

# SOLO SHOWS: THE CURIOUS MAGIC OF ONE-WORK EXHIBITIONS

BY *Andrew Russett* POSTED 10/15/15 3:10 PM

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'Richard Prince: Cowboy' at Gladstone Gallery, New York, through October 31, 2015.

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The history of the empty gallery show is by now widely known. The bare rooms and closed spaces of Yves Klein, Robert Barry, Art & Language, Maria Eichhorn, and many other artists are ensconced in art history books and, in recent years, have provided the subject for two separate major museum shows—“[Voids: A Retrospective](#)” at the Pompidou in Paris in 2009 and “[Invisible Art](#)” at the Hayward Gallery in London in 2012.

However, an equally intriguing phenomenon, the show with just one work, has received comparatively little notice. I am thinking not of shows that fill an entire gallery with one grand, overproduced installation (a bane of so [many seasons](#)), but exhibitions that consist of only a single discrete piece—a sculpture, a painting, or a photograph alone in a gallery. They are out in force in New York galleries at

the moment.

The one-work show advertises an artist's unbridled confidence. It can be delivered with a measure of aggression ("This will dominate the room") or insouciance ("This is all I need to do to get people talking") or even disdain, real or feigned ("This is all the space deserves"). Often, it embodies a mixture of all those attitudes. Always, it is an act of seduction and a tactic for control. The work takes on the aura of a relic in a church or a depiction of a deity in a temple.

The prime example of the one-work exhibition at the moment is Richard Prince's "Cowboy" show at Gladstone Gallery's West 21st Street location, which runs through Halloween. The whole cavernous space houses a single metal sculpture of a young boy dressed as a cowboy. He has blond hair, impressive chaps, and a holster with two guns, and he stands on what looks to be a plywood box, also cast in metal.

"It surprised me at first," the artist writes in a lengthy booklet accompanying the show, recalling the moment that he saw the mannequin his work is based on. It was a gift from his wife, he says. "Made me physically move when I first walked in on it. Startled." It may also startle you a bit. The boy stares you down as you enter Gladstone, his left hand hovering above one revolver, ready to draw.

Immaculately trompe-l'œil, the piece radiates a distinct creepiness, tied to the dressing up, posing, and fetishization of young bodies, and calls to mind another one-work show, from 1983, featuring Spiritual America, a photograph of a naked 10-year-old Brooke Shields that Prince appropriated and displayed at a gallery, also called Spiritual America. Prince makes reference to this work in his essay, adding that he made changes to the boy mannequin, altering his pose and dress.

Prince has a long history with cowboys, ranging from the iconic Marlboro ads he photographed in the early 1980s to the undistinguished paintings he made a few years back of cowboys taken from pulp book covers. While most of Prince's work over the last decade since he made his delightful "Nurse" paintings has felt sadly onanistic—either an indulgent retread or a toss-off joke—*Cowboy* just manages to escape that fate. It harbors a potent darkness. Prince's *Cowboy*, after all, is not a cowboy, but rather a young boy pretending to be one. It is difficult to resist seeing the sculpture as a brazen portrait of the conservative white American male psyche: a child, fantasizing about power, freedom, and violence. Like Prince's work, that worldview has a certain very sleight, sinister humor to it—at least until, as we have seen, the guns turn out to be real.



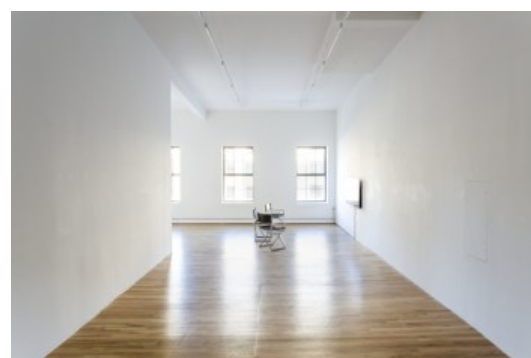
'Richard Prince: Cowboy' at Gladstone Gallery, New York, through October 31, 2015.  
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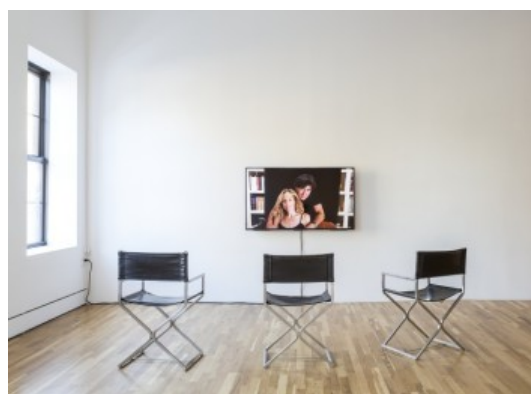
Benjamin Morgan-Cleveland at Eli Ping Frances Perkins, through November 1.

On a far more positive note, the artist and dealer Benjamin Morgan Cleveland has staged an uplifting, generous beauty of a one-work show at [Eli Ping Frances Perkin](#) on the Lower East Side. The one work is a huge couch with fabric colored bright pink, pale rose, and orange. The piece—which has the same good vibes of the classic Nickelodeon couch, a friend suggested—fills a sizable percentage of the gallery and is so tall that you have to hop up a good yard to relax on its sumptuous cushions. It's worth the effort. And just when you think it can't get any better, you may notice that its legs are large, ancient-looking wooden feet—each with four toes, like something out of a Maurice Sendak book. Are monsters hiding inside the furniture? Is the sofa itself some kind of camouflaged beast? All I know is that I wish I had an apartment large enough to provide that sofa a home. The show is on view through November 1.

If Prince and Morgan Cleveland both use the one-work show to engineer a knockout aesthetic punch (and a killer Instagram moment), then Talia Chetrit wields the technique with oblique, secretive intents in her show at [Off Vendome](#) in Chelsea, which is titled “Parents” and runs through this Saturday, October 17. She has left the gallery space empty except for a television and two leather chairs by the window. (Coming upon it, I thought about those scenes in movies where the hero bursts through a door expecting to find the kidnapping victim only to receive a videotaped message from the villains.) Chetrit's TV has a video on loop, about 10 minutes long, which she recorded of her mother and father during a photo shoot, without their knowledge. They are a good-looking couple, and they wait patiently as their daughter works, largely unseen. They chat and goof off, dad especially hamming it up, kissing his wife's neck or sucking in his belly as Chetrit gets ready to shoot. At a few moments, knowing smiles and maybe even uncomfortable glances seem to pass between the two parents, though it's hard to say because they come and go in such a flash. Art is brushing up against the limits of what it can represent, what it allows us firmly to know. Alone in that room, the video becomes both a teasing, sneaky behind-the-scenes document of a superb photographer at work, in control, and a modest, affecting portrait of family members aging together.



Installation view of 'Talia Chetrit: Parents' at Off Vendome, New York, through October 17, 2015.  
COURTESY OFF VENDOME



Installation view of 'Talia Chetrit: Parents' at Off Vendome.  
COURTESY OFF VENDOME

It should be noted, though, that “Parents” is not, strictly speaking, a one-work show. One floor below, in the gallery's office, Chetrit has hung five of her characteristically mysterious, alluring photographs, though they are all in different styles, as if we are looking at selections of her work rather than a full-on exhibition. None show her parents, though the artist does appear in one. She is straddling a space heater with her bare legs, her jeans are down at her boots, and she has left her face outside of the frame.

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Talia Chetrit, *Parents*, 2015.

*“Art of the City” is a weekly column by ARTnews co-executive editor Andrew Russeth.*

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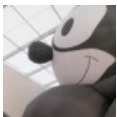
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