

ART BREAKER

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VISUAL ARTS

A road trip for art lovers — Wayne White in Fort Myers

Visit a giant puppet tribute to Robert Rauschenberg and solo exhibition by Wayne White.

Posted By **DANNY OLDA** on Thu, Sep 24, 2015 at 1:49 PM



Seven years after his passing, Robert Rauschenberg once more walked through the Fort Myers Gallery named after him. Kind of. During the opening of his latest exhibition at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery, *Wayne White: Here Comes Mr. Know-it-All*, artist Wayne White paid tribute to the Neo-Dada giant with a performance that dramatically reenacted Rauschenberg at work in the studio via giant puppet.

Robert Rauschenberg and Wayne White are, of course, separated by more than just time. A contemporary art historical heavy-weight and critical favorite, Rauschenberg produced a large and repeatedly revolutionary body of work. His career was as productive as it was long. Wayne White, on the other hand, has garnered considerable attention on the pop side of culture for work such as his set and puppet design on the cult television show Pee-Wee's Playhouse and his art direction in the Smashing Pumpkins music video, "**Tonight, Tonight.**"

Still, White has increasingly seen art world cred for his meticulously reworked thrift store paintings and prints. Gaudily framed lithographs of bucolic landscapes are overlaid with pithy, often irreverent phrases painted in acrylic and set carefully into the perspective of the scene.

The two artists, though, have Captiva Island in common. Rauschenberg's home until his death in 2008, the island was also the setting for a 2013 residency of White's. Paintings produced during that residency hang on the exhibition's rear wall. Abstract and soft, as if slipping in and out of water, the influence of the sub-tropical surroundings are easily spotted.

At the opening reception, Rauschenberg was most explicitly summoned in Bob, a puppet sculpture used in a performance during a crowded opening reception boasting more than 400 visitors. Largely created from cardboard over the course of two weeks, White and two volunteers paraded the enormous Rauschenberg puppet behind a loud fanfare of drums and a violin. The puppet lumbered up to a white wall and painted on it in large red swaths, soon joined by four painting arms that burst through the rear of the wall scribbling in every direction. After the painting was deemed finished, the puppet Bob and the band paraded out of the gallery, the way they had come.



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The puppet bore a vague resemblance Robert Rauschenberg, but its style and performance were singularly White's. Nevertheless, some credit is due to Rauschenberg — the bulk of a decade after his death, his work influences a group of artists diverse enough to include Wayne White.

The exhibition *Wayne White: Here Comes Mr. Know-it-All* still can be seen and worth a two-hour road trip. It features a collection of White's popular word paintings as well as a selection of the aforementioned work created during his time in the Rauschenberg Foundation residency program.

Show runs through Nov. 7 at Florida SouthWestern State College, 8099 College Parkway S.W., Fort Myers. **RauschenbergGallery.com**.