

# EDWYNN HOUK GALLERY

## PRESS RELEASE



## **HANNES SCHMID**

### *Cowboy*

**22 September – 29 October 2011**

**Opening reception for the Artist:  
Thursday, 22 September, 6 – 8 pm**

Edwynn Houk Gallery is pleased to announce the first New York solo exhibition for the Swiss artist Hannes Schmid. This follows his 2010 solo presentation *Never Look Back* at the prestigious Fotostiftung Schweiz, Winterthur, and his exhibition at the Edwynn Houk Gallery's Zurich space earlier this year.

Hannes Schmid's Cowboys have stealthily entered our consciousness via a steady flow of gorgeous advertisement imagery and within the art market, via the appropriated cowboys of Richard Prince. In the photographs on display in this exhibition, selected by the artist from his personal archive, Schmid grasped the scenery of the American West in a refined pictorial way and reimagined the cowboy, who had already been ennobled to be the mythical icon in America, by giving him a contemporary and tangible appearance. Drawing from an extensive knowledge as artist and photographer, Schmid dramatically reduced the vocabulary of the image to essentials and emphasized the brilliance of the prints. In addition, he has been expanding his Cowboys from just photography, reclaiming and reworking them into oil paintings and other media.

Schmid anchors his seductive images in a collective memory that derives from the fictional accounts of the West in Hollywood genre films. His frequent use of the panoramic format mimics the cinema that, in return, heightens the sense of the open and dramatic landscape as well as the staged 'action' depicted within.

As one of the photographers who has worked on the advertisement campaign first launched in 1954, Schmid is often credited with updating the Cowboy and its iconic status, injecting new life and a fresh perspective. He was originally approached because of his renowned work within the fashion industry and his proven eye for intense color and sharp, unusual angles. His style of reduction - hiding faces, dramatic contrasts within a limited color palette, and the use of the silhouette - added new drama to one of the most successful advertising programs, and it ensured the continued longevity and global recognizability of the Cowboy as the *Marlboro Man*.

However, these images go beyond mere marketing pragmatism and also entertain a longing and a fascination with the American West. In this respect, it seems remarkable that a Swiss born photographer produced an image that shaped the decidedly American iconography of these desires. Yet, unlike his fellow countryman Robert Frank, Hannes Schmid embellished the (self) image of the United States rather than deconstructing it. Schmid's Cowboys have become part of us, whether we are American or not.

Hannes Schmid was born in Zurich in 1946. He studied photography at the Ruth Prowse School of Art, Cape Town, South Africa. Recent exhibitions include *Never Look Back*, Fotostiftung Schweiz, Winterthur; *A Star is Born*, Museum Folkwang, Essen; *Echoes*, Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris; and *Who Shot Rock: Photographers of Rock and Roll*, Brooklyn Museum, New York, which is currently touring the U.S. Schmid is also exhibiting at the Rubin Museum, New York, with *Human Currents*, his film and photographs of the 2001 Maha Kumbh Mela pilgrimage to the Ganges River in northeastern India (22 July – 13 November 2011). Schmid was awarded the prestigious Delphic Art Movie Award in Berlin for his film "For Gods Only" in 2011. A major retrospective and accompanying catalogue is planned at the Kunstmuseum Bern in 2013.

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