

For Immediate Release

## Mid-career Survey of Vancouver-based and Internationally Renowned Artist Geoffrey Farmer Opens May 30 at the Vancouver Art Gallery

Highlighting major works from the artist's 15-year practice

Media preview: 9:00am, Thursday, May 28, 2015, at the Vancouver Art Gallery  
Media attending please RSVP to Debra Zhou, [dzhou@vanartgallery.bc.ca](mailto:dzhou@vanartgallery.bc.ca)



May 21, 2015, Vancouver, BC – The first major mid-career survey of artist **Geoffrey Farmer** opens at the Vancouver Art Gallery on May 30, 2015. Featuring 6 major installations and several new sculptures, including some of the artist's most recognizable and technically complex projects, *How Do I Fit This Ghost in My Mouth?* traverses through the 15-year career of this Vancouver-based artist who has gained international recognition for his ground-breaking installations.

“We are excited to showcase Geoffrey Farmer's outstanding and thought-provoking artistic output at the Vancouver Art Gallery, following his critically acclaimed presentation at DOCUMENTA 13 in 2012. *How Do I Fit This Ghost in My Mouth?* illustrates Farmer's ability to create extraordinary art from simple yet strategic use of found materials, taking Gallery visitors on a memorable journey that evokes personal, social and art historical narratives,” said Kathleen S. Bartels, Director of the Vancouver Art Gallery. “We are especially thrilled to display for the first time *The Surgeon and the Photographer*, a monumental installation that was acquired by the Gallery in 2010.”

Geoffrey Farmer is renowned for his sculptural works that unfold as theatrical narratives involving mechanical plays, assemblage and tableaux. His projects are often cumulative, drawing from object and image archives whose diverse sources include pop culture, literature, art and personal history. Deeply influenced by the artistic traditions of collage and assemblage, Farmer explores spatial perception and the passage of time, while simultaneously implicating the historical, psychological and the philosophical. His works are rarely exhibited the same way twice—they respond to the specific space and context, turning the gallery into an improvisational site and temporal event.

“What becomes apparent in this survey of the last 15 years of Farmer’s practice are the diverse ways that he uses the accumulations of the past—from text to image to theatre prop—in order to reshuffle the narratives of history. In locating this exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery, he begins by evolving the dramatic life of Francis Rattenbury, the architect of the original courthouse building, one where Farmer’s father once served as a prosecutor. Stories that are real and surreal are woven into a complex and pulsating experience of discovery for the viewer,” said Daina Augaitis, Chief Curator/Associate Director of the Vancouver Art Gallery.

The exhibition incorporates the following major works:

***The Last Two Million Years* (2007)**

Consisting of 200 puppets cut from an edition of *Reader’s Digest* of the same title, *The Last Two Millions Years* is Geoffrey Farmer’s first collage-based work, mapping the emergence of civilization through a condensed version of human history and culture. The presentation for this exhibition ignores the chronology of the book’s narrative, rearranging figures, cultures, traditions, locations and events of history into new associations that provide endless permutations.

***And Finally the Street Becomes the Main Character* (2005)**

Composed of sculptures made from different objects such as lamps, drums and a suitcase, life-size props are theatrically arranged as an ensemble of characters that perform an hours-long instrumental, staging a day in the life of an urban alleyway.

***Trailer* (2002)**

In *Trailer*, the language of film production is the subject, the twenty-eight foot hollow prop truck replicating those seen on-location film sets of movies frequently shot in Vancouver.

***The Surgeon and the Photographer* (2009- )**

Acquired by the Vancouver Art Gallery in 2010, *The Surgeon and the Photographer* is a massive work comprised of 365 hand puppets cut from book images and adhered to fabric forms, utilizing the conceptual framework of a calendar. Arranged in groups of varying sizes that suggest social gatherings, crowds or processions, this work creates a fluid and kaleidoscopic cacophony of surreal characters. *The Surgeon and the Photographer* was inspired by the unfinished yet highly influential work *Memory Atlas* by cultural theorist and art historian Aby Warburg, and by a passage from Walter Benjamin’s seminal essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.”

***Let’s Make the Water Turn Black* (2013-2015)**

The final iteration of *Let’s Make the Water Turn Black* is the artist’s largest and most technically complex sculptural project to date, made in collaboration with Brady Marks. Named after Frank Zappa’s iconic 1968 track, this work is a mechanical tableau of assembled figures animated by movement, light and sound that perform scenes based on Zappa’s life that unfolds over the course of a day.

In addition, the exhibition includes several special tours through the basement space of the Vancouver Art Gallery, known colloquially as the catacombs and otherwise limited to the Gallery’s staff and artists. Scripted by the artist, the tour is based on the history of the Gallery, its building as a former courthouse and how it has been repurposed, as well as the artist’s own personal history. Tours will be scheduled during the first and second Saturdays of June, July and August.

**Geoffrey Farmer**

Born in 1967 on Eagle Island, British Columbia, Geoffrey Farmer lives and works in Vancouver. He studied at the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, Vancouver and the San Francisco Art Institute. He gained international recognition with solo exhibitions at venues including The Curve Gallery, Barbican, UK (2013); Migros Museum, Zurich (2013); Project Arts Centre, Dublin (2011); REDCAT, Los Angeles (2011); Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff (2010); Dunlop Art Gallery, Regina (2010); Museo Experimental El Eco, Mexico City (2010); Western Bridge, Seattle (2010); Witte de With, Rotterdam (2008); Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal (2008); The Drawing Room, London (2007); The Power Plant Gallery (2005) and Art Gallery of Ontario (2000), both in Toronto. Recent exhibitions include Kunstverein Hamburg, 2014, and Pérez Art Museum Miami, 2015; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, 2014; and National Gallery of Canada, 2015.

In addition to inclusion in biennales in Istanbul, Sydney, Brussels and Montreal, Farmer's work has been in major group exhibitions including: *Triennale der Kleinplastik*, Stadt Fellbach-Kulturamt (2013); *DOCUMENTA 13*, Kassel (2012); *Children's Films*, International Project Space, Birmingham (2012); *Stage Presence*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2012); *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Art, San Francisco (2010); *Nomads*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (2009); *Encounters: Art as Experience*, National Gallery of Canada (2008); *Beachcombers*, Gasworks, London (2002); and *The World as a Stage*, Tate Modern (2007).

Geoffrey Farmer is the recipient of a 2003 VIVA Award, a 2008 Victor Martyn Lynch-Staunton Award, and the 2011 Hnatyshyn Foundation Visual Art Award, where he was lauded for his "original and steadfastly courageous practice," creating works that "set in motion assemblage and collage as ways of reading history and contemporary crisis." In 2013 he was awarded the Gershon Iskowitz Prize, accompanied by an exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 2014. He was an Artist-in-Residence at Cove Park, Edinburgh, Scotland in 2014. Geoffrey Farmer is represented by Catriona Jeffries Gallery in Vancouver and Casey Kaplan Gallery in New York.

***How Do I Fit This Ghost in My Mouth?*** is organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery and curated by Daina Augaitis, the Gallery's Chief Curator/Associate Director, with Diana Freundl, Assistant Curator. This exhibition is accompanied by a substantial 400-page artist book by Geoffrey Farmer. Co-published by the Vancouver Art Gallery and Black Dog Publishing in the UK, this publication focuses on *The Surgeon and the Photographer* and features the artist's annotations of each element in the installation.

**SPECIAL EVENTS:**

Artist's talk: Saturday, June 13, 3pm, at the Vancouver Art Gallery

Archives Tour: June 6/13, July 4/11, August 1/8, 10:30am and 1:00pm, at the Vancouver Art Gallery

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The publication program is funded by the **Jack and Doris Shadbolt Endowment for Publications at the Vancouver Art Gallery.**

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A media preview will take place at 9:00am on Thursday, May 28, 2015, at the Vancouver Art Gallery (750 Hornby Street, Vancouver). Artist will be in attendance. Media attending please RSVP to Debra Zhou, [dzhou@vanartgallery.bc.ca](mailto:dzhou@vanartgallery.bc.ca) by Wednesday, May 27, 2015.

(Image credit) Geoffrey Farmer, Detail from *The Surgeon and the Photographer*, 2009–, paper, textile, wood, metal, Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Jean MacMillan Southam Major Art Purchase Fund, Phil Lind, Vancouver Art Gallery Acquisition Fund, Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance Program and the Michael O'Brian Family Foundation

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**MEDIA INFORMATION:**

Debra Zhou, Communications Specialist

[dzhou@vanartgallery.bc.ca](mailto:dzhou@vanartgallery.bc.ca),

Direct: 604-662-4722, Mobile: 604-671-2358

About the **Vancouver Art Gallery**: The Vancouver Art Gallery is a not-for-profit organization supported by its members, individual donors, corporate funders, foundations, the City of Vancouver, the Province of British Columbia through the BC Arts Council, and the Canada Council for the Arts. We thank everyone for their continuing generosity.