

Welcome to Arc Studios News! This newsletter features events and activities of artists, nonprofit professionals and micro business owners that are part of the creative community at Arc Studios & Gallery 1246 Folsom Street San Francisco.



Arc Studios News June 2017

This month Arc Studio News features artist Joshua Coffy who works out of studio #206.

A Conversation with Joshua Coffy

by Sherri Cornett

The whimsical animals and nature scenes in Joshua Coffy's acrylic, prints and mixed media works have their roots in the small rural township of Tuscarawas, Ohio, where he and his two brothers could be found, almost daily, fishing, hunting, hiking and playing. Add in a captivation with Georgia O'Keefe's skull paintings, engendered from a move to New Mexico when he was thirteen and which inspired him to first take up painting, a fascination with scientific illustration and design, and his extensive photo reference library and we see the building blocks of his intriguing and detailed work.



SC: Joshua, let's start with something most viewers want to know from artists. What motivates you and how would you describe your art-making process, from inspiration to finished piece?

JC: It feels rare when the picture on my panel is exactly what I see in my head. I love chasing that. I am always striving to get better. I follow artists that work the hardest and are always challenging themselves.

I sketch less than most artists I know and am trying to change that. [laughter] Most of the time my paintings start with a phrase I scribble in my sketchbook, which often become the titles to those paintings. I let the phrase sit for a while and build stories around it. Once I settle on the idea, I look through my photo reference library, piece together something in photoshop and then start painting. Sometimes the idea phase takes way longer than the painting. Mostly, I am an acrylic painter. I also use a mixed media technique I call "paper inclusion", where I paste or collage various papers into my paintings and then paint the subject on top of that inclusion.

SC: Would you tell me about those subjects?

JC: I use animals to illustrate metaphors in my life. With animals, people are free to add in their own story. If I used human models, the connotations would change.

Last year, I staged a show based on predator/prey relationships to illustrate that this is not good vs. evil, but simply survival. Right now I am working on a series for the *Myths and Legends* show with another Arc artist Diane Hoffman at Secession Art and Design, 3235 Mission Street., which runs from May 30th -July 30th

SC: What would you like viewers to take away from experiencing your art?

JC: I like it when my subjects remind viewers of someone they know and when they make up their own stories and apply them to my illustrations. But, it is a thrill when I can clearly communicate the story I was trying to tell.

SC: How do you recharge your creativity?

JC: Lots of naps. [laughter] Walking in the woods, visits to the zoo, playing the ukulele and with my son. For my birthday, my wife and son bought me a membership to MOMA. It's AWESOME! And I also rather enjoy going to Burning Man.

SC: Would you tell me about a particularly meaningful or influential response to your art?

JC: In 2012, I created *The Gift Prolific* (www.thegiftprolific.com). As a response to a crippling depression, I gave a gift to someone every day for a year. Then I made a small painting about each day's gift. At the end of the year, I staged the exhibit at Burning Man. Then, I gave all the paintings away as gifts. People connected with me in so many ways through this project. Some were looking for a way to beat their own depression. Some knew they wanted more of a daily meditation in their lives. Some became life-long friends.

SC: It sounds like the gift giving went both ways! Are there other ways you are involved in the art community?

JC: I am the Co-Chairman of the Open Studios Committee of Artspan and love helping artists by giving workshops about art business and, through the Open Studios Mentor Team, assisting artists new to Open Studios get ready for their first participation. Artspan is a fantastic organization with year-round resources for San Francisco artists.

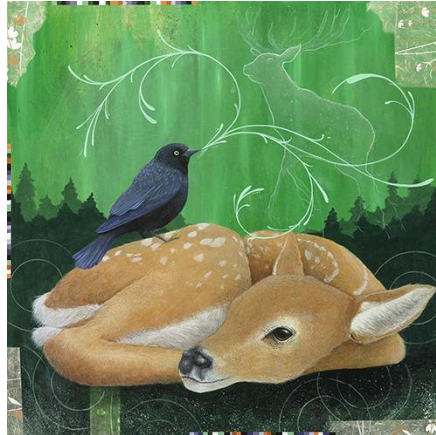
SC: And then there is the community of artist studios at Arc. What do you like about having a studio there?

JC: I have never been so in love with a workspace. I love splitting my studio with one of my favorite artists, Amy Ahlstrom. She works really hard and that keeps me on my toes. [laughter] Everyone here is a complete bad ass at what they do. It is awesome and I feel very welcomed. I can't wait until Fall Open Studios. It should be a blast.

SC: Any last words?

I feel fortunate that I get to do this for a living. Art and "dadding." [laughter] As a father, I am learning so much stuff weekly from my son. He has brought out a tenderness and playfulness in me, moving my art to a lighter place than in the past. Art is filled with ups and downs. I work harder than I ever did for any "job", but I wouldn't trade it for anything.

Joshua Coffy currently lives near Glen Park with his wife and seven-year old son. Click [here](#) to view a documentary video about his "Bird Song" mural he painted at Van Ness and Market in San Francisco. Joshua's website is www.undersong.com. Sherri Cornett is a curator, consultant and artist living in Billings, Montana. www.sherricornett.com



Joshua Coffy, *Let Me Tell Your Story*