

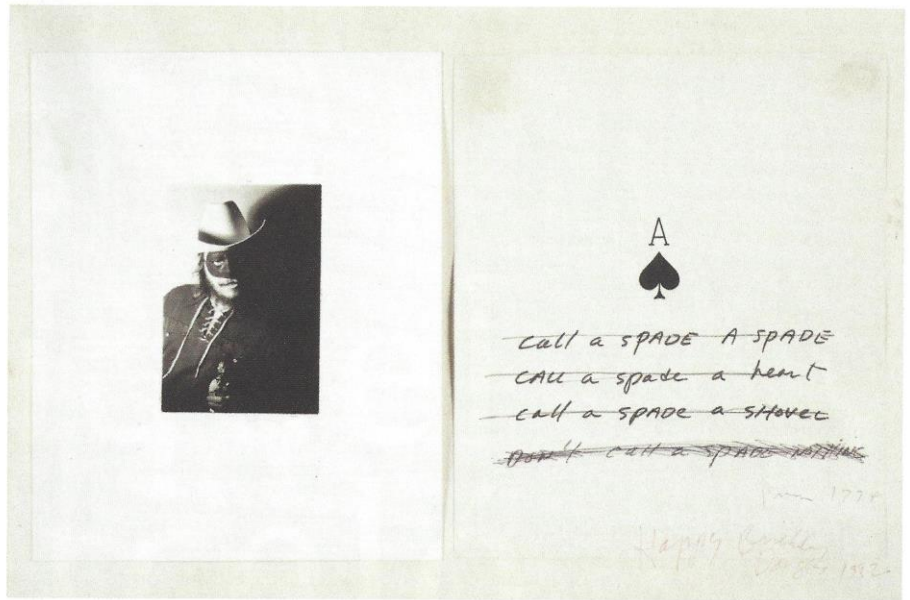
## WILD CARDS

### Bruce Hainley on “Richard Prince: The Douglas Blair Turnbaugh Collection (1977–1988)”

ON JULY 28, 2016, Richard Prince retweeted an item from curator Marvin Heiferman’s feed about a \$1 billion copyright-infringement suit that photographer Carol Highsmith had just filed against the stock-photo agencies Getty and Alamy, charging “gross misuse.” Earlier that day, Prince had tweeted a picture of a slightly enlarged black-and-white photocopy of his short 1977 text “Practicing Without a License.” He commented: “Feel like I got hacked. Or waxed. Or whacked. Mickie’d. Surprised they didn’t have my underwear on display. Shame.”

What instigated the Twitter outburst of Assange-ish lingo and Runyonesque? “Richard Prince: The Douglas Blair Turnbaugh Collection (1977–1988),” on view this past summer at the Los Angeles gallery Edward Cella Art & Architecture, an exhibition organized without the artist’s . . . license. With his tweets, Prince marshaled an already habituated if not quite enervated way of “managing” rather than quoting existing material (as the artist puts it in “Practicing Without a License”), one that “affords the opportunity . . . for an individual to identify him or herself as much as an audience as an author.” Vulturelike, he was pointing to fundamental issues he’s been circling for decades. Another way of putting it would be to say dude felt dicked over, royally. About the “Edward Celer [*sic*] Gallery in LA [*sic*],” Prince tweeted that “Wrestle mania [*sic*] is more legit.”

The artist has been doing his act a long time, with quasi-Kardashian relentlessness and similar aesthetic returns. Given the nature of that act, his pique at the exhibit and gallery might register as jarring or galling (take your pick), especially to those who know that the artist has trafficked in such ironies for his entire career. But if for Prince the show represented the unwelcome return of the repressed, for almost anyone else it provided the kind of history that the artist has called “wild” (“the regular is straightforward. Mao on his way to the revolution. . . . The ‘wild’ kind is Mao FUCKING in the bushes . . . on the way to the revolution”). Writer, artist, dance historian, fund-raiser, and Prince’s onetime neighbor, Turnbaugh collected—in addition to a leather jacket the artist gave him—numerous drawings, many with enough erect dicks (a leitmotif) to occupy a busy bathhouse for a night; text-and-photo collages; key early photo works (his fey 1980 self-portrait, acorn jewelry,



Richard Prince, *Self-Portrait with a Spade*, 1973–74, gelatin silver print, offset print and ink on board, 12 × 18”.

watches, etc.); manuscripts; an extensive 1985 proposal by Turnbaugh and Prince for a survey of the wildling’s photographic work, 1976–86, never published; detailed letters; invitation cards—in short, a meticulous, long-cared-for archive, most of its items signed and/or inscribed as well as dated by Prince: e.g., a winsome portrait of Turnbaugh signed “For Dougy with *Big* love From Dikie Boyman, Dec 1, 1985”; a letter from a London hotel, 1983, signed “Love Rick” immediately above his underlining of the hotel’s motto, “For Comfort and Service.” Another letter ends, “All the boys of Florence with their sandpaper crotches say hello. Love, Richard.”

The artist mailed Turnbaugh, who would soon help raise funds for the publication of *Why I Go to the Movies Alone*, a candid photograph, presumably of himself, as “nude male figure with golf club” (according to the checklist), headless like so many str8 Grindr profile pics

to come, without any note, in 1982. Prince recently bought the photo back, which doesn’t mean he won’t try to expunge it from his record by claiming, as he has been known to do with other works, that it was made by another Richard Prince, an actual Canadian artist. FYI: If it’s his, Dikie’s dick’s fine, but not exactly deserving of an American spiritual.

While repeatedly diddling sameness and copyright as well as bumping up against the concept of public domain, Dikie Boyman’s flirtations nevertheless reveal nothing except that Prince was hungry, solicitous, insinuating, worried about success, figuring things out, bi-curiously craving attention from whoever would give it, as he suggested to Turnbaugh:

The crux of my affliction is the fact that I cannot stop “inquiring”—therefore the appearance of a style never seems to make itself present—I mean I think it does but it’s not an easy style—it’s not at all on the surface—the style has a more menacing subtle presence—

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**Menace is rarely boring, aesthetically, and Prince trades in this kind of tarrying with the negative.**

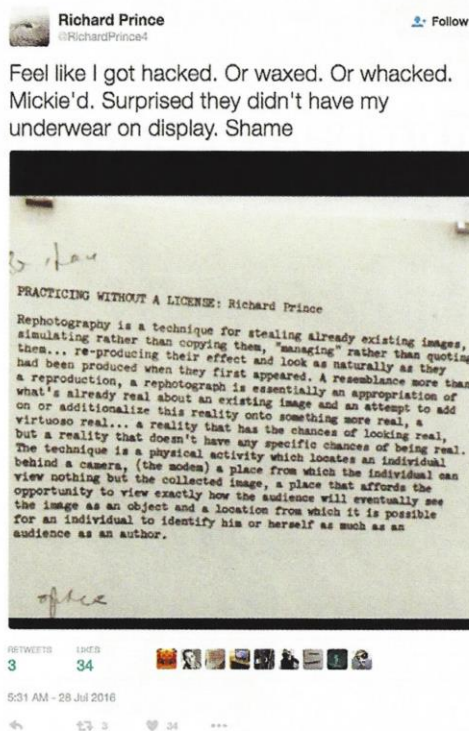
appropriation the better: pedodalisques, Rastafarians with monster-clown blotches effacing their faces, and sundry supposedly droll or edgy trolleries. Turnbaugh's archive throws a harsh, interrogational light on what practicing without a license entails—during the bumpy years, before Prince had his techniques fully down, refining his cold-blooded talents and developing his willingness to freak a viewer's amygdala:

This weekend Metro Pictures had another opening but I couldn't get a hold of you for the invite. Robert Longo showed his new work which I think will drive a nail into the heads of people who don't quite know what to make out of the gallery. What does that mean? Well—I think his show will trip the “desire/threat” mechanism in the audience's heart/head. Metro Pictures has been a hard address to swallow for many—mainly because of the name—attitude—owners—stable—I.E. Why am I choking when I should be swallowing and breathing. Most do not know what to make out of it.

Working its own hard address, Prince's possible allusion to deep-throating—whether taken as an example of tricks of the trade, a metaphor for the art game as it's so often played, or just something “most do not know what to make out of”—is key. Appropriation, in its “attempt to add on or additionalize this reality onto . . . a virtuoso real . . . a reality that has the chances of looking real, but . . . doesn't have any specific chances of being real,” as the artist characterized it (again in “Practicing Without a License”), nevertheless remains adherent to intransigencies of the real and to the bodies, objects, and histories—wildly sexualized, racialized, classed—that help constitute it. Michael Lobel's revelatory 2007 exhibition “Fugitive Artist: The Early Work of Richard Prince, 1974–77,” demonstrated Prince's authorial cascade effects and intense disavowals while tracing his development as an artist during a time when there was “widespread public discussion of recent developments in genetic engineering and reproductive technology.”\* Lobel acutely brought the point home: “In light of this . . . *Untitled (three women looking in the same direction)* (1980), while certainly a typological study of advertising motifs, also looks uncannily like an attack of the clones.” The Cella show was the unlicensed coda of “Fugitive Artist.”

Items: exhibition cards and announcements from 1979 (“Single man looking to the right,” a window installation at Three Lives & Company; “Pictures: Photographs” at Castelli Graphics; “Imitation of Life”

\*A history, re: production/reproduction, still being written: Only this past summer did the *New York Times* profile Margaret Crane, who, in 1967, designed the first at-home pregnancy test, allowing “a woman to peer into her own body and to make her own decisions about it, without anyone else—husband, boyfriend, boss, doctor—getting in the way.” Overseeing the marketing plan for her design was Ira Sturtevant, ex-husband of Elaine.



Screenshot of a July 28, 2016, tweet by Richard Prince.

at the gallery of the Hartford Art School). Writing at the time of Prince's 1992 Whitney Museum of American Art survey, Paul Taylor, profiling the artist for the *New York Times*, elucidated this germinal moment:

After seeing his work in an exhibition in 1979, according to Mr. Prince, the intense young artist Sherrie Levine called him and asked how he had done his photographs and whether she could use the idea. Nonchalantly, he said he wouldn't mind. Years later, after Ms. Levine had stolen the appropriation spotlight and amassed greater critical acclaim, he is less cool about her call.

“People associate artists with doing things original,” he says. “Here's someone who calls you up and says, ‘I want to do your work.’ I thought ‘Jeez, I haven't heard that one before.’” Ms. Levine, for her part, says, “I know that Richard thinks I get all my ideas from him.”

Item: On the back of an invitation card for “By Richard Prince / A Photograph of Brooke Shields / By Gary Gross” at Spiritual America, a gallery run by Kim Fine, at 5 Rivington Street, New York, handwritten in red ink, the following info: YOU ARE INVITED TO A COCKTAIL PARTY, 28 OCTOBER FROM 8. / THE PASSWORD IS: TESTIMONY.

The Turnbaugh archive allows anyone who cares anymore to subpoena testimony on how the fugitive artist arrived at his watershed moment of 1983. October of that year would see his first exhibit of the cowboys at

Baskerville + Watson uptown, the publication of *Why I Go to the Movies Alone* by Tanam Press, and, downtown, the séance at Spiritual America. He had finally figured out how to hustle spirituality as “America,” i.e., as whiteness and masculinity and manifest destiny in the flesh, and how to rustle art out of gross misuse. In the same *Times* exposé, Taylor reported that Prince circa the early ’80s “felt like the only man in [a] predominantly female group [of artists], whose most immediate supporters among dealers and critics also tended to be women.” Pre-*Pretty Baby* Brooke Shields helped take care of that: “I got kicked out of the women’s club.” Prince described his Gross work to Taylor as “an extremely complicated photo of a naked girl who looks like a boy made up to look like a woman. For me, she had the perfect body.”

The convergence of cowboys and kiddie erotica also effectively branded his usual two-step: violate—and then deny; “steal”—and then refuse to own it. Until it becomes safe or profitable to do so. First step: After Spiritual America gallery’s opening night, Prince, as Kim Fine has put it, “took off and left [me] holding the bag” for the rest of that notorious show’s run. Second: Under oath during the deposition for *Cariou v. Prince*, the artist admitted that in 1992 he legally purchased the rights to the Gross photo of Shields for \$2,000, so that he could show the work as his own in his Whitney Museum retrospective. “I think my attitude changed a bit and I was sort of willing to become more part of the process I suppose,” because of its coming “back into the limelight.” Only then did he make “ten copies and two artist proofs, none of which I own.”

The lead picture on Prince’s page on the Gagosian Gallery site antes up a dirty look: Sporting a collared, keyhole-neckline shirt that laces up crisscross, a scruffy lone ranger scowls at the camera, white hat pushing down his black mask, long hair and beard hiding most of his face. His gun drawn and aimed right atcha, the buckaroo leans hard into the frame, which goes dark behind his left shoulder. Stealing from himself to make *Self-Portrait*, 1973/2013—Lobel, in his exhibition, tracked a series of fugitive image-text works using related photos—the b/w gunslinger appears as one half of a work in Turnbaugh’s collection, *Self-Portrait with a Spade*, 1973–74, signed “Prince 1974” and inscribed “Happy Birthday Douglas 1982” in red ink. The other half centers the graphic components of an ace of spades (capital A above the suit’s emblem) with four lines of handwritten text, the top three struck through (CALL A SPADE A SPADE / CALL A SPADE A HEART / CALL A SPADE A SHOVEL), the final line (DON’T CALL A SPADE NOTHING scribbled out). Other works on display trafficking with less semantic equivocation in black bodies—*Untitled (Portrait of a black child)*, 1980, based on a Colgate-whitening-toothpaste ad;

*Untitled (White races decended [sic] from Chimpanzees . . .)*, 1976, a four-part work including an extended cursive text on eugenics and photographic prints of a black child—remain equally “wild,” that is to say, emphatically unacknowledged or fugitive in more cultivated histories of the artist’s oeuvre.

Let’s ignore that Prince used the “new” *Self-Portrait* as a poster image for his spiritless cowboys paintings in 2013; ignore that, reckoning with his career, especially its iconic “masterpieces,” a headless naked guy practicing his golf swing just wouldn’t lend the right mythologizing

vibe; ignore the fraught history of difference the 2013 work continues to occlude, as if the “virtuoso real,” with its representational dissolve of “being real” and “looking real,” released everyone from recognizing, say, the difference between the history of Native American and African American cowboys and the history of the Lone Ranger and Tonto.

Instead, let’s “rephotograph” *Self-Portrait*, as “Practicing Without a License” encourages anyone to do, for an “appropriation of what’s already real about an existing image and an attempt to add on” to it, relocating “an individual behind a camera . . . a place from which the individual can view nothing but the collected image.”

The collected image.

By which I assume Prince meant what collects or accrues when something is doubled, when it becomes “appropriation”—all that wild history, living specificity, located in the source material and in its retransmission.

The biggest-grossing (sci-fi) western of 1973 was *Westworld* (remade recently for HBO), about an “adult-themed amusement park” populated with “lifelike androids,” whom the wealthy clientele could fuck or kill but not marry, and who take their revenge. Within this national fantasy, the line between “unreal” and “real,” lifelike avatars and live people, is moot, at least from the androids’ POV. Who decides the unbearable lightness or heaviness of an image, a representation, a projection? While always potentially up for grabs, the decision remains too often in the hands of unrelenting power. *Westworld*’s insurrection provides an alternative history, since the androids are tired of their subjugation without real subjectivity, tired of working for someone else’s amusement, tired of the requirement to be someone else’s representation of themselves. While in 1973, *Westworld*’s allegory of the violence wrought by unthinking, unmanaged privilege was ahead of its time, it also reiterated some brutal truths already long in play. Volatile substance, the double troubles. Especially when used for mere amusement, its effects will boomerang. The aftershock is an earthquake. Our history recruits the sleeper cell.

In the early ’70s, David Hammons embarked on a series of works using spades. He later explained: “I was trying to figure out why black people were called spades, as opposed to clubs. Because I remember being called a spade once, and I didn’t know what it meant; nigger I knew but spade I still don’t.”

In 2011, the man who managed a picture of himself with a spade bootlegged verisimilar copies of *Catcher in the Rye*, identical to the book’s first edition, except now “a novel by Richard Prince.” On January 20, 2015, Prince avatar @fulton\_ryder tweeted a picture of Prince selling his books juxtaposed with one of the famous documents of Hammons selling snowballs, a (fanboy?) adjacency that I guess you could say “commented” as much on Prince’s trumpery as on the image they’d posted the day before, the first posting in over a month, of a woman’s snowy “globes.” A princely joke for MLK Day. □

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