

# Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

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## KELLY HEATON: LIVE PELT

SEPTEMBER 6 – OCTOBER 11

*The art of Kelly Heaton exists in that place where obsession, engineering and popular culture come together.*  
-- George Fifield for the catalogue of the 2001 DeCordova Annual Exhibition

*Live Pelt*, by Kelly Heaton, is a multimedia installation based on the transformation of 64 previously owned Tickle Me Elmo dolls, the popular consumer toy, into a woman's coat. Fashioned from the toys' pelts and electronics, the coat (entitled *The Surrogate*) provides full body vibration and is designed to be a substitute lover. Using Elmo as a vector to channel information about contemporary American culture, the installation encompasses moods both poignant and Frankenstein weird. The narrative investigates frontier economics, the human-machine relationship, and the technologist's power to play with life. In all seriousness, Heaton's sense of humor prevails.

The artist has developed eight characters to represent the various facets of *Live Pelt*. Desecration and fetishism are consistent throughout the narrative, which relies heavily on the historic precedent of the American fur trade. **The Trapper** collects Elmos through eBay; **The Industrialist** performs the skinning; and **The Taxidermist** stuffs and mounts their heads. **The Alchemist** solders the electronic viscera and seeks clues to the mystery of life. Other characters, **The Sociopath**, **The Debutante**, and **The Fashionista**, interact with the coat and its accessories at various stages in *The Surrogate's* development. **Btsy Rss** alters the American flag to the tune of *De-Star Spangled Banner*, a painfully slow rendition of our national anthem performed by Pamela Z. Heaton plays some of these roles in a documentary video by Shambhavi Kaul.

Embracing and critiquing the information glut caused by computer-based media, Heaton's narrative work also includes *The Yearbook of Live Pelt*, which chronicles information about the Elmos "trapped" online; *The Sociopath's Map*, a geographic profile based on the hometowns of the acquired Elmos; drawings and sculpture that blend engineering with human physiology; and artifacts from the performance videos. Antique photographs provide a historical context. Conceptual constructions suggest an autobiographical evolvment of the artist. *The Sears Portrait Series*, featuring 16 young girls posing in commercially available Elmo costumes, relates to the recurring themes of innocence and loss.

The implications of online auction as a new frontier for trade and its potential for exploitation are important components of *Live Pelt*. The Elmos were purchased through eBay. With circular symmetry, many of the transformed Elmo artworks will be "recycled" for sale on eBay, extending the domain of online commerce to the gallery marketplace.\*

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*Live Pelt*, Heaton's first exhibition at the Feldman Gallery, continues her series entitled *Bibiota* that includes *Reflection Loop* and *Dead Pelt* in which 400 Furbies have been re-engineered into a coat for Mrs. Santa Claus and a wall of reactive eyes and mouths. She has exhibited recently at the Howard Yezerski Gallery as part of the Boston Cyberarts Festival and Bitforms Gallery in New York. Heaton received a Master of Science from M.I.T. in 2000 and was artist-in-residence at the Duke University Department of Computer Science last year. Awards include the 2001 L'Oreal Promotion Prize in the Art and Science of Color. She was a Creative Capital Recipient in 2002.

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**\*The Surrogate will be available for sale through eBay: October 4 – October 11. Sixty-one trophy plaques with the mounted heads of Elmo will be sold individually through eBay during the exhibition.**

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There will be a reception on Saturday, September 6: 6:00 to 8:00. Gallery Hours: Tuesday – Saturday: 10:00 to 6:00. Monday by appointment. For information, contact Laura Muggeo (212) 226-3232 or [laura@feldmangallery.com](mailto:laura@feldmangallery.com).