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Artist Presents Rauschenberg Tribute At FSW



Poster for the Wayne White documentary
Beauty Is Embarrassing

photos by Jeff Lysiak

by Jeff Lysiak

Internationally-acclaimed artist Wayne White is currently exhibiting a one-man exhibition of watercolor paintings, drawings and collages at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery, located on the campus of Florida SouthWestern State College, on display through November 7.

The site-specific installation, Wayne White: Here Comes Mr. Know-It-All, opened last week with a special reception which featured a 14-foot tall puppet sculpture of the late, great Captiva Island artist Robert Rauschenberg.

"This will be the first puppet I've made in Florida that will actually make a painting and a sculpture," White said last week, days before the opening



Artist and puppeteer Wayne White stands next to what will become a 14-foot representation of the late, great artist Robert Rauschenberg for a performance held last week at Florida SouthWestern State College

of the exhibit. "I grew up a big fan of Rauschenberg the artist. In fact, the first modern art exhibition I ever went to was back in 1977 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City which featured his work. It made a huge impression on me."

Considered a modern day Renaissance man, given his vast variety of talents – fine artist, cartoonist, illustrator, puppeteer, writer as well as production and set designer – White won three Emmy Awards for his set designs and puppeteering on the popular children's TV program *Pee-Wee's Playhouse*. He also garnered an MTV Video Music Award in 1996 for Best Art Direction for his work on *The Smashing Pumpkins' video Tonight*,



Wayne White creates another element of the Rauschenberg puppet sculpture

Tonight and a 1987 Billboard Magazine award for Best Art Direction for his work on Peter Gabriel's landmark music video *Big Time*.

In 2013, White – along with his writer/cartoonist wife, Mimi Pond – spent a month living at Rauschenberg's Captiva estate, an experience which greatly influenced and inspired the artist.

"During my residency (with the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation), I reacted to the landscape and atmosphere of the islands," said White. "There is so much beauty here in Florida, and I was inspired by the colors of the water, which was reflected in my work done there... I think I completed 40 paintings during that month. I learned a lot about the artist (Rauschenberg) just being there, too."

Since that time, White has spent much of his time traveling to art museums and galleries across the country, participating in art installations and special events – including parades, which have featured his larger-than-life iconic puppets – in cities including Los Angeles and Laguna Beach, California; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Shreveport, Louisiana; Fort Lauderdale; and Key West, Florida.

"I created a puppet of Napoleon Bonaparte Broward, the former governor of Florida, which is now on display at the Fort Lauderdale/Hollywood International Airport," noted White, who added with a smirk, "It's featured near the baggage



One of Wayne White's untitled watercolor, acrylic and colored pencil on paper creations from his 2013 residency on Captiva claim."

While constructing the puppet he called "Cubist Robert Rauschenberg," White said that he was very impressed with the amount of space available at FSW's Bob Rauschenberg Gallery. "This is one of the nicest spaces I've shown in," he added. "It's a real honor to be in the proximity of his legacy... he's one of the true giants of the art world."

A humble giant himself, White was the subject of a feature-length documentary, *Beauty Is Embarrassing*, a 2011 film which critic Leonard Maltin called, "one of the most pleasurable moviegoing experiences I've had this year." Asked where the title of the movie was inspired by, White explained that it came from a title of one of his paintings.

"People have a hard time accepting beauty," he elaborated. "Even though we agree that something on the surface may be beautiful, deep down it may be difficult to accept. That's especially true in our culture, when we're always told that we shouldn't waste our time with 'pretty' things."

Wayne White: Here Comes Mr. Know-It-All will be on display at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery, located on the campus of Florida SouthWestern State College, 8099 College Parkway in Fort Myers. Gallery hours are Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Saturday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. (closed Sundays and holidays). For more information, call 489-9313 or visit www.RauschenbergGallery.com.

"Robert Rauschenberg was one of the first sort of abstract artists that I really connected with," added White. "I want my art to communicate with people... plus I do like them to feel entertained." ✨