

GALERIE EDWYNN HOUK
ZUR STOCKEREGG

PRESS RELEASE



HANNES SCHMID

Myth of the West

19 May – 16 July 2011

Vernissage Thursday 19 May, 6 – 8 pm

the artist will be present

Galerie Edwynn Houk zur Stockeregg is pleased to announce its first solo exhibition with the Swiss artist Hannes Schmid. This will be his first exhibition in Zurich following the overwhelming success of his 2010 solo presentation at the prestigious Fotostiftung Schweiz, *Never Look Back*.

Hannes Schmid's Cowboys have stealthily entered our consciousness via a steady flow of gorgeous advertisement imagery and within the art market, via the appropriated cowboys of Richard Prince. In the photographs on display in this exhibition, selected by the artist from his personal archive, Schmid grasped the scenery of the American West in a refined pictorial way and reimagined the cowboy, who had already been ennobled to be the mythical icon in America, by giving him a contemporary and tangible appearance. Drawing from an extensive knowledge as artist and photographer, Schmid dramatically reduced the vocabulary of the image to essentials and emphasized the brilliance of the prints. In addition, he has been expanding his Cowboys from just photography, reclaiming and reworking them into oil paintings and other media.

Schmid anchors his seductive images in a collective memory that derives from the fictional accounts of the West in Hollywood genre films. His frequent use of the panoramic format mimics the cinema that, in return, heightens the sense of the open and dramatic landscape as well as the staged 'action' depicted within.

Being part of a handful of photographers who has worked on an advertisement campaign that was first launched in 1954, Schmid is often credited with updating the Cowboy and its iconic status, injecting new life and a fresh perspective. He was originally approached because of his renowned work within the fashion industry and his proven eye for intense color and sharp, unusual angles. His style of reduction - hiding of faces, dramatic contrasts within a limited color palette, and the use of the silhouette - added new drama to one of the most successful advertising campaigns and ensured the continued longevity and global recognizability of the Cowboy as the *Marlboro Man*.

However, these images go beyond mere marketing pragmatism and instead also entertain a longing and a fascination with the American West. In this respect, it seems remarkable that a Swiss born photographer produced an image that shaped the decidedly American iconography of these desires. Yet, unlike his fellow countryman Robert Frank, Hannes Schmid embellished the (self) image of the United States rather than deconstructing it. Schmid's Cowboys have become part of us, whether we are American or not.

Hannes Schmid was born in Zurich in 1946. He studied photography at the Ruth Prowse School of Art, Cape Town, South Africa. Recent exhibitions include *Never Look Back*, Fotostiftung Schweiz, Winterthur; *A Star is Born*, Museum Folkwang, Essen; *Echoes*, Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris; and *Who Shot Rock: Photographers of Rock and Roll*, Brooklyn Museum, New York, which is currently touring the U.S. Upcoming exhibitions include *Human Currents* at the Rubin Museum, New York, showing his film and photographs of the 2001 Maha Kumbh Mela pilgrimage to the Ganges River in northeastern India. Schmid has just been awarded the prestigious Delphic Art Movie Award in Berlin for his film "For Gods Only." *Myth of the West* will be shown at our New York gallery this autumn. A major retrospective and accompanying catalogue is planned at the Kunstmuseum Bern in 2013.

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