

There is a Horizon

COLLEEN BROWN

Geoffrey Farmer: For Every Jetliner Used In An Artwork... at Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver, October 21 to November 18, 2006

In all of Geoffrey Farmer's continually shifting installations, a visit to the gallery on any particular day would be a visit to a completed work. Although the exhibitions are in constant flux, open gallery hours are moments of stationary display. The completion is similar to the compositional whole of a carefully selected film still. Farmer acts just outside of the viewer's direct experience while the camera, explore the physical possibilities of objects. The recordings of Farmer on video are limited to limbs entering the frame or as an off-camera animating force. Evidence of other actions can only be accessed by witnessing the daily expansion and contraction of the exhibitions. Successive alterations of these works offer a direct expression of time not often afforded to matter.

The exhibition began with a minimalist appearance. The opening view of a whole object was constructed from a section of a commercial jet abstracted by removing the exterior fuselage in order to expose its serial construction. The plane had been used as a film set that Farmer found, long abandoned, in a barn located in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia. Farmer used only the section of the jet most familiar to travellers: the passenger cabin with its rows of seats, tray-tables, luggage holds, and windows. A platform raised the set to waist height. From the rear of the plane, where the tail would have been, a long view down the aisle of seats was exposed. Raising the floor of the plane provided a view of the cabin from a low and unfamiliar angle. A close look at the set gave the impression of revealing secrets of filmmaking and planemaking. Although I relish having movie magic undone, I do not actually want to know about plane magic. I prefer

to continue to think that real planes are held together with magic bolts, not the real bolts I could see all too clearly from my low view into the plane.

Plane anxieties range from niggling thoughts of technological hubris to persistent visions of crashes and explosions. Plane anxiety is about expansion. Even if travellers have overcome these fears, they must embark knowing that they will inevitably arrive at their destination with parts of themselves persisting in a different time zone. The cabin holds its occupants in stasis, muting the forces at work outside, while the plane brings two distant points side-by-side. Foreign geographies and cultures that are physically and cognitively distant become very close to us in time. Through air travel, private and collective panic attacks co-mingle with spatial and temporal liberation.

Farmer's first act in investigating the plane was to begin draping the exterior hull with coloured strips of fabric that functioned as festive camouflage. The cut-up strips obscured the shiny technology, weighing down the jet and transforming it into a softened, lumbering mass. In the video, Farmer obscured his own form in the same way, disappearing into the background of the larger lump that described the scale of the plane. As the exhibition continued, the fabric that had also invaded the plane's hull was removed and the set was carefully swept. Many small gestures that were played out in the cabin of the aircraft were recorded on video. In one sequence, a broom and Farmer (shot from the waist down) were partners in a dance. The monitor displaying this video was positioned so that as I watched it, I could look past the monitor to the set being recorded by the camera. I was standing where the camera had been. The set in front of me had advanced to a different stage in the installation from the time that the video was shot. There was a displacement between a stationary, three-dimensional present, to a moving and framed two-dimensional past.

In the weeks that followed, the exhibition opened out and spread through the gallery. Discrete sculptures

were added, removed, and replaced by stand-ins with a formal or performative relationship to their predecessors. In an early stage of the installation, a sculpture appeared built of two cubes of different sizes that were pushed together to make a framed ledge. The addition of a small, three-legged form changed the ledge into a path. It was only after this formal sculpture was removed and replaced with a wheeled pallet that I understood the original work as a representation of what a dolly does in filmmaking. Later, the wheeled pallet was removed but continued to be represented in video.

The familiarity of the materials and methods used in these discrete elements allowed for a certain fluidity in the experience of temporal displacement. Farmer's actions on video were simple gestures I was able to mentally repeat while standing in the installation. Because there were no hidden fasteners or complicated tools used in the construction, it was possible to imagine what had occurred in the past and anticipate what would happen in the future.

Growth in the physical exhibition coupled with the displacements occurring in time creates a metaphysical conundrum. Answering the *where* and *when* of it (that might result in a sense of its boundaries and essence) is impossible to locate in its physical presence. The temporal and spatial boundlessness results in a conceptual work through a maximal aesthetic seemingly antithetical to the restrained aesthetic of conceptual art's past. One motivation for the earlier restraint of conceptual art was a resistance to an idea's confinement within a particular, a desire to cleave the idea from the world. In contrast, Farmer's practice laces the idea through an overwhelming mass of distant, worldly particulars. In this way, the work defies a totalizing summary. The undefined collection of particulars becomes the rough edge of the unbounded idea.

In this metaphysical conundrum, I see Farmer lending a portion of his agency to objects, or his chosen particulars. *continued on page 5*

IMAGE

Geoffrey Farmer, *For Every Jetliner Used In An Artwork...*, 2006. Mixed media. Photograph by Geoffrey Farmer. Courtesy of Catriona Jeffries Gallery.