

## WEST: THE AMERICAN COWBOY

Anouk Masson Krantz has been fascinated with the Wild West ever since she was a child. With her camera, she has now captured the essence of the cowboy life, a life situated somewhere between myth and hard work.

TEXT

Wiebke Brauer

**PHOTOS** 

Anouk Masson Krantz



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"The ranching culture of the American cowboy maintains the same fundamental values and traditions that were held by their ancestors and that continue to hold truth for a culture of Americans that has been almost entirely overlooked."

ANOUK MASSON KRANTZ





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ANOUK MASSON KRANTZ

"A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do." This quote, often attributed to John Wayne, is actually from the 1952 classic *High Noon* directed by Fred Zinnemann and starring Gary Cooper as Marshal Will Kane. The role of the prototypical reluctant hero earned him his second Oscar. The arch-conservative hardliner John Wayne later condemned the film as un-American and unpatriotic. Which only goes to show how widely opinions as to what makes a successful Western can diverge — and have ever since the genre was invented.

In the general pop culture understanding of the term, the Western tells the story of the triumph of civilization over nature, consolidated in the image of the tamed mustang. It illustrates the victory over the foreign, the threatening, the uncivilized. Its (white) hero is melancholic, taciturn and righteous. He's earned his prosperity through hard work, defended his country with a rifle in his hand, and heads out into the world. He's not tied down to anyone; his loneliness sets him free . . . So much for the myth, which continues to inform the identity politics of America to this day.

But something that is often overlooked – if we ignore those B movies with the good guy on his white stallion chasing a handful of villains on black horses – is that the iconic films of the great Western directors are always characterized by a mixture of drama and terseness, hero worship and realism, and that they show the history of America as it is: self-confident to self-righteous, yet always self-critical. In this respect, the Western only apparently tells of the past. The Western is always a reflection of the present. Including its longings for endless possibilities in an endless expanse, of course, but always its contemporary problems as well.

It pays to keep in mind the historical origins of the Western. The heyday of the cowboy was short, lasting only from about 1865 to 1885. This era was

shaped by the industrial revolution, which produced an army of losers seeking their fortune in the West. Then came its colonization. Civilization catches up with the cowboy in the form of barbed wire, farms and railroads, political tensions in society, and finally economic pressure through globalization – not to mention the changing archetype of masculinity.

## FOR A COWBOY, IT'S TO RIDE

So what remains? Regarding the Western, German literary critic Hellmuth Karasek wrote in 1993: "Hollywood recognizes today's realities, only to then triumph over them with cinema." And things aren't any different today. Two years ago, The Rider by director Chloé Zhao portrayed a cowboy who can no longer ride after suffering brain damage from a rodeo accident. The picturesque landscape is the one we know from every Western movie ever made: the sky arches wide over the vast wasteland of the prairie, the sun hangs low over empty steppes and fields. The film is a tribute to the Wild West, perhaps even a farewell, or just a contemporary reflection of real life. In closing, a quote from the film: "To the horse, it's to run across the prairie. For a cowboy, it's to ride.

Sunny Side Up West: The American Cowboy

I am an explorer.

I explore places.

I explore people.

I enjoy driving unreasonably long distances.

I love to exchange with those who are different, those with another set of convictions.

I try to learn about them and then to understand them, what is important to them, what they love and what they fear, so that I might learn what makes us different and what makes us the same.

I am trying to raise my children to think for themselves and not to be taught what to think.

I want them to seek to understand the world around them and how we got here; to listen first, and then to find their voice; and to have their own direct experiences with the world that will have uncertain outcomes.

This is how we can open ourselves to the possibility of discovering and creating unknown, undiscovered inspirations of our own.







"My work is a celebration of those values, the work ethic, the integrity, love for friends and family, community, and country, regardless of cultural background."

ANOUK MASSON KRANTZ











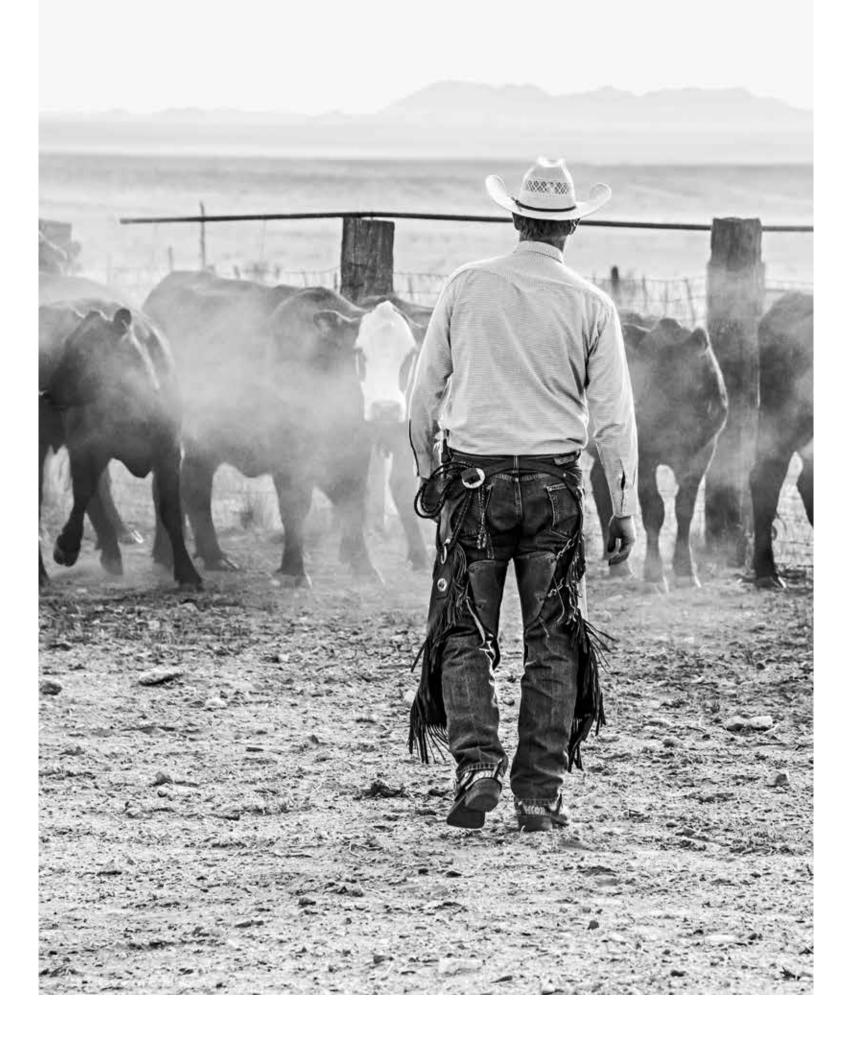


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"The American cowboy became an international icon because of his appearance on the silver screen. The truth of the matter is that the cowboy usually is a quiet, unassuming individual who is proud of what he is and doesn't talk about how good he is at his trade."

"The world of the cowboy belongs to a society that honors historical traditions and practices a set of values that includes honesty, integrity, loyalty, work ethic and dedication to his family and conviction about his belief in God. He practices common decency and respect for his fellow man every day that he lives. The life of the cowboy is a simple life based on the aforementioned attitudes, pride at being good at what he does, and protecting the image and the lifestyle that he treasures."

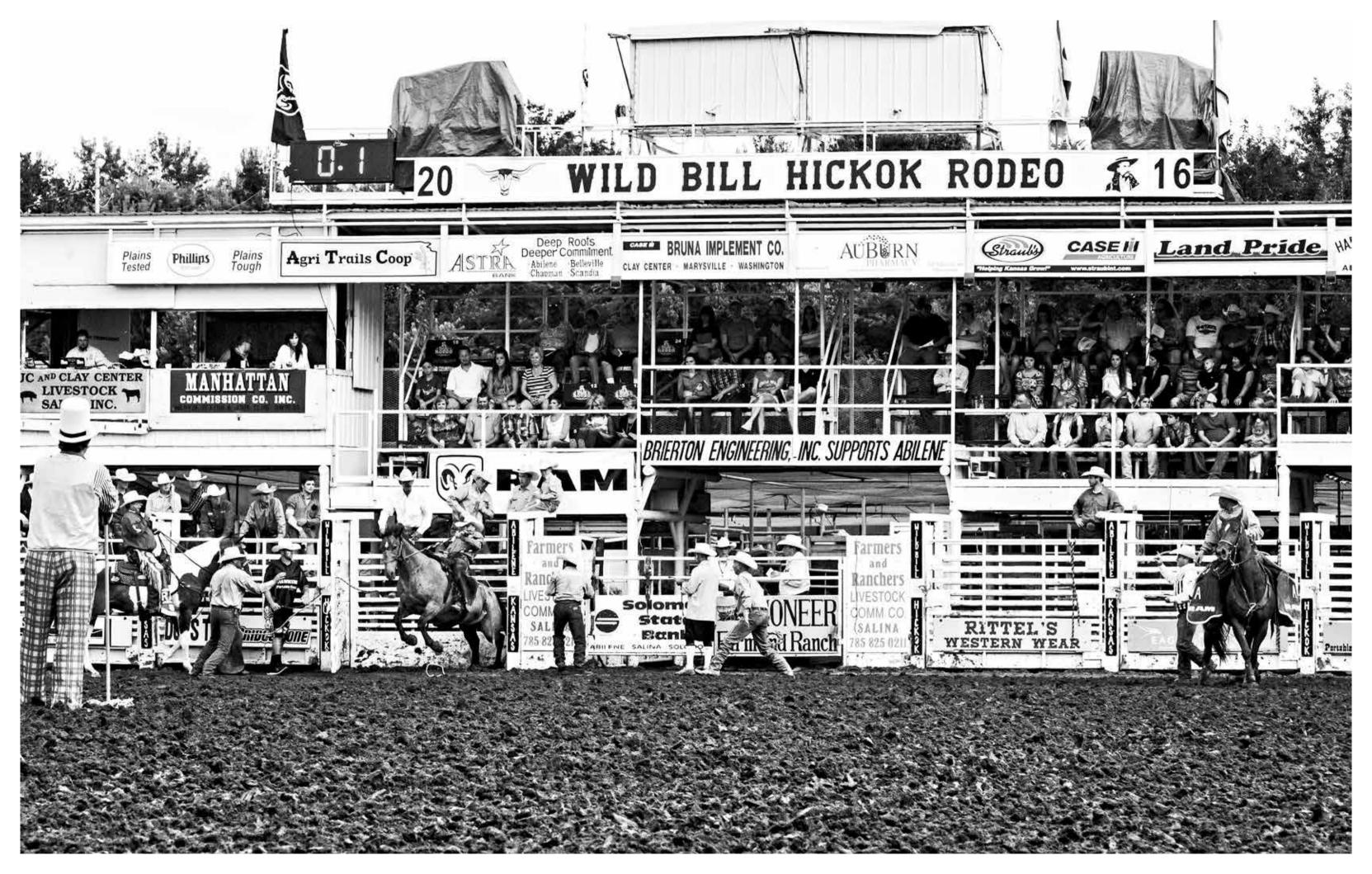
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