

# Time Out New York

February 28—March 5, 2008

## Mai-Thu Perret, “An Evening of the Book and Other Stories”

★★★★★

**The Kitchen**, through Mar 8  
(see Chelsea)

Mai-Thu Perret's first solo exhibition in New York aims to mine past avant-garde movements for newly provocative images and ideas, but provides little of either. What you do get are lots of arcane references underscoring the video, sculpture and diagrams. Take, for instance, the show's centerpiece video of young, female dancers in utilitarian garb, which, according to Perret, is inspired by artist Varvara Stepanova's set designs for Vitalii Zhemchuzhnyi's 1924 agitprop theater piece, *An Evening of the Book*. You wonder whether knowing any of this is worth the piece's slim rewards.

The front gallery offers an oddball assortment of artworks, including a ball of neon tubing that looks like a wadded-up (rejected?) version of props the Geneva-based Perret has previously shown, a carpet with a Rorschach pattern and large wall diagrams of dance steps. But nothing quite sums up the pointlessness of this show better than the eight



gigantic, cardboard commas—which, tellingly, resemble quotation marks—that line a wall leading to Perret's take on Zhemchuzhnyi's homage to revolutionary literature.

The same commas, along with a huge blank-paged book, appear in the video as part of a set around which the aforementioned cadre of women performs synchronized movements that seesaw between energy and lethargy. Apparently unable to sustain the stamina to convert past ideology to present-day meaning, the characters convey the disappointing message that such attempts are better in theory than practice.—*Merrily Kerr*