

**FOR  
IMMEDIATE  
RELEASE**



# **BRAD KAHLHAMER**

## ***FRIENDLY FRONTIER***

**OCTOBER 14 – NOVEMBER 6, 1999**

*Friendly Frontier*, an exhibition of new paintings and drawings by Brad Kahlhamer opens Thursday, October 14<sup>th</sup> at Deitch Projects.

Kahlhamer's exuberant work reflects both his Native American heritage and his immersion in the history of modern and contemporary painting. He fuses the visionary approach and dream-like space of Native American art with the gestural energy of action painting. The subject of Kahlhamer's work is the American landscape. His version of the American landscape is teeming with wild animals, towers of rock concert amplifiers and ecstatic portraits of the artist and his friends, both real and imaginary. Kahlhamer is also a musician, playing country blues guitar, and his paintings rock to a musical rhythm.

Kahlhamer was born in Tucson, Arizona in 1956 of Native American ancestry. Like many Native American boys of his generation he was given up for adoption. He grew up in Arizona with his German-American

adoptive parents and then moved with them to Wisconsin where he attended college. Kahlhamer spent ten years as a road musician before moving to New York in 1982 where he became a design director for Topps Chewing Gum. His work designing packaging for Topps Chewing Gum products brought him into contact with cartoonists like Art Spiegelman. He has been a full-time fine artist since 1993. Kahlhamer's background is significant in understanding his work because his path has been quite different from most of today's successful younger painters who went into full time art careers directly out of art school. Kahlhamer had twenty years of life experience before becoming a fine artist and one feels that his paintings have been lived, not just conceptualized.

Kahlhamer's paintings are an arena for him to explore the world of his ancestors and to create his own hybrid landscape that fuses his heritage with his own contemporary experience. He thinks of his paintings as his "third place", as distinct from the "first place" of his Native American heritage, and his "second place" of his more conventional American upbringing with his adoptive parents. Kahlhamer creates his own personal America in his work, scrambling the real and the imaginary. The prominent use of red, white and blue in his works represents his own version of the American flag, constructed out of sky, water and the American earth. Colors have specific symbolism in Kahlhamer's paintings: Black is the East; his towers of black amplifiers stand in for skyscrapers and urban development. Blue is for the sky, the wind and velocity. Browns and reds are for the earth and for flesh. Yellow is for understanding. Transparency and openness are about possibility.

The quality of Kahlhamer's space is dreamlike. The objects in Kahlhamer's paintings are not weighed down by gravity and do not recede

into European-style perspective. Kahlhamer paints the visionary space that he finds in Plains Indians ledger drawings. The paintings are populated with a set of characters as in comic books: Ugh, Jr., Bison Girl, Prairie Girl, Bear, and Missy are among the ones who reappear. Most are surrogates for the artist and his friends, whom he brings with him into the "third place" of his painted world.

In addition to its embrace of his Native American artistic heritage, Kahlhamer's work also reflects his enthusiasm for German Expressionist artists like Emil Nolde, for 1940s-style American cartoons, and for contemporary artists like Jean-Michel Basquiat. The work is the result of a personal journey through America's history, and modern and contemporary life and art. Kahlhamer's work gives us an animated and profound vision of the American experience.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT SUZANNE GEISS AT DEITCH PROJECTS**

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**DEITCH PROJECTS GALLERY HOURS ARE TUESDAY – SATURDAY, 12 - 6**