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DEC 22 PARADISE: RUBEN VAN SCHALM

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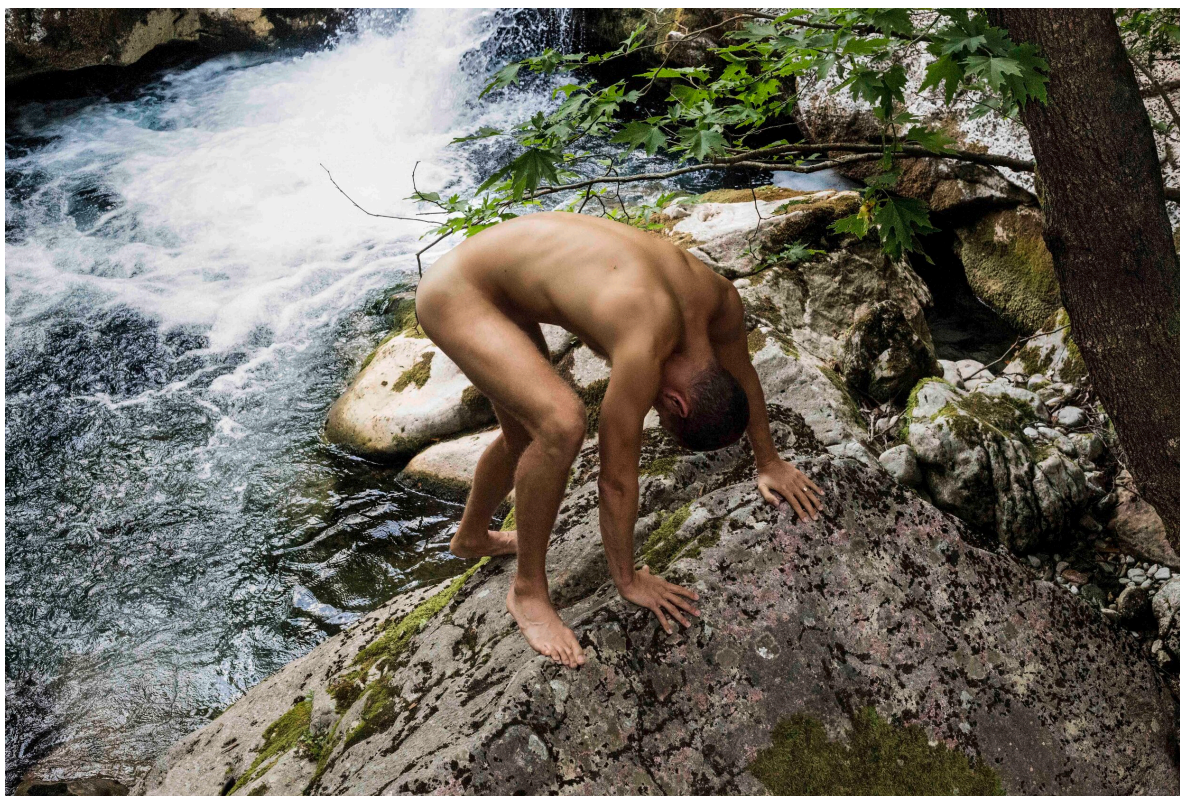


By: Terrence Phearse (<https://museemagazine.com/search?q=terrence%20phearse>)

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In religion, paradise is a place of bliss and happiness. It is a world without calamity, violence or strife or judgement. Typically full of pastoral imagery, in contrast to the agony of humankind, paradise is a place of peace, serenity and happiness. It is a mental and physical space of being. Paradise is synonymous with heaven—a higher place or holy land.

When we think of paradise on earth, we think of going on holiday to the Seychelles or Hawaii or any other exotic location for a beach escape. In the current moment the escape of paradise seems like a distant memory due to the never ending travel restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The world has shut down in many ways, and travel has become permissible only when essential. Ruben van Schalm devoted his practice to creating several photographic series around the world. His book, *Paradise*, contains images made in Israel, French Polynesia, Barbados, New York, Greece, The Netherlands and the Philippines.



Climb Up ©Ruben Van Schalm



Introspection ©Ruben Van Schalm



Shape Your Body ©Ruben Van Schalm

During the making of this work, he created a journey toward finding a personal paradise. The book contains unpublished photographs in black and white as well as color from several series the photographer has created over his travels between 2014–2019. By its very nature, photography has the ability to give its makers the room to carve out their own spaces in the world, no matter how imperfect life can be. The artist fused these perspectives into making this body of work. At the core of the book, is an intersection between man and landscape.

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In one way or another, paradise is an imagined space. One where we go to escape the calamity or chaos of our everyday lives. Through his images in *Paradise*, van Schalm envisions a world without boundaries. He documents landscapes as a compliment and counterpoint to the soft nude males in the book. In doing so, the artist envisions a space that captures the beauty of man in isolated fragile spaces outside of our day to day lives.



©Ruben Van Schalm



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Beyond the desire that their nude figures bring to this work, many of the male subjects with whom the artist collaborated express a sense of vulnerability and fragility in their portraits. Since the artist was new to most of the places he traveled to, his subjects take agency in navigating the spaces they are pictured in. Some express smiles while others remain hard featured and stoic. Equally, the landscapes in this book range from idyllic waterfalls and tropical serene lakes to arid portraits of mountainous, rocky lands.

The project acts as a signpost to the historical past of early civilisation. Man, portrayed both nude and alone, as well as interacting with nature. *Paradise* is a limited edition book with an essay written by Dutch photographer Erwin Olaf and an essay by Marth von Loeben.



Hold Your Breath ©Ruben Van Schalm



Calm Waters ©Ruben Van Schalm



Contemplate ©Ruben Van Schalm



Jump ©Ruben Van Schalm

For more on this project, visit the artist's website site [here](http://www.rubenvanschalm.com/)
(<http://www.rubenvanschalm.com/>) and purchase a copy of the book.

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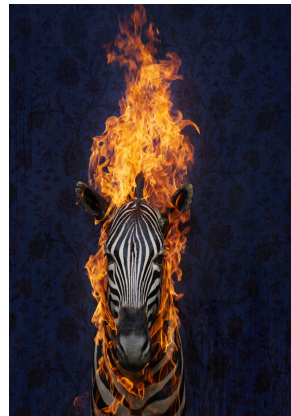
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