



Moore, Gareth. Interview. By Jens Hoffmann. *Passengers 1.9*. CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, 2008.

Early Career Survey: The Flaws and Myths of Childhood

GARETH MOORE
IN CONVERSATION WITH
JENS HOFFMANN

Since the beginning of his career as an artist in the late 1970s, Vancouver-based artist Gareth Moore has avoided any form of classification. Working with painting, sculpture, found objects, photography and collage, Moore's early work is characterized by an intense experimentation with style and material, often involving an elaborate play with color and scale. Yet, despite engaging in multiple media, his three-dimensional pieces have emerged as his most important body of work, forming the foundation and underlying structure for a large variety of pieces made by Moore today. Spanning three decades, this early career survey brings together over 60 works produced at the outset of the artist's career between 1977 and 2008. Exposing the faults, missteps, and mythology of infancy and youth, these early pieces are unquestionably occupied with issues raised by his upbringing in western Canada and dominated by an interest in the exploration of the artists' own creative progress as a toddler, young child and teenager.

Jens Hoffmann (JH): I am very happy to have the opportunity to organize your early career survey at the CCA Wattis Institute. It would be nice if we could walk through the exhibition together and talk about the different pieces. Perhaps a chronological order is appropriate so that we are able to trace the development of your work over the last decades. What is the earliest piece in this exhibition that you made?

Gareth Moore (GM): I'm not altogether certain what the first work made was. Many of the works aren't dated but I think it would be *Early Drawing Under Table* or *Dear Grandma and Grandpa, thank you for the big brown wallet I will use it for a very long time*. I was around three or four at the time of making these, so they were produced in 1978 or 79.

JH: Can you speak a little bit more about these two works and the circumstances under which they were produced?



GM: *Early Drawing Under Table* is just that, a drawing of a small figure done under my family's dinner table. At the time of making *Dear Grandma and Grandpa...* I could not yet write, so it would seem possible that the drawing was actually a letter, the additional text being my mom's translation of the imagery for my grandparents.

JH: What is this work over here at the beginning of the exhibition?

GM: The exhibition begins with a recreation of a piece made around the age of two, *Early Studio Work* (1977). The work is based on my mom's recollection of entering my room one evening to find me standing in my crib, painting on the wall with the only material I had on hand.

JH: The only material at hand?

GM: My poo...

JH: Okay...What is this piece about over here? It is a photograph of someone vomiting. You seem to have had a fascination with bodily fluids?



GM: I made this piece in my last year of High School. I think it's called *Regurgitate* (1992). If you look carefully at the projection over there you can see me throwing up, and there's a photo over there of my first performance where I'm also throwing up. I guess at the time I was interested in seeing what comes back.

JH: Would you consider this a self-portrait?

GM: You might call the photo an anti-self portrait as I was eating a cake with my image made from icing.

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JH: I am very intrigued by the piece over here *Artist's Conundrum (Self Portrait)* (2008). When was this made and what were you trying to say with it?

GM: I made *Artist's Conundrum* specifically for the exhibition. It is a self-portrait and it's sewn out of paintings I did some time ago while living in Toronto. I was thinking about the history of self-portraiture and generally about art production, especially in relation to having something like a retrospective. You might say it has its scatological intrigue as well.

JH: Ah...yes...well...I thought we had that covered...did you use specific paintings of yours to make this piece or just what was at hand?

GM: Those are all the paintings I had left, so aside from the initial material there wasn't much decision in the matter.

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JH: There are quite a number of other paintings and drawings in the exhibition. Maybe we can talk about these two over here. The first one is a portrait of an older man with wild hair and a very big beard. Is that your grandfather?

GM: No, that's Donald Sutherland.

JH: Oh...yes, of course, the great Canadian actor...Are you related to him?

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GM: Not that I am aware of.

JH: The second piece over here is a drawing with the fascinating title *Forward? If there are things like this to go back for* (ca. 1979). This is definitely one of the highlights of the exhibition, a very accomplished piece. I am not sure what we can see. There are three creatures, one of which seems to be a tiger or a large dog

with stripes, and there are two human-like figures in the front. One looks like a devil. This piece is very dark, very apocalyptic, perhaps an early fever dream or a prophecy?

GM: Yes this one still entices me as well, these figures really are quite frightening. I think that might be a wolf, oh and did you notice the third small figure on the head of the red cheeked fellow? You know, as a child I often felt I was born from the seed of an extraterrestrial, but maybe this isn't the place to go into that. Maybe I should undergo some regression hypnosis to see if I can find out more about this drawing.

JH: An early masterpiece!

GM: Thanks.

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JH: Tell me more about these sculptural works. There are these two sculptures that relate to rocks, *Rock with Collage* (1994-2008) and *Rock Painting Turning Back into Rock* (1997-2008). What is the collage about? Here it says: 'I'll clean the rest of my stuff in the mornin'

GM: The collage material is taken from photo studies and general shots of interest taken over the last ten years or so. A couple years ago, while helping my brother go through some things of his, we came across a collage of magazine clippings on a rock that he had done as a child. So partly this is a homage to my brother (as a young child). It made sense to use all these study photos I've been carting around, storing in boxes, to try and find another use for them. The text 'I'll clean the rest of my stuff in the mornin' I found painted on a sheet of plywood at a construction site. It helps to pick it up and get a feel for it, you will get a better understanding of the work, go ahead...

JH: We are actually not allowed to touch the works, conservation issues... Well, let me try...ah, yes, very intriguing, I suspected this piece to be much heavier...Anyway, is your brother an artist as well? Have we seen his work?

GM: No, I have two brothers, and neither of them are artists but you'll find early items made by each of them on the front wall of the exhibition room.

JH: It is very apparent that you are interested in a combination of materials, styles and media and I am stunned by how much creativity you expressed when executing these works. This piece here is such a great example of your practice, *Found Dead Insects Painted* (1991).

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GM: Do you really think so, hmmm...it was simply a study I did when I was 15, but I suppose looking back I can notice some ongoing material and conceptual concerns.

JH: This is where it all began! The plinth over here, a piece titled *Base* (2008), is a small retrospective of your drawing practice. Can you point at a few particularly important drawings? I just love that variety of styles.

GM: I quite like the one of a man in a vortex canoe that was done on a found child's drawing. There's also a large cricket at the bottom of the plinth that I originally did for a school report, above that is a computer drawing of Paul McCartney's *Spaghetti Man* and a rather nice heckling witch. There's also a drawing of Obi-Wan Kenobi, the older Alec Guinness one, done with pen dots and watercolor.

JH: Before we leave this gallery and look at the outside space, I just wanted you to maybe say a few words about a piece, the title of which I feel is a very appropriate description of the overall exhibition, *Shoes for walking backwards while going forwards* (2005). The piece consists of two pairs of old trainers with tennis socks inside them.

GM: Yes, I see this work as a kind of title piece for the exhibition, you are right, though they were made long before the exhibition came about. Essentially the shoes make a trail that leads in the opposite direction to which you walk. Art has this ability to speak to the future from the past. I wanted to try and do it the other way around, if that makes sense. Of course the shoes

also talk about the possibility of using left over materials, ideas, histories...

JH: Let us go outside this gallery now.

GM: Yes, there is more to see in front of this space.

JH: Now here, outside the gallery, we have a selection of what you call *Inspiration Material* (1967-2000). Why did you decide to include this? These are some wonderful works. Who are they by? I personally have always been a big fan of Richard Scary as well if I may say that.

GM: There is a landscape painting by my adopted grandmother Margaret done on a mushroom, a small drawing done by my brother Adrian of a really fantastic creature with an award ribbon beside it, also a wooden rocket ship he made. An amazing drawing *Clash of the Titans* (1987) done by my elementary school friend Devin Larson, so good for an 11 year old. The drawing is actually based on a fight I had while at school. The MC Escher book was the first "art" book I saw. My father was a mathematician and liked his work and I was just amazed by Escher's madness. Of course Richard Scary is the best, it's nice you also like him, and he really understood observation. That little yellow worm that you had to look for, amazing. It's a way of introducing the exhibition, creating a point of reflection, and giving thanks to these individuals and the things that they have made.

This conversation was recorded on April 19, 2008.

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| <p>1. <i>Early Drawing Under Table</i>, ca. 1978
Old family dinner table and pencil
48 x 24 x 29 in.</p> <p>2. <i>Regurgitate</i>, 1992
C-print documenting life size sculpture composed of plaster, paper mache, paint, plastic figures, toilet, wig and clothes
4 x 6 in.</p> <p>3. <i>Artist's Conundrum (Self Portrait)</i>, 2008
Artist's old paintings, thread and stuffing
48 x 25 x 13 in.</p> <p>4. <i>Portrait of Donald Sutherland</i>, ca. 1993
Graphite on paper
7 x 5 in.</p> | <p>5. <i>Forward? If there are things like this to go back for</i>, ca. 1979
Pencil and crayon on paper
8 1/2 x 11 in.</p> <p>6. <i>Rock with Collage</i>, 1994-2008
Photographs, glue and rock
9 x 6 x 5 in.</p> <p>7. <i>Base</i>, 2008
Artist's old drawings, found plinth and glue
10 x 10 x 37 1/2 in.</p> |
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Gareth Moore was born in Matsqui, Canada in 1975. He lives and works in Vancouver.

Passengers is a constantly transforming exhibition, combining solo and group presentations that feature emerging international contemporary artists.

Passengers 1.9: Gareth Moore is the ninth solo show in this series.

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Upper Gallery

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