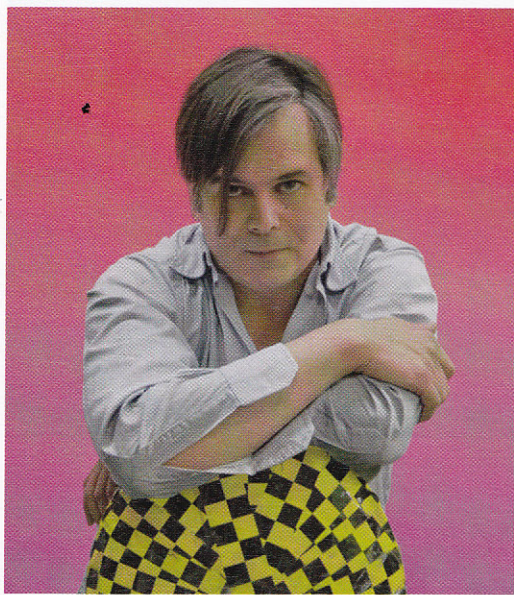


Rob Pruitt



PANDA-LOVING ARTIST Rob Pruitt has a museum survey opening May 3 at the Aspen Art Museum. *Modern Painters* executive editor Scott Indrisek touched base with him via e-mail to talk about drugs, bedbugs, and a hypothetical statue of Oprah Winfrey.

This will be your first museum survey. How has it been to look at your body of work thus far?

A couple of years ago, I made a little book called *Look What I've Done*. I loved the title. It was like an outburst of a child or a serial killer. Whenever I look back over what I've done, it's always with a certain amount of mortification. But in the instance of the Aspen Art Museum show, curator Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson has been the one with the task of looking back and not me, which is an exciting position to be in. It feels like someone has been assigned to clean up the mess I've made. I just hope she does a good job.

A lot of your art is about making connections to people; it's accessible, which is often a dirty word in the art world. What sort of person do you have in mind as the type of individual who would appreciate what you do?

Well, first I will say that I just love making things, and I trust myself to know if they've turned out well or not. I also love thinking about people who I actually know rather than strangers looking at my latest work and responding to it. From friends like Jonathan and Elizabeth and Gavin and Massimo and Florence and Ludavica and Lucy to collectors who I feel close to, like Andy Stillpass, to Laura, who I work with

every day at Gavin's gallery. I have an inner circle that I trust to be honest with me.

You honored Andy Warhol with a flashy statue that sadly is no longer on display by Union Square in New York. What other figures might you consider giving the same memorial treatment?

Well, Andy may be coming back. He's just on a world tour at the moment, which started at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. But I would like to do Malcolm McLaren in London and Oprah Winfrey in Chicago, and my father on Arctic Avenue in Rockville, Maryland. This is the street that I grew up on.

Aspen is well-known as a playground for the rich and a premiere winter sport destination. In 1998 you became infamous for *Cocaine Buffet*, a self-explanatory piece that invited viewers to indulge in illicit drugs. Which raises the question: Do you ski?

I don't take drugs but I love skiing. In fact I lived next to a ski mountain for a few years in Upstate New York. Only I was always afraid of a possible Sonny Bono ending.

You've always walked the line between contemporary art and the commercial field—whether that's designing a shoe for Jimmy Choo or selling T-shirts at Opening Ceremony to coincide with your exhibition at Gavin Brown's Enterprise. Does dabbling in the world of fashion or consumerism sully your artistic soul, or is that just something that jealous people say?

I don't know about other people but I love it and I plan on doing a lot more. In fact, the e-mail that I opened right before yours was an invitation to make wallpaper. I've also been in talks with Fiat to make a special edition Fiat Panda, which I'm very excited about.



In 2011 you and Nate Lowman presented an exhibition on the theme of bedbugs. Have you ever had the pleasure of dealing with this New York scourge yourself?

As a person who's prone to hypochondria and paranoia, during bouts of insomnia I've convinced myself that I've had bedbugs in the bed with me, but it's never actually been the case.

You are known as an artist who isn't afraid to embrace popular culture. What is inspiring you, and what is grossing you out?

I'm always engaged in pop culture. I just let it flow over me like a river. I love *Girls* on HBO. I read a lot of celebrity Twitter accounts, like Sarah Silverman's; I know so much about Britney Spears that she might as well be my sister. I think that Pantone chose the wrong color when they picked emerald for 2013—for me this year's all about cobalt blue. And I really want to get a Vitamix.

Rob Pruitt
Panda and Bamboo, 2001.
Glitter and enamel on canvas, 96 x 72 in.