

GAGOSIAN GALLERY



Art

Richard Prince

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Time Out says ★★★★★



Gagosian Gallery Until July 16

As the second blockbuster artist – after Damien Hirst – to show individually at the new Hong Kong branch of the Gagosian Gallery, Richard Prince appears to have been a curious but ultimately shrewd choice. In a town famously big on appearances, there may even be a touch of the subversive in presenting to Hong Kong a retrospective-like catalogue of the contemporary art world's most famous appropriationist. A fundamental characteristic of Prince's work has been his questioning of the originality of appearances, and whether the author's role in perpetuating a certain image is really all that important in the wider

context of society and mass media, the latter of which plays out stereotyped values in an endless loop. Just as the city's notorious weekly tabloids continue their deconstruction of celebrity as an ideal, Prince's works on display hold up a sort of mirror to their audience, even if projected from halfway across the world.

The curatorial approach this time is more consistent and logical than the Hirst PR-pleasing smorgasbord, which opened the gallery in January; the pieces shown from the artist's oeuvre are thematically-related, circling primarily around the notion of female beauty as it is perceived in popular culture; the works from Prince's famous *Untitled (Cowboys)*, in this instance, are aptly missing. Hong Kong may be less familiar with the genre of biker chicks, as featured here in a selection of rephotographs taken from motorcycle magazines in Prince's now-iconic *Girlfriend* series; yet Hong Kong is big on fashion, which is exactly what Prince prescribes in the likewise-titled series of black and white advertising images from the 80's shot on colour film – of which Prince is not the original photographer either. In a better-known nod to the runway world, Prince offers in the exhibition's most mysterious artwork a sinister looking, large-scale painting of knife-like strokes of various shades in red over black and white pictures of Kate Moss circa Calvin Klein; its sheer matter-of-factness renders it the exhibition's most compelling statement on the dark side of society's obsession with fame and glamour.

On the whole, Prince's startling juxtapositions between high and low culture may intrigue audiences in a metropolis as obsessed with the grit as it is with the glam. The artist takes his image borrowing to a second level as one of the *Girlfriend* photographs in particular is copied and pasted in a grid-like pattern, serving as wallpaper for one of his trademark *Jokes*. However dubious Prince's method may be to his critics, the biggest joke pulled off this time may not be the ones hanging on walls, but on those looking at them without a second thought towards just what exactly it is that they're seeing.

Matthew Wong