

Geoffrey Farmer & Gareth Moore

29 July – 1 October 2017

Textbook

**SALZBURGER
KUNSTVEREIN**

Geoffrey Farmer & Gareth Moore

***A Dark Switch Yawning, Neptune Skeletons Thronging,
Black Bucket Prolonging, World Turtle Longing, Sink Plug
Wronging***

Text by Séamus Kealy

Artists Geoffrey Farmer and Gareth Moore have paired up to develop a collaborative, site-specific installation for the Salzburger Kunstverein in which the gallery is transformed into a large pond like constellation of sculptures, found objects and fountains.

In their respective work, the artists share a deep interest in many associative histories and references, and share also an interest in notions of the double, the void and infinity. As reflected in this installation – the central component being an indoor pond with fountainry – the artists view history itself as the emptying and re-filling of meaning and phenomena, with sprouts of fertile excess emerging suddenly to interrupt darkness, if only briefly. A shared curiosity for different cosmologies and an active evasion of categorical meaning are a key spirit to their conception of this installation.

Upon entry into the main gallery, visitors encounter a darkened room lit by thirteen suspended lights, which illuminate the various components of the installation, all of which sit in this giant pond-pool. One hears the whirring of several water-works, and upon closer observation, one discovers that several of the artworks are themselves fountains.

The fable-like title of the overall exhibition is *A Dark Switch Yawning, Neptune Skeletons Thronging, Black Bucket Prolonging, World Turtle Longing, Sink Plug Wronging*. Within these conjoined phrases are several references that convey a few central elements of the exhibition's conception and realisation. One finds embedded in this

title (and within the installation) associations to cosmologies from different eras and an emphasis on the turtle as a major character in the overall scenario. *A Dark Switch Yawning* is a playful notion of a typical light switch that brings darkness instead of bringing light. An interesting consideration here may be the alleged gnostic belief system, where the gnostics apparently believed that they dreamed by daylight. Thus, a wakeful experience of the world was at night when the gods ended the illusions of daytime. Notions and roles of darkness and light are here, in comparison with our own perception, reversed, even subverted. However this switch, much like an object animated by a magic spell, seems fatigued from the ever-darkness it is continuously employed to disperse.

The next phrase, *Neptune Skeletons Thronging*, is a re-titling of one of the artworks in the installation, *Neptune Skeleton*. Here this new title brings about an associative image of animated skeletal forms, the long-dead, pushing against each other as living bodies might in overcrowded settings, but here the dead are that of the Roman god of water and are thronging about for an unknown purpose.

Also playful, but deriving from a reference that has mutated through the artists' discussions, is the phrase *Black Buckets Prolonging*, which arises from the artists replacing the image of the turtle in an ancient myth with that of black buckets. An anecdote from Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* relates this myth in an alleged situation involving Carl Sagan:

A well-known astronomer described how the earth orbits around the sun and how the sun, in turn, orbits around the center of a vast collection of stars called our galaxy. At the end of the lecture, a little old lady at the back of the room got up and said: "What you have told us is rubbish. The world is really a flat plate supported on the back of a giant tortoise." The scientist gave a superior smile before replying,

“What is the tortoise standing on?” “You’re very clever, young man, very clever,” said the old lady. “But its turtles all the way down!”

This image of infinity as an endless column of turtles, that which is both graspable and ungraspable simultaneously, was one of the beginning points for the two artists for this exhibition. This expression is an illustration of the Indian Philosophical notion of *Anavastha*, which conveys simultaneously that which does not stand down, something non-resting, unstable, holding no definite position, ungrounded or without foundation (it also means the unsettled condition or character and absence of finality or conclusion). The association provides some conceptual territory from which to view the entire collaboration and installation. The artists, in conceiving a few elements around the exhibition, replaced the idea or image of the endless turtle column with that of black buckets, and had for some time considered the phrase *Black Buckets all the way down* as the exhibition title. On the one hand these may be devices at the ready perhaps inside a great, deep well of knowledge containing the hidden, the mysterious, the unknown and the forgotten. On the other they might simply be utilitarian vessels utilized to bail a sinking ship or to fetch water for everyday purposes. The notion of something universal appears important in that manner, but at root is the notion of the impossibility of grasping eternity and infinity together with the continual and continually revised attempts by humanity to conceive the ungraspable, whether through science, religion or superstition. The next phrase in the title is *World Turtle Longing*, which conveys not only references to the two turtle-inspired artworks in the installation, but also perhaps the unimaginably vast migration of sea turtles, which in itself might be bound up with the tragedy of globally-threatened ecosystems. There is also a reference to the sad end of an actual turtle found in Thailand, which had died due to consuming hundreds of coins. These coins in various states of erosion are presented in the exhibition, having been brought from Thailand to Salzburg by Dr. Nantarika Chansue, the marine biologist who

originally diagnosed the turtle's ailment and subsequently operated on it in order to remove the coins. The turtle is a suffering victim to the terrible whims of everyday human folly (throwing coins into a wishing pond filled with turtles) and the greater ongoing human folly of global industrialization. As such, the turtle is possibly as much a witness to the nature of humankind's tendency to shift (or merely repeat) its behavior from epoch to epoch.

The final phrase in the title is *Sink Plug Wronging*, which in itself conveys the spiraling down of water once a plug is pulled. It also conveys a possible ongoing state of threat, alike the light being switched off suddenly, but here everything may be spontaneously sucked out of sight (and existence). Immediately, astronomical notions of black holes meet here with the image of water spinning down a drain (we may associate the misnomer of water spinning in different directions north and south of the equator; it is true, however, of cyclones, but not trains, and due to the Coriolis force) with notions of the fourth dimension and cosmologies that explain varying apocalyptic scenarios, all meeting with our own global situation today, our own moment in this exhibition, whether experienced therefore on an individual level or as imagined simultaneously collectively. As with the delicate turtle above, the entire situation before us in this gallery appears also fragile and can at any time be pulled out, whether as mindless fate or, again, terrible human whim, such as the fondness of Baron Vladimir Harkonnen, the villain from the Dune universe, to bathe within and drink the blood of his servants after removing their installed heart plugs (in the David Lynch film adaptation).

This association may be one step too far and with that, we return to the artworks as the basis for another sketch through the exhibition.

An object or thing that does not appear out rightly in the exhibition, but lurks in the black water, is the *Kappa*, a Japanese mythological sea creature that the artists discovered in their research. Not unlike

the figure of the *Krampus* in Alpen folklore (and contemporary ritual), the *Kappa* holds symbolic importance for the exhibition. *Kappa* are Japanese flesh-eating water imps who reside in rivers, lakes, ponds, and other watery realms. They smell like fish and are generally portrayed with the body of a tortoise, with an ape-like head, scaly limbs, long hair circling the skull, webbed feet and hands, and yellow-green skin.

The myths recommend that should one chance upon a *Kappa*, one should bow deeply. If the *Kappa* bows in return, it will spill its strength-giving water within it, making it feeble, and forcing it to return to its water kingdom. Having the stature only of a young child, *Kappa* are however notoriously dangerous. They attack horses, cattle, and humans, usually dragging its prey into the water, to feed on their blood. They also drain out their victim's life force like vampires, or suck out their victim's entrails or livers through their anuses. This kind of cultural redirection of sexuality (sodomy) continues with the *Kappa* being also associated with thieving and raping women. They also pull unknowing, little children into the water and drown them, not unlike the Celtic tales of Changelings or the *Wechselbalg* in German folklore, which replaced the shame of infant mortality or the ramifications of infanticide with fearsome superstition.

What is emergent with this shared interest of the artists in the *Kappa* is a fascination for the formation, necessity and flux of the belief systems that humanity inhabits, even to cover up its own crimes and transgressions. Therefore the *Kappa* is indeed present in these dark waters if only to safeguard the artworks therein. Curiously, *Kappa* resemble turtles, one might argue, and are here possibly a flip side to the image of the turtle otherwise represented throughout the exhibition.

Thirteen lights hang over the installation to light the various components. Of interest to the artists, the Attic calendar, an ancient Greek calendar, apparently included a thirteenth month every nineteen years to necessarily re-sync human time with the earth's orbit. The actualities of the calendar and its thirteen month are still disputed today, and it appears clear that calendar dates and times were adjusted to mark the arrival of new leaders or simply manipulated for political reasons. Today our world has simplified this inability of human time to sync with the universe by carefully inserting an extra day in an anointed leap year once every four years.

Between shadows and the orbular lights, are discernible small stations of objects, offerings and images. One of the oddities to immediately emerge are two amorphous white shapes, which are carefully-placed whale ear bones. Another, to the left, is an ancient cannon, which found on the coast and traded for fish was carried by Geoffrey Farmer's uncle across the continent. Here it is made into a trickling fountain, its original destructive function reinvented, repurposed, subverted: shooting water, gently. One of the first discernible objects upon entrance into the space, appears like a giant key-hole in reverse. This wooden panel was recently found by Gareth Moore in a rubbish heap at the perimeter of a Vancouver park. Originally painted on it had been a curious landscape with a powerful, setting sun. Below the background mountains and closer in the perspective, one can make out the faint remains of a brick wall.

Behind the cannon, as one continues left in the installation, is a sculpture conceived as a shrine. Originally produced by Moore as one of many shrines for an exhibition several years ago, this small bronze box contains a jar and candle. Protected by the glass of the jar the candle illuminates the water from within. The work suggests the sentiment that this entire installation may even be a shrine, and its multi-functionality (having several configurations) plays on references to spiritual pluralisms and even to Minimal Art, where the

bronze box alone could be a stand-in for a segment of a Donald Judd sculpture.

Further along, near the first corner of the pond is Gareth Moore's sculpture *Into the Water (In His Leather Breeches)*, a work from 2008, including pants made from hand-sewn salmon leather. The work originally arose from a reference to the Austrian naturalist, Viktor Schauberger's research on the living properties of water. Moore bought the salmon leather from a Chinese-Canadian business in British Columbia, whose ancestors are attributed with initiating the commercial use of salmon leather commercially. Each encounter with each artwork accumulates more possible references and associations. In this case, what may come to mind are myths about salmon, including West Coast Aboriginal (First Nations) myths (Haida Gwaii stories of Salmon Boy or The Origin of the Salmon) and the Irish "Fenian Cycle" mythological tale of the Salmon of Knowledge, which the hero Fionn Mac Cumhaill ate and in so doing gained all the knowledge of the world.

A painting is next encountered as one makes the first bend of the pond. Geoffrey Farmer and Gareth Moore collaborated to make this work, entitled *A Serious Moment for the Water Is When It Boils*. We can read this text upon the painting's surface, along with others such as, "Down The Suck Hole," "A Ghosting Tire Deep into the Drink," or "Beneath Morals," each of which affirming some of the suggested readings of the entire installation above. The texts are a mixture of poems and a recycling of notions found in other parts of the installation, amounting to the visualization of a conceptual Möbius strip. Poets such as Kenneth Koch are quoted ("phosphorus bouquet sprays") and Michael Turner with the inverted quoting of his poem ("Against a Yawning Grave, a Piss-Hole in the Snow").

Ghosting (from above) is the deliberate act of letting a vehicle continue its journey without steering (such as a car or bicycle). Here this every-day daredevil act or rather, extreme letting-go, is wedded with the image of a single tire running off on its own, perhaps drowning and disappearing sullenly into a deep body of water. Likewise the short expression “Beneath Morals” seems to hint at that which lurks in the deep. It is also perhaps a piss-take on both the earnest but misguided tendency to adopt meaning where a void of meaning is apparent, and the accompanying need to attribute a belief system or, in the worst cases, a doctrine of morals or perhaps even social or financial value to the matter in question, when nothing else sticks. This painting is as literary as it is visual, and as evasive as it is present.

A dead and dried potted plant lies just behind the painting. Here, re-animated like a taxidermy specimen, we might imagine Coleridge’s mariner suddenly animated within it, crying, “water water, everywhere, and not a drop to drink.”¹

Water-works emerge from the turtle by Geoffrey Farmer that is next encountered. This “*A Barely Mobile Hard Roll, a Four-Oared Helmet,*” came about through the assemblage of a number of components located around the foundry in St. Gallen where Farmer was producing work for his current pavilion at the Venice Biennale. The turtle appears to carry a great burden of knowledge upon its back as well as the pitiful remains of rations meant to sustain it. Despite this and despite its worry, the turtle appears resigned to its situation, even cheerily accustomed to it, and continues on without a grimace or a tear. As with much of Farmer’s work, this sculpture is immediately both familiar and carries with it some great unknown, which appears to sit alongside its familiarity. The Canadian author

¹ Samuel Coleridge. “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” 1797.

Robert Enright writes about Farmer's artistic process, which conveys a similar sentiment:

“Looking at his work, reading what has been written about it, and in his own texts and discussions, it seems that in every case, for Farmer the piece lies in the process of its own making. An orchestral parallel comes to mind. The music begins, all the instruments are brought in by the artist's conducting hand, all moving together to produce a single composite sound. Then nothing, a caesura, what Farmer calls “a collapse and a great silence appears that feels expansive and electric.”²

This turtle also seems to embody Farmer's continued search for meaning within foggy, dense or anguished settings, inner or outer. He says, “Your intuition leads you to explore even in the presence of uncertainty. In my case dismantling or cutting something up has been where the work and my understanding of the work emerges. The cutting up unhinges things, it introduces the idea of mutability. You can transform it and move it around and shift it and juxtapose it in ways that you couldn't if it were still a cohesive whole. It breaks into parts in a way that I imagine as an alphabet that I can then rearrange and create new sentences. So the reconstruction is important: it allows the viewer to experience something that already existed but in a different way.”³

In this case, this reconstruction and juxtaposition is in careful deliberation and collaboration with Gareth Moore, whose work shares many parallels in varying directions. It is Gareth Moore whose spontaneous decisions to include objects such as the dead plant described above or other things that emerge in the dark water, such as a broken plate, a single floating light bulb, and 600 Thai coins

² From: Robert Enright & Meeka Walsh: “The Multitudinous See: An Interview with Geoffrey Farmer,” *Bordercrossings*. Issue 141. March 2017.

³ From: Robert Enright & Meeka Walsh: “The Multitudinous See: An Interview with Geoffrey Farmer,” *Bordercrossings*. Issue 141. March 2017.

removed from the poor turtle's belly. And these objects have broadened the encyclopedic spectrum of the installation. Ideas of the Readymade are naturally at work here, but so are notions of chance and random meaning-construction in a complex play of signifiers and objecthood. Where Farmer's sculptures sometimes appear animated or haunted by an anguished spirit, so do Moore's carefully-observed and selected things.

Further, his work "Unnamed Offering," which consists of a taxidermy duck head on a wooden post, converge mysticism, poetry and a hypnotic ability of the dead. Moore found this wooden post as driftwood on the British Columbian west coast. The post itself clearly carries its previous function (although ultimately unknown) and its various journeys (also ultimately unknown) within its form, while the duck head tragically looks anon, summoning our gaze. Alike a collage and totem pole in the same breath, the gestures and actions of Moore's careful arrangement of forms come together as a sign-post, a critical station and, with and without a cross, an image of crucifixion for pause on one's wander around the pond. A painting by both artists immediately follows, depicting on both sides a small and quite legible constellation. Here are depicted two clear paths of meaning in the arrangement of stars, like a modest cut out of the night sky acting as a friendly, double-sided window to the vast cosmos.

After the constellation painting and the wooden pole, is a floating stone-like slab—titled *Naturgemälde*—which appears to have fossils added to its surface. The sculpture is at once a tombstone, sarcophagus, and object of apparent archaeological and anthropological study, while absurdly contradicting the laws of nature by floating on the water's surface. It is, in fact, made of styrofoam, also found as rubbish on an ocean beach. Nearby it is the third painting, made by Geoffrey Farmer, which possibly depicts a foggy

morning, another state of water, here mysterious, unravelling, dream-like.

Around the final bend of the pond before one exits the exhibition is the third and final fountain-sculpture by Gareth Moore, entitled *Neptune Skeleton*. In 2012, Moore lived in the Aue Park in Kassel during *dOCUMENTA (13)*. He had constructed this sculpture from found broken gardening pipes and parts discarded by the garden maintenance workers. This sculpture was one of many components of his overall installation “A Place, near the Buried Canal,” and had also then functioned as a kind of agricultural fountain placed in the backyard of the house he had earlier constructed and inhabited over a 15 month period.

When approaching this installation it may be tempting but also limiting to hold the experience or the associations brought together one has to a singular meaning, as to that of one deity for example. Water flows in this installation as has history and life before these moments we share in the exhibition together. The nature of this collage of ideas is firstly associative and collaborative, but ultimately we might see this installation as an open shrine with converging and co-existing cosmologies. Each associative reference is wed to the next in a generative and open manner, suggesting an ethics of form and of meaning. Here the process of the installation’s own making has been, from the beginning of the project’s conception, the work in-itself.

Biographies

Geoffrey Farmer (b. 1967, Vancouver, lives and works in Vancouver) is currently the official Canadian representation for the 2017 Venice Biennale. His recent solo exhibitions include *The Institute of Contemporary Art*, Boston (2016); *How Do I Fit This Ghost in My Mouth*, Vancouver Art Gallery (2015); *Let's Make the Water Turn Black*, Pérez Art Museum Miami (2014); Hamburg Kunstverein (2014); Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich (2013); Nottingham Contemporary (2013); *Every day needs an urgent whistle blown into it*, Art Gallery of Ontario (2014); *The Grass and Banana go for a walk*, Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver (2014); Fondazione Morra Greco, Naples, Italy (2013) and *The Surgeon and the Photographer*, Barbican Centre, London (2013). He has also had solo exhibitions at REDCAT, Los Angeles (2011); Walter Philips Gallery, Banff (2010); Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal and Witte de With, Rotterdam (2008); The Drawing Room, London, UK (2007) and the Power Plant, Toronto (2005).

Recent group exhibitions include *Objects do things*, Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw, Poland (2016); *A Brief History of the Future*, The Louvre, Paris (2015); Steirischer Herbst Festival of New Art, Graz, Austria (2015); *Shine a Light*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (2014); *Puppet Show*, Eastside Projects, Birmingham (2013); *Triennale der Kleinplastik*, Stadt Fellbach, Germany (2013); dOCUMENTA (13) (2012); *Stage Presence*, SFMOMA, San Francisco (2012); *The Garden of Forking Paths*, Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich (2011) and the Istanbul Biennial (2011).

Gareth Moore (b. 1975, Matsqui, British Columbia) lives and works in Vancouver. Recent solo exhibitions include *Bullae*, Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver, 2017, *A Burning Bag as a Smoke-Grey Lotus*, Stroom den Haag, The Hague, and *La Loge*, Brussels (2015); *Household Temple Yard*, La Criée - Centre d'Art Contemporain, Rennes (2014); *Blocked Arch, Deferred Ceremony, Dawn Chorus, Tra-diddle da. Like a fly in slow suspense*, Glasgow Sculpture Studios (2014); *Household Temple Yard*, Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver (2013); *Allochthonous Window*, Vancouver Art Gallery (2013); *Rocks on a Clock, Some Photos of Ducks, A Collection of Masks and a Post to Touch*, Lüttgenmeijer, Berlin (2009); *Passengers*, CCA Wattis Institute of Contemporary Arts, San Francisco (2008); *As a Wild Boar Passes Water*, Witte de With, Rotterdam (2008).

His work *A place, near the buried canal* (2012) was commissioned as part of dOCUMENTA (13) and he has been included in numerous international group exhibitions, including *Reborn Music Festival*, Ishinomaki, Japan (2016); *Primary Research Lab*, Western Gallery, Western Washington University (2016); *Journeys*, Israel Museum, Jerusalem (2014); *Play time*, Les ateliers de Rennes, Biennale d'art contemporain à Rennes, Rennes (2014); *Bat Ear*, Lüttgenmeijer, Berlin (2014); *Andrea Büttner, Joëlle de La Casinière, Gareth Moore, Catriona Jeffries*, Vancouver (2013); *The Intellection of Lady Spider House*, Art Gallery of Alberta (2013); *Woodman, Woodman, Spare That Tree*, Lüttgenmeijer (2010); *Every Version Belongs to the Myth*, Project Arts Centre, Dublin (2009); *Sentimental Journey*, Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver (2009); *Nomads*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (2009). *His Children's Films*, a curatorial film project developed specifically for children has been shown at Spike Island, Bristol (2014); Schmela Haus, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Dusseldorf (2013); Whitstable Biennial, International Project Space, Birmingham, and Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver (2012); and the Bielefelder Kunstverein, Bielefeld (2011).

Salzburger Kunstverein
Künstlerhaus
Hellbrunner Straße 3
5020 Salzburg

Tel.: +43 662 842294 0
www.salzburger-kunstverein.at
office@salzburger-kunstverein.at

Hours Exhibition: Tue–Sun 12-7 pm
Hours Café Cult: Mon–Fri 11 am – 11 pm