

M+B



Norm Clasen: American Icon

January 25 – February 15, 2025

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M+B is pleased to present *American Icon*, an exhibition of iconic photographs by Norm Clasen. This is the artist's second solo show with the gallery. The exhibition opens on Saturday, January 25 with an opening reception at the gallery from 6 to 8 pm.

Norm Clasen's photographs occupy a singular place in the American visual lexicon, not only as artifacts of one of the most iconic advertising campaigns of the 20th century but as works of striking artistry in their own right. A lifelong photographer, Clasen honed his craft capturing the vast expanses of the American West, merging a deep respect for the landscape with a cinematic sensibility. This exhibition highlights his role as a creator who shaped national mythology through artistry as much as intent.

The works in the show—including *Sunset Chase*, an expansive portrayal of a cowboy silhouetted against a blazing sky, and *Holding Tight*, a dynamic diptych—demonstrate Clasen's ability to harness light, composition, and timing to create images of extraordinary drama and intimacy. Each piece is steeped in the spirit of the West, evoking themes of freedom, resilience, and the human connection to the land.

Though Clasen's career includes a breadth of photographic work, it is his association with the Marlboro advertising campaign that has left an indelible mark. His deft use of color and light, coupled with his ability to frame his subjects in a way that exudes narrative depth, made his photographs essential to the success of the "Marlboro Man" mythos. These works transcended their commercial origins, becoming enduring symbols of Americana while also embedding themselves in the art-historical conversation.

This conversation became more layered in the 1980s when Richard Prince appropriated Marlboro imagery, including several of Clasen's photographs, for his *Cowboys* series. Prince's act of recontextualization spotlighted the inherent artificiality of the Marlboro myth, raising questions about authorship, originality, and the commodification of culture. While Prince's work garnered critical acclaim, it also overshadowed the photographers who originally crafted these indelible images. Clasen's exhibition reclaims his voice within this narrative, urging viewers to recognize the technical and artistic sophistication behind these works.

The gallery presentation also underscores the dualities within Clasen's practice: commercial versus fine art, myth versus reality, and regional specificity versus universal resonance. The photographs themselves, from the sweeping landscapes to the intimate moments of cowboy life, carry an undeniable allure. They are imbued with a painterly quality, a testament to Clasen's meticulous approach to his craft and his ability to evoke emotion through visual storytelling.

In revisiting these images today, the exhibition invites a reassessment not only of Clasen's contributions but of the enduring power of the American West as a cultural construct. What does the cowboy represent in an era defined by environmental and social precarity? How do these images—once used to sell an addictive product—speak to broader themes of authenticity and artifice in American life?

Norm Clasen's photographs are living documents that continue to shape and challenge our understanding of identity, artistry, and the stories we tell ourselves. This exhibition is a compelling tribute to an artist whose work continues to ride the line between nostalgia and critique, offering viewers a chance to confront both the beauty and the burden of a mythic past.



Norm Clasen

Norm Clasen (b. 1939) was born and raised in Southern California. An avid outdoorsman from an early age, Clasen's passion for photography grew from his love of the natural world. After attending the University of Colorado, Norm moved to Aspen in 1962, where he founded and ran an independent advertising agency. In 1978, a series of coincidences led to Clasen being invited to shoot for Marlboro. The campaign was a natural fit, drawing on his intrinsic understanding of horses and the cowboy way of life. Clasen would go on to spend the next thirteen years of his life as a principal photographer for campaign. Clasen's authentic point of view helped guide the campaign to its zenith, with his work appearing in newspapers, magazines, and billboards across the world; helping shape a visual lexicon integral to the iconography of the American West. Norm Clasen lives and works in Carbondale, Colorado.

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Sunset Chase, Riverton, WY, 1985

archival pigment print

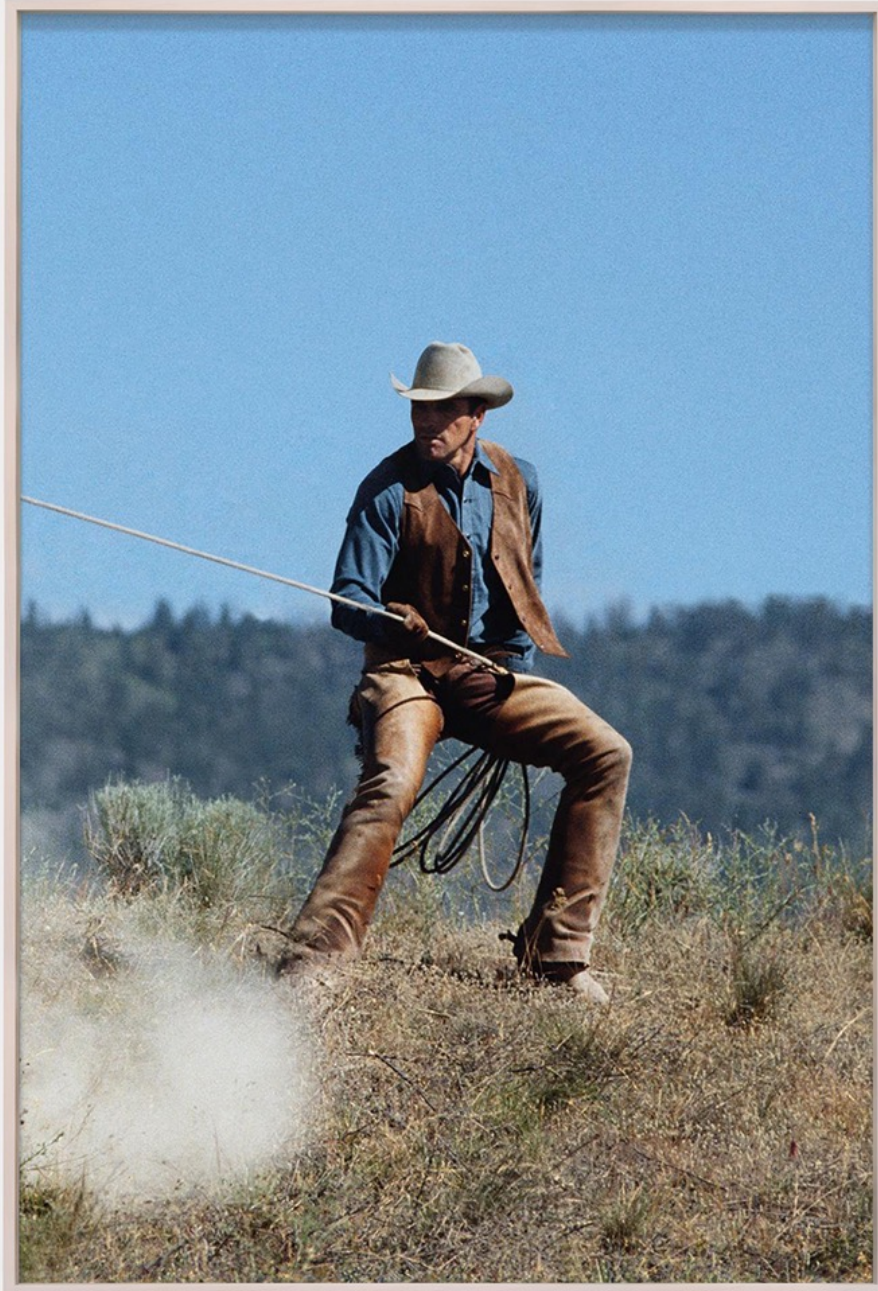
48 x 72 inches | edition of 3

40 x 60 inches | edition of 5

16 x 24 inches | edition of 15

**Pricing subject to increase as edition sells*





Holding Tight, Newcastle, WY (diptych), 1988
archival pigment prints
each panel: 72 x 48 inches | edition of 3
each panel: 40 x 26.5 inches | edition of 9
each panel: 24 x 16 inches | edition of 15
**Pricing subject to increase as edition sells*







Twilight, Riverton, WY, 1985
archival pigment print
48 x 90 inches | edition of 3
40 x 75 inches | edition of 5
26.5 x 50 inches | edition of 9
16 x 30 inches | edition of 15
**Pricing subject to increase as edition sells*



Red Rider, Montana, 1988

archival pigment print

48 x 72 inches | edition of 3

40 x 60 inches | edition of 5

26.5 x 40 inches | edition of 9

16 x 24 inches | edition of 15

**Pricing subject to increase as edition sells*



Mission Ridge, Perma, MT, 1988

archival pigment print

48 x 72 inches | edition of 3

40 x 60 inches | edition of 5

26.5 x 40 inches | edition of 9

16 x 24 inches | edition of 15

**Pricing subject to increase as edition sells*





Passing Thru, Raton, NM, 1990

archival pigment print

48 x 72 inches | edition of 3

40 x 60 inches | edition of 5

26.5 x 40 inches | edition of 9

16 x 24 inches | edition of 15

**Pricing subject to increase as edition sells*



Desert Winter, Monument Valley, AZ, 1985

archival pigment print

48 x 72 inches | edition of 3

40 x 60 inches | edition of 5

26.5 x 40 inches | edition of 9

16 x 24 inches | edition of 15

**Pricing subject to increase as edition sells*



Cold Back Sunrise, Durango, CO, 1983

archival pigment print

48 x 78 inches | edition of 3

40 x 65 inches | edition of 5

26.5 x 43 inches | edition of 9

16 x 26 inches | edition of 15

**Pricing subject to increase as edition sells*



Cactus Ridge, Seymour, TX, 1987

archival pigment print

72 x 48 inches | edition of 3

60 x 40 inches | edition of 5

40 x 26.5 inches | edition of 9

24 x 16 inches | edition of 15

**Pricing subject to increase as edition sells*



Remount Station, Hudson, MT, 1990

archival pigment print

48 x 72 inches | edition of 3

40 x 60 inches | edition of 5

26.5 x 40 inches | edition of 9

16 x 24 inches | edition of 15

**Pricing subject to increase as edition sells*





In Charge, Perma, MT, 1988

archival pigment print

48 x 72 inches | edition of 3

40 x 60 inches | edition of 5

26.5 x 40 inches | edition of 9

16 x 24 inches | edition of 15

**Pricing subject to increase as edition sells*



Red Hill Run, Seymour, TX, 1987

archival pigment print

72 x 48 inches | edition of 3

60 x 40 inches | edition of 5

40 x 26.5 inches | edition of 9

24 x 16 inches | edition of 15

**Pricing subject to increase as edition sells*







Dream Herd, Durango, CO, 1987

archival pigment print

48 x 84 inches | edition of 3

40 x 70 inches | edition of 5

26.5 x 46 inches | edition of 9

16 x 28 inches | edition of 15

**Pricing subject to increase as edition sells*



Wind River Mountain, Wind River Reservation, WY, 1988

archival pigment print

48 x 96 inches | edition of 3

40 x 80 inches | edition of 5

26.5 x 53 inches | edition of 9

16 x 32 inches | edition of 15

**Pricing subject to increase as edition sells*



River Roper, Newcastle, WY, 1982

archival pigment print

48 x 89 inches | edition of 3

40 x 74 inches | edition of 5

26.5 x 49 inches | edition of 9

16 x 29.5 inches | edition of 15

**Pricing subject to increase as edition sells*





Ghost Herd, Sheridan, WY, 1984

archival pigment print

48 x 77 inches | edition of 3

40 x 64 inches | edition of 5

26.5 x 42.5 inches | edition of 9

16 x 25.5 inches | edition of 15

**Pricing subject to increase as edition sells*



Vanishing Light, Perma, MT, 1990

archival pigment print

48 x 75.5 inches | edition of 3

40 x 63 inches | edition of 5

26.5 x 41.5 inches | edition of 9

16 x 25 inches | edition of 15

**Pricing subject to increase as edition sells*