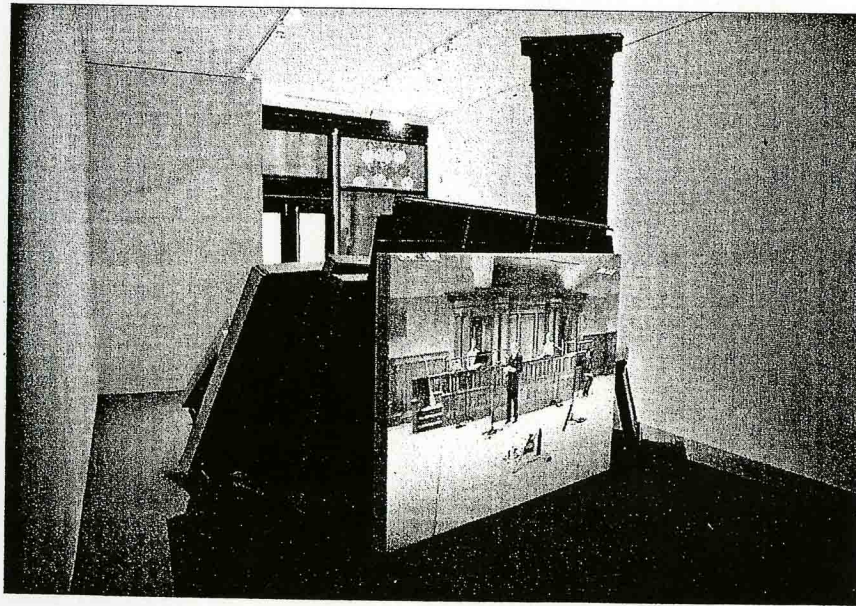


Burnham, Clint "A body of work that somehow makes us forget it's art at all", *The Vancouver Sun*, Saturday November 5, 2005, F3

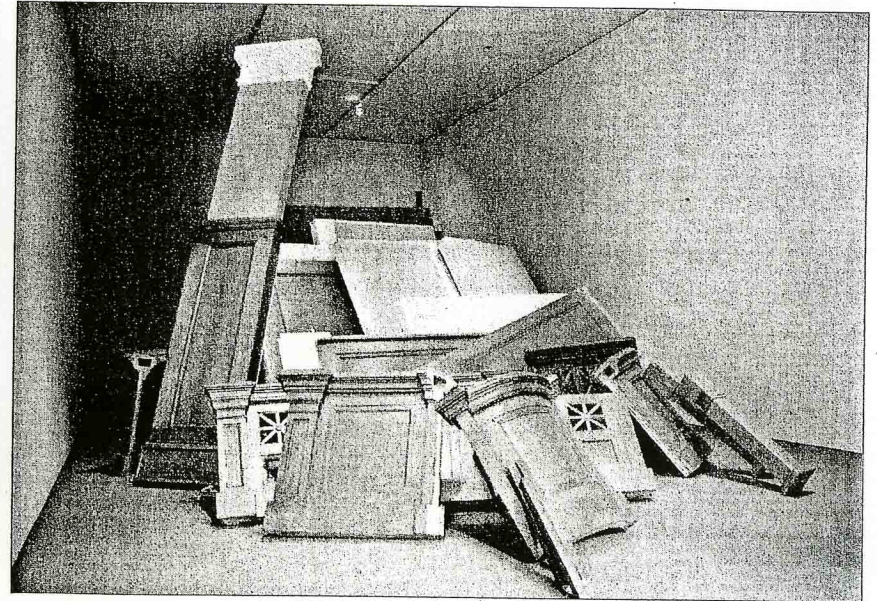
ARTS & LIFE

THE VANCOUVER SUN, SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2005 **F3**



COURTESY CATRIONA JEFFRIES GALLERY

Room 302, Geoffrey Farmer's collaboration with Judy Radul, is on display at Artspeak.



COURTESY CATRIONA JEFFRIES GALLERY

Room 302: The name of a former courtroom now used for film shoots at the Vancouver Art Gallery.

A body of work that somehow makes us forget it's art at all

VIEW FINDER

Geoffrey Farmer has something about piles, messes, and, especially, things. This young Vancouver artist — whose work is appearing in three shows right now in Vancouver and Toronto — likes to turn chaos into order, or perhaps it's the other way around. And while he does this he's been making art that somehow manages

not to look like art at all. Farmer studied at Emily Carr and the San Francisco Art Institute. Senior Vancouver artist Ian Wallace and American punk-provocateur Kathy Acker are two of his teachers whom he credits as important to his development. Farmer rose to prominence locally in 1997 as part of the *New Vancouver Modern* exhibition at the Belkin Gallery at the University of B.C. He was very quickly showing internationally — including the Melbourne Biennial in 1999, and shows in Sweden and the U.K. He has been represented by Catriona Jeffries Gallery here in Vancouver since 1999.

Right now, Farmer has his *Hunchback Kit* at the Vancouver Art Gallery's Classified Materials exhibit. He has a collaborative work, *Room 302*, at Artspeak Gallery. And his installation *A Pale Fire*, is at the Power Plant in Toronto.

A Pale Fire is based on — or at least grew out of — Vladimir Nabokov's 1962 novel-in-verse *Pale Fire*, in which a poet and an academic battle it out over questions of authorship and history. For this show at Toronto's premiere contemporary art gallery, Farmer has installed a fireplace designed in the 1960s by Dominique Imbert.

Surrounding the fire place are rows and stacks of furniture that the artist procured from the Salvation Army and the Goodwill — some 10,000 pounds. For the duration of the exhibit, furniture is broken up and fed into the fireplace. As Farmer says, "grappling with objects is an important part of the work for me" — and here we have a gallery full of objects that will then

Classified Materials: Accumulations, Archives, Artists
Vancouver Art Gallery
Show runs to Jan. 2, 2006

Room 302
Artspeak Gallery, 233 Carrall Street
Show runs to Nov. 26

A Pale Fire
The Power Plant, Toronto
Show runs to Nov. 20

disappear.

Farmer's show at Artspeak is also a mess — and I mean that in a good way. *Room 302* is a collaboration with Judy Radul. In the centre of the gallery is a stack of wood — or furniture. In fact, it is the movie set decoration for when the Vancouver Art Gallery's room 302, a former courtroom, is used for film shoots. Projected on a screen on this pile is a video shoot Radul and Farmer did in the courtroom. Actors (one of whom is retired UBC architecture professor Abraham Rogatnick) read transcripts from various trials — Air India, the Rosenberg trial, a case of a judge being shot — as well as speeches culled from *Sonny Chiba* and other movies. The work is about sound: at different times, the judge asks a witness to make the sound of a pen writing, a foot stomping, or a decapitation.

The sculptural aspects of this work, Farmer notes, came to him "in part from looking at Cubist works, in their attempt to represent all sides of an object." In a 2003 exhibition at the Contemporary Art Gallery, Farmer showed the gallery explod-

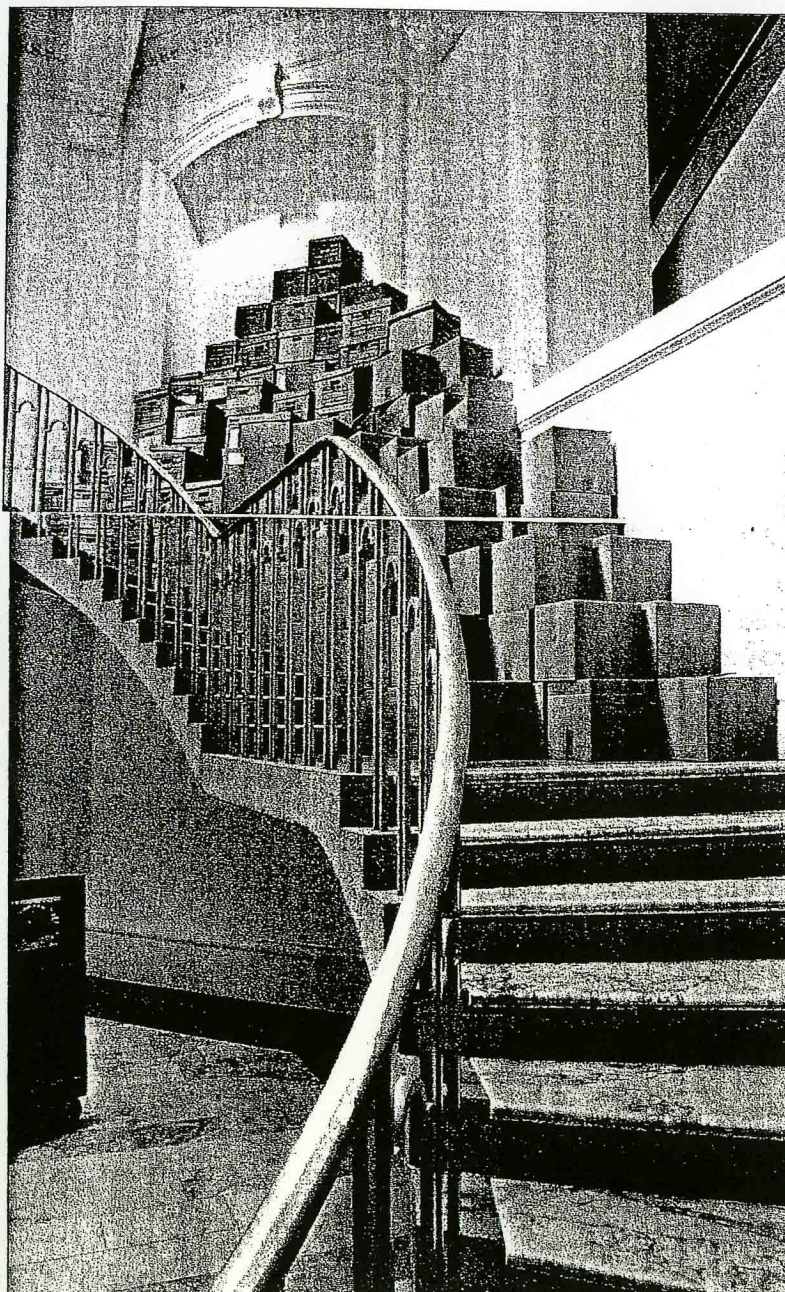
ing. Now we have a courtroom that has imploded.

It is Farmer's work at the V.A.G. that most clearly shows his interest not just in objects, but in the context in which we encounter them. As a way of installing his *Hunchback Kit*, he scoured the catacombs and archives of the gallery, bringing to the rotunda and staircases shelves of books, slabs of marble, and archival boxes of everything from Sotheby's catalogues to Christmas decorations. Suddenly the unconscious of the gallery is brought to the fore. We see notes between the staff in which they threaten to string up malefactors. Vitrines protect humble objects like a coil of yellow nylon rope, a garbage can, a red IBM Selectric typewriter.

Discussing his prodigious output in his Hastings-Sunrise studio, Farmer said of his work at the V.A.G. that he was "interested in revealing the different organizational facets of the museum, even the disorganized and liminal spaces where things whose value are yet to be determined are tossed or stored." Like the Thai artist Rikrit Tiravanija, he makes us aware of our relation to these spaces, these objects. Looking at Farmer's work earlier this week at the V.A.G., I took out a book from a shelf in the rotunda. Put it back, the guard told me. It's art.

The strength of Farmer's work is not only that it makes us forget it is art, but that it makes the critic's job — and the guard's — more difficult.

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COURTESY CATRIONA JEFFRIES GALLERY

