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Richard Prince to Exhibit More Than Eighty Key Early Photographs at Gagosian in London

Early Photography, 1977–87 Occupies the Grosvenor Hill and Davies Street Galleries



Richard Prince, *Jackee*, 1983 (detail), Ektacolor photograph, in frame, 96 × 48 inches (243.8 × 121.9 cm), edition of 3
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Most of what’s passing for information right now is total fiction. I try to turn the lie back on itself.
—Richard Prince

LONDON, September 11, 2023—Gagosian is pleased to announce *Early Photography, 1977–87*, an exhibition by Richard Prince opening at the Grosvenor Hill and Davies Street galleries in London on October 5, 2023. The exhibition features many of Prince’s iconic cowboy, girlfriend, and advertisement photographs, some of which have not previously been exhibited in the city. The Davies Street gallery hosts work solely from *Entertainers* (1982–83), while the gallery at Grosvenor Hill features works from several other series.

Collecting, chronicling, and repurposing examples of discomfiting mainstream humor alongside images from a variety of mass media, Prince chronicles the intersection of America’s vernaculars and subcultures in the construction of its national identity. In 1977, he began using a process of “rephotography” to appropriate shots from advertising and lifestyle press, redefining the concepts of authorship and originality—an approach he would later extend to include social media. A conscious elision of the aims and techniques of traditional picture-making, the technique allows Prince to redirect the authority of a visual referent. “When you put an already existing image in front of a camera,” he explains, “you know what you’re going to get. You’ve taken out the decisive moment.”

In the black-and-white photograph *Untitled (Self-Portrait)* (1980), Prince portrays himself in eye makeup and lipstick along with a suit and tie, plumbing themes of alienation and uncertainty found throughout his oeuvre. As Prince wrote in his 1983 essay “Cowboys: The Perfect Tense,” “Some

people would like to try to change places, just for a day, with maybe someone they admired or even envied, to see what it would be like, to see if it would be what they'd always heard it would be." In *Untitled (Cowboy)* (1980–84), Prince shows his subject merging with the landscape of the American West, accentuating a heroic individualism.

In works such as *Untitled (Couple)* (1977) and *Untitled (Man Looking to the Left)* (1978), Prince explores tropes of masculinity in rephotographed images of square-jawed, suit-wearing models, calling their authenticity into question through a focus on heavily styled representation. Other works depict advertisements for objects such as luxury watches and pens—items that Prince has described as being foreign to him—in a polished but generic manner that suggests a lack of individual author. From Prince's perspective, this makes his sources fair game for recontextualization; he categorizes the original photographers as having been commissioned: "They were for hire," he states, "I was working in a completely different way."

Many of the works reveal a fascination with the photographic medium as a tool for categorization and cataloguing that exhibits a sociological and anthropological slant: *Untitled (Three Women Looking in the Same Direction)* (1980) assembles its subjects purely according to the attitude of their heads; *Criminals and Celebrities* (1986) groups images of the famous and the infamous in the act of attempting to shield themselves from the camera's intrusive gaze; and *Untitled (Fainted)* (1980) gathers four stills of unconscious women. In this, Prince's organization of images mirrors the currency (and inherently partial nature) of stock photography and anticipates the ubiquity of categorized and labeled photographic images in the era of Internet searches and artificial intelligence—a period during which the medium has become at once more available and less "reliable" than ever.

#RichardPrince

RICHARD PRINCE

Early Photography, 1977–87

Press preview: Thursday, October 5, 10am–12pm

Opening reception: Thursday, October 5, 6–8pm

October 5–December 22, 2023

20 Grosvenor Hill and 17–19 Davies Street, London

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