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Print

The Raw and the Cooked

Capturing youth at its most wayward is child's play for Ryan McGinley
By Carl Swanson

You wouldn't know it from the euphoric photographs he takes, but Ryan McGinley has some hassles in his life. The musty apartment he rents in New York's Chinatown was formerly a brothel, and he's still being woken up by the occasional middle-of-the-night door-buzz. A company that was supposed to print posters for his new show refused the job because it felt his pictures were too dirty. McGinley was uncomprehending: "People think just because there are penises it's pornographic," he says.

That issue was debated long before the 26-year-old McGinley's high-energy, lo-fi pictures earned him a solo show at the Whitney Museum last year. As a photographer for *Vice* magazine, he provided images of his skinny, cute friends jumping around naked, puking, and jerking off. These brought him not only controversy but celebrity: He counts everyone from the Strokes to Björk as friends, and even enjoyed a short romance with Sigur Rós vocalist Jónsi Birgisson. "There are like three gay guys in Iceland," says McGinley. "He's one of them."

Last summer, when the New York scene and the envy he engendered became too much, McGinley purchased a VW camper and escaped to Vermont for about five months, where his latest pictures were taken. Showing at New York's P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center through the end of September, they depict a bunch of pasty Manhattanites, full of beer and mushrooms, cavorting nude in the woods, climbing trees, and jumping on trampolines at night. Though he now shoots regularly for such prestigious publications as *The New York Times Magazine*, not everyone is convinced that McGinley's hit the big time. "Sometimes," he says, "my mom calls to say a friend of hers knows someone at a graphic-design agency who might be hiring."



If naked people frolic in a forest and no one's there to photograph it, do they make a sound?: Ryan McGinley's *Tree #3*, 2003