ALMINE RECH

# Richard Prince
# It's a Free Concert

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There are almost countless texts, books, and exhibition catalogues about Richard Prince (born 1949), as well as texts he himself has authored not only for his own publications but also those of other artists. Gaining any overview of his exhibition activities proves likewise a challenge, and he was already at the beginning of his career being given solo shows in important international museums. He is known, not least, for the astronomical prices his works command on the art market. Nevertheless, though his work has been widely shown and many believe they know it well, Richard Prince remains an enigmatic artist, even today. He is skilled in convincingly covering his tracks, through sudden changes of direction. That he occasionally returns to the very same paths, for example reusing identical or similar titles, subjects, and motifs which he had previously employed in other series, does not make an understanding of his oeuvre any less demanding. It remains an enigma that, even though his artistic approaches ultimately remain opaque, his *Cowboys, Nurses,* and *Jokes* still count amongst the most established contributions to contemporary art's canon.

Richard Prince first came to attention at the end of the 1970s through the re-photographing of advertisements and imagery from sales catalogues, but which ultimately featured neither text nor logos. The jewelry and accessories of fashionable lifestyles as well as elegant interiors pervade the atmosphere of the artist's early photographic works. A decade later his *Cowboys* based on Marlboro cigarette advertisements quickly achieved cult status and were amongst the highlights of the group exhibition *That's the Way We Do It* at Kunsthaus Bregenz in 2011.

Aspects of American popular culture and the depiction of various social milieus have provided his work's repeatedly occurring and predominant imagery, which encompasses painting, photography, sculpture, and installation. These include groups from various subcultures such as rockers and their *Girlfriends* (the title of one of Prince's series of works). Amongst his most popular paintings are the so-called *Jokes* and *Cartoons*, in which jokes in the form of text imagery, or drawings in acrylic, are transferred to canvas using the screen-printing process. Even if Prince privileges the banal, such as car hoods, he nevertheless succeeds in placing them in a state of suspension that is equally anchored in the trivial and the auratic. Prince has conceived his exhibition *It's a Free Concert* especially for Kunsthaus Bregenz. The majority of works on display will be receiving exposure to a wider public for the first time. It is in just such a spirit that the title represents a kind of leitmotif that permeates the whole of the display, without however individual works being reduced to merely an illustration of it. The reference to a Seite 3 | 10 concert could be either interpreted as a reverential homage to the Bregenzer Festspiele, its open-air opera, or an evocation of hippiesque youth culture. Numerous associations to popular and subculture, rock and pop stars such as Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix, and so-called doo-wop bands from the 1950s, which the artist grew up with, are omnipresent. The dissolving of boundaries and transcending of conventions which frequently accompany rock concerts, likewise shine through in the small-scale works, where Prince has adorned advertising photos for pornographic films with stickers which normally serve as labeling for DVDs.

Along with sex, rock 'n' roll and other forms of popular music, the car – more precisely the American Chevrolet El Camino and Buick Grand National, so-called land yachts – is an additional site of projection in the exhibition, that is the (supposedly male) American dream of freedom. In his equally reverent and critical examination of his native culture, Prince succeeds in transferring its complex seductive power to works of art. Moreover, and alone by means of the titles of his already legendary car works bearing such names as *Elvis* or *The Doors*, he manages, in this exhibition for Bregenz, to loop music and street culture.

This first large-scale solo exhibition by Richard Prince in an Austrian institution not only demonstrates the range of his approach, but also its impressive conceptual strengths.

–Yilmaz Dziewior