



PALO Gallery | 30 Bond Street, New York

Real Wild

October 14 – November 20



Palo Gallery is pleased to announce *Real Wild*, an exhibition presenting a wide array of representations and interpretations of American Western iconography. Comprising more than 70 works from more than 35 artists, spanning from the late 19th century to present day, the exhibition explores the visual vocabulary of the American West and the mythologies that derive from it. The gallery will host a public opening reception on Friday, October 14, from 6–8 PM.

The American Western frontier is often imagined as a period of unbounded freedom, the self-reliance of man, and possibility. Stories of the “Wild West” have time after time been used as proxies for the pursuit of independence. Frequently fantastical, Western folklore became the origin of skewed perspectives upon which many histories about American life have been built. Myths of an exciting and alluring frontier morphed into, and sometimes out of, mainstream iconography of the American Western period. At the center of this iconography is the cowboy. From films like *El Dorado* to books like *Riders of the Purple Sage* to advertising from brands like Levi’s, the image of the cowboy was used to represent a cool and relatable American hero. While many faithful depictions of popular frontier narratives poured into the culture, artists often subverted and played with the conventional iconography. Indigenous artists often countered these mythical narratives by inserting a more historically accurate and piercing lens.

Despite the varying perspectives, American Western iconography has permeated culture for decades with little sign of abatement. German Dadaist George Grosz, who immigrated to the United States when Nazism was gaining momentum, critiqued the romanticization of the Wild West with skepticism and disillusionment. Edgar Heap of Birds, a multi-disciplinary Southern Cheyenne artist, amends the American Western narrative in his *Native Host* series by centering the individuality and personal freedoms of Native Americans. Artists like Andy Warhol and Jane Hilton queered images of the Wild West. That international contemporary artists like Jonathan Meese and Yinka Shonibare make use of this American iconography in their work, speaks to the continued relevance of the “Wild West” as a metaphor for liberty as well as an example of how cultural lore forms.