

19 FEBRUARY – 15 MAY 2016

RYAN MCGINLEY

The Four Seasons



Curated by Stefano Raimondi

GAMeC – Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Bergamo

Opening: 18 February 2016, 7 p.m.

From 19 February to 15 May 2016, GAMeC – Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Bergamo is pleased to present an extensive show of works by **Ryan McGinley** (b. Ramsey, New Jersey, 1977; lives and works in New York), **the first solo exhibition by the famous American artist at an Italian institution and the first one that GAMeC has devoted to a young photographer on the international scene.**

McGinley is considered **one of the most important contemporary artists**, so influential that the Whitney Museum and MoMA P.S.1 in New York devoted a solo exhibition to him in 2003 and 2004, respectively. In 2007 he received the *Young Photographer Infinity Award* from the prestigious International Center of Photography in New York.

He grew up in New Jersey and then moved to New York's East Village, becoming part of the irrepressible underground community of graffiti artists, skateboarders and artists. He captured this group of young people in their excesses and restless lifestyle, making them the main subject of his work, which culminated with his first publication, *The Kids Are Alright* (1999).

McGinley's work witnesses and speaks for the subculture of the Nineties, which then burst onto the scene in the new millennium. **His digital photographs revolve around youth, freedom, hedonism, excess, the vital spirit, and the relationship between humans and nature. These are very powerful, compelling and fascinating works with an energy that expands through the figures' surroundings.**

Regarding his work, McGinley said, "Remember, it's romantic as hell, what we do", and **he creates a bond and reference between his work and the romantic myth of the "noble savage", which has direct ties with Romanticism and the Romantic-Enlightenment philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.** In the photographs represented here, it seems that **man, immersed and almost incorporated in nature,**

innately strikes the right balance with the world in which he lives, observing the world with benign innocence. And the subjects of McGinley's photographs seem to act according to their own instinct, which is harmonized naturally and necessarily with the reality they experience. This is what is equally expressed – but in a way that had an even greater influence on the American counterculture – by Walden, reporting the adventure of the author Henry David Thoreau, who devoted two years of his life to seeking a close bond with nature. The Beat Generation, in particular, viewed Thoreau's experience and his powerful desire to return to nature as a contrast with the growing modernization of metropolises in the United States, and this concept was reformulated and widely circulated at the start of the third millennium.

As the exhibition curator Stefano Raimondi explains, the exhibition structure “moves to the musical rhythm of Vivaldi's Four Seasons: in each room there is a completely different sequence of horizons, colours, musicality and atmosphere, but they are all tied together.”

The exhibition is divided into **four rooms** and presents over forty medium- and large-format works from the artist's most recent production. **In particular, the autumn and winter photographs represent a new moment of research and organization of the artist's oeuvre and are conceived as an autonomous work.** Starting in 2004, for ten years McGinley travelled the continent looking for an array of different locations and taking the pictures that conceptually compose the quartet of the seasons, but **the two latter series are the most circumscribed and, in a certain way, the most intimate, tied to well-known and widely explored territories.**

Winter, which opens the exhibition, is glorious and majestic, dominated by the bluish white colour of ice. Impressive snowy landscapes, stalactites, ice caves and blizzards give an epic quality to the relationship between nude bodies and harsh weather conditions. Yet no suffering or resignation is evident: on the contrary, we see complete adaptation, coexistence and concurrence, tempest and impetus.

Spring unfolds in delicate tones, with light musicality, the sound of the wind and the scent of grass. Humans blend in with nature and are stretched out in brilliant green meadows or in ponds, amid cane thickets and shrubs. The photographs of spring, like those of summer, were taken during the artist's long and already mythicized photographic journeys, which led him to explore all of the United States.

Summer opens with bright and violent tones, fully reflecting the explosiveness of the season. A storm is heralded by darkening skies and flashes of lightning on the horizon, and then it unleashes its full fury, while humans go along with it and listen to it. When the storm is over, the water unleashed on the land becomes an occasion for celebration, passion and aggregation.

For **Autumn** McGinley was inspired by the romantic American landscapes portrayed by Frederic Edwin Church and other artists from the *Hudson River School*, which developed in the 19th century. In fact, upstate New York is the point of departure for all the photographs comprising this series. The hues become very intense, with reds and yellows dominating the scene, and the images convey great peacefulness and empathy.

The photographs McGinley is presenting at GAMEC are sublimely beautiful, often pervaded by a touch of nostalgia, and always accompanied by music ranging from soft to impetuous to silent. Nature is always viewed in terms of colours and forms; many of the photographs are taken at the first glimmer of dawn or in the early morning light, or at sunset or twilight, when the atmosphere

becomes more delicate and enthralling. There is something that ties his photographic practice to pictorial research: *“Being a photographer, you’re always searching for colour, and this definitely happens when I’m looking for locations. The same way that a painter would choose a colour to paint with, I’m looking for colour in locations.”*

But if the environment is a central component in McGinley’s work, the presence of people is equally important. **Male and female models inhabit these boundless landscapes as if they were living in or reconquering an earthly paradise. They are innocent and inevitably nude bodies, in which the colours and form of the body, eyes and hair are constantly juxtaposed with the surroundings until everything converges into one**, as demonstrated by the works *William (Green Swamp)*, 2013 e *Big Leaf Maple*, 2015. Often this primordial nature is completely devoid of any trace of civilization, but in brief junctures – as we can see in photographs like *I-Beam (Bolt)* and *Red Beetle* (2015) – it bears signs of incongruous modernization that are nevertheless rendered innocuous and converted into an innocent dimension through the way they are used.

The exhibition is part of a series in honour of Arturo Toffetti.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a **catalogue** published by **GAMEC Books**, edited by Sara Fumagalli and Valentina Gervasoni.

We are grateful to **GAMEC Club** for its generous contribution to the publication of the catalogue.

The exhibition is being staged thanks to the support of **Team Gallery**.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

McGinley’s work is part of the public collections of the world’s most important museums, such as the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery in Washington, the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, the Ellipse Foundation in Portugal, the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León in Spain and the Queensland Art Gallery in Australia.

In addition to collaborating with the most prestigious international art galleries, McGinley has shot photo campaigns for companies such as Christian Dior, Calvin Klein, Balenciaga, Bottega Veneta, Stella McCartney, Missoni, Levi’s, Adidas, Puma and Nike.

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