



**ARTIST**

Rory Mulligan

**TITLE**

Ropeswing

**DATE**

2010

**DIMENSIONS**

17.5 in H x 22 in W

**MEDIUM**

Inkjet Prints

**IMAGE NOTES**

Inkjet Print

**CATALOGUE NUMBER**

2014.091

**CURRENT LOCATION**

2024-19B

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**RORY MULLIGAN**

**BORN**

1984

**BIRTHPLACE**

Bronxville, NY

**GENDER**

Male

**CITIZENSHIP**

United States

**CULTURAL HERITAGE**

European-American

**LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP**

Artist-in-Residence, 2014

## LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS

Contact Sheet 182

## BIOGRAPHY

For a more recent CV or bio please visit the artist's website, <http://www.rorymulligan.com>.

Rory Mulligan was born in New York in 1984. He received a BA from Fordham University and a MFA from Yale University in 2010 where he was awarded the Ward Cheney Memorial Award. His work has been exhibited both nationally and internationally and is included in the permanent collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Mulligan's work has been published by J&L Books and Blind Spot Magazine. He has worked as a fine art printer since 2006 and is currently Visiting Lecturer in Art at Drew University in Madison, NJ.

circa 2014

## ESSAYS

There is a spectrum in Rory Mulligan's work between, on the one hand, photography's ability to authenticate the facts of the world (the house was here, the vandal sprayed graffiti here, the crime scene looked like this) and, on the other, its ability to elicit emotion (this photograph from me to you) and desire (turn to the left and raise your knee, that's good). It ranges from the objective function of the camera to describe what is in front of it to a subjective impulse to give shape to the way things feel, that is, from mechanical recording to the Romantic sublime. The strength of this work is Mulligan's ability to animate the former while restraining the latter. Without elaborate stage sets or props, fantasy rises from household objects or a walk in the park. Scenes skew toward a dark libidinal imagination that resides within the quotidian settings described with the clarity of a medium format Silver Gelatin Print. The photographs presented here are one chapter of a larger series called *Sam I Am*, which portray men who are either surrogates for Mulligan or who serve as objects of sexual longing or become repellent. Repeated characters lounge variously in a destroyed and despairing normality. Many pictures are unpeopled but look instead to the side of the wreckage. One section takes place in a park in Yonkers where David Berkowitz, the serial murderer known as the "Son of Sam," performed satanic rituals. Another section follows a college student named Sam whose extreme awkwardness calcifies through the photographs into a certain kind of dandyism. In this psychic world, dreamlike but hard-edged figures are tattooed by the bright light of day onto film. The Syracuse chapter starts with a white picket fence, silhouetted into a Halloween black, spanning the picture diagonally like jagged teeth. In the next photograph a vinyl-clad house raises a white sail in the wind, a curtain blown inside out from the black aperture of a window. A veil of shadow falls against the window and a contrail vector in the sky points toward its opening. Inside we see a naked man, back arched kneeling at the (same?) window. He flaunts his body, though he is no longer young. He looks back to us rapaciously, as if to show how the aging body never loses its ability to express and solicit desire. Waking from the chimera of pornographic daydreams, the narrator of Jean Genet's *Our Lady of Flowers* writes, "The despondency that follows makes me feel somewhat like a shipwrecked man who spies a sail, sees himself saved, and suddenly remembers that the lens of his spyglass has a flaw, a blurred spot — the sail he has seen." When we see the man again, he is rigged with ropes around his head and neck, attaching him to some unseen point beyond the picture's margin. These ropes seem to tether him to an artificial support, bearing the current of his own electrical charge. The rope extends into the next frame, implicitly tying the man into the tangle of gnarled roots tenuously clinging to an impossibly steep incline. We come to understand that time and place are mutable, as each picture becomes a doorway to the next. The penultimate photograph shows the man basking in the sun, transfixed by the high-key light against his skin — the nose, erection and toe each tautly pointed toward heaven or earth, forming a perfect Trinity. We have the sense that he has laid himself bare, willingly, happily for our contemplation and delight. And then — as though the precariously balanced, brittle arch of his posture is about to collapse — the final picture shows a caved-in burial vault. A half-buried drain, an open grave. Or is it the rabbit hole, leading back home? One of the first photographs I ever saw by Mulligan was a self-portrait with an egg held in his open mouth. Perhaps it was intended as a joke that only a black-and-white photographer would make, inverting the black hole of a scream to the white of a large cartoon tooth. But I thought of it more as an inverted ball gag, revealing rather than concealing the face, a face laboring to hold the egg showing a double chin, the eyes beginning to tear up. And while it's clear the egg will not suffocate Mulligan, I can palpably feel his vulnerability in this subtle act of masochism. If I think of this earlier picture next to the portrait of the man in the sun, it is clear to see these new pictures as great acts of empathy, registering both how things feel and how they are. *Sam I Am* steps through the whiteness of the egg and describes a world beyond the self. Justine Kurland Justine Kurland is a fine art photographer based in New York, NY. — Rory Mulligan lives in Hastings-on-Hudson, NY, and completed his residency in June 2014.