

RICHARD PRINCE

25⁰ ALBERTINA

Exhibition Facts

Duration	April 17 to August 16, 2026
Opening	April 17 18.30 p.m.
Venue	Bastei The ALBERTINA Museum
Curator	Walter Moser
Curatorial Assistance	Alexandra Mae Hiebert
Exhibits	ca. 150
Catalogue	Available at the shop of The ALBERTINA Museum as well as at https://shop.albertina.at/ Richard Prince, Ed.: Walter Moser, 2026, 256 pages, 23cm x 29cm (portrait format), softcover, Hirmer Verlag, ISBN English edition: 978-3-7774-4734-6, 39,90 € Authors: Eva Kernbauer, Christian Liclair, Walter Moser, Nicole Scheyerer, Sydney Stutterheim, Thomas D. Trummer and Tanja Widmann
Contact	Albertinaplatz 1 1010 Vienna T +43 (0)1 534 83 0 presse@albertina.at www.albertina.at
Opening Hours	Daily 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. Wednesday and Friday 10 a.m. – 9 p.m.
Press Contact	Daniel Benyes T +43 (0)1 534 83 511 M +43 (0)699 12178720 d.benyes@albertina.at Veronika Werkner T +43 (0)1 534 83 512 M +43 (0)664 78976934 v.werkner@albertina.at

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Richard Prince

April 17 to August 16, 2026

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.

Chapter Texts

Introduction

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.

The Magic Castle

Richard Prince's early piece *The Magic Castle* is considered a key work in the development of his appropriation techniques. It was created in 1968/69 during a study tour of Europe and shows classic tourist motifs like castles, rivers, and monuments in Paris, Florence, or Vienna. Prince mixed slides that were sold in souvenir and museum shops, sorted according to thematic groups, with his own pictures. He realized that his own photographs hardly differed from the standardized pictorial language of the tourist pictures. Predefined through conventions and existing images, originality and subjective authorship appear questionable. Prince would elaborate on these key issues of photographic perception and authorship in his subsequent works.

Gray Folders

The *Gray Folders* are amongst Richard Prince's earliest works, and they illustrate how expansively the artist dealt with issues of photographic representation—a process from which the method of appropriation derived. These collages, assembling two or more casual, snapshot-like pictures, follow in the tradition of conceptual photography: by combining various pictorial fragments, Prince dissolves what pretends to be the integrity of an individual image, revealing the construction of meaning behind it.

He repeatedly makes use of text and image pairings destabilizing photographic evidence, with the two components complementing, commenting upon, or contradicting each other. Furthermore, overpainting establishes an intermedial relationship between photography and painting, one which explores the correlation between material support and visual representation.

In other works, Prince combines individual images to create serial sequences intended to represent temporal processes. The repeated view from a driving vehicle captures various moments in time, thus expanding static photography into a process-based technique.

Strategies that would be characteristic of Prince's later work already become manifest in these early collages. Towards the late 1970s, his collages and first appropriated photographs were created in parallel; accordingly, Prince drew on found images even in his beginnings.

Living Rooms

In the 1970s, Richard Prince worked for the Time Life publishing company, clipping articles and editorials from magazines for the staff writers. What remained after the process was mostly advertisements for consumer goods like watches, pens, or interiors. In 1977, Prince, fascinated by this material, would rephotograph it with his 35 mm camera for the first time. Through techniques of cropping, enlargement, and manual editing, he strategically removed logos and captions so that the images were freed from their original commercial function. Subsequently, he arranged the photographs in groups. Through the repetition of similar arrangements, Prince makes both the artificiality of the depictions and the visual codes addressing our needs and desires visible. He frequently places his focus on gender stereotypes: male models, photographed repeatedly in similar poses and costume, exude authority, while the rephotographed commercial images featuring female models expose the *mise-en-scène* of seductive coquetry.

Fashion

The series *Fashion*, shot in 1982–84, is an outstanding example of Richard Prince's practice of appropriation. In these works, the artist rephotographed fashion images, making narrowly cropped views and then enlarging the pictures. Translated into an art context, these photographs oscillate between everyday familiarity and estrangement. The monumental effect, the emphasis placed on the

visual aspect through harsh lighting, and strong close-ups make the faces come into view as projection screens of social expectations and cultural fantasies.

Prince's act of appropriation involves diverse forms of manipulation. As he explains in his text "The 8-Track Photograph," there is a productive analogy with musical sampling—the reuse of existing sound recordings—in these methods. Besides cropping the image, he works with sharpness and blurring, by which the artist lends the works a hyperreal or abstract appearance. Or he combines images in the form of collage and then photographs them in unusual compositions that frequently give a dystopian impression. Moreover, he photographs color images in black and white and vice versa, thereby provoking unusual color casts.

Spiritual America 4

The point of departure of *Spiritual America 4* was a controversial picture taken by photographer Garry Gross in 1975. Gross photographed actress Brooke Shields, who was working as a model at the time, as a ten-year-old child in the nude in a bathtub, with her face made up. Gross's decision to reedit the picture as a pin-up poster in the early 1980s resulted in a lawsuit that attracted a great deal of attention: Shield's mother sought to prevent the re-dissemination of the picture, but she lost the case, having ceded usage rights to the photographer.

Through a reflexive study of the power structures and patterns of meaning inscribed into the pictures beyond the visual representation as such, Richard Prince took a closer look at Gross's photograph. In 1983, he photographed the original, adapting the composition slightly by choosing a tighter frame. Entitling it *Spiritual America*, he alluded to the work of the same name by photographer Alfred Stieglitz of 1923, who proposed a critical metaphor for American society, described by him as materialist and intellectually feeble, in the form of a castrated horse. In addition to their ambivalent attitude towards sexuality, celebrities, and morals, Prince addressed people's voyeurism: he presented the picture in a gold frame, installed in a gallery space that he rented specifically to exhibit this piece.

In 2005, Prince revisited the subject. In *Spiritual America 4*, he did not make use of the instrument of rephotography but collaborated with photographer Sante D'Orazio, who photographed Brooke Shields, now forty years old, in an almost identical pose. Different from 1976 she wore a bikini, leaning against a motorbike as an allusion to Prince's *Girlfriends* series. This work enabled the actress to regain control of her image, thereby asserting retroactive agency over the earlier representation in turn.

Gangs

For his *Gangs* series, begun in the early 1980s, Richard Prince grouped nine to twelve images together, exposing them on photographic paper according to a predefined grid—an approach derived from the darkroom technique of ganging, for which several frames are combined into a single print, like a contact sheet.

The images appropriated by Prince are not only taken from advertising but also from subcultural imagery or popular mass media. The combination of these heterogeneous materials results in unexpected iconographic interrelationships. Photography is not a means here to depict the world in a neutral fashion, but it serves the process of reinterpretation. In this way, Prince systematically undermines preconceived readings of images.

Supposed technical reproduction flaws remain visible. They disclose the act of rephotographing, pointing to the potential multiplication of images for mass-media circulation. For Prince, analyzing reality is not primarily a means of critiquing the media. On the contrary, as he emphasizes how repetition can facilitate credibility: “I’ve always thought that if you present an image that might be questionable multiple times or in proximity to ones similar to it, then it might help the viewer to maybe believe that the image is true.”

When Prince embraced painting, his work remained nevertheless rooted in photography. The *White Paintings* are based on silkscreens of fragmentary cartoon motifs—such as household furniture or punchlines—connected through white paint, which underscores the conformity of popular cartoons. Not only does Prince revisit motifs already explored in the *Gangs*, but the works are also related conceptually: the *White Paintings* resume the combination of images appropriated from diverse sources and arranged in a seemingly random manner—this time, however, on canvas.

Cowboys

The iconic *Cowboys* series started out from advertisements for the Marlboro cigarette brand. Redefining the frame and removing texts and brand references, Prince relied on the suggestive presentation of the original pictures, which he additionally emphasized through substantial enlargement. However, at the same time the pictures’ origins would remain recognizable: the blurring and halftone dots found in the final images allude to the act of appropriation by which they were made.

The series addresses the commercialization of cultural values and signals how images convey stereotypical ideas of gender roles. As the epitome of freedom and masculinity, the cowboy is one of the most powerful symbolic prototypes of American culture. At the same time, he is part of the national myth of the conquest of the American West.

Prince drew upon these images at a time when the Marlboro campaign began to show first cracks and the tobacco company was facing increasing criticism from health organizations. At the same time, the figure of the cowboy was monopolized by politicians like Ronald Reagan as a symbol of strength, authority, and nostalgic ideas of national identity during the politically loaded period of the 1980s. Prince’s *Cowboys* oscillate between criticism and affirmation: they stand for the power of mass-media images while making use of their aesthetic seduction.

Girlfriends

For his *Girlfriends* series, which he began in the late 1980s, Richard Prince appropriated photographs from biker and custom motorcycle magazines, in which mostly male fans expressed their enthusiasm for motorbikes in the form of amateur photographs of their girlfriends in erotic poses. The series joins in with Prince's explorations of American myths: like cowboys, motorbikes stand for the freedom of individuals. At the same time, Prince questions the visual policy of stereotypical representations of sex. Looking into the camera, the women appear eager to stage themselves. Is this an act of self-empowerment, do they design their self-image here, or are they forced into this role by the male photographers' and audience's authority? Prince does not offer a definite answer but leaves it to the viewers to interpret these images. Feminist debates on this point also go in different directions: while some critics recognize an affirmation of stereotypical images of women in these pictures, others regard them as critical reflections upon the subject.

Upstate

Had Richard Prince focused his camera solely on found pictorial material before, during the second half of the 1990s he captured his surroundings by camera in rural New York, where he now lived. In his *Upstate* series, photographs frequently seem entirely casual, but in fact have been subtly composed. In so doing, he shows seemingly unspectacular motifs that paint the picture of a region undergoing social change. The photographs are to be seen in the long tradition of American documentary photography, such as the works of Walker Evans, in which ordinary objects taken from everyday culture envisage a socially informed landscape oscillating between familiarity and estrangement. Therefore, *Upstate* is less a break with, than a continuation of, Prince's artistic strategy: for him, there is no fundamental difference between rephotographing pictures and photographing the three-dimensional world, where the motifs appear to be visually preconceived as well. With Prince presenting his landscapes on an equal footing with his appropriated compositions, it becomes obvious how permeable the boundary between reality and image has become.

He further sharpens this practice in *Adult Comedy Action Drama*: by combining his own pictures, which have been taken in his personal environment, with appropriated images and photographs of objects from his own collection, he designs his autobiographical self-image as an artist. Prince played with his own identity even earlier: in his self-portraits he worked with masks and disguises, while in his writings he switched between first and third person, thereby blurring the line between fact and fiction.

Untitled (Original)

A passionate collector of varied pictorial materials and books, Richard Prince has increasingly pushed his own collection to the fore in more recent works. In *Untitled (Original)*, he eliminates the difference between artist and collector by arranging vintage nurse novels as diptychs using the original illustrated cover designs. The popular stereotype of the "naughty nurse" reveals society's hidden

desires, fantasies, and fictions, while it also shows the transformation from a painted sketch to a printed cover.

For his *Publicities* series, Prince combined such celebrity memorabilia as film stills and headshots to compose collages, instead of rephotographing existing images. These pictures are part of an economic system in which the interaction between sitters, media, and audience feeds a profitable publicity machinery. The signatures, some of which are genuine and some of which have been added by the artist, augment the impression of personalization and authenticity while undermining it at the same time. The *Publicities* are a consistent development of earlier work groups in which Prince exposes the relationship between self-portrayal, commercialization, and economic exploitation, as well as formal and typological connections, through image combinations.

Similarly, in *1, 2, 3, 4* Prince continues to pursue the principle of montage. Selected images are mounted on the cardboard support according to a simple, regularized pattern: in each picture, one more figure appears within the image series. This successive numerical order not only highlights the interplay between the individual motifs through sequencing but also points to the essential openness of pictorial meaning.

Tiffany Paintings

Based on the format of a newspaper spread, the *Tiffany Paintings*, dating from the 2000s, are collages in which Prince combined articles and images from the New York Times with ads for the luxury jewelry house Tiffany & Co. that ran in the same publication, placing them in the upper right corner of the compositions and then overpainting the support with monochrome color fields.

Richard Prince's use of advertisements in this series can be traced back to his early photographs, in which he removed brand names by cropping the images accordingly. Here, the words and images, which have been extracted to various degrees and frequently shine through the paint layer, relate to the artist's autobiography and make reference to his own works. This strategy is characteristic of the artist's subsequent output, for which he resorts to his early works, putting them into adapted thematic contexts through new combinations.

New Portraits

The *New Portraits* series, begun in the 2010s, denotes the contemporary expansion of the artist's central themes into the digital realm. The works oscillate along the lines between privacy and public life, authenticity and artificiality, free availability and commercial exploitation. Prince chooses images from the social media platform Instagram, mostly selfies or lifestyle shots, screenshotting entire posts. By ensuring that posts, likes, and his own comments remain visible, Prince interconnects the relationship of artistic appropriation and public image circulation, which is at the heart of his work, with issues regarding the economic conditions of digital attention. By transferring the images from the digital space to the realm of art, he directs attention to the paradoxical mechanisms of self-representation in the social media: helping the creation of online identities, photography circulates

as visual currency. What seems to be available on the Internet for free turns out a commercially exploitable factor of the digital economy.

The artist's preoccupation with constructed self-portrayals can be traced back to his early work. In 1984, when making portraits of his friends, Prince did not ask them to pose for him in front of the camera but to provide him with five existing pictures of each of them. From this selection of five he chose one, which he rephotographed and used as portrait of the person in question.

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Take a look is a short, engaging image-based talk on selected works from the respective exhibition, offering a concise introduction to its ideas and highlights.

The approximately 20-minute talk is available in German and English and can be attended without registration (a ticket is required). Visitors receive a compact art introduction before exploring the exhibition independently and with a fresh perspective.

Richard Prince

Sunday, 26 April

10.30 a.m. – 12.30 p.m.

The ALBERTINA Museum, Grand Studio

Podcast and Symposium

A podcast is currently being produced in conjunction with the exhibition.

As part of a symposium, panel discussions featuring international experts will take place on June 19.

Press Images

The following images are available free of charge in the Press section of www.albertina.at.
 Legal notice: The images may only be used in connection with reporting on the exhibition.



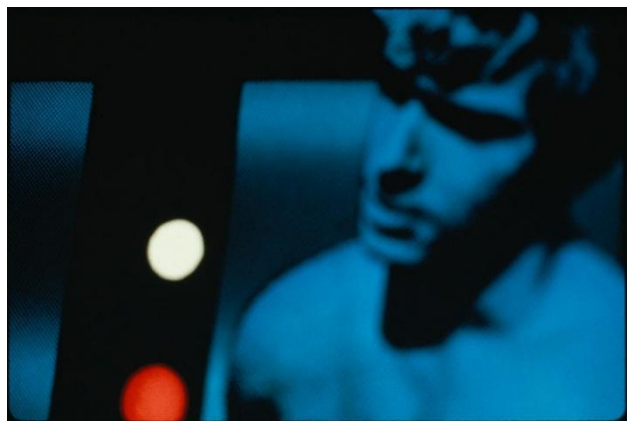
Richard Prince
Untitled (Postcard), 1968-69
 From the series *The Magic Castle*
 C-print
 50.8 x 61 cm
 Courtesy of Richard Prince Studio
 © Richard Prince



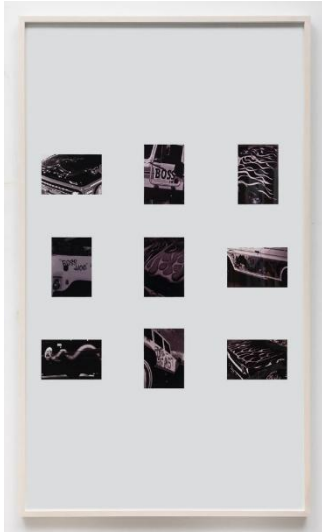
Richard Prince
Untitled (Three Women Looking in the Same Direction), 1980
 Three Ektacolor photopographs
 101.6 x 152.4 cm
 Courtesy of Richard Prince Studio
 © Richard Prince



Richard Prince
Untitled (Fashion), 1982-1984
 C-print
 152.4 x 101.6 cm
 Courtesy of Richard Prince Studio
 © Richard Prince



Richard Prince
Russell, 1982
 From the series *Entertainers*
 Giclée photograph
 246.7 x 124.8 cm
 Courtesy of Richard Prince Studio
 © Richard Prince



Richard Prince
Flames, Dragons and Titles (Gang), 1985-1986
 Ektacolor photographs
 213.4 x 121.9 cm
 Courtesy of Richard Prince Studio
 © Richard Prince



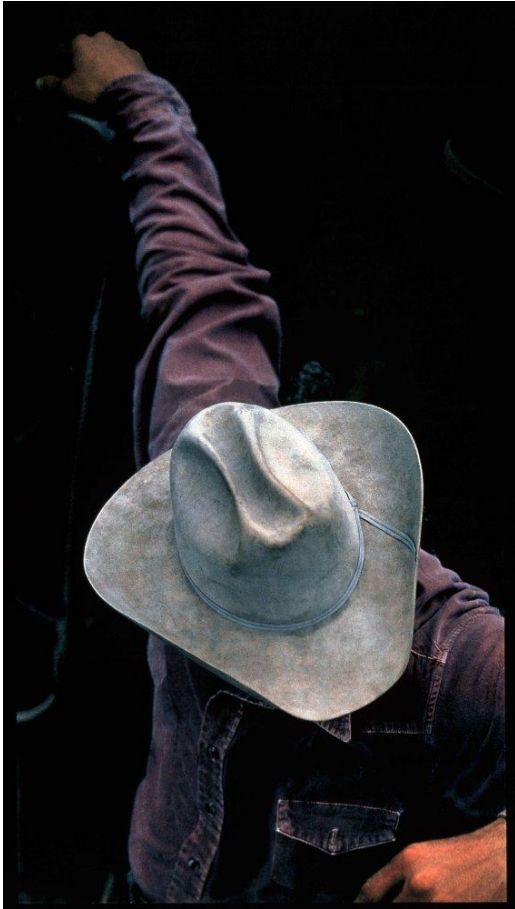
Richard Prince
Untitled (Cowboy), 1989
 Ektacolor photograph
 121.9 x 184.8 cm
 Courtesy of Richard Prince Studio
 © Richard Prince



Richard Prince
Lady Doc, 1993
 Acrylic and silkscreen on canvas
 210.8 x 294.6 cm
 Courtesy of Richard Prince Studio
 © Richard Prince



Richard Prince
Untitled (Upstate), 1995-1999
 Ektacolor photograph
 101.6 x 152.4 cm
 Courtesy of Richard Prince Studio
 © Richard Prince



Richard Prince
Untitled (Cowboy), 1999
Ektacolor photograph
218.4 x 121.9 cm
Courtesy of Richard Prince Studio
© Richard Prince



Richard Prince
Untitled (1,2,3,4), 2008
Collage and graphite on rag board
61 x 76.2 cm
Courtesy of Richard Prince Studio
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