

## ROB PRUITT HAS PAINTED PORTRAITS OF BARACK OBAMA EVERY DAY SINCE 2009

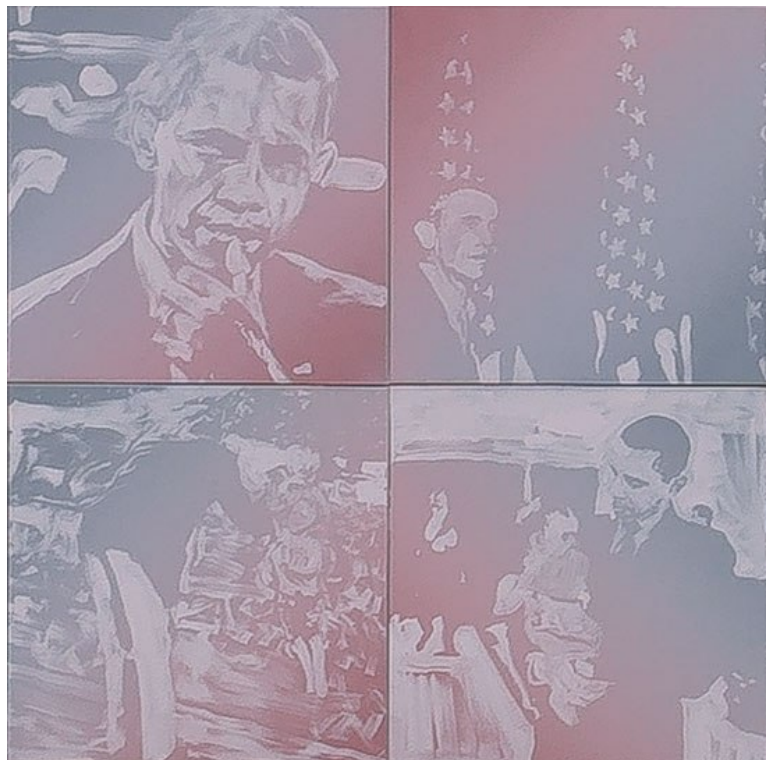
Text by Michael Slenske | Photography courtesy of Gavin Brown Enterprise and MOCAD | May 18, 2015



Rob Pruitt's "The Obama Paintings," an installation at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit.

On May 15 the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit unveiled Rob Pruitt's obsessive-compulsive vision of presidential iconography with the opening of "The Obama Paintings"—two-by-two-foot portraits of Barack Obama, which the artist has created every day since the President's January 20, 2009 inauguration—and *The Lincoln Monument*.

"During the campaign it was so exciting to be involved and help support a candidate I really believed in, so I wanted to take that energy I was feeling and translate it into something that extended beyond the election," says Pruitt, who started the work as a personal project that he never intended to show. "I just liked doing it. I like having a project that's established that can be maintained; it's much different than going into the studio and embarking on a new painting with a new subject."



Detail from "The Obama Paintings."

Pruitt paints each piece in the morning, devoting 40 odd minutes to the practice, which he likens to a yoga

ritual. He begins by pulling an image from the Internet—say, the President signing a bill, giving his State of the Union address, or sharing a moment with the First Lady—which Pruitt then transfers with white paint onto a muted red and blue gradient background. “It’s very expressionistic,” says MOCAD executive director Elysia Borowy-Reeder. “It almost looks like a silkscreen.”



*The Lincoln Monument, 2014.*

Though the backgrounds started out in Pruitt’s signature Pop palette, he quickly toned them down to earthy hues to mimic the somber qualities of monuments. “I was very conscious of monuments growing up in D.C., but I noticed they were typically devoted to one incident, so I wanted to create something that was very even and a complete picture.”

The exhibition also grows by one painting each day over the course of its run. As of today, there are 2,310 paintings lining MOCAD’s walls, and there will be 2,922 when the project is complete.

Meanwhile, the show is anchored by *The Lincoln Monument*, a shimmering, eight-foot-tall sculpture crafted from three copper-painted tractor tires. “It looks like a public fountain, except there’s 200,000 pennies cascading down the sides,” says Borowy-Reeder. “It represents labor and this workhorse of our monetary system that’s also totally obsolete.”

Though the Obama painting project will soon come to a close, Pruitt says he’s not nostalgic about losing his morning ritual. “I think I’ll be pleased about committing myself to something I started.”