

## GAGOSIAN

The New York Times

**Richard Prince's New, Late Style Is One of His Best**  
*An exhibition of over 50 new paintings and several other works is among this artist's most fun to look at, and uncharacteristically generous and self-revealing.*

Roberta Smith



*An untitled 2017 work in "Richard Prince: High Times," at Gagosian in Chelsea. © Richard Prince, via Gagosian*

Richard Prince is losing his cool — or at least some of it. And that's a good thing. His new paintings — in a show titled "Richard Prince: High Times," at Gagosian in Chelsea — radiate an unusual heat. Mr. Prince, after all, is the artist who started photographing existing photographs in the late 1970s, which set the stage for appropriation art and the suave, aloof style of the 1980s Pictures Generation.

This show is uncharacteristically generous and self-revealing, with numerous moving parts. All told, it forms a rabbit hole of cross references, a hall of mirrors that irregularly reflect some of the life, times and inner thoughts of an artist given to mixing fact and fiction, one who is a devotee of American rock, an erudite collector of postwar literature and a writer of some distinction.

In addition to over 50 paintings, "High Times" includes a large group of Mr. Prince's 1997-2000 "Hippie Drawings"; a hilariously fictive, fetishized private library; and 16 copies of the catalog for a recent Willem de Kooning retrospective, each Oedipally vandalized and appended onto a

Richard Prince artwork. The catalog is virtually an artist's book, laden with pertinent essays and treats, including three seemingly autobiographical posts from Mr. Prince's blog, Bird Talk.

The initial reaction (mine included) to the paintings has often been "Basquiat meets Dubuffet." Indeed, they are so distant from the Pictures Generation's photo-based ethic that they all but join forces with its '80s adversary, Neo-Expressionist painting.



*An installation view of the exhibition. © Richard Prince, via Gagolian; Rob McKeever*

Their flat, dark surfaces are covered with cartoonish, robustly painted figures. Some of these creatures loom; others are tiny, and many flaunt bright colors and bristling masks. Still others are so simply outlined that they might be wearing onesies. Big, mitt-like hands are the norm. These figures conjure jubilant trick-or-treaters, comically armored avatars or rock fans leaving a concert.

Mr. Prince has never made anything quite so much fun to look at as the new Princes. They communicate an inclusive camaraderie, and a world that comprises markedly different beings. It's hard to know exactly if they are with us or against us, which creates some existential frisson. (Some of his earlier efforts could be sexist or classist, as when he focused on biker chicks and demolition derby pickup trucks that seemed to place artist and audience in a position of superiority.) As never before, the paintings reveal Mr. Prince's chops as a painter and colorist, but the "fun" they provide actually challenges more than entertains.

With a little scrutiny, it becomes clear that the artist has not abandoned appropriation or the camera as much as taken them into much messier territory. And now he's appropriating from himself: Most of the figures in the paintings can be traced to the nearby "Hippie Drawings." This is a smart move, given the frequency with which he has been sued for using other people's photographs.



*Above and right, two works from Mr. Prince's "Hippie Drawings" series, both from 1997. © Richard Prince, via Gagosian. This show includes a large group of Mr. Prince's 1997-2000 "Hippie" series. © Richard Prince, via Gagosian*



*An untitled work from 2017. With these collages, Roberta Smith writes, "You'll never get to the bottom of the alluring confusion of photography, rephotography and hands-on painting and drawing." © Richard Prince, via Gagosian*

The paintings are collages. Every character appears on a separate piece of canvas that has been cut out and glued to the large one. Also, most figures begin as printed (inkjet) "Hippie images" on canvas and are then sometimes — but not always — supplemented with real brush strokes and drawn lines.

You may move toward what looks like some lush bit of brushwork, and suddenly see pixels pop into focus. But no worries: Look to other paintings, and you may find the same figure as an original painted-on print, or other copies of it, but in a different size. Sometimes you'll see large and small versions of the same figure in one painting.

You'll never get to the bottom of the alluring confusion of photography, rephotography and hands-on painting and drawing here. But you may come away appreciating Mr. Prince's provocative fusion of the twain of the Pictures Generation and Neo-Expressionism. And he affirms two of the Pictures Generation's founding principles: Photographs lie, and a copy is as good as an original.

At 69, Mr. Prince is beginning what must be called his late work. A gallery handout that he may or may not have written traces the development of the "High Times" paintings, stating that as a young artist, Mr. Prince put aside some drawings of heads when he came to New York because "they were the real thing, and he didn't want the real thing." Now, apparently, a greater realness appeals, and he's even glued his old drawings of heads into the de Kooning catalogs.