

# 'Ryan McGinley: The Kids Were Alright'

[The Kids Were Alright](#) opens tomorrow, February 11, 2017 at MCA Denver. The exhibition will feature early photographs by McGinley, whose pioneering, documentary-style approach captured the antics and daily activities of himself, his friends, and collaborators in lower Manhattan in the late 1990s.



Occupying the entire second level of MCA Denver, the exhibition focuses on McGinley's work from 1998 to 2003, from his earliest forays into photography to his rise to national prominence. Additionally, over 1500 of McGinley's Polaroids, which have never before been exhibited, will wrap the museum's second floor. On display there will also be some works by Dash Snow and Dan Colen, two of McGinley's closest collaborators during his early period.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a multi-author catalogue, co-published with [Skira Rizzoli](#). It will include a critical essay by Nora Burnett Abrams, a conversation between the artist and Dan Colen, and contributions by Aaron Bondaroff, Leo Fitzpatrick, Marc Hundley, Teddy Liouliakis, Lizzy McChesney, George Pitts, Agathe Snow, and Jack Walls. The book will feature 1500+ of McGinley's Polaroids as well as never-before-published photographs included in the exhibition.

For the occasion we have sat down with Jack Walls and Leo Fitzpatrick to discuss their contribution to the catalogue and Ryan's life.

### **LEO FITZPATRICK**

*What is your contribution to the catalogue?*

I contributed sort of the same way we are doing now – telling stories about us growing up. We were both skateboarders from New Jersey, and being from there you were already an outsider and looked down upon, so there was this kind of bond we shared – being NJ kids in New York, where nobody liked us.

*What do you think makes this show different to any other he already had?*

The thing that I think is going to be the most interesting about this show is that Ryan was always shooting polaroids which no one has ever seen. He has thousands and thousands of polaroids, and some are going to be at the Denver show. Also what I think will be more visible now, is the fact there were a lot of people behind the scenes of a scene. There are a lot of pieces to the puzzle that make those photos really important.

*Jack Walls is an important piece to the puzzle. Tell me something about Jack. About Jack and Ryan!?*

Jack is really important and big part of Ryan's world/career. He has been around art world for a long time before any of those guys started (Dash, Dan, Ryan). Also, back then a lot of people hated on other people for being ambitious, but Jack completely supported Ryan's ambitions. And because Jack has had his history with Robert Mapplethorpe, he understood what it means to position yourself with the right people and places to build a career.

*What is one of Ryan's best traits?*

He was always really good at attaching himself to attractive outsiders. People who didn't fit in conventional roles. But, I think, you can already see that from his body of work.

*Do you often reminisce about your youthful times together?*

It's weird to look back on and reminisce because you never expect to get old enough to do that. You are just living every day like it's your last, going 100 miles per hour. And then as you get older, you start looking back at things and saying, „I wish I weren't so fucked up all the time so I could remember it better.“ But that said, our adulthood was probably the most innocent time of our lives, even though it doesn't look so innocent.

*What do you miss the most from that time?*

For me, the moments I miss the most are moments where everybody would get together at Ryan's apartment, get drunk or fucked up. And even though we were partying and being fuck ups, we were also really productive, and we were always plotting what our next attack is going to be. So I miss that! I miss all of us being together.



### **JACK WALLS**

*What is your contribution to the catalogue?*

My contribution to the show as a whole is mostly just spiritual, I guess. But I did write a piece for the book, a story is what it is. I don't know how they're going to use it.

*How did you and Ryan first meet?*

The story I wrote for his new forthcoming book is basically about how we met. The short version of the story is my friend at the time, Dwight Ewell, introduced us. Ryan and I started to hangout with one another on a daily basis pretty much immediately after we first met. We all hung out in the East Village anyway. So once we became friends we would bump into one another on the street and end up hanging out together for days and nights on end.



*Did you like him from the get-go or it took you awhile?*

Oh yes, I liked Ryan immediately, he seemed harmless enough, or so I thought. Ryan was adventurous, he was part of all those skater kids that would be hanging out in Lower Manhattan in the early 90's, although I didn't know him back then. We met in May of 1998, I started to bring him around my friends, they all liked him. He could behave himself when he wanted to. But there was always this wild streak simmering below the surface.

*How so?*

Well, what I mean is, a lot of his early work that sort of made his reputation centers around the whole theme of unbridled youth. Kids acting out on a regular basis. I mean, Ryan was actually spending nights in jail. This was real shit. I certainly was not even remotely considering this as "life as art". I would hear these story and try to talk to him, to reprimand him.

Of course he ignored whatever advice I was trying to give him about staying out of trouble. Yeah, he was truly wild in those days. But I could be pretty wild too back then.



*What is the wildest thing you two did together?*

Ha! I'm not telling you.

*What is one word that best describes your relationship?*

Loyalty.

*Where you surprised at McGinley's success?*

His success took everyone by surprise, the art world certainly wasn't ready for it. Ryan captured energy, it was a certain energy that the art world was lacking at the time. I thought it was exciting. No, exciting is not the right word, it was *invigorating*. I felt I was involved with something with bounce, these kids were reinventing the art world. You know?

*Can you explain? What do you mean by, "something with bounce"?*

What I mean by that is something that resonates. Something that speaks to your soul. I mean, isn't that what good art is supposed to do?

*What are you working on these days?*



Painting mostly, but I write everyday because I keep a diary, and I write stuff for myself too, you know, poems, ideas, thoughts. I'm sitting on at least 3 shows here at my studio right now. I could have a show for any gallery at the drop of a hat. If you follow me on Instagram that's pretty much a visual diary of what's going on with me.

*How has your relationship with Ryan McGinley evolved over the past 20 years?*

Well, Ryan works all the time and I work all the time. I've seen him mature, not only as an artist but as a human being too. We don't see each other physically all that much these days but we're always in contact with one another. We're family.