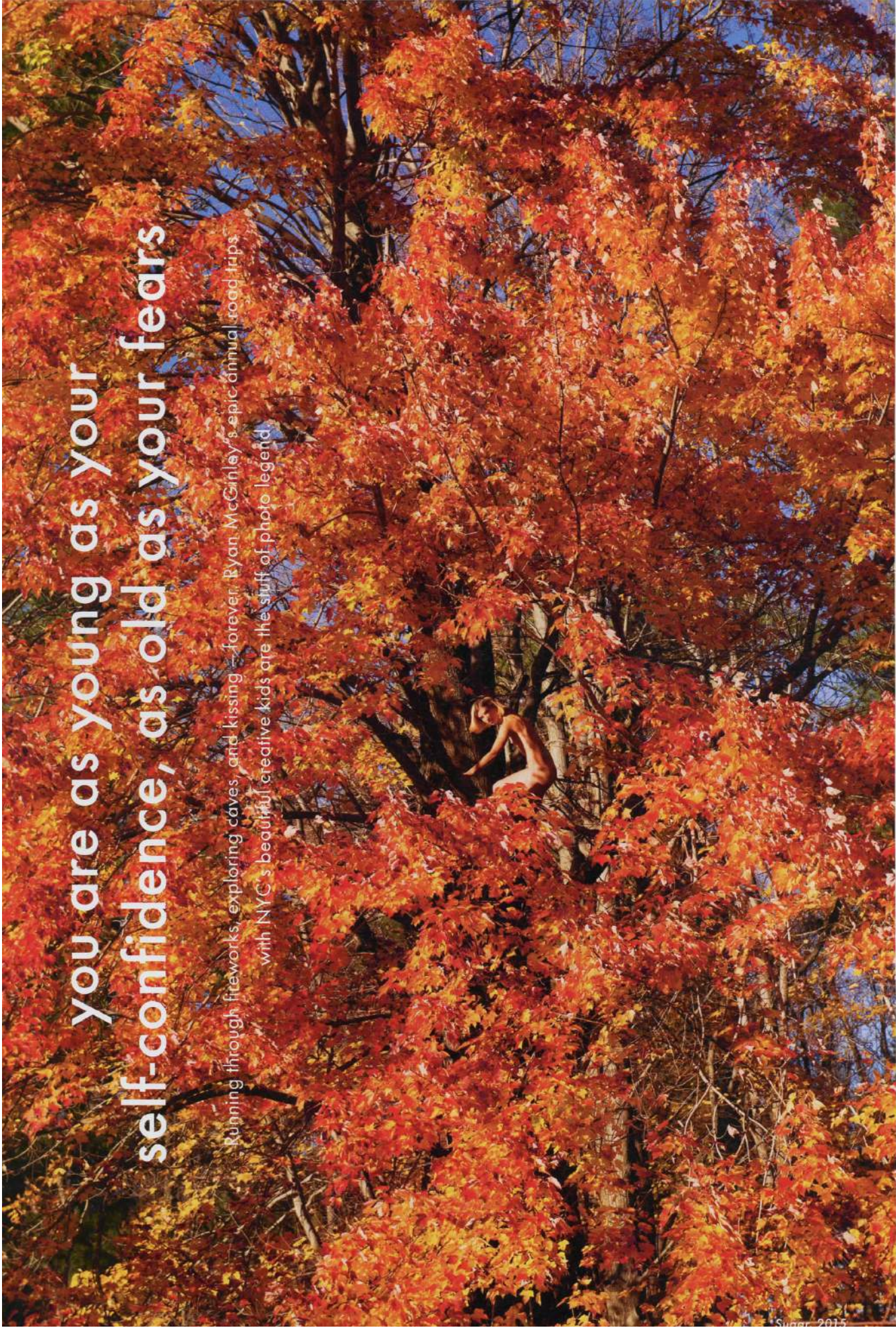


you are as young as your self-confidence, as old as your fears

Running through fireworks, exploring caves, and kissing — forever. Ryan McGinley's epic annual road trips
with NYC's beautiful creative kids are the stuff of photo legend.



PHOTOGRAPHY RYAN MCGINLEY TEXT RORY SATRAN
All images are courtesy of Ryan McGinley and team (gallery, inc.), New York.



Crimson & Clover, 2015





"People are running through the fireworks, and the gorgeous flower field, and we are at the end of the Earth. It's hard, you want to be in that world all the time. But it's not a place that you can live in."

RYAN MCGINLEY

"I want to live in my photographs," Ryan McGinley says. And in a way, he does. From the first, incandescent pictures he took on the Yashica he kept in his pocket (Dash bombing, Tim falling, Lissy jumping) to his recent, genre-breaking studio nudes, he has photographed the young artists who make New York the city that these kids keep coming to — from places like Ramsey, New Jersey, where Ryan grew up idolising his seven older siblings, and began plotting a life as an artist.

He is talked about as one of the greatest living photographers, which sounds nuts for someone who's only 37, yet it's apt when you realise he's been making serious art for 16 years. At 25 he was the youngest artist to mount a solo show at the Whitney. But he's still Ryan. You can find him on the subway with his blue backpack and dirty white Converse. He's a sweet, beautiful, earnest little punk — the kid who lingers behind his wilder friends to thank your mum for her hospitality.

There have been many exhibitions (the most recent is a career retrospective this summer at Kunsthal KAdE in the Netherlands), books, thousands of Instagram followers, and endless glowing profiles since that first Whitney show. And through it all he has taken extreme breaks each summer to go on working road trips with the city's most beautiful and fascinating young people, documenting their black eyes, make-out sessions and waterfall dips.

A new book of the more recent road trip pictures, *Way Far*, comes out via Rizzoli this autumn. When I meet him at his studio, he's ultra-prepared in a very Ryan way: blown-up prints of the most stunning road trip photos hang on the walls, and he sits calmly at a table with a dummy of the book.

These pictures are so damn beautiful. They show the purest states of exhilaration. It's youth without the outfits, the posturing, the comedown — the moments when you're far from the city and you're with your friends and the stars come out. He shoots the road trip pictures mostly within a three-hour radius of his home in Hudson, New York.

"When I bring people on trips upstate, they go to a place that is freeing and I access something in them that's a bit childlike," he says.

The kids that he photographs are artists and New York figures in their own right. (They're men and women, really, but in Ryan's pictures they're always "kids".) There's photographer Petra Collins in a mud pool, with the reflection of a tree rising out of her curls. There's performance artist India Menuez lying in a field of frost. But without any signifiers they could be anyone, any time. Ryan has spoken about photographing subjects that look the way he remembers his brothers and sisters growing up.

One of those brothers, Michael, died of AIDS at the age of 33, when Ryan was a young teen. He describes that period as bleak, with many of Michael's friends dying within a few short years before the advent of antiretroviral medicine. It made his coming-out more difficult. "Probably as a teenager, I thought if I come out I'm going to die," he says. When he did come out, at 18, "it was awesome". But his brother's death made him hyper aware of the burning wick. "Him dying has affected, and still affects my photos. When someone you're so close to dies, it really makes you think of mortality. When you see somebody's body change from being really healthy to completely skeletal, the whole process of dying... it made me really want to live hard."

Ryan talks about "real life" a lot. And the tension between the drudgery of making a living compared to a nomadic, vibrant art life is at the crux of his work. As he says, maybe everything comes back to your father. Ryan's was a travelling salesman and war veteran who put eight kids through school. "He was a realist about life," says Ryan. "He always used the expression, 'the real world'. 'Wait until you get out to the real world.' And I was like, 'Oh, fuck'. It scared the shit out of me. And then I made the decision to devote my life to art and not follow their suggestions of doing something else. It's still what motivates me, my fear of not being able to survive."

The magic of Ryan's career is having both the suburban work ethic of his father and a romantic, visionary quality that is all his own. He creates his own reality — one that extracts the best elements of youth. "My photographs are not real life," he says. "But they're pretty close to it. I always wanted them to have this reportage feel. All the moments that you're seeing are happening — it's all pseudo-documentary. I set the mood, but I really just let people do what they want to do. I have a very light hand directing. And they all happen. People are running through the fireworks, and the gorgeous flower field, and we are at the end of the Earth. It's hard, you want to be in that world all the time. But it's not a place that you can live in."

One of his biggest influences is, improbably, the ultimate WASP documentarian Tina Barney. He picked up her first book, *Theater of Manners*, at a flea market years ago and still looks at it today. "It's the gift that keeps on giving," he says. "It's like the life that I never had, the really fancy Westchester-y, Hamptons-y life. It almost looked like a John Hughes film, like *Pretty in Pink*, but it was real." "Real life" yet interesting and inspiring. Sound familiar? From the time he discovered an Andy Warhol book at the local Pearl Paint at the age of twelve, Ryan has devoured artists' biographies. He's on to Sally Mann's this summer. "From day one I have been hungry for information about artists. I want to know how people continue to be artists, because it's so fucking hard. And there are no rules for it. Being an artist is the wild west."

Having gleaned lessons on the art life from his obsessive reading, as well as mentors like artist Jack Walls and his Parsons professor George Pitts, Ryan is ready to pass on some wisdom of his own. A 2013 *New York Times* article calling him "The Pied Piper of the Downtown Art World" spoke of his influence in supporting the careers of young artists like Collins, Michael Bailey Gates and Sandy Kim. And last year he gave a radical commencement speech at his alma mater Parsons (with a camera slung around his neck), urging graduates to "find something to be obsessed with, and then obsess over it". And to "remember: it's romantic as hell what we do." He says: "It's important to give back. You can't keep it unless you give it away. That's a philosophy that I've always lived by."

And Ryan keeps learning, from everyone, from the interns in his studio to a napkin factory owner who lives near his parents in New Jersey: "I talk to him every night, and he really drops amazing knowledge and wisdom of how to navigate through life and not lose your mind." After this long in the art world, pushing himself to new heights each year, he appreciates the perspective. "I've been taking photographs for 16 years, that's kind of crazy," he says. "It does feel like one long day sometimes."



Elise, 2015



Deep Well, 2015