

## [Washington Post Review](#)

May 15, 2014 by [Phillip Adams](#) | [Comments Off](#)



Silent Swing, installation, charcoal directly on the wall, swing, 17' x 11' 201

## Art review: 'Spring Solos' at the Arlington Arts Center

By [Michael O'Sullivan](#), Thursday, May 15

The best fiction, it has been said, tells the truth by lying. Writers, filmmakers, even visual artists make stuff up to get at verities that transcend their invented circumstances.

This paradox lies at the heart of "[Spring Solos 2014](#)," the new show — or, rather, shows — on view at the [Arlington Arts Center](#). Though unrelated thematically, conceptually or in terms of medium, the seven mini-exhibitions cluster, inadvertently, around a single question: Do we want to be deceived?

If the answer is yes, as it seems to be, a better question might be: Why?

The answers depend on how the question is framed.

Deception is front and center the minute you walk in the art center's door. Along one wall of the atrium is a large trompe-l'oeil mural by Phillip Adams. Rendered in charcoal and graphite, the drawing depicts, in hyper-realist detail, the vertiginous view of a mountain range as seen from the edge of a snow-covered slope. Making it even more dizzyingly disorienting is the red plastic swing hanging from the ceiling, just in front of the mural.

Facing Adams's immersive installation, it feels as if you might slip and fall into it. Reminding you that it's a picture, not a portal to another world, is the room's bright red fire alarm, which happens to be mounted smack in the middle of the drawing.

Adams, who often works as an outdoor muralist specializing in lifelike landscapes, practices a form of postmodern illusionism. His pictures fool the eye even as they call attention to their trickery. His visual punch line — that awkward, unavoidable fire alarm — both makes and unmakes the picture.

For Adams, then, the purpose of deception is visceral. His drawing is a thrill ride, cut short by a belly laugh.

Salvatore Pirrone's aim is somewhat different. For his solo, the sculptor has cast multiples of everyday objects — dozens of cell phones, light bulbs, pencils and tennis balls — in pastel-colored concrete and plaster. Unlike Adams's work, these are not realistic; they resemble oversize Pez candies as much as the objects they represent. Like Adams, though, Pirrone highlights his own artifice. His sculptures, although familiar in form, appear strange, even unnerving.

Several of the artists in the show betray a fascination with the uncanny.

That word — which can suggest both "weird" and "weirdly alike" — encapsulates the exhibition's central paradox. If the art in "Spring Solos" is a mirror held up to the real world, it's a mirror from the funhouse.

Take Benjamin Andrew. His installation in the basement presents an alternate history of Matthew Fontaine Maury, the man whose name once graced the former schoolhouse in which the AAC is located. Andrew's art — which includes doctored photos, fake documents, machines and specimen jars — imagines Maury (1806-1873) as a time traveler who collaborated with scientists from the 23rd century. One artifact purports to be a time machine. "Powered by nostalgia," as the label declares, it's actually a plug-in appliance timer you can buy at Home Depot, modified with additional wires and hardware.

It seems, at first glance, that Andrew isn't trying terribly hard to fool anyone. But maybe he's trying too hard. Unlike Adams and Pirrone, his art comes across as less subversive than silly.

Favorites in "Spring Solos" include the work of Kyle J. Bauer and Alex Arzt. Bauer, a sculptor working mainly in ceramic and wood, creates brightly colored constructions that resemble pool toys. Inspired by nautical equipment, his enigmatic forms evoke such devices as buoys, floats and other navigational aides. But rather than guiding, they're meant to confound and disorient. As a metaphor for being at sea — in both senses of the term — they're quite effective.

As a photographer, Arzt would seem to be the artist most interested in recorded "truth." Yet his contribution here is a display of surreal photographs — prints made by placing an object directly on photographic paper and exposing it to light. In this case, the objects are mushrooms that, over the course of hours or days, disintegrate and release spores or insect larvae. The resulting patterns — beautiful and unpredictable — don't look like mushrooms, nor are they supposed to.

According to Arzt's statement — which could well speak for most of the artists in this show — he's less interested in making a slavish facsimile of an experience than in leaving a trace of something invisible, but no less true.

#### **The story behind the work**

Elizabeth Kauffman's contribution to "Spring Solos" includes such interactive objects as a View-Master slide viewer containing a depiction of a UFO. But the core of her work here consists of a series of six watercolor paintings, each of which contains a text fragment suggesting that the images are renderings of paranormal phenomena through history. (You can research the back stories of several of her paintings, including "November 15, 1667 in Mittelfischach, Germany" at [www.thinkaboutitdocs.com](http://www.thinkaboutitdocs.com), a Web site devoted to "alternative views and truths on aliens, UFOs and the hidden agendas associated with them.")

Kauffman's titles may be presented as a matter of fact, but her paintings aren't exactly deadpan. Full of drama, they come across as midway between credulous and skeptical. As documentary, they may be hard to believe, but as art, they're hard to dismiss.