



BOOP

MUSEUM



A solo exhibition by  
**Sameer Farooq**

May 5 - July 5, 2019



## Boop Museum

Essay by Sandy Saad, Curator of Exhibitions and Education,  
Visual Arts Centre of Clarington

*BOOP Museum* is a fictional children's museum filled with dolls of various shapes, sizes and colours. Visitors are greeted by an assembly of rag dolls, baby dolls, Barbie dolls, porcelain dolls and more. The exhibition displays a variety of characters representing different ages, ethnicities, occupations, and walks of life; a Ken doll wearing red trunks stands behind a Nubian doll in a jellabiya carrying a woven basket. Some dolls stand in long orderly rows while others engage with their peers; a piper serenades a couple, while an adult female appears to be casting a spell on a child lying on the floor. Others come dressed in ball gowns, tuxedos, bathing suits, and various cultural attires, some in winter coats, and some not dressed at all. Each doll is given a name inspired by what children tend to call objects - *Loopy*, *Cissy*, and *Ping* are a few of the names loosely handwritten next to each doll. These evoke a sense of indiscriminate child's play and boisterousness.

Although *BOOP Museum* is filled with colourful childhood objects, it offers a critical reflection on conventional museum spaces, narratives and collecting strategies. The exhibition, a large-scale installation of deaccessioned objects from the Clarington Museum and Archives, is part of Sameer Farooq's continued practice of building propositional museums resistant to hegemonic historical narratives. He proposes an alternative museum space that makes you question the original model. For over 15 years, Farooq has created community-based models of participation and knowledge production in order to re-imagine a material record of the present. Using museum display strategies as a medium, his practice points to persistent absences in historical narratives, making buried histories more visible and offering counter-archives and museum spaces. Museums and archives offer authoritative histories; Farooq critiques their divisive and privileged discourse and counters with the fictional *BOOP Museum* of deaccessioned dolls, built to be accessed and enjoyed by children.

*BOOP Museum* does not include didactic panels, extended labels, or historical anecdotes. Instead, Farooq builds a shrunken museum in which objects are displayed on short plinths built for visitors with heights between three and four feet. Some dolls stand in multitudes on short and wide custom-built structures, while others are placed on ascending stairs like plinths inspired by unconventional display

techniques he saw in his travels to international museums. The dolls in many cases remind us of our own lived experiences of child's play. By definition, a doll is a small-scale figure of a human used especially as a child's plaything. Adults often give children dolls, whose lives are endlessly made over by play. They are reformed and manipulated to live out the imaginations and fantasies of their handlers. The dolls in *BOOP Museum* wear the evidence of their use in play; some have torn clothes, missing or twisted limbs, are chipped and bruised, which offers clues to the lives and fantasies they have supported.

However, for a long time, these dolls were taken out of the play world and stored in boxes as part of the collection of The Clarington Museum and Archives. The dolls transitioned out of being named and played with, to being numbered and conserved. Their enactment of narrative and engagement with the world was through museum exhibitions that maintained a distance between viewers and objects that were once so intimately handled. Founded in 1961, the Clarington Museum and Archives cares for a variety of objects including a large doll collection. With over 2000 dolls, the museum is following the common practice of assessing the effects of surplus, duplication, and excess that are compounded by the growth of collections over time. After a long process of following The Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture & Sport's Guidelines and ethical museum practices with respect to collecting and deaccessioning objects, the dolls were offered to the Visual Arts Centre of Clarington to be used in a project by Sameer Farooq.





The exhibition is divided into two rooms: in one, the dolls are displayed facing and engaging visitors, while in another, more dimly lit chamber, the dolls' backs face visitors, who are held back by a stanchion. Of all of the dolls, these are the most problematic and stereotypical in their cultural representations. Ending the continuation of their prejudice, Farooq halts their engagement with visitors, letting them retreat into darkness, removing them from circulation. In doing this, Farooq questions sinister techniques of othering and resists hegemonic narratives that exist within the privileged discourse of the traditional museum. While the dolls in the dark room are turned away, the rest of the collection is given new life and released back into the community. On the last day of the exhibition, Clarington community children are invited to the Visual Arts Centre of Clarington to "loot" the museum space created by Farooq. The act of looting has a long history intertwined with war and plunder. Many longstanding traditional museums house objects that carry the legacies of colonialism, violence and domination from the looting of art, archeology and cultural property of various imperialized regions around the world. In releasing the objects back into the community, Farooq offers new life to the dolls as a gift, and restores the significance of the objects to the individuals who acquire them, freeing meaning from the traditional museum's essentializing frame.







## Biography

Sameer Farooq is a Canadian artist of Pakistani and Ugandan Indian descent. With exhibitions at institutions around the world including the Aga Khan Museum (Toronto), the Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto), The British Library (London), the Institute of Islamic Culture (Paris), The Lilley Museum (Reno), Vicki Myhren Gallery (Denver), the Contemporary Art Gallery (Vancouver), Maquis Projects, (Izmir), Trankat (Tétouan, Morocco), Sol Koffler Gallery (Providence), Artellewa (Cairo), and Sanat Limani (Istanbul), Farooq received several awards from The Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council, Toronto Arts Council, and the Europe Media Fund, as well the President's Scholarship at the Rhode Island School of Design. Reviews and essays dedicated to his work have been included in Canadian Art, *Hyperallergic*, *C Magazine*, *The Washington Post*, *BBC Culture*, *Artnet*, *The Huffington Post*, *Border Crossings*, and others. He also appeared on the 2018 Sobey Art Award long list, Canada's preeminent art award.



## Exhibition Event

**Children's Looting of *BOOP Museum*:  
Friday, July 5, 2019, 4 pm**

On the last day of the *BOOP Museum* exhibition the children of the Clarington community are invited to the Visual Arts Centre of Clarington to "loot" the museum space created by Farooq. In keeping with his social practice, Farooq releases the objects back to the children, creating a community-based museum space while exploring the potential lives objects could have once they leave the historical archive.



**VISUAL  
ARTS  
CENTRE**  
OF CLARINGTON

## CONTACT US

The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington,  
P.O. Box 52, 143 Simpson Avenue,  
Bowmanville, Ontario L1C 3K8

Ph: (905)-623-5831  
E: [communications@vac.ca](mailto:communications@vac.ca)  
Visit: [www.vac.ca](http://www.vac.ca)

Follow us on social media: [f visualartscentre.clarington](https://www.facebook.com/visualartscentre.clarington) [i visualartscentre](https://www.instagram.com/visualartscentre) [t c\\_vac](https://twitter.com/c_vac)

© The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington, 2019, in collaboration with the individual contributors. Essay by Sandy Saad. Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid. Catalogue data available from Library and Archives Canada. ISBN: 978-1-926772-33-2. Designed by The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington.

Publication to accompany *BOOP Museum* by Sameer Farooq at The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington, May 5- July 5 2019. The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington is supported by its Members, Donors, the Municipality of Clarington, the Ontario Arts Council, the Ontario Trillium Foundation, and the Ontario Arts Foundation.

**Clarington**



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL  
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO  
an Ontario government agency  
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

Ontario  
Trillium  
Foundation



Fondation  
Trillium  
de l'Ontario

ONTARIO ARTS  
FOUNDATION  
f fondation  
DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO

An agency of the Government of Ontario  
Un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario