

## **‘Edison Impluvium’ cannot be experienced vicariously; the proof is in the seeing**

**By TOM HALL**  
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*Keith Edmier: Edison Impluvium* opened Saturday night inside the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery which, quite frankly, may never be the same again. You see, Edmier creates mindboggling sculptural environments and the site-specific realm he created for this exhibition recreates the interior of the concrete swimming pool that Thomas Edison installed at his winter residence right here in Fort Myers in 1910. So when viewers entered the gallery space Saturday night through what appears to be



a jagged round hole in a dull gray stucco wall, they found themselves at the bottom of the Edison pool surveying smooth Portland cement walls, metal ladders and a flight of concrete steps. They also discovered to their astonishment and, perhaps, utter horror, that they were surrounded by host of smooth porcelain faces that appeared to follow them as they moved around the pool’s interior. At first, the crowd gawked at the ghostly countenances, recognizing something familiar, trying to place a name with the faces. Then the Rauschenberg Gallery staff and volunteers took pity and provided a roster that united each one with the person to whom it belongs or belonged.

The names read like a veritable list of the Hollywood elite and powerful. Linda Blair, Alfred Hitchcock, Michael Jackson, Clint Eastwood, Jeff Goldblum, Geena Davis, Keifer Southerland, John Candy, Chuck Connors, Michael J. Fox, Jean-Claude Van Damme, Mel Gibson, Paul Newman, Keanu Reeves, Ice Cube, John Goodman, Henry Winkler, Farrah Fawcett, Rodney Dangerfield, Leonard Nimoy, Charlie Sheen, Jeff Bridges, Grace Kelly and, yes, Kevin Bacon too. There’s even a president or two on the list, along with a likeness of the artist and his parents as well. But missing from this illustrious group is the man who inspired the sculptural environment, Thomas Alva Edison.



A homage to the inventor is only right and reasonable given that he is, after all, Fort Myers' most famous winter resident and responsible in no small measure for attracting many of the people who influenced the way in which the town grew and developed. And until legal challenges forced a change in name, Florida SouthWestern State College was known and beloved by students, faculty and townsfolk alike as Edison State College. But his famous façade won't be found within

the confines of his recreated swimming pool. Rather, the death mask that was cast in the hours following the inventor's death in 1931 is on display in a glass case outside Edmier's sculptural environment, in a place of honor, where it can be appreciated in its own time and space.

The Bob Rauschenberg Gallery has seen many impressive exhibitions over the years. Since director Jade Dellinger took the reins a little more than two years ago. There was the *Moon Museum* exhibition, *Rauschenberg: China/America Mix*, *Yoko Ono Imagine Peace*, *ELEVEN: The John Erickson Museum of Art*, *Theo Wujcik: Artist's Artist*, *Wayne White: Here Come Mr. Know-It-All* and *Dave Muller: Everything Sounds Good Right Now*. But none changed the gallery and re-configured the space so thoroughly and convincingly as *Keith Edmier: Edison Impluvium*. Edmier has assembled a thoughtful and thought-provoking exhibition, from the architectural environment he has installed in the gallery from the floor up to the casts and masks hanging on the swimming pool walls. But like most art exhibitions, the proof is in the seeing because *Edison Impluvium* cannot be experienced vicariously or inferred from mere words or even the accompanying photos. ■

