent my awakening to the understanding of the relationship of knowledge to my body. I wanted it to be humorous, because without humour, we can't defy our own authority—or authority period.

AL: What has the experience been like to look back at 15 years of your own creative work in preparation for the show?

Geoffrey Farmer, Let's Make the Water Turn Black, 2013-15. Photo: Fred Dott.

GF: Looking back makes me feel uneasy, because my work appears to me as wreckage. This is often why my works are continually being developed or transformed. I think it is important, though, to confront past work, to stare straight through it, because it is never what you imagined it to be anyway. But something happens when you stare it down, crack open a window and jump through into the possibility of something different. It is a form of necessary critique, as everything you will know as your future grows out of it. There are a few works of mine from the past that are like kind strangers, encouraging me to believe in the possibility of making good work. This is always a nice surprise.

AL: Has this confrontation with past work, however uneasy, affected your current thinking or activities in any way?

GF: I never realized that I had produced texts for each of my works. When I looked back at them, they were the parts of the work that made me think, "Yes, this is how I want my work to feel." I liked them. I hadn't really ever thought of them as work, and so there has been this epiphany, that perhaps they are the work. And there has been a process of going back, sifting through the wreckage and rescuing them.

AL: Are the texts accompanying some of your works also intended to function, like you said of the titles, as "friends"? I am thinking of the notes accompanying works like The Last Two Million Years (2007) or Boneyard (2014). Those texts are certainly not didactic; to me, they are not exactly texts on or to the visual work, but with.

GF: The work is a reason to make the texts, and vice versa. That is what I realize now, while writing this, and so this exhibition is about writing and the role it plays in my work. The texts

don't necessarily have to be written by me, but as you say: the texts are with the work and they act as accomplices. I am imagining that the texts in this exhibition will be removable so that people can take them when they leave, and perhaps the texts can act as an accomplice in this way outside of the exhibition. I want it to be an exhibition that makes a book.

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AL: During my research, I came across an essay by curator Jessica Morgan, and she jokingly wrote that you are "an enemy of the museum," referring to the way some of your works morph across the period of an exhibition, confounding standard curatorial and archival practices. What is it like for you to grapple with these kinds of works for exhibitions?

GF: Sometimes it is easier in certain circumstances, and it really depends on the project and institution. The clarity of an idea can also make things easier. But when a work forms in relation to a place, it can be difficult because my process might be antithetical to the way museum staff are used to doing things, or I might be seen as actively working against them and what they consider to be a good job. The more I understand what is important to me in a particular piece, the easier it is for me to articulate this to the people I am working with. Sometimes the making of the exhibition is the process of trying to articulate something that you don't know how to articulate. What might appear to be resistance or uncertainty is more about finding the shape of an idea, of what is important and needed in the work. Or it is just the nature of it. This is an important part of how a work comes together.

AL: Sometimes your negotiation with the institution is very visible. Pale Fire Freedom Machine, for example, which was shown at the Power Plant in 2005, involved activities, like burning furniture in a fireplace and using the soot to print posters, that are not at all expected to go on within an art gallery. Would you say that testing the flexibility of the art institution is something you deliberately strive to do?

GF: No, it is never considered or deliberate. I just want to explore an idea and doing so feels natural, but it becomes a negotiation of what is possible and what is not. My ability to negotiate and figure things out becomes a reflection of what I am able to do in the end. And this becomes the exhibition. It is always coming from a place of excitement, possibility and potentiality.

AL: You were recently at the Watermill Center in New York for a residency, working with a programmer on self-generative image and sound montage systems, an idea you explored in the work Look in my face; my name is Might-have-been; I am also called No-more, Too-late, Farewell (2010–). Can you talk about your time there?

GF: I went to the Watermill because I was interested in Robert Wilson's early work, especially a work called KA MOUNTAIN AND GUARDenia TERRACE: a story about a family and some people changing. It was produced as part of the 1972 Shiraz-Persepolis Festival of Arts in Iran, and it was performed continuously over a seven-day period. I was there to research

this and to think about how I could expand the horizon of my own work. It was really a productive time for me; even though I was only there for 10 days, it felt like a much more extended period of time.

AL: What is it in particular that draws you to Robert Wilson's work?

GF: I saw an exhibition that he mounted at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1992. There was a glass sarcophagus in the installation that moved across the ceiling on a wire. I remember an elephant's foot with a man sitting inside of it. What I realize now is that it was a mixture of elements from different productions, some of them props and parts of sets made for the context of the stage, not the museum. So in the museum, they had a strange sensibility. I realized that I knew so little about his work, except through stills, so I applied to go to the Watermill Center to do some research and be there to think about the survey exhibition in Vancouver. I knew about the seven-day play, but I wanted to know how something like that might be structured. How he worked, and what the parameters might be for a work like that, and how it played out. I'm still figuring this out, and I think it is going to take some time to understand exactly what I am interested in.

AL: And how has the research informed your work with programmed, self-generative montage?

GF: I found some understanding through this poem of Christopher Knowles, who had collaborated with Wilson and Philip Glass when he was very young on the mid-1970s opera Einstein on the Beach, and the poem in part is the repeated variations on a single line: "Emily likes the TV, because she watches the TV, because she likes it." I couldn't stop thinking about it, and in thinking about it, it released me, it gave me some kind of freedom. The self-creating montage, in my mind, works in a similar way, in that it is creating itself using variations on a single line, and in experimenting with the organizing principle of the images, some kind of freedom is found for me. I'm released from the work,
and the work has its own independence. Writing the script has become a kind of choreography, and what I feel I discovered at the Watermill is that this is enough. The film is what it is, and that is what it is.

AL: Releasing your authorship and giving the work independence must have an estranging effect. You also said earlier that your past works can seem like strangers to you. Is this feeling of estrangement something constant, even while a work is in the making?

GF: When I am thinking about a work, there is a lot of research and preparation and a kind of rationalizing of the process. But what ends up happening is mysterious, because where you think the work is going to be, it isn't, and then through so many decisions and non-decisions it just suddenly appears. It is totally unpredictable. It appears often seemingly by accident, but an accident that you work very hard to make. So it is always a feeling of estrangement, but a familiar estrangement, because you recognize it, and you say, ah, yes, that is it. But as soon as you try to make it, or think you know how to make it, it goes completely wrong, so then you destroy that, and then, boom: it appears again. Or not.

Luo, Amy, "Geoffrey Farmer's Savage Economy", Canadian Art,, Summer 2015.

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MACLEAN'S

The collage graduate: Geoffrey Farmer's mixed-media masterpieces

More than mere collage, Geoffrey Farmer's odd, delightful and impossible-to-label art exhibit hits Vancouver en route to the Louvre

By Joanne Latimer
May 29, 2015

Geoffrey Farmer/Vancouver Art Gallery

At their home in Vancouver, art collectors Kathleen and Laing Brown were waiting for the movers to arrive to collect a piece by Geoffrey Farmer. They were lending it to the Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG) for Farmer's mid-career survey show, opening on Saturday, May 30. The piece, Notes For Strangers, is comprised of a curious grouping: a toy typewriter, an old bus transfer and some notes Farmer typed for fellow passengers as he rode the bus. The notes are wall-mounted in glass boxes, while the typewriter and the bus transfer sit on floating shelves.

When Farmer made this piece in 1990, he was still an art student and just beginning to figure out how to include text and theatre into his art practice. "It's such a poetic piece. We keep it on the upstairs landing," said Laing, ignoring a phone call on the other line from the Gagosian Gallery in New York. "We put it beside a work by Martin Creed, who won the Turner Prize. Martin's piece is a neon sign that says 'asshole' in capital letters."

Okay, so nobody can accuse the Browns of buying art to match the couch. And visitors to the VAG for Farmer's survey show can expect equally challenging, often delightful, installations. Or are they assemblages? Or sculptures? No single label does the job. Sometimes Farmer is more of a collage artist, as when he used the back catalogue of Life magazine to make 27,000 cut-outs, all reconfigured to disrupt history and time. That encyclopedic piece, Leaves of Grass, was recently installed at its new home at the National Gallery of Canada. Two years earlier, it caused a sensation at Documenta, which is to contemporary art what the Cannes film festival is to cinema, held every five years in Kassel, Germany. The piece was so ambitious, it took three shifts of 30 assistants more than six weeks to get it ready in time for its debut.

"Collage is a widespread phenomenon, but Geoffrey takes it to a very high level of execution and imagination," explains Daina Augaitis, chief curator and associate director at VAG, where Farmer and his studio assistants installed the 21-piece exhibition on the second floor (he ripped out that tired, grey carpet), in the gallery's catacombs and in the gift shop.

The show, playfully called How Do I Fit This Ghost in My Mouth?, has a new theatrical installation created for the gallery's rotunda.

Farmer describes it as a sculpture play. "It's the story of the building's architect, Sir Frances Rattenbury, who was murdered by his [second] wife's lover with a carpenter's mallet in the 1930s," explained Farmer, 48, who remembers visiting the rotunda as a child when it was still a courthouse and his father was a Crown prosecutor. "Rattenbury's wife was a singer from Kamloops, and we found a recording of her playing the piano, so that's part of the audio, along with a backdrop from L.A. of a music shop. I added animated mechanical figures." Farmer also incorporated his father's black robe from court.

Curator Augaitis promises that the show will be wonderfully chaotic. That's easy to believe, when you think of how skilfully Farmer mixes seemingly disparate content, such as Frank Zappa and Sesame Street's Snuffleupagus. "Geoffrey, along with Brian Jungen and Myfanwy MacLeod, is part of a generational shift away from image-making toward process-based work that looks more toward L.A., incorporating pop culture," said the director of Presentation House Gallery, Reid Shier, who curated Farmer's first solo show in 1996 at the Or Gallery. "Vancouver's older generation of photo-conceptualists, like Jeff Wall and Stan Douglas, blazed a very difficult trail for the next [era], by working from a town that's geographically isolated, yet achieving international recognition."

Farmer went further, citing their direct influence. "For a lot of those artists, photography had a sculptural quality," he says. "If you think about Jeff's light boxes and Stan's screens, they have a presence in my work."

This September, Farmer will be in a group exhibition of international artists in Paris. That answers the question, "How do you follow success at Documenta and a hometown survey show?" With the Louvre, of course.

Latimer, Joanne", "The Collage Graduate", Macleans, May 29, 2015.

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THE VANCOUVER SUN

What's On: Walk Off The Earth, Best Coast, Geoffrey Farmer and more.

Check out best events in Vancouver this week, May 28 to June 4.

By Nancy Lanthier

Geoffrey Farmer: How Do I Fit This Ghost in My Mouth?

Vancouver's Geoffrey Farmer creates visually entrancing works of many parts. His sprawling menagerie, Leaves of Grass, featuring thousands upon thousands of Life magazine cut-outs, was the visitor favourite at dOCUMENTA 13. Tate Modern had to have the 200 puppets from his installation, The Last Two Million Years. His newest work, Let's Make the Water Turn Black, here from Zurich, is his largest and most technically ambitious, a sculpture play starring legions of characters. As you peruse this expansive, mid-career survey exhibition, you might consider the cues from history and culture the artist employs to explore the nature of meaning, or his subtle take on the legacies of minimalist and postminimalist art. But Farmer would be just as impressed if you delved into this show as you would a playground of your own fantasy.

May 30 to Sept. 7 | Vancouver Art Gallery

More info: vanartgallery.bc.ca

Lanthier, Nancy, "What's on", Vancouver Sun (online), May 28, 2015.

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ARTNEWS

2014: THE YEAR IN REVIEW

EYEGAYS, ECSTATIC PAINTING, AND A GLORIOUS MESS: ANDREW RUSSETH ON THE YEAR IN, AND BEYOND, THE GALLERIES

BY Andrew Russeth

Detail of Farmer's Boneyard, 2013, at Kaplan.
Courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York

"Geoffrey Farmer: Cut Nothing, Cut Parts, Cut the Whole, Cut the Order of Time" at Casey Kaplan and "Geoffrey Farmer: Let's Make the Water Turn Black" at the Pérez Art Museum Miami: If one of the tasks of art right now is to wring a bit of poetry from the torrents of information and images that flow through contemporary society, few perform that arduous activity as elegantly and joyously as Geoffrey Farmer, who, despite his fame in Canada, remains relatively little known in the United States. (He had his first show in this country in 2011.) At Documenta 13, he delivered his masterpiece, a 124-foot-long display of some 16,000 pictures sliced from almost the entire history of Life mounted on wooden sticks—a sui generis history of the 20th century, its images, its art, and its people—and he has not let up since. At Casey Kaplan this winter, he showed a compendium of images of sculptures, similarly mounted and presented in the round. It was a teeming theater that encompassed thousands of years of human activity. References and rhymes accumulated the more time you spent with it. Down in Miami, at the Pérez, he went big, with a roomful of assemblages that bathed in colored lights, and that let out all sorts of comedic movements just when you were about to stop looking—as if they had minds of their own. It restored, with a child's delight, the mystery one sometimes feels in objects, the strange lives we imagine they have when they're just out of our reach. Outside of the room, a bit of text penned by Farmer summed up the vibe nicely: "Here, everything becomes melody or sculpture play."

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ARTFORUM

New York

Critics Picks

Geoffrey Farmer

CASEY KAPLAN
525 West 21st Street
October 30-December 20

Geoffrey Farmer, ***Boneyard***, 2013, paper cutouts, wood, glue, dimensions variable.

Hundreds of cutouts from a 1960s Italian book series featuring masterpieces of sculpture have been propped up on a round table that spans eighteen feet in diameter in Geoffrey Farmer's latest exhibition. There is Desiderio da Settignano's Bust of a Young Woman, Giambologna's Appennino, Constantin Brancusi's Maiastra, Michelangelo's David, and Antoine Le Moiturier's hooded monks, nudes, medieval saints, small children, and tiny animals. Part of the installation Boneyard, 2013, the paper figurines stand as sculptures would, intimating the flatness of being Photoshopped in space—a slideshow of Western sculpture from antiquity to modernism in the round.

In the next room, a more traditional slideshow, Look in My Face; My Name Is Might-Have-Been, I Am Also Called No-More, Too-Late, Farewell, 2013, shuffles through political snapshots, anonymous portraits, ethnographic studies, and then-genre scenes of work, leisure, agriculture, and industry. A history is told by the shifting film stock—sepia to Kodachrome; black-and-white to dye transfer—the tonal qualities reflecting the technological changes in film as new methods for printing enter the mass market. The clamor of disjointed percussion accompany the slideshow, alternating between a synced pattern with the images (footfalls on the stairs) and random sounds guided by a computer algorithm.

Farmer's subject matter is time, he states, cut and reordered. This nonlinearity entices a contemplation of the looming past alongside a suspended present, which is made acute by the juxtaposition of cacophonous noises and the disquieting muteness of the photographic artifact.

—Andrianna Campbell

Campbell, Andrianna. "Geoffrey Farmer," ***Artforum***, December 2014, Online.

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GEOFFREY FARMER
“ BONEYARD INDEX ”
(2014)

MOUSSE
N 46° — Artists’ Words
December 2014 — January 2015

Installation view, Geoffrey Farmer, ***Boneyard***, 2013-2014

As of November 14, 2014

1.

a. Once Friedrich Nietzsche declared, “God is dead” then FUCK became the most important word in the English language.
b. Everything then needs to be fuckable or unfuckable.
c. The world as it was given to me. Conservative or RADICAL.
d. Asparagus, pencil, metal figure or grave.
e. You think you know, because you are thoughtful, and you have studied our history. But seeing you deliver the torch so many others before you carried, year after year, decade after decade, century after century, only to be struck down before igniting the flame of justice and of law, is almost more than the heart can bear.
f. I would advise you to remember that you did not create the disaster that the world is experiencing, and you alone are not responsible for bringing the world back to balance.
g. Fuck if I know!? What the fuck is going on here? What the fuck are you doing? Get the fuck out of here! I’m going to knock your fucking head off! Who gives a fuck, get a bigger fucking hammer!
h. You can see the Moon sliding down the orange slice creating a mouth.

2. Here is an Emoji? Here I want to describe the colour. A green. No I want to describe tarnish. No verdigris. No I want to describe thingness or what happens to something exposed to seawater:

This living hand, now warm and capable
Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold
And in the icy silence of the tomb,
So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights
That thou would wish thine own heart dry of blood
So in my veins red life might stream again,
And thou be conscience-calm'd–see here it is
I hold it towards you.

Hold it towards, he or him that we know of as him. He who him, he who made a him or he who, he who made hers, he who made Emojis and sculptures inspired by bathers on the Mediterranean coast. A hot hand, the living hands of a fisherman. Cast. Cast from assembled found objects – with pictures frames turned into arms, part of a bed into feet, a broom handle into a backbone, whale tail, dog toe.

3. Is a dream child? Representing, personal habits, being unaware, awakening, subliminal messages, trances, hypnagogic, sleep, dreaming, delirium and comas.

4. Visible gesture. Unifying performers. (To offer opportunities for educational outreach.)

5. General view…broad view. I needed to begin somewhere. Can we begin somewhere?! Just wanted to have a beginning. Let's just begin. Here you see an example of variations in cobbler's stools, then chest expressions reminiscent of studio 54, then a reading bird, an angel taking a picture and some alien-like form made from dough dusted with icing sugar.

6. Niccolo dell'Arca rejected his training in Naples.

7. Cut the kiss of sweet leaps. (Lips?) Moist, moist, moist and sugary sweet. A non-political kiss of sounds and sucked in air. Smack. And pressing. Klimt kiss. The kiss of Judas. The beautiful colours of a kiss, Giotto. A kiss in the Scrovengi Chapel. Kataphilein. Tender, warmly.

7. a. Friend, do what you are here to do. No names no games, no fats no fems.

7. b. The Aramaic word, barnasha, literally "son of man" meaning "this person" – is used in rabbinic literature as a humble self-effacing to refer to oneself, to the speaker.

8. When Christ was removed from the cross, a ladder was used. I mean think about that. And this whole scene! Who would cartwheel in front of this scene? The other story here is the Penitent thief Dismas. He is about to be crucified along with Jesus. Dismas is a name adapted from the Greek word meaning "sunset" or "death". Before dying Dismas turned to Jesus and asked him to remember him in his Kingdom, unlike the other thief who taunted him. Jesus replied, "Amen I say to you today you will be with me in Paradise."

8. b. The Cartwheeler. Bulge maker. Frottage.

9. Each shield depicting and describing a deeply felt sense of shame.

10. During the War, this figure was suspected of spying for Germany……. In 1915 was briefly detained in France. Then returned to Germany. Then took part in the German nationality. Then became an artist. Part of the artist's estate was discovered more than 60 years after his death in the attic of a Bavarian inn.

11. Nakedness a glorious symbol of national greatness or An Effort of the Devil 1968. The wearing of clothing is exclusively a human characteristic and is a feature of most human societies. The Black. Black marble. Skin is not a badge of shame, but rather a glorious symbol of national greatness. Michael Schwarze. Schwarze literally is the German word for the color black. It is a Yiddish slang as well, for a back person, equivalent to the N- Word. A Jewish person using the term "Schwarze" while speaking English is being racist. "Person 1: I can't believe she's dating a Schwarze. Person 2" Man they're in love – don't be such a racist asshole." Or "Die Deutche Fahne ist Schwarz-rot-gold."

12. The gnoll spear-thrower will, if victorious, anally rape a player of any gender with her pseudo-dick, and explain as she does so that "queens of the Savannah" demand submission and will allow the player character to go about "their" lands so long as they pay tribute in the most "primal of ways". If the player has a Succubi's Dream on-hand when defeated, the gnoll will have a changed rape scene where she grows balls and rapes the player for most of the day.

13. Pizza dust thinker.

14. Domme. Dominator. Ruler.

15. Puppeteer in woven read dress. (Long Haired Leaner)

16. Not necessarily lesbians, but probably.

17. I know what it is like to fall.

18. Arturo Martini's, Woman Swimming Underwater. In 1945 he published a pamphlet, Sculpture: A Dead Language, in which he expressed his frustrations with the limitations of the medium.

19. Knee touching hand.

20. The Stone Head Lecture. Or also known as the Stone Head Explanation. Expert: "This head, this stone head. This head, this stone head. This head, this stone head… etc…" Also behind this you can see the two metal heads. This two-piece sculpture poses a different kind of problem. A problem of relationship, like the kind of relationship between two people. It's very different once you've divided it into three.

21. I am an artist/photographer near Iowa Falls and I am looking for female figure models in the area to pose for fine art figure and bodyscape photographs. NO porn. models 21to 70 years old welcome. Pay or TFP

22. The stage lights come up and seen for the first time a figure standing next to a large rabbit. To the left, a large silver thumb, depicting a body buried in an avalanche. The audience can be seen reflected in the nail.

23. THPPTPHTPHPHHPH phhhhhhrtttt fuuuuuuurttttttt.
PPPPPPPPPPPPPPPPPPPPPPPPPP, pff, prtrtrtrgurtrufnasutututut, prrrt, PFFT!,
PHHhhhh..., SPLPLPLLLP, WHOooooffff, poot, prrrrrrrvt, scraeft,
ppppppwwarrrrppppp, pllllllllllllllllllllllllooooooooooooaaa..., RRRRRRRIIIIIIIIIII
IIIIIIIIIIIIIIPPPPP, fuuuuuuuuuuurrrrrrrt, thhhppbbbb, verrrrrrrrrrnnnnnntttttt,
hooooooooooooooooooooooooonk, pbpbpbpbp,
frr frr frrrrrr rampooooooooo ag, pppppppptttttttttttttttttttttttt,
flurpppppppppppppppppppppppppppppppppppppp... (Calvin and Hobbes)

24. I pull up in that Spyder, strapped up like McGyver
Should have brought my Phantom, na, but I'm mad at my driver
He so fuckin' turned up, ridin' on auto pilot, smokin' kush and smilin'
He drinkin' while he drivin'

25. Sword Murder Prank Gone Wrong (Gun Pulled!)

26. The Assholes.

27. A subjective feeling that one's partner has violated a set of rules or relationship norms.

28. The expression that is as if, today.

29. This Prayer, shit eater and also responsible for creating flogging schools.

30. The book from which all figures emerge.

31. Small Maternity Standing, 1910-1914 We must enter into the spirit of the character: here the challenge is to place this figure in the human space, to work out what he/she represents in relation to other people, other human personalities; when you've worked this out, you're done. The subject is placed in the realm of the dead that go on living.

32. Heads Will Roll. Decapitation in Medieval and Early Modern Imagination

33. Where in this wide world can man find nobility without pride, friendship without envyor beauty without vanity? Here, where grace is laced with muscle, and strength by gentleness confined. He serves without servility; he has fought without enmity. There is nothing so powerful, nothing less violent, there is nothing so quick, anything more patient. England's past has been borne on his back. All our history is his industry; we are his heirs, he our inheritance. The Horse!

34. Hamlet noticed them in the shapes of clouds, but I saw them in the furniture of childhood.

35. These sculptures make cracking sounds that continue for the duration of the exhibition.

36. Remembering the millions. 3,000 sea otters, 300 harbor seals, 250,000 murres, 14 orcas, and countless fish, benthic invertebrates, and other species who died, oftentimes horrible deaths, because of the spill.

37. A great love in my heart for all things.

38. Nobody should ever have to endure this.

39. The Lonely Boy is 3:13 in length. (The Black Keys song)

40. Uncertainty.

41. The memorial will not only remember those killed, but it will celebrate the heroism that prevailed following the attacks, and the resolve of our nation to overcome.

42. Walking a dog in Echo Park.

43. A number of his sculptures were either lost or destroyed.

44. Drown my sorrows flood my soul
By tomorrow I'll be cold
(wash it all away, wash it all away)
Now I'm hollow and alone
Take the shadow
Almost gone
(wash it all away, wash it all away)

45. Faceless game.

46. Missing Label.

47. Burying the last animal trainer.

This numeric index accompanies the work ***Boneyard,*** which is comprised of 813 paper-cut-figures—images of sculptures ranging from 10 AD to the 1970s — from a collection of decommissioned academic portfolios used for the study of sculpture entitled *Capolavori della Scultura*. "*Boneyard index*" represents a partial list of the work's components, filtered through Farmer's own readings and associations.

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art agenda December 4, 2014

Geoffrey Farmer's "Cut Nothing, Cut Parts, Cut the Whole, Cut the Order of Time"

CASEY KAPLAN, New York
October 30–December 20, 2014

by ALAN GILBERT

If some version of the afterlife exists, and if Aby Warburg manages to find a little peace there, he might be pleased to see Geoffrey Farmer's "Cut Nothing, Cut Parts, Cut the Whole, Cut the Order of Time" at New York's Casey Kaplan. During the last few years of his life, Warburg famously worked on *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1924–1929), a collection of nearly one thousand images divided thematically and pinned to wooden panels. Though primarily art-historical (and heavy on the Italian Renaissance), these black-and-white reproductions were supplemented with maps, cosmological and mathematical formulas, text, and newspaper photos. While diachronically charting the evolution of an image or motif through time ("ascent to the sun," for instance), *Mnemosyne Atlas* also makes synchronic connections across cultures and metaphor. The result is a project that combines the deep knowledge of the scholar with the associational logic of the poet, both amplified by a sense of iconography as always alive: Warburg's panels are a kind of animistic art history (and prophetically proto-digital).

Farmer's *Leaves of Grass* (2012) was among the most memorable works at Documenta 13 in 2012. Using approximately 16,000 images clipped from issues of LIFE magazine spanning 1935–1985 and affixed to thin sticks, he created a 124-foot-long installation that pans chronologically while also containing thematic clusters (color photographs of processed food, for instance). In the middle gallery at Farmer's current exhibition, the horizontal timeline plinth has been reshaped into a circle, and the images concern the history of (mostly) Western sculpture from the ancient Greeks to the 1960s. Utilizing hundreds of reproductions from decommissioned art-history textbooks, *Boneyard* (2013) evokes *Mnemosyne Atlas* while displaying a more circumscribed scope that is closer to cultural diorama than Warburg's inspired tropological collage. Yet one of Farmer's important points here is that archives exclude as much as they include, that their silencing of other knowledges and discourses helps feed their power.

Warburg was prescient in attempting to look outside the box of art history's nineteenth-century origins in nation-state chauvinism, but the various canons of the humanities needed the political activism of the 1960s to happen before they really began to shake. ***Boneyard*** turns the history of Western European sculpture into an informal and somewhat archaic-looking cemetery of sorts, with certain figural motifs receiving shared plots in the arrangement: children, slaves, Davids, nudes, etc. However, the research and care that went into selecting, excising, gluing to sticks, and arranging these images reanimates them, a process echoed throughout the exhibition. Four repurposed archival photographs open the show, two of musicians with stringed instruments, two playing wind instruments (respectively assigned the titular categories ***Plucker and Blowers*** [all 2014]), and each representing a different culture. A single audio speaker emits clicks and cuts along with snippets of archival sound in keeping with the overall collage aesthetic, one in which history has been flattened out both formally and conceptually.

This is most apparent in the back gallery, which contains the digital slideshow of found images ***Look in my face; my name is Might-have-been; I am also called No-more, Too-late, Farewell.*** (2013–14), a title lifted from a sonnet by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The computer-generated sequencing produces thematic and formal taxonomies—workers, animals, cigarettes, portraits, and so on—that in turn seem at least partially synched to a lone speaker matching the one in the first gallery. Along with determining the order in which the photographs appear, the computer selects the editing technique: speeding up and slowing down the pace of the slideshow; making a quick edit or slow dissolve. As indicated by the installation's title, both sound and image feel slightly out of date, as if history mainly serves as a prelude to the present. Images are sometimes badly pixelated; the audio crackles with scratches and static. Overall, the slideshow has the feel of an updated ***Family of Man***, with its anthropologically shared rituals, performances, and labor, from cultures around the globe.

The archival impulse in art was originally intended to be an intervention into history, whether uncovering silenced narratives or challenging standard ones. Farmer expands this approach into something more encyclopedic and algorithmic, with an accompanying loss of affect. As a result, there's something that feels a bit thin about "Cut Nothing, Cut Parts, Cut the Whole, Cut the Order of Time," compounded by its abundance of "two-dimensional" imagery, however purposeful. Even its press release eschews explanation in favor of a web of personal memory. Of course, this looseness is meant to create a space for the gallery-goer to participate in the generation of visual meaning and historical connection. As an artist who once worked more conventionally with sculpture and multimedia, Farmer displays a subtle understanding of how bodies move through a room to encounter image, object, and sound while becoming elements in a much larger collage.

Alan Gilbert is the author of two books of poetry, ***The Treatment of Monuments and Late in the Antenna Fields***, as well as a collection of essays, articles, and reviews entitled ***Another Future: Poetry and Art in a Postmodern Twilight***. He lives in New York.

Gilbert, Alan. "Geoffrey Farmer's, 'Cut Nothing, Cut Parts, Cut the Whole, Cut the Order of Time'," ***Art Agenda***, December 4, 2014, Online.

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ARTFORUM

Best of 2014

Hili Perlson

December Issue
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AT THE RISK OF SOUNDING DRAMATIC, 2014 was nearly marked by a personal crisis of faith in art, as too many exhibitions pertained to trends I couldn't get excited about. If artistic production addresses a contemporaneous condition, am I wrong not to feel enthused by work that directly responds to technological advances? Is the flat, lurid quality of much of the art seen the only adequate expression of the effects of networked technologies on our lives? What's more, as violence and war became increasingly devastating throughout the year, I saw too many hapless examples of the slippery relation between art and politics. These three exhibitions below followed no trends and didn't rely on eliciting political sympathy—which I'd argue encourages reducing complex conditions to simplified binaries—and yet still reflected the times we inhabit with an independent poignancy.

Geoffrey Farmer, "Let's Make the Water Turn Black," Kunstverein Hamburg, March 1 to May 25, 2014: In this show, kinetic props performed while a sound archive mapped the life of Frank Zappa. Referencing Zappa's own influences, Farmer constructed a library of key movements of twentieth-century art and music history, with clips from radio news broadcasts providing chronological cues, including the 1941 announcement of the attack on Pearl Harbor. The sound files were played by an algorithm, save for several choreographed sections when the kinetic works broke out in a delightful, mechanical dance. By also including bits by Schwitters, Cage, and organized sound pioneer Edgard Varèse, the installation echoed Musique concrète in both approach and acousmatic structure, with Farmer probing our expectations of art and how we perceive objects.

Smadar Dreyfus, "School," Haus der Kulturen der Welt Berlin, May 29 to July 14, 2014: Dreyfus's audiovisual installation represented secondary-school classes in civics, bible reading, geography, history, Arabic, and more at a secular state school in Israel. One heard disembodied interactions between pupils and teachers while English translations of the classroom cacophonies were projected, giving rise to questions of pedagogical techniques, power, nationhood, and belonging. The show oscillated between affirming the school's function as an Althusserian site for reproduction of ideology and a place characterized by hopefulness, where alert teenagers challenge ethics in the context of current affairs.

Julie Mehretu, "Half a Shadow," Carlier Gebauer Berlin, September 20 to November 1, 2014: Following her work for Documenta 13, which was inspired by the Arab Spring, Mehretu abandoned architectural structures for her new paintings. Dark, chaotic, and nebulous, they seemed motivated by disillusionment and doubt and are evocative of a cavernous space of retreat. Beside the work's unflappable humanism, it's affirming to see an established painter evolving her language.

Hili Perlson is an Israeli-born, Berlin-based writer and critic.

Perlson, Hili. "Best of 2014," *Artforum*, December 2, 2014, Online.

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MOMUS

BY ANDREW BERARDINI • REVIEWS• NOVEMBER 18, 2014

"HE DID NOT RING MY HEAD LIKE A BELL": REVIEWING GEOFFREY FARMER

Kathy Acker rang my head like a bell.

It happened in the Spring of 1990, while she was reading out loud, a passage to our class from Gertrude Stein's 1914 book Tender Buttons.

…from the press release.

Geoffrey Farmer did not quite ring my head like a bell.

On a rainy night in the autumn of 2014, I went alone to the opening of Cut nothing/cut parts/cut the whole/cut the order of time (Casey Kaplan, October 30-December 20). Three photographs of traditional musicians from around the world hung mysteriously and spaciously in the first chamber along with a seemingly silent speaker. All three held an instrument I can't quite name in traditional costumes of countries, I can only guess. Two of them blew silent horns, the third held her fretted instrument with a soundless delight.

In the following room, atop a huge circular plinth, stood hundreds of cut-outs of ancient statues and sculptures from old art-history textbooks, small to large from the edge to the center, all facing out, each ingeniously propped: Etruscan and Egyptian, Nubian and Sumatran, Greek and Incan, Lombard saints and Swabian angels. Unless your are an expert, the names of disappeared civilizations are are only exotic poems, their relics curiosities.

In the third room, weird and often delightful photographs, battlefields and butterflies, celebrities and glaciers, slide-showed to the sounds of random playful crackles, rattles, rustles, and dings, like something off an old sound-effects record.

I had just read it myself and thought little of it. In fact I clearly remember not liking it.

The book is comprised of three parts: Objects, Food and Rooms. I didn't understand what any of the passages had to do with any of the subjects that they were listed under. When Kathy read, she did so simply, without sentiment and with a New York accent that delivered the words with matter-of-factness.

She was sitting at the end of a long conference table at the San Francisco Art Institute, and I was with half of the class, looking out through the window at Alcatraz, our backs facing the wall with the then entombed painting, The Rose (1958-1966) by Jay Defeo.

If you know who Kathy Acker is (punk feminist, experimental mistress, a surging charismatic underground force of the 1980s); and if you know who Gertrude Stein is (modernist feminist, experimental mistress, a surging charismatic force of the 1920s), both lovers of ladies, you'll know that the confluence of the two is a historic moment.

The Rose is a painting by a woman who died with her greatest work forgotten behind a wall. That it is entombed while the artist looks at Alcatraz, the notorious high-security prison, listening to one feminist icon read another, is not lost on me.

But even if you don't know Kathy Acker or Gertrude Stein or Jay Defeo, or that Alcatraz is a prison, then you have only the artist's story to tie them together, the sound and shape of those words.

Even without knowledge of every name, image, and sound employed by Geoffrey Farmer, I can sense that all these references are not random. The connections mysterious but still intuited, they are meaningful even if often indecipherable. Some subtle truth unites them.

The artist himself is another reference. Do you know his work? Will you feel more knowledgeable if I tell you what museum's he's shown at? What important international exhibitions? His previous work or his perceived significance? The mystery of him here is the mystery of his work. On that press release, his biography reads only as "Geoffrey Farmer born 1967".

I lean into his press release (and another stapled hand-out called "In it amongst other things" and dated "As of October 30th, 2014") because these bits of literature are as much a part as the rest of the displayed artworks.

We have only what he tells us and what we can gather for ourselves, but it's enough.

Kathy read:

"The care with which the rain is wrong and the green is wrong and the white is wrong, the care with which there is a chair and plenty of breathing. The care with which there is incredible justice and likeness, all this makes a magnificent asparagus, and also a fountain."

Then the sound of a bell.

Words and syntax contain a deeper meaning than their definitions clearly denote. Even when words strung-together sound like nonsense, we can make their meaning as we wish through sound and association. Gertrude Stein only comes to mean something, anything, to the artist only because he hears it. Sounds like music are abstract but they make us feel, so can words and here perhaps so can pictures.

For Geoffrey Farmer, sounds and images and words can all surpass literal meaning and carry the forking paths of poetic possibility, the unstable web of meaning that can be connotative and personal, each new connection an epiphany. Like music, you don't have to read treble clefs or eighth notes or play an instrument or compose yourself to let it affect you. Even the most astute practitioners forget themselves and just let the thrashing, unstable beauty wash over them.

Farmer's is not the hard, head clang of the revolution fought by Kathy and Gertrude, but it doesn't have to be war all the time either. Their necessary struggle has too many casualties. "Never send to know for whom the bell tolls…" The gentility of Geoffrey Farmer rings more truly like a whispering breeze through wind chimes, a church-bell's tolling faraway on the other side of a thick morning curtain when you have only to pull your lover close and go back to sleep.

"The care in which the the rain is wrong and the green is wrong and the white is wrong…"

I'm thinking about this now in Los Angeles, while I look out at the rainless day from the rectangular windows of my living room.

Berardini, Andrew. "'He Did Not Ring My Head Like A Bell': Reviewing Geoffrey Farmer, Momus, November 18, 2014, Online.

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VISUAL ARTS

Geoffrey Farmer on Henry Moore: All that is solid melts into air

Every day needs an urgent whistle blown into it is Gershon Iskowitz Prize winner's exhibit at the AGO until Sept. 7

An image from 'Every day needs an urgent whistle blown into it,' by Geoffrey Farmer at the Art Gallery of Ontario. Farmer, who won the Gershon Iskowitz Prize last year, created a work that recasts the Henry Moore Sculpture Centre in a cascade of light and sound.

Geoffrey Farmer is full of surprises.
Just when you think you have a bead on the Vancouver artist's playfully dense, thoughtfully absurd oeuvre, he goes and does this: at the Art Gallery of Ontario last week, Farmer opened a new work in the museum's Henry Moore Sculpture Centre.
In the blocky old brutalist space, Farmer has positioned Moore's rough, amorphous works in the precise spots they were originally placed by Moore himself, back in 1972.

In the midst of Moore's coolly primeval forms, Farmer has installed a dense cluster of technology: robotic lights dip and swivel according to an algorithm that runs in time with a sound collage, throwing coloured beams and their resulting shadows around the space and charging the austerity of Moore's high-Modern temple with a haunting urgency.

Farmer made the piece as part of winning the AGO's Gershon Iskowitz Prize last year. He calls it ***Every day needs an urgent whistle blown into it***, and it's apt: sound comes in bursts — a poppy-sounding guitar lick, a saccharin jingle for Bubble Yum — or long, eerie monologues. The light sears Moore's sculptures in sharp relief, projecting overlapping shadow and colour on the walls behind them. In bursts and moments, they live outside themselves: stolid pieces briefly surrounded by wraithlike apparitions, as though spirits had been set loose from their stony bodies.

Granted, I haven't seen Farmer's computer-choreographed multimedia work on Frank Zappa, which is currently on a global jaunt, but I imagine some affinities here. It's less a work — at least in the conventional sense — than an intervention, both into the space and, a little less directly, into the intertwined histories of the gallery and Modernism itself, of which Moore is a towering emblem.
At its core as an esthetic movement, Modernism shilled for a purity of form, guided by material and some quasi-spiritual, primal essence that linked all of mankind. It all seems terribly quaint now in our pluralistic, everyone-in-the-pool social mash-up, but at the time Modernism was a very real attempt to make sense of a radically changing world. The first half of the 20th century was riven by industry, war, radical social change and mass global movements of huge populations at a scale never before seen. The resulting chaos spawned an urge for order and Modernism, among other things, was an answer: a unifying notion that could be extended from artmaking to city-building to craft a universal, democratic experience of an emerging new world.

It didn't quite work out that way and its leftovers — colossal, inhuman public housing blocks, meant to communalize grotty urban living into modest, efficient utopias, became desperate high-density warehouses of poverty and despair; cities cleaved by freeways — still serve as agonizing monuments to that naive idealism.

What does this have to do with Farmer or Moore? Well, a lot. Over the years, Farmer's body of work has a powerful strain running through it, both of unpacking history and dismantling its mechanics. A breakout work for him was ***Leaves of Grass***, shown in 2012 at Documenta 13 in Kassel, Germany, likely the world's most prestigious art exhibition. It was built of 16,000 images clipped from LIFE magazine from 1935 to 1985.

Each image was fixed to a piece of grass and then clustered chronologically on a tabletop, so it quivered slightly in the wake of each passerby. The piece was an overwhelmingly dense cascade of visual information but, at the same time, had an alarming physical presence. It almost dared viewers to make sense of it. Inevitably, the viewer would be hooked by glimmers of recognition but ultimately lost in the flood.

The piece was a plain-spoken metaphor for the constant flow of information that sweeps past us daily; by giving it material form, Farmer made a game but ultimately futile attempt to moor it to the ground. Modernism, as practised by Moore, was nothing if not that: during and after the Second World War, he became almost a paternal figure in the U.K., crafting works of stiff-upper-lipped nationalism: mothers and children, reclining figures of women conveying a serenity amid the tumult. Moore, in this imagining, was a grounding force for a nation badly in need of something solid to stand on. While that hardly accounts for the artist's entire career, it became his hallmark, so deepening the understanding of his work has become a natural recent mini-oeuvre at the AGO. Brian Jungen, for his own Iskowitz show, set up in the Sculpture Centre with his own version of primal works in 2011, and the gallery's Bacon Moore show pairs the visceral painting of Francis Bacon with the sculptor's work, unpacking from Moore a world of infrequently seen pain.

Into this, Farmer inserts his own dizzying view and his tendencies freshen the experience of Moore's works, and the space they inhabit, in a way that's fresh, captivating and unique. Farmer's work, I think, is about the inescapable forces of constant change, and even as he reconstructs a historical arrangement of the Moore Centre, going so far as to mask off the archway that leads to the Frank-Gehry designed Galleria Italia, he acknowledges its futility. ("The Galleria triumphs as it needed to," he writes in an accompanying pamphlet, "a glass and wooden battleship that has blasted a cannonball into Moore's thinking.")

Over the bulwark of Moore's grounding high-Modernism, Farmer lets loose a wash of destabilizing light and sound, pulling them up by the roots and recasting Moore's works as ephemeral, fleeting things that shift and change by the moment. Like ***Leaves of Grass***, it staggers the firm footing of history with a blast of the chaotic present and scatters it to the wind. Farmer, on hand the other night, fretted that he hadn't yet crafted the work moment by moment as he had hoped. But as a visceral experience, it has an uncommon, haunting beauty. While that may not be quite enough for him, in its current form, Every day conjures up a truism, no less profound now than when a revolutionary named Karl Marx first coined it: all that is solid melts into air.

-Murray Whyte

Geoffrey Farmer: Every day needs an urgent whistle blown into it
On view at the Art Gallery of Ontario
July 5 - September 2, 2014

Whyte, Murray, ***Geoffrey Farmer on Henry Moore: All that is solid melts into air,*** Toronto Star Visual Arts, July 7, 2014, Online.

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BORDERCROSSINGS

The Mime of the Ancients: On Geoffrey Farmer's "A Light In The Moon"

Aryen Hoekstra

Installation view, ***Boneyard***,

"In this city marches an army." And so the following procession of sleeping architectures, fixed crowds, abeyant bodies and stuck faces are set in motion. Stepping over honking horns and racing motors this declaration opens Arthur Lipsett's film ***Very Nice, Very Nice*** (1961), decisively naming modern progress's ambulatory desires. The film was shown alongside six others at a recent screening at Cinecycle in Toronto (co-presented with Mercer Union and York University's film department) in anticipation of Geoffrey Farmer's exhibition "A Light In The Moon," which opened at Mercer Union in November, 2013. Composed of the discarded sounds and images Lipsett collected from the trim bins of the National Film Board of Canada, V***ery Nice, Very Nice*** continues to bewitch. Having been lauded with acclaim since its earliest screenings, the film now serves as a signal reference for those working in experimental found-footage montage. Farmer's choice to include Lipsett's film, as well as equally timeless works by Bruce Conner and Stan VanDerBeek, was a purposive acknowledgment of the artist's filmic forebears; a brief introduction to the evening's event described them as his teachers. As a means of advancing possible contextualization for the upcoming show, the films' presence provide a potential critical lexicon with which to interpret Farmer's work.

The incidental nature of found images has long been generative within Farmer's sculptural practice; the butting of two formerly autonomous images against one another inevitably leads to the invention of new, often humorous, latent narratives. In ***Leaves of Grass***, 2012, commissioned to be a part of last year's dOCUMENTA (13) in Kassel, DE, Farmer sorts through 50 years of photographs from an archive of ***Life*** magazines, cutting out and repositioning them down the long sculptural corridor of the Neue Galerie Kassel's second floor. The fragmented images clamour to meet one another, half-freed from their source, marooned somewhere between emancipation and restraint. Through shifts of scale and false proximities, the historical narrative formerly constructed through the 20th century's documentation of itself is left faltering and unsure.

In the exhibition "A Light In The Moon," Farmer's indebtedness to Lipsett's concussive edits are on full display in the computer-generated montage ***Look in my face; my name is Might-have-been; I am also called No-more, Too-late, Farewell***, 2013, though the march has been detoured, continuously being rerouted by an algorithmic program generating countless permutations of images; regrouping; rearranging; realigning. In it, the rigid features of a chiselled marble bust dissolve into those of a fleshy-faced press photo; an anxious lab animal invokes an army brigade; an agitated crowd conjures a landscape. The selected photographs are culled from the whole images of the source material for his installation of cut-out hand

Boneyard (detail),

Look in my face; my name is Might-have-been; I am also called No-more, Too-late, Farewell, 2013, computer generated algorithmic montage sequence.

puppets, The ***Surgeon and the Photographer***, 2013, shown earlier this year at The Barbican in London, UK. Each photograph is then tagged with multiple labels by Farmer—fluctuating between personal and descriptive classifications—with which the program constructs a succession of images synced to a correspondingly composed set of audio files. It is a method of nuanced categorization that often draws close to recognition, yet always retreats back into obscurity.

As an organizational methodology for arranging photographs ***Look in my face; my name is Might-have-been; I am also called No-more, Too-late, Farewell*** shares its peculiarity with another backward looking source; the panels of the great German art historian Aby Warburg's unfinished ***Mnemosyne Atlas***. Warburg's project similarly involved the gathering and arranging of over a thousand images, ranging from the paintings and sculptures of antiquity to the infamous photograph of the Pope greeting Mussolini. Organized across 40 panels covered in black fabric, Warburg grouped the images by their gestural commonalities, producing specific associative histories spanning thousands of years. In ***Notes on Gesture*** Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben argues that in Warburg's project what is at stake is not the 'science of the image'—as it is claimed by Panofsky-school art historians—but instead the image, or more precisely the gesture, as the "crystallization of historical memory." Like ***Leaves of Grass***, in their distribution across each panel Warburg produces a temporal equivalency, flattening time so that each gesture sheds its indexicality in an attempt to point towards a common motion. As one looks across the images suspended amidst the darkness of their cloth backing, they appear as if in virtual motion, advancing an amorphous pop-and-lock routine begun outside of our being-in-language, stalled only by their fixedness to a predestined stage.

Farmer's impulse to cut out wrests these gestures from their graven place, allowing the dance to continue into the night. In ***Boneyard***, 2013, the focal centre of "A Light In The Moon," the whole history of Western sculpture (at least until 1966) acts out on a circular stage, a grand spectacle of gesticulations, breaking the ties that tether them to their armatures and breathing life into one another as Venus did Pygmalion's Galatea. Since being extracted from a collection of salvaged books preserved and gifted to Farmer by artist Ted Rettig, each cut-out image candidly acknowledges its photographic source material through the revelation of previously captured highlights and shadows. However, what is simultaneously cast in their spiralling posture is that in Farmer's paper cut-outs the rigidity of the sculpture/image has been broken, or rather, there is no longer an image, only gesture. That the scene of this decampment occurs at a boneyard makes the escape all the more conspicuous. The invocation of an image, never mind a sculpture, from its eternal pose is both a haunting feat and a decidedly political act.

Like Farmer's method of imagistic extractions, Lipsett's montages too, propel what once seemed eternal in the photograph back into motion. The film ***Very Nice, Very Nice*** is paradigmatic, where each frame leans upon the previous, causing the passage from one to the next to endure a flux of after-images helpless to their intrusion. The charge activated by the myriad images is a product of their close pressing against one another, potentially stirring them from their languor with each lurching step. And while one cut-out photograph alone is unlikely to incite the riotous activity that plays out on Boneyard's stage, in their multitude they assume a stance in relief of one another, producing a relational violent encounter that

reanimates the statuary. Though Lipsett's source images were generally restricted to those produced contemporary to his working, Farmer's archival sifting hints towards an ancestry of movement enacted over millennia, and which continues to twist today.

The living statue, as a particular subset of the traditional pantomime routine, has continued to be an anachronistic fixture in city centres, on subway platforms and throughout those highly trafficked, pedestrian-friendly festivals that attract the touring classes. The living statue, like the mime, exhibits communication without speech, gesturing towards a state of ***infans***-cy—from the Latin ***in-fans***, referring to an inability to speak. In the text that Farmer prepared to accompany ***Boneyard***, the only utterance heard from any of the figures are the spasmodic cracklings and moanings emanating from number 23—a wrenched contortion of barely recognizable arms and fists slamming in on themselves—which are described as continuing for the duration of the exhibition. Boneyard's very speechlessness is the performance of a muted refusal that calls for the rupturing of formalized holds upon the image in favour of its reanimation.

Anterior to Warburg's studies on the correspondence between gesture and history, though a markedly more clinical account, were those published in 1832 by the Italian antiquarian Andrea De Jorio in ***La Mimica Degli Antichi Investigata Nel Gestire Napoletano (The Mime of the Ancients Investigated Through Neapolitan Gesture)***, in which he observes the gesticulations of 19th century Neapolitans as the manifestation of those previously performed in their iconography. De Jorio's project interprets those historical representations through this signage, assigning a wordless text to the gestures of the ancients in anticipation of their contemporary decoding. Tracing one upon the other, bodies silently speak across time, forever intelligible to those living statues re-enacting their former testimonies.

Just as the gestural studies of Warburg were prescient about the coming technological developments that would soon lead to the reconstitution of motion that we now know as the cinema, Farmer too advances through a process of looking back, recognizing in his source's fastened rigidity the potential ethics of a gestural image. Within his practice, history collapses upon itself; its images, detached from their source, are freed to assert their presence more urgently. The implication of time within a prescribed lineage between Lipsett and Farmer is therefore troubled by this interruption. Perhaps it would be appropriate to amend the introduction to the films screened at Cinecycle as being—rather than those of his teachers—those of his classmates, silently signing to one another across the room, out of view of the institution. Lipsett's filmic gestures continue to signal to Farmer, calling to him for their continuation and advance. A willing collaborator, Farmer too now awaits ***A Light In The Moon***'s future gesticulations, their unthinkable extension to be authored outside of time, possibly unseen, but always moving.

Aryen Hoekstra is an artist currently based in Toronto.

Look in my face; my name is Might-have-been; I am also called No-more, Too-late, Farewell, 2013, computer generated algorithmic montage sequence.

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LET'S MAKE THE WATER TURN BLACK
GEOFFREY FARMER
MARCH 1 2014 - MAY 25, 2014

KUNSTVEREIN IN HAMBURG

The new director of the Kunstverein in Hamburg Bettina Steinbrügge is pleased to present the Canadian artist Geoffrey Farmer in his first solo exhibition in Germany. The unique artistic practice by Geoffrey Farmer (born 1967) has its roots in Dada, happenings, performance, and process-based art. It refers to the possibility of alternative temporalities, configures the contrast of materiality and conceptual, and embarks on the adventure of the performative production of meaning. After extensive research created the artist encyclopedias that bring together aspects of the visual arts, literature, music, politics, history and sociology. The mechanical play "Let's Make the Water Turn Black" is by Farmers interest inspired by the Kabuki theater and consists of numerous, partially kinetic sculptures that follow a constantly changing over the duration of the day, computer-generated light and sound score. Frank Zappa's life structures the procedural work that chronologically unfolds over the years 1940-1993 and implements various methods have influenced the Farmer: William S. Burroughs technique of "cut-up", Kathy Acker's representation of imitation as well as Zappa's compositional technique of Xenochrony with which the alienation of time is called. This creates a kaleidoscopic effect, allowing disparate topics, ranging from Edgar Varèse to the LA Riots, the Pachuco to nose picking. Algorithms and the ability to improvise the score Farmers can play every day to someone special and unpredictable experience will be. Farmer examines in his work concepts and representations of power, freedom and identity, which often come from the Community protest movements of the late 1960s. The possibility of being through music represents an anti-authoritarian perspective on society. The artist contributes to a reorientation of cultural history by breaking chronological structures and mixed cultural forms. The barely perceptible space between the outside world and the world of art marks a point of transition, at which the visitors open up new possibilities through music.

The exhibition is a co-production of the institutions Migros Museum of Contemporary Art Zurich, Nottingham Contemporary, Kunstverein in Hamburg and the Pérez Art Museum of Miami. . Every institution shows a different version of itself over time continuously evolving installation for the exhibition are a monograph by JRP | Ringier, as well as an artist's book, published by Studio farmer appeared. Supported by the Agency for Cultural Affairs of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg and the Embassy of Canada .

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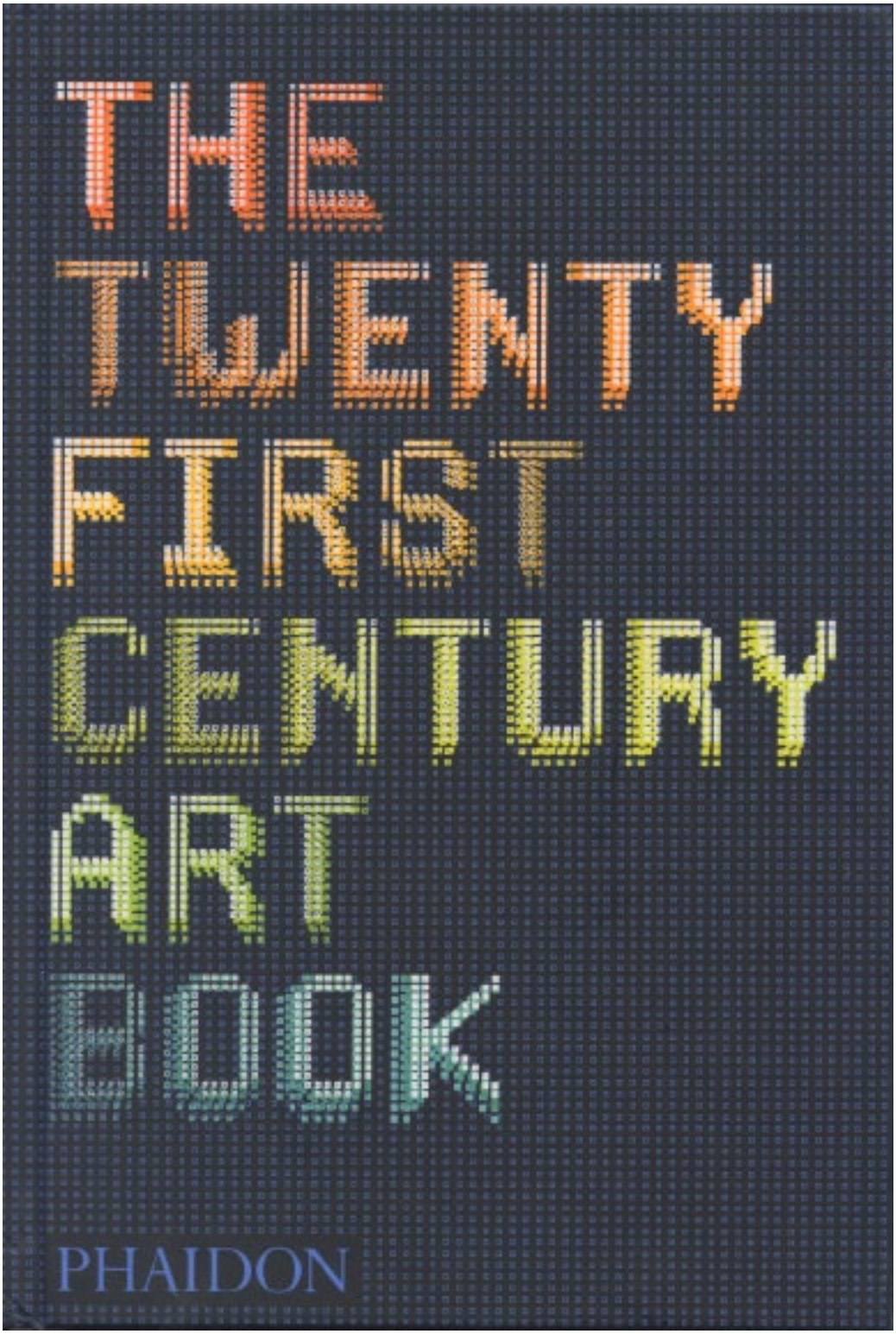

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Farmer Geoffrey

The Surgeon and the Photographer, 2009 - 13

Hundreds of figures, assembled from images cut from books and magazines, are mounted puppet-like onto cloth-covered mannequins. The act of moving around them brings them to life: their collaged elements shift and change, they cast shadows, stand in altered relationship to each other. Individiually the spotlit figures have a compelling presence. They gesture like orators, or stand in mute observance. They have personalities and, sometimes, specific roles: soldier, artist, politician. Developed over a three year period, when presented en masse at the Curve Gallery of the Barbican Centre, London, they became a vast company of actors standing ready to perform their parts in some enigmatic play. Farmer typically makes site specific work and engages the audience in animating it, thereby playing an active role in constructing its meaning. He combines elements of sculpture, collage, video, film, performance and text, making reference to literature, theatre and cinema.

Geoffrey Farmer b. Vancouver, Canada; 1967. The Surgeon and the Photographer. 2009-13. Paper, textile, wood and metal. Dimensions variable. Installation view, Curve Gallery, Barbican Centre, London, 2013. Vancouver Art Gallery, Canada

Griffin, Jonathan, et al. ***The Twenty First Century Art Book,*** Phaidon Press Limited, New York, NY, 2014, p. 80

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Geoffrey Farmer: A Light in the Moon, at Mercer Union

Farmer's new work at Mercer Union addresses the weight of history and its tendency to vanish from view

November 9, 2013
by Murray Whyte

The weight of history hangs heavy over A Light In The Moon, the arresting, sombre, beguiling and, in spurts, uproariously funny exhibition crafted by world-famous Vancouver artist Geoffrey Farmer. It's strong testament to the artist's unique gift for crafting transformative, lasting experience from mountains of ephemera; A Light in the Moon carries heavy freight, but is also light as air.

On a huge, round plinth that occupies a good half of the floor space of the main gallery at Mercer Union sits Boneyard, Farmer's main event here and the piece commissioned by the gallery itself. That it evokes nothing so much as a stage is no accident. On it are hundreds of sculptural figures of varying sizes, from classical Greek and Roman to Giacometti's nubbly sentinels to sleek, Modern Brancusis and rough-and-tumble Picassos.

A detail of Geoffrey Farmer's Boneyard, a new work commissioned by Toronto's Mercer Union. Farmer, who won the Iskowitz Prize at the AGO this year, will have a major solo show at the gallery in 2014.

Each is a cut-out photograph from one art history book or another, which Farmer has braced with wooden backing and propped up in his elaborate mise-en-scène. All face outward, their backs to a central fluted column, which looms above — a rallying point maybe or just a way for Farmer to mark a knowable centre amid the swirl.

Farmer might feel as though he could do with a little anchoring himself. It's been a busy couple of years. Last summer, he was among the big hits in documenta (13), the once-in-five-years art exhibition in Kassel, Germany, that's seen as the pinnacle of international contemporary art. Since then, he's shown in London, Zurich, Naples and Berlin, to list a few. All this adds up to Farmer being one of Canada's best-known art exports: a veritable rock star, ready and waiting for his stadium tour. He won't wait long: talk of him being the next artist chosen to represent Canada at the Venice Biennale in 2015 won't go away.

In June, Farmer won the $50,000 Gershon Iskowitz Prize at the Art Gallery of Ontario, which includes a solo show at the museum, loosely slated for next spring. So you can think of A Light in the Moon as something of a preview. The breadth of Farmer's interests and material curiosities make his practice endlessly fresh and surprising, but you can connect some dots. Boneyard has strong ties to Leaves of Grass, his much-loved work for documenta (13).

For it, he meticulously clipped hundreds of images from 50 years of Life magazine, then fixed them to flexible supports, so that the entire installation would shiver and quake with the faintest breeze. There was something being said about time: both its relentless churn and our insignificance within it. Then again, significance is a slippery notion itself, no less fleeting than those who determine it.

Boneyard gathers up these ideas and seems to apply them straight-forwardly to the more eggheaded realm of art history (its source material came during a residency at Queen's University in 2011, when professor and fellow artist Ted Rettig redirected deaccessioned art books from the Queen's library Farmer's way).

Look a little more closely, though. A numbered text leads you through; a handful identify canonic

pieces, but most dive deep into gleeful absurdity. A cluster of tiny classical figures are described as follows: “The wearing of clothes is exclusively a human characteristic and is a feature of most human societies. It is not known when humans began to wear clothes.” What appears to be a Christ figure exhorting a disciple is titled thusly: Please Sir, I have asked you politely would you please leave now or I will call security.

This is uproarious but serious fun. Farmer has unpacked a storehouse of catalogued cultural significance and has turned it loose in the painfully real world of constant noise and virtual chatter. Add in that these are pictures and they destabilize further: ghosts of ghosts, bearing the likeness of real things with substance in a world so many of us gave up knowing in favour of Googling.

Farmer’s guide is a riot, but more than that, a fair approximation of the voice in our heads that struggles to grasp meaning from images and ideas that fly by in a torrent of information that accelerates daily. His suggestion — how much can be known, in a world exploding with it and so much of it wrong? — underpins the good humour with what is, really, the dilemma of our times.

It is, after all, a boneyard, a reliquary of the known, unknown and vaguely recalled, yanked from the dustbin of history and reanimated for one last dance. Meanwhile, the winds of change ever blow and, like the song said, we know what wind does to dust.

A Light in the Moon continues at Mercer Union, 1286 Bloor W., until Jan. 11, 2014. http://www.mercerunion.org.

Whyte, Murray. “Geoffrey Farmer: A Light in the Moon, at Mercer Union ,”The Star, Visual arts, 11/09/2013. Online.

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Mercer Union
A CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

A Light In The Moon

Geoffrey Farmer

1 November 2013 - 11 January 2014

Opening Reception 1 November 2013, 7pm

In her 1977 book ***On Photography*** Susan Sontag pronounced "to collect photographs is to collect the world." This statement resonates with the work of Geoffrey Farmer who excavates multifarious cultural histories, from the life of Frank Zappa and his Mothers of Invention, photographs in ***Life*** magazine between 1935 and 1985, Victor Hugo's ***The Hunchback of Notre Dame*** or Nabokov's 1962 novel ***Pale Fire***, to the figure of Aloysius Snuffleupagus from ***Sesame Street***. Rather than existing in isolation these stories, or histories, are intertwined with social and political events, music, visual art, film and happenstance through atmospheric and multifaceted installations combining video, film, sculptural elements, found objects, and sound. The exhibitionary moment becomes a magical space to tackle larger themes of the dialectical relationship between reality and artifice, how we understand our existence, knowledge and power.

A Light In The Moon refers to Gertrude Stein's 1914 poem which breaks from a possible 'sensible decision' to a litany of options, possibilities, excitements and creations. Often playful, Farmer's work leads us to renegotiate how we look at objects, and the meanings they elicit. In gathering histories, stories, objects, sounds, and images through poetic and theatrical installations, Farmer prompts wonder and undermines and disrupts the very
concept of categorization or an encyclopedia of the world in which we live. Underlining such ideas is the capacity for anything, an object or an artwork, to alter its role and significance alluding to continual transformation and the potential for change.

A Light In The Moon represents a milestone for Mercer Union's ongoing commissioning series. We would like to acknowledge the relentless and generous support of our patrons in this endeavour.

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Geoffrey Farmer

Let's Make the Water Turn Black

12 Oct 2013 - 05 Jan 2014

Nottingham Contemporary

Geoffrey Farmer is a unique and disconcerting voice in Canadian art. Borrowing elements from conceptual and installation art, he combines poetry and social commentary with specific cultural histories and memories. He presents these findings in a new and unfamiliar light, creating playful and visually entrancing works.

Let's Make the Water Turn Black is his most technically ambitious installation to date. Over 70 sculptures have been constructed from found materials, salvaged movie props and discarded theatre sets which he presents as an ensemble on a large platform. Animated by computer, in an environment of changing coloured light, the population of characters are choreographed into a mechanical performance. They move slowly in response to musical compositions.

Echoing a 1968 composition by Frank Zappa of the same name, Farmer's Let's Make the Water Turn Black presents an improvised chronology of the six decades of the American musician's life. Farmer sees the vast sculptural structure as a single instrument.

The soundtrack is composed from field recordings relating to places Zappa recorded and played his music. Farmer uses a "cut up" approach to the soundtrack that is related to William S Burrough's way of writing literature, and to Zappa's own compositional technique. It also references musique concrete, kinetic art, and the counter- culture music scene in Los Angeles in the 1960s. The computer algorithms that control the work reflect the idiosyncratic compositional forms Zappa used, making each day unique and unpredictable.

Let's Make the Water Turn Black is a co-production by Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst in Zurich, Nottingham Contemporary, Hamburg Kunstverein and Pérez Art Museum Miami.

13 October – 18 October

During the first week of the exhibition visitors will be able to see technical run throughs and rehearsals as the artist and crew choreograph the sculpture to the new musical compositions created especially for the Nottingham Contemporary exhibition.

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CANADIANART

Geoffrey Farmer The Intellection of Lady Spider House 2013 Installation view Various media

Q&A: Geoffrey Farmer Launches Haunted House in Edmonton

Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton September 14, 2013 to January 12, 2014

By Leah Sandals

POSTED: SEPTEMBER 16, 2013

Vancouver artist Geoffrey Farmer—this year's $50,000 Gershon Iskowitz Prize winner—recently had solo exhibitions at the Migros Museum in Zurich and the Barbican in London. This week, he returned home to Canada, opening one of his largest installations yet at the Art Gallery of Alberta. Taking the form of a haunted house, The Intellection of Lady Spider House is an unprecedented collaboration between Farmer and 11 other Canadian artists, including Valérie Blass, Julia Feyrer, Hadley + Maxwell, David Hoffos, Brian Jungen, Tiziana La Melia, Gareth Moore, Judy Radul, Hannah Rickards and Ron Tran. Here, in an email interview, he tells us more about the work and its origins.

Leah Sandals: You came to international prominence with works like The Last Two Million Years, which transformed a found book into a sprawling and philosophical installation. How does it feel to now take on the task of making a multi-artist exhibition for a space as large as the one at the AGA? How are the strategies the same or different from the ones used in that previous work?

Geoffrey Farmer: There is a scene in the movie The Shining when Jack is looking over the maquette of the hedge maze. The hotel where the hedge is located and where this scene takes place is itself called the Overlook.

I have thought about this, the concept of the overview in relationship to my interest in making a work like The Last Two Million Years. Reader's Digest, the book's publisher, was both trying to shrink, condense and categorize our understanding of history while at the same give a ridiculously broad overview of it. Photography innately has the ability to miniaturize the world, and in doing so allows for the creation of a visual language that can then be organized into various categorical groupings.

The process for this exhibition was similar. Like the scene with the maze maquette, we created a model of the gallery at the AGA, and the objects of the exhibition were photographed and shrunk into the scale of the model so that they could be arranged.

LS: Your installations have often had an eerie or uncanny quality in the past, but this exhibition is more explicit in positioning itself as a kind of fun-fair haunted house. Why? How did you arrive at this concept?

GF: Haunted house walk-throughs are constructed in the form of a labyrinth. They create a space where it appears that there is the possibility of getting lost. They are constructed as a form of exhibition-making, using tableaux vivants, sculptures, still lifes and performances.

I had spoken to [AGA curator] Catherine Crowston about my earliest memory of exhibition-making, which was the construction of a haunted house for neighbours when I was 13. I wanted to come home and take the time during the summer in Vancouver, with friends and artists I respected, to explore this type of exhibition-making.

LS: Collaboration is also more explicit in this project than it has been in your past ones, as you've invited well-known Canadian artists like Brian Jungen, Gareth Moore and others to contribute to the work. How has that collaborative process played out, and why were you interested in pursuing it?

GF: A haunted house walk-through, I think, is a good collaborative and curatorial template.

Allyson Mitchell is making a lesbian haunted house walk-through in Toronto this fall with different community groups. I think it should be an annual event.

My exhibition's aim is less radical. It is less curating and more setting up the conditions for the work to exist within. Spiders are able to create from their bodies the structures on which they exist, and the web is also an instrument they use to nourish themselves. I wanted the process of making the exhibition to be a similar experience.

LS: As you mentioned, this project also has some roots in your childhood. Can you talk about that a bit more? What were your childhood haunted houses like? What aspects of it did you wish to capture in the AGA installation?

GF: When we made haunted houses as children, a lot of the process was trying to figure out what the visitor's experience might be. We took each other through as test subjects and discovered, for example, that it wasn't fair to create a set of stairs out of found wood and have it suddenly drop off to a futon.

It was like making a happening, or the exhibition that Robert Morris made at the Tate in the 1970s, but at the age of six.

I have often thought back to this experience when making exhibitions—when trying to figure out a layout or how a visitor might see the work.

So in essence, this [childhood haunted house] was my first memory of my fabrication of the other. It was also the time I began to ruminate on the concept of death and began having recurring nightmares. It was a time that I first experienced physical violence and the socialization that occurs when you are sent to school.

These experiences created questions, and the exhibition is, in essence, a way to map this out, even if it is many years later—it's a way to try and answer them.

My [earlier] haunted houses were about trying to alter space and materials and make them function in different ways. I learned how to block out light with garbage bags, create lighting effects with tinfoil, make blood stains with beet juice, and paint broken pencils with Liquid Paper to create the effect of broken finger bones.

LS: The haunted house at the AGA also has links to certain Edmonton sites. How so?

GF: Fort Edmonton Park influenced the interior facades, which came to construct the rooms of the exhibition. It is a mixture of historical authenticity, fable and the active repression of certain narratives.

Some of the artists travelled around Edmonton and used it for the source of their work. Maxwell and Hadley collected black foil impressions of various parts of figurative monuments and statues from around the city. They brought these back into the gallery and collaged them back together to create new hybrid forms.

LS: Is there anything else you think visitors should know when visiting the AGA installation? Or anything you hope they will ultimately take away from it?

GF: I made this exhibition with a group of friends, and I hope that this spirit is present as part of the experience of being in the exhibition.

I also hope there is a sense of the possibility of getting lost within its labyrinthine structure, and a sense of curiosity in the atmosphere that we created.

This interview has been edited and condensed.

This article was corrected on September 16, 2013. An earlier version indicated the exhibition opened on September 4 rather than September 14.

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barbican

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

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

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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.

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Art Review:

Geoffrey Farmer Let's Make the Water Turn Black
Migros Museum fur Gegenwartskunst, Zurich 23 May -18 August

Between the first version of this capricious installation (at REDCAT in Los Angeles in 2011) and the most recent remix (with others to come), Geoffrey Farmer presented a work at Documenta 13 of stylistic and material focus that was tailormade to be the visitor favourite it became. *Leaves of Grass* (2012) incorporates thousands of images cut from the pages of a full run of Life magazine that were attached to sticks like paper dolls and arranged in rough chronological order. As an extended frieze with a front and a back, it enabled its viewers to file past a twentieth century picture parade of particular social and visual impact, almost as if it were lying in state. Without seeing this work in Kassel I likely would not have fully appreciated how adept Farmer is at invoking the movement we make around the perimeter of his installations. So, as the magazine images of *Leaves of Grass* flipped through us rather than vice versa, this current installation, one that Farmer categorises in a wall label as a 'sculpture play,' stubbornly maintains the expected relationship berween sculpture and viewer, at least until certain things start to happen, things that set up other things that surely would happen either the moment we left if not years later. During my first visit to this new version of *Let's Make the Water Turn Black*, I couldn't figure out what was going on. But that didn't interfere with what immediately came across as a mindful playfulness enacted by a menagerie of sculptural objects, some of which are animatronic and would on occasion come to life: a wooden stick waving for a moment in a small clay pot, the arm of a mechanical cactus engaging a set of chimes and plenty of coloured lightbulbs (often positioned as the eyes or nose of a human or animal-like assemblage) turning on and off along with the theatrical lighting of the space, as well as the cut-and-paste soundtrack of the entire work that includes clips of popular songs and radio broadcasts, as well as sound effects (like thunder) and various musical instruments. Spanning the figurative to the fantastic, the 'indigenous' to the 'modern', Farmer's sculptures wear their influences without apology, and I very much appreciated being encouraged to recall the inspirational early work of Mike Kelley, as well as more obscure connections to aspects of the work of Wallace Berman. The direct connection to California comes from Farmer's title. Lifted from a 1968 song by Frank Zappa, it indicates the extent to which the performative aspects of Farmer's overall production (lights, sound, movement, music, etc) mirror the West Coast collage aesthetic of Zappa's compositions. I got this much more during my second visit, as the symbiotic relationship berween the temporal structure of the installation and the first years of Zappa's life literally played itself out, starting with snippets of songs and broadcasts from 1940, the year of his birth. Just as I was succumbing to the work's layers of activities and references while moving with rapt attention around the boundary of its raised stage, the lights changed dramatically, creating a twilight moment as the voice of FDR came over a loudspeaker - "Yesterday, December 7,1941- a date which will live in infamy" - and, for a moment, it was as if both time and I stood still.

- Terry R. Myers

photo: Lorenzo Pusterla

Myers, Terry R., "Geoffery Farmer: Let's Make the Water Turn Black," ArtReview Vol.65 no.7, October 2013.

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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

MIGROSMUSEUM für Gegenwartskunst
AN INSTITUTION OF THE MIGROS CULTURE PERCENTAGE

PRESS RELEASE
ZURICH, MARCH 26, 2013

The artistic practice of Geo!rey 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 !%th 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.

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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.

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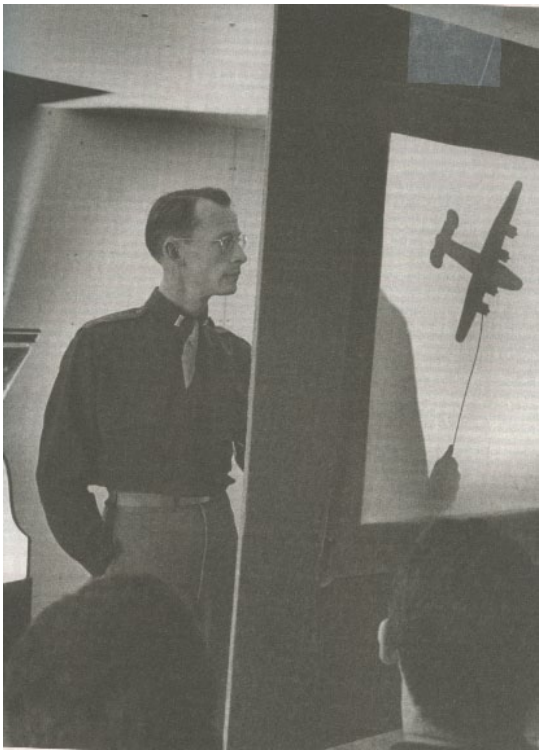
Geoffrey Farmer
b. 1967 in Vancouver
lives in Vancouver

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 accross 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.

"Scharrer, Eva, Das Begleeitbuch / The Guidebook dOCUMENTA (13)," exh. cat. p. 150-151"

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"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, objecthood and the ‘Black Forest voodoo’ of **Geoffrey Farmer**’s mirages and micro-events

BY JAN VERWOERT
01 MAY 2012

The Surgeon and The Photographer (detail), 2009, 365 puppet figures, fabric, found images, metal stands and 60 wooden plinths, each figure: 45 x 13 x 13 cm. All images courtesy Casey Kaplan, New York, Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver, and the artist. Photograph: Scorr Massey

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-leafed 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 To 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.

The Vampire of Coyoacan, 2010, 10 giclée prints, dimensions variable

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'.1 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 10am or midnight; on Tuesdays, it's at 11am or 1am …

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 spir

A different scene materialized each day, like a drama in stop motion, or the visions of a capricious god might send to prospective prophets in the desert to test their spiritual capacties

its 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 be shown in. This seems to be as much a self-imposed 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 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.

Let's Make The Water Turn Black, 2010-11, mixed media, isntallation view, REDCAT, Los Angeles Let's Make The Water Turn Black, 2010-11, mixed media, isntallation view, REDCAT, Los Angeles

On a similar vast white platform, a different scene materialized each day, like a drama in stop motion, or the visions a capricious god might send to prospective prophets in the desert to test their spiritual capacities (e.g. Monday raining frogs, Tuesday temptations of the flesh etc.). Blankets and draperies crumpled in lumps on one day, rose to be suspended as backdrops and ghostly figures with masks and magic rods attached to them on the next.

In an earlier piece, For Every Jetliner Used in an Artwork (2006), Farmer acquired the entire seating and panelling of a passenger aircraft cabin. During its exhibition at the Catriona Jeffries Gallery in Vancouver, he first assembled the cabin on a waist-high plinth, to expose the interior of the 'dead' plane in its brute facticity, and then covered the entire thing under a cloak of assorted frayed blankets, like a vast raft prepared for a burial rite or, perhaps, another incarnation 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

God's Dice, 2010, mixed media, installation view, Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff Centre

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.

Geoffrey Farmer lives and works in Vancouver, Canada. Recent exhibitions include Project Arts Centre, Dublin, Ireland (with Jeremy Millar); and redcat, Los Angeles, usa (both 2011). He participated in the 12th Istanbul Biennial, Turkey (2011), and his work is included in documenta (13), Kassel, Germany, from 9 June. He will have a retrospective at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 2013.

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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 tighty-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

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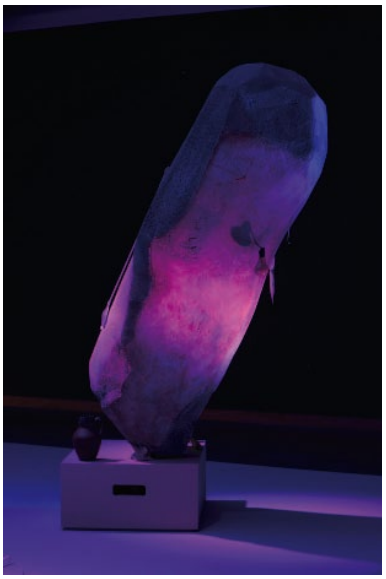
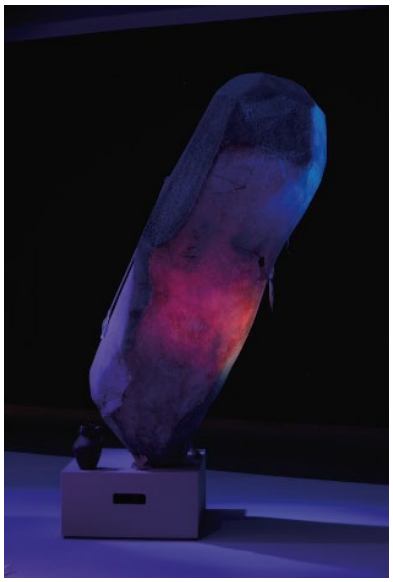
Mousse Publishing

Szewczyk, Monika, “Geoffrey Farmer,” MOUSSE, Issue #30, Sept 2011, 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...

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 can be on the same page, both working to see and understand...

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 revealed.

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 théatron; 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

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?

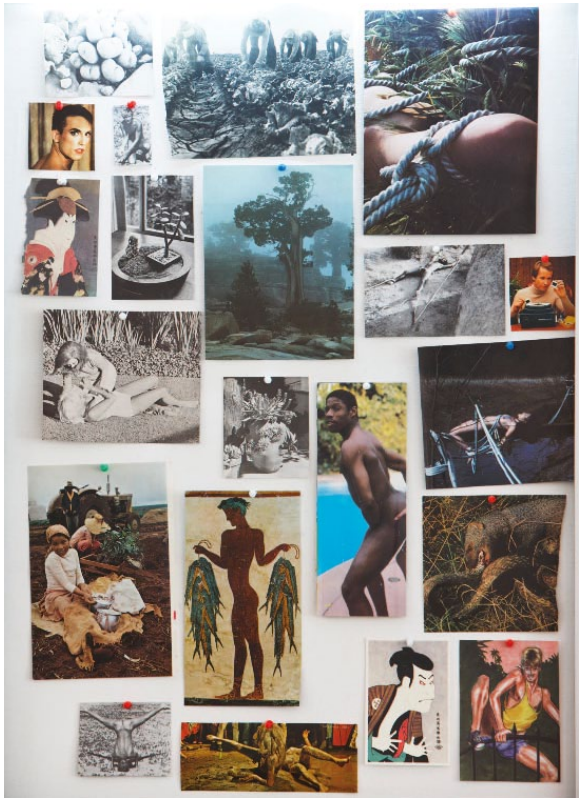
"The Vampire Of Coyacan And His Twenty Achichintles",
installation view, Museo Experimental El Eco, Mexico City, 2010.
Courtesy: Museo Experimental El Eco, Mexico City.
Photo: Ramiro Chaves

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.

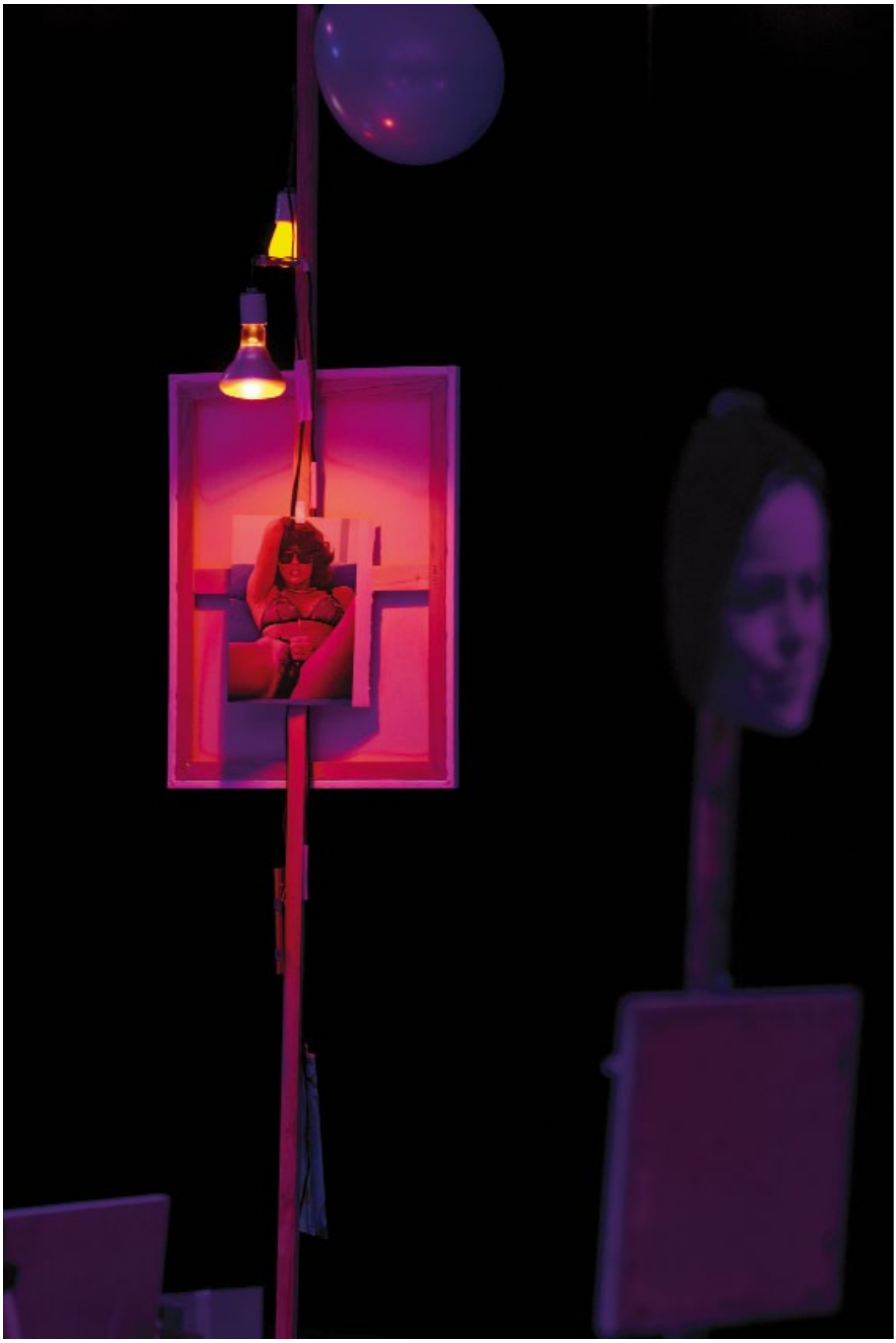


Left and below – Let's Make the Water Turn Black (details), installation views, REDCAT, Los Angeles, 2011. Courtesy: the artist; Casey Kaplan, New York; and Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver

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

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



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

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

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ARTFORUM

LOS ANGELES

Geoffrey Farmer

REDCAT

The stage is set and lights dimmed. Whenever you might have chosen to enter Geooffrey 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 spotlit tableauz 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 wodden sandals; a latern 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! Theere 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 tha 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 stitled and syncopated kineticism of sporadically spazzing limbs and intermittenly 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 porgrammed 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 congreagation 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 occured." 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 turnoffs-that register ebbs and flows of energy, instigating waves of dramtic 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

Lehrer-Graiwer, Sarah, "Geoffrey Farmer: REDCAT", Artforum, June 2011.

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REDCAT

GEOFFREY FARMER
LET'S MAKE THE WATER TURN BLACK
February 18 – April 10, 2011

Opening:
Sunday, March 5, 6–9pm

REDCAT is pleased to present the first solo exhibition in Los Angeles by Vancouver-based artist Geoffrey Farmer, curated by REDCAT assistant curator Aram Moshayedi.

Regarded internationally for his cumulative, research-based projects, Farmer creates context-specific sculptural works that grapple with his longstanding interest in the relationship between art objects and theories of drama and dramatization. In doing so, Farmer mines a diverse array of literary and artistic histories to reveal the pervasiveness of theatricality within cultural experience. Rather than adhere to the convention of exhibitions as static displays, Farmer reconstitutes the gallery space as a site for improvisation, movement, alteration and accumulation.

For this exhibition, Farmer transforms the Gallery at REDCAT into both studio workshop and theatrical space where an assembly of performers and mechanized objects act out a scripted narrative in the form of a sculptural tableau. Starting mid-February, Farmer is in residence to work on-site and create a new site-specific "sculpture play" titled Let's Make the Water Turn Black in response to the region's social history and Los Angeles' influence on the counter-cultural movement. The exhibition begins on February 18 with a series of discrete installations on an architectural façade built to separate the central gallery from the REDCAT lobby. These revolving installations act as a prelude to the first public presentation of Farmer's sculpture play on March 5, 2011, when visitors are invited to enter the central gallery space for the first time.

Let's Make the Water Turn Black borrows its title from a song released in 1968 by The Mothers of Invention, a band led by Frank Zappa that embodied the cultural spirit of the era in Los Angeles. Farmer's installation uses the song as a starting point for a new narrative that casts a recreated copy of Isamu Noguchi's monumental stone sculpture To the Issei (1983), located in the nearby plaza of the Japanese American Cultural & Community Center complex in Little Tokyo, as the central protagonist. A large platform consumes the gallery and acts as a stage for kinetic sculptures to perform a script based on themes adapted from traditional Japanese theater and the history of the counter-cultural movement in Los Angeles. Farmer's interest in Kabuki's "off-kilter" acting style is brought into focus around a similar off-balance approach that defined the history of experimentation with kinetic art, Happenings, and the ethos of art-making in the 1960s and 70s. Let's Make the Water Turn Black uses found and composed objects, props, theatrical lighting and recorded sound to find formal similarities in otherwise disparate cultural histories.

This exhibition is funded in part with generous support of the Audain Foundation.

Special thanks to Catriona Jeffries, Casey Kaplan and Presentation House Gallery, Vancouver.

Gallery at REDCAT aims to support, present, commission and nurture new creative insights through dynamic projects and challenging ideas. The Gallery presents five exhibitions every year, often of newly commissioned work, that represents the artist's first major presentation in the U.S. or Los Angeles. The Gallery also maintains an active publishing program producing as many as two major monographs per year. Proceeding from the geographic and cultural specificities of Los Angeles, its program emphasizes artistic production of the Pacific Rim—namely Mexico, Central and South America and Asia—as regions that are of vital significance to California. The Gallery aims to facilitate dialogue between local and international artists contributing to a greater understanding of the social, political and cultural contexts that inform contemporary artistic practice.

Gallery at REDCAT is open Tuesdays through Sundays from noon to 6:00pm or until intermission. It is closed Monday and major holidays. Admission to the Gallery at REDCAT is always free.

REDCAT is located at the corner of W. 2nd and Hope Streets, inside the Walt Disney Concert Hall complex in downtown Los Angeles (631 West 2nd Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012.)

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Moser, Gabrielle, "Geoffrey Farmer: Playing Stateside," Canadian Art, March 17, 2011, < http://www.canadianart.ca/online/reviews/2011/03/17/

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 lamplampposts constructed from plywood, found objects and exposed light bulbs. Farmer is at his best when he is unapologetically playful, and the standout 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

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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

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

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.

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

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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

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"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 5in. (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.

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Hertz, Betti-Sue, "Tableaux Vivants," Flash Art, November/December 2010, p. 78-82

Tableaux Vivants

IN THE NEW THEATRICALITY

Betti-Sue Hertz

The imagination is the first luxury of a body that receives sufficient nourishment, of a person who has just a bit of spare time, and whose surrounds provide just the rudiments from which dreams are made.

— Geoffrey Farmer[1]

IN RECENT YEARS some very daring and thought-provoking artists have been embracing a new theatricality in visual art by breaking boundaries across artistic practices and reworking modern forms in theater and dance through homage, mirroring and reinvention. They are addressing the formal and informal stage as a location for conjoining hyper-indviduality and collectivity, and adapting traditions in these forms to a 'spatialized' orientation of performance through the physical body, props, set and curtain. Historical references, often many disparate ones within a single work, emerge as specific sources, and these familiar images are reclaimed for constructing new meanings. The artists' repeated references to ghosts from the past and their inevitable companions, mortality and death, are summoned up through performance and presented to audiences in both live and photo-based mediums. Very much present are

Above: DARIA MARTIN, In the Palace, 2000. 16mm film, 7 mins. Courtesy Maureen Paley, London. Opposite: KELLY NIPPER, Evergreen (C), 2004. Framed chromogenic print, 123 x 165 cm.

of the harlequin and Venetian Carnival; late 19th-century tableau vivant practiced by amateur theater troupes; the Dada performances of Hugo Ball at Cabaret Voltaire; and the Bauhausian Triadic Ballets of Oskar Schlemmer. As art historian Patricia Falguières points out, modern visual artists in the early 20th century behaved differently from their theater contemporaries when considering bodies and objects in staged settings. She writes: "In question here, as much as the virtualization of space and of the operations of marking out what are its corollary, is the fundamental transformation undergone in the 20th century by objects and actors on stage; like the elements of what was usually called the set, characters too entered into that figural logic called for by [Antonin] Artaud, making copious use of masks, megaphone, dummies, stilts, and puppets."[2] For these artists, sources as varied as Carnival and Rudolf Laban's movement theory are access points for experimentation with subjective belief systems — the occult, magic and ritual. Why are their fantasy-infused worlds filled with remnants of history?

Central to this discussion is the crisis of the formal stage as a site, which is dependent on clear boundaries in its illusionistic separation between performers and spectators. With an aim of engaging the audience on a heightened physical level, Spartacus Chetwynd and assume vivid astro focus (avaf) often move the stage to a club or procession creating experiential collectivities through ceremony, improvisation and chance. Daria Martin and Kelly Nipper, in some sense successors to innovators in dance such as Anna Halprin and Yvonne Rainer, are also exposing the mechanics of performance that were half-hidden in Bertolt Brecht's plays. Geoffrey Farmer, Ulla von Brandenburg and Enrico David rely on inference and absence to trigger ghostly collective memories by creating 'visualities' for internalized fears that are social or parasocial in nature. Whether the artist leans towards excessive camp or highly controlled revisions of modernist forms, each of them offers up what Alain Badiou describes as "relationships between the visible and the invisible in theatrical (or non-theatrical) action. Here I call 'invisible' the instructions or statements which you rightly identify as being 'between' the idea and the act."[3] These artists are taking the invisible into new directions, furthering strands of artistic motivations that were emergent in earlier forays, where performance is comfortably situated within the spatialism of visual art.

Farmer's sculptural installations are unstable units of assemblage-style objects highly evocative of situations of human interaction. Functioning like changeable pseudo-tableaux vivants, the character-objects and prop-objects are configured as if in a play that is both open-ended and spontaneous. The static becomes non-static through a form of puppetry that barely re-

GEOFFREY FARMER, Theatre of Cruelty, 2008. Props, found objects, fabric, computer controlled LED lighting system, speakers, and framed photographs, Dimensions variable. Courtesy Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver.

ingenious practice is 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 (2001-ongoing) where numerous arrangements suggest the infinite possibilities of which only some are selected. In one instance, a prairie woman is situated not far from a scarecrow and a tattered witch with a broom. Another witch made of draped black fabric with a body implied, has eyeholes that have been cut out, which prevent the possibility of the gaze. Throughout, the aura of death is animated through the inanimate.

A dancer in a skeleton costume is the sole performer in von Brandenburg's film Tanz, Makaber (Dance, macabre, 2006). The simple steps are repeated as if it would be impossible to stop moving. In Geist (Ghost, 2007), a figure draped in a white sheet walks away from a camera in a field seen through a reflecting ball. For Reiter (cavelier, 2004), a tableau vivant framed by a curtain with a diamond-shaped-black-and-white harlequin pattern incorporates three specific references: Tiepolo's baroque paintings of the Venice Carnival, Goethe's poem "Ginkgo Biloba" and Pierre Klossowski's designs, which all collapse into a single scene.[4] The harlequin-patterned curtain, which reappears with an addition of segments of orange diamonds in Curtain II (2009), again channels an experience with a past that haunts the present, to eerie effect.[5]

Von Brandenburg exploits the curtain as demarcation of the boundary between the illusionism of the stage and the real world populated by audiences. In Five Folded Curtains (2008), an empty mise-en-scène becomes a site for the spectator to become an actor. Each of the five versions offers different opportunities for approach, entry and concealment. The stage curtain is the architectural equivalent to the mask, an object that delivers a liminal space between interiors and exteriors, between fantasy and the real world. "The theatrical middle zone proposes a genuine transferral of attention towards inter-subjective relations, revealing the blurredness of life and art …"[6] In Nipper's Evergreen (2004), the mechanics of the stage and the deflation of its artifice are indicated by a technician appearing in front of the curtain to set up a microphone. In addition, the femininity of the curtain as skirt becomes a metaphor for that which is revealed or concealed.

Spartacus Chetwynd's grotesqueries wrestle with a potpourri of cannibalized references borrowed from street theater, literature, pop culture and Carnival. Her bacchanalian escapades embrace popular social aesthetics while maintaining strong ties to medieval pageantry and amateur traveling troupes. In the scenes of celebratory collectivity in Hermito's Children, Episode 1, (2009), her pilot TV show, a variety of characters feast together, taunt innocence and revel in naked harmony. The carnivalesque space is in keeping with Mikhail Bakhtin's notions derived from the study of François

ENRICO DAVID, Bulbous Marauder, 2008 (detail). Gouache on paper, 129 x 94 cm. Courtesy Daniel Buchholz, Cologne / Berlin.

with pagan-style ritual, puppetry and post-pop cabaret casualness marked with inventive personas that drives its confluence of alternative lifestyles and spiritualities. Similarly, in the spirit of Brazilian Carnival assume vivid astro focus's costumed extravaganzas presume commonality for large heterogeneous general audiences. Their post-pop events embrace the continuity connecting campy gay club cultures and Carnival, which was itself adapted from the Venetian version. Their continual transformations — a procession becomes a sculpture, an installation becomes a workshop, revelers are changed into moving sculptural forms — express the fluidity between life and death within the cycles of ritual.

Whereas avaf exploits overt sources, Enrico David recodes received symbols and forms to represent his most intimate experiences. Bulbous Marauder (2008) was inspired by a private sexual encounter of "tea bagging," where he noticed that up close the scrotum took on a crisscross diamond-like pattern. This memory became a catalyst for the two figures in dance poses. The mask form, which reveals a single eye and teeth, quotes the harlequin black half-mask. A black chin-piece of the traditional mask and the eyeholes convey a similar astonishment, sensuality and craftiness. The simultaneously aggressive and seductive pose of the figures prioritizes the dark side of the harlequin's role, and the sword, often depicted in the shape of a bat, reverts to the image of the scrotum. For David, Art Deco style and the Bauhaus are visual sites ready for repurposing. He states, "I am attracted by the aesthetic resolution of the work of Schlemmer for its sense of completeness, a sophisticated innocence and harmony. I am fascinated by this harmonization as a potential vehicle for a certain friction, the gaps that I identify, the queer potential left to be colored in."[7] Kelly Nipper's instructional dance videos prioritize the functional body where movement is stripped down to codified gestures and shapes. As different as they are, Nipper's and David's projects share common ground in their fascination with the symbolic affect of gestural forms in dance. In Nipper's small collage sketch for Shifting Shapes (3, 6, 9, 12) (2010), a female dancer is in a balletic pose, her face hidden behind a facemask with one leg and the chest indicated by skeletal elements. This partial image of death (which is also a reference to Laban's analytic movement system) is in playful dialogue with David's more menacing male figures.[8] Another reference-based work, Weather Center (2009), features a solo performance, which was inspired by Mary Wigman's German Expressionist Witch Dance (1914). The fixed emotion of the mask contrasts with the flows and twists of the solo seated dancer.[9]

Daria Martin's film sequences accumulate into mysterious, ghostly and magical effect placing invisible pressure on the gesture of the body and relational expressions between the performers.[10]

ASSUME VIVID ASTRO FOCUS, installation view at Enel Contemporanea at Area Sacra di Torre Argentina, Rome, 2008. Courtesy Peres Projects, Berlin.

Closeup Gallery (2003), live performance is available only through the mediation of the camera shots. Almost tableaux vivants, the masks, sets and sculptural mise-en-scène both conceal and reveal the play between the ensemble and the individual in carrying the elements of narrative where intimacy, seduction, eroticism and fear appear and fall away. In the Palace draws directly from Schlemmer's Slat Dance (1927). The film "contains a kind of petrified ecstasy, both sexual and fantastical, corrupting remembered fragments of theater, art and of dance history…"[11] The transparent masks in Birds reference Ball's Cabaret Voltaire costumes made of cardboard that feature the donning of a white-striped witch doctor's hat.

It seems that each of these artists is making contact with death by entrusting performance with the power to achieve mystical or elated states. They pay homage to some piece of an artistic past as if this strange layer before the present, by its own agency, needs to be resuscitated. Like Tadeusz Kantor (1915-1990), these artists see all elements that form the theatrical scene to be important, rather than one being subservient to another. Going beyond quoting, they are inventing new forms out of acknowledged visual and performance histories. Their works have emerged from the gaps between distinct art forms to achieve integrated and elaborately textured taxonomies that rebound, deflect and reflect on received artistic categories.

■

Betti-Sue Hertz is Director of Visual Arts, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco.

Notes:

1. Geoffrey Farmer in Zoë Gray, Nicolaus Schafhausen & Monika Szewczyk (eds.), Geoffrey Farmer, Witte de With, 2008, p. 67.
2. Patricia Falguières, "Playground" in A Theater without Theater, MACBA, 2007, p. 31.
3. "A Theatre of Operations: A Discussion between Alain Badiou and Elie During" in A Theater without Theater, MACBA, 2007, p. 22.
4. See Edit: Trouble-Boredom/L'Ennui No. 5 at http:// www.edit-revue.com/?Article=141
5. This curtain design is a reproduction from the Royal Shakespeare Theatre's curtain from 1932 designed by Walpole Champneys.
6. Catherine Wood, "Art Meets Theatre: The Middle Zone," in The World as a Stage, Tate Modern, London, p. 25
7. "Fracturing of Hope, Anke Kempkes In Conversation with Enrico David" in Anke Kempkes and Ralph Ubl, (eds.), Flesh at War with Enigma, Volumes 67-2004, Kunsthalle Basel, Schwabe, 2005, p. 67.
8. The fully realized version of Nipper's full head mask was inspired by Jean Arp's organically rounded and irregular shapes.
9. Nipper's inspiration for the staging was Nikolai Erdman's 1924 stage design for Ilya Shlepyanov's comedy The Mandate. Erdman's comedy was considered during its time to be the first truly Soviet play.
10. Martin explains: "My first films set the performing body in relation to sculptural objects. At times the constructed environment around the performers — sets and props — almost appears as important as the human presence. And yet the sense of bodily frailty and fallibility is always hinted at. These films set up a parity between the delights of artifice — form, color, sculptural space — and the complex nature/culture entity that is the human body." In "Daria Martin talks with Yilmaz Dziewior and Beatrix Ruf," in Beatrix Ruf, Yilmaz Dziewior (eds.), Daria Martin, Kunsthalle Zurich / Kunstverein, Hamburg, 2005, p. 78.
11. Catherine Wood, "The One and the Many," in Beatrix Ruf, Yilmaz Dziewior (eds.), Daria Martin, Kunsthalle Zurich / Kunstverein, Hamburg, 2005, p. 16.

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The Banff Centre
inspiring **creativity**

Geoffrey Farmer creates new work with God's Dice

God's Dice Geoffrey Farmer • November 13 – December 12, 2010

Walter Phillips Gallery, The Banff Centre

Opening Reception: Friday, November 12 •7:30 –9:30 p.m.

Closing Reception: Friday, December 10 •7:00 – 9:00 p.m.

Noted Vancouver artist Geoffrey Farmer will create a new work with God's Dice, a 'sculpture play' and exhibition that will open at the Walter Phillips Gallery at The Banff Centre on November 12.

God's Dice is presented by Farmer in association with Theatre of Erosion or I Hate Work That Is Not A Play, a four-week thematic residency that he is leading at The Banff Centre. Continuing his interest in time and place, and in art that makes process visible, Farmer will work with participants enrolled in the residency to create God's Dice. Incorporating props from the Centre's Theatre Department, such as mirrors, musical instruments, sculptures, texts and costumes, this conceptual work will also use improvisation and choreographed actions to create a singular narrative— a story that will only be fully realized at the moment the end is announced.

Geoffrey Farmer is at the cutting edge of Canadian contemporary art. His multi-media installations combining video, film, performance, drawing, sculpture, found objects and texts have been the subject of major exhibitions in London, Montreal, and Toronto. Solo exhibitions include Geoffrey Farmer (2008), Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal; The Last Two Million Years (2007), The Drawing Room, London; Northern Gallery of Contemporary Art, Sunderland, and Spacex, Exeter (2007); Pale Fire Freedom Machine (2005), Power Plant Gallery, Toronto; and The Blacking Factory (2002), Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver. Recent group exhibitions include The World As A Stage (2007), Tate Modern, London, and ICA Boston (2008); Gasoline Rainbows (2007), Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver (2007); Classified Materials (2005), Vancouver Art Gallery; and Intertidal: Vancouver Art & Artists (2005), MuHKA, Antwerp. Farmer attended the San Francisco Institute of Art and the Emily Carr College of Art and Design. In 2003 he was awarded the Shadbolt VIVA AWARD given to emerging visual artists in British Columbia

Walter Phillips Gallery hours: Wednesday through Sunday: 12:30 to 5 p.m., Thursday: 12:30 to 9 p.m.

The Walter Phillips Gallery gratefully acknowledges the support of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.

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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.*

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

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.

—Aaron Peck

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

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

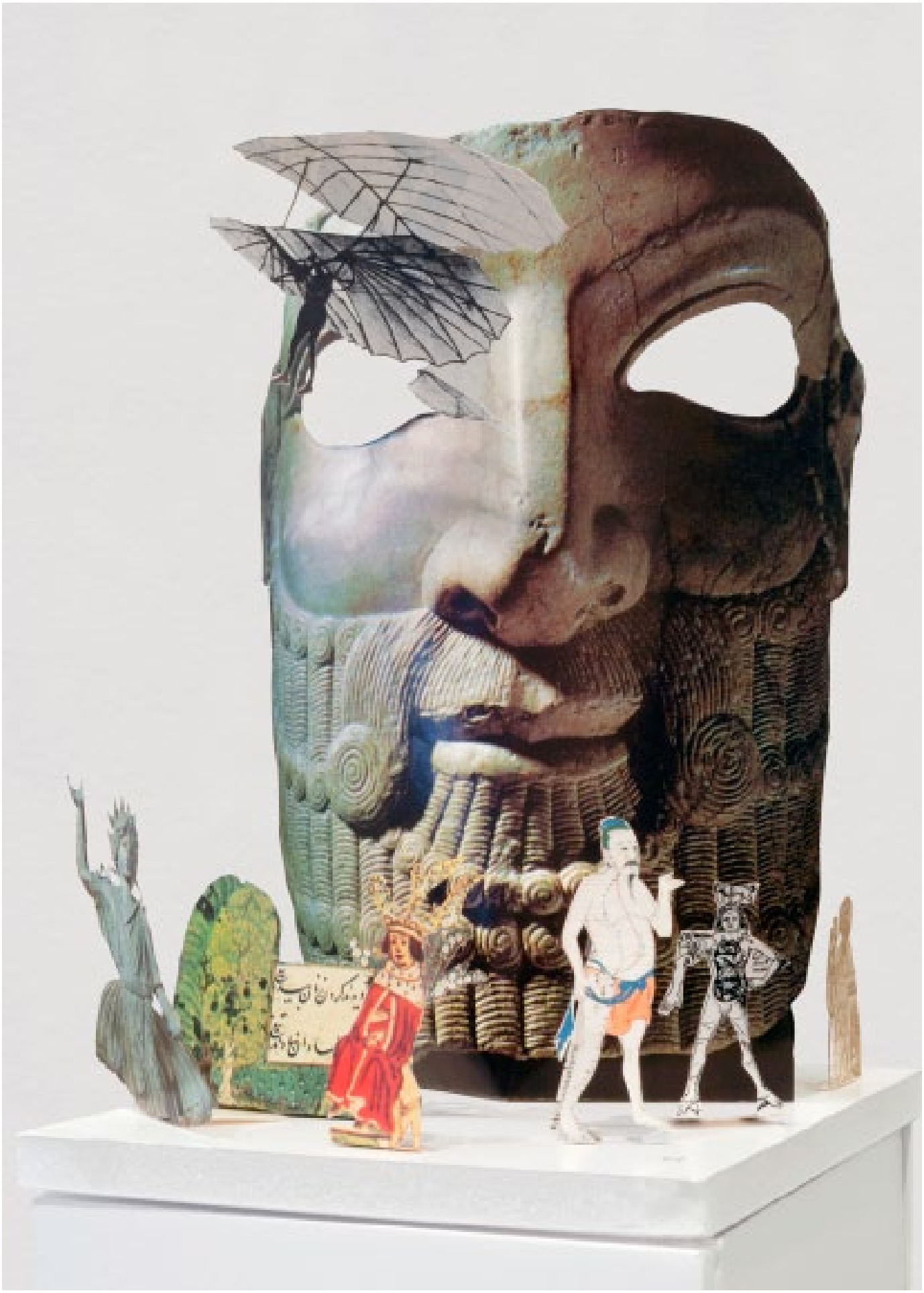
Das Werk von Geoffrey Farmer ist unter anderem durch seinen zutiefst prozessualen Charakter geprägt—der Künstler gibt dem Prozess und Projekt auf programmatische Weise Vorrang vor dem Objekt und dem finalen Ergebnis. Anders formuliert, könnte man behaupten, dass das Wesen von Farmers künstlerischer Praxis in einer Destabilisierung sämtlicher Vorstellungen des Wesens liegt, das ein einzelnes, begrenztes Objekt umfassen könnte. Dieses Interesse am Prozess und am sprunghaften Charakter aufgefuhrter oder inszenierter Ereignisse bedeutet fur gewöhnlich, dass ein Betrachter, der eine Ausstellung von Farmers Werk nur einmal sieht, lediglich einen flüchtigen Blick auf die erzahlerische Entwicklung seiner Kunst erhascht; sehr oft kehrt der Kunstler, sofern es die Umstande erlauben, an den Ort der Konzeption, Kreation und Ausführung zuruck, um sein Werk sanft, aber bestimmt auf seinem Weg der ständigen Transformation zu leiten, sodass der teilnehmende Betrachter (um eine beruhmte Außerung von Heraklit zu umschreiben) nie zweimal dasselbe Environment betritt. So überrascht es nicht, dass die asthetische Gesamtwirkung dieser labyrinthischen, stets veränderlichen Environments oft an Wucherungen, Streuungen, Versenkungen und Fragmentierungen denken lasst; sie offenbart eine tiefe Faszination durch Bricolage (Bri-Collage wäre der treffendere Begriff), Handwerk und die verblüffenden Artefakte der alltaglichen Objektwelt. Doch im Unterschied zu vielen Kunstlern seiner Generation, die im Rahmen derselben allgemeinen Asthetik arbeiten, sind Farmers Installationen stets streng choreografiert und folgen einem prazisen Drehbuch.
Ein narrativer Aspekt, der einige seiner bekannteren Galerieausstellungen kennzeichnete, war der des Ehrengeleits oder der Prozession: Ein festlich geschmuckter 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 prioritization 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 destabilization 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

The Surgeon ond 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



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONVERSATION PIECES
A Chamber Play
Curated by Jens Hoffmann
Act II: February 13 – March 13
Exhibition Opening: February 13, 6 - 9pm

Johnen Galerie
Marienstrasse 10, 10117 Berlin

mail@johnengalerie.de
www.johnengalerie.de

Scene 1: Thomas Ruff | Andrew Grassie
Scene 2: Roman Ondák | Wiebke Siem
Scene 3: Geoffrey Farmer | Martin Honert

Johnen Galerie is pleased to celebrate its 25th anniversary with Conversation Pieces, a group show of three parts curated by Jens Hoffmann. Adapting the structure of a three-act chamber play to an exhibition of visual art, Conversation Pieces presents a diverse range of artists currently or previously represented by the gallery, engaging them and their artworks in a series of intimate and dynamic conversations. While focusing on the theatrical aspects of the works, the exhibition will also reflect on the display of contemporary art and its relationship to the staged or dramatized. Each act is four weeks long and represents one part of a larger, developing narrative. Intermissions will last one week. The title of the exhibition, Conversation Pieces, traditionally refers to a particular style of group portraiture popular in Britain in the 18th century. The chamber-play premise for Conversation Pieces in part arises from the gallery's proximity to one of Germany's most important theaters, the Deutsches Theater.

Act II of Conversation Pieces further aims to present a varied cast of characters in a seemingly natural way. In Scene I of Act II, Thomas Ruff has exponentially enlarged thumbnails of porn images found online. Six of the resulting photographs are hung in a salon-style hanging. Andrew Grassie has taken Ruff's unobscured "original" source material and carefully rendered them in tempera, which he has then put behind frosted glass. In either case, naturalism is not synonymous with realism; these varied screens are all faithful to exposing and shrouding the enigmatic essence of the source material.

In both the Kammerspiel and the Conversation Pieces genres, stylistic unity was determined by emotion and atmosphere rather than by traditional narrative devices. Once assembled in an effective sequence, the resulting chemistry between plot and character drive the narrative. Chamber plays were initially defined by the spaces in which they took place—and hence its name—by a series of small domestic rooms. In Scene II, the kitchen/dining area sets the stage and serves as the initial bridge to Roman Ondák and Wiebke Siem's work. In Ondák's photo diptych His Affair with Time, the kitchen wall serves as a meter-stick for measuring a child's height. Even though the two photographs seem identical, they were taken minutes

apart, serving as a documentation of the process and passing of time. In Wiebke Siem's sculptural installation Die Fälscherin, figures that mimic traditional African forms made from household objects overflow a prewar modern dining-room. While rendering the room unusable, the figures seem to represent or replace the family, and the housewife, the artist. In this conflation of motifs, Siem skewers the way in which Modernist artists portrayed African motifs as "other," "primitive," "uncontrollable," "sexual," and often female. Although in the domestic spaces in Ondák and Siem's work time is at a standstill, we have the ability to enter these spaces, while acknowledging our simultaneous distance to them.

In Scene III, Monert Honert painstakingly recreates a photographic negative of his boyhood boarding-school dormitory. All of the shadows are made light and all that was light is made dark, so the resulting electric light installation is faithful to the negative, but not to reality or his own memory. Perhaps, then, the work and its obsessive depictions to the last detail encourage us to draw upon our own collective memory. From materials found in a school in Montreal, Geoffrey Farmer has fashioned an owl figure puppet out of an old rag found in a boiler room. Other such relics are accompanied by a poetic and humorous text that alludes a plot to overthrow the school that is controlled by an owl. The serious and factual presentation of the work as well as its legitimate source material purports an impossible actuality, but we recognize an authenticity in the impetuous naiveté driving them. Moreover, the accompanying Deutsches Theater material reminds us that perhaps only in a theatrical setting can we fully immerse ourselves in the dialogues that arise.

Image: Wiebke Siem, Die Fälscherin, 2009, Mixed Media, Dimensions variable

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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

El Eco

April 30th - June 27, 2010

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)

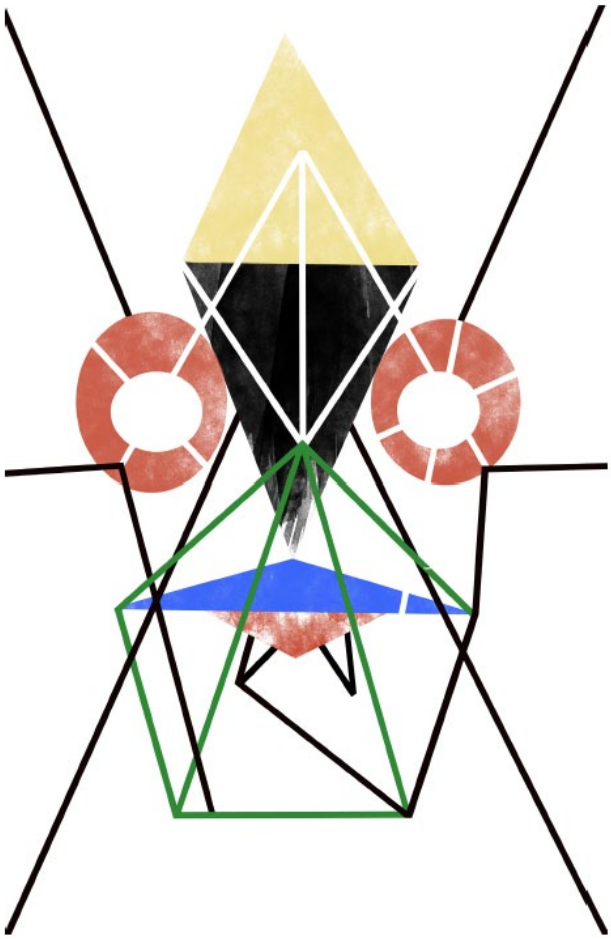
The crease separated me from my biography, between my eyes and my mouth, my words and my thoughts, creating a distancing effect. This allowed a new form of language to erupt like music, and it swamped me over, totally. An absolute work, a total work. Tears, emotions, these holes... I can only communicate 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 Tlaltecuhtli 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 crea·te 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), ,Musee 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-les-Eaux, France. A major publication of Farmer's work was published in 2008 in conjunction with his retrospective

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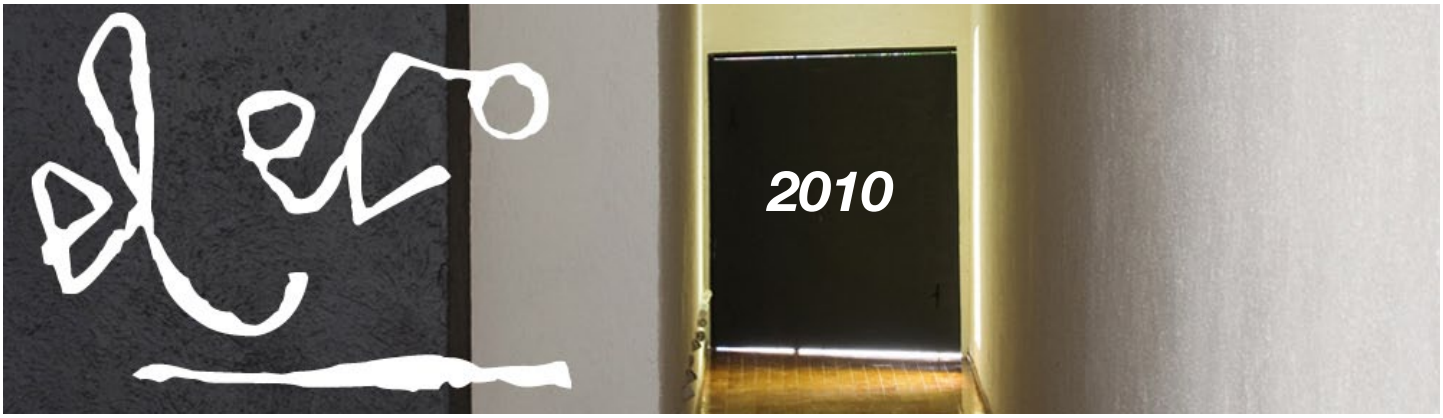

EXHIBITION

EL VAMPIRO DE COYOACÁN Y SUS VEINTE ACHICHINTLES

From april 30 to june 27

Mixing diverse found and fabricated materials and text, the sculptural works of Geoffrey Farmer often create theatrical or filmic environments, which seek to involve the viewer. His forms draw from a diversity of sources, from early Modernist painting and sculpture, such as the experiments of DADA, Surrealism or Expressionism; to the literary works of Victor Hugo, Antonin Artaud, or Vladimir Nabakov. ***The Vampire of Coyoacan and His Twenty Achichintles*** by Geoffrey Farmer is an opera in which objects perform on a dark, multi-level stage that the artist has been constructed in the main gallery. The title of the exhibition is taken from an “autobiographical” text of Mathais Goeritz, written by Pedro Friedeberg, in which Goeritz uses this phrase to describe Diego Rivera. Farmer´s sculptures, texts and sounds mix together historical narratives and forms associated with Goeritz, Rivera and Friedeberg, abstracting and morphing them with his own autobiography and imaginary.

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ART PAPERS

MAY/JUNE 2010

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 Jeff ries Gallery; January 29--March 6, 2010].

With a recent solo exhibition at Witte de With in Rotterdam and a mid-career retrospective at the Musee d'art contemporain de Montreal, 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-scene. 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 trajectory 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.

- Rachelle 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)

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Milroy, Sarah. "Artists in a Land of Wanderers." *The Globe and Mail* 25 April 2009: R5

Artists in a land of wanderers

A new exhibition tracks the journeys of five emerging British Columbia artists—some across physical terrain, but also their treks through art history, world culture and artistic genres, **Sarah Milroy** writes

The West has always been the domain of wanderers and outsiders, drifters off the grid of societal expectation. In the contemporary art of British Columbia, this theme has a special place. You can see it in the photographic work of Liz Magor of the past 20 years—her pictures of hippies and indigent makeshift housing—and also in her sculptural investigations into the practices of hoarding and hiding in the wild. You can see it in Jeff Wall's backlit Cibachromes of homeless people, or Roy Arden's documentation of the urban wilderness and its rootless migrants.

Making an exhibition of new art from British Columbia, National Gallery of Canada curator Josée Drouin-Brisebois at first thought she would be dealing principally with this motif. The exhibition *Nomads*, though ultimately has a wider purview, exploring the meandering way of thinking and working that is being practised by five emerging B.C. artists. Landscape is traversed, but so is history, world culture, media and the categories of high and low art.

The most literal nomad in the group is Gareth Moore, who has been gaining attention for his odd and eclectic installations documenting his travels from Marfa, Tex., to Paris, France, to the coast of California. Like several in this exhibition, he is presenting a work in progress that shows no signs of coming to rest any time soon. With his assemblages made from found materials on the road travelled, Moore invokes the historical-tradition of the Grand Tour, infused with a hobo aesthetic. He calls the work *Uncertain Pilgrimage*.

One photograph documents a pair of moss-covered running shoes he discovered by a roadside, an intriguing image that conflates motion and stasis. A video projection records images of movement that he has captured: cars on the freeway, wind through the grass, airplanes, waves on the ocean. A modified walking stick that signifier of the 19th-century French fâneur —has been rigged out by Moore with compartments to hold a cigarette, a match, and a pencil, for spontaneous acts of creation. A standing vitrine holds a pair of heavy men's shoes that he has made, each cobbled together from two pairs nested back to front, simultaneously coming and going.

Moore has also instigated a migration of sorts within the gallery, harvesting three lesser known paintings from the gallery's collection for inclusion in his installation, all of them records of landscape at dusk. The work feels like a mini-museum, gathering together objects that evoke the motif of the peripatetic artist, at home nowhere and everywhere in the world.

Myfanwy MacLeod wanders between historical periods, making work that relies on antique postcards, and comic retro images of drunks in popular culture, flunk-outs from social decorum. Her principal work here is a cast acrylic sculpture of a tousle-haired drunkard in tails, a figure who (as accident would have it) looks remarkably like the globe-trotting Vancouver artist Rodney Graham, with whom she shares an interest in the comic grotesque. Her little man crawls on all fours up a pedestal, bleary eyed and dishevelled. Another work of hers here is a perfectly art-directed pastiche of a frontispiece for a fictive volume titled *The Complete Practical Distiller*, typeset to suggest the manuals of the 19th century. (I wonder, isn't distilling what artists do?) Exploring the theme of inebriation, MacLeod spotlights the idea of escape through altered states, but her thematic connection to the show seems the most tenuous of the bunch.

Geoffrey Farmer's *The Photographer and the Surgeon* also seems to stretch the show's theme a bit, but it is a delight all the same: a group of 365 puppets that he made from dismembered picture books acquired at a Vancouver second-hand store. Some of the characters are recognizable (Trudeau in his hippie days makes an appearance, as does a jowly John Diefenbaker), but the faces are mostly hard to place, interspersed with sculptural heads from world archeology and art history. The darkly comic collages of German modernists Hannah Hoch and John Heartfield are called to mind, as are the medieval passion plays that once toured Europe. All the world's a stage, and Farmer's menacing and enchanting cast of characters

Like the other works in this show, the world view expressed here [in 1+1+1] is one in which every individual is adrift in an infinite sea of information (each to his own iPod and bookmarked preferences) ...

Althea Thauberger is another kind of traveller, showing a new film work that sheds light on the phenomenon of tourism—that perverse human fascination we have with travelling far distances in order to see things that stay put and remain unchanged. Last summer, Thauberger spent some time in the isolated Fassa Valley of northern Italy, where the rare dialect Ladin is spoken, an ancient Romance language that has survived in seclusion. Working with local villagers, she recorded a rather roughhewn performance of a traditional myth: the tale of how Death was defied by the old woman Poverty. Refusing to respond when summoned by Death, Old Poverty instead trapped Death in a tree permitting his release only on the grounds that he would travel the world and not come back to bother her village. Thus Poverty lives on forever, and Death, too, roves the planet, bent on his relentless mission.

Several themes spring to mind. Poverty, like death, is part of the human experience, and always will be. But the video also suggests how we long for the rootedness these people have in their landscape, their culture and rituals, their antique language and their storytelling traditions. By contrast, the artist's fate is to be the itinerant recording angel, her perspective perpetually in flux by virtue both of her profession as detached observer and her role as tourist from a fast-paced urban culture.

Thauberger has made several other sociological studies in the past—her poignant debut video work *Songstress* (2002) comes to mind, in which she spotlighted amateur female teen singers performing a cappella - but this is her best work to date, a haunting, at times comic and extremely beautiful meditation on community and belonging.

The work of Hadley + Maxwell (Hadley Howes and Maxwell Stephens) is as contemporary and edgy as Thauberger's is primeval, a mixed-media gallery-sized installation that responds to one of Western culture's sacred pop touchstones: the Rolling Stones' 1968 recording sessions for *Sympathy for the Devil*, as documented by the French filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard. Godard's *Sympathy for the Devil* was a highly political film, marrying images of the band with fictional footage of the Black Panthers and other political agitators, and it would become the source of a struggle between filmmaker and producer when Godard protested the ending imposed by the producer: the conclusive performance of the title song. Godard wanted to leave things open-ended, so Hadley + Maxwell have obliged him, "unfinishing," as they say, Godard's film with their work here: 1+1+1.

Their installation, shown here in its largest of several incarnations, includes projected sequences of the Stones in rehearsal borrowed from the Godard film (blown up large enough to clearly reveal the image pixelation) as well as sharply focused images of contemporary musicians jamming (among them Maxwell and fellow Vancouver artist Kevin Schmidt). One sculptural vignette in the space involves a snare drum (of the sort used by Charlie Watts in Godard's film) and a metronome bathed in red light against a scarlet scrim. Articles of clothing worn by the band in Godard's footage are echoed here (a white ruffled shirt, a pair of men's pink boots, an orange T-shirt) and they have about them the air of religious relics. Theatrical lights with coloured gels are scattered through the space, lending an atmosphere of morning-after disarray.

The song was an anthem of the 1960s, with a tribal drumbeat that seemed to call a whole footloose generation together. Revisiting it as they do, Hadley + Maxwell take a trip across time to a utopian moment when massive social change was afoot. But the togetherness of 1968 today seems almost quaintly anachronistic. Hadley + Maxwell's fractured reiteration thus seems to express a more contemporary zeitgeist. Like the other works in this show, the world view expressed here is one in which every individual is adrift in an infinite sea of information (each to his own iPod and bookmarked preferences) in which past and present are suddenly simultaneous through technology, in which every image from art history and film are retrievable in a nanosecond, and in which each of us finds ourselves navigating an eversmaller planet. We hash through, and then we rehash some more. Irresolution is in the restless wind.

<< Nomads continues at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa until Aug. 30 (http://www.gallery.ca or 1.800-319-2787).

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"National Gallery of Canada Acquires Thought-provoking Geoffrey Farmer Art Installation," *Artdaily.org*, 5 February 2009.
< http://www.artdaily.org/index.asp?int_sec=11&int_new=28878&int_modo=2>

artdaily.org

National Gallery of Canada Acquires Thought-provoking Geoffrey Farmer Art Installation

Geoffrey Farmer, Theatre of Cruelty (Detail). Sound, light and props, 2008. Photo: Terry Brennan/ National Gallery of Canada.

OTTAWA.- Today the National Gallery of Canada (NGC) and the National Gallery of Canada Foundation announced the acquisition of Theatre of Cruelty, an immersive art installation by internationally-renowned Canadian artist Geoffrey Farmer. This significant work has been acquired through the generous support of the NGC Foundation's Audain Endowment for Contemporary Canadian Art. Theatre of Cruelty represents a pivotal point in the evolution of the artist's creative practice in which experience and imagination are blurred as he draws from narratives, forms and images taken from modernism, popular culture, theatre, literature and the everyday.

This installation turns the table on traditional ways of observing art by engaging the viewer as a participant. The audience is invited to enter into a reconstructed version of the artist's studio and navigate through visual historical references, which speak of cruelty and violence, into a "dream scene" where inanimate objects seem to come to life through an elaborate orchestration of sound and light effects.

"This ambitious work by an important Vancouver artist strengthens our collection of installations," said NGC Director, Marc Mayer. "We are indebted to Michael Audain and Yoshiko Karasawa for having established the Audain Endowment for Contemporary Canadian Art which facilitated this acquisition considerably."

Theatre of Cruelty combines Farmer's interest in politics, social history and psychology. Within it he sets up tensions between the animate and the inanimate, the active and passive and the real and artificial. It also reveals his longstanding interest in theatre and storytelling along with his more recent socially-engaged and increasingly process-oriented, trans formative installation practice.

Elaborate staging and a choreographed light and soundscape create a continually shifting experience.

Commenting on the acquisition, Michael Audain, Chair of the Audain Foundation and member of the NGC Board of Trustees said, “Contemporary art reveals to us the preoccupations of our age as expressed by exceptionally creative people. The endowment fund was established specifically for their point of view to be appreciated. I am delighted that it helped the National Gallery of Canada lead the way once again through this important acquisition.”

This is the second purchase made possible by the Audain Endowment, the first of which was People’s Flag by Brian Jungen in 2006. “This is a perfect example of how endowment funds allow us to augment and enrich the NGC Collections,” said NGC Foundation President and CEO Marie Claire Morin. “We are grateful to Michael Audain and his wife, Yoshiko Karasawa, for having shown such vision and commitment to contemporary Canadian art and the National Gallery of Canada.”

Theater of Cruelty is one of the works featured in Caught in the Act: The Viewer as Performer, an exhibition of contemporary art on view in the NGC’s Special Exhibition galleries until February 15, 2009. The Gallery owns two other works by Geoffrey Farmer: an elaborate sculpture, Trailer (2002), and photographs from the Pale Fire Freedom Machine series (2005).

About Geoffrey Farmer
Geoffrey Farmer is an established contemporary Canadian artist whose work spans the realms of sculpture, photography, and multi-media installations. He is interested in the processes of theatre – of storytelling, staging, improvisation and the fabrication of reality. Consistently in a state of metamorphosis, Farmer’s works are often based in a found object, memory or dream and blur the boundaries between experience and imagination. Over the past decade, Farmer has achieved international recognition. His works have been presented in solo and group exhibitions across Europe and North America. Based in Vancouver, Farmer attended the San Francisco Art Institute (1991–1992) and graduated from the Emily Carr College of Art and Design in 1993.

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01

02

Geoffrey Farmer

In its original form, Geoffrey Farmer's *Hunchback Kit* (2000) is a long, narrow transport case containing an eclectic miscellany of objects, from books and make-up to costumes and found objects, which can be used as props in 'conceptual adaptations' of Victor Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris*. Each unpacking of the kit sets the stage for new and unpredictable performances and configurations of its contents, dictated by specifics of site and the subjective interpretations of curators and public. *Hunchback Kit* exemplifies the formal, conceptual and textual unpacking that characterizes Farmer's practice, in which passages from art history, pop culture, film and literature are translated into intricately crafted and process-based installations that push literally and figuratively against the strictures of exhibiting, the making of art and its institutions.

Farmer's installations inscribe a literature of images and objects that remains porous to the slippages of meaning inherent in acts of adaptation and translation. *The Last Two Million Years* (2007) is an expansive (and ever reconfigured) installation that emerged from Farmer's discovery of a 1970s *Reader's Digest* publication that somewhat audaciously attempts to present the entire history of humankind in a single illustrated volume. Freeing them from the pages of the book, Farmer arranged the cut-out illustrations across a series of platforms, replacing traditional categorizations with more intuitive combinations to create a wayward historical landscape that dismisses any singular account or point of view.

Projects such as *Airliner Open Studio* (2006) reveal the way in which Farmer employs the exhibition as a framework, and an inherently social space, within which any number of ideas are encouraged to take form. Constructed around a reclaimed 737 aircraft cabin, the work evolved as both a temporary stage set and rehearsal space. Built from real and fabricated parts — an ontological confusion with which Farmer recurrently plays — the set-up functioned in both filmic and theatrical terms; while some actions presented in real time exploited a direct relationship between viewer and performer, others, such as performative gestures recorded on video and displayed cumulatively in the space throughout the exhibition, created moments of greater intimacy that recalled the psychological explorations of 1970s video art. As in his earlier performative installations *Catriona Jeffries Catriona* (2001) and *Every Surface in Some Way Decorated, Altered, or Changed Forever [Except the Float]* (2004), *Airliner Open Studio* shifts the processes of production to centre stage and engages objects and individuals in an unstable choreography that flits between mutable form and uncertain signification.

If each of Farmer's installations in some way reflects on the act of making art itself, then his epic 2005 installation at The Power Plant in Toronto could be read as a full blown manifesto for his creative methodology. *A Pale Fire Freedom Machine* was laid out like a vast processing plant in which hundreds of pieces of collected furniture were cleaned, sorted and incinerated in a fireplace originally designed by Dominique Imbert (later appropriated by French artist Xavier Veilhan for his 1996 installation *Le Feu*). Visitors were invited to print posters using ink made from the resulting soot. With its titular reference to Vladimir Nabokov's classic meta-fiction novel *Pale Fire* (1962), the work held up a mirror to its own construction, reveling in the creative process as a form of labour and the exhibition space as a workshop in which ideas are in a constant state of production and transformation.
[Andrew Bonacina]

01, 02 *The Last Two Million Years*, 2007
Images cut from found book, foam core, tape, marble replica of book Dimensions variable

03 And Finally the Street Becomes the Main Character (clock), 2008 Wooden stage, computer-controlled soundscape, 8 speakers, styrene brick, glass shards, paint can, tree branch, paint tray, stool, artificial ivy, hand-carved wooden bowl, cardboard boxes, wooden mallet, protest sign, cardboard tubes, leather suitcase, folding chair, towel, sweater, desk lamp, string, blanket, light bulbs, tripod, sponge, lock box, tissue, paper bag, oil can, moth, thread, masking tape, felt books, rag, wooden figure, spoon, paint, styrene cup, chopstick, candleholder, ballet costume, brass sculpture, found wood, various framed works
490 × 600 × 180 c m

03

04

04 *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,* 2001
Various figures, wood, fabric, styrene, lights, brooms, chair, paper, wigs, shovels, costumes
Dimensions variable
Overleaf:

05 *Pale Fire Freedom Machine,* 2005
Found wooden furniture, fireplace, fire, fire extinguishers, sand blaster, axe, chopping block, paper, coveralls, tools, print shop, ink made from soot, found note paper
Dimensions variable

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CATRIONA JEFFRIES GALLERY

ART BASEL MIAMI BEACH 2009

Art Basel Miami Beach
3 – 6 December 2009
PART II: Ongoing Time Stabbed With A Dagger |
GEOFFREY FARMER AT ART BASEL MIAMI BEACH
Booth J13

Catriona Jeffries is pleased to announce its forthcoming special project at Art Basel Miami Beach from December 3–6, 2009 with a major new solo work by Geoffrey Farmer.

> On the stage: a functioning clock. Next to the clock, a figure dressed in black stands transfixed. On the opposite side of the room a leg appears accompanied by the sound of a wooden knock. This means it is 7 o'clock. A red candle is lit while everything else remains in darkness. The figure that has been scrubbing all day confronts the clock. The clock wears a bowler hat and has just come in from outside. There is mud on the floor. The clocks face is partially obscured. There is the sound of a gunshot and the red candle goes out. Now it is half past the hour. The clock sees its refection in the mirror and doesn't quite recognize itself. The cauldron on the root cellar calls out. A storm approaches…

As part of Art Basel Miami Beach the gallery will present a new sculptural work by Geoffrey Farmer, in which staged objects are choreographed in a kinetic work that shifts between time keeping and theatrical allusion. Expanding upon recent generatively composed works, Theatre of Cruelty, 2009 and And Finally the Street Becomes the Main Character (Clock), 2008, Farmer has now introduced moving components to create an ever-reconfiguring play presented in real time.

The construct of the clock is key to the temporal narrative of the work, which coalesces through interacting sounds and movement embedded amongst a number of sculpturally constructed objects and

embedded amongst a number of sculpturally constructed objects and figures. The set-up functions both cinematically and on theatrical terms; while some actions presented in real time exploit a direct relationship between viewer and object, others allude to representations of time and history. Characters such as a cloaked figure, a clock wearing a bowler hat, a shuttered cellar and other objects comprise the interacting performative relationships between these sculptural subjects. As is with most of Farmer's work a text is then used to create a tension between what is described and what is experienced.

The gallery is also pleased to announce Geoffrey Farmer's next solo exhibition in Vancouver, 29 January – 6 March 2010. In this new project, Farmer will continue to transform and elaborate The Surgeon and the Photographer, his dark theatre of collaged paper and fabric puppets recently presented in the Nomads exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada.

For further information please contact Catriona Jeffries or Charo Neville at + 604 736 1554.

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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

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"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.

Q *What's next for you?*

A I'm in the Sydney Biennale this year and the theme is "revolution." So I'm travelling around the world and will make a work along the way. I don't know what the work will be and, to go back to my first point, that's making the festival uncomfortable because they want to know what it is, how big it is. There has to be a level of trust that something will emerge, an element of faith.

Q *You also have to have faith to think you're going to fly around the world without losing your luggage -- or your artwork.*

A Yeah! And that could be part of the work too. Whatever happens becomes part of the process.

*Geoffrey Farmer continues to April 20 at the Musée D'art contemporain de Montréal. For more information, visit www.macm.org.

National Post

Clockwise from top left: The Last Two Million Years; a Farmer installation at the Musée d'Art contemporain de Montréal; Trailer; and a detail from The Last Two Million Years.

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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 Bienniale.

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.

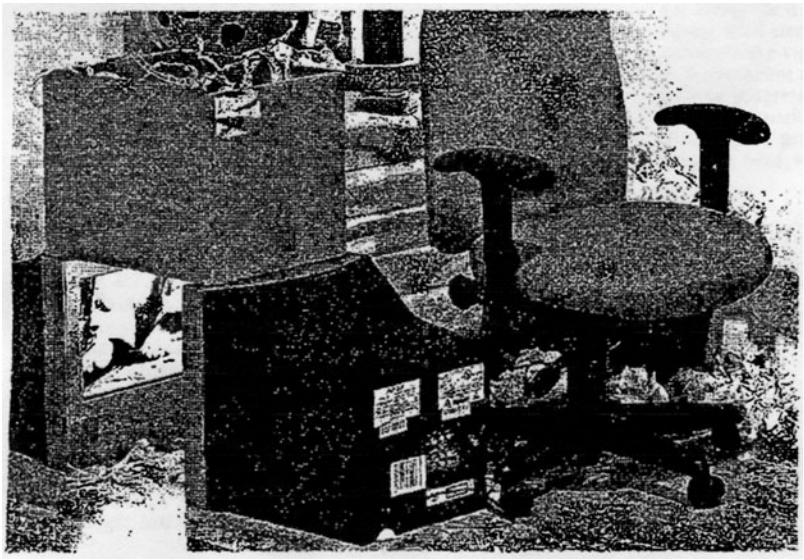
Farmer has created an appendix that annotates 100 of these images, distributed to gallerygoers in the form of a photocopied handout. These entries are by turns long and

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

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Dhillon, Kim, "Geoffrey Farmer," *Frieze*, January/February 2008, p. 189

Geoffrey Farmer

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

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 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

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Brown, Nicholas, "Geoffrey Farmer: Forgetting Air[1]/Gareth Moore: As a Wild Boar Passes Water," *Cmagazine* no 99. 2008, p. 42-43

GEOFFREY FARMER: *FORGETTING AIR*[1]/ GARETH MOORE: *AS WILD BOAR PASSES WATER*

Witte de With, Rotterdam
by NICHOLAS BROWN

Gareth Moore, *Cane,* 2006-07, bamboo, 3,000-year-old Irish Bogwood, scrap wood, pencil, cigarette and match, saw blade, knife blade, fishing line, thread and needle, 5 euros and 1greenback (currently), sail, needle, mirror, portion of handkerchief, metal ferul, tin badge, case dimensions not available, IMAGE COURTESY OF CATRIONA JEFFRIES GALLERY, VANCOUVER

It's no secret that Vancouver artists enjoy special status in Europe. Recent programming at Rotterdam's Witte de With provides evidence of this phenomenon. Sandwiched between last year's Brian Jungen exhibition and an upcoming show of Ian Wallace's work are simultaneous exhibitions by Geoffrey Farmer and Gareth Moore[2]. While this year has been particularly good to Farmer, with a mid-career survey at Montréal's Musée d'art contemporain and his inclusion in the Sydney Bienniale, this exhibition is still a remarkable achievement for the relatively young artist, whose profile in Europe may not be as established as some Canadians think. Moore, on the other hand, is still making a name for himself both in Canada and abroad, having spent the last two years as an international transient for *Iris Uncertain Pilgrimage* project (2006-07). Their alignment within this prestigious institution comes as no accident—both share an affinity for eccentric round and manipulated objects that sit precariously within the gallery space and which frequently shift contexts over extended periods of time. These two exhibitions gave me—also a Vancouverite traveling abroad—an opportunity to consider the two artists, whose individual contributions establish a dialectical tension, to the benefit of both.

Moore's new works draw inspiration from Austrian naturalist Viktor Schauberger Viktor Schauberger whose chief contribution to science seems to be a patently unscientific study of water. Water figures throughout *As a Boar:* a 16mm film entitled *We both step and do not step in the same rivers, with Heraclitean bench* (2008) is projected against a wall, within an installation of thorny branches, while the adjacent room offers Dutch visitors a glass of British Columbia spring water drawn from a wooden keg in *For a spring abrim with songs of love is constantly reborn* (2008). Around the corner lies *Into the Water (In his Leather Breeches)* (2008), a pair of pants fashioned from fish leather, flattened as if drying out. Moore clearly has affinities with Schauberger's methods of autodidactic study in the world (as opposed to the hermetic confines of the academy), his own commitment to education existing chiefly in relation to casually appointed mentors that the artist chances upon in his travels. Whereas earlier projects such as *Uncertain Pilgrimage* took form from fleeting encounters with peripheral sites—the result of a nomadic and elusive methodology—here, the artist isolates objects neatly and sparingly within the gallery.[3]

If As a Boar feels less ambiguous than Moore's earlier work, it might be due to its narrative thrust, anchored as it is within in a small, beautifully printed book made available to the viewer in a modest cardboard box in the middle of the gallery floor. The text compiles a few selections from Schauberger's writings and places the exhibition in the context of Moore's research and affinities with the historical figure. This is not only significant for reading Moore's own artistic process as a kind of evolving apprenticeship, wherein the artist foregrounds his relationships with mentor figures, living and dead, it also helps to distinguish the works from those of Farmer, who offers no guiding historical figure or text to contextualize his output, which is always fragmented and elusive.

While Moore may have phantom-like tendencies, his presence located in the traces of his research, travels and sited relationships, Farmer is more like a poltergeist.[4] Similarly hidden, yet indexed by the constant movement of things within the gallery, Farmer differs from Moore in that he cannot leave the gallery, as exhibitions dating back to *Catriona Jeffries Catriona* (2001) have made clear. Nocturnally haunting the gallery, disguised in a wig that deliberately aped the hairstyle of his dealer, Farmer continually altered not only his installations, but everything in the gallery down to the heating ducts and plumbing. In his first solo show at Witte de With, Farmer undertook a similar project, occupying the gallery at night and constantly shifting the installation that took his 2006 Vancouver exhibition *Airliner Open Studio* as its point of departure (this show, too,

Geoffrey Farmer, *Airliner Open Studio,* 2006, variable dimensions and components
installation view, Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver
IMAGE COURTESY OF CATRIONA JEFFRIES GALLERY, VANCOUVER

was predicated on the artist's *modus operandi* of taking up residence in the gallery during the wee hours of the first month of its two-month run). Thus, the opening was really the beginning of the process, where viewers could reuse the same admission ticket until the show closed (allowing the viewer to re-enter an exhibition in a state of constant flux provides a nice institutional compliment to Farmer's practice).

In contrast to the romantic, flowing narrative taking place one floor below, Farmer's ongoing installation was marked with a sense of creeping discomfort. During my visit, in which I viewed just one iteration among dozens, I couldn't help but feel as if I was trespassing upon something fraught and unresolved. Unlike the pre-emptive viewing of an unfinished painting or a rough draft of a piece of writing, here the combination of re-enactment—*Airliner Open Studio* revisited—and the artist's compulsive refusal to complete the narrative made for a vexed yet exhilarating viewing experience. Like the first *Airliner*, the show incorporated a section of airline fuselage complete with cabin seating, which the artist slowly manipulated, transformed, decorated and dismantled over the duration of the show. Whereas the first airplane housing occupied the centre of Catriona Jeffries' impressive project space, this time it took on a fragmented form. Instead of the massive, intact fuselage that was contextually bound to the Vancouver show, Farmer presented a partial section supplied by Aircraft-End-of-Life Solutions, a Dutch company that specializes in giving ancient airplanes a dignified retirement.

At the time of my viewing (April 8 to be exact—each work in the show was labeled by date of alteration), the fuselage itself occupied just one quarter of the exhibit space, while familiar features such as its rowed seats were dispersed throughout the gallery. Also transformed is the overall labour process of the first exhibition, which fore-grounded the meticulous work required to clean the mould-infested airplane cabin, which had been rescued from a dilapidated farmhouse. Here, the process unfolds in a more diffuse and indirect manner, the airplane acting as a catalyst rather than the locus of meaning and activity.

Moore and Farmer's offerings posited two very different conceptions of the artist's role in the space of the museum-gallery. Not only different in form, the two shows also brought into focus two distinct notions of life and labour within an art practice. Farmer's amateur/worker dialectic, a recurring theme, is exemplified in the artist's emphasis on a constant, traumatic need to construct, transform and position generic objects. Unlike Moore's recurring role of the apprentice, Farmer eschews any specific discipline of labour outside of the generic fact of work within the overarching context of contemporary art and the specific location of the gallery (this brings to mind another recent work by the artist, occasioned by the MAC survey, which referenced Gordon Matta-Clark's expression "not the work, the worker"). Moore's role, by comparison all the more romantic, emerges in a dialectic of leisure and labour; the nomad who

1. Farmer gave the exhibition a number of titles, but eventually came to call it *Forgetting Air*, a reference to French Feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray.

2. That all four artists are represented by Catriona Jeffries gives a hint of the role the dealer can play in consolidating power in Vancouver.

3. The show's aesthetic tidiness may have something to do with its position within context of another artist's exhibition, placed as it is within the "Curatorial Zone" designated by Liam Gillick whose architectural intervention in Witte de With doubtlessly impacted on Moore's installation.

4. Farmer invoked this term in a past work, which incorporated a prop from the film of the same name.

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Phil and Galia Kollectiv. "The World as Stage." *Art Papers*. Jan/Feb 2008. p. 50-51.

THE WORLD AS STAGE
LONDON

In 1920, in the immediate aftermath of the Russian revolution, writer Viktor Shklovsky remarked: "All Russia is acting, some kind of elemental process is taking place where the living fabric of life is being transformed into the theatrical."[1] It is peculiar that at the moment when capitalist fiction and historical drama were defeated— that is, if one follows Marx, at the moment of truth—Russia gave in to an urge to recast this very moment into a theatrical spectacle. This resulted in the mass performances of the 1920s, most famously the storming of the Winter Palace, in which thousands of people took part, blurring the distinctions between audience and actors, or real life and reenactment. This is the paradox at the heart of the artistic aspiration to engage with the everyday: in order to be celebrated, the vitality of the everyday has to be elevated to the level of simulation and artifice, which destroys its very essence. This is the classic scenario of the psycho-thriller's I-love-you-therefore-I-have-to-kill-you narrative.

A similar paradox defines the exhibition *The World as a Stage* [Tate Modern; October 24, 2007- January 1, 2008]. The exhibition purports to present a dialogue between performance and gallery-based art by exploring the use of theatrical conventions and strategies of staging. But by putting forward the idea that the works in the exhibition "frame the viewer's presence in the gallery and point to everyday activity in the world as a form of theatre," it sets up expectations of interactivity, which are thwarted at every turn. While the world may indeed be configured as a stage in Pawel Althamer's *Realtime Movie*, 2007, in which actors including Jude Law continuously enact scripted but barely discernable actions outside the Tate, inside the gallery the chairs or Mario Ybarra Jr.'s simulated barbershop, scheduled to become a set for a performance at specific times, are off limits for visitors. We are encouraged to step into Jeppe Hein's *Spiral Labyrinth I*, 2006, a slow moving, circular hall of mirrors, but we are told to keep to the lower rungs of Rita McBride's sculptural Fiberglas sealing *Arena*, 1997-2006. As such, our presence feels no more framed here than in any hands-off museum display: the series of stages and theatrical settings rarely deliver on the exhibition's pretense to invite us to become part of the performance. Meanwhile in the *Turbine Hall*, the facile symbolism of Doris Salcedo's *Shibboleth*, 2007, where a lightning bolt crack in the floor stands in for racial and social dividing lines, proves much more effective in engaging audiences in a situation where their agency as performers is inevitable. Crossing from side to side and peering into the fissure, we activate the platform of the shattered concrete floor.

The avant-garde stage was always intended as a place that cancels itself out. By following Artaud's dictum to ignore the invisible fourth wall separating the performers from the audience, playwrights, directors, and actors actively sought to demolish the stage's autonomy in order for it to claim real life as its realm. A direct line does indeed connect the mass theatrical spectacles of the Leninist era and the mass show trials of Stalin's regime: when real life becomes theater, the stage is transformed into a real, political place. In a similar fashion, the newfound theatricality of sculptural gallery installations, meant to rescue engagement and humor

from bleak objective minimalism, has cast the audience as reluctant actors in the living art experiment. Like the legions of colorful Play-Doh bunnies that invade the concrete heart of a grey urban center in front of bewildered passers-by in the recent ad for Sony's Bravia television set, the avant-garde has succeeded, perhaps all too well, in its quest to resist the rationalization of modern life by injecting it with fun and play. This experiment-become-reality has left art with a limited capacity: to merely document and reflect the movements of late capitalism.

Limited by the constraints of filling up a large gallery space, the exhibition rarely transcends vague references to the theater: we are left with such objects as Ulla Von Brandenburg's curtain, a discarded costume by Althamer, and Cezary Bodzianowski's video of his measuring of the nearby Globe Theatre. More intriguing is Geoffrey Farmer's *Hunchback Kit*, 2000-2007, which inverts the relationship of play and props. His display of crates and found objects stages their potential assembly into a dramatization of *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*. Ultimately, however, these objects merely serve to fetishize the stage, in keeping with the current vogue for theatricality, rather than address the political implications of virtuosic performance in a work market dominated by immaterial labor, which have been explored by theorist Paolo Virno and others. Catherine Sullivan's video *The Chittendens: The Resuscitation of Uplifting*, 2005, comes closer to examining the implications of life in the age of the experience economy. Her characters repeat their set tasks—resembling acting school exercises—to the point where everyday gestures become neurotic tics, glitches in the mimetic machine that make us question our own performances of normality. While the portrayal of historical and fictional American stereotypes threatens to distract from more contemporary concerns, in the video's finest moments, the uncomfortably exaggerated movements transform the most mundane of scenarios into a zombie horror-fest of mental and physical collapse. This is the Ballardian suburban landscape where neurosis has become the norm to such a degree that the characters can no longer experience desire beyond the technical perfection of ritualized drama. In light of this piece, Tino Sehgal's instruction to the entrance guards to recite a newspaper headline to visitors becomes more menacing and suggestive: how might other slight behavioral shifts alter our daily experience? Unfortunately, while the accompanying performance program and offsite work might push such questions further, the gallery proves itself to be an ineffective space from which to dig beyond the surface of the object.

-Pil and Galia Kollectiv

NOTE

1. Konstantin Rudinsky, Russian and Soviet Theatre: Tradition and the Avant-Garde, Roxane Permar, tr.,
London: Thames & Hudson, 1988, 41.

ABOVE, LEFT, TOP TO BOTTOM: **Catherine Sullivan**, 35 mm production still from *The Chittendens: The Resuscitation of Uplifting [Chittenden Lobby: Triangle Arial,* 2005, performer: Carolyn Shoemaker [© the artist; courtesy of the artist, Galerie Catherine Bastide, Brussels, and Metro Pictures, New York]; Pawel Althamer, detail of still from trailer for *Realtime Movie:* ABOVE, RIGHT: Geoffrey Farmer, *Hunchback Kit,* 2000-2007, mixed media, variable dimensions, installation viiew at Gasworks Gallery, 2002 [© tha artist; collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund and purchased with the financial support of the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisitions Assistance program]

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Bovee, Katherine. "Geoffrey Farmer: Montreal." *Art Papers*. July/August 2008. p. 64-65

GEOFFREY FARMER
MONTRÉAL

Geoffrey Farmer's survey quickly reveals the breadth of themes and materials that characterizes his wide-ranging practice [Musee d'art contemporain de Montréal; February 8—April 20, 2008]. Accumulations of found objects and low-production videos are installed alongside carefully fabricated sculpture. Literary, historical, art historical, and pop culture references are freely cited, often within the same world.

The exhibition galleries assume an equally broad range of relationships to the work on view, variously serving as stage and ad hoc studio. Temporal involvement is favored over spatial experience in pieces such as *And Finally the Street Becomes the Main Character (Clock)*, 2005-ongoing, in which a "cast" of assemblages crafted from second-hand furniture and thrift-store finds "perform" a pre-recorded soundtrack through the aid of embedded speakers. Allusions to Hollywood—undoubtedly a fascination fueled by the thriving movie industry in the artist's hometown of Vancouver—further recast the gallery as a stage. A life-sized transportation trailer—the kind that might house movie props and sets on location—is revealed to be a hollow shell fabricated from steel and fiberboard. In this way, the gallery is analogous to a stage, artworks to illusory props. It is appropriate to Farmer's way of working, as objects themselves most often function as an extension of the artist's practice as a tool or a prompt for action, rather than an end product.

In *Ghost Face*, 2008, a false column seamlessly integrated into the architecture of the exhibition's entrance, Farmer invites the viewer to a game of mimicry. The back side of the column is sheared off so that one can enter and peer through two small holes, carved out at the artist's eye level, towards the incoming crowds. Inside the column is a small wooden step, originally placed there to accommodate curator Pierre Landry. In this way, artist, viewer, and curator become interchangeable performers.

Physical material is literally carved from the white box in *The Idea and the Absence of the Idea (Not the Work, the Worker),* 2008. In a corner a piece of flooring has been removed and pulped to create raw material for a small stack of paper piled neatly in a nearby corner. A single sheet of paper is adhered to the wall, bearing a quote by Gordon Matta-Clark that doubles as the alternate title of the piece. The separation between the object, its production, and its presentation is collapsed, establishing the primacy of both the artist/worker and the act of production over the resulting art/work.

Production plays a central role for Farmer. He constructs layered relationships through elaborate environments that change throughout the duration of their exhibition, placing an emphasis on process over object. Two major production-oriented works are represented here through remnants and reproductions. *Entrepreneur Alone Returning Back to Sculptural Form*, 2002, originally exhibited in an empty office in a Toronto financial institution is recreated on a smaller scale. The accumulation of objects based on the tension between the ennui of day-to-day deskwork and the search for creative inspiration lose context through their recreation within the museum, a poor proxy for the carefully chosen original site. Similarly, the six large-scale photographs of formally arranged furniture selected to represent *A Pale Fire Freedom Machine*—a complex multi-part exhibition/performance staged in 2005 at The Power Plant in Toronto—seem out of place in their emphasis on the object, and the loss of rich associations to the larger project.

The failure of such pieces within the formal of the survey points towards an important facet of Farmer's way of working. The diversity apparent in the work on view not only reaffirms the experimental attitude with which Farmer approaches his work, but his refusal to limit himself to a singular path of investigation, with one "big idea." Rather, Farmer employs the white cube as an adaptable environment that can be repurposed and challenged, serving as a starting point for a seemingly inexhaustible series of investigations.

-Katherine Bovee

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

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

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 bitingly clever and heartfelt.

-Dan Adler

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WITTE DE WITH
CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

GEOFFREY FARMER

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 (2008)
Detail installation Witte de With
Photo: Bob Goedewaagen

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* (2008)
Detail installation Witte de With
Photo Geoffrey Farmer

Type: exhibition
Date: April 3, 2008 - June 1, 2008
Location: Witte de With

Witte de With presents the major solo exhibition in Europe of the work of Geoffrey Farmer, following his survey currently on display at Montreal's Musée d'art contemporain.

Opening Wednesday 2 April, 6 p.m.
7 p.m. Geoffrey Farmer and Gareth Moore in conversation with Jesse Birch

Geoffrey Farmer creates complex installations that consist of multiple elements distributed throughout the gallery space. These installations activate narratives, which are drawn from diverse sources including social history, popular culture, art history and literature. The exhibition at Witte de With will be a playful experiment that re-explores an existing work titled *Airliner Open Studio* (2006). It will feature elements of story-telling, writing, performance and process-based sculpture.

Airliner Open Studio is a work structured around a full-scale aircraft cabin, complete with seats, overhead lockers, emergency lighting and cabin windows. Composed of real and false components, this install-

Geoffrey Farmer, *Forgetting Air. (museum)* (2008)
Detail installation Witte de With
Photo Geoffrey Farmer

ation transforms the gallery into a stage-set, revealing the influence of the film industry (ever-present in Vancouver) on Farmer's work, and his fascination with the theatrical: with staging, improvisation, role-play and self-disguise. The artist will use this interior as a rehearsal space, and as a starting point for a number of performances – some scripted, some improvised, alone and with others – performed live in the exhibition space or recorded on video and then presented in the gallery.

Farmer's preoccupation with the theatrical is also evident in the form adopted by his exhibitions, which enact a real-time staging of change and evolution. Seeking to challenge the apparent timeless neutrality of the gallery and to render the processes of construction visible, he inverts the usual temporality of the exhibition format. Instead of the opening night marking the completion of an installation period, for Farmer it is merely the beginning. He often transforms his installations over the course of an exhibition, working through the night to create changes for visitors to discover each morning, with new elements appearing, others disappearing or being translated into new forms. In this way, his work is "actively worked out in front of the viewer over the duration of the exhibition" (artist's statement, 2007).

Farmer will be at Witte de With throughout April, making frequent changes to his installation. For this reason, visitors in the first month of the exhibition will be given tickets that allow them to revisit the show, in order to highlight the importance of transformation and process in Farmer's work.

Curated by: Nicolaus Schafhausen, Zoë Gray.

Publication: Witte de With will publish a Source Book on Farmer's work, edited by Nicolaus Schafhausen, Monika Szewczyk and Zoë Gray, featuring an introduction by Nicolaus Schafhausen, essays by Diedrich Diederichsen, Thierry Davila and Vanessa Desclaux, and an interview with the artist by Zoë Gray. ISBN: 978-90-73362-79-6. Price: 10 euros. Publication date: Mid June 2008.

During the exhibition at Witte de With, other work by Geoffrey Farmer will be on view in Leidsche Rijn, Utrecht, as part of the project *Master Humphrey's Clock* (12 May - 8 June) by de Appel's Curatorial Training Programme.
www.masterhumphreysclock.nl www.deappel.nl/cp

Linked to this exhibition, Witte de With is organizing the project **Kunst van Nu** (Art Now) for high school students, in association with the SKVR. (Information Dutch only).

Thanks to
The Canadian Embassy, The Hague
The Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery, University of British Columbia
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PRESS RELEASE
For immediate release

MUSÉE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN DE MONTRÉAL
Québec

Exhibition
Geoffrey Farmer
at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal
February 8 to April 20, 2008

Montréal, January 29, 2008. "The *Geoffrey Farmer* exhibition is the largest devoted to this artist to date. Nothing we know about the Vancouver scene could have predicted this work." Those are the enthusiastic words with which Musée Director Marc Mayer presents the new exhibition ***Geoffrey Farmer*** slated to run from February 8 to April 20, 2008 at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, thanks to the generous support of BMO Financial Group.

Geoffrey Farmer is certainly one of the most unique and disconcerting voices in the Vancouver art community. Borrowing elements from conceptual and installation art, he practices an aesthetics of accumulation to works that incorporate sculpture, video, performance, drawing, photography and the found object. In a tone that combines poetry and social commentary, Farmer examines history, pop culture and art history, as well as the exhibition process itself, with its fictional power and its temporal aspect.

Exhibition

The exhibition comprises some twenty works produced over the last fifteen years, including some new pieces produced especially for the show. Within this second group is *The Idea and the Absence of the Idea,* 2008. Farmer has cut out a small area of the gallery's wooden floor, reduced it to a pulp and then used it to make a piece of paper on which he has written a quotation from Gordon Matta-Clark: "Not the Work, the Worker." Here the artist employs a favourite strategy of his: defining the work on the basis of the process that gave rise to it.

Also featured are key works that have marked Farmer's career, such as *Trailer* and *Entrepreneur Alone Returning Back to Sculptural Form*, both from 2002. The former refers to the cinematic in order to give form to an intense personal experience. While an art student, Farmer witnessed an accident in which a woman was struck and crushed by a semi-trailer. In the latter, the artist has developed an ongoing site specific work, reinstalled for the Musée, exploring the disintegration of identity within the working world.

Finally, a large part of the last gallery is taken up by the spectacular installation *The Last Two Million Years*, first shown in 2007 at The Drawing Room in London and presented here in a new form. The work consists of hundreds of images cut out from a copy of an eponymous book published in the 1970s by Reader's Digest, which set out to sum up the entire history of humankind in a single volume. Farmer, in turn, literally cuts up history (and the encyclopaedia!) in a series of free associations that haphazardly mixes periods, cultures and regions. According to exhibition curator Pierre Landry, "The result is monumental and fragile, ordered and chaotic, serious and humorous—and extraordinarily poetic."

Geoffrey Farmer

Geoffrey Farmer was born on Eagle Island, British Columbia, in 1967, and lives and works in Vancouver. Through his studies at the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in Vancouver and at the San Francisco Art Institute, he developed a strong interest in the notions of process and transformation, as well as narrative structure. Represented by the Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver, Farmer has seen his career take off meteorically in the last few years. In 2007 alone, he was the subject of a one-man show at The Drawing Room, London, with *The Last Two Million Years,* and took part in the group exhibitions *Remuer ciel et terre*, in conjunction with CIAC's Biennale de Montréal, and *The World as a Stage* at the Tate Modern in London. The current presentation at the Musée d'art contemporain is his largest exhibition to date. *Geoffrey Farmer* is the latest in the Musée's ongoing series of shows focusing on the leading figures in Canadian art today, which has previously highlighted such Vancouver artists as Stan Douglas in 1996, Jeff Wall in 1999 and Rodney Graham in 2006-2007.

Catalogue
A catalogue providing an overview of the artist's work will be released in March, in order to include pieces produced specifically for this exhibition. It will contain essays by the show's curator Pierre Landry, by Jessica Morgan, curator at the Tate Modern in London and by Scott Watson, director/curator of the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery and professor at the University of British Columbia, along with a biobibliography and reproductions of the works. This publication, made possible through the financial participation of RBC Foundation, will be available at the museum's Olivieri Bookstore or from your local bookseller.

Meet the artist

The artist will meet the public just before the opening, on Wednesday, February 6, 2008, at 5:30 p.m. in the exhibition galleries. The event is free of charge and will take place in English.

Point[s] of View Series

In conjunction with the exhibition, curator Pierre Landry will offer a public tour of the show on Wednesday, February 27 at 6 p.m. This free tour will be conducted in French.

Presentation of the exhibition Geoffrey Farmer has been made possible by generous support from BMO Financial Group. "Art has the power to transform how we perceive life, each other and ourselves," says Bernard Letendre, Vice-President, BMO Harris Private Banking, Québec. "From young, emerging talent to Geoffrey Farmer, one of Canada's most exciting contemporary artists, BMO is proud to help bring their voices to the public. We believe our partnership with the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal will enable Québec audiences to discover one of Canada's most innovative artists."

The Musée d'art contemporain is a provincially owned corporation funded by the Ministère de la Culture, des Communications et de la Condition féminine du Québec. It receives additional funding from the Department of Canadian Heritage and the Canada Council for the Arts.

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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.

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

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.

ATTENTION

NOTICE TO ALL PERSONS

TAKE NOTICE that beginning on November 19, 2004 a FREE LAUNDRY SERVICE will be provided at the CHARLES H. SCOTT GALLERY.

WASH HOUSE

Did you ever think that it would come to this? I mean did it ever occur to you how close we all are, at any point, to completely disintegrating, evaporating, dissolving, falling apart, breaking down and separating?

WE ARE ALL ONE OR NONE!

DISTINGUISH YOURSELF FROM THE FILTH OF THE TIME!

SOCIETY OWES YOU NOTHING & EVERYTHING!

Take advantage of the free booking service by going to the Charles H. Scott Gallery front desk between the hours of 12:00 noon and 5:00 P.M., Monday to Friday, or between the hours of 10:00 A.M. and 5:00 P.M., Saturday and Sunday, to receive further instructions.

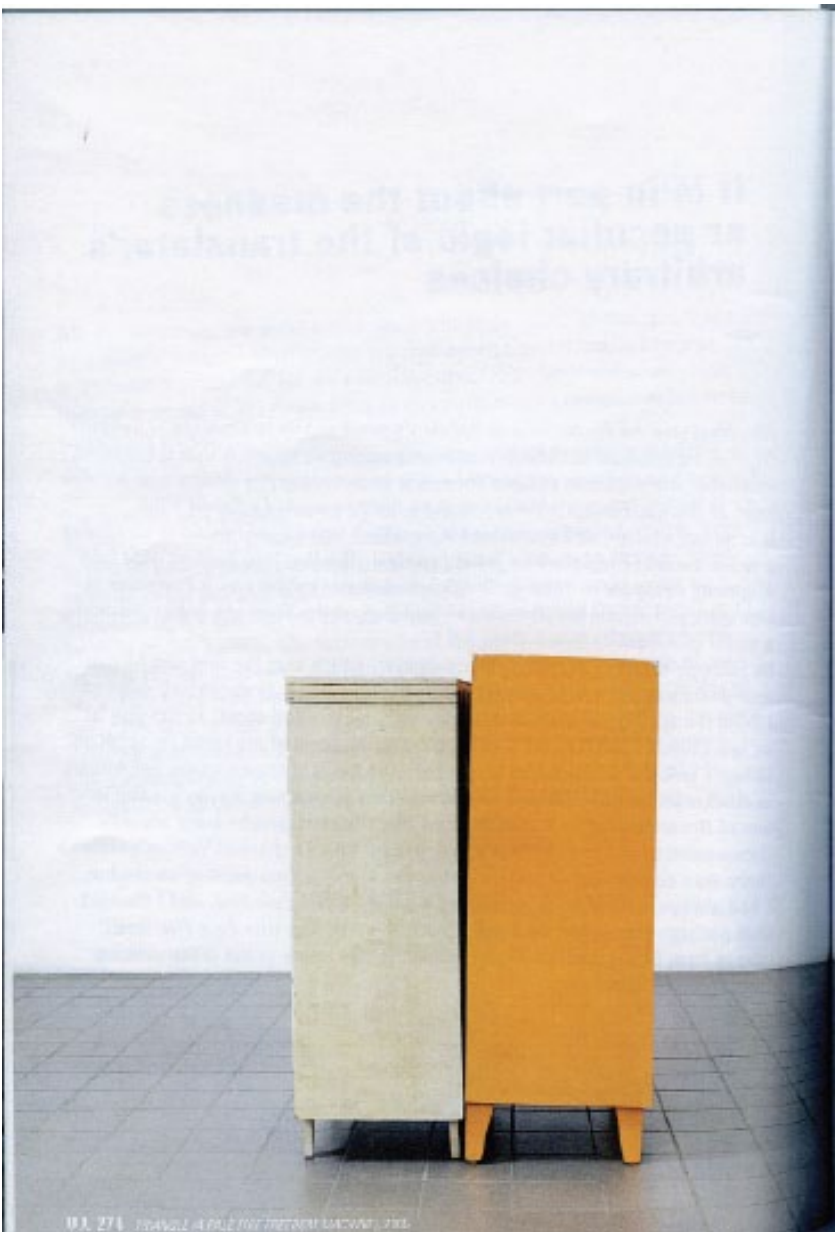
U.U. 270 *WASH HOUSE POSTER*, 2004

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.

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de Brugerolle, Marie, Jessica Morgan and Catherine Wood, "The World as a Stage I-II," *Tateetc,* Issue 11, Autumn 2007. p. 66-75

IT'S ALL TRUE

The distinction between the theatrical and the real in contemporary life has atrophied drastically over the past decades. What meaning does the title 'The World as a Stage' have for you now?

MARKUS SCHINWALD: I think that this atrophied distinction is true not only for the present, but also for the past; think only of historical etiquette or religious practice. The title has long been prevalent, but I believe it holds a special interest now in contemporary art. The focus on the theatre has probably to do with themes, such as pathos, that were not particularly inherent in art in the past couple of years and which have been nourished by a renaissance of bourgeois ethics.

MARIO YBARRA JR: The world as a stage translates for me as an artist into the world as a studio, meaning that all of my activities – from walking through markets to driving down the road – are integral parts of my production: to understand that everyday we are performing on every level and we are always in a costume, even if it is the anti-costume.

JEREMY DELLER: I always thought the quote was "the world is a stage". The fact that we are showing next to a 400-year-old theatre I find intriguing. It might be interesting to make a piece at the Globe… but I'm getting distracted. I think people have been showing off forever, it's a part of human nature, we are drawn to the theatrical and spectacular, we can't help ourselves.

GEOFFREY FARMER: At first I read it negatively, a type of claustrophobia, the dwindling space of what we might conceive as the possibility and power of "the authentic gesture". But this is a kind of reactionary thought, and in thinking of it more, perhaps it is a question about use.

Stills from **Jeremy Deller's** *The Battle of Ongreave* (2001) Colour video
© (c) Artangel. Photo: Martin Jenkinson

How important are ideas of staging and participation in your work?

TINO SEHGAL: Very

JEPPE HEIN: Most of my installations offer the viewer the possibility to participate in the action of the piece, to interact with the work, the space and other visitors. More than that, my artworks often surprise the audience and confront them with the unexpected. Sometimes the viewers find themselves in a situation of interaction against their will. Thus, instead of passive perception and theoretical reflection, the visitor's direct and physical experiences are very important to me.

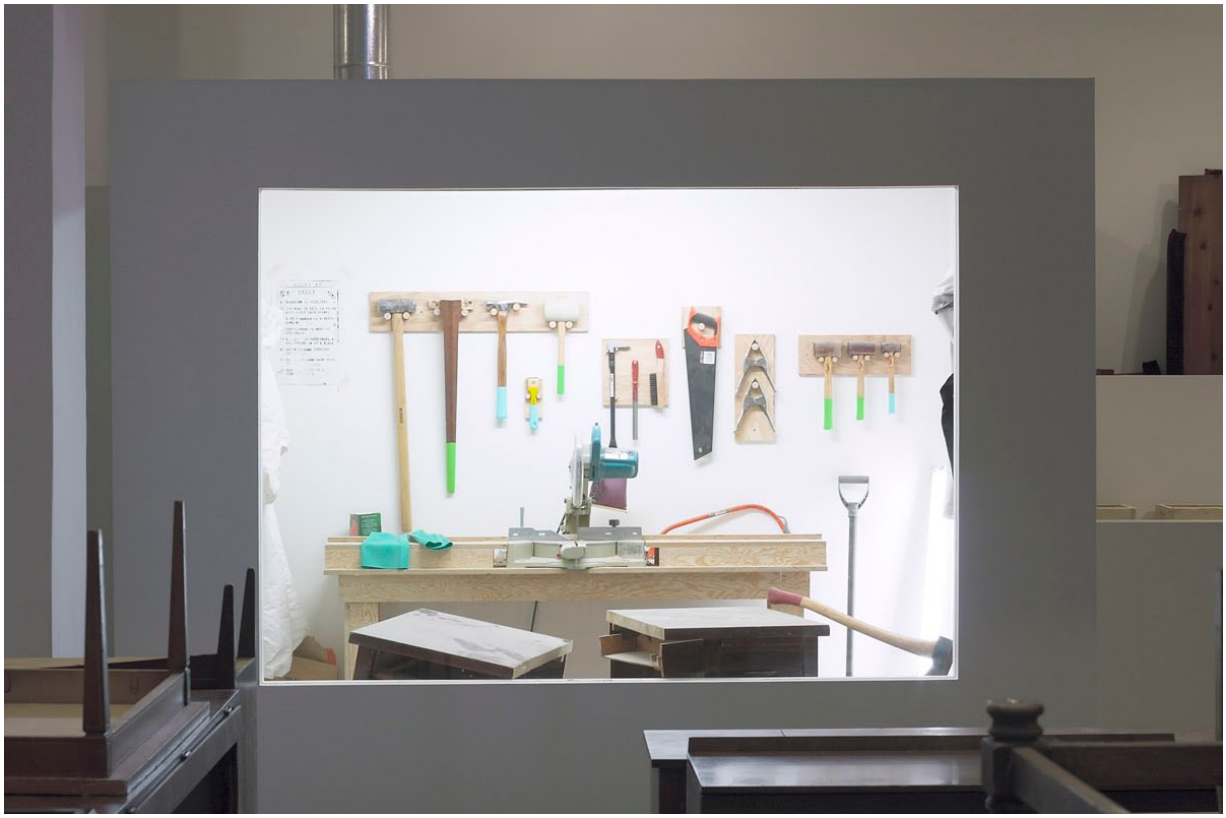
ULLA VON BRANDENBURG: Participation is very important. I stage people in my tableaux vivants, I film them, but they are not moving. I show them in an unpersonal way – you don't hear them speaking, you don't see what kind of movements they make. For these films I asked the people around me to participate, my friends, my studio neighbours. In the one hand, I know them, I know how they look, I have a feeling for them, and so it is easier to control the content of the film. On the other hand, I am showing my clique, my entourage, my nearest or my possible nearest, a potential secret society.

MARKUS SCHINWALD: Somehow the idea of staging in itself is a little too general. In a way everything is staged. The main difference for me between an exhibition and a performance is the immediacy. In a performance, the audience agrees to watch something together while it is being made. In an exhibition, usually the work is already done when the audience get to see it. Of course, there are exceptions.

MARIO YBARRA JR: Staging and participation are very important to my practice. I feel that the work doesn't begin until a living, breathing audience is engaged with it. It should go home with them and enter their lives. When Karla [Karla Diaz, Ybarra's partner and collaborator] and I were running Slanguage [a community-based workshop-cum-studio in Los Angeles] I would get people who wanted to do studio visits to come over, and they would walk in expecting to see drawings or something on the wall that looked like art. They would look at the walls with disappointment and ask: "So what are you working on?" And I would have to reply: "You are breathing it." The work was the studio, everything in it, the people involved in workshops, the neighbours, etc. So people are an actual and vital part of the entire work; without them it is not done, they are the catalyst.

JEREMY DELLER: The two things are connected – staging enables participation.

GEOFFREY FARMER: Literally, participation is not so important, although I aspire to engage people. I think this is done through different means, one being the staging of the work.



Installation view of **Geoffrey Farmer**'s *A Pale Fire Freedom Machine*, (2005) at The Power Plant, Toronto
Dimensions variable

Is the idea of a cross-disciplinary practice relevant to the way in which you work?

RITA MCBRIDE: In a way I don't think this applies to me, but if using the language of architecture and design and sculpture us cross-disciplinary, then okay. Arena was originally produced in 1997 as an alternative structure for cultural activity. I employed design innovations from the moment (Nike training shoes and Trek racing bikes and the general use of high-tech materials with buzzwords such as light and strong) to arrive at the form of Arena. Conceptually, I was employing architecture of the largest civic dimensions – stadiums as potential mirrors of society; empty or full of people, they embody the essence of population.

TINO SEHGAL: No.

MARKUS SCHINWALD: Well, I don't really know if what I do is cross-disciplinary. I do work with different media and fields, but I noticed that I often failed to satisfy the audience of the field I entered into. For example, I did a sitcom taping (Exceptions prove the rule) in a dance context a while ago and really pissed off some of the dance audience. The only people who didn't have problems with the piece were the ones that had a background in the visual arts. For me, cross-disciplinary also means succeeding in the world one enters into.

JEREMY DELLER: When you don't have technical skills you survive by your wits. So you use whatever is at hand, and that will inevitably be cross-disciplinary, if only by chance. Also, I am not a controlling person, and I tend to lose control of certain works quite early on.

GEOFFREY FARMER: When I was in art college in Vancouver, I studied in the newly formed interdisciplinary department, which offered courses in 4-D and had classes devoted to concepts such as "the total work" and "the fourth wall". It seemed relevant at the time to define a working process as being cross-disciplinary, but I think now it is more important to discuss other aspects of a practice.

Jeppe Hein
Installation view of *Appearing Rooms* 2004
© Courtesy T Johann Konig, Berlin. Photo: Ludger Paffrath
At Tanz in Berlin
Variable dimensions

What does the notion of theatre mean to you, and does it have relevance for your practice as an artist?

RITA MCBRIDE: Strictly speaking, the theatre has very little to do with my thoughts and activities as an artist. Theatricality is, however, central to my observations and impetus to produce art. Specifically, theatrical architecture (not just stadiums) often reveals essential qualities of a socially relevant nature, formalizing and exaggerating human activity and desire.

TINO SEHGAL: Theatre belongs to antiquity in the way that exhibitions belong to our times. Theatre addresses us as "the people", as a collective, while the exhibition addresses us as individuals. The fact that theatre was the dominant ritual form of antiquity and the exhibition is the dominant one now is one of the many indicators that the process of individualisation, or rather a consciousness of oneself as an individual, has accelerated. Then, one was first of all a member of the people, which is reflected in being part of the audience; today I am first of all just simply myself, an "I", which is reflected in the fact that in the exhibition I am not part of some larger whole, I am a visitor. The other notion that the format of the exhibition celebrates is, of course, the material object. This relates to a soon-to-be or already-gone era, the industrial society, which is focused on and derives its (material) wealth from the transformation of the earth's resources into objects. As this era dies out, the new ritual (we don't know if it will still be called "exhibition") will most probably be one that celebrates the notion of the individual, but not any more the material object, rather the production of an inter-subjective wealth.

ROMAN ONDAK: I like theatre as a phenomenon that we have created for us to observe life staged. I like its straightforwardness – it doesn't use any additional medium for mediation between itself and spectator, just a stage, movements, gestures, language. That's what we all do on a daily basis, being a part of many stages – in apartments, offices, restaurants, streets. I believe an exhibition is a stage of the same sort, that's why it gives endless opportunities to fill it with meanings.

JEPPE HEIN: Although I do not directly refer to theatre, I think my artistic practice has something in common with a performance on stage. Even though plays are restricted by rules as well as specifications in form and content, allowing only limited space for boundless activity, the actor is always free to decide if he wants to take an active part or not. My installations offer people a stage for performance, a platform for interaction with the artwork, other visitors and the space. My water pavilions, for example, can be interpreted as staged where people can experience and respond to the artwork, adopting the position of wither the actor or the audience. But in contrast to the classical theatre, everyone is invited to perform as an actor or as audience in the play.

MARKUS SCHINWALD: I have worked in the theatre since I was a child and it has had an influence on me and my work, whether I wanted it to or not. But I have a very destructive relationship to theatre – I am obsessed by the idea of hurting it.

ULLA VON BRANDENBURG: With theatre it is clear who is watching and who is being watched. There is a line between stage and audience – it can be a curtain to emphasize the beginning and end of what we are watching. It is very relevant to my work. I like it if the spectator has the free choice to enter into the piece if they really wish. I like theatre as a construction. I like replayed things, roles, movements, patterns, repeated words and sentences, reanimated feelings. Somebody on a stage can be an example of your self. You have a choice between empathy and distance.

MARIO YBARRA JR: The notion of theatre means to me that artists can create content with the players and a context with the set. This is intriguing because as artists we are usually trained only to create content for galleries and museums, not the context or the environment in which works are presented. In theatre, as a context creator you can give the audience more things to form relationships with to tell a story. A simple prop such as a chair can totally change the way a player or actor engages with the stage. In the same way, I feel an audience member in an installation can move and react to the story an artist is trying to convey.

JEREMY DELLER: In most obvious terms theatre means to me something that I never go to, even though I know I should. In traditional terms “theatre” has little impact on my work, only as a counterpoint to what I want to achieve. I have a problem with actors in that they are often fairly unconvincing, in the same way that I see a lot of better art made by people who would not necessarily see themselves as artists.

GEOFFREY FARMER: Theatre simultaneously fascinates and repulses me, although I have always been interested in its notion, the idea of theatre and what has been written about it, especially the counter-traditions, which I have always found really inspiring.

CEZARY BODZIANOWSKI: It means everything and nothing. I prefer nothing. It doesn’t have any relevance for my practice as an artist, because I’ve never been an artist; maybe in the future [I will be].

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GEOFFREY FARMER
THE LAST TWO MILLION YEARS

24 May – 1 July 2007

Geoffrey Farmer, ***The Last Two Million Years*** (installation view)
Courtesy Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver

The Drawing Room presented the first solo exhibition in the UK by Vancouver-based artist, Geoffrey Farmer with a new work titled ***The Last Two Million Years***.

Geoffrey Farmer, ***The Last Two Million Years*** (installation view). Foamcore plinths, perspex frames and cutouts from selected pages of The Last Two Million Years
Courtesy Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver

Farmer is well known internationally for producing large-scale mixed media works, comprising drawing, sculpture, photography and film that are characterized by their meticulous research and conceptual rigour. He creates structures that transform and activate the gallery space and its visitors, incorporating objects which are often in a state of flux. Specific literary or cinematic narratives anchor the projects, which are continually revised, altered and adapted from exhibition to exhibition, even within the same work. These multiple narratives are used to conceptually generate and contextualize the processes and materials produced, acquired and presented.

Geoffrey Farmer, The Last Two Million Years (details). Foamcore plinths and cutouts from selected pages of The Last Two Million Years
Courtesy Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver

The new body of work made for The Drawing Room takes as its starting point a book found lying on the street titled 'The Last Two Million Years'. Published by Readers Digest, the encyclopedia presents a description of the evolution of the earth leading up to the appearance of 'Homo sapiens' and the subsequent history of man from this time. Farmer uses the specificities of this chance starting point to tackle the larger themes of how we understand our existence in the world, how this is articulated through language and how this can have relevance to an individual.

The exhibition will tour to the Northern Gallery of Contemporary Art, Sunderland, 20 July – 15 September 2007 and then to Spacex, Exeter, 5 October – 1 December 2007.

Recent solo exhibitions by Farmer include Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver (2006) Power Plant, Toronto (2005) and Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver (2002).
Recent group exhibitions include Vancouver Art Gallery (2005), MuHKA, Antwerp (2005); Charles
H Scott Gallery, Vancouver (2004) and Bluecoat Gallery, Liverpool (2003). He was included in 'The Beachcombers' curated by The Drawing Room, which toured to Gasworks, London, Middlesbrough Art Gallery and Mead Gallery, University of Warwick (2002-03). Forthcoming exhibitions include The World's A Stage, at Tate Modern, October 2007, The Musee d'art Contemporain, Montreal, January February 2008 and Witte de With, Rotterdam 2008. Farmer is represented by Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver.

The exhibition toured to SPACEX, Exeter, 6 October - 1 December 2007

Geoffrey Farmer Out of a dark hole appears the craggy ash-like finger of time. (Incenses clock), 2007
Marble book, incenses made from selected pages of The Last Two Million Years.
Courtesy Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver

The exhibition was presented in collaboration with the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia.

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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 innumberable 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.