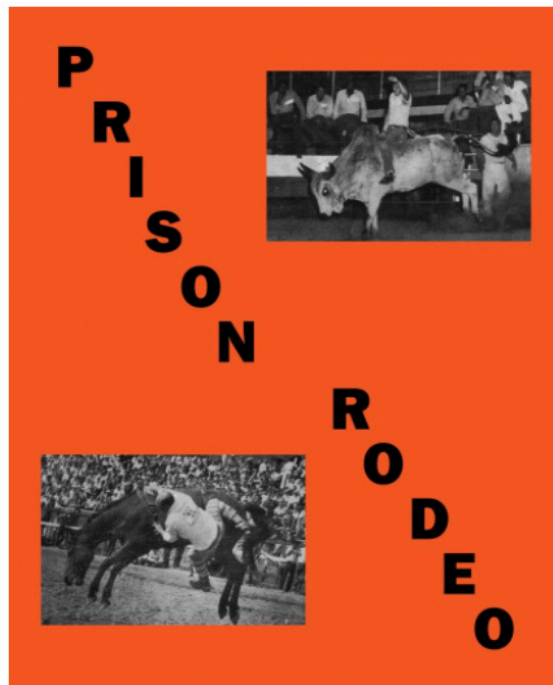


Pullin, Gracie, "Good Ol' Boys and Grifters: Will Boone's Take on Southern Mystique in Prison Rodeo," *PerversionMagazine.com*, July 17, 2015

P E R V E R S I O N

Good Ol' Boys and Grifters: Will Boone's Take on Southern Mystique in Prison Rodeo



Regardless of what you might think of Will Boone's hotly debated "Sigils" paintings, *Prison Rodeo*, his 2014 publication from Karma, warrants a close look and an open mind. Primarily known as an up-and-coming painter and installation artist, Boone here takes on the role of archivist and curator to present the images that he references across his various modes of artistic production. The result is a lush collection of found photographs and ephemera in a handsomely minimalist package that explores Boone's southern roots and fascination with Americana rebellion.

What sets *Prison Rodeo* apart from the standard trendy vernacular photography publication is the unique insight it offers into Boone's practice as a catalogue of his visual reference points. While it's true that many independent publishers have practically perfected the found photography book in titles such as *The Ice Plant's Dive Dark Dream Slow* from 2012, Boone's project is singular and remarkable because of the practical significance of these images. Rather than passively allowing critics or curators to make assertions about source material and subject matter for his audience to process, Boone invites the viewer to encounter the stuff directly and draw their own conclusions about the relationships between the imagery and his work in other media. Almost akin to a studio visit, it is an intimate

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experience to look through the very photographs and clippings that have inspired him; each object bears signs of having been thumbed through and meticulously poured over in search of material for his painting and sculpture work. In this sense, the 50 pages of reproductions in *Prison Rodeo* serve to further illustrate the history and visual culture that inform his ambiguous semi-abstract painting. The images help clarify and expand on much of Boone's referential work, including his famous "hieroglyphics" paintings—there are clues throughout *Prison Rodeo* to the markings used as communication by vagrants in the early 20th century that inspired those works. Though the mystery of subjectivity remains critical to his investigations of legibility and abstraction in painting, the book concretizes his artistic concerns and contributes an added layer of narrative depth. In *Prison Rodeo*, Boone presents the iconography that is so central to the mythologies with which he engages.

Though various themes emerge between the images in *Prison Rodeo*—including heavy metal, horror costumes, incarceration, intoxication, and Elvis—the wild South seems to reign chief among them. In fact, a distinctly southern atmosphere pervades the book, invoked both by overt subject matter and subtle signifiers. The locus of *Prison Rodeo* is, to be certain, a nonspecific, Americana kind of South, rendered by images of snakes, brambles, tree-houses, cowboy hats, hicks, and hunters. For all of the book's references to a sort of grit or underbelly, Boone certainly romanticizes the landscape and culture of the South. Having been born and raised in Texas, he remains concerned with its character and mystique across his various projects, even well after relocating to New York and embracing a distinct downtown artistic community there. Though the collection of images is certainly more accessible than his semi-abstract paintings in terms of legibility, Boone's selection conjures a South that contains a similar note of mystery in its wildness. All of that is not even to mention the intrigue surrounding the individuals featured in the images or history of the found photographs and clippings as objects.

In a related 2014 project with Karma, Boone published *Paradise*, a collection of his original photography. *Paradise*, in keeping with Boone's minimalist tradition with regards to both form and content, exclusively features images of his New York studio alongside his photographs of the Florida coastline taken during his show at the Rubell Family Collection in Miami. Though less dense and varied than *Prison Rodeo*, the book shares a distinct aesthetic and follows a similar line of investigation into his practice and its relationship with the South. Together they speak to Boone's unique interest in illuminating his influences and process in print and Karma's pioneering approach to publishing. As a pair, *Prison Rodeo* and *Paradise* would make for a great addition to any kind of collection that highlights the expanded zine format, southern imagery, Americana mythology—or even Elvis, for that matter.