



South Florida Outings: Wayne White at Hollywood Art and Culture Center

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by Sandra Hale Schulman

HOLLYWOOD, FL—The winner of three Emmy Awards as a puppeteer and set designer on “Pee-wee’s Playhouse,” artist Wayne White used a 10-day residency at the Art and Culture Center of Hollywood to create a floor-to-ceiling giant cardboard bust, with giant arms, of the man Broward County is named for, Napoleon Bonaparte Broward.

The giant sculpture, which the Culture Center’s website refers to as a puppet, is currently on view with a number of the artist’s paintings in an exhibition that runs through August 23, 2015.

White got his start as an artist in the 1980s as a cartoonist. After taking a job turning some of his cartoons into 3D characters, he went on to become the lead puppet maker for “Pee-wee’s Playhouse” in the 1980s.

That job soon led to work creating groundbreaking music videos. One was for the Smashing Pumpkins’ song, “Tonight, Tonight”—an homage to the 1902 Georges Melies film “Trip to the Moon.” Another was for Peter Gabriel’s “Big Time,” a circus themed video that was a hit in the early days of MTV and won him more awards.

After 25 years of commercial work in the entertainment business, White felt he needed to be a full-time artist and turned his attention to making huge puppets of painted cardboard, immortalizing such celebrities as George Jones and Elvis.

For his “word paintings,” he also lettered on vintage offset lithographs, often obtained from thrift shops and other sources, such ironic words and phrases as “Uh Huh,” “Aw Cmon,” “Good Looking People Having Fun Without You” and “Dunno.”

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Artwork by Wayne White.

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“I’ve always had the do-it-yourself approach,” White, a Tennessee native, is quoted on the Culture Center website. “I grew up in this blue collar family and didn’t have a lot of toys, so you had to make your own fun. Building forts out of sticks and scrap lumber—that’s where I learned the joy of making something from nothing.”

By his own account, his early puppets were salvaged from street detritus and he basically learned on the job.



Artwork by Wayne White.

During his 10-day residency, held during the year-long observance of Broward County’s 100th anniversary, White, ever the ironist, chose deep green hues for the skin, hair and clothes of his giant bust of Broward, who had a questionable environmental record. The man the county is named for was responsible for draining and paving over a significant section of the Everglades to allow for massive development in the area.

The artist also mentored nine specially selected high school students during his residency, helping them to craft “puppets” of such Everglades and south Florida creatures as dragonflies, manatees, snails, alligators and snakes.

“I had to burn myself out on the Hollywood system to understand that what I really wanted to do was create my own art in a studio by myself,” White said in an interview with wired.com. “For my own survival, I had to step back from it all and that’s when I started painting again.”

Many of the artist’s paintings, which represented a major rebirth for White, were reproduced in the 2009 book “Maybe Now I’ll Get the Respect I So Richly Deserve” (edited by designer Todd Oldham). His life and art are the subject of the acclaimed 2012 documentary “Beauty Is Embarrassing,” directed by Neil Berkeley.

For his residency at the Art and Culture Center, White was joined by his wife, acclaimed illustrator Mimi Pond. The exhibition at the Center also showcases a selection of new works on paper that the artist created at residencies in Captiva (2013) and Key West (2015).

Meanwhile, Florida SouthWestern State College has announced an exhibition of paintings, drawings and a newly commissioned, site-specific installation, “Wayne White: Here Comes Mr. Know-It-All” at the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery from September 11 through November 7, 2015.

In addition to his newly commissioned Bob Rauschenberg puppet/installation and related opening night performance, the exhibition will also include a selection of the artist’s now iconic and humorous “Word” paintings, as well as a series of recent watercolor drawings and collages

produced during Wayne White's month-long Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Residency on Captiva Island in 2013.

The Bob Rauschenberg Gallery is at 8099 College Parkway SW, Ft. Myers, FL 33919.
www.rauschenberg.com

BASIC FACTS: "Wayne White: Art is Supposed to Hypnotize You or Something," through August 23, 2015, at the Art and Culture Center of Hollywood, 1650 Harrison Street, Hollywood, FL 33020.
www.artandculturecenter.org

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