



# Pop goes the ruckus at BMAC

Major exhibit of work by pop pioneer Red Grooms highlights new slate of exhibits

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**BRATTLEBORO** — Growing up as the daughter of legendary proto-Pop artist Red Grooms is a wonderful thing that comes with some special perks.

"He's fun ... kind of what you imagine," said Saskia Grooms, a Williamsville resident whose many fond childhood memories include birthday party decorations her father did for her. "He did the whole birthday party based on Dr. Seuss' 'Happy Birthday To You.' ... He's definitely a person who's interested in the colorful liveliness of life."

With Saskia's help — and the good fortune that comes to those who do good work — the Brattleboro Museum & Art Center will present a major survey of Red Grooms' work.

"Red Grooms: What's the Ruckus?" opens Saturday and represents a major coup for the museum. The exhibit spans the artist's long career and features several of his signature, large-scale, interactive sculptures, including a near life-size replica of a New York City bus, including driver and passengers.

Grooms' work has not been shown in New England in 17 years and never as a solo show in Vermont. But equal measures of professionalism and the personal touch made this exhibit happen. Friendship between folks at the museum and Saskia Grooms helped. So did the museum's successful 2012 exhibit of Stephen Hannock's work. Grooms and Hannock are both represented by New York City's Marlborough Gallery. Hannock's enthusiastic endorsement helped open the doors.

"I asked for the moon, and they gave me everything I asked for," said BMAC Chief Curator Mara Williams.

"It's a very big deal for us," said BMAC Director Danny Lichtenfeld. "We sort of set our sights on a smaller show ... but they said 'Yes' to everything. It's much more extensive than anything we've ever done before." Visitors to "Red Grooms: What's the Ruckus?" will first



"Greetings from Coney Island" is one of the works featured in the major new exhibit, "Red Grooms: What's the Ruckus," which opens Saturday evening to members and Sunday to the general public at the Brattleboro Museum & Art Center.

encounter the artist's life-size "Hot Dog Vendor" outside the museum's front entrance. Upon entering the museum, they will see the 10-foot-tall "Jumbo the Elephant" and have an opportunity to board "The Bus," a 1995 mixed-media creation that has only traveled outside New York once before. Accompanying these large-scale works are nearly 30 other pieces created between 1950 and 2012, including portraits of the artists Picaso, Renoir, Morandi, Rauschenberg and Louise Nevelson, as well as Grooms' 1968 film "Tappy Toes" and several early works on loan to BMAC from a private collector, which have never been exhibited before.

One of those works is a model circus Grooms did when he was 12, a fascinating look at a creative genius just beginning to express himself. The transportation and logistics of the exhibit make it the costliest the museum has ever mounted — imagine the work it takes to ship and assemble a 22-foot by 9-foot by 9-foot bus. It's a feat of high ambition at the museum, where Williams is looking at the gallery space as never before.

"That's 5th Avenue, right there," she said pointing to a wide swath of the Wolf Kahn and Emily Mason Gallery. "I've got Coney Island, Chinatown and the Big Top."

And you thought it was just an old train station in Brattleboro. But Grooms' work does that. It's imaginative and fun, much of it is cartoonish.

"It's for the child in all of us," said Williams. "He's been categorized as Pop, but he's never been arch in commenting on popular culture. He's chronicling everyday people. ... There's no mean spirit to it, and there's certainly no scolding. It's observational, but it's not pejorative."

Because of that, the exhibit is very family-friendly.

"People will have an opportunity to see art that is accessible," said Saskia Grooms. "I love the Brattleboro Museum. They do a

great job. ... I'm so excited, and my Dad's excited."

Grooms first made a splash in the art world in 1959, when he and other young, aspiring artists staged a series of "Happenings," — wild, anarchic events blending improvisatory performance and studio art. In the decades since, Grooms has delved into an astonishing array of artistic media, including film, printmaking, sculpture, and painting. He has even created a signature medium he calls "sculpto-pictoramas," something akin to relief paintings, often with moving parts.

"He has a real need to create, and he'll try any media that he wants to," said Saskia Grooms, who recalled a recent visit to her Dad in Nashville, Tenn., where he had just bought a large bag of thrift shop clothes and had people help string them up on a laundry line to how that looked. "He definitely looks for new things."

Grooms' fascination with performance, spectacle, and the hustle-and-bustle of daily life is evident in the BMAC exhibit, which primarily explores three themes in the artist's work — the circus, New York City, and the art world.

Opening alongside the Grooms exhibit are "Dynamic Invention: American Abstract Artists at 75," a portfolio of 48 digital prints by members of the long-standing abstract artists' organization; "Between Dark and Night: New Pastels by Mallory Lake," featuring lush, film noir-inspired work by the Brattleboro-based artist; and "Collective Memories of Place," a site-specific outdoor installation by Terry Slade. All four new exhibits will remain on view through Oct. 20.

Offering visual contrast to the richly detailed, figurative work of Red Grooms, the museum's Center Gallery will contain "Dynamic Invention: American

Abstract Artists at 75," 48 digital prints, each by a different artist, created as a portfolio to mark the 75th anniversary of American Abstract Artists, an artist-run organization founded in 1936 in New York City to promote and foster understanding of abstract and non-objective art. The exhibit is accompanied by an essay written by AAA member, artist, curator, critic, and teacher Robert Storr, Dean of the Yale School of Art and former Director of the Venice Biennale.

Tucked into the museum's intimate South Gallery is "Between Dark and Night: New Pastels by Mallory Lake," featuring 12 masterful works created by the Marlboro-based artist over the past year and a half.

A friend's recommendation of an old French black-and-white film, kindled Lake's interest in steam trains, foggy nights and the golden glow of monumental Beaux-Arts interiors.

The result is a body of evocative and richly atmospheric work.

"It's not the trains that are intriguing, but the atmosphere. It's not about the mechanics of trains," said Lake. "I think it's what the elements of the steam and the night do that touches on something emotional."

Outside the museum, Terry Slade's "Collective Memories of Place," a site-specific installation inspired by the museum's history as Brattleboro's train station, is "intended to stimulate conversation about our relationship with our surroundings and the impact human existence has on the planet," according to the artist.

In the museum's Ticket Gallery, BMAC Education Curator Susan Calabria, has created a hands-on, interactive exploration of color, encouraging visitors to reconsider their perception of color and its associations with language, food and art history.

These exhibits open to BMAC members on Saturday, at 5:30 p.m., and to the general public on Sunday at 11 a.m.

The new exhibits will remain on view through Oct. 20. During that time, BMAC will present a number of related events, including a public conversation between Red Grooms and artist Stephen Hannock; guided exhibit tours by Mara Williams; screenings of the film-noir classics "The Hitch-Hiker" and "Detour"; a lecture on pop art by Susan Powers of the Hood Museum; and more.

The museum's exhibits and gift shop are open Sunday, Monday, Wednesday and Thursday, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Friday from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.; and Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Admission is \$8 for adults, \$6 for seniors, and \$4 for students. Members and children under 6 are admitted free. Located in Union Station at the intersection of Main Street and Routes 119 and 142, the museum is wheelchair-accessible. For more information, call 802-257-0124 or visit [www.brattleboromuseum.org](http://www.brattleboromuseum.org).



"Evening Departure" is one of the new pastels featured in an exhibit of work by Mallory Lake.