

# sculpture

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**FORT MYERS, FLORIDA**

**Wayne White**

Bob Rauschenberg Gallery, Florida  
Southwestern State College

Wayne White's recent exhibition opened with a puppet performance by the artist that paid homage to the gallery's namesake. Best known for his Emmy Award-winning sets and puppets for "Pee-Wee's Playhouse," White has had a foot in the art world since the beginning of his career. Here, he brought the playful gestures of a comedian and prankster into the gallery, transforming it into an immersive space.

Viewers were greeted by a logo painted on the wall outside the space—the Florida Southwestern college mascot morphed into White's image. The subversive attitude continued inside, where enlarged abstract "doodles" covered the walls from floor to ceiling. These became the backdrop for White's word-art paintings, which in turn became the environment for the *Big Bob* puppet sculpture and *Big Bob's* "performance painting."

The word-art paintings are comedic puzzles that White creates by painting dramatic phrases on second-hand, framed prints. Remin-



Wayne White, installation view of "Here Comes Mr. Know-It-All," 2015.

iscent of the Hollywood sign, these works function as imagined sculptures set in landscapes and still-lives. The paintings were accompanied by a series of drawings and collages that White made while in residence at Rauschenberg's compound on nearby Captiva Island. The drawings reflect on regional concerns through titles like *Ding Darling* (local environmentalist and political cartoonist).

*Big Bob*, a 15-foot-tall puppet, dominated the exhibition, sitting stationary in front of a wall, surrounded

by mounds of cardboard boxes. Made of painted cardboard affixed to a wearable structure, this Cubist-style portrait of Robert Rauschenberg supports a group of prodding demons on his shoulders and back. During the opening, White donned *Big Bob* and, with the help of two other puppeteers (one for each arm), dramatically entered the gallery. Preceded by a parade of live drummers and a violinist, the massive puppet ducked through the doorway with arms outstretched. The puppeteers guided the arms in dramatic gestures, pushing the crowd back as *Big Bob* made his way to a freestanding wall. There, White/*Big Bob* continued the performance by dipping a giant brush into buckets of paint. As he made his initial marks, four human arms erupted from the wall, expanding on his abstract gestures. This animation of inanimate objects offered surprise and the joy of play, reminiscent of Alexander Calder and his circus.

After the performance, the musicians led White/*Big Bob* out of the gallery. The next day what remained was the static sculpture of *Big Bob* next to his creation. The show emphasized the importance of context; experiencing the work in the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery and seeing it performed rather than static changed the meaning entirely. White occupying *Big Bob* placed those demons not only on Bob's shoulders but also on his own.

—John Loscuito



Wayne White, installation view of "Here Comes Mr. Know-It-All," 2015.