

“I want to be profoundly touched by art, by life. I came to painting at the time of its death, not breathe its last breath, but to caress its lifelessness. The necromancy of the pietà, Pollock’s One, timed with the birth of a synthetic star, 1958 BLACK PAINTINGS, DEATH & DISASTERS, modernism at its most powerful, before the point where circuses began. / The dust clears (just barely), and I stand in my own graveyard. I hear the constant din of BLACK NOISE.”

- Steven Parrino

*Dancing on Graves* is five minutes of video shot by Steven Parrino (1958-2005) in 1999. He might describe it as a “sex and death painting thing.” But, before that, it’s grainy footage (handheld) of a woman dancing on a stacked platform of black-enameled aluminum. She looks into the lens, turns her body and bends over. Sits in a chair and opens her legs. Distortion blasts off-camera and the dancer’s body, suddenly all-vector, forms a “V.” It’s been suggested that Eros is a form and Thanatos a kind of entropy. And these two extremes seem to inform the dialectical friction one encounters in Parrino’s work. The video abruptly concludes with a cut to Parrino sawing into a black sheet of painted aluminum. A black screen. A loud silence.

Parrino comes to painting at the time of its death in the 1980s. He produces intensively reductive paintings. Black monochromes (painted with ‘one-shot’ sign-painters enamel) that he mishapes and distorts into bi-products of formed material. Canvas is unstapled, folded and restretched without a rigorous or declarative narrative. He intentionally avoids “melodramas” and “fantasy.” Instead, he reduces the structure of painting to the status of equipment (as per Heidegger, not just a specific tool, but a system (Parrino would call it a “black system”) of tools that are collectively put to use), adhering to its materiality through a practice of applied distortion. Entropy endowed with form.

The paintings aren’t ‘pictures.’ Sometimes an inverted pyramid leaned against the wall (*Untitled*, 2004) or a kind of sensuous drapery (*3 Units Aluminum Death Shifter*, 1992).[1] But Parrino continues to unstretch, pull and contort the canvas to negotiate the literal boundaries of possible action while simultaneously limiting them. It’s his system. Disciplined and uncompromising. This isn’t formalism gone wrong, but formalism laid bare. A real thing. Fucked-up. And it gives Parrino the ability to un-ironically speak about the “reality” one finds in “abstract painting” because “reality” itself is incomplete and fucked-up. If the “the world is falling apart,” then painting should too. Like distortion (power chords and feedback), painting should “vibrate until it disjoins.”

The distortion “thing” is important. In conversation, Parrino would never not talk about noise. His sometimes collaborator Jutta Koether describes the vibe of Parrino’s group Blood Necklace in terms of his visual output:

rigorous, stripped down, hard.[2] He listens for the constant din of black noise in the white static of Manhattan's traffic and attempts to channel this into his work. He is as attracted to a New York Post cover ("A Murder Most Posh") as to the *Black Square* of Malevich.[3]

In this sense, Parrino's work is committedly realist. Not because it shows us a picture of reality, but because it participates in reality's entropy. Even when real materials are historical or necrophied artifacts (the monochrome, the action painting or modernism) subjected to "theoretical distortion" (his words) or appropriation. Parrino directs attention to the structuring of painting's "facts" through their destruction. And it's through their mutual fragmentation and intercession (the gloss of black enamel or shine of crushed aluminum) that we get a glimpse of what's at stake in painting's entropic undoing. Adorno says "the splinter in your eye is the best magnifying-glass," because distorted vision is the only way to confront something objectively. Like running into an object in the dark.

The selection of works on view at The Power Station adhere to Parrino's elemental vocabulary: black, white and aluminum. Like Titian, Parrino begins his paintings with a fundamental contrast. Black. White. A positive.

A negative. Not to outline a form, but to establish matrices for possible action and intervention. Here, Parrino's decision to limit painting to a narrow economy seems to amplify the works' materialism and "heighten" their exteriority, context or "social field." The problem isn't to stop paring away, but to produce paintings that destroy themselves in their making. Because "all creation hinges on destruction." Because "all things destroy themselves or are destroyed."

Steven Parrino was born in 1958 in New York, and died in 2005 in New York. He received his A.A.S. in 1979 from SUNY Farmingdale, New York, and his B.F.A. in 1982 from Parson's School of Design, New York. Parrino's work has been exhibited in major exhibitions around the world including the Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, Switzerland (2000); Ludwig Museum, Köln (2000); Contemporanea, Milan (2001); Nuremberg Museum, Germany (2002); The Swiss Institute, New York (2002); Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (2003); Le Consortium, France (2004); Museum of Modern Art, Frankfurt (2005); P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York (2005); and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco (2006). Recent solo shows include Massimo De Carlo Arte Contemporanea, Milan (2000); "*Exit/Dark Matter*," FriArt, Switzerland (2002); "*Steven Parrino Videos 1979-Present*," Circuit, Lausanne, Switzerland (2002); Massimo DeCarlo Arte Contemporanea, Milano Galerie Jean Brolly, Paris (2003); "*A Retrospective (curated by Fabrice Stroun)*," Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Geneva (2005-07); Palais De Tokyo, France (2007) (curated by Fabrice Stroun and Marc-Olivier Wahler); "*Born to Be Wild: Hommage an*

*Steven Parrino*,” Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, Switzerland (2009); and “*Steven Parrino: Armleder, Barré, Buren, Hantai, Mosset, Parmentier, Toroni*,” Gagosian Gallery, Paris (2013).

The Power Station thanks the Parrino Family Estate and Gagosian Gallery for their assistance with the exhibition.

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[i.] Bob Nickas. “Steven Parrino at Palais de Tokyo.” *Artforum*, September 2007.

[ii.] Jutta Koether and Bob Nickas. “Dark Star, Bob Nickas and Jutta Koether on Steven Parrino.” *Artforum*, March 2005.

[iii.] *Artforum*, September 2007.

[iv.] Most quotations taken directly from Steven Parrino’s *The No Texts*, (1979-2003) (Abaton Book Company: New Jersey: 2003)

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Screened on the third floor of The Power Station throughout the duration of the exhibition:

Drew Heitzler and Amy Granat

*T.S.O.Y.W.*, 2007

Two channel projection, 16mm film transferred to digital video

TRT: 3 hours 18 minutes 21 seconds

Edition of 5, 3AP

Courtesy of the Artists and BLUM & POE

Filmmakers Amy Granat and Drew Heitzler collaborated to make *T.S.O.Y.W.*, a two-part film based on Wolfgang von Goethe’s loosely autobiographic, tragic novel, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774). Following the style of the American road movie *Easy Rider* (1969), *T.S.O.Y.W.* chronicles a dysfunctional love story between a man and his motorcycle while representing what the artists call America’s wartime malaise. Werther, portrayed by artist Skylar Haskard, steals a friend’s Harley-Davidson to cruise the desert, eventually arriving at art historical destinations including Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty*, Walter de Maria’s *The Lightning Field*, and James Turrell’s *Roden Crater*. Granat and Heitzler’s variations on the theme which they edited from 16-millimeter footage that they shot simultaneously on identical Bolex cameras are screened as dual projections.

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