

Somewhere Place



'Jake (Fall Foliage)' (2011), by Ryan McGinley

★★★★★

Galerie Gabriel Rolt until 14 May

In 2004, Ryan McGinley became the youngest artist ever exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art. He proved that 'The Kids Are Alright' with his show of the same name by documenting the exuberant shenanigans of his skater, graffiti-writing friends. Seven years later, with several awards under his belt – including 2007 Young Photographer of the Year from New York's International Centre of Photography – McGinley's no longer waiting around to capture unique moments. He's now making them happen by staging and choreographing photos.

The 12 images that constitute 'Somewhere Place', his first solo show at Galerie Gabriel Rolt, feature McGinley's favourite kind of models: young, androgynous, skinny and undeniably hip boys and girls. They hurl themselves across cinematic landscapes or pose in the studio, with their always-naked bodies covered in scratches as they hold kittens and hawks. His 2007 exhibition at FOAM, 'Celebration of Life', depicted lots of smiling faces; however this new series of portraits is a bit more mysterious, with a conceptual sense of humour emerging from the often life-size photos.

One of these shows a girl lying on her back and lifting her legs to reveal a vagina from which a white thread hangs. Next to her, a bare-necked white rooster stares defiantly at the camera. After a few seconds of puzzlement, the viewer can't help but let out a few uncomfortable chuckles. It could be about a male and female 'bird', after they've engaged in an intimate encounter. Or it could simply say, thanks to the homogenis-

ing effect of the black and white, that animals and certain parts of the human anatomy aren't so different after all.

The same idea of a hybrid between animals and humans acts as a common denominator of otherwise quite eclectic imagery. In one photo, thanks to a clever blurry effect and some clip-on wings, a girl becomes an avian humanoid. In another, a blue-eyed boy looks straight into the camera, lips slightly parted, with two snakes casually wrapped around his

Young, androgynous, skinny and hip

neck. It's either that or people acting as wild animals, jumping around naked in wet, dark forests.

They're all aesthetically pleasing, with their thoughtful composition and subtle lighting, but the artificial shine never quite wears off. Save for one perfect photo, 'Jake (Fall Foliage)' (2011), which effortlessly captures the feeling of abandonment, of dropping into the abyss without any care in the world. The image seizes the exact instant in which a man is mid-air, after plunging backwards from the branch of a leafy, copper-coloured tree, hovering above other trees bathed in the blue light of evening. Choreographed or not, it doesn't matter. It looks and, most importantly, feels authentic. That's what McGinley ultimately tries to convey, the rawness of the moment and the joy of youth. Too bad that only one of these beautiful photos manages to completely live up to the hype.

Catalina Iorga

Antiphotjournalism

★★★★★

FOAM until 6 June

With 'Antiphotjournalism', curators Thomas Keenan of the Human Rights Project and Carles Huerra of La Virreina Centre de L'Imatge in Barcelona, are giving the finger to the naysayers who've declared the profession of photojournalist dead in recent years. They argue instead that photojournalism has been reborn, fed by new technologies, different approaches and experimental points of view.

Keenan and Huerra have incorporated mediums such as video, collage and installation to show how today's photojournalism transcends its traditional format,

leaving more room for interpretation and going beyond simply informing the public about current events. A large portion of the exhibit, for example, focuses on the value of archiving and retracing history, emphasising the importance of the past and future.

Rich in content, the show, which confusingly starts on the second floor, is however marred by signage problems. In the context of demonstrating the advent of a new photojournalism, the works themselves don't stand alone and need more explanation on how they fit the bill. The decals applied to the walls are small, dirty, worn, poorly positioned and insufficiently descriptive.

For example, it takes too much effort to locate the tiny text that explains Gilles Peress' series 'The Long Arm of Justice', which at first glance appears to be a conventional – if gorgeous – photo essay on the refugees in Kosovo, juxtaposed against the wide colour picture of a plas-

tic photo album featuring self-portraits of soldiers. Yet the story is fascinating: the album, found and photographed by Peress during his Kosovo assignment, later became instrumental in identifying soldiers who perpetrated war crimes – a primary example of photojournalism overstepping its usual boundaries by becoming proof in a criminal prosecution.

The show stretches the definition of journalist, too: the camera-phone videos of the 2009 revolts in Tehran, compiled by Sohrab Mohebbi (a Queens Museum of Art curator whose name is

Photojournalism has been reborn, fed by new technologies

missing a handful of decal letters on the gallery wall), have an added realistic quality thanks to their low resolution, grain and shakiness. The videographer isn't a distant observer anymore, but a participant.

There's a point, though, at which creativity with the form becomes an end in itself and some of the works exhibited prove irritating in their attempts at originality. Hito Steyerl's 'Red Alert', for example, is simply three monitors displaying uniform red backgrounds – a conceptual contemporary art piece that doesn't have its place in a show about journalism. In the last room before the exit, Renzo Martens' 'Episode I' is a 45-minute exercise in solipsism, during which the Dutch director visits Chechnyan camps and cuts off refugees' pleas for help to ask, 'Do you think I'm free?' As a Russian soldier tells him later in the video, 'You're just an idiot looking for adventure.' Maybe this is where the name of the exhibit makes the most sense; what doesn't transcend sometimes simply mocks and, ultimately, negates its good intentions.

Marie-Charlotte Pezé



Detail of 'Afterlife I' by Adam Broom