

Review in <http://www.artnet.com/magazine/reviews/robinson9-25---03.asp>

Speaking of sexual fetishes, another one of the month's exceptional shows is Kelly Heaton's "Live Pelt" exposition at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts. This elaborate project involves 64 Tickle Me Elmo dolls, which were hunted down and bought on eBay, only to be disemboweled in a mad scientist's lair and then transformed into a luxurious red "fur" coat according to the traditional arts of the furrier (once again we are spared the necessity of making an ethical judgment, that goodness, by the absence of any real living creature). The heads of the Elmo dolls are even mounted as trophies, and are currently being sold on eBay (bidding begins at \$1, and early examples have already been knocked down for a high of \$300).

At the core of the work is the fetishistic "live pelt," or the artist's "merkin," died red to match the cybertronic doll. Elmo vibrates and laughs when his sensors are touched, and Heaton's garment, which includes a cloth bodice implanted with the doll's vibrator units, is itself a super sized vibrator for the artist's torso; in one sultry boudoir videotape, she gives the cloak its test run. The sexual component gives the piece its "charge."

In an ancillary project, Heaton solicited parents who were willing to have their toddlers photographed wearing Tickle Me Elmo costumes. The show includes 16 of these pop artifacts, which were made at Sears and are so framed in Sears white plastic frames (that comically resembles Matthew Barney's portentous "self-lubricating" ones). Unlike many avant-garde artists, Heaton is actually impressively credentialed, with a M.S. degree from M.I.T.; she recently completed a residency at Duke's department of computer science.

A photograph of Heaton in full "Live Pelt" regalia, taken by Tom LeGoff, is \$10,000 in an edition of seven. An eBay auction for the Surrogate cloak, made of all 64 pelts, runs October 4-11, 2003, with bidding starting at \$35,000. Buy it now for \$50,000.

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