

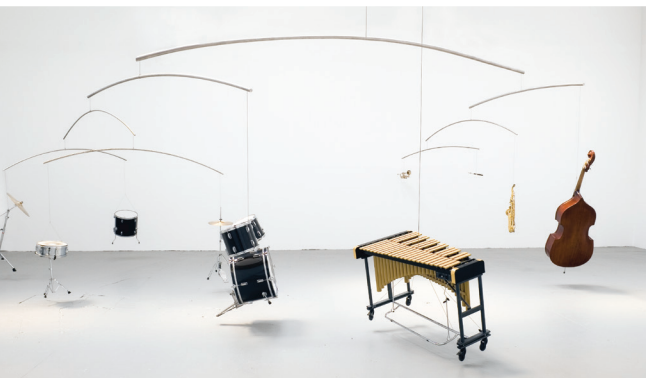
PETER COFFIN

Play is not ordinary life.... [This] does not by any means prevent it from proceeding with seriousness, with an absorption and a devotion. The contrast between play and seriousness is always fluid.

— Peter Coffin, paraphrasing Johan Huizinga

HERE & THERE

J U N E 2 9 — O C T O B E R 6, 2 0 1 3



Throughout his career, Peter Coffin (b. Berkeley, California, 1972; lives and works in New York) has created an unpredictable and eclectic array of works, including many that express a sense of joy and, sometimes, humor.

The artist, whose practice includes photography, assemblage, performance, time-based media, installations, sound art, and sculpture in many forms, often draws inspiration from odd facts or obscure theories. The spirit of his approach brings to mind the writings of philosopher Henri Bergson, who was fascinated by the meaning of laughter and a life force he termed *élan vital*.

The artist's projects have ranged from a hovering, colorful LED UFO that flew over Gdańsk, Poland, and later, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to a mobile comprised of actual musical instruments and an installation inspired by the habits of the male Bowerbird, which builds a nest of blue objects to attract a mate. For the latter, he assembled a huge collection of locally scavenged blue objects, including a vintage Toyota Land Cruiser, and invited visitors to add their own blue items and perch within the giant human nest. A sense of absurdity and the use of found, familiar, or fabricated sources

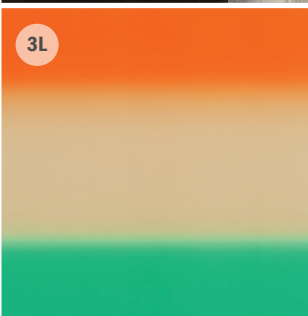
popularized by the Surrealists recur in Coffin's work. In place of their socio-political commentaries, his works point toward wry, cosmic humor. The artist flirts with outrageousness through shifts in scale, surprising connections or contexts, and sly superimpositions. His take on serious fun challenges viewers to question, but also to smile.

Instead of a single style, Coffin has developed an uninhibited approach that takes many forms. To emphasize the artist's chameleon-like virtuosity, the works in the exhibition, rather than being concentrated within one exhibition area, are installed in spaces around the Museum. Nature, science, pseudo-science, psychological displacement, urban happenstance, and "what if" brainstormers are among the myriad departure points for his pieces, but what is constant is the undercurrent of his unique, exuberant subversiveness.

Kelly Gordon, Associate Curator

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Top left: *Untitled (UFO)*, 2008–9, airborne construction with LED lights; **Middle left:** *Untitled (Free Jazz Mobile)*, 2007, musical instruments, steel; **Bottom left:** *Untitled*, 2009, mixed media, Aspen Museum of Art installation documentation. All images courtesy of the artist. **Opposite:** Details of works in the exhibition (see hirshhorn.si.edu for complete checklist); **Back cover:** *Untitled (Dog)*, 2012, mixed media. Courtesy of the artist and the Mugar Collection.



Key to visual clues for PETER COFFIN: HERE & THERE

Plaza Level (PL): *Untitled (Spiral Staircase)*, 2007, powder-coated aluminum: The spiral is an essential form in Sacred Geometry, expressed in nature, art, and science, and associated with essences that connect cosmology, math, and music. The torus is a 3D spiral form on a circular axis that physicists hypothesize as an expression of the “shape” of the expanding universe and an emblem of the infinite.

Lower Level (LL): *Untitled (Dog)*, 2012, mixed media: Nobody knows what it's like...behind the blue eyes of a beast taller than “Zeus,” who, according to internet sources, at 44 inches is the world's largest canine. This anonymous but unforgettable pooch is slightly floating, thinking, on guard—but for whom or against what? • *Untitled (Smithsonian Hirshhorn Museum)*, 2013, animated projection on paintings from the Hirshhorn collection: Where does the brain “ping” when looking at art? Sound, music, and superimpositions “animate” works in the collection, encouraging new ways to consider them. • *Untitled (Rainbow)*, 2007, collage, 31 color photographs: Somewhere over—and over and around—these naturally occurring arcs connect?

3rd Level (3L): *Untitled (Designs for Colby Poster Company)*, 2007, 80 lithographs, letterpress ink on coated card stock: Adapted Colby Poster Company prints omit the traditional black-letter promotional texts heralding concerts, county fairs, and the like. Rothko-esque auras glow revealing in a different type of *upcoming event*...? • *Untitled (One Minute Whale Breach)*, 2005, manipulated found video, loop: The small-screen view of a spectacular, if common sea-faring natural phenomenon gets figuratively turned on its head.

www.hirshhorn.si.edu: *Untitled*, 2012, image from C-print: It's fruit. It's a frame. It's supersaturated photography. But is its essence empty or bountiful? “real” or hyper-real?



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Peter Coffin: Here & There
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