

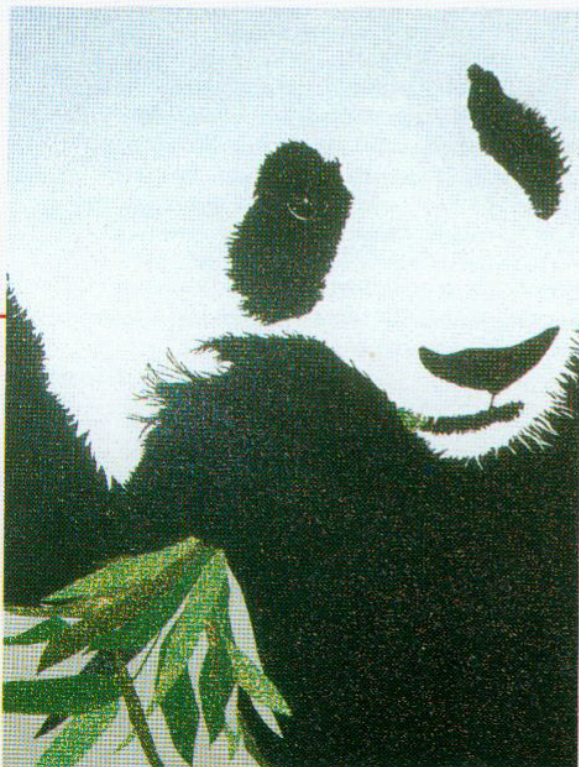
## Rob Pruitt

Gavin Brown's Enterprise, **New York**

TEMA CELESTE  
May-June 2001, p.86

In a show that was at once goofy, sweet, and oddly affecting, Rob Pruitt presented nine paintings, executed in colored glitter on canvas, of bamboo trees and panda bears. Featuring the pandas grasping at branches, caring for their young, and responding to observers, the images no doubt offer a mild suggestion of protest against human depredations in the animal's habitat. And, perhaps, they gently mock the self-congratulatory devotion of the entertainment and art worlds to such celebrity "causes." But, overall, the tone is of innocent wonder and, without betraying too much irony, a Pop Art, crowd-pleasing accessibility: is there anyone who doesn't like pandas? Some works frame the animals with such tight cropping that the images almost resolve into abstract tableaux. In fact, one large painting, filled with the flat black and white patches of a soulful looking bear eating leaves, suggests nothing so much as an abstract expressionist canvas—a "Spanish Elogy," say, by Robert Motherwell. At the same time, the glittery extravagance of these works connotes a dreamy teenage notion of glamour. One side of a large, billboard-like piece bears the show's title on a blue glitter field; the other depicts a close-up image of a panda on the move, as if it were the star of the show. In a second room, Pruitt has projected a live San Diego Zoo web-cam of pandas onto a white glitter canvas—a literal silver screen—to a background of *I am the Panda*, a hypnotic song by Annika Ström, which plays throughout the course of the show. Only one work on view—a large canvas of dense tangled lines that seems to have been transferred from a grainy black-and-white photo of a panda caught alone on the forest floor—suggests a colder, less innocent eye. The work offers a view of pandas not alive within their natural domain, but preserved in documentary representation, diminished and subdued.

**Jonathan Gilmore**



boy

RN!

or]

e-mail: [passerby@bway.net](mailto:passerby@bway.net)