

# INTO THE WILD

For art star Rob Pruitt and indie darling Chloë Sevigny, the creative process is anything but black and white.

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In 1992, Chloë Sevigny, then 18, was just becoming a downtown-New York It girl while Rob Pruitt, 10 years her senior, was already a fallen art star, following his infamous show at the Leo Castelli Gallery. With his collaborator Jack Early, Pruitt had explored the marketing of African-American culture; their exhibition consisted of shrink-wrapped posters of famous African Americans accompanied by a rap soundtrack in a room covered in gold foil and spattered with paint. Political correctness ruled the day: The duo's work was dismissed as racist, and they soon received the art-world's heave-ho. Pruitt eventually found his way back: In 1998, at a group show in New York's Meatpacking District, he presented *Cocaine Buffet*, a line of cocaine that viewers were invited to sample. And in 2010, his huge solo exhibition "Pattern and Degradation," a study of cultural excess at Gavin Brown's Enterprise and Maccarone, sealed his return to the firmament. Pruitt is perhaps best known now for his glitter panda paintings, first shown in 2001; but in the past few years, he has also transformed a Victorian house in upstate New York into a Goth art installation, created a diaristic mural using pictures of his Facebook friends, and hatched the Guggenheim's annual Art Awards, the contemporary art world's version of the Oscars. All the while, he's kept up his friendship with Sevigny, who has long maintained her indie cred despite an Oscar nomination for her role in the 1999 movie *Boys Don't Cry* and five seasons as sister-wife Nicki on HBO's hit series *Big Love*. This winter she tackles yet another provocative character: a preoperative male-to-female transsexual contract killer in the new miniseries *Hit and Miss*. In advance of the program's February debut on DirecTV—and in time for Pruitt's new solo show, currently on display at Dallas Contemporary, in Texas—*W* invited the pair to collaborate on a photographic art project.

*How did you two meet?*

PRUITT: It was around the time my career had just kind of ended. It was the early nineties, and I wasn't getting any shows, so I took a job in SoHo at the Anna Sui store. I had seen this young woman around town, and I figured out that she worked at Liquid Sky [a downtown boutique]. That young woman was Chloë. I developed a mini-obsession; it really was like being a stalker. I've always been a very nervous and shy person, but I would go into Liquid Sky and buy things I didn't necessarily want just so that I could have a few words with Chloë at the counter. To me, she was like a walking embodiment of art—just the way she dressed and the way she behaved.

SEVIGNY: We met through my good friend, the artist Rita Ackermann. She was my doorway into this whole world. I was really young and shy and just working in a shop and figuring out my place. And she exposed me to all these incredible artists who were doing insane things.

PRUITT: Then fast-forward a couple of years after Chloë finished filming *Kids* [the 1995 cult film directed by Larry Clark, starring Sevigny], and I ended up cutting her hair in a downtown loft.

SEVIGNY: I was really sad about the haircut—I thought it was pretty bad. But because of Rob's voice and his nature, I fully trusted him. That was the first time I saw his panda paintings—in that apartment.

PRUITT: Yeah. The building was painted, like, a bubblegum pink on





Gucci's mink cape, mussola shirt, and cotton pants. Zasha by Jude Frances sterling silver, enamel, white topaz, and diamond bracelets (on right wrist); Miriam Salat bracelet, Zasha by Jude Frances sterling silver, enamel, and onyx bracelets, Miriam Salat bracelet (on left wrist, from top); Jimmy Choo bag; Emilio Cavallini hosiery; Pierre Hardy shoes. On extras, from left: Maison Michel hat; M&S Schmalberg Inc. silk flowers; M&S Schmalberg Inc. silk flowers; Jimmy Choo bag.



Louis Vuitton's embroidered leather, silk, and mink jacket; Carven's leather shorts. Look from London hosiery; Robert Clergerie shoes.

the outside. And a lot of interesting people went in and out of that space while I lived there.

SEVIGNY: Seeing how all the worlds were kind of meshing—fashion, art, and music—and that you didn't have to do only one thing had a big impact on me.

PRUITT: Maybe every generation has this romantic period when it seems like everyone is working together and everything feels new and fresh. But it did seem to me that everything was multidisciplinary—more so than 10 years before, when I was Chloë's age and becoming acclimated to New York. I experienced a certain amount of success at a very young age in the art world, and I always thought it was a fluke. My early success lasted only two or three years, so it wasn't really too painful when it was suddenly stripped away. Of course, I also found a good therapist.

*You've played a lot with pattern and design in your work. How did you approach this project for W?*

PRUITT: I'm interested in the arc of a project—how it starts with a singular focus. In this case it was the panda bear, this black and white animal that teeters on the brink of extinction. It's been 11 years since my very first panda painting. I had this idea of mixing the panda with other black and white animals, because I think the panda looks this way so that it can camouflage into the environment. So I took that idea literally, thinking about fashion and patterns that are created by the human mind and hand, and I mixed it all together. I also thought about the biblical concept of when the lion lies down with the lamb, then there will be world peace. I could be misquoting, and I'm not the kind of person who ever actually goes back and does the research to see if he's gotten it right. I was just thinking about this notion of animals and patterns that don't necessarily go together. And then Chloë is this kind of Dian Fossey, with her career as an actress. She's very comfortable inhabiting roles. I saw her as playing a benevolent ringleader in this world of creatures and becoming one herself, wearing black and white clashing patterns. Chloë was perfect because she's known for not being afraid of fashion. So it just seemed like a good chance to do a project again and maybe wash away the bad memories of that haircut from 17 years ago.

SEVIGNY: For me, corralling the animals was difficult. There were a lot of creatures and a lot of people handling them. I felt like I let everybody down because I couldn't hold the chicken. There was this tableau, and I was just another creature in it, just another piece of pattern.

*Rob, you studied at Parsons, and then you worked for Anna Sui. Tim Gunn admitted you to art school right out of high school and became a good friend. Is fashion something that intrigues you as an artist?*

PRUITT: It is. You would never know it by looking at me, but I'm totally into fashion, and I love to follow it. It's sort of like a fat guy who watches sports on TV on the weekends.

*There were moments that reminded me so much of the Cecil Beaton Ascot scene in My Fair Lady. It was a contemporary version of that.*

PRUITT: I thought it was like that, too, but I didn't plan it that way. As it was happening, it was like, Wow! This seems like something very familiar.

SEVIGNY: I've never seen *My Fair Lady*. It's Audrey Hepburn, right? I can't stand Audrey Hepburn. It's this character she created in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*—a comic kind of New York City character. I don't know, for me it's just vapid. It irritates me.

*One of the things that artists get to do very freely, which actors don't, is speak their mind, either through their work or in interviews. Chloë, is that something you envy?*

SEVIGNY: I do. In Hollywood, if you are outspoken, you risk your career. I have been very outspoken in the past and gotten in trouble for it. I've always felt like an outsider anyway, but definitely in Hollywood I've never felt like part of the "in" crowd. In fact, I just finished filming a new TV series in Manchester, England, where I play a pre-op male-to-female transsexual who grew up around a lot of violence. She escapes from her family and brutally kills this guy and becomes a hit woman. In the beginning, she's kind of devoid of feelings, and she's cut herself off, but she adopts this family of misfit kids and opens up through her relationship with them. It's pretty amazing and out there. I mean, *out there*: I'm wearing a prosthetic penis—that's something you don't usually see on television. ♦

"I SAW CHLOE AS PLAYING A BENEVOLENT RINGLEADER IN THIS WORLD OF CREATURES AND BECOMING ONE HERSELF," SAYS PRUITT. "CHLOE WAS PERFECT BECAUSE SHE'S NOT AFRAID OF FASHION."



Versace's cotton top. Heather Huey hat; Miriam Salat earring (worn as brooch).



Versace's cotton top and cotton skirt. Maison Michel hat; Miriam Salat earring (worn as brooch); Lorraine Schwartz 18k white gold and diamond cuffs (on both wrists); Versace belt; Emilio Cavallini hosiery; Versace shoes.



Salvatore Ferragamo's silk dress. Marc Jacobs beret; David Webb 18k yellow gold, platinum, agate, enamel, and diamond necklace; M.C.L. by Matthew Campbell Laurenza bracelets (on both wrists); Sermoneta gloves; Michael Kors bag; Wolford hosiery; Dolce & Gabbana shoes. On extras: M&S Schmalberg Inc. silk flowers. For stores, prices, and more, see Backstory, page 102.

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WATCH THE SURREAL ROB PRUITT-DIRECTED SHOOT COME TOGETHER AT WMAGAZINE.COM/VIDEO