

# GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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## PRESS RELEASE

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

456 NORTH CAMDEN DRIVE

BEVERLY HILLS CA 90210

HOURS:

T. 310.271.9400

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Tue-Sat 10:00am-6:00pm



## ★RICHARD PRINCE: COWBOYS★

Thursday, February 21-Saturday, April 6, 2013

Opening reception for the artist: Thursday, February 21st, from 6:00 to 8:00 pm

*A cowboy walks into a bar and says to the bartender, "Who's the asshole who owns this shithole?"*

—Richard Prince

Gagosian Gallery is pleased to present Richard Prince's *Cowboy* paintings.

Over the last thirty years, the American cowboy has given rise to some of Prince's most celebrated works. Dividing into several phases between the early 1980s and the present, his rephotographing of *verité* images inspired by cowboy Westerns and produced for the advertising industry, reveals as much about his shifting relationship to an American icon and its construction by the mass media as his use of evolving reprographic technologies.

In the earliest iterations, out of necessity Prince shot around advertising copy to obtain the final edit, resulting in tightly cropped, grainy close-ups of larger-than-life ranchers, printed in standard format. In the second stage, enhanced production techniques allowed him to substantially increase the scale and intensity of the final images, and move his subjects out into the landscape. In the third phase he was able to work from high quality images totally devoid of copy. Thus the cowboys were reduced to diminutive yet legible ciphers dwarfed by vast, bucolic American landscapes. Transposed into the world of art, these cinematic vistas evoked—not without a trace of irony—the great Romantic tradition in painting.

For his first *Cowboy* paintings, which follow earlier series of *Nurse* paintings, Prince has again tapped pulp fiction for inspiration. Directly inspired by the covers and cover artwork of so-called "frontier books," he has transferred to canvas greatly enlarged inkjet prints of scanned figures removed from their original settings. He then paints in, around, and over the prints in an uninhibited manner evocative of post-war American painting—from sedimentary layers and floating blocks of color to swipes and splatters of more animated moments.

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At a glance, the *Cowboy* paintings are ironic appropriations intended to deconstruct both a regressive stereotype and the truth of uninhibited artistic gesture. But on closer scrutiny, there is an undeniable element of complicit pleasure in Prince's masterfully casual renderings of figure and ground where the powerful male gunslingers are little more than pretexts or catalysts for free experimentation with paint. Lush, lurid abstract grounds, rapidly executed, replace the information of the former landscape backgrounds, intimating at various atmospheric conditions or temperaments: the vaporous pastels of a midday summer haze; a rosy dawn or a vermilion sunset; the fresh green depths of a mountain landscape, or the ominous dark of night.

**Richard Prince** was born in 1949 in the Panama Canal Zone. His work has been the subject of major survey exhibitions, including the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1992); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (1993); Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam (1993); Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel (2001, traveled to Kunsthalle Zurich and Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg); Serpentine Gallery, London (2008); "Richard Prince: Spiritual America," Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in 2007 (traveled to The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 2008); and "Richard Prince: American Prayer," an exhibition of American literature and ephemera from the artist's collection, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (2011).

Prince lives and works in New York.

For further information please contact Alexandra Magnuson at [alex@gagosian.com](mailto:alex@gagosian.com) or at +1.310.271.9400.

Please join the conversation with Gagosian Gallery on Twitter (@GagosianLA) and on Instagram (@gagosiangallery) via the hashtag #RichardPrinceCowboys

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