







# Uncertain Pilgrim

An interview with  
Gareth Moore by  
Andrew Bonacina

*Dark Water (from Uncertain Pilgrimage), 2006*

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Andrew Bonacina: Last year you completed the final stop in your year-long project *Uncertain Pilgrimage*. How did the project begin and what were the motives behind embarking on a journey such as this?

Gareth Moore: *Uncertain Pilgrimage* began with the impetus to visit and investigate the ensuing interactions with a number of places, objects and people, in an attempt to write a kind of 'sculptural story'. It was quite unstructured, having no predetermined schedule or route. It physically began in Vancouver with the collaborative construction of a wool suit (or costume) with an 84-year old tailor, Bill Wong. Throughout the excursion the suit and costume transformed, grew, and dwindled, at times taking on additional components and at others, leaving parts behind.

AB: You describe the suit you made as a 'costume', which suggests that your role in *Uncertain Pilgrimage* was that of protagonist in this epic-style narrative journey. Was there an overarching ambition that linked or guided the choice of tasks performed and are there models for such a journey that you were looking back to in thinking about this work?

GM: I was looking and thinking a lot about travel literature, and about ways in which people take on time and distance as a way of engaging in something that is felt to be spiritual at some level. There is usually an end point to these types of journeys, one travels to a destination and back, typically accomplishing something at a chosen point. *Uncertain Pilgrimage* had no real destination, no end point, and no clear objective, there were things set out for, but there were no grand narratives or desired conclusions. It was less about me and more about finding a medium for traveling, researching and constructing the project.

In a way the suit was more the (initial) protagonist, quite invisible when worn, becoming more visible through transformation and over time. I think the 'specific' journey also recedes a bit when exhibited and the constructed objects with their stories come to the foreground.

AB: The places you passed through and the tasks you set yourself veered from visiting tourist attractions and historical sites of interest to more anecdotal and fleeting engagements with people and places. Where did your journey take you?

GM: In responding to all of this I am reminded of how throughout this project I have always been trying to get away from travel-writing-a-journey, and think that printing this discussion might come close to that, in a way curtailing my motives. What follows is a selection in no particular order (as I would like to keep it), of some of the events, transformations and interactions, as experienced in the *Uncertain Pilgrimage*:

A pair of 'Smugglers shoes' were constructed out of two pairs of shoes which I had previously worn. When walking in one direction these shoes, leave a trail going in the opposite direction.

As I traveled homewards a pair of glasses were made, *Glasses for going west*. The lenses were made from my hair and the frames from a motel pencil, a roe deer horn and other scrap material collected along the way.

A moss beard was constructed whilst traveling through England, *Crusoe tells a monoecious joke to himself*.



One of the first places I traveled to was Albi, France in order to see Henri Toulouse-Lautrec's cane. The cane he used by necessity (he had malformed legs, a cause of his parents being first cousins) but he was also a heavy drinker and ordered to abstain on account of further physical ailments. This was not a sound possibility with Lautrec, so he fashioned for himself a cane that concealed a small flask of alcohol and a tiny cup. This allowed him to take his drink discretely at any place. I was quite taken by the cane's dual function to keep one upright, and also contribute to the stumbling effects of alcohol that inevitably bring one to the ground. I then began constructing a cane out of a piece of bamboo gleaned from one of the thriving local bamboo groves.

I traveled to the replica caves of Lascaux II and followed a dramatic tour, complete with flashlight in hand, and described in a language I have little understanding of.

I asked Richard Long for a pair of his shoes. (After months of attempting to find him and a number of visits to England I found that he lived walking distance from my grandmother's home)

Sitting in the back seat of a car in northern Italy, moving near a hundred miles an hour, I peered into the 'Valley of Nothing' going by on my left hand side.

I stuck my arm in the Mississippi River.

By means of walking in ill-fitting shoes I injured my feet, and so somehow I decided on Geneva as a place to rest. I then spent much of the following days gazing at the *jet d'eau* issuing from the lake, learning stories of its accidental conception at the hands of two city plumbers.

I dug a ditch in order to keep my travels financed.

I traveled into the heart of New Mexico's desert attempting to find the test pad for Richard Branson's spaceport project.



*Tarring Wheel (from Uncertain Pilgrimage), 2006/2007*









*Gesellen Work (from Uncertain Pilgrimage), 2006/2007*



AB: How do these anecdotal experiences live on in the space of the gallery or museum? In the same way that you don't wish to write a travelogue or fix these experiences through documentation, how did the sculptural aspect of this story develop and how can they live on without becoming relics?

GM: Works such as *Gesellen Work* and *Le Cane* have, within the context of exhibition, been transformed in a specific and reactive manner to these temporary positions. *Gesellen Work* was initially formed as a slow growing bundle of wood. Pieces of scrap wood were collected over various locations such as a broken sign post from the Eden project in Cornwall, a piece of weathered lumber found leaning against Donald Judd's old studio or a stake from an abandoned gold mine, and bound together. As part of an exhibition the bundle was later transformed into a new structure, a bench and bed-like sculpture *Gesellen Work, Waiting here for*; after this it was disassembled, and reformed as a slightly changed version of its original sculptural self. While taking part in another exhibition, *Le Cane* was adjoined to a slightly dilapidated 19th century chair, temporarily becoming *Cane at current moment*. A chair dating from within Henri Toulouse-Lautrec's life span was found and the cane substituted for one of its legs, becoming a support for the chair as well as finding a position to rest itself upon the seat. At the exhibition's end the cane was removed and the chair left behind. I see these secondary points (or gallery / institutional settings) as ways of interaction that might further inform / transform the sculptures and their stories. To nomadic peoples such as the Roma and Hobos, producing and selling craft and art was often integral to sustaining existence and movement. Traveling with often humble pockets I began to carve and fashion *Spoons and Forks and Runcible Spoons* as what I imagined as a somewhat symbiotic way of supporting the movement and formation of the journey.

AB: The titles of many of the works that have emerged from the project remain ambiguous as to the origin of the works or the narrative that led to their making. Is this sense of ambiguity an intentional part of the project?

GM: It wasn't an attempt to be overly ambiguous, but neither had I a desire to follow a direct trajectory. The titles largely developed from the individual works created, rather than the project at large and, to some extent, I believe these hold a less ambiguous nature within the contexts of the certain groups or individuals interacted with during the specific works' construction.

AB: Will the objects and other works that resulted from the project continue to grow and change each time they are shown?

GM: Given future contexts or investigations, a number of the pieces will grow, reduce or transform, to what extent and which individual works is largely uncertain.



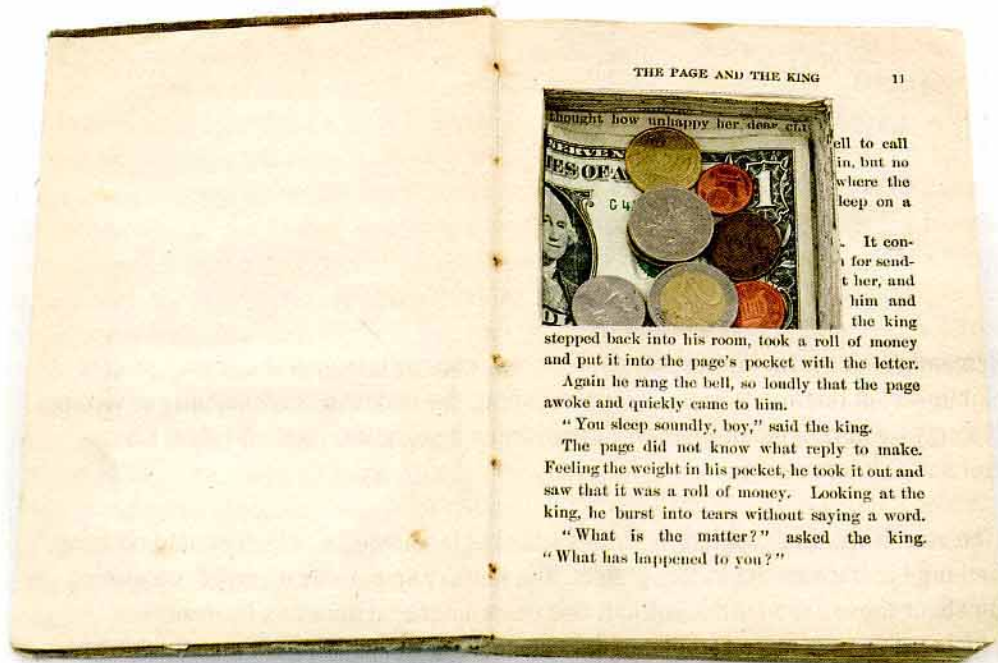


Cane, 2006/2007

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Bonacina, Andrew. "Uncertain Pilgrimage: An Interview with Gareth Moore by Andrew Bonacina ." *Uovo*, issue 17, April - June 2008: 104 - 127.





AB: Your descriptions of the various elements of your journey and the resulting sculptural works chart not only a physical journey but also a historically referential one – a writing of an alternative form of art history perhaps, told by means of anecdote and historical ephemera. How important is the notion of ‘writing’ in its widest sense to this project?

GM: In preparation for, and throughout, *Uncertain Pilgrimage* I was looking at a lot of travel literature, early travel guides and that of personal logs and memoirs. Over time I amassed a small transforming collection of such writings where books were sometimes abandoned or altered, pages torn out and left behind after being read. I was thinking more about creating a story without writing, in a tradition like that of maritime sailors singing a song to describe a map or First Nations performing dances to pass along personal histories. Walter Benjamin makes some really interesting observations about the nature of storytelling in his text *The Storyteller*, for example he says, ‘The earliest symptom of a process whose end is the decline of storytelling is the rise of the novel at the beginning of modern times. What distinguishes the novel from the story (and from the epic in the narrower sense) is its essential dependence on the book ... More and more often there is embarrassment all around when the wish to hear a story is expressed. It is as if something that seemed inalienable to us: the ability to exchange experiences ...’



AB: Benjamin's text is an interesting point of reference in thinking about your project as it highlights, in relation to my previous question, the task and responsibility of writing. Was *Uncertain Pilgrimage* another way of writing a history, be it an individual history or one of social interactions?

GM: The way in which Benjamin describes a loss of language, or way of communicating, is something I really connect to this project. The journey was partly a way of attempting to write about these experiences without this dependence on books as he describes. About history this gets more complicated, I was looking to the past, but also thinking of it as something that would not really be finished, and therefore not be fixed in history, something perhaps like ripping the last chapter(s) off a book without reading it.

AB: Benjamin also ties the loss of the art of storytelling to the loss of a traditional sense of community in Modernity, the type of communities such as those you mentioned – the Roma or Hobos – in which memory, speech, experience and social practice were shared. These types of communities were often structured around traditional working practices which brings us to your self-appointed 'apprenticeship' with certain traditional trades such as the baker, with whom you worked for a short period of time. Can you tell me a bit about what you were looking to investigate by engaging this way with traditional forms of work?

GM: I see art as holding the potential of both creating this sense of, and simultaneously, loss of, community. It builds points of relation and dialogue in which individuals converse over time and space, but often much of this is filtered and mediated over time. I was attempting an interaction in the most basic of ways, engaging in something that I would most inevitably learn from – hopefully, in turn and through conversation, to have something to offer back. Benjamin writes of how resident master craftsmen and traveling journeymen worked together and how every master craftsman had been a traveling journeyman before settling down. He was addressing, in part, the Gesellen, who leave their homes for a period of three years to apprentice in the world. I saw *Uncertain Pilgrimage* as somewhat of an apprenticeship as well. It became an investigation of a more immediate, less filtered, way of interaction.





*Baker's Dream (detail), 2007*

**AB:** Can you tell me about your experience at the bakery, how the project came about and how your role as an artist in that environment developed?

**GM:** The bakery project grew out of an invitation to interact, under the premises of performance, with the community of Trento, in northern Italy. Of course, I kept seeing bakery after bakery and began thinking of how bakers work while most everyone else is sleeping, place their goods in the shop, and go home to bed. Later, someone buying bread interacts with another individual who hasn't had a part in this construction. I wanted to insert myself into the working of the bakery and establish a more invisible and immediate collaboration between myself and the baker. I produced a batch of 'sculptural' breads that could be inserted into the bakery for a day. Someone stopping in for their daily typical loaf might instead have a choice of another more mysterious form, like that of a shoe, a cane or a beard. I imagined how this interaction might lead home to the dinner table and take on further interpretation.

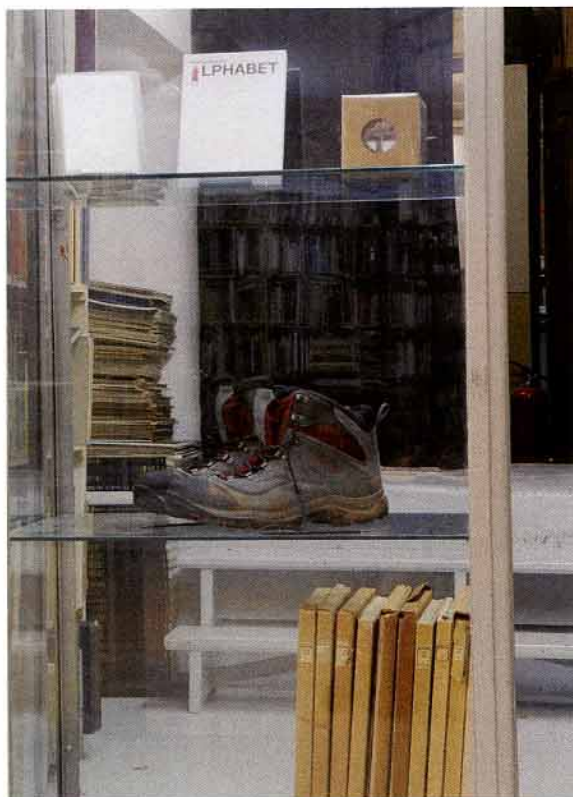


*Uncertain Pilgrimage; Glove, 2007*

AB: This type of apprenticeship is reminiscent of the activities of the Artist Placement Group, a group of artists who began working in the 1960s and 1970s (including artists John Latham, Keith Arnatt, Ian Breakwell and David Hall among others) and explored the notion of art in a social context by placing artists in various industry and government departments, challenging both their own practice, but also, hopefully, the practices of their adopted colleagues within these companies. How do you think your working in the bakery affected the baker and his attitude to his work, and then, to art?

GM: That's impossible to answer as my communication with Andrea Pulin (the baker) was limited. My Italiano is *piccolo* as was Andrea's English. In our initial contact we had an interpreter but for the night in which we baked together, we relied on a more rudimentary way of communication and a child's English / Italian dictionary. It seemed as though he enjoyed the experience, possibly he was slightly perplexed by it, but definitely enthusiastic. There was one strange outcome to the event, which relates to my noticing Lega Nord posters around the town that proclaimed 'No Moschee in Trentino' (no mosques in Trentino). In response to these surprising announcements, I decided to make some bread mosques to place in the bakery. Later (from what I was told), these mosques seemed to affect how the retail clerk responded to possible sales of these new bread items.





Left: *Schuhevitrine* unten Richard Long's shoes, 2006/2007 /  
Above: *Der Landloper* (from *Uncertain Pilgrimage*), 2006/2007 /  
Opposite: *Uncertain Pilgrimage*; *Crusoe Tells a Monoecius Joke to Himself*, 2006/2007

AB: Your other quiet intervention in the public sphere in Cologne at the Galerie Daniel Buchholz bookshop could be read as a metaphor for the whole project and indeed much of your work – a cabinet of curiosities in which varying narratives and histories and art and non-art objects come into close contact by means of forms of display that play with the tropes of museological display. What material did you bring together in Cologne?

GM: As a unifying unit I constructed a sculptural sled / cart out of found wood that I thought of as a device for transporting the other materials I had been working on. The cart was placed within the front window display of the store with the rest of the material, absorbing itself into the Antiquariat bookshop. I spent a week or so going through the many wonderful books, prints and curiosities housed in the store, developing some new work, and finding relationships amongst the existing material for the works to rest with. Sculptures like *Smugglers Shoes* and *Crusoe Tells a Monoecius Joke to Himself* found temporary homes in the store vitrines, beside old etchings, books and other materials that somewhat expanded these objects' histories, (those of the Antiquariat, and those which I had constructed). Sculptures such as *Der Landloper* were developed on site with the construction of a previously flattened tumbleweed collected in the Texas desert and the addition of a portion of a Hieronymus Bosch catalogue gleaned from the Antiquariat.







AB: The pilgrimage of the works, so to speak, can continue beyond the life they have as part of the project when inserted into new contexts.

GM: Yes, they can retain a flexibility and hold onto the possibility of transformation aided through interaction with possible new contexts.

AB: So you arrive at this form of 'Musée Imaginaire' where traditional object distinctions become less important. It's something you've explored in your work in the past with projects such as *St. George Marsh*. Like the Antiquariat bookshop display, and even your time at the bakery, it became an insertion into the public sphere that challenged the way in which art functions, is categorised and works within a social context.

GM: Well, I think without this insertion into life, it can sometimes be a little all too structured, and designated to a rather fixed position. *St. George Marsh* started quite loosely, my friend and fellow artist Jacob Gleeson spotted a small corner store for rent in a residential area of Vancouver and we began discussing the possibilities of what could unfold in such a space. Looking at ways of conflating interests we had in mind things such as small-town-low-budget museums, aged and fragmented corner stores (stores that dealt with items of an unlikely union, such as meat and videos, or vacuums and golfing equipment), and art made outside of the overarching forms of art historical discussion. Quite quickly we had a little shop and a license.

AB: Were visitors aware that they were entering something other than a normal corner store?

GM: This really varied between visitors, some it seemed would drop in, buy a snack and leave without taking the slightest notice of anything else, others would offer business advice as to what we might do or sell, as a way of helping our obviously failing business, others again found the store to be very reminiscent of something they had once encountered. We had a young boy drop by once, maybe seven or eight years old, and shortly he began to weep quietly. The man escorting him detailed how the child at times suffered from nostalgia. Given that most of the objects within *St. George Marsh* were older than the child himself it seemed a strange but beautiful description of the boy's upwelling.

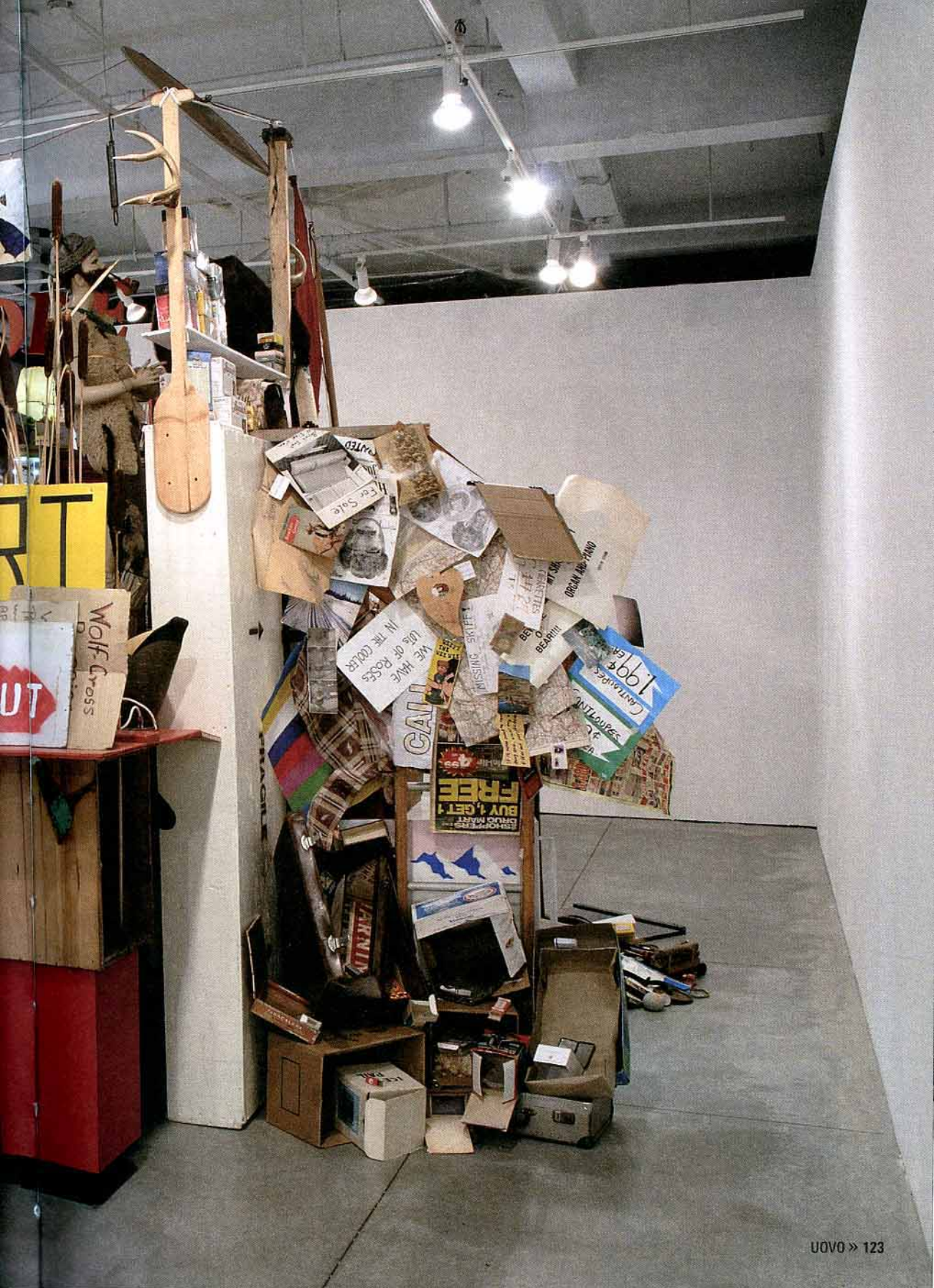


*St. George Marsh, June 2005 – August 2006*











AB: So as much as the project was about the challenging of the way art functions, mixing useless 'aesthetic' objects with everyday consumable goods, it was very much a social project in which your everyday interactions with the visitors became a form of performance, or at least a way of collecting conversations and encounters in the way that you might collect and arrange the objects on the shelves?

GM: Well that became an interesting remainder of the store, something both Jake and I really enjoyed but if you are to call it collecting it was done in an unintentional way, like all memory, these stories simply reappearing through later discussion, description or rumination.

AB: Does the store have an afterlife other than in the memories and stories that came out of it?

GM: It has gone through two transformations since the store originally closed. The first being a sale St. George Marsh, Everything must go, Away, held in the loading bay of Catriona Jeffries Gallery, in which everything housed in the store (down to the cashbox and broom) was for sale, under the condition that it all stay together. (It didn't sell.) The second, after sitting in storage for a year, was its transformation within a Vancouver gallery into something slightly replicating itself under a new somewhat neutered form 'St. George Marsh, Denaturalized'. After this last transformation it was once again placed into storage, this time somewhere in the suburbs of Vancouver.

Previous pages: St. George  
Marsh, Denaturalized, 2007  
Opposite: St. George Marsh,  
Denaturalized, 2007 (detail)



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*Sculpture Garden with Bench, 2007 (detail)*

AB: Can you tell me about your recent sculptural works, such as *Sculpture Garden with Bench*?

GM: *Sculpture Garden with Bench* grew out of a continuing series of photographs taken over time at various locations. The photographs are of sculptures constructed in-situ, out of found materials. The specific locations, and the material found therein, entirely inform the sculptures made. Upon completion I take a photograph and leave the construction there. The collection of photos up to the point of producing *Sculpture Garden with Bench* were brought to San Francisco as part of an exhibition. I had decided that I would make a sculpture to house the photographs but left it at that point until I could physically make it to the exhibition location. What developed from the gallery space and surrounding environment was this slightly reduced and patchwork enclosure, constructed from found scrap wood. The photos were mounted first on found material; plywood, drywall, cardboard and then as well mounted to the internal perimeter of the structure.



*Uncertain Pilgrimage; Donkey (as sculptural companion) Sketch, 2007*

AB: They seem to develop this idea of building a 'sculptural story' through objects and locations.

GM: It was a way of addressing their physical displacement. By mounting the photos on found scraps I was looking to bring the photos into a more direct relation with materials similar to what the sculptures depicted were originally constructed from.

AB: Do you envisage there being another journey in the future, or a continuation of *Uncertain Pilgrimage*?

GM: I'm not sure if there will be another journey in actuality, but a continuation exists through the materials and their possible reconstitution over time. A small amount of material was collected that hasn't been addressed, so that always gives rise to a possible future. But that said, it is always nice to amble.

Gareth Moore is a Canadian artist based in Vancouver. Forthcoming and recent solo exhibitions include Witte de With, Rotterdam; CCA Wattis Institute of Contemporary Arts, San Francisco (both 2008) and St. George Marsh Denaturalized, Belkin Satellite, Vancouver (with Jacob Gleason, 2007). Group exhibitions include

'The Museum', Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2008); 'The Theater of Life', Galleria Civica di Arte Contemporanea, Trento; 'Door Slamming Festival', Berlin; 'KölnShow 2', Galerie Daniel Buchholz, Cologne (all 2007).

Andrew Bonacina is a writer and curator based in London.