

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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RODNEY GRAHAM: CANADIAN HUMOURIST
May 26, 2012 – September 30, 2012



Rodney Graham, production still from *Canadian Humourist*, 2011, illuminated light box. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Scott Livingstone.

Vancouver, BC – Opening on May 26th, ***Rodney Graham: Canadian Humourist*** brings together five recent works by internationally renowned Vancouver-based artist Rodney Graham for their first exhibition in Canada. In his more than four decade-long career, Graham has become known for his often witty artworks which focus on the legacy, predicaments and vexations of modern life. In this exhibition, Graham's film and photographic works draw upon sources ranging from Alphonse de Neuville, a nineteenth century French painter of military scenes, to Canadian literary icons such as Pierre Berton and Eric Nicol.

As with much of the art Graham has produced over the past two decades, each of the images in *Rodney Graham: Canadian Humourist* features the artist acting out a role that seems comically out of time and place. The meticulous detail evident in the costumes and settings of these works speaks to an ongoing yearning to locate the present in relation to archetypal moments from the past. However, the theatricality of these images – the sense that each setting has been carefully constructed – casts doubt on the possibility of truly grasping the moment of origin. Graham's portrayals of a model in a nineteenth century painter's studio, a humble clerk in a basement camera shop, or a woolly, middle-aged author comfortably ensconced in his study, enact an ongoing search for identity in the past. His depictions evoke the tension between a representation of history as linear progress and one that is cyclical, in which the present cannot be freed from the continual re-enactment of the past.

This exhibition marks the Gallery's first presentation of *Artist Model Posing for "The Old Bugler, Among the Fallen, Battle of Beaune-Roland, 1870" in the Studio of an Unknown Military Painter, Paris, 1885, 2009*, a work donated to the Gallery by the Bank of Montreal in 2011. This work was inspired by a book illustration Rodney Graham found depicting the Paris studio of the French military painter Alphonse de Neuville c. 1880, with a model in the uniform of the French National Guard lying prone on the floor. Graham has re-staged this image, with himself as the fallen soldier, using a composition that places the viewer in the position of the painter at his easel. This image is part of an extended consideration of modern culture in which Graham has also addressed the work of Sigmund Freud, the 19th century Belgian scientist Joseph Plateau, the 19th century composer Richard Wagner and the rock musician Kurt Cobain, among many other historical figures.

Graham, born in Abbotsford, B.C., works in film, video, painting, photography and music. His work has been collected by the Museum of Modern Art, the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The artist represented Canada at the Venice Biennale in 1997, exhibited at the international art exhibition Documenta IX in 1992 and at Sculpture Project Muenster in 1987.

Rodney Graham: Canadian Humourist is organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery and curated by Grant Arnold, Audain Curator of British Columbia Art. Arnold will give a public tour of the exhibition on Saturday, June 9th at 2pm.

Arnold and the artist will be providing a media tour of the exhibition on Monday, June 4th at 10am. Media are requested to RSVP to Carolyn Jack.

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Photographs for publication are available on request.

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.