

MAI-THU PERRET

*Black Noise Drawings*<sup>1</sup>

*An Evening of the Book*: so the title of a three-dimensional installation by the artist Mai-Thu Perret (born 1976 in Geneva) for the 9th Biennale in Lyon 2007. In the title Perret refers to a revolutionary theater play - for which the constructivist artist and textile designer Varvara Stepanova (1894-1958) did the stage sets - celebrating the victory of the revolution with a quasi parade of books. With her modernist pictorial vocabulary, Mai-Thu Perret translated this historical drama into a performance that was premiered at New York's Kitchen and filmed on that occasion. In Lyon, on the other hand, these takes became a three-channel video work that was projected onto wallpaper designed by the artist with a sound accompaniment. It was not only in this impressive installation that Mai-Thu Perret referred to the formal language and practices of Modernism, which she approached by way of direct or indirect quotations, but also via the strategy of fictionalization, as in the instance of her long-term project *The Crystal Frontier*. At the close of this very strictly choreographed video work, *The Spider Song* (2004) can be heard, whose sound her artist colleague Steven Parrino had provided.

Mai-Thu Perret dedicated a series of drawing to him: *Black Noise Drawings*, which she did for a JRP|Ringier edition in memory of her deceased colleague. Mai-Thu Perret's drawings can be read as formal research, as a game with props extracted from constructivist picture traditions, but also as a reflection on the pictorial perspectives that Steven Parrino's striking images opened up. In consistently dark colors, the drawings avoid any kind of revolutionary euphoria and, in their basic somber tone, team up with Steven Parrino's "necrophiliac" approach to painting and his deconstruction of modernist picture formulas, even though with their fine spray technique they, at the same time, may be reminiscent of something like a more medial and spiritistic treatment of the culture of heroic modernism: *Perret's work could be seen as a compilation of rituals used to summon the voices of history and turn them into corporeal spirits with whom to dance*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Published in *Born to be wild. Homage to Steven Parrino*, exh. cat., Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, 2009, pp. 70-73.

<sup>2</sup> Julien Fronsacq, „Medium - Botschaft" in: *Parkett*, Nr. 84, 2008, pp. 129-130.