



GEOFFREY FARMER MONTREAL

Geoffrey Farmer's survey quickly reveals the breadth of themes and materials that characterizes his wide-ranging practice [Musée 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 work.

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—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 format 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