

He's open to



suggestions

Gareth Moore's quirky bits and pieces reveal the human urge to connect

MURRAY WHYTE
VISUAL ART CRITIC

On a recent bone-chilling afternoon at the Power Plant, Gareth Moore gripped his sketchbook tightly and stared at the growing array of things he had made.

They seemed rough and hurried, an endearing, homely cluster plunked down in a gallery typically much more fastidious: An array of pineapples cut from orange-and-green tissue paper dangled from a string. Across from them, a small cluster of snowmen — one cut out from plywood, another of crumpled paper — sat on the floor. A stack of unused Dixie cups was placed next to a plastic coffee thermos.

"I'm just trying to figure out if I can fit any more in," he said, a little fidgety. Moore, who is tall and slight with an unblinking intensity, had the tightly-wound air of a man on a particularly unforgiving deadline. Which, of course, he was: In December, "Nothing to Declare," the Power Plant's sculpture show of younger Canadian artists, opened. For most, the work ended there. For Moore, 34, it had barely begun.

He's been catching up: His contribution was a weathered suggestion box, paper and pencil helpfully provided. Over the past few weeks, he's been executing as many as he can.

"There were lots — a lot more than I expected," said Moore, his crisp dress shirt buttoned up to the collar. All in, he counted almost 100 re-

were friendly ("things like 'go for a hike, have a falafel, eat more kale,'" Moore said; "I've been having fun with those at home"), some practical ("sharper pencils, please"), and some eminently doable — after a little interpretation:

- To the bossy edict "no mango," Moore replied with pineapples

- The snowmen came, naturally, from, "more snowmen" ("there weren't any snowmen to start

with," Moore smiled)

- "Make a piece that involves an alpaca" became a Google-found photo of the beast being sheared, smeared with a dollop of paint

Others were matters of comfort. "It would be nice to have some coffee available, perhaps a small Danish." With the thermos and cups, Moore tried to accommodate.

"I'm still working on that one," he shrugged, a little apologetic. "I

think it might be against gallery rules to have coffee in here." (A few days ago, the cup and thermos bore another note, this time in Moore's hand: "NO COFFEE TODAY.")

For some, it's a little much to grasp. "Is this the art? Please clarify," went one polite suggestion, taped to the wall; another expressed the same consternation, if not so civilly: "GET F--KED."

Context, as they say, is everything, and at first glance, Moore's practice would seem uniquely ill-suited for a gallery's antiseptic walls. For an exhibition in San Francisco two years ago, he had gallery staff drive him, blindfolded, into the Northern Californian countryside. He returned — on time, no less — to deliver an artist's talk, where he recounted the excursion, and showed the things he picked up along the way.

Moore spent much of 2006 and 2007 crisscrossing North America and Europe, gathering cast-off bits and repurposing them as makeshift talismans for the journey. A selection of these appeared last year at the Catriona Jeffries gallery back home in Vancouver, but it's difficult to call them Moore's art — not strictly, at least. Some were useful tools — a cane that does quadruple duty as a fishing rod, wallet and cigarette holder. Others, from that journey and more recent ones, are enigmatically functionless: A pair of perforated oxfords, a bundle of dried grass, a desiccated rat. In a decidedly un-art like gesture, they're not built to last, but remixed and recombined along the road.

There's a comic futility here, of the hollow urge to cling to experiences by salvaging the stuff on hand while they happened — an urge that un-

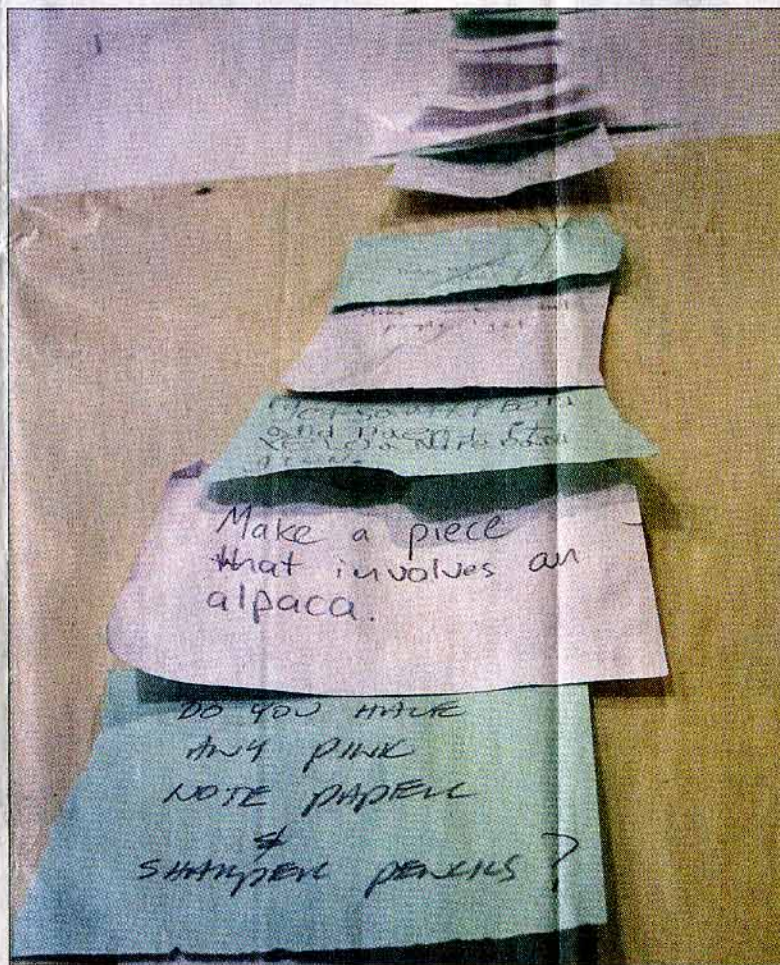
both the Duchampian notion of the readymade and early conceptual art. Art wasn't found in objects, both argued, but in ideas and action; Lawrence Weiner, one of the giants of conceptualism, built a career famously providing cryptic instructions, — "more black powder than saltpetre" — and never executing them.

Moore recasts himself as an everyman, clinging to his collected bits like a life raft adrift in the dislocated pan-global, post-modern wash. At the Power Plant, he plays the hapless tourist, gathering requests — tiny units of interaction, his personal set of experiences — and resolutely toils to give them form.

Moore calls the process "a distant collaboration" with the anonymous churn of viewers struck by the opportunity to engage. On the wall, an enthusiastic note reads "Pick me!" ("I did!" Moore grins). "A little to the left," reads another. It dangles off to the side.

He puzzles a little more over how to keep the coffee from damaging other works in the show, wondering if he could confine it to his little collection. "It wouldn't matter if it spilled here," he says; any spillage is just another part of the collaboration.

Besides, how many of these things survive, either reduced, reworked or rejigged, isn't all that important. For Moore, it's the journey, not the destination, that matters.



MURRAY WHYTE/TORONTO STAR

Wheat, Murray. "He's Open to Suggestions." *Toronto Star*. Thursday, February 11, 2010: E8.

Just the facts

WHO: Gareth Moore in

'Nothing to Declare'

WHERE: Power Plant, Harbourfront Centre