



MATERIAL WORLD

This summer, Canada sent six representatives to the world's most prestigious art show. Three are from Vancouver, but that's where their commonalities end, as discovered when I spent two nights living in one of the artworks

By Michael Turner

DOCUMENTA—HELD EVERY FIVE YEARS in the central German town of Kassel—is arguably the biggest deal in contemporary art: over 200 artists share eight venues over 100 days between June and September. At this year's edition, the 13th since its 1955 inception, three-quarters of a million visitors passed through its galleries, bought its publications, and consumed its macchiatos.

One of that horde, I arrive at Kassel under grey skies after a sun-dappled train trip from Berlin. I'm given a map, and from this I locate my immediate goal: Gareth Moore's installation *A place*—near the buried canal deep in the Karlsaue parklands.

Vancouver artists have been well-represented at past Documentas, but this year marks a shift. Absent are the Stan Douglas and Rodney Grahams, the Ken Lums and Liz Magors and Jeff Walls; in their place, a new, post-boomer generation: Geoffrey Farmer, Brian Jungen, and—my quarry—Moore. All are graduates of Emily Carr University, and all are represented by Catriona Jeffries Gallery.



All images courtesy the respective artist and Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver, and Casey Kaplan Gallery, New York



Geoffrey Farmer's *Leaves of Grass*: shadow puppets made from *Life* magazines (1935 to 1985 displayed in chronological order), tall grass, and glue. At left: A postcard of Gareth Moore's shrine to Vulcan, part of *A place*—near the buried canal

On my walk to *A place* I detour into the Fredericianum to scan the rotunda—what Documenta artistic director Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev has called the “brain” of her exhibition and the lens through which to consider the whole. Contemporary Afghan ceramics, a 1945 *Vogue* article on bombed-out Germany, drawings from 1967 by Vietnamese artist Vu Giang Huong, a text piece by Lawrence Weiner (“THE MIDDLE OF/ THE MIDDLE OF/ THE MIDDLE OF”). War, I jot down. Reconstruction. And that which lies between.

The entrance to *A place* begins at the edge of a wooded area made narrower by a roped-in path. On either side are hand-made signs in German and English that tell us what to expect (a kiosk/meditation centre, a shrine to Vulcan, a foot bath); listed too are verbotens concerning phones, cameras, and dogs; and reminders to “VISIT VULCAN” and “NO PUBLIC TOILET.” The seniors ahead of me read these signs aloud to great gales of laughter.

When we get to the entrance booth, a stern young art stu-

dent/volunteer asks the woman ahead of me for her camera. (Postcards of the installation, a co-worker chimes in, can be purchased at the kiosk/meditation centre.) Dutifully the woman hands over her bag and is told, in manner most officious, to remove the camera because the storage cubbyholes were designed for phones and cameras only. We are already part of Moore's project; the booth bears his delicate yet rough-hewn aesthetic. Same with the cubbyholes.

After the volunteer verifies that I am indeed a guest at the “pension,” I am allowed entry, only to find that the roped pathways continue. Where these paths lead is impressive: Moore's shack (complete with stone chimney) at the centre, a cairn-style washstand beside it, an elevated outhouse, the meditation centre, a work shed, a daybed platform (the “Museum of Rest”), a lily-padded footpath, an enshrined statue of Vulcan (requisitioned by the artist from the vaults of the Fredericianum), and, at the far end of the installation, my temporary home: the pension.



Brian Jungen's *Dog Run* contains sculptures that function as both tunnels and platforms for pets, as well as benches for their owners. Every week, a local obedience school offers training sessions

The sun comes out and the seniors are happy again. I follow in line as we amble past the structures, great mounds of crab grass and clover between them. As we near the meditation centre I catch sight of a man sitting with his knee up at the back of the shack. The sun is behind him, and although he appears in silhouette, I know him.

GARETH MOORE (like Rodney Graham) was born in the Fraser Valley farming community of Matsqui. He first came to attention in 2005 as a cofounder (with Jacob Gleeson) of St. George Marsh, an East Vancouver corner store that for a year displayed penny candy alongside hunting decoys and Canadiana bric-a-brac. After closing in 2006 (the site is now home to gentrification's Le Marche St George restaurant), Moore embarked on a mysterious two-year global odyssey (commissions, exhibitions, residencies) that ended in *Selected Chapters from Uncertain Pilgrimage* at the Catriona Jeffries Gallery, an immersive sculptural installation that captured the imaginations of public institutions and private collectors alike. Shortly thereafter, he disappeared again. Then came word he'd turned up at Kassel.

Today, Moore is exhausted. He brightens when he sees a familiar face from home, but the installation is in his bones now and it shows. Not the years he has spent building *A place* so much as the scramble required to maintain it since the exhibition opened.

"The paths were not meant to be roped," he admits over dinner at a local schnitzel house. "It was only after the

weather, has the potential to transform a sculptural idyll into a battle zone, a ruin, an Appalachian wrecking yard with a kid picking banjo on a porch swing. Yet the ropes seem like bars, the "museum of rest" and "interspirituality" a garden penitentiary, a death camp. I'm reminded of my earlier notes: war, reconstruction, and that which lies between.

History is full of artworks built to decay over the course of an exhibition, or certainly alter through our interaction with them. I consider sharing this with Moore in the form of a question as we head back to *A place*, but he distracts me by veering us toward the Weinbergterrassen, under whose scenic lookout huddles Adrian Villar Rojas's castings of bells, like those still used to mark time in cities and towns around the world. Only these bells are solid, their jars filled with the same compound used to remind us of their function.

"The rest of Rojas's piece runs along the stairs," says Moore, gesturing downhill.

He is referring to the outsize plaster statues of flayed soldiers, the Allied airmen who bombed Kassel during World War II. It was not just the fact that Kassel was bombed that gave it what is now the biggest contemporary art exhibition in the world, but the severity of that bombing. (Kassel was home to a tank factory.) I mention this to Moore, but he is busy sizing up the fence that denies our access to these statues.

"Too bad," he says, giving the gate a final shake. "We could get back faster this way."

We consider climbing the fence, but we are full from our meals, and more than a little tipsy.

opening that I realized people would be walking all over the place, and with the rains it would be a mud pit in no time."

I recall how the installation's frothy crab grass and clover allow the structures between them that soft, knee-deep quality, like the opening of *The Sound of Music*. Then I imagine the trampled alternative: the viewing public, allied with bad

ON MY FINAL DAY I seek out Geoffrey Farmer's *Leaves of Grass* and a selection of Emily Carr paintings included as part of Christov-Bakargiev's nod to influential—and under-recognized—moderns. While the earthy, churning Carrs curdle against their white corner walls and cafeteria lighting, *Leaves* is a greenhouse of explosive foliage—thousands of images clipped from 50 years of *Life* magazines grafted to exotic grasses from the artist's garden and planted on a high narrow table that runs down the centre of a long south-facing hallway. Over 80 people, many of them student volunteers, assisted in the construction of this work, and an equal number ooh and ahh as I follow behind.

If *Leaves* is designed to overwhelm, Brian Jungen's *Dog Run*, located not far from Moore's installation, quietly expresses what many of us take for granted—inclusion; in this case a place for attendees to bring their dogs, which past Documentas (and Moore's *A place*) have banned. The outdoor dog park brings to mind an earlier work he made for cats based on Moshe Safdie's *Habitat '67*, and as with all his sculptural installations, the ideas are solid, but it is only when experiencing the work in material form that you appreciate its intellectual depth and emotional generosity, where it is not what is seen that is on display but what emanates from it.

Moore has sought similar emanations in his installation. What I admire most about his work is his ability to take seemingly disparate materials (like Farmer) and montage them together to form not a new object but new sets of relationships (utility and fragility, harmony and injury, representation and transformation). When Moore showed me the pension, I thought I was entering an eight-foot-square doll house: a bunk bed on the wall opposite, with wool blankets dyed and woven by his partner, the artist Anne Low, from sheep brought in to graze. To the right of that, a counter and a sink; to the left, a table and chair. The scale was perfect, the shack of my dreams. But what my eyes kept returning to was the lantern hanging from the soffit outside.

The lantern turned out to be a repurposed gas can. Instead of wick and a place for oil there was a pane of red glass. Through it I saw with new eyes the path I had trodden three days earlier. *War, reconstruction, and that which lies between.* VM