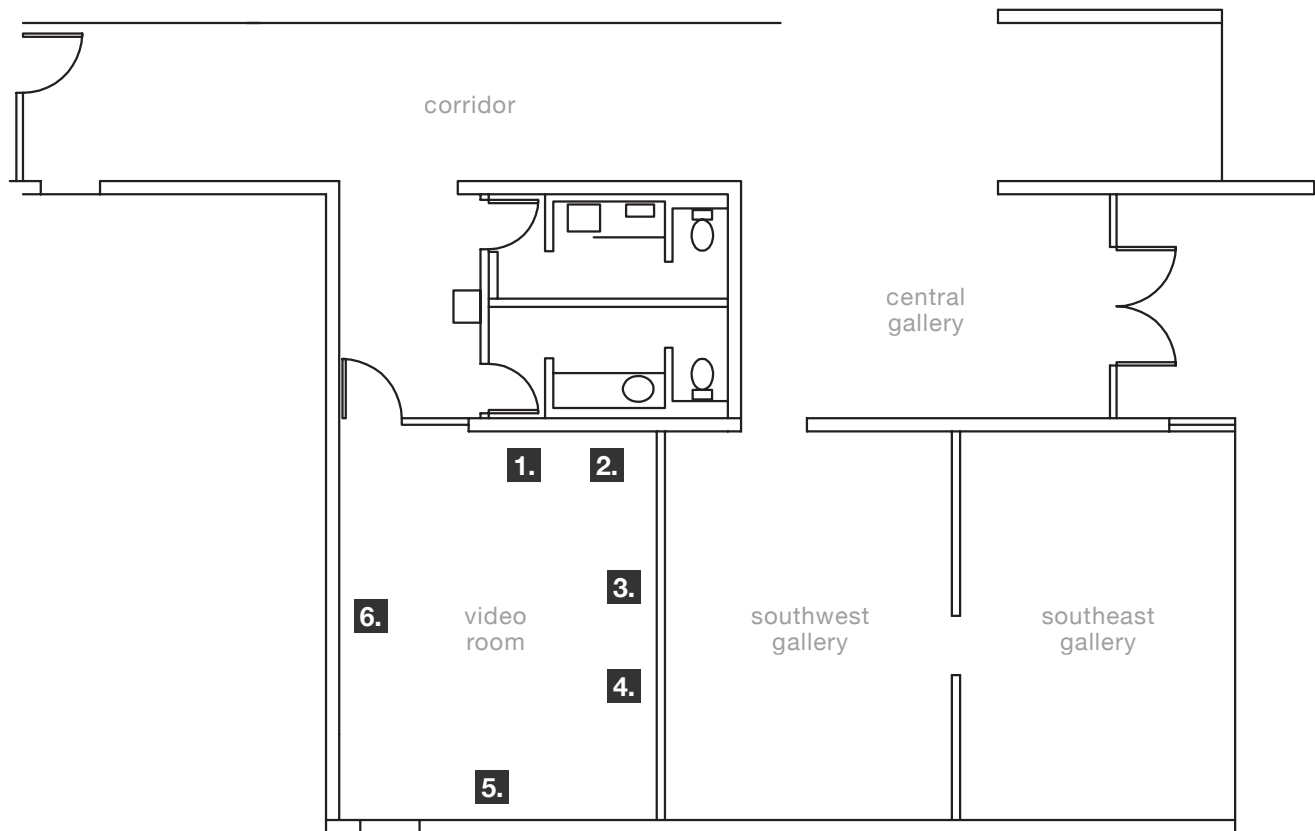


VIDEO ROOM

Steven Parrino



VIDEO ROOM

Clockwise from door

1. **Vortex # 1 & 2** (2002) pen on paper, 7 1/2 x 9"
2. **Untitled** (2000) pencil on vellum, 10 x 13"
3. **Untitled** (1984) pencil & ink on paper, 11 1/4 x 8 1/2"
4. **Elvis head (erased)** (1988) pencil on paper, 11 1/4 x 8 1/2"
5. **Slow Rot** (1985) engine oil on canvas, 75 x 50"
6. **Untitled (Happy New Year)** (1996) pen on paper, 8 1/4 x 10 3/4"

MOCA would like to express its gratitude to Olivier Mosset for his unyielding support and invaluable help and advice with the conceptualization and implementation of *Steve Parrino* at MOCA Tucson. Also, our deepest gratitude goes to Elizabeth Cherry and Clif & Paula Taylor for loaning works from their private collections to this exhibition.

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 at the Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, Switzerland in 2000, The Swiss Institute, New York in 2002, P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York in 2005, and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco in 2006. Solo shows include Massimo DeCarlo Arte Contemporanea, Milan in 2000, Galerie Jean Brolly, Paris in 2003, and *Born to Be Wild: Hommage an Steven Parrino*, Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, Switzerland in 2009.

Curator's Essay

VIDEO ROOM

Steven Parrino

18 June – 25 September 2016

Steven Parrino was a New York-based artist and musician known for his monochromatic paintings and a palette primarily consisting of black, white, orange, red, blue, and silver in works that he violently slit, ripped, or twisted off their stretchers, making what he called “Misshaped” paintings. His rough, creased, and cleft surfaces amounted to a purposeful and direct deconstruction of painting. He also exhibited environments involving monochrome walls pounded with sledgehammers, and bent and warped metal sculptures related to his aggressively mistreated canvases. Before his untimely death in a motorcycle accident in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, Parrino traveled to Tucson on several occasions to visit his friend—the artist Olivier Mosset—and developed an appreciation for the city, its environs, and its people. This concentrated, intimate exhibition is homage to the artist and this deep well of friendship in Tucson, consisting of the painting “Slow Rot” from Mosset’s personal collection, a stretched raw canvas soaked in motor oil, along with five uncharacteristically representational drawings revealing a less rigidly polemical side of his corpus, with studies of sci-fi space babes, motorcycle-riding, bloodshot-eyed maniacs, Elvis, and two patterned vortex abstractions.

Music played a central role in Parrino’s life, and he released records including 1999’s “Electrophilia – Live France” and 2002’s “Steven Parrino - Electrophilia / Shock Wave Troop.” In his 1995 noise work “Guitar Grind,” he rubbed his bass up against a guitar, causing a somewhat unholy racket. In accordance with the primacy of sonic distortions to his ethos, Tucson’s own Clif Taylor—musician, filmmaker, artist, and friend who has generously loaned a drawing to the exhibition—will perform the audio-visual *NECROMANTIS: NOISE TO BLACK, BEYOND GHOST RIDER* at MOCA on June 23rd. Inspired by conversations they had covering topics ranging from punk rock to 1970s schlock films, this audio-visual onslaught will be a feedback-ridden, heartfelt paean to Parrino’s musical preferences.

The paintings often have the initial effect of looking like failed artworks that were being thrown away. The important thing is that he didn’t; instead, he showed them. He mangled and defiled them, and in doing so, as Mosset wrote in *Bomb* magazine in 1996 on the occasion of two exhibitions in Europe, he was “redefining a debate on the conventions of painting and that affair of the integrity of the picture plane.” With his destroying of the surface and shape of his canvases, or in the case of “Slow Rot,” covering it with unstable motor oil, he made painting a kind of sculpture, or something that is both and neither, a radical gesture that “sends the old debate about flatness or the problem of the canvas’ outer edge to the dustbin of history.” Faced with the conclusion that you can’t kill painting or get rid of its corpse, why not, in Parrino’s own words, “engage in some necrophilia.” To the benefit of all who appreciate such inquiries, he questioned the nature of art and the avant-garde’s susceptibility to atrophy and normalization. Art must deal with the anxiety of influence, and keep trying to come up with something new, and Parrino did: an accomplishment even more evident in the present thanks to an increasingly nuanced perspective on his achievement in the decade since his premature passing.

“That 20th Century thing called abstraction,” in Mosset’s words, is still here with us, you might say with a vengeance, unexpectedly ubiquitous. It’s in Mosset’s work, in countless artists’ production, and certainly vital to Steven Parrino’s legacy. Despite repeated reports of the demise of painting and abstraction in particular, his sweeping and thorough scrutiny of what painting is or has become, his head-on confrontation with notions of its validity and determination to keep making “paintings” after their “death” is just as defensible today, and even possibly more so, than when they were made. Along with “Slow Rot,” an example of the now-canonical Parrino, the figurative drawings are unexpected, mostly unknown, more personal facets of his output. They uncover evidence that even in the mandarin discourse over the end of painting there lurked passions, interests, and concerns that spilled out in other modes and found a voice through presents, as testaments to love and friendship. The duality between the two approaches and their interconnectivity is a tribute to a life lived for art, in art, that resonates even more forcefully as history reckons with this formidable, exacting, and exciting artist whose influence on younger generations is becoming more pronounced with time’s passing. His serious, vigorous, and veritably heroic grappling with what art is and can be, and his fusillades against established convictions, are sorely missed.