



PHOTOGRAPHY

By [Brendan Seibel](#); photos by [Reine Paradis](#)

Mar 12 2019, 9:18am

step into reine paradis' surrealist adventureland

The LA-based artist tells i-D about climbing billboards, public nudity, and not getting caught.

While working on her latest series, *Midnight*, Los Angeles-based artist [Reine Paradis](#) caused rather a stir with her neighbors, by laying almost naked in the walkway of her building. “I wasn’t exposed but it was a bit provocative for them,” laughs Paradis over the phone. “So we had to stop. However, we got the image before we had to stop.”

That image, "The Garden," is just one fantastical snapshot of adventure from the Paradis universe. Her imagination is a creative sanctuary uncorrupted by outside influence, and usually free from anyone telling her what she can or cannot do. She doesn’t need a production crew and can’t afford one anyway. She doesn’t need permission to photograph, although that would be nice. It’s just a lot less stressful to work when you’re not worried about scandalized neighbors or the cops.



Garden.

The photographs are her performances staged under a blue moon, and they capture a twilight landscape steeped in childhood fantasies. “My work isn’t 100 percent conventional photography,” she says. “I imagine everything before, so I use photography to make it real.”

Each vibrant scene is like a frozen movie frame. Bold shapes pop out and absurdist humor is tempered by a tinge of foreboding. Many of these tales have stayed with Paradis through the years, from her rural family home in France, through art school in Paris, a year in London, and now, America.

“I’m still very inspired, even nowadays, by a love for locations in L.A. and I feel it has definitely been a big part of my work,” says Paradis. “Just for the architecture, and the eccentricity of the landscape that I had never been exposed to before when I was in France. I feel it really is part of something inside of me.”

An empty pool, an abandoned tennis court, relics of her past have become manifestations of pretend as real as memories. They take corporeal form through a meticulous process as concept becomes a hand-painted sketch, the stage design of a performance to come. Paradis hunts locations on road trips, prowling for that magical convergence of aesthetics and emotional resonance that signifies the perfect spot. Then come the props, once elaborately folded paper creations, now plexiglass sculptures fabricated with a little assistance from the furniture workshops beneath her South Central studio. A tailor cuts costumes to Paradis’ design.

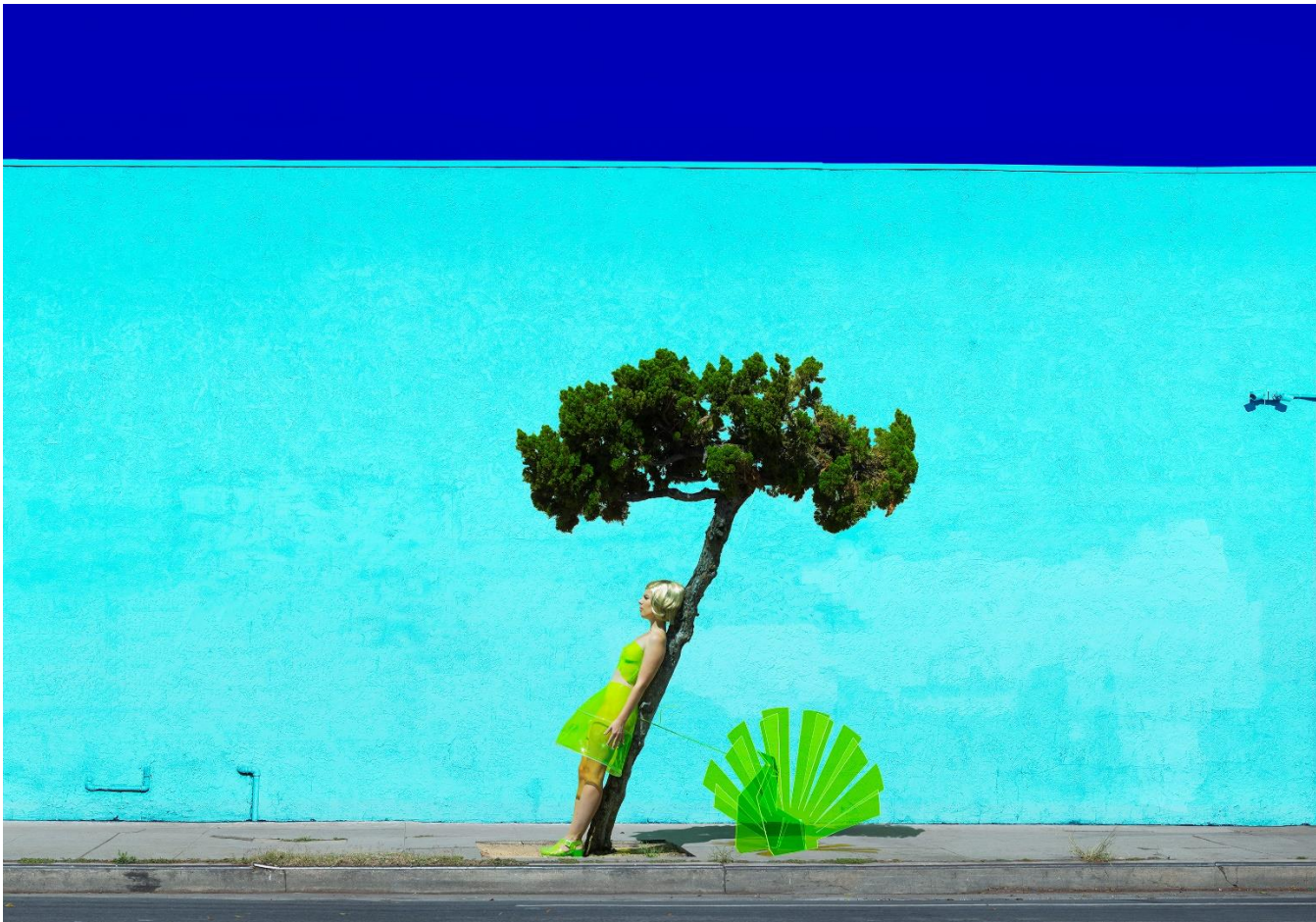


The Station.

In today's hypersaturated image landscape where people replicate social media celebrities and brand ambassadors, the singular universe of Paradis stands out. There's no need for manufactured absurdity to consume as photographable experiences, she already inhabits her own surrealist adventureland far from the ticket booths of commercialized fun. Everyone gets free admission. "It's not about me," she says. "It becomes people's own projection of their own life. When someone is looking at the picture they can picture themselves."

When Paradis committed to being an artist she didn't think she'd star in the work. But getting fired from a production job was the push she needed to take the leap, which meant there was no budget for a crew or actors. She feels the timing was right. "At the end of my studies I was lacking confidence in myself and I feel I needed to evolve, and to also discover a bit of the world," she says. "When I moved to LA it was kind of a big move for me. I had never been to the States before. So it was good for me to explore a little bit."

Midnight and her earlier series *Jungle*, explore worlds of excitement that Paradis brews in the cauldron of her mind, but creates in waking life. Through the process, her bravery is tested from time to time. Capturing her shot titled *Billboard* was a cocktail of danger and derring-do savored under the desert sun of Palm Springs. Too much time had been invested to turn back when the packed ladder proved too short and the plexiglass chair was too fragile to bear any weight.



Peacock.

“I had to hold a very uncomfortable position for a while, and I didn’t expect it would be like this. It was actually one of the top five most demanding scenes to shoot. And also, we had to be careful not to be caught by the police because we’re not allowed to shoot on a billboard,” Paradis says. “The whole scene was stressful, but I’m very happy with the image because it’s exactly what I wanted, what I imagined.”

A nicely rendered maquette convinced a pastor to let Paradis onto the church roof for " The Tower." But no one could've known from the ground just how narrow the parapets were. In her scariest shoot she balanced on the edge gazing boldly out at some distant adventure on the horizon, secretly terrified of falling.

“I’m already too far into the process to pull back,” she says. “I know it’s going to be challenging, but it also makes it exciting and I guess it’s one part that I enjoy too. Each scene is like an adventure in itself.”

The irrepressible spirit that leads Paradis to dizzying heights lends to the *joie de vivre* of her work, as much as it exudes an inspiring confidence. Sneaking around forbidden places is often envisioned as the domain of mischievous boys courting misdemeanors to test the limits of authority. Paradis renders gender stereotypes irrelevant through her nonchalant, don’t-give-a-damn presence. “I like that my work could inspire young women in that sense,” says Paradis. “It’s something I didn’t really anticipate when I started working on this project, but it’s a fact that makes me truly happy.”

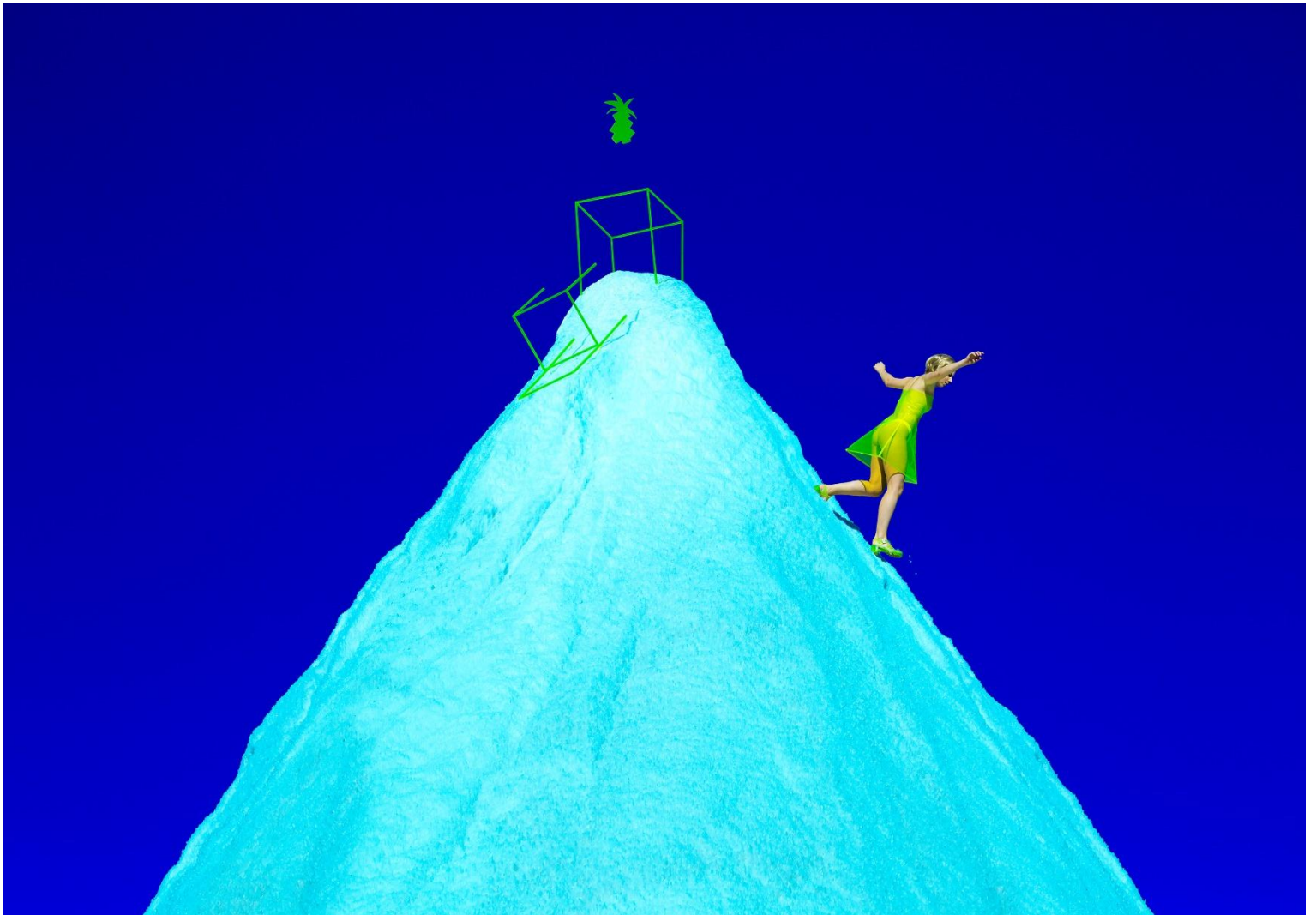


Picnic.

Paradis may not have planned to be a role model, but it's a consequence of being exactly who she is on her own terms. She loves collaborating on projects disconnected from her art, if the collaboration feels right. Over the past year, she's developed an earthy fragrance with Parisian perfumery [Ex Nihilo](#) and designed a sculpture for the promotional video.

"If I can create something new, for example with this perfume, it's a great opportunity because I can develop a new scent — it's something that I have been interested in actually — and I love the brand. It's very separated from my work," she says. "However, I would never take on a commissioned series for a brand and show it as my own artistic project. I want to keep it very separated."

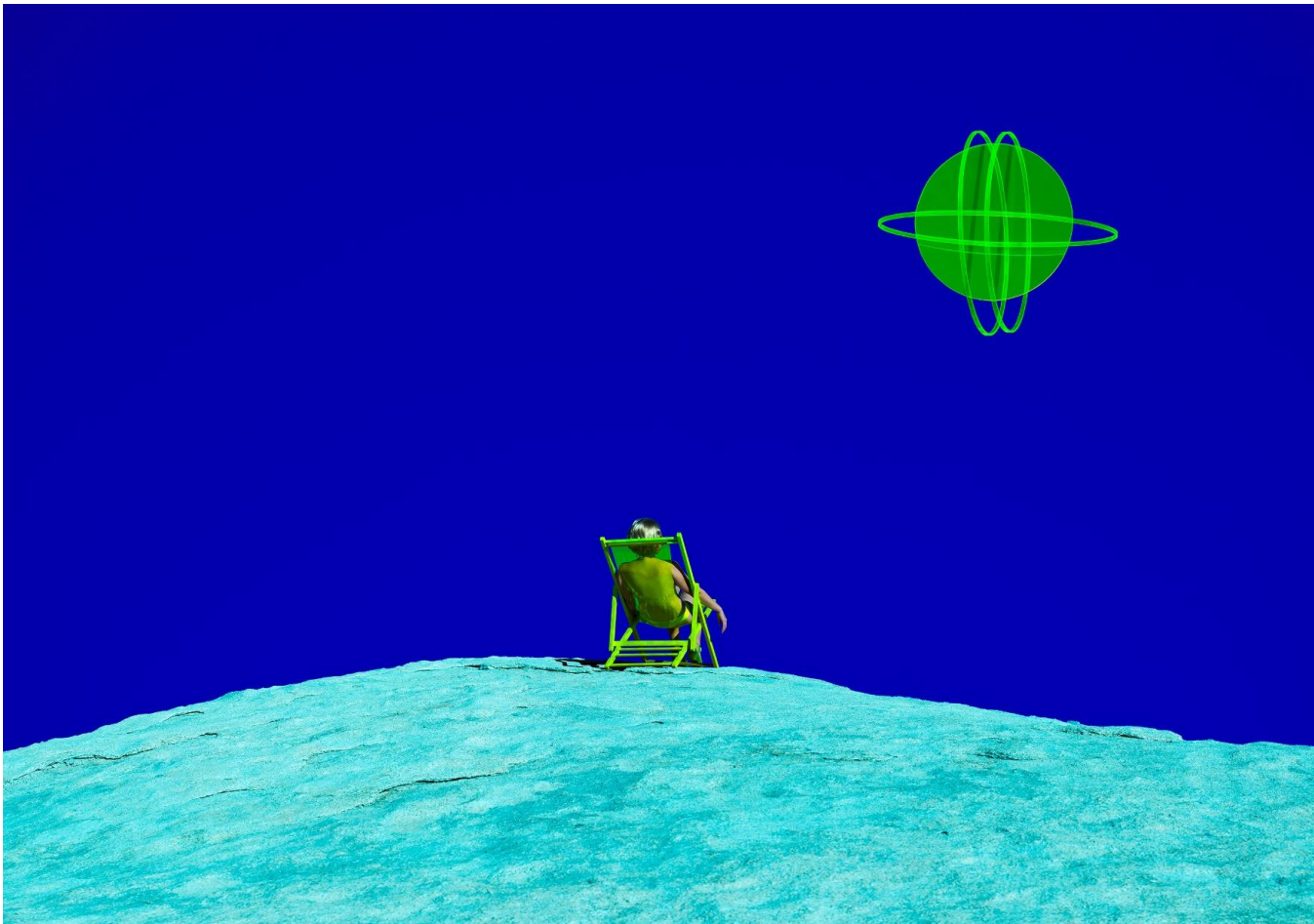
Another long collaboration has burst out into the world. *Queen of Paradis* is a documentary directed by her husband Carl Lindstrom. The movie just took "Best Feature" at the LA Indie Film Fest and the couple are touring it — Austin, Newport Beach, Ashland and beyond — while simultaneously opening exhibitions of *Midnight*.



Birthday.

There's no plans to incorporate video into her art, but Paradis does have a movie idea. And she wants to design her own fashion line. And she wants to create more sculptures. But right now the adventure is on the road, scouting locations for the next series in between film festivals and art exhibitions. She isn't an artist by vocation, but by living. Her practice is exploring small towns and tourist traps, fielding interview questions from the back of the van somewhere in between Santa Fe and Denver. "It's a busy time but I love everything we are doing, so it's exciting too," says Paradis. "It's a bit tiring but it's fun also."

And somewhere around Denver, in a derelict amusement park, there's a roller coaster that's the perfect location for a new piece. Even if it means sneaking in without permission and scaling treacherous heights, hoping the cops don't show up.



The Cliff

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