

ARTS COMMENTARY

(Put your hand inside) the puppet head



Cardboard boxes, balls of twine, sticks of wood — not necessarily what immediately comes to mind when you think of art supplies.

But in Wayne White's skillful hands and funhouse imagination, they're transformed into something magical.

The Bob Rauschenberg Gallery at Florida SouthWestern State College commissioned Mr. White to make a puppet of the late artist/gallery name-sake in conjunction with the season's opening exhibit: "Wayne WHITE: Here Comes Mr. Know It All."

With the assistance of some FSU art students and alumni, Mr. White created the Bob puppet in five days. Preceded by two drummers and a fiddler, it made its grand entrance during the opening reception at the gallery on the Fort Myers campus.

The gigantic puppet, whose oversized head practically grazed the gallery's ceiling and needed two assistants (one for each long arm), walked to a wall as white as a canvas, dipping his brush in paint so red it practically screamed.

One by one, in perfect choreography, white arms burst through the wall and joined the Bob puppet in painting.

Attendees cheered.

The Bob puppet turned, opened his chest and showed us his heart.

We suspect Mr. Rauschenberg, with his strong love of play and own history of using cardboard and found objects in his art, would have loved this.

The puppet is on exhibit through Nov. 7, along with Mr. White's sly and hilarious word paintings. It may even make an appearance in the 2016 Edison Festival of Light parade.

Florida Weekly photographer Vandy Major took daily photographs of the puppet's progress. Here are her behind-the-scenes images of the Bob puppet being created. ■



The beginning of Bob's head.

VANDY MAJOR / FLORIDA WEEKLY



The head attached to the frame/backpack.



The finished head.



Wayne White gives Bob's head its curls.



The torso takes shape.