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UNITED STATES

For about 17 years, the primary focus of our work has been what we call "the transportation of place," situations in which one limited or isolated place strongly resembles another distant one. There are many reasons for these transpositions: colonialism, diaspora, war, migration and emulation. We use our own backgrounds as starting points: one of us is German and came to the United States as a teenager (Max), the other grew up in a Jewish family in Marblehead, Mass. By locating personally familiar images in unfamiliar contexts, rather than seeking out the exotic, we hope to arrive at new meanings.

One area of particular interest to us is how American internal expansion has been sold through the figure of the gun-slinging cowboy, and how that myth has sometimes evoked unintended interpretations abroad. In Germany, for example, Karl May, the wildly popular late-19th century novelist, helped write a German version of the Wild West in which the Indian is the protagonist. While many Americans grew up playing heroic cowboys and villainous Indians, many German children grew up playing the game with Indians as the heroes. The American cowboy myth was reinterpreted to fit local nostalgias and anxieties.

We photographed the phenomenon of Germans dressing up as Indians on weekends and at special festivals to capture what it looks like on the receiving end of an American projection. We are also asking how, in light of the Holocaust, Germans wound up identifying with the victims of American manifest destiny, rather than with its perpetrators. How could a

people who waged an internal colonization within Europe less than 60 years ago, killing millions of people – Jews, Gypsies, gays and people considered "asocial" – and banishing millions more to the four corners of the earth, identify with native Americans, the victims of American imperialism?



"Knife Thrower," from the series "German Indians," 1998
Chromogenic color print
Collection of the artists; courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery, New York