

PRESS RELEASE

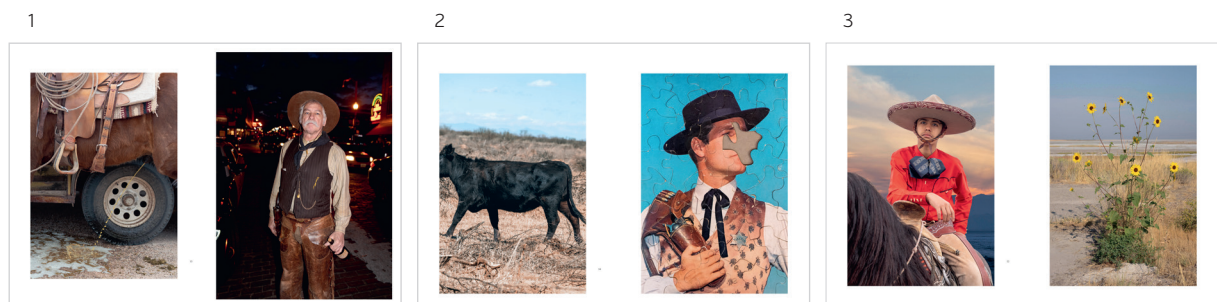
Cologne, September 1, 2025

Ute Behrend | Cowboys | After Barbed Wire

The cowboy is an invention

With her brand new publication *Cowboys | After Barbed Wire*, Cologne-based artist Ute Behrend takes a multifaceted and surprising look at one of pop culture's most enduring icons: the cowboy. It says so right on the back cover: the cowboy is an invention. And that is precisely the central thesis that Behrend pursues in her work with wit, empathy, and analytical acuity.

Historically speaking, the real cowboy only existed for a short period of time between 1865 and 1880. Mostly, it were not white pioneers, but former slaves, Mexicans, or indigenous men who captured and sold cattle herds that had been released during the American Civil War. But history was quickly overshadowed by myths, films, advertising images, and a persistent ideal of masculinity and freedom, which was strongly influenced in the beginning by Buffalo Bill's Western shows, including those in Europe.



1 Pissing horse | Old cowboy with whiskey bottle, 2 Headless Cow | Cowboy jigsaw puzzle,
3 Young mexican cowboy in festive garb | Sunflowers

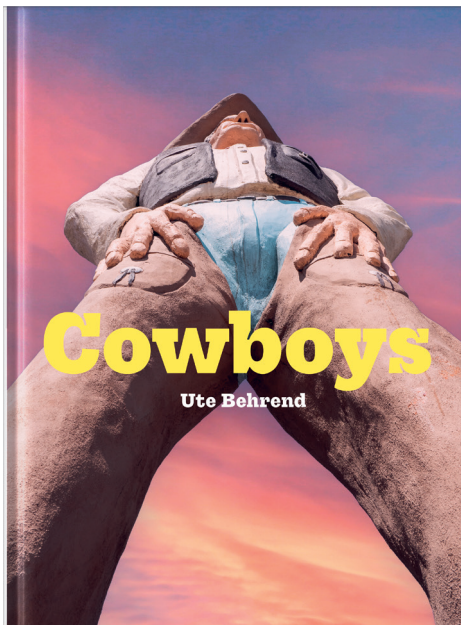
For many years, the photographer followed the diverse footprints of cowboys – from Cologne Carnival to rodeos and farms in Belgium and Spain to the United States, which she visited three times during the course of this long-term project. The result is a multifaceted visual narrative in which we encounter the men who capture the cattle, the men who kill it, and the men who ride horses and bulls – seemingly never in doubt as to what they are doing and how they are performing. The photographs, compositions, juxtapositions, texts, and collages all bring us intimately close to them; They reveal their pride, as well as their forlornness. The camera questions and confronts the *cowboys*—in Susan Sontag's sense of the term, in quotation marks—with humor, but always with respect. Reinforcing the impression that they are mere performers, these cowboys have become figurines. They are quotations, projections, roles. Ute Behrend's work exposes them as actors in a cultural spectacle – without taking their dignity away.

The invention of barbed wire [as in the subtitle *After Barbed Wire*] marks the end of the open prairie and thus also heralds the inevitable fading away of the original cowboy. The claim on a young man's T-shirt at the opening of the book stating "the world needs more cowboys" shifts during the course of the book towards a question: "Does the world still need more cowboys?"

Ultimately, however, Ute Behrend naturally entrusts the reader to come to their very own conclusions – as all great storytellers do.

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BUMMBUMM BOOKS has set itself the ambitious goal of reclaiming the visual poetic space. A keen eye, contemporary topical discourse, meticulous design and outstanding printing and finishing quality define the dedicated portfolio of the Cologne-based company around publisher Florian v. Wissel.



Ute Behrend

Cowboys

After Barbed Wire | 2025

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www.utebehrend.de

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