

PRESS RELEASE

RICHARD PRINCE

Protest Paintings
1989 – 1994

15 October – 20 December 2013



Richard Prince
Untitled (Protest Painting), 1994
acrylic on canvas laid on board
38 1/2 x 18 5/8 in. (97.7 x 47.4 cm.)

Together for the first time in a comprehensive exhibition, Skarstedt is delighted to present *Richard Prince: Protest Paintings* (1989 – 1994), the artist's sixth solo exhibition at the gallery. Devoted solely to this exceptional body of work and including paintings from across the entire series, a detailed catalogue of the *Protest Paintings* will be published to accompany the exhibition.

Painted on a vertical canvas in the shape of a protest placard, the *Protest Paintings* alternate between monochromatic minimalism and richly layered colourful abstraction. Incorporating recycled jokes, printed and handwritten, as well as mined pattern details silkscreened onto the canvas, these paintings are characteristic of Prince's tenet of appropriation. A mainstay in his oeuvre, the classic one-liners offer comic respite, whilst also challenging the antipathy between high and low art. Masking a menacing truth behind a veil of humour, the jokes are subversive in their purpose. As the curator Nancy Spector writes in an essay on Prince: 'humor is a serious business.'¹

Purposefully ambiguous, the scrawled slogans resist interpretation, enacting their very own protest through language. Refusing to conform to the standards of the art value system, the *Protest Paintings* seemingly channel the spirit of the 1960's counterculture, a defining era to which Prince bore witness.

Featuring paintings from public and private collections, the exhibition demonstrates the breadth of Prince's creativity in this singular body of work. The range of paintings on show includes monochrome canvases with printed and handwritten jokes, patterned canvases with block text and brightly coloured abstract compositions overlaid with graffiti and drip marks.

In contrast to the formulaic design of the earlier *Monochrome Joke* paintings, in the *Protest Paintings* we see Prince's full creative involvement. Carefully assembling different segments of canvas to form the symbolic crossbow shape of the protest placard, Prince combines gestural brushstrokes with under-painting, silkscreen and disjointed signs, to create a palimpsest of art historical reference and his own particular brand of humour. A visual expression of the performativity that is both characteristic of a protest and a constant element throughout Prince's oeuvre, the *Protest Paintings* are a masterful example of Prince's unique artistic practice.

Rising to prominence in the 1980s, Richard Prince is a celebrated pioneer of a critical approach to art making. Appropriating images and text from advertising and popular culture, his photographs, sculptures and paintings explore ideas of American identity and consumerism, whilst simultaneously challenging ideas of authorship and the privileged status of the unique artwork. Prince has been the subject of solo exhibitions at leading institutions worldwide, including Serpentine Gallery, London; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and IVAM, Valencia amongst others.

¹ N. Spector, 'Nowhere Man', in *Richard Prince*, exh.cat., New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 2007. p. 35.