

The artist who paints Barack Obama every day

Each day since 2009, Rob Pruitt has painted whatever the president happened to be doing. Now, the pictures have been combined and put on display in Detroit

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Ever since Barack Obama was inaugurated on 20 January 2009, American pop art artist Rob Pruitt has combed through the president's day and painted his own rendition of it. Now, more than 2,000 paintings surveying Obama's time in office have been plastered across the walls of the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, rendered in red, white and blue.

This is not Pruitt's only daily project. He has an eBay store where he posts one object from his apartment each day. The funds from that endeavour go to a charity at the end of each year. And at the studio, he says people draw on lunch tables and calendars.

Pruitt said that he likes projects with daily maintenance because he finds routine and repetition relaxing.

"I like eating the same thing for dinner every night. I love flossing. I like watching the same television shows," Pruitt told the Guardian. "There's so much pressure in daily life, but there's serenity in routine."

To begin each work, Pruitt searches online to see what Obama did the day before. He then picks what he believes is "the most appealing image" and adjusts it in photoshop before printing it on transparency film. That film is then projected onto a canvas so that he can paint the image in what is the project's trademark style - white expressionist brush strokes on a canvas covered in a spectrum of red to blue.

"This may be hard to believe, but I never really thought about it at the beginning - I simply started with one painting on the first day," Pruitt said. "I never imagined that one day I'd end up with almost 3,000 paintings of the president, so I've sort of surprised myself with how this project has grown."

When the project is over, there will be 2,922 2ft x 2ft square paintings of things like Obama standing alongside attorney general Eric Holder or meeting with foreign dignitaries.

Pruitt's favourite depiction is Michelle and Barack together, and he insists there was not a worst day to paint. To choose which image to paint, he looks at the significance of the activities portrayed in photographs from the day.

“If he’s at an international summit or signing an important bill, I’m certainly not going to choose a portrait of him playing frisbee with Bo on the front lawn,” said Pruitt. “I also have formal concerns and my own ideas about a compelling composition, so that comes into play too.”

The paintings overwhelm the gallery’s walls, intending to call to mind a monument that presents the presidency in its entirety - no matter how mundane.

Inside the gallery will also be a Pruitt work called The Lincoln Monument, which consists of 200,000 pennies filling three stacked truck tires, covered in copper-colored paint.

The Obama Paintings and The Lincoln Monument are open now at MOCAD until 2 August