

Ryan McGinley

Life's best and prettiest years fly by fast—a good reason to record them while you can

KIDS AT PLAY It's not easy living in New York City when you're young and beautiful and so are all your friends. Don't believe it? Neither does Ryan McGinley, which is why his work is such an edgy and innocent joy.

McGinley, 30, grew up in New Jersey, spent his teen years going slightly wild in Manhattan and in his early 20s settled on the arty Lower East Side. The fashion magazines of the time had a singular image of his peer group, and it was not a good one: hollow-cheeked and sallown-skinned with the lank look of a hungry junkie. That wasn't McGinley's crowd—healthy, happily sexual, not above living in the extreme fast lane sometimes but otherwise O.K.

To McGinley, who was attending Parsons School of Design, all that sounded like grist for photos, so he began documenting his high-energy world and sent a collection to magazines and museums. The images were unairbrushed and unironic, which freed them of the twin burdens of prettiness and

ponderousness. He titled the portfolio "The Kids Are Alright," and the pictures apparently were too since New York City's fabled Whitney Museum snapped them up and exhibited them in 2002, making McGinley the youngest artist it ever honored with a solo show.

Since then, McGinley has been featured in museums around the world, ventured into fashion photography and photographed Olympic swimmers for the New York Times Magazine. But his favorite subject remains youth, as his 2008 exhibit, "I Know Where the Summer Goes," proves. In that collection, McGinley's troupe travels the country as he photographs them, sometimes clothed and often not, while they leap fences, lounge in a desert, play together in a tree.

Photography is about freezing a moment in time; McGinley's is about freezing a stage in a lifetime. Young and beautiful is as fleeting as a camera snap—and thus all the more worth preserving. —J.K.



Running Field, 2007

