

Kent Monkman

12 September – 10 October 2008

Private view Thursday 11 September 2008, 6–8pm

Stephen Friedman Gallery is pleased to present the first solo exhibition in Europe of Canadian artist Kent Monkman.

Monkman is part of a new generation of Native American artists who has exhibited widely in museums throughout Canada. His broad practice, which ranges from figurative painting to film and performance, explores the complexities of the flawed, yet enduring myth of the American West. Taking on the artistic traditions of Western nineteenth century painting, Monkman's appropriations of 'New World' painting are meticulous recreations of large-scale, sublime landscapes. Yet Monkman's 'trickery' only becomes clear on closer inspection: these grand panoramas, painted in acrylic not oil, are populated with cavorting 'cowboys and indians'. Toying with the notion of authenticity, these reimagined, often homoeroticised tableaux playfully subvert and distort traditional narratives and perceptions.

In this exhibition, Monkman transforms the front of the gallery into a nineteenth century 'salon', with gilt framed paintings hung at all levels. Here, his attention is focused on the artist and pseudo anthropologist George Catlin (1796-1872) who, with the zeal of a missionary, set about 'documenting' aboriginal tribespeople across North America as they faced the threat of extinction. Of particular interest to the artist is Catlin's deliberate exclusion of the Native American 'dandy' from his idealised and misleading depictions. Monkman reinstates these lost dandies into his landscapes, where they act as observers of reinterpreted classical Western allegories and imagined scenes from North American colonial history.

In the back gallery his split-screen film 'Shooting Geronimo' (2007) is projected onto two artificial buffalo hides. Adopting, tongue-in-cheek, the style of early silent films, Monkman places Hollywood under scrutiny as another perpetrator of inaccurate and damaging stereotypes: the heroic, macho cowboy, pitted against the blood-thirsty Red Indian, or 'noble' savage.

By reclaiming the aesthetic languages of oppression, Monkman, with mischievous alacrity, questions the myths propagated by European colonialist ambition. Simultaneously his work challenges the highly politicised notions of cultural identity and authenticity, acknowledging his own culture's complicity in the perpetuation of such clichés. The past is opened up for reexamination; new myths are born and history is re-presented as a fluid and subjective interplay between fact and fiction.

Kent Monkman's recent solo shows include *Dance to the Berdashe*, Urban Shaman Gallery, Winnipeg, Canada (2008); *Théâtre de Cristal*, The Union Gallery, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada (2007); *The Triumph of Mischief*, Art Gallery of Hamilton, Ontario, Canada (2007) touring to Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, Toronto and Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg, Canada. Recent group shows include *Remix: New Modernities in a Post Indian World*, Heard Museum, Phoenix Arizona, USA (2007) touring to National Museum of the American Indian, New York, NY, USA; *Crack the Sky*, Montreal Biennale, Canada (2007); *Re-thinking Nordic Colonialism*, The Nordic Institute for Contemporary Art, Finland (2006) and *The American West*, Compton Verney, UK (2005).

Forthcoming exhibition: **Catherine Opie** 15 October – 15 November 2008

Gallery hours are: Tuesday to Friday, 10am-6pm and Saturday 11am-5pm
For further details please contact Charlotte Nourse on +44 20 7494 1434