

GAGOSIAN

Gagosian Basel to Present Survey of Works by Iconoclastic Artist Steven Parrino

Opening February 3, 2022



Steven Parrino, *It (Blob #1)*, 1994, enamel, silicone, and rubber eyeball on canvas, 30 1/2 × 41 × 12 inches (77.5 × 104.1 × 30.5 cm) © Steven Parrino, courtesy the Parrino Family Estate

I came to painting at the time of its death, not to breathe its last breath, but to caress its lifelessness.
—Steven Parrino

BASEL, January 27, 2022—Gagosian is pleased to present a survey of works by Steven Parrino (1958–2005), an influential American artist with close ties to Switzerland. The exhibition features manipulated canvas paintings, works in sprayed enamel on vellum, and other works on paper. This is Parrino’s first solo exhibition with Gagosian since 2007, and his first at the gallery in Basel.

Blending an elegant formal aesthetic with an aggressive punk approach, Parrino slashed, crushed, and twisted his paintings’ supports, transforming them into “misshaped” sculptural monochromes. A pioneer in video art and spontaneous performance, he approached all his work in a radical spirit informed by the history of the avant-garde; he also undergirded his art’s direct physicality with references to occult and underground currents in American culture, from the Hell’s Angels to No Wave. Initially grouped with the Neo-Geo and Appropriation artists of 1980s downtown New York, Parrino was inspired by materially destructive strands in Arte Povera and Minimalism—as well as by the crushed steel sculptures of John Chamberlain and the muscle-car *Hoods* of Richard Prince—to reconfigure and recontextualize elements of pop iconography.

The works in the exhibition span Parrino’s brief but incendiary career, which was brought to an untimely end by his death in a motorcycle accident at the age of 46. In *Disruption* (1981), *International Style* (1983), and *Seduction* (1984), he pairs monochrome acrylic paintings on torn or crumpled canvases with framed photographs and Xerox prints, reproducing such confrontational images as a 1928 shot of Ruth Snyder, the first woman to be photographed in the electric chair, and actress Anna Karina posing with a handgun on the set of Jean-Luc Godard’s *Made in U.S.A.* (1966).

The manipulated and appended-to monochrome also forms the basis of later works such as *It (Blob #1)* (1994), in which Parrino crumpled and re-stretched a canvas robed in glossy black enamel, splattering it with gooey silicone, and accessorizing it with a rubber eyeball—an allusion, perhaps, to his uncompromising visual style. Silicone is also an ingredient of *Bentoverslime #1* (1995), functioning as an adhesive that rejoins the component parts of a brutally trisected aluminum panel. *Untitled* (2004), which occupies a corner of the gallery, consists of four triangular canvases—also painted in black enamel—linked in a pyramidal configuration. Such strategies are consistent with Parrino’s attempt to reanimate a medium repeatedly declared dead—he described himself as “the Dr. Frankenstein of painting.”

Parrino often made his cultural—particularly musical—references more explicit in drawings and collages; among the artifacts and images featured here are stickers featuring the logo of experimental rock band Butthole Surfers and a reproduction of a drawing by the artist’s contemporary Raymond Pettibon that adorns the cover of Black Flag’s divisive 1984 album *My War*. Parrino pairs and juxtaposes these loaded cues and artifacts with sketches and studies for paintings, using graphite, ink, and tape—as well as more unconventional materials such as engine enamel and glitter vinyl—to stand in for the more substantive components of larger works. Elsewhere, by spraying enamel onto sheets of crumpled vellum, he allows the textures of the support to determine structure and detail, echoing earlier projects by Lucio Fontana and others, and anticipating contemporary undertakings such as Tauba Auerbach’s sprayed painting series *Crumple* (2008).

Steven Parrino was born in New York in 1958 and died there in 2005. Collections include the Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, Vaduz; Museum of Modern Art, New York; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Exhibitions include Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, Switzerland (2000); Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany (2000); *Jutta Koether and Steven Parrino: Black Bonds*, Swiss Institute, New York (2002); *Videos 1979–Present*, Circuit centre d’art contemporain, Lausanne, Switzerland (2002); Le Consortium, Dijon, France (2004); Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main, Germany (2005); PS1 Contemporary Art Center, New York (2005); Musée d’Art Moderne et Contemporain, Geneva (2005–07); *Retrospective 1981–2004*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2007); *Born to Be Wild: Hommage an Steven Parrino*, Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, Switzerland (2009); *Dancing on Graves*, Power Station, Dallas, (2017); and *Nihilism Is Love*, Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, Vaduz (2020).

#StevenParrino

STEVEN PARRINO

Opening reception: Thursday, February 3, 12–8pm

February 3–March 19, 2022

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