

TAUBMAN

MUSEUM OF ART

Ralph Eaton:
Fuzzy Kudzu



Tuesday, July 22, 2014 - Saturday, January 17, 2015

Sculptor Ralph Eaton's first site-specific museum project draws from three decades of "laying bare the absurdities" of our culture's fascination with "junk." Commissioned by the Taubman Museum of Art, *Fuzzy Kudzu* (2013-14) is the result of nearly two years of labor, a monumental gesture that transforms the City of Roanoke Atrium into an otherworldly fantasyland that is both welcoming and unsettling. Named for the invasive Southern vine that enshrouds

anything in its path, it parallels for Eaton a culture being overtaken by mass-produced stuff: "We are a dysfunctional species, and my work is about finding the humor and beauty in the absurdity of it all."

Most of *Fuzzy Kudzu* is stitched from used stuffed animals that are taken apart by the artist and reassembled—along with added faux fur—into over fifty sewn "vines" and "tentacles." Ranging from twenty to thirty-four feet,

they cascade downwards from a giant cluster of organic forms poised on the balcony above. At nearly two tons, *Fuzzy Kudzu* suggests many things: a waterfall, tree trunk, classical column, or a plant hiding something from view.

Born in Roanoke, Eaton is influenced by West Coast artists of the 1990s. Back then in Los Angeles, Eaton saw thrift store cast-offs as symbols of consumerism gone awry: "Making art out of junk is my therapeutic strategy for coping with the human condition." His first stuffed animal works were teddy bears "cured" of their cuteness "by burning and other surgeries." His pieces today are more abstract, wall constructions dominated by red or blue clumps with animals' faces either missing or buried.

Fuzzy Kudzu continues Eaton's interest in creating unfamiliar experiences out of familiar objects, a passion that began while working on Rose Parade floats in Pasadena, CA. He studied at the San Francisco Art Institute, has a BFA in sculpture from Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, and assisted in fabrication projects for such artists as Jonathan Borofsky, Niki de Saint Phalle, and Robert Therrien. His work has been in dozens of group and solo exhibitions across Virginia, including the *From These Hills* show at the William King



Ralph Eaton, *Fuzzy Kudzu*, 2013-14, Repurposed stuffed animals, textiles, and Polyfill
Photo courtesy of Ashley Pannell

Museum in Abingdon, and *New Waves* at the Contemporary Art Center in Virginia Beach. Eaton is also one of the founders of Roanoke's Marginal Arts Festival, which energizes the city's downtown through outdoor art installations and collaborative performances. *Fuzzy Kudzu* is presented in conjunction with Eaton's solo exhibition *Tournament of Kudzu Parade* at Roanoke College's Olin Gallery, curated by Gallery Director Talia Logan and on view September 5 - October 5, 2014.



Ralph Eaton: Fuzzy Kudzu is a reuse/recycling partnership between the artist, the Taubman Museum of Art and Goodwill Industries® of the Valleys and is sponsored in part by the Virginia Commission for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts. This exhibition has been curated by Leah Stoddard, Adjunct Curator of Contemporary Art, Taubman Museum of Art, and will be on display in the City of Roanoke Atrium July 22, 2014 - January 17, 2015.