

GEOFFREY FARMER

Let's Make the Water Turn Black

May 23–August 18, 2013
Opening: May 22, 2013, 6–8pm

The artistic practice of Geoffrey Farmer (b. Vancouver, 1967; lives and works in Vancouver) integrates forms of collecting and scholarship employed by cultural historians, and draws on a diverse repertoire. After extensive research, the artist builds collections that unite aspects of visual art, literature, music, politics, history, and sociology, and crystallize in sprawling theatrical installations. Each of Farmer's works comments on its own temporality—be it by alluding to the passage of time within a work, by referring to its production phase, or by itself constantly changing over time. *Let's Make the Water Turn Black* combines these three, echoing a 1968 composition by Frank Zappa, from which it also borrows the title. Choreographed sculptures on a stage coalesce into a multifaceted and atmospheric work that unfolds over the course of the day and presents an improvised chronology of the American musician.

Farmer's first Swiss solo exhibition at the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst presents the sculpture-play *Let's Make the Water Turn Black*, which is based on an earlier work of the same title he created in 2011. The newly produced piece referring to this precedent concept is an elaborate mise-en-scène that will further develop over the course of its display in the following two years.

Eventually, the mechanical performance—an ensemble of computer-controlled sculptures installed on a low platform—interprets and revisits selected scenes from Zappa's chronology in a sequence coordinated with the time of day and the museum's opening hours. The work journeys Zappa's life over the course of a day, reaching its conclusion, his death, with the closing of the museum each day. The individual kinetic objects that make up the installation simultaneously function as acoustic modules in the overall composition; sound recordings represent individual periods and events in Zappa's life.

Farmer approaches the biography of his subject with a technique that echoes William S. Burroughs's method of the cut-up as well as Zappa's own principles of avant-garde composition, of mixing and layering diverse acoustic levels and arranging sonic spectra in kaleidoscope-like ensembles—and shares these artists' delight in frequent disruptions. For the sculpture, the artist, drawing on the influence of Musique concrète on Zappa's work, has created a sound library that functions chronologically over the course of the day. Composed of selected clips, field recordings, and archival material, it contributes to the atmosphere of a quasi-theatrical performative moment: an assemblage of objets trouvés on a low stage enacts a mechanically propelled choreography while also performing, as though it formed a single instrumental body, an hours-long cyclical sound installation. However disconcertingly spectral, automaton-like, and atmospheric this sculptural performance may seem in its invocation of Frank Zappa's spirit, it rigorously hews to Farmer's meticulously structured storyline.

The exhibition is a coproduction of the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Nottingham Contemporary, Kunstverein Hamburg, and the Pérez Art Museum Miami. Each institution will present a different version of the show as it evolves over time.

In 2012, Geoffrey Farmer contributed his *Leaves of Grass* to documenta 13; in 2011, he participated in the 12th Istanbul Biennial. His work has been on display in numerous solo shows at REDCAT, Los Angeles, the Casey Kaplan Gallery, New York (both 2011), and other venues, as well as the Witte de With, Rotterdam, and the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (both 2008). Geoffrey Farmer's art was first shown in Switzerland in 2011, when he contributed to the project *The Garden of Forking Paths*, initiated by the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst.

Curated by
Heike Munder
Director, Migros Museum
of Contemporary Art

Geoffrey Farmer
Let's Make the Water Turn Black
2013
Various materials
Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist, Catriona
Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver,
and Casey Kaplan, New York.

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Catalogue:

The exhibition will be accompanied by a monograph published by JRP|Ringier.