

# The Drawers - Headbones Gallery

*Contemporary Drawing, Sculpture and Works on Paper*

**10 Cent Hot Dogs**  
June 3 - June 28, 2008

**Robert Farmer**

Commentary by Julie Oakes

Artist Catalog, Robert Farmer  
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Commentary by Julie Oakes  
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Robert Farmer

10¢

HOT DOGS

Best in Town!

## Robert Farmer

### 10 Cent Hot Dogs

Robert Farmer is a modern day surrealist with a pop bent. As inundated as we are with visual imagery, and especially in the age of aggressive advertising, it is not surprising that the information that we believe we are receiving when we 'see' is not the true long and short of it. There were rumours (justified) circulating that planted a creeping suspicion in the mind of the viewing public that they were being subliminally affected by messages imbedded in the apparent, messages that floated behind the screen or beneath the surface. It is with surreptitious objectives that Farmer lays down his ideas, seduces and snatches our trust. On the surface, it all looks so nice and sweet. The colors are happy with shades of innocence in the pastels and tones of childhood in the cartoon-like manifestations. The paintings seem fit for a small child's bed time in a pleasing nighty-night room with a candy-coloured story book. The paintings draw us in, just like advertisements for junk food. There is a concealment of pertinent facts that in reality nullifies the promise that the visual seemingly was granting. Numerous examples come to mind.

The overall patterns of bunnies for instance, appear to be an utterly benign image. No one will back away from their innocent allure on first confronting the work. The background has bled through and the bedroom has been overrun with copulating bunnies. The wet dreams of the innocent have become part of the wallpaper - almost unnoticeable. The overall design made by the shadowed pink and blue clad carousers forms an abstract lacy web over the surface of the aged paper and lulls the awareness of the permutations into a comforted sense of quiet decency. A closer look steps-up the energy as the bunny bodies, in their imaginative positions, exhibit human tendencies - for the animal world doesn't employ the props and playthings that these bunnies do. The bunnies at one time were merely witnesses to the madcap world of Robert Farmer. Their references more naive, they had sat at tea parties in the company of baby faced guests, marvelled at the hot dog served for the last supper or been present, and perhaps in collusion, when the teddy bear humped the pussy cat. More than one bunny has lost its head over the strange state of affairs, but never before have they appeared with such fornicating force - crowds of bunnies getting it on with an overall frantic feeling of "What are those bunnies up to?!"

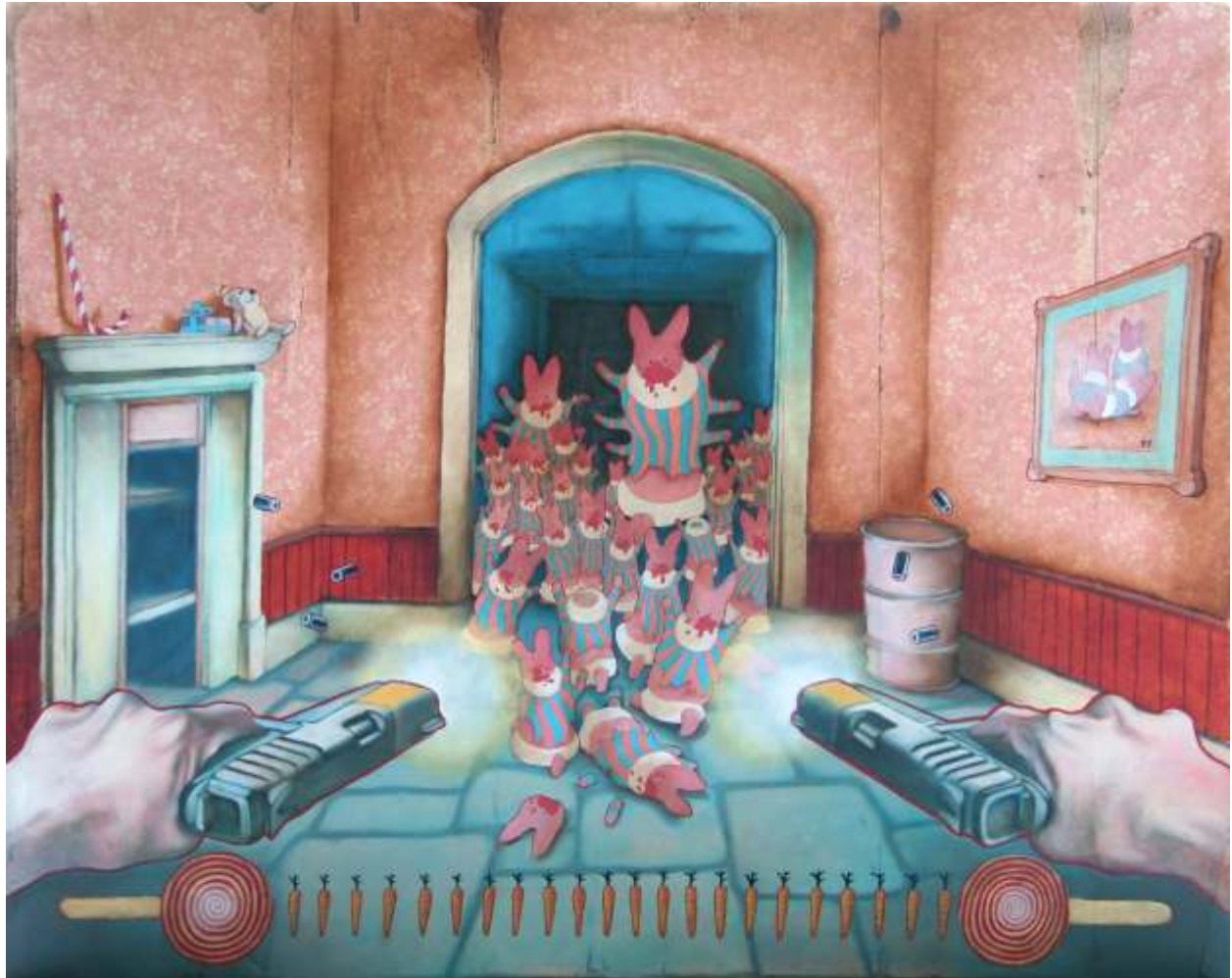
There is a formlessness to their bodies that belies the sexuality being enacted. Like androgynous figurines, they appear to be made of a malleable substance similar to bubble gum. Their shapeless clothes recall gum wrappers and the overall color scheme of pink (for a girl) and blue (for a boy) reiterate the hermaphroditic allusion. Robert throws in accents of other

characters such as a snowman in a cowboy hat, a gay reference to the archetype of a queer cowboy hooker. Since he has carrots serving as dildos, the erect nose of the blue snowman, launched into an upturned bunny body, furthers the reckless atmosphere of wild orgiastic abandon. Cavorting with the glee of propagating and adding twists of bondage to the naughtiness, Robert Farmer's bouncing characters play out their sexual fantasies against a backdrop of delicate wallpaper and within their lacy layout they appear as harmless, delightful and seductive as safe sex.

The paintings using hot dogs also use subreption as a ploy. The hot dog is depicted with a nostalgic flare. It is the good ol' hot dog, the ten-cent hot dog before food additives and carcinogenic fillers. It is the hot dog sold on the corner by a paternal vendor with a push cart, wearing an old straw hat and standing under a candy striped awning. It is a visual vocabulary invested with belief, old fashioned and not yet jaded by modern times. The same can be said for the ice cream cones. Farmer's ice cream looks as if it was made in a wooden ice cream maker, with cream, sugar, strawberries and ice ground down from that rare commodity on a hot day before refrigeration, when the ice truck delivered to the neighbourhood and an ice pick was better known as a utilitarian tool than a murder weapon. Robert Farmer's ice cream is pre-petroleum products, before the occult manipulations of recipe makers vying for a grosser profit transformed a special reward for good behaviour into a habit. Farmer tells the tale. He rattles, in fact, on the bad guys. He points out the obvious that has been obfuscated beyond recognition. He shows us that children are fat and ill tempered, that the Last Supper has become a giant hot dog, and that bunnies are fluffy sex maniacs.

The redeeming factor in all of this clothed exposure, this posturing of promises, is that the art piece, the work itself is actually 'quite nice'. Although we are an overweight, unhealthy society, it's not all that bad if we can gently prod ourselves on to a better position. There is still time to relegate the hot dog to the ten cent past. Above all, Farmer cautions against depression at the state of affairs. His tongue in cheek lyricism is palatable and we can take our medicine as he's mixed it - within an emulsion of sugar and spice and all things nice.

Julie Oakes



zombunnyocalypse  
oil on wallpaper on panel, 24x30 inches, 2008



the shapes of things to come IV  
oil on wallpaper on paper, 30x22 inches, 2008





hotgod

oil on wallpaper on panel (framed), 18.5x24.5 inches, 2008



last supper II  
oil on print (framed), 24x48 inches, 2007



git 1 in ya  
oil on paper on panel, 24x48 inches, 2008



The dogcatcher  
oil on paper on panel, 24x48 inches, 2008



Vienna sausage monster  
oil on paper on panel, 20x20 inches, 2008



Frankenstein  
oil on paper on panel , 20x20 inches, 2008



wonderland II  
oil on paper on panel, 36x48 inches, 2007



crackerjacker  
oil on paper on panel, 48x48 inches, 2006

## **Robert Farmer**

### **Bio**

Originally from Winnipeg, Manitoba, Toronto, artist Robert Farmer was born in 1968. After a three months stint at Emily Carr College in 1995, Farmer eventually attained a foundation year at Kootenay School of the Arts in Nelson, BC (1998-1999) before he moved to Toronto. While employed as a faux finisher, he co-founded Eastern Front, an artist's collective in Riverdale in 2003. Farmer's work has been featured in The Toronto Star, NOW Magazine, Riverside Quarterly and was part of the press release for The Toronto Outdoor Art Exhibition in 2007.

### **Solo Exhibitions:**

- 2008 10 Cent Hot Dogs, Headbones Gallery, Toronto
- 2007 The Hot Dog Show, Mercury Espresso Bar, Toronto
- 2007 Toronto Outdoor Art Exhibition, Nathan Phillips Square, Toronto
- 2007 The discovery of pink III: mini salon, Eastern Front Gallery
- 2007 Child's Play, art101, Toronto
- 2006 retrospective, Eastern Front Gallery
- 2006 discovery of pink II, mini salon, Eastern Front Gallery
- 2005 Toronto Outdoor Art Exhibition
- 2005 robertfarmerworld, Eastern Front Gallery
- 2005 the discovery of pink, Hangman Gallery, Toronto

### **Selected Group Exhibitions:**

- 2008 Weird Queer Freaky Xmas, Headbones Gallery, Toronto
- 2008 Bax DIY World Tour, Keep Six Contemporary, Toronto, ON
- 2008 The Dirty Show, Detroit, MI, USA
- 2008 Pass The Buddha (w/Julie Oakes), Varley Gallery, Unionville, ON
- 2007 The yo-yo show, Sweet Art Gallery, Toronto
- 2007 Toronto International Art Fair, Headbones Gallery
- 2007 Love Those Clothes, Snap Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta
- 2007 Summer Splash, Christopher Cutts Gallery, Toronto
- 2006 Little Art Show (fundraiser), Toronto
- 2005 Square foot IV, Project Spaceman, Williamsburg, NY
- 2005 Blender 3, Mind Control Gallery, Toronto
- 2004 'mas-x', AWOL Gallery, Toronto
- 2004 square Foot, AWOL Gallery, Toronto

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