



## The Horticultural Society of New York

148 West 37th Street, 13<sup>th</sup> Floor, New York, NY 10018

Tel: (212) 757-0915 • Fax: (212) 246-1207

[www.hsny.org](http://www.hsny.org)

For Immediate Release:

PETER COFFIN

TREE PANTS

July 11 – September 7, 2007

Opening Reception: Wednesday, July 11 from 6 to 9pm

**The Horticultural Society of New York** is pleased to debut new photographs and a sculpture by contemporary artist **Peter Coffin**, as part of its continuing exhibition program, featuring art that investigates botanics and horticulture. On view will be nine photographs documenting the site-specific sculptural installation *Tree Pants*, produced by the artist at Wanas Sculpture Park in Malmo, Sweden. The photographs feature custom pants made for trees in collaboration with Levi Strauss & Co. and will be shown alongside a sculpture riffing on the same idea: a dried sunflower also donning a unique pair of pants.

The works on view portray the *Tree Pants* through the seasons from bucolic summer, through a barren winter into spring. What initially seems like a cheeky gesture on the part of the artist eventually expands into the field of metanarrative and critical satire. What's more, Linnaeus, the godfather of taxonomic horticulture, who would turn 300 this year, once occupied the land neighboring Wanas Sculpture Park – contextualizing Coffin's works into the lineage of invention, persuasion and manipulation.

The following texts are taken from the artist's notes:

"The tree in this work looks as though it's 'wearing' pants. This is the obvious literal interpretation. The naked tree is anthropomorphized – the same way we project human personality and character on things in the world as a way to relate to them. In the example of this work, that tendency is exaggerated, highlighting the absurdity or nonsense of something that seems to make sense in an obvious way even if it's not rational. It might remind us that our relationship to nature is unnatural to begin with and that this is reflected in our view of the world ...we like to anthropomorphize animals and even inanimate objects for example – what a strange tendency. Take the 'pet-rock' for example – in this way we relate to nature as the object in which we are the sole subjective players – as though nature only makes sense the way it relates to us. It reminds us that our perspective is anthropocentric.

"The metaphor represented by the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is relevant. Masaccio's *The Banishment from the Garden of Eden* is the famous image of Adam and Eve covering themselves as they are being expelled from Eden. They're ashamed of being naked in the Garden. The genesis story is itself pretty silly, but interesting to think about with respect to how we relate to nature and understand ourselves within it. Adam and Eve were probably much more comfortable in Eden before they started eating psychedelic mushrooms and playing with language. And look what it's done to them. Humans are strange and we have strange ways of relating to the natural world. We believe that we have some kind of superiority over nature and are somehow apart from it when we classify all things natural and even project our perspective onto it. ...I sometimes think about how strange it is that dogs we live with, under our influence, have become strangely distant from their wolf ancestors, even developing human-like personalities. It's as though Adam and Eve needed to take the wolf and some potted plants with them into their caves so they wouldn't feel so guilty for having been expelled from Eden.

"*Tree Pants* makes fun of the disconnected, stupid logic with which humans apply their sense to the world. A self-reflexive expression of stupidity might allow us to understand ourselves more objectively and exercising stupidity in this way is significant. I'd even argue that it's political. In the context of art it certainly is. The tired rationale of tradition for tradition's sake coupled with commerce still manages to limit art's expansion. If stupidity is an expression of energy, it can be self-reflexive and challenging, the way it is in the Dada tradition or the fool's wisdom imparted on the King. Sol LeWitt said that, "Irrational thoughts should be followed absolutely and logically" and that "Irrational judgments lead to new experience."

"...William Allen's 'Shadow Repair for the Western Man' (1970) is a painting of a pair of jeans standing on top of a mountain as though the invisible subject has just had an out-of-body experience and that the jeans are simply all that's left materially. It was an important work for California Funk artists in the early 70's and an inspiration to this piece."

Accompanying the exhibition, the gallery's display cases will feature out-takes from Peter Coffin's current, as yet untitled plant book. The Horticultural Society of New York, The Precipice Alliance and 2 x 4 design studio are collaborating to produce the project: an illustrated book edited by Coffin containing reproductions of contemporary photography, drawing, painting, sculpture and collage that relate to the life of plants. The book is slated for release in spring 2008, and will be launched with simultaneous exhibitions at both The Horticultural Society of New York and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York, summer 2008.

Born in Berkeley, California and currently working in Brooklyn, Peter Coffin exhibits widely in Europe and the United States. His works have appeared and been reviewed in numerous publications such as Artforum, Frieze, Art Review, Contemporary, Modern Painters, Flash Art and the New York Times. Coffin has recently exhibited works at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, Tate Modern, London, Le Confort Moderne Museum, Poitiers and PS1/MoMA, New York. This will be the artist's first solo exhibition at The Horticultural Society of New York.

The works on view for this exhibition at The Horticultural Society of New York appear courtesy of Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York. Peter Coffin is also represented by Galleria Fonti, Naples, Herald Street, London, and Emmanuel Perrotin, Paris. The photographs on view appear courtesy of the Wanas Foundation.

The mission of The Horticultural Society of New York is to enhance our City's environmental and cultural life by providing unique educational, vocational, and therapeutic outreach programs, library resources and art exhibitions.

The Gallery at The Horticultural Society of New York is open Monday – Friday from 11 am – 6 pm.

For further information, please contact Curator Jodie Vicenta Jacobson at [jjacobson@hsny.org](mailto:jjacobson@hsny.org) or 212.757.0915 x113.