

POSSESSED

# Smitten

## With a Plain Jane

By DAVID COLMAN

**A** LOT of energy goes into deconstructing today's pervasive theme of irony. But even more goes into dismissing it as a smug and lazy exercise in art-making. But as arguments go, that's a smug and lazy one. Isn't this really an age of ambivalence, where cynicism, adoration, pragmatism and frivolity come together in equal measure?

This modern-day yin-yang — like and dis-, sincerity and in-, reverence and ir- — spins so fast in the work of Rob Pruitt that all you can see is a sublime blur. Take his latest paintings: Pollock-like splatters in Warhol-like colors of silver, pink and orange. To the casual eye, they are glib, vain beauties until you realize that to Mr. Pruitt, tinsel is one of the precious metals.

"It's not like I have a strategy to make a chic object," he said. "In fact, when I set forth for this show, I said: 'This time you're going to be classy, Rob, no more glitter. It's going to be coffee grounds and mud

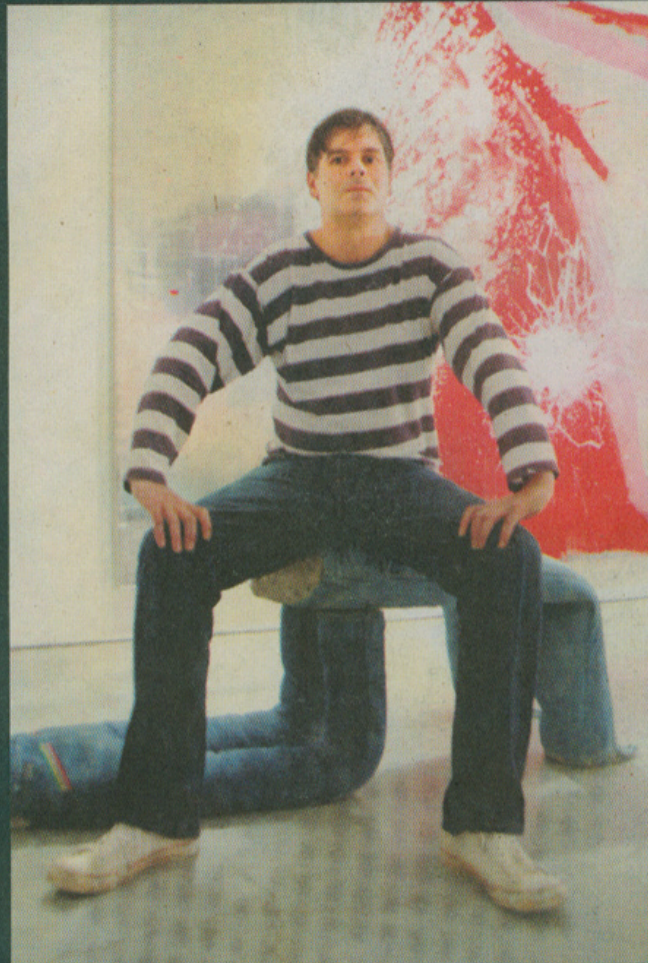
### THE COLOR GREEN

Rob Pruitt,  
painter and  
one-plant man.

and burlap.' But there it is. I couldn't not be myself, I suppose." The show with his new paintings and sculpture opened last week at Gavin Brown's Enterprise.

Given Mr. Pruitt's love of decoration, it seems only normal that, to see if his latest paintings felt right, he treated them as he would any of the myriad objects for which he is always scouring tag sales.

"I would drag it out of my studio into my living room to see if it was functioning," he said. "I don't see any distinction between what I bring into the gallery and how I make



Photographs by David Corio for The New York Times

my home."

The pleasure he takes in the newest and homeliest addition to his house in Orient Point, N.Y., is both perverse and devout — that is, if there is a difference. Two months ago he bought a fledgling spider plant that was an offshoot of a spider plant at the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center in East Hampton, N.Y. The hardy green thing has since been repotted, watered and christened.

"Dusty Krasner," Mr. Pruitt said. "Because she gathers so much dust."

A spider plant? This lack-luster companion of Xerox machines and black-thumb gardeners everywhere? Seriously?

Well, yes and no, of course. Mr. Pruitt was drawn to it first as a memento of his visit to the house. "I love a house museum," he said. "That's why I felt so compelled. Everyone knows their personal history, that they didn't have children, that he was a philanderer. Their legacy is their art. Now the plant seems to have taken on this whole other life, as sort of like their offspring."

The aesthetic virtues of a spider plant are debatable. "I do think of it as kitsch," he said. "It's like Nancy Walker was in terms of Hollywood, a definite icon that's always in the background. There's something tender about what it elicits: no one can ever dump it in the garbage, no one loves it, but it's always being taken care of by the office community. So I feel like I am housesitting for Jackson and Lee, like when you look after someone's cats."

But as custodial as he feels, he also loves little Dusty as an object. "It's not like I want a spider plant in my house," he said. "I bought it because I was so charmed by being there. It was only \$5. But its provenance turns this very meager thing into a status item."

Status, of course, is in the eye of the beholder; irony is in the heart.