



Untitled #735 (Monks II), 1992



Untitled #1040
(One Leg Hanging,
Bridal Series), 2001



Untitled #885
(Saucer Baby), 1997

Coyne's photography captures fleeting moments of life in transition. When Coyne takes her photographs, both she and her subjects are in motion, leading to a feeling of transitory presence. This sense of change and becoming is embodied by works like **Untitled #885 (Saucer Baby)**, 1997, an image of a child in an inner tube that is part alien, part playful exuberance. The **Bridal Series** depicts imperfectly focused pleats and folds of wedding dresses that at once seem to be embodied and empty. A similar sense of time and movement is evident in **Untitled #735 (Monks II)**, 1992, a huddled mass of robed Japanese monks running through the forest. This blurry apparition seems to suggest both body and ghost, humanity and divinity.

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Petah Coyne Everything That Rises Must Converge

This exhibition borrows its title from a short story written in 1963 by Flannery O'Connor (1925–1964). O'Connor's writing, like the sculpture of Petah Coyne, takes dark turns while simultaneously referencing themes of human weakness, morality and redemption.

The works in this largest retrospective of the artist's work to date range from her earlier and more abstract sculptures using industrial materials to newer works made of delicate wax. All of Coyne's works take inspiration from personal stories, film, literature and political events. Coyne takes these sources and applies a Baroque sense of decadent refinement, imbuing her work with a magical quality to evoke intensely personal associations.

Together these diverse yet intimately connected periods of Coyne's practice make evident an evolution, which highlights the artist's own blend of symbolism alongside an innovative use of materials including black sand, car parts, wax, satin ribbons, trees, silk flowers, and taxidermy.

Coyne's works both rise and converge at MASS MoCA, making palpable the inherent tensions between vulnerability and aggression, innocence and seduction, beauty and decadence, and, ultimately, life and death.

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Untitled #670
(Black Heart), 1990



Untitled #638
(Whirlwind), 1989



Untitled #720
(Eguchi's Ghost), 1992/2007



Untitled #1234 (Tom's Twin), 2007-2008

In the late 1980s Coyne discovered “black sand,” a by-product of pig iron casting. **Untitled #670 (Black Heart)**, 1990, references the vulnerability and awkwardness of life that Coyne experienced while viewing open-heart surgery. *Black Heart* hangs from the ceiling as an amorphous lump, referencing the anatomical rather than anthropomorphic organ. The black sand surface then glints, adding a sense of animation. **Untitled #638 (Whirlwind)**, 1989, has the strength of a storm with its funnel-like form that looks like a tornado in reverse. Swirling around this central form is a series of smaller teardrop shapes and wire. These circling elements are like small galaxies or clouds orbiting the central core of the work.

Untitled #720 (Eguchi's Ghost), 1992/2007, refers to the protagonist of Japanese author Yasunari Kawabata's “House of the Sleeping Beauties” (1961). In this story Eguchi goes to the house of sleeping beauties, where men nearing death can sleep the night next to young unconscious women. The story makes palpable the loneliness of beauty and the link between desire and death. Coyne's work imagines Eguchi as a silver ghost with a massive cape and a dark void in place of a face. The material of the work comes as the biggest surprise—what appears at first to be hair or fiber is a shredded aluminum airstream trailer—a startling transformation from industrial to organic.

In, **Untitled #1234 (Tom's Twin)**, 2007-2008, the central element of the work takes the form of a large mound of flowers on the floor recalling a burial. In all of Coyne's works the use of flowers and wax cannot help but reference the decay associated with death and funerary practices. This subtext is even more palpable here, as hidden amidst the folds of the sculpture is a small crib. In fact, when looking at the work, the floor mound suggests the figure of a woman lying on her side. Contained within that gesture, within the fold, is a sense of sadness and loss.



Untitled #1205 (Virgil), 1997-2008



Untitled #1180 (Beatrice), 2003-2008



Untitled #1093 (Buddha Boy), 2001-2003



Untitled #1336 (Scalapino Nu Shu), 2009-2010

In 1997 Coyne began a series inspired by Dante's *The Divine Comedy* (1308-21). The first of Dante's characters to appear is **Untitled #1205 (Virgil)**, 1997-2008, based on the Roman poet and Dante's guide through *The Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. *The Inferno* begins by referencing the dark woods. Coyne's Virgil actually becomes the woods: deep black with hints of dark reds and purples appear before viewers like a tangled tree. Tucked within the mass are a taxidermy bobcat and game bird, the first referencing Virgil and the second, Dante. Also in this series is **Untitled #1180 (Beatrice)**, 2003-2008, which radiates energy, color and motion. Beatrice Portinari was Dante's muse who inspired his *La Vita Nuova* (1295) and served as his guide through *Paradiso*.

Untitled #1093 (Buddha Boy), 2001-2003, looks like a convergence of religious statuary and a candle-strewn altarpiece. This small sculpture requires viewers to kneel down in order to see the female face that emerges from the dripping white wax, pearls and flowers. Coyne made this work just after September 11, 2001. Seeing people flee the twin towers covered in white ash recalled, for Coyne, the dance form that was a direct result of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. However, Coyne was also amazed at the camaraderie of New York City in the aftermath of this crisis and the hundreds of personal shrines that covered its streets.

In **Untitled #1336 (Scalapino Nu Shu)**, 2009-2010, an apple tree covered in black sand is populated with taxidermy pheasants and peacocks. Peacocks were important to Flannery O'Connor, who wrote about and raised them, and saw them as symbols of renewal and the “eyes” of the Catholic Church. The peacocks in Coyne's tree are brilliant, but rather than preening they seem strangely frozen in time, anticipating. This sense of waiting is embodied in Nu Shu, a centuries-old Chinese writing technique solely for women and used to secretly express loneliness and fear. Knowing this back story gives Coyne's peacocks something to anticipate—a story told in secret writing to an intimate friend. The title of the work references Coyne's own friendship with poet Leslie Scalapino.