

January 22 – April 11, 2010

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STEPHEN PRINA

(Born in 1954 in Galesburg, Illinois. Lives and works in Los Angeles and Cambridge)

Stephen Prina has since the early eighties exhibited in galleries and museums worldwide. Surveys of his work have been presented at Museum Boijmans-van Beuningen Rotterdam; Frankfurter Kunstverein; Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden; and Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporaneo, Sevilla. One-person exhibitions have been mounted at Kunsthall Bergen, Art Pace, San Antonio; Musée d'art Moderne et Contemporain, Geneva; P.S.1 Museum, New York; The Power Plant, Toronto; The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago; as well as in Los Angeles, Cologne, Düsseldorf, London, Paris, Seoul, and Vienna. He has participated in Documenta IX, Venice Biennale XLIV, 51st Carnegie International, the 2008 Whitney Biennial, and in group exhibitions at Museum of Modern Art, New York, and Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. His concerts of have been staged in venues around the

world and recordings are available on the Drag City and organ of corti record labels. Prina splits his time between Los Angeles and Cambridge, where he is Professor of Visual and Environmental Studies at Harvard University.

Cover image:
The Way He Always Wanted It VI
(Cold Press/English),
2005 – 2009

Suite of twenty watercolors with graphite, with aluminum, 19 1/4 x 25 1/4 each
Courtesy of the artist and Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York



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1 — Main Galleries

Stephen Prina

Modern Movie Pop

Simultaneously gaming on classic conceptualism and modernism's formal tropes, American artist Stephen Prina has for thirty years developed a layered practice that encompasses painting, installation, photography, sound, and film. At the same time, he has cultivated an acclaimed career as composer and pop musician—releasing over a dozen albums under his own name and with The Red Krayola. Having kept his artistic interests separate from his musical pursuits for decades, Prina has begun to synthesize the two endeavors. Presenting recent work in multiple media alongside his music, *Modern Movie Pop* explores the role of reprisal in art-making.

Recently, Prina has developed a point of reference in the work of American modernist Bruce Goff. One of the most imaginative and iconoclastic architects of the twentieth century, Goff was also

an artist and, in the 1930s, a writer of modern piano compositions. In 2008, Prina made Goff the subject of his 35 mm film, *The Way He Always Wanted It II*. Shot at Goff's Ford House in Aurora, Illinois, the film explores the architect's multifaceted approach to music, painting, and architecture. The musical score, performed by Prina and others inside the circular house, draws from Goff's own correspondence and music fragments, written before Goff abandoned music at the age of thirty.

In the language of music, a reprise signals a further performance, in which a musical passage reappears, often slightly altered from its original form. Prina's film, an homage to Goff and Modernism both, informs much of the work that makes up his exhibition in Saint Louis, its images and outtakes represented within the museum's walls. *The Way He Always Wanted It III* (2009) features a wooden crate alone in a large white-carpeted gallery, three videos projected from its open ends onto adjacent walls. In his first video installation since 1976, Prina marshals outtakes from the final wintry scene of his new film, and at

the end of every sequence, we hear a musician's voice quipping, "That's the one man." From this same snowy shot, twenty frames have been culled for the photographs that line the Performance Gallery wall.

For Prina, who considers the role of the artwork within cultural, art-historical, and personal systems, the motifs of previous projects often reappear in new ones. The small photographs, designed to draw the visitor in for close inspection, themselves bisect another body of work: *The Way He Always Wanted It V* (2005-09). In this series of watercolors, painted en plein air from the balcony of his Los Angeles apartment, the artist created each image using the vocabulary of earlier projects—including "It's in our own best interests."; "It was the best he could do at the moment."; "We represent ourselves to the world."; and the artist's initials "SJP." Painting holds a strong presence here, too, in a series of richly painted window blinds that festoon the Performance space.

Unlike Goff, Prina has over the course his career maintained both his artistic practice and his music, represented together for the first time in *Modern Movie Pop*.

The exhibition's title is shorthand for the artist's newest—and most complex—musical score. Appropriating Anton Webern's *Concerto for Nine Instruments*, Opus 24 (1934), Prina re-inserts his own pop songs and covers from the last fifteen years into the new composition. A ten-musician score in three movements, *Concerto for Modern, Movie, and Pop Music for Ten Instruments and Voice* (2010) is a powerful metaphor for the cross-pollination of personal, art-historical, and musical narratives that have long suffused Prina's practice. A place is held for the concert (and the screening of Prina's recent films) in the context of the exhibition by a new unframed poster stapled to the wall. The concert premieres at the Contemporary in March 2010, staged within this installation and framed by Prina's art—together orchestrating a taxonomy of an artist's work that, at its heart, reveals an attention to the consonant spaces of painting, film, architecture, and music.