



The Surgeon and the Photographer

Geoffrey Farmer

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The Surgeon and the Photographer profiles the complete collection of paper and fabric sculptures by Geoffrey Farmer in his seminal installation of the same name. The book lavishly reproduces all 365 figures, which correspond to portraits of days of the year. Taking cues from literature, theatre and cinema, Farmer's meticulously constructed characters are composed of tiny photographic fragments that are snipped from second-hand books and magazines, then mounted onto fabric forms with metal stands. The figures have a complexity that provides an animated quality and many cast unexpected shadows that deepen the dimension of character and generate an eccentric vitality. Produced over a four-year period, the work blends the collage and assemblage traditions of Hannah Höch and Robert Rauschenberg, the element of chance employed by John Cage and Merce Cunningham, and an animist perspective from Pacific Northwest Coast cultures. Its title, The Surgeon and the Photographer, refers to Walter Benjamin's seminal 1936 essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction?', in which Benjamin compares the magician and the surgeon, then makes an analogy to the work done by the painter and the cameraman. Farmer believes in material exploration and physical production as a form of research, which allows the work to maintain a playful and appealing quality. Taking a process-orientated approach, the artist draws on storytelling, popular culture, history and literature to construct an interesting and poetic reflection on photography, process and reproduction.

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