ALMINE RECH

# Richard Prince

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It is with irony, humor, and an astute gaze that Richard Prince (b. 1949) exposes consumer society's imagery. The New-York-based artist has dealt with the visual codes and fictions of US-American popular culture since the 1970s, looking into the mechanisms of authorship, originality, and media representation. He became famous for his legendary series *Cowboys*, in which re-photographed advertisements for Marlboro cigarettes featuring perspectives different from the original shot turn into critical reflections upon myths, masculinity, and media.

With an emphasis on his photographic oeuvre, Prince's key medium, the ALBERTINA Museum devotes a major exhibition to Richard Prince spanning the period from the 1970s to the present. It showcases iconic series like *Fashion*, *Gangs*, and *Cowboys*, as well as rarely shown and hitherto unseen works—from his groundbreaking rephotography of advertising motifs and autobiography-based images from rural upstate New York to complex collages of found material.

Prince does not tire of approaching issues of appropriation from ever-new perspectives, the connections and interrelationships of which are in the focus of the presentation: at the interface of photography, painting, and sculpture, the show, comprising some 150 works, illustrates how consistently Prince's work is steeped in photographic thought. Sometimes edited only to a minimal extent, his images unfold a dual effect: they are both analytical and seductive.

Richard Prince (b. 1949) ranks among the most prominent contemporary exponents of appropriation art. The artist, who lives in New York, has dealt with the imageries of US-American popular culture since the 1970s. By appropriating existing images from advertising, subculture, and mass culture, and by editing and recontextualizing them, Prince explores the myths and fictions on which mass media images rely. Inextricably linked to this are issues of authorship, originality, and mechanisms of media representation.

Prince's artistic practice is often considered alongside that of the Pictures Generation. These were an informal group of New York-based artists who, beginning in the 1970s, began using representational imagery as a critique of how the mass media's growing flood of images would shape our perception of reality. Within this context, traditional notions of originality and authorship seem obsolete. Pictures are no longer considered original, but as reproducible materials circulating within cultural pictorial systems. As Prince frequently edits his source material only to a minimal degree, his works remain ingeniously ambivalent: being both objective and seductive, they take a critical look at visual fictions and amplify them.

This exhibition places its focus on the artist's photographic oeuvre. A popular medium of everyday culture, photography is at the heart of Prince's art, even as he later embraced painting and sculpture. Starting out from his groundbreaking early photographs, for which he rephotographed advertisements and commercial images from magazines, this selection of works on view demonstrates how Prince has continuously developed his subtly nuanced approach to the medium of photography. In subsequent years, he photographed his living environment in the rural parts of the state of New York, thus bringing together autobiographic elements with fiction. More recent groups of works rely on collected items, which Prince appropriates in their quality as objects and arranges within complex collages. Paintings and sculptures augmenting the show illustrate how comprehensively the artist's work is informed by photographic thinking.