ALMINE RECH

Richard Prince
The Fug

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Almine Rech Gallery is pleased to announce *The Fug*, its first solo exhibition of acclaimed American artist Richard Prince at the gallery.

Prince has been working as an artist since the 1970s; a member of the influential Pictures Generation, he worked alongside other artists to expand the scope of conceptual photography through the use of appropriation and rephotography. As John McWhinnie's essay for the catalogue accompanying this exhibition observes, the line between fact and fiction is constantly blurred, not only in Prince's work but also in the artist's mythic identity.

Prince's art frequently takes as its subject peripheral aspects of American culture, both high and low, and transforms them into a medium. Whether "Borscht Belt" jokes, car and motorcycle enthusiasm, pulp-literature or celebrity, his material is sourced from the underbelly of society. Prince takes aim at the vulgar, revealing culture's indiscretions—misogyny, consumerism, exhibitionism and idealized desire. However, as a critique it is ambiguous in that it is accompanied by an equal dose of sympathy and obsession. That said, Prince is not confined to the low. He is equally versed in the high art of de Kooning, Pollock and Picasso, not to mention literary tradition. As Robert Rubin writes "He appropriates an era and makes something that resonates differently for different people. The beauty of Richard Prince's art is that it doesn't have limits."

Prince is an avid collector and curator of Americana. In selecting or regroupings images, whether they be rephotographs of advertisements of luxury pens, living room sets, the Marlboro Man, or forged publicity photographs, extracting them from their source, Prince elevates them to the status of fine art. Having been sourced for his palette, Prince's subjects are recycled to fit into the framework of the artist's diverse repertoire. One may consider, for example, the title of this exhibition, which references the lesser-known American band *The Fugs*, founded in the early 1960s. Noted for their participation in the anti-Vietnam movement and alternative intellectualism, they were also allied closely with the Beat Generation, another of Prince's longstanding references. The band can be found in the series *Untitled (1,2,3,4)*, which groups together images in a gang-like fashion.

The black and white *Joke paintings* from this exhibition find their roots in the monochromatic stenciled joke paintings that Prince debuted in 1987. These works were preceded by the *Handwritten jokes*, which he began in 1985, and their legacy continues in the silkscreened *White paintings* that reproduced New Yorker cartoons. The *Check paintings* were originally made possible by the artist's collection of cancelled checks from famous figures. Here they again include jokes, but Prince has taken his process a step further: the support is wallpapered with paperback covers that reference his famed series of *Nurse paintings* from the early 2000s. The Nurses in turn are indicative of the bibliophile within the artist, and relate to series such as *American English* (which compare first edition covers from the UK and the United States highlighting differences in national taste) and the *Originals* (which compare the original cover art to the pulp fiction volumes themselves).

His series *Girlfriends* from the 1980s features suggestive, if not graphic, self-portraits of women splayed over motorcycles that were submitted for publication in *Biker magazines* by the subjects themselves. Exhibitionist in nature, they are laced with an insight into the nature of gender and desire in contemporary America. These images have at times appeared

individually in the past, but with the works from this exhibition multiple images are grouped together into a single composition. As with the *Girlfriends*, the *Hoods* relate to American car culture as well as the artist's personal affinity for the automobile and allude to the earlier *Gangs*, which included images of car hoods. The freestanding sculptural *Hoods* exhibited here begin with the ready-made fiberglass replicas of classic muscle cars that the artist obtained from the advertising pages of *Hot Rod* magazines and then treated as a three dimensional canvas, painted with atmospheric pastel colors reminiscent of *Color Field painting* and anchored to the floor with boxy pedestals.

This exhibition will be accompanies by a fully illustrated catalogue with essay by John McWhinnie entitled *Thirteen Different Ways of Looking at Richard Prince*.

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 (2002); Serpentine Gallery, London (2008). The retrospective *Richard Prince: Spiritual America* opened at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in 2007 and traveled to The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis in 2008. *Richard Prince: American Prayer*, an exhibition of American literature and ephemera from the artist's collection was on view at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris earlier this year.