M+B

NATHANIEL MARY QUINN

Press Pack

612 NORTH ALMONT DRIVE, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90069 TEL 310 550 0050 FAX 310 550 0605 WWW.MBART.COM

NATHANIEL MARY QUINN

BORN

1977, Chicago, IL
Lives and works in Brooklyn, NY

EDUCATION

2002 M.F.A. New York University, New York NY

2000 B.A. Wabash College, Crawfordsville, IN

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2018 M+B, Los Angeles, CA (forthcoming)

2017 Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago, IL (forthcoming)
On that Faithful Day, Half Gallery, New York, NY

2016 *St. Marks,* Luce Gallery, Torino, Italy
Highlights, M+B, Los Angeles, CA

2015 *Back and Forth,* Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago, IL

2014 *Past/Present*, Pace London Gallery, London, UK
Nathaniel Mary Quinn: Species, Bunker 259 Gallery, Brooklyn, NY

2013 *The MoCADA Windows*, Museum of Contemporary and African Diasporan Arts Brooklyn, NY
Artist Salon, Private art gathering and opening, Brooklyn, NY

2011 *Glamour and Doom*, Synergy Gallery, Brooklyn, NY

2008 *Deception, Animals, Blood, Pain*, Harriet's Alter Ego Gallery, Brooklyn, NY

2007 *The Majic Stick*, curated by Derrick Adams, Rush Arts Gallery, New York, NY
The Boomerang Series, *Colored Illustrations/One Person Exhibition:* "The Sharing Secret" *Children's Book*, The Children's Museum of the Arts, New York, NY

2006 *Urban Portraits/Exalt Fundraiser Benefit*, Rush Arts Gallery, New York, NY
Couture-Hustle, Steele Life Gallery, Chicago, IL

2004 *The Great Lovely: From the Ghetto to the Sunshine*, curated by Hanne Tierney, Five Myles Gallery, New York, NY

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2018
The Drawing Center, New York, NY (forthcoming)
Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art, College of Charleston School of the Arts, Charleston, SC (forthcoming)

2017
Museum of Contemporary Photography, Columbia College, Chicago IL (forthcoming)
Color People, curated by Rashid Johnson, Rental Gallery, East Hampton, NY
Hope And Hazard: A Comedy Of Eros, curated by Eric Fischl, Hall Art Foundation, New York, NY

2016
Rhona Hoffman 40 years Part 2, Rhona Gallery, Chicago, IL
Still/Moving: Photographs and Video Art from the DeWoody Collection, Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, FL
like·ness, Albertz Benda, New York, NY

2015
Unrealism, organized by Jeffrey Deitch and Larry Gagosian, Miami, FL
Russian Doll, M+B, Los Angeles, CA
5 x 5: Other Voices, Litvak Gallery, Tel Aviv, Israel
American Survey Pt: I, Papillon Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
Here He Come: Black Jesus, Rawson Projects, Brooklyn, NY
Driscoll Babcock Gallery, New York, NY

2014
Ballroom Marfa Benefit Gala, Prince George Ballroom, New York, NY
Frieze London Art Fair, Pace Gallery, London, UK
Whitney Museum of American Art | Art Auction Party, Highline Stages, New York, NY
Look At Me: Portraits from Manet to the Present, Leila Heller Gallery, New York, NY

2013
American Beauty, Susan-Inglett Gallery, New York, NY
Corpus Americus, Driscoll Babcock Gallery, New York, NY
Doin' It In The Park, Rush Arts Gallery, New York, NY

2012
SITE Project, The Humanities Gallery; Long Island University; Brooklyn Campus, Brooklyn, NY

2011
Alumni Group Exhibition, Wabash College Contemporary Art Gallery, Crawfordsville, IN

2010
Gold Rush Awards Benefit Auction, Rush Arts Gallery, New York, NY

2009
Children's Museum of the Arts Art Auction, Children's Museum of the Arts, New York, NY
Luck of the Draw, Rush Arts Gallery, New York, NY

2008
Macro-Micro, Gallery Satori, New York, NY
The Mythic Female, Gallery Satori, New York, NY

2007
Rush For Life Benefit Exhibition, Rush Arts Gallery; Rush Philanthropic & Arts Foundation, New York, NY
BOMB Magazine 26th Anniversary Gala, New York, NY

2006 *Fragmentations of the Self: Smeared, Smudged, Marked, Drawn*, Rush Arts Gallery, New York, NY

2004 *Phat Farm Show*, Rush Arts Gallery, New York, NY
The National African American Arts Exhibition, Rush Arts Gallery, New York, NY
Exhibition of Recent Charcoal Drawings; The Wooster Arts Space, New York, NY
AIM 23, Artist-in-the-Marketplace; The Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York, NY

SELECTED PRESS

2017 Bogojev, Sasha, "Nathaniel Mary Quinn And The Family Of Man," Juxtapoz, August
Carrigan, Margaret. *Home Bittersweet Home: Nathaniel Mary Quinn*, Modern Painters, April 5

2016 Krasinski, Jessica. "Nathaniel Mary Quinn," ELLE Decor, November
Boutboul, Charlotte. "Artist to Watch: Nathaniel Mary Quinn," Whitewall, August 16
Agustsson, Sola. "Piecing It All Together: Nathaniel Mary Quinn Transfigures a Shattered World," Artslant, May 31
Mizota, Sharon. **"**From housing project to gallery wall: Nathaniel Mary Quinn's portraits put subjects in a new light," Los Angeles Times, May 25
"Interview with Dexter Winberly," Issue Magazine, May 13
Powers, Bill. "'Art Derives From Everything in Life': A Talk with Nathaniel Mary Quinn," Artnews, May 12
Saltz, Jerry. "11 Artists Poised to Have Breakout Years in 2016," New York Magazine, April 22
Thomason, John. "Still/Moving Plumbs Collector's Eclectic Psyche," Boca Raton Magazine, April 1

2015 Walker, Julie. "17 Brilliant Black Artists Featured at Art Basel in Miami," The Root; December 6
"Nathaniel Mary Quinn's portraits recreate the grotesque specters of the Robert Taylor Homes," Chicago Reader; October 13
Fair, Audrey. "Must-See Art Guide: Chicago," Artnet News, September 17
Pepi, Mike. "Vision Quest: An artist channels his past through his painting," Modern Painters, September

2014 "Nathaniel Mary Quinn: Past/Present at Pace London," Arts & Culture; Arts Observed; London, September 20
Clark, Nick. "Nathaniel Mary Quinn: Artist Who Grew Up in Chicago Poverty Chooses London for First Show," Arts & Entertainment, The Independent; London, September 12
Frank, Priscilla, "Nathaniel Mary Quinn's Disfigured Portraits Would Make Even Francis Bacon Shudder," Arts & Culture, Huffington Post, September 9
"Nathaniel Mary Quinn: Past/Present," Arts & Culture; One-Person Exhibition at Pace London; TimeOut London, September 8
"An Unusual Artist: Nathaniel Mary Quinn," Another Magazine; September 7

Jean, Ella. “Being Past/Present: An Interview with Nathaniel Mary Quinn,” Arts & Culture, Loose Lips Magazine; September 6
Van Spall, India. “The Blood of Violence and Academia Clash in this New Show,” Arts & Culture, Dazed and Confused Magazine; September 4
“Nathaniel Mary Quinn: Past/Present,” Arts & Culture; London Evening Standard; September
“D.C. Art Collector Rebuilds a Bolder Collection After a Fire,” Interview of Peggy Cooper Cafritz, one of the country’s leading collectors of African-American Contemporary Art; author Diane Brady; Bloomberg Businessweek, March 19
Bunyard, Jesc. “The Interview: Nathaniel Mary Quinn,” Arts & Culture, Hunger TV; August 27
Kealoha, Ami and Sheena Sood. “Nathaniel M. Quinn: ‘Deception, Animals, Blood, and Pain,’” one-person exhibition, Harriet’s Alter Ego Gallery, Cool Hunting; February 28
Wimberly, Dexter. “Nathaniel Mary Quinn: “King Kong Ain’t Got Nothing On Me,” Afropunk; February 21
Cotter, Holland. “American Beauty,” art review of group exhibition at Susan-Inglett Gallery, The New York Times, January 23

2010 Womack, Ytasha. “Post Black: How a New Generation is Redefining African-American Identity,” Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books

AWARDS, GRANTS, FELLOWSHIPS

2008 Center for the Book Arts Prize Nominee, New York

2005 Joan Mitchell Painting and Sculpture Foundation Fellowship Nominee, New York

2004 Five Myles Gallery Artist’s Grant Award, New York
Bronx Museum of the Arts, AIM (Artist-in-the-Marketplace) artist-in-residence prize winner; New York

2002 Freedom School Award, Chicago, IL
President’s Service Awards, Resident Assistant, New York University
Nia Award Winner; Lorraine Hansberry Artistic/Performance/Fine Arts Award, New York University, 2002
National Arts Club Prize Winner, New York City

2001 National Arts Club First Prize Winner, New York City
OASIS ISM-Project Grant, New York University

2000 Opportunity Fellowship, New York University, 2000-2002
Phi Beta Kappa Prize, Wabash College
Paul J. Husting Award in Art, Wabash College
Malcolm X Institute Award, Malcolm X Institute of Black Studies, Wabash College

COLLECTIONS

Whitney Museum of American Art, NY
The Art Institute of Chicago, IL
Sheldon Museum of Art, NE
Burger Collection, Hong Kong
Pizzuti Collection, OH
Hall Art Foundation, VT
Michael Buxton Collection, Australia

NATHANIEL MARY QUINN

Nathaniel M. Quinn (b. 1977, Chicago, IL) received his BFA from Wabash College and MFA from New York University. Solo exhibitions include *On That Faithful Day* at Half Gallery, NY; *Highlights* at M+B Gallery, Los Angeles; *Back and Forth* at Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago; *Past/Present* at Pace Gallery, London; *Hybrids: The Windows Exhibit* at the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts, New York, and *The Magic Stick* at Rush Arts Gallery, New York. Upcoming group exhibitions include the Museum of Contemporary Photography at Columbia College, Chicago, IL and The Drawing Center, New York, NY. Quinn has also participated in the thematic exhibitions, *Unrealism*, organized by Jeffrey Deitch and Larry Gagosian, Miami; *AIM 23* at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York; and *Still/Moving: Photographs and Video Art from the DeWoody Collection*, Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach. In *New York Magazine*'s April 2016 issue, Jerry Saltz selected Quinn as one of eleven artists "poised to have breakout years." Other recent press includes *The Independent* (London), *Modern Painters*, *ARTnews*, *Los Angeles Times,* and *Huffington Post*. His work is in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; The Art Institute of Chicago; and Sheldon Museum of Art, Lincoln, NE, among others. Nathaniel Mary Quinn lives and works in Brooklyn.

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Selected Portfolio

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Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Installation view of *St Marks*, solo show at Luce Gallery, Torino, Italy
November 5, 2016 – February 4, 2017

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Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Installation view of *St Marks*, solo show at Luce Gallery, Torino, Italy
November 5, 2016 – February 4, 2017

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Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Terry, 2016
black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel, oil pastel, paint-stick on vellum
44-1/2 x 54-1/2 inches (113.5 x 138.8 cm)
unique

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Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Wide Asleep, 2016
black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel, oil pastel, oil paint, paint-stick on vellum
17 x 17 inches (43 x 43 cm)
unique

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Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Installation view of *Highlights*, solo show at M+B, Los Angeles
May 13 – June 25, 2016

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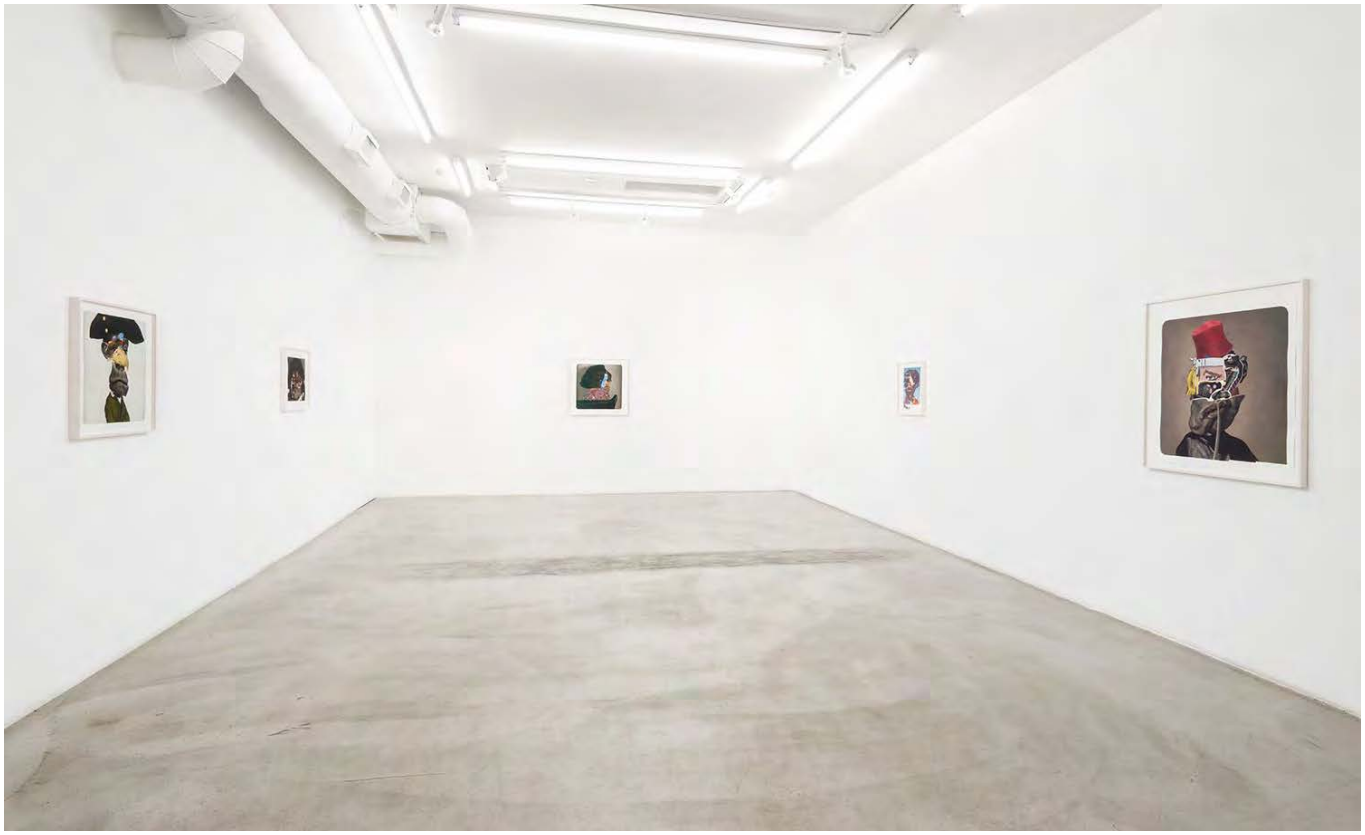

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Installation view of *Highlights*, solo show at M+B, Los Angeles
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Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Elaina, 2016
black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel,
oil pastel, oil paint, paint stick on vellum
33-3/8 x 33-3/8 inches (84.8 x 84.8 cm)
(NQ.16.007.33)

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Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Rosey, 2016
black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel,
oil pastel, oil paint, paint stick on vellum
15 x 14-1/2 inches (38.1 x 36.8 cm)
(NQ.16.002.15)

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Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Van Williams, 2016
black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel, oil pastel on vellum
21 x 16-1/8 inches (53.3 x 41 cm)
(NQ.16.009.21)

M+B

Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Super-Fly, 2015
black charcoal, soft pastel, oil pastel,
oil paint, paint stick, gouache on vellum
21 x 19-5/8 inches (53.3 x 49.8 cm)
(NQ.15.005.21)

M+B

Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Scout, 2015
black charcoal, soft pastel, oil pastel,
oil paint, paint stick, gouache on vellum
18-1/8 x 21-1/8 inches (46 x 53.7 cm)
(NQ.15.007.18)

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Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Black Jesus, 2015
charcoal, gouache, oil pastel, oil paint and
paint stick on Coventry vellum paper
74-1/4 x 44 inches (189 x 112 cm)

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Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Installation View of *Back and Forth*, solo show at Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago
September 11 – October 24, 2014

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Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Installation View of *Back and Forth*, solo show at Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago
September 11 – October 24, 2014

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Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Class of 92, 2015
black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel, oil pastel and
paint stick on Coventry vellum paper
34 x 38 inches (86.4 x 96.5 cm)

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Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Erica with the Pearl Earring, 2015
black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel, oil pastel, oil paint,
paint stick, acrylic silver on pastel on vellum
25-1/2 x 25-1/2 inches (64.8 x 64.8 cm)

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Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Junebug, 2015
black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel, oil pastel, oil paint,
paint stick, acrylic silver leaf on vellum
41 x 44 inches (104.1 x 111.8 cm)

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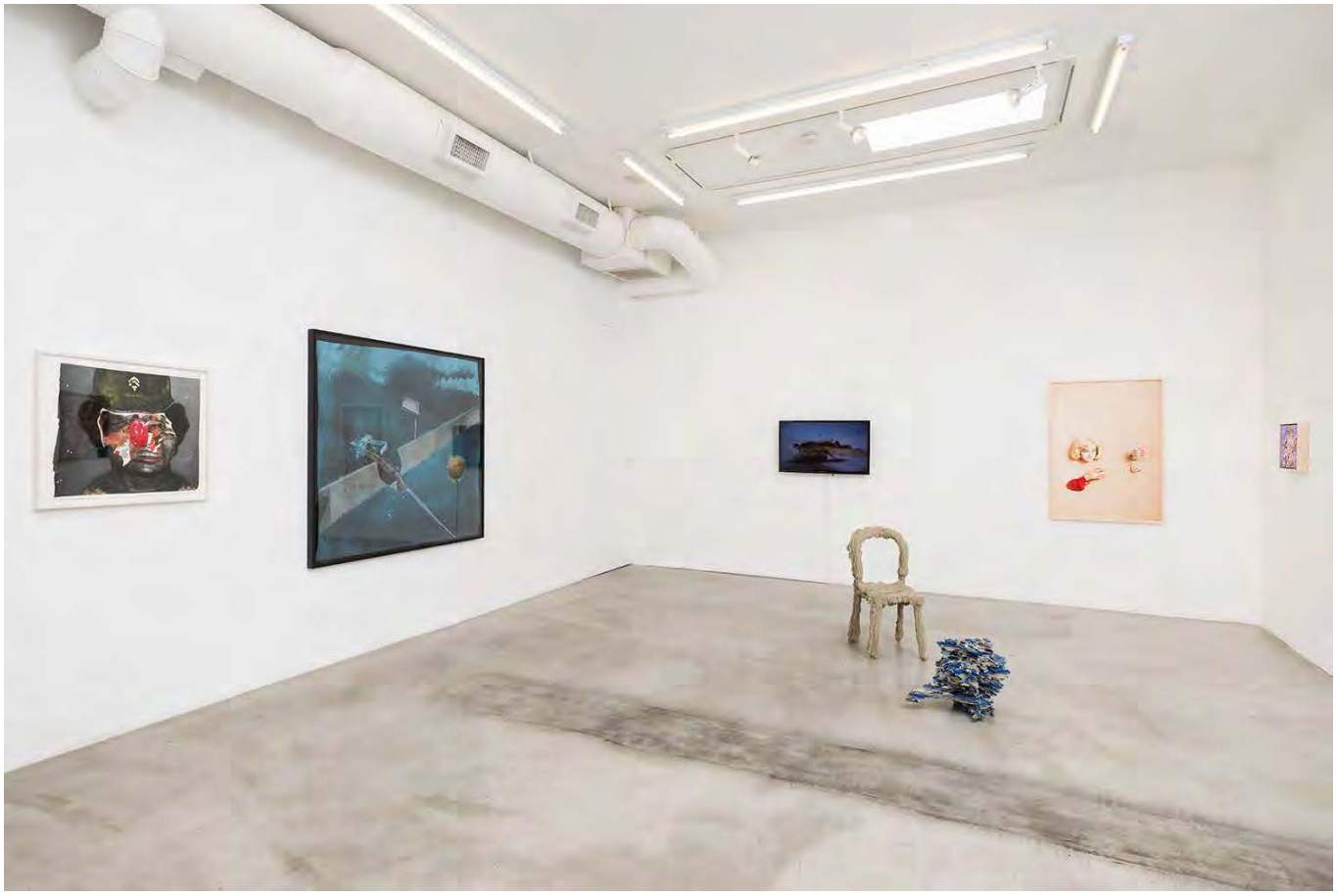

Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Installation view of *Russian Doll*, group show at M+B, Los Angeles
July 11 – August 29, 2015

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Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Bang, 2015
black charcoal, soft pastel, gouache, oil pastel, oil paint, paint stick, acrylic silver on vellum
28 x 35-¼ inches (71.1 x 89.5 cm)
(NQ.15.003.28)

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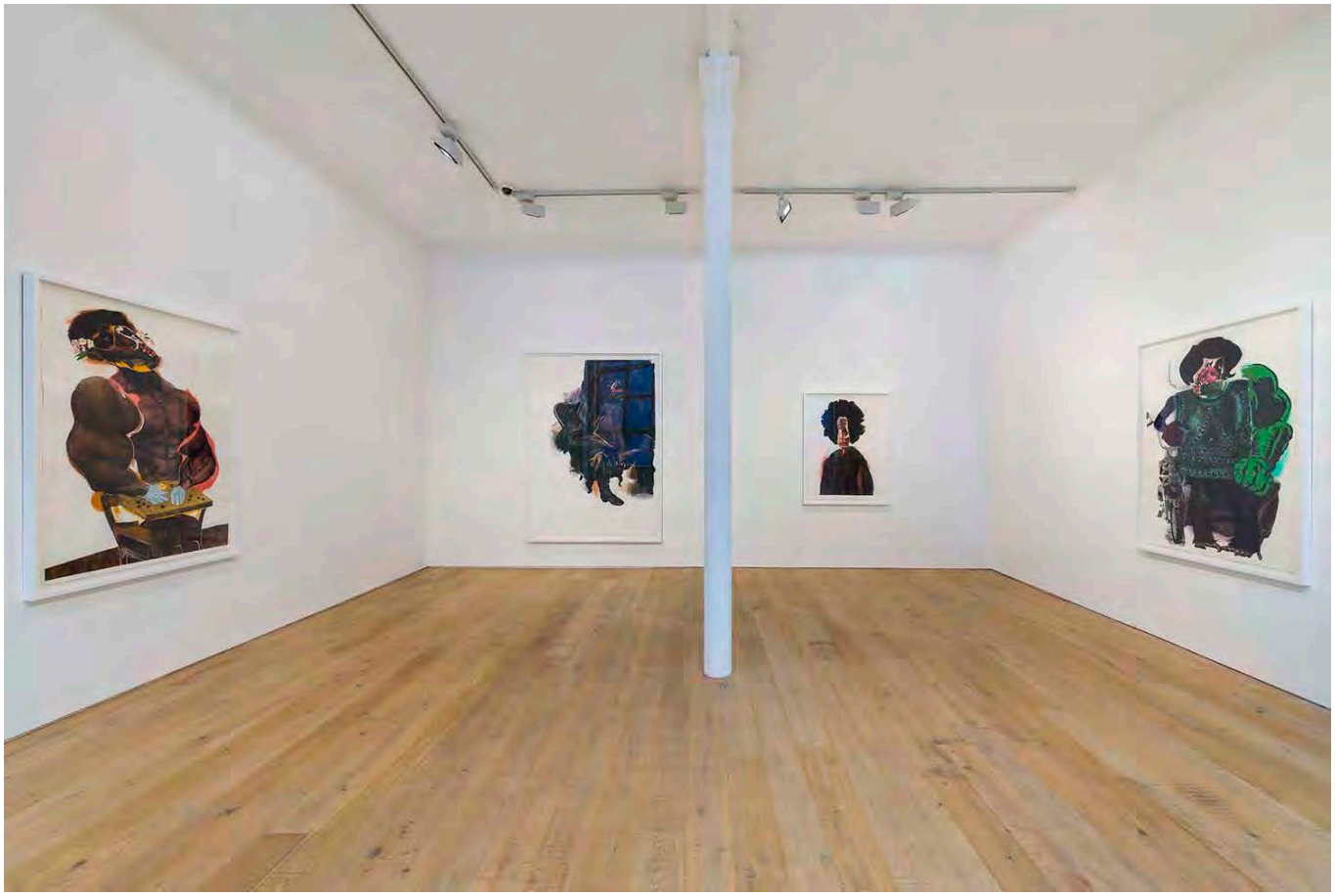

Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Installation View of *Past/Present*, solo show at Pace London
September 5 – October 4, 2014

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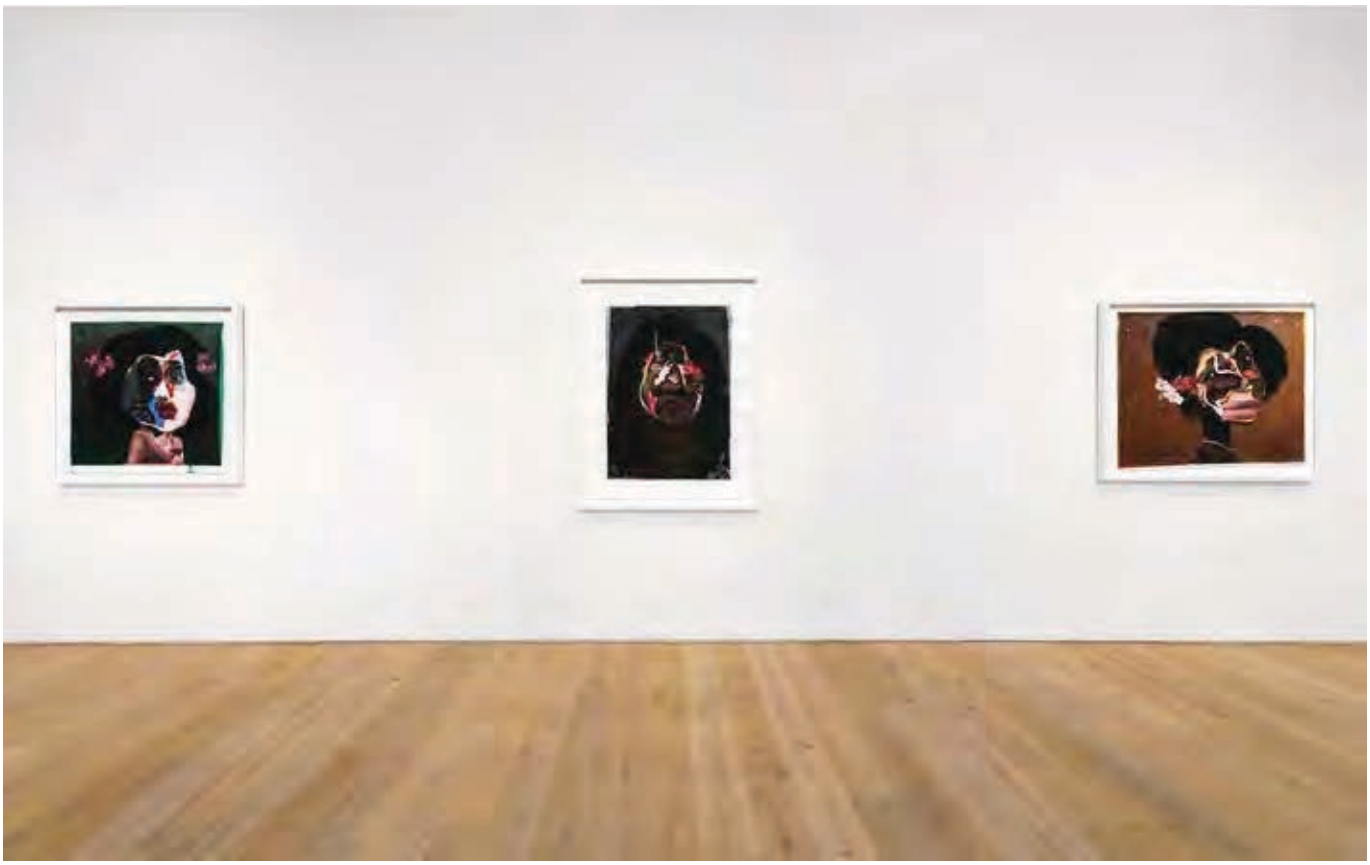

Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Installation View of *Past/Present*, solo show at Pace London
September 5 – October 4, 2014

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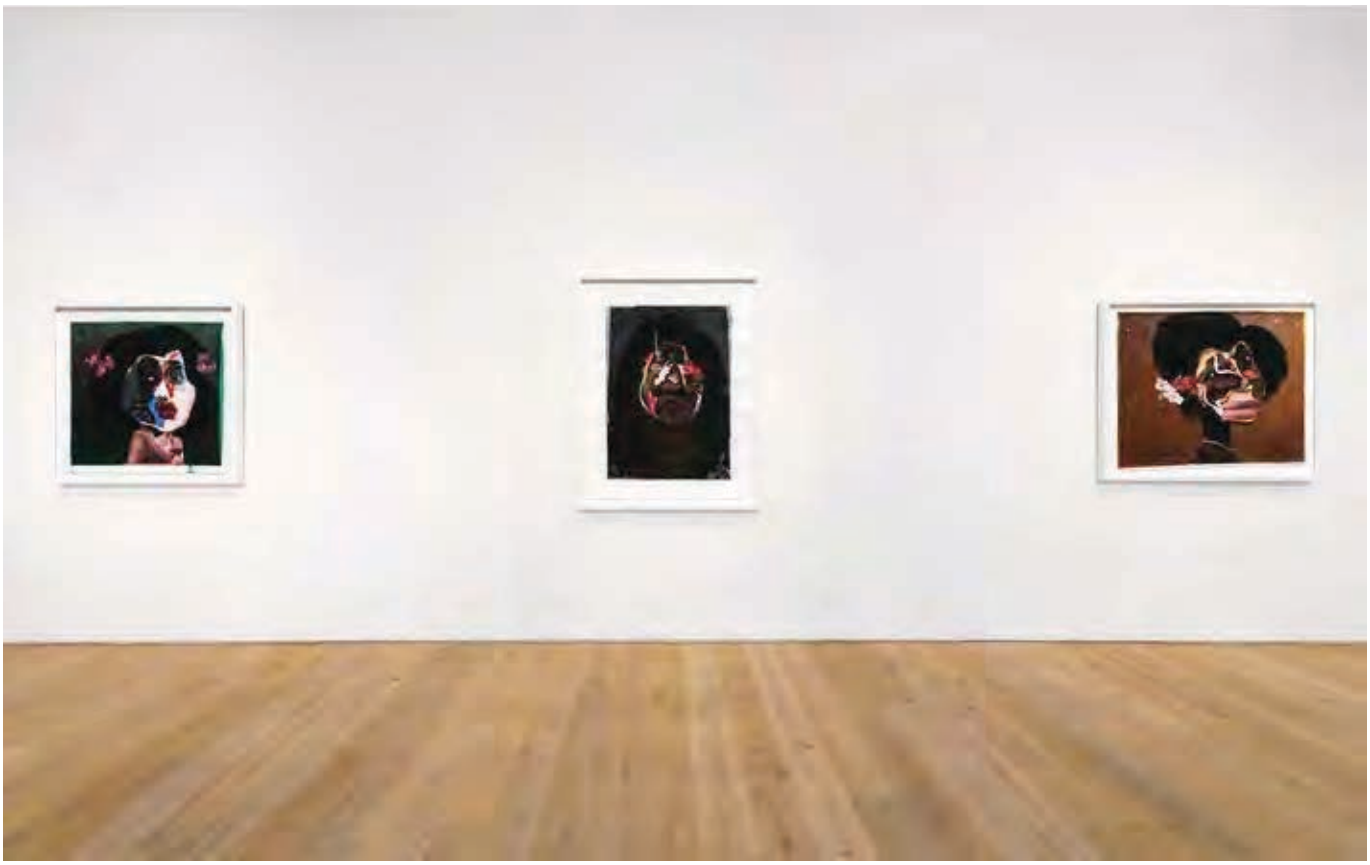

Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Installation View of *Past/Present*, solo show at Pace London
September 5 – October 4, 2014

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Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Monique, 2014
black charcoal, oil-pastel, oil-paint, paint-stick, gouache on Lenox Paper
36 x 43 inches (91.4 x 109.2 cm)
unique
(NQ.14.003.36)

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Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Diane, 2014
black charcoal, oil-pastel, oil-paint, paint-stick, gouache on Lenox Paper
37 x 37 inches (94 x 94 cm)
unique
(NQ.14.001.37)

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Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Lala, 2014
black charcoal, oil-pastel, oil-paint, paint-stick, gouache on Lenox Paper
60 x 44 inches (152.4 x 111.8 cm)
unique
(NQ.14.002.60)

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Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Slim, 2014
black charcoal, oil-pastel, oil-paint, paint-stick, gouache on Lenox Paper
50 x 38 inches (127 x 96.5 cm)
unique
(NQ.14.004.50)

M+B

Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Motorcycle Pig, 2014
black charcoal, oil-pastel, oil-paint, paint-stick, gouache on Lenox Paper
60 x 44 inches (152.4 x 111.8 cm)
unique
(NQ.14.005.60)

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JUXTAPOZ ART+CULTURE

NATHANIEL MARY QUINN AND THE FAMILY OF MAN

By Sasha Bogojev
August 2017

DURING THIS TIME WHEN PEOPLE share inspirational quotes on social media in an effort to create better, wiser images of themselves, it feels good to chat with someone who lives a genuinely inspiring story, the kind of person who not only has theories about how life works, but backs them up with amazing, anecdotal personal experiences. Nathaniel Mary Quinn grew up in some of America's toughest projects and eventually made his way to the top of the fine art world, a journey full of substantive stories. From how he dealt with abandonment and the loss of his mother, to his ability to recognize and explore opportunities, all the way to how he perceives people and their behavior, his thoughts and stories are as intriguing as his captivating paintings. Built from memories and visions, both harsh and pleasant, these parts of an unfinished puzzle nudge each other, shaping both the artist and his subjects. Painfully real, indisputably relevant, and stripped of any unnecessary embellishments, Quinn's work proves that equal acceptance of perceived strengths and flaws makes us all stronger.

***Sasha Bogojev*: As you've probably been asked many times already, tell us a bit about your upbringing and about how you ended up being an artist?**
Nathaniel Mary Quinn: Well, I grew up on the South Side of Chicago in a family of five. I had four brothers and I was the fifth child, all boys. We were a lower working class family living in these tenement housing developments called Robert Taylor Homes. They were kind of gang infested, lacking resources, a lot of drugs and poverty, and all that. But from as far as I could remember, I was always interested in art. I was always drawing.

Do you remember any particular moment when you decided you wanted to be an artist?
The earliest moment that I can remember was when I was copying an image from a coloring book of superheroes. I remember having this keen sense of awareness that I was actually able to duplicate something that I saw. I didn't know how this was possible, but I felt this is something that I can do and something I enjoy doing. That feeling really stuck with me.

How did your family react to your affinity for drawing?
I was always drawing on the walls of the apartment, and, of course, my mom would spank me to try to teach me a lesson. One day, I was making a drawing, and my brother Charles saw it, but when my mom wanted to spank me for it, my brother stopped her and said, "Wait. Don't spank him. Look at the drawing." She looked, and they were both very pleased. He says, "Mom, I think Nate has some real talent here, and I think we should let him continue drawing."

So that was your first studio?
Yeah, the walls of my project apartment were my first studio, that's right. I would draw on the walls, and my mom would wash the walls and would let me draw again.

Did your teachers notice your talent and give you support?
Yeah, yeah. There were these two teachers—Mrs. Filtcher and Mrs. Jackson, who were two very important people in my life. They put me in a special class with a few other students and tutored us on science, math, public speaking, art and that sort of thing. The assistant principal at that time was Mrs. Hunter, and she told me about this really cool high school called Culver Academies. But my family couldn't afford that, so the only way I could attend was if I got full scholarship. So I said, "Ok, let's do it!" and two weeks later, I was accepted.

So you stayed there for four years?
Yeah. After my first semester at the high school, I got the word that my mom passed away. That was a hit. It was so shocking that I kind of convinced myself that mom went on a vacation. I couldn't stomach the reality that she was gone.

Did you continue school after that?
I did, but one month later I went back home on a bus for Thanksgiving, and when I got home, I found the apartment door opened. There wasn't anything in there except a few articles of clothing. I haven't seen my family since. My four brothers and my dad. Yeah, that was it.

So that all happened within a month?
Just like that. And at that moment, I knew I was faced with a major choice—either I stay in that community and die young, or I go back to this private boarding high school and I just see where that road takes me.

Sounds like you were good at making right decisions and taking these life opportunities.
Absolutely! I never took anything for granted, and I still never take anything for granted today. When I'm presented with an opportunity, it doesn't matter how big or small, if I can do it, I'll do it. You can ask my wife—Quinn never complains. Quinn just gets it done. And I've always been that way. I had no choice, I had nowhere to go. If I failed, I'd be on the street, homeless. I had no family. It was all on me. Who was I gonna complain to?

How did moving to New York influence your work?
When I came back to NY, I found a cheap apartment in Bed-Stuy and I got a job painting the interiors of public schools. After that, I got a job as a teacher, working with at-risk youth, which I did for ten years. I would work until 7:00 p.m., come home and would make art in my little bedroom or whatever from 9:00 until midnight. And I did that for ten years. I would just focus on becoming a better artist.

Did the work look like anything you're making today?
Nothing like it. It was completely different. I mean, it was always figurative, but it was more natural figures, you know, straight forward, representational stuff. But I kept working all the time. I always focused on just being better as an artist.

Did you get to show or sell any of that work?
Nah, I didn't sell anything. I mean, I sold few pieces here and there, like one piece for $200 or $150, and would have two or three sales a year. But it was nothing close enough for me to be a full-time artist.

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opposite
Richard
Black Charcoal, gouache, oil pastel, oil-paint and paint Stick on Coventry Vellum Paper
38" x 50"
2014

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When did things start changing?
In 2012, I became a private tutor to make some extra money. There was this one kid I was helping, and his mom, Regina, offered to show my work at her brownstone in Brooklyn to help me get some exposure. By that time, I had four paintings and I wanted to finish the fifth, but I only had, like, five hours to make something. I knew I could not make a painting, so I thought I'd make a drawing. Normally, I would look at photographs and think about how they related to each other, but I didn't have the time for all of that, so rather than draw the entire face, I'd just reduce everything and focus on what's important. I'd just draw the slither of the eye and the slither of the nose, and maybe part of mouth. And I thought I'd fill in the gaps with some watercolor. And when I was done, when I revealed the whole image, I couldn't believe I made this. It blew me away! I never did anything like that in my life. Ever! It didn't even feel like I made it, it felt like somebody else made it.

Did you do it in one go?
One go! It took me four hours. And that piece was *Charles*. Cause it reminded me of my brother Charles who I haven't seen since I was 15 years old. And also, it was the most fun I had at studio practice. So about 20 people came to the salon, and sure enough, everybody gravitated towards that piece. Everybody! Yeah, it was like the heavens were opening for me.

Did you continue working that way straight away?
After that, I made six more of these drawings with the same passion, 'cause my conviction had changed now. When I made that piece, I didn't do any preliminary sketches. I didn't even think about it. I just worked. And the work that came out was the reflection of my brother. So that let me know that my true convictions must lie with my family. So I thought my work can be an expression of that. But also the expression of human identity and re-understanding how our experiences dictate the

"MY WORK IS A REPRESENTATION OF WHO AND WHAT WE REALLY ARE."

below
Terry
Black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel, oil pastel, oil paint and paint stick on Coventry Vellum paper
50" x 40"
2016

opposite (from top)
Mama in Winter
Black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel and oil pastel on Coventry Vellum paper
20" x 20"
2017

Mama in Fall
Black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel and oil pastel on Coventry Vellum paper
20" x 20"
2017

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construction of our identity. 'Cause for me, humans look like my work. That's who we are. It was like exposing the internalized world of a person, very crudely put together.

What happened next?
My friend, William Villalongo, an artist himself, was blown away with the works. Now, I trust his reaction and his excitement 'cause I had known Will for seven or eight years, and in that time, he was trying to convince me to be a stand-up comedian [laughs]. But I'm in debt to him for life 'cause he really gave me his best to help me have a career. He put me in a group show with Susan Inglett gallery and in a solo show at the gallery Bunker 259. Afterwards, Marc Glimcher from Pace Gallery comes by my studio, and two weeks later, he calls me saying they would be very happy to give me a solo exhibition at Pace London. So my first breakout show was a solo exhibition at Pace London in September, 2014.

You recently had a show at Half Gallery in NYC that was about your mom. How did that one come to be?
The show opened on May 2, 2017, and it's like an ode to my mom and the relationship between my mother and I. My middle name is Mary, but that was my mom's first name. I took her name 'cause she never had formal education, so now all of my degrees say, "Nathaniel Mary Quinn". So now my mom has a college degree and master's degree and her name is on the walls of the gallery, because my ultimate goal in life is to be remembered as an inspiration for future generations of artists. On a personal note, I wanna be the polar opposite of what happened to me—I was abandoned and forgotten. Now I have the opportunity to be remembered and *never* forgotten.

Do you have any major goals for your life or your career now?
I guess the next step for my career and life is to gather more institutional support from museums and stuff. I'm in a few museum collections now, but I wanna get into more, and do more museum shows. Also, I'd like to get more critical press on my work, and that's why I was so excited about this opportunity with *Juxtapoz* magazine. It gives me opportunity to talk about my work from a more critical perspective.

Yeah, it seems like your life story always takes over in your interviews.
There is no doubt that my work is about my family. But also, it's about the complexity of humanity and exploring the wide spectrum of colors of humanity. In our society, in the world at large, we have many belief systems, but what ties us together is our humanity. No one is exempt from the waves of life. We all experience loss, happiness, we go up, we go down, and we have various experiences that impact who we are and what we may become. Pain feels the same way to everybody. It's a what binds us all together. And I'm interested in exploring that. And you have to be a highly empathetic person to be able to embrace the journey with human complexity. That's why, in my work, I do images of people that I actually knew, so they become the platform from which I can talk about the larger scope of the idea about visualizing human assets. It's one thing to talk about humanity, but it's another thing to be about humanity. You

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left
Von Williams
Black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel, oil pastel on Coventry Vellum paper
16" x 21"
2016

above (clockwise from top left)
Mama in Summer
Black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel and oil pastel on Coventry Vellum paper
20" x 20"
2017

Choir Rehearsal
Black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel and oil pastel on Coventry Vellum paper
20" x 20"
2017

Ethan
Black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel and oil pastel on Coventry Vellum paper
36.5" x 36.5"
2016

Space Monkey
Charcoal with stumping and erasing, gouache, pastel, and paint stick, with incising and additions of oil paint and gold metallic leaf, on white wove paper
14" x 16"
2015

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learn to understand about compassion, integrity, character, loss, all because of your direct dealings with another individual. You learn to live with abrupt changes in your life and they impact your identity as a human being.

Did you feel that the current politics in the US affect your work in any way, or are you staying focused on humanity in general?
The current political situation further emboldens my work and gives it more weight. I tend to believe that Trump is in the office because he is a reflection of the collective consciousness of the American people. He is the embodiment of the social media era in which we live. Social media created the new mantra of the love of attention, and if there is one thing that Trump loves, it's attention. But he is the reflection of America at large. People are using media platforms like Instagram to express these deeply embedded insecurities under the guise of being cool, accepted and special. The reality is, though, that you don't feel special, you don't feel accepted and you don't feel cool, because you don't want to embrace who you really are. And my work is a representation of who and what we really are. And if you can embrace that, all the jagged edges of yourself, all the disjointedness, the chaos, the grotesque, the beauty, you'll be much more secure and you'll be set free.

below
Fifteen
Black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel, oil pastel and acrylic gold powder on Coventry Vellum Paper
11" x 14"
2017

opposite
Over Yonder
Black charcoal, soft pastel, oil pastel, oil paint, paint stick and gouache on Coventry Vellum Paper
34" x 34.5"
2015

Do you feel any extra pressure or responsibility being where you are in the predominantly white male art world?
The only thing I do have a conviction about is being a pillar of hope and inspiration for other black and brown folk who may want to have a career in art. I'd like to show them that this is possible. The bedrock of prejudice and racism is the notion of superiority. So blacks are inferior and whites are superior, right? Which is false, no truth in that at all. A superior race would be if I was walking down the street and I saw another guy just take off in flight. And he starts flying. Now, that motherfucker is superior to us! Also, to me superiority means that you are superior in every way. But that's not the case. Because if you were superior in every way, then any given white artist should be better at making art than I am. And I know that's not true. So no, I don't feel any kind of pressure to prove myself to white people or anything like that. I never felt like that. I never thought, "I need to present my best self cause who I am naturally isn't good enough."

I was thinking more about being a role model to younger kids, as you had mentioned.
I wanna be an inspiration to them so they can see there is a black guy from the hood of Chicago, whose parents couldn't read or write, whose brothers were all drug addicts and alcoholics, and that motherfucker, that nigga right there, is now rising up in what is considered as one of the world's most elite fields, fine art. Do not let racism or prejudice stop you from achieving your dreams 'cause far too many people of color have died so that I can have what I have today. People have fought for us, for the future, to get the life that we rightfully deserve, not only as black people but as citizens of America. As human beings. As far as I'm concerned, your skin color is dictated by the amount of melanin in your skin, which then can protect you from the rays of the sun, perhaps preventing your ass from getting skin cancer. It's a protection barrier for your body. That's it. Making other kind of interpretations is a dangerous slope.

Where do you see yourself in 30 years?
30 years from now? I'd like to believe that I'd be in museum collections and foundations, that I'd have a number of major museum shows and retrospectives too. I'd like to be in a position where I can have my own foundation where I can give money to students to go to school, with particular focus on black and brown students, making sure they can go to school without having a financial burden, to make an impact on the education of young people. And after that, of course, dead [laughs].

JUX

@nathanielmaryquinn

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ELLE

NATHANIEL MARY QUINN

By Jennifer Krasinski
November 2016 Issue


Elaina, a 2016 mixed-media work on vellum.

NATHANIEL MARY QUINN

This Brooklyn-based painter juxtaposes diverse fragments of pop-culture imagery to create powerful figures and faces.

BY JENNIFER KRASINSKI

Her hair is jet-black and wild, dissolving into a foggy gray background, and her face is composed—or is it decomposed?—to appear more a puzzle than a person: a man's sharp eye and bulbous nose; an ape's mouth; a carved cheekbone and full lips. Her polka-dot blouse is cut away to reveal a woman's bare back. This is *Elaina*, one of the vivid and troubling figures with which painter Nathaniel Mary Quinn has made his name.

On first sight, Quinn's works appear collaged, assembled in part with bits of photographs and magazine clippings and interrupted by colorful, abstract brushstrokes daubed here and there. A closer look reveals that, in fact, every element in the work has been painted or drawn by the artist's own hand with hyperrealist precision in a variety of media: charcoal, soft and oil pastels, gouache, and paint stick.

"I don't paint portraits," Quinn says, standing in his studio at his home in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. "I paint what is not seen. I paint the internalized world of a human being." His compositions mirror the complexity of the human psyche: a fractured, yet somehow seamless, whole. The tricorn hat and eagle's beak of *Lamont;* the scarlet fez and comic-book cutout of *Zechariah;* the mismatched side-eyes of *Rosey*—his characters are multifaceted concoctions. If there ▷

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ART SHOW

Van Williams, 2016.

Sister Odell, 2014.

is any truth to identity, these figures seem to imply, it's how constructed it is.

"What's behind the work is something that's very passionate, very real, and very visceral," says Dexter Wimberly, curator and executive director of Aljira, a Center for Contemporary Art, who gave Quinn an exhibition at Brooklyn's Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts in 2013. He also notes that the figures Quinn conjures are often based on people he knows, or once knew. "He's pulling from his background, his history, where he grew up, and really using the work as a way to tell those stories."

Born in 1977, Quinn was raised in the Robert Taylor housing projects on Chicago's South Side, a community plagued by poverty and violence. "I'm from a place where most of my friends were drug dealers," he says. Although his parents couldn't read or write, they always supported and encouraged their son's preternatural gifts for art.

When he was very young, his mother would let him scribble on the walls of their apartment, then wipe them clean so he could do it again. His father put together a makeshift studio for him in the kitchen pantry. Every Saturday, he would draw with his son, coaching him, telling him to keep his hand loose

Kenwood, 2016.

and free, and to use every gesture. "Never erase," Quinn recalls him saying, "Every mark you make is there for a reason."

Quinn's mother died when he was a teenager; he added her name, Mary, to his own to honor her. Soon after, when the 15-year-old was away at boarding school, his father and brothers moved out of the family apartment without telling him where they went. Quinn came home to find the door ajar—and has never reconnected with them since. Initially traumatized, he has said that he now accepts their abandonment as a sort of deliverance from the lives of hardship that other members of his family have led. He went on to study art at Wabash College in Indiana and New York University, but he still refers to his father as "the best teacher I ever had."

Those lessons in trusting his own hand and gut stayed with him. "Everything I make comes from visions," Quinn says. "I never make preliminary sketches." When he begins a new painting, he doesn't know who he's bringing to life until, at some point, the painting tells him. Perhaps it's this fluid relationship with his own subconscious that gives his paintings something of the embattled gravity of the Surrealists' "exquisite corpses" and the montaged physiques of Dadaist Hannah Höch's absurd characters.

Quinn's most recent figures weren't born of the past. Rather, his mind's eye has refocused on the present. This November, at the Luce Gallery in Turin, Italy, he will exhibit new paintings propelled by a vision of the people who live in his neighborhood. "Every piece is going to be a reflection of this current world—a world that will cease to exist two or three years from now simply because of gentrification," Quinn says of the changes he sees. "I want to record it." ■

M+B

whitewall

ARTIST TO WATCH: NATHANIEL MARY QUINN

By Charlotte Boutboul
August 16, 2016

When we visited Nathaniel Mary Quinn he was still living at his Bed-Stuyvesant apartment where he had a room he used as his studio. More recently he bought a house in Crown Heights where he now uses the parlor floor as his studio. The price of his paintings has increased by around 660 percent in the last three years. When we were there, some of those paintings, mostly evocative expressionist portraits with an abstract twist, were hanging in the living room.

“All these works are gouache and black charcoal on paper. Everybody thinks it’s like traditional collage and appropriated images from a magazine glued onto paper, but that’s not the case. Everything is applied by hand: I either drew it or painted it onto the actual paper itself,” he told us.

Quinn’s portraits look collaged but are in fact organically composed. He amasses pictures sporadically from the Internet, newspapers, and magazines and cuts out individual features that he then draws directly onto the work using construction paper to create sharp traces. He insists on not removing these rough edges. “I use the accidental cuts as an instinctual response onto the work,” he said.

When done with one part of the drawing, he covers it and maps out the next section of the piece. “I can’t see what I just did anymore, so I don’t have any idea how this part of the portrait is going to land until I remove it for the first time. What that does is that it functions on a more psychological level because human behavior is based on symmetry,” he said.

Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Space Monkey
17 X 14 inches
Black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel, oil pastel, oil paint, paint stick, acrylic gold leaf on Coventry Vellum Paper

To some, Quinn’s process of free association may defy classical notions of beauty. The human brain is known to have an ingrained attraction toward symmetry arising from nature that can be witnessed as the central black hole of a galaxy, for example, or the gracious proportions of the unfolding feathers of a peacock. The Harvard mathematician George David Birkhoff (1884–1944) even developed a theory of aesthetic value based on symmetry, “clearly separable from sensuous, emotional, moral or intellectual feeling.” This means one’s eyes would instinctually and objectively pick up on objects and images that the brain can interpret in depth, space, and context. Through symmetry, the brain is drawn to understandability and predictability, yet Quinn’s process is the exact opposite of that—it is volatile and unforeseeable, even to him.

“If you make yourself blind to what you’re doing, you can no longer depend on what makes sense. It becomes about memories that start to come up in play. They emanate from the storage of your subconscious. Once the work is complete. it tells me what it is,” Quinn said.

M+B

The artist grew up from the 1970s onwards as the youngest of five boys in the Robert Taylor Homes in Chicago, one of the most infamous housing projects in the country for its problems of drugs, gangs, violence, and extreme poverty. Planned for 11,000 inhabitants, the project housed up to 27,000 people and included six of the poorest U.S. census areas.

Like the majority of the inhabitants of the homes, his parents were illiterate and his four brothers high school dropouts. Quinn stood out as a bright student with a talent for drawing, which allowed him to receive a scholarship to attend Culver Academies, a boarding school in Indiana. One month through the new school, Quinn received notice from his father that his mother had passed away. One month after the funeral he returned to visit on Thanksgiving only to find the door open and the house emptied. He never heard from his family again until 2016, when to his surprise he received a call from his brother Charles, who saw Quinn on youtube in a popular podcast called “The Brilliant Idiots”, where Quinn was a special guest discussing his art practice. His brother explained some of the circumstances regarding his abandonment and family. This was the first and only conversation Quinn had with his brother.

Despite the circumstances that turned him into an orphan at 15, Quinn managed to finish high school and attend Wabash College, double majoring in art and psychology, and later completed a master’s of fine arts at New York University. He landed a job in New York with at-risk youth while painting on the side.

“I was teaching professional development to young kids involved with the juridical system. I was trying to find ways for them to identify skills from the street that they could implement into the workforce. If you sold drugs for five years, that means you know how to move a product, you know how to build a clientele, you know how much to charge, you know how to save money, you probably are pretty good at managing money, and a lot of people have to go to business school to learn these same skills but you learned them on the street,” he told us.

By then Quinn had gotten married and his situation was stable: He worked during the day from 11:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., went home, spent time with his wife, and was then off to the studio room to paint from 9:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. “To have a job and be able to pay my own rent, I was happy. I didn’t complain about working late at night. As far as I was concerned, I was blessed,” he said.

His artmaking was drastically different from today, as a small canvas hanging by one of the living room doors testifies. It is a more figurative portrait, well crafted but unnoticeable unless someone points it out to you, as Quinn is doing. “My previous art practice was this: excessive thinking, heavy on theory. A great part of it was based on having to make art that was a response to racial politics and black culture.”

In 2013 the mother of one of a kid he was tutoring privately saw his former work and decided to organize a salon featuring four of his paintings. The day of the salon Quinn made the fourth work: “It was the day that I was supposed to deliver the work and there’s no shipping company, nothing, this is me carrying the paintings and walking. I had five hours. So I thought I would do something with paper, because I knew I could draw faster than I paint.”

That afternoon *Charles* (2013) was born, as well as his current process. Without any particular intention or questioning, Quinn followed a recent vision he had experienced, an incoherent memory of his past. Once he was done, he recognized his brother, which left him “blown away.” At the salon the 15 people who had shown up gravitated toward Charles, which would have been sold to the host’s husband for $3,000 had the man managed to follow up on the payments.

The next two years saw a cascade of tumultuous events around Quinn’s art. When his old mentor and fellow artist William Villalongo saw *Charles*, he was amazed and took the initiative of showing the new works to Dexter Wimberly, Director of Strategic Planning at Independent Curators International (ICI) who decided to feature them in the windows of the *Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts* (MoCADA) during the summer of 2013. Wemberly followed up by including the works in his next curated exhibition at Driscoll Babcock Galleries, “Corpus Americus,” in December 2013. At the same time Villalongo presented his protégé’s work at Susan Inglett Gallery in his exhibition “American Beauty.” Given that some pieces were selling, Villalongo organized later another solo show entitled “Species” at Bunker259 from January through February 2014. In the meantime, Beth Rudin DeWoody from the board of the Whitney Museum had bought two pieces displayed at Driscoll Babcock Galleries and decided to feature a new work by Quinn in the Whitney Museum’s VIP auction on May 8, 2014, for which made a work on paper — black charcoal and gouache — entitled “Richard.” “At the Whitney auction my work got the second highest sale of the night. What was like $5,000 became like $14,000. I was still teaching, though, because I thought this could end tomorrow, this could be a fluke, beginner’s luck,” Quinn remembers.

Yet by that time his work at Susan Inglett Gallery had been mentioned in the New York Times and positively reviewed by *Afropunk* and *Bloomberg Businessweek*. He had also met art patron Peggy Cooper Cafritz, who had been more effective than the former interested buyer in purchasing *Charles* (2013), along with *Wretched* (2013), for her personal collection. Quinn had also been introduced to curator Fairfax Dorn,who connected him with Marc Glimcher who got him a solo show at Pace Gallery in London, “Past/Present,” which ran in 2014. It was only when the news of the show was announced that Quinn quit his job. The show was a hit.

Rhona Hoffman Gallery and M+B are those predominantly representing Quinn in Chicago and Los Angeles respectively.. The former introduced his work at this year’s ADAA Art Show, while the latter featured him at the Armory and is organizing his first solo show in Los Angeles next May. Although Quinn currently does not have gallery representation in New York, it seems clear that his portraits are bound to circulate more internationally, as they are presently being showcased in Milan by Brand New Gallery while M+B has already planned to follow the L.A show, and Luce Gallery is planning one in Turin, Italy, next November.

Although a certain pride can be read on Quinn’s face when he mentions these important upcoming shows, one can also distinguish a restless expression that could be misinterpreted as uneasiness. It is evidently not in his nature to take things for granted.

“No one remembers the money. People remember what you did. People remember the cultural impact you made and why you were here. That’s what people remember.”

In resuscitating his childhood memories on paper, Quinn believes he is addressing the complexity of identity. “I think that most human beings are very crude because of our varying experiences. There’s always good and bad, high and low, gain and loss, but those polarizing realities are necessary for the creation of our identity. I’m just going to lay my wounds bare. This is pain, this is anguish, this is a reflection from being ripped. I’m not fully mended, you see, but there’s beauty in that. I’ll be the first to tell you I’m insecure in some places. But I also think true confidence is when you can accept your shortcomings. There are people who go out of their way to present this idea that they’re perfect. That’s insecurity to me. True confidence is when you can just accept who you are.”

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NATHANIEL MARY QUINN
Highlights

May 13 – June 25, 2016

Opening Reception

Friday, May 13, 2016 from 6 to 8 pm

M+B is pleased to present *Highlights*, Nathaniel Mary Quinn's first solo exhibition with the gallery. The exhibition will run from May 13, 2016 through June 25, 2016, with an opening reception on Friday, May 13 from 6 to 8 pm.

Nathaniel Mary Quinn's works on paper exemplify a singular approach to image-making. His figurative compositions are intimate, psychologically-charged portraits influenced by the artist's own past experiences as well as contemporary imagery. Faces are fractured with composite features and spliced with colorful patterns and other graphic elements. Foregoing any preparatory drawings, these works are a result of the artist's intuitive working method and technical virtuosity with the materials. Using charcoal, oil-paint, paint-stick, gouache and oil pastel, Quinn's meticulously rendered compositions appear as if physically collaged from various sourced images.

Quinn's works are deeply informed by his personal history growing up in Chicago's South Side. His childhood experiences at the Robert Taylor Homes, a place of violence, abandonment and poverty, are embedded into his early narrative. *Highlights* features portraits of individuals from the artist's past, who, through various means, were able to make it out of the notorious public housing project. These compositions give shape to Quinn's memories, the figures from his past finding their way from the subconscious to the paper. In their abstracted bodies and faces, Quinn's personal narrative transforms into a wider exploration on the resiliency of human nature.

Nathaniel Mary Quinn (b. 1977, Chicago) received his BFA from Wabash College and MFA from New York University. Solo exhibitions include *Back and Forth* at Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago; *Past/Present* at Pace Gallery, London; and *Hybrids* at the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts, New York. Past group exhibitions include *Unrealism*, organized by Jeffrey Deitch and Larry Gagosian, Miami; *AIM 23* at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York; *Still/Moving: Photographs and Video Art from the DeWoody Collection*, Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach; and presentations at Frieze London and Art Basel Miami Beach. In *New York Magazine*'s April 2016 issue, Jerry Saltz selected Quinn as one of eleven artists "poised to have breakout years." Quinn has been profiled in a number of other publications, including *The Independent* (London), *Modern Painters*, *ARTnews*, and *The Huffington Post*. His work is in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Art Institute of Chicago; and Sheldon Museum of Art, Lincoln, NE, among others. Nathaniel Mary Quinn lives and works in Brooklyn.

Location:	**M+B**, 612 North Almont Drive, Los Angeles, California 90069
Show Title:	Highlights
Exhibition Dates:	May 13 – June 25, 2016
Opening Reception:	Friday, May 13, 6 – 8pm
Gallery Hours:	Tuesday – Saturday, 10 am – 6 pm, and by appointment

For press inquiries, please contact Jeanie Choi at (310) 550-0050 or jeanie@mbart.com.

For all other inquiries, contact Jonlin Wung at jonlin@mbart.com or Sonny Ruscha Granade at sonny@mbart.com.

# # #

M+B

Los Angeles Times

Review

From housing project to gallery wall: Nathaniel Mary Quinn's portraits put subjects in a new light

By Sharon Mizota
May 25, 2016

By turns monstrous and whimsical, Nathaniel Mary Quinn's portraits at M+B are fractured, richly inventive images of former residents of the Chicago housing project where he grew up. They are somewhat reminiscent of the work of Wangechi Mutu, although rather than using found imagery directly, Quinn draws or paints from various sources — photographs, comics, history painting, fabric patterns and more — putting them all together in distorted collisions resembling faces.

"Super-Fly" features a hairline that looks like Superman's and a red-and-blue garment, but everything in between comes from somewhere else: a bulbous, pink cartoon nose, photorealistic brown-skinned eyes, ears and lips (all apparently from different sources), and a black-and-white image of an emphatically cocked arm clad in a delicate print. The portrait tweaks the notion of the singular, indomitable superhero, injecting it with a jaunty come-what-may panache. This make-do aesthetic also resonates with the work's reference to the 1972 blaxploitation film "Super Fly," the story of a drug dealer who orchestrates his own second chance.

Nathaniel Mary Quinn's "Super-Fly," 2015.
(Nathaniel Mary Quinn / M+B Gallery)

Although portraiture as collage is nothing new — see Cubism or Surrealism — Quinn's works add dimension to the tradition. Yes, we all contain multitudes, but these portraits give depth and texture, both flattering and unflattering, to subjects rarely seen in contemporary art. I was reminded of the totally different work of photographer Dawoud Bey, who seeks to give his sitters — often kids from poor neighborhoods — the gravity and stature of Renaissance portraiture. Quinn does a similar thing, granting his subjects a complexity they often don't receive in other places.

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ARTSLANT Los Angeles

Piecing It All Together: Nathaniel Mary Quinn Transfigures a Shattered World

By Sola Agustsson

May 31, 2016

Nathaniel Mary Quinn's fragmented portraits recall his childhood growing up in the Robert Taylor Homes, a notorious housing project in Chicago. His new series Highlights, now on view at M+B in Los Angeles, features highly personal works that reflect on his upbringing and the people he knew who were able to escape the violence and poverty so many experienced in the now demolished project.

Highlights
Nathaniel Mary Quinn
M+B
612 N. Almont Dr., Los Angeles, CA 90069
May 13, 2016 - June 25, 2016

Though his pieces resemble collages, they are in fact improvised paintings. Quinn does not do initial sketches of his works, preferring to paint using a process of free association based on internal visions and emotions that arise when thinking about a particular subject matter. He uses combinations of charcoal, pastel, gouache, and oil paint on vellum to create a pastiched style that is truly his own.

The abstract, distorted figures encompass both grotesque and innocent imagery reflecting many facets of the human experience. The works are intimate and embracing of binaries: good and bad, male and female, past and present. Quinn's work gives reverence to all aspects of the individual experience. "The journey of those living in difficult communities like that of The Robert Taylor Homes is reflected in all of humanity. No human is impervious to pain and loss, to despair and grief, to suffering and longing. Such a disposition does not exist, and all experiences are, indeed, relative to one's own unique set of circumstances," the artist told me.

Quinn was the youngest of five brothers born to illiterate parents. His father provided for the family with gambling earnings from pool halls. His brothers were all high school dropouts, many of who succumbed to addiction and alcoholism. Quinn, a precocious artist, received a scholarship in eighth grade to a prestigious boarding academy in Indiana. His mother, who was crippled from two strokes, died soon after he left, and when Quinn returned home from school one Thanksgiving, he found his entire family had abandoned him. He was 15 then, and he hasn't talked to his family in the two decades since. He says he believes now their abandonment may have been a blessing in disguise. After graduating high school, Quinn received a BFA from Wabash College and an MFA from New York University. He now lives and works in Brooklyn, NY.

The specter of childhood runs through Quinn's work, with cartoon fragments spliced into many of his pieces. Quinn first began making art by copying comic books in his youth. He infuses superhero illustrations into his portraits because he thinks people he knew who were able to escape the projects are superheroes in their own right, saying:

One's escape from a community akin to the Robert Taylor Homes is predicated on a mutant-like feat, where the psychological barrier and its very purpose were deconstructed and, somehow, rebuilt. The shapes and forms in my work, the works' marriage of that which is beautiful and that which is grotesque, of a Frankenstein-like framework of cut parts and components by means of intense rendering and painting, all give rise to the journey of such a difficult, yet necessary, human transformation.

One subject who made it out of the housing projects cycle is "Rosy," a nickname for the artist's best friend, who won a scholarship to the same boarding school he attended. "It was rather strange meeting a chap like Rosy; most of the boys in the Robert Taylor Homes were incredibly tough and, at times, rather dangerous, although, obviously, they were not born this way: the interlacing factors of the community were efficient enough to bring about a certain conditioning that made empty the sanctity of life and optimistic prospects of one's future. Rosy never succumbed to such conditioning, which could, perhaps, be attributed to a collective set of influences: the love, compassion, and discipline of his mother," Quinn said of his friend. Rosy now enjoys a successful career in the Midwest.

Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Antoine Jackson, 2016

Though these portraits are singular depictions of people Quinn knows personally, they relate to larger universal themes of human resiliency. The collagist structure conveys the fragmentation inherent in an individual's collective experiences. Influenced by Cubism, Francis Bacon, and Neo Rauch, Quinn is drawn to artists who meld seemingly disparate elements into a cohesive whole.

"My aim is to, firstly, create, but to also reflect human capacity for all that exists," says the artist. "The various structures in my work—the layering of shapes and forms, of color and tone, of lines and that which may be described as decorative—are reflections of the complexity of human existence, of presenting such reflections on the same plane, all at once, to be fully embraced by the viewer, and by which the viewer will be confronted."

—Sola Agustsson

Sola Agustsson is a writer based in Los Angeles. She studied at UC Berkeley and has contributed to Bullett, Flaunt, The Huffington Post, Alternet, Artlog, Konch, and Whitewall Magazine.

M+B

ISSUE

Nathaniel Mary Quinn

Interview by Dexter Wimberly
Images by Michael Mundy

May 13, 2016

"OTHER PEOPLE MIGHT LOOK AT MY WORK AND BELIEVE THAT THERE'S TRADITIONAL COLLAGE TAKING PLACE. THERE'S NO COLLAGE. EVERYTHING IS DRAWN OR PAINTED BY HAND. IT'S TWO-DIMENSIONAL SCULPTURE."
— NATHANIEL MARY QUINN

I met Chicago-born artist Nathaniel Mary Quinn in 2013 and have had the pleasure of working with him on a number of exhibitions. I recently talked with Quinn about new developments in his career, the new challenge of being a recognized artist and Highlights, his upcoming exhibition at M+B Gallery in Los Angeles. Known for portraiture that blends sophisticated painting and drawing techniques to achieve the fractured, disorienting appearance of collage, Quinn's highly-coveted work depicts an array of people from his childhood who had an indelible influence on his life. Sitting in his new studio in Brooklyn, NY, the artist discusses the lessons he's learned, the importance of humility and the transformative power of imagination.

Dexter Wimberly: Quinn, we've known each other for a few years now, and during that time quite a lot has happened for you. I know it's been a really strange and interesting journey. Can you give me a capsule of what has happened in your career during the past two or three years?

Nathaniel Mary Quinn: First, in the last three years I went from being a full-time teacher to being a full time artist. Second, I made a transition from being an obscure artist to being acknowledged and discussed, becoming more known. My work has become more recognizable to where viewers can identify, "That's a Mary Quinn." Third, I graduated from having community-based exhibitions—i.e. coffee shops or people's brownstones, which were significant shows for me—to having exhibitions in reputable galleries. I even have a museum show coming up in 2018 in South Carolina at the Halsey Institute of Art at the University of Charleston and had a prior installation that you curated at the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts (MoCADA) in Brooklyn, New York.

DW: Making that transition from obscure to recognized is both rewarding and challenging in many ways because with recognition come scrutiny and criticism. Some artists begin to change under the weight of that. Change isn't necessarily a bad thing. Change can be good. But from your perspective, how has this shift in your recognition and acknowledgement affected you both personally and in your work?

NMQ: I feel happy. Personally, it's exciting. It really is. There's a saying that because a gallery gives you a show, it validates your work. I understand that concept but don't subscribe to it. I believe that true validation comes from within in the very beginning—it's just icing on the cake that other people get on board. Artistically, it hasn't changed my work at all. I just always focus on pushing my art. Because I am a full-time artist now, I have more time to push it further, but I'm not trying to appease the audience or give them what I think they may want. I try to remain extremely authentic no matter what, in the way I would have if none of this had happened.

DW: I remember our first encounter and visiting your studio a few years ago—I immediately had a positive reaction to your work. I've also been quite fascinated by the scale of some of the new pieces. A lot of artists have the tendency to work in a particular size range, but you've been able to use scale to your advantage. I recall seeing your exhibition at Rhona Hoffman Gallery (Chicago) last September and was very moved by the fact that the smallest works in the show had so much power and energy in them. How are you making these decisions about scale and content?

NMQ: Everything I make is born from a vision, a visual idea, that becomes the blueprint for the work. In that vision, all details are provided: the subject, the way the subject is constructed, the color palette, shape, form and size of the work. If it calls for a large-scale work, then that's what I do, but if it calls for something small, I do that. At some point, I had this appetite for doing small works. I really wanted to explore a more intimate relationship with my work, and small scale allows that to happen because you're up on it the whole time. I wanted to make the small works as powerful as the big works. I think there's a permeating ideology that small works tend to be less strong. But if you think of a painter like Vermeer, all of his paintings were small but he had very powerful and beautiful textures and ways to control light in such a small scale. I think that's as time consuming, laborious and challenging as making a large work.

DW: And for those who are not as familiar with your practice, I want to talk a little bit about what's behind it. Could you talk to me about your subject matter?

NMQ: My upcoming show is titled Highlights, and every piece in it represents a figure who has transcended or overcome in a way. These are people I actually know who transcended very dire circumstances and managed to get out of the community from which I come, the Robert Taylor Homes in Chicago. That doesn't mean that they all became teachers and lawyers. Many of them went on to just get regular jobs, but they didn't fall prey to the volatile monstrosity of the community we shared. A lot of the images have comic book superheroes attached to them because, to me, the subjects are heroic. They are uncanny. These are highlights: those who were lifted, who lifted themselves.

DW: We're here in your studio, so tell me a little about your process—the materials you use to make your work.

NMQ: I use black charcoal, gouache, oil pastel, oil paint, paint stick, sometimes acrylic gold or silver powder. I work from photographs, and I pretty much manually render everything. Other people might look at the work and believe that there's traditional collage taking place. There's no collage. Everything is drawn or painted by hand. I use construction paper to produce form or shape with sharp edges. Or I use other materials that can be adhered to the surface of the paper without ruining the work. It's two-dimensional sculpture. My process is intuitive, so I never make preliminary sketches of anything. It's like being a surgeon. I use an X-Acto knife everywhere and cut right on the paper. It's an insane amount of work.

DW: Being an artist in your position is quite exciting. There's a lot of demand for your work now and a lot of demand put on you—you're working with multiple galleries in different ways. As you mentioned, you have a museum show coming up in 2018. Between then and now, one can only imagine what will happen. Can you talk to me about one or two lessons that you've learned in this process of going from being obscure to being recognized?

NMQ: Lesson number one: always say "thank you" and "I'm sorry". Those are two of the most powerful statements that you can use in any field, particularly in the art world, because people help you. I'm in a binary position: on one hand I could say, "My work is so good that people just want to buy it." But on the other hand I can say, "The work only sells because the market decided to support it." So I tend to go with the latter of the two because art is very subjective. You don't know if what you're making is particularly strong, but somehow you hit a nerve or a collector who will support it. A lot of artists are exceptional, but the market doesn't support their work for some reason. So when you get opportunities, say thank you. Show gratitude.

Another thing is being very disciplined. I have a nice, tight schedule. Don't forget to live a bit and be completely transparent with people. Under-promise, over-deliver. That's how I live. And it's okay to say no. Just be genuine. Show love to other people. Support and celebrate other artists, curators and directors. Those are some of the lessons I've learned and have been very effective for me.

DW: What are some of the challenges you're looking forward to overcoming as an artist?

NMQ: I just want to make better work. I don't feel like my work is good enough. Every waking moment I have a real anxiety about that. Everything I make is an inspiration for making really good work, but I haven't achieved that yet. There's no way. I can feel it in my gut. I'm getting there, but I want to be able to achieve it before I die. If I could just make one good piece in my lifetime, I would be a happy man. That's more than money, more than fame. The money thing is cool, but it doesn't affect me. When I come to my studio, I still feel like the same insecure guy. Fear is personified in my studio practice every day. And you know what the fear says? "I don't think I can render that jacket. I don't know if I'm good enough." Every day.

DW: It's good to hear someone talk about vulnerabilities in such an honest, forthright way. I sense that in your work, that you're channeling that vulnerability. There's a sensitivity to your work that I don't find with a lot of other artists. You're not simply painting someone as they appear in a photograph, or as they wish to appear.

NMQ: Right, I'm painting what's real, and what is oftentimes real is the unseen. You can buy a new car and think, "I see it physically in front of me: a brand new car." But the car doesn't symbolize what's really happening. What's really happening is that you just spent a lot of money with the hope of enhancing your self-esteem. Or I can say that I just bought a house—you see it here, physically. What's really real, though, is I just found a way to solidify the roof over my head because I'm afraid of being homeless. That's the truth. So I'm interested in painting the truth. Not what I see, but what I don't see. In order for me to see that, I have to feel it. I have to get into harmony with you. That tends to be the reason why people from my past are my best subjects, my best models, because I spent time with these people. I know them. I have a linked fate with them.

DW: In your work, you're depicting people who are both alive and passed away, but I don't get the sense that you're treating the living any differently than you're treating the dead.

NMQ: That's right—we're already dead now. That's just nature. The earth produces plants, animals and humans. We all go through this cycle. My mom passed away when I was 15 years old. Until this day, when I think about my mother the feeling that comes over me is the same feeling I had when she was alive. She seems very real to me. And here's the thing: nobody's higher than another person. That's why I love charcoal so much. I feel like I am one with that material. We're all from the same origin, from the earth. And the conclusion you come to is twofold: on one hand, I ain't shit. I am no better than a tree or a roach. But at the same time, I'm very special because there's only one Nate Quinn. God saw fit to give me life, but I'm just like anybody else.

DW: To me, a fantastic artist is someone who reminds us of our connectedness to the rest of the world and also of our littleness. Only certain people are open to being reminded of their smallness.

NMQ: The one beautiful thing we all possess is imagination. That is a tool given to humans by the universe, a tool that will allow us to envision for ourselves the kind of future that we can achieve. Some may argue that this is a Westernized ideology, that this kind of talk doesn't happen in third world countries. I get it. I can't quite dispute that, but I went to Belize for the first time and saw little children playing with dirt. Happy, man. I saw kids happily playing with dirt. I've seen kids in America with much more who were far less happy. Those children decided to use the most powerful piece of technology, their imagination and create for themselves a different reality. Beautiful. They were playing with nothing. I will never forget that. Imagination is not tactile, but it impacts you. And then you work toward it. Via faith, belief and hope, you just keep working toward it.

M+B

ARTNEWS

‘Art Derives From Everything in Life’: A Talk with Nathaniel Mary Quinn

By Bill Powers
May 12, 2016

Bill Powers: Do you consider your paintings to be portraits?
Nathaniel Mary Quinn: In many respects a portrait is an attempt to duplicate a visual physicality. I’m trying to bring to the surface what I feel; it’s more of a psychological excavation of the internalized world of a human being.
BP: The clothing depicted in your work often harks back to an older era. Is that intentional?
NMQ: Chicago is known for being a cold city. It’s called the Windy City not only because of the harsh weather but in part because of the city’s politics. I grew up there, in a very impoverished community. When you grow up poor, you make attempts to communicate to the public that you’re not as poor as people may think you are. That’s why you might wear a fake-fur hat or a fake-fur coat.

BP: And what’s interesting about that projection to you, as an artist?
NMQ: I find that these types of figures are not normally represented in the art world because they are from the ghetto or the periphery of culture. But that doesn’t mean that these people are any less important. I love the idea of putting a pimp on the walls of the Whitney. And I did it! When [collector and Whitney trustee] Beth DeWoody invited me to be a part of their annual auction, I donated a piece called Richard [2014], which was named after my brother, who was big into fashion. He went out of his way to show people that he wasn’t broke. I presented him as a real gangster-like pimp.

BP: You enjoyed the subversive aspect.
NMQ: Absolutely. And I don’t change who [my subjects] are. I don’t try to make them more palatable to any given audience.

BP: How do you start one of your paintings?
NMQ: I normally start with the nose or the nucleus of the piece. It could be the neck or the hat. I’m looking for harmony. The composition has to be well balanced.

BP: Hailing from Illinois, were you influenced at all by the Chicago Imagists?
NMQ: I’m very much influenced by music production. I mean, obviously I’m influenced by painters as well. However, art derives from everything in life. I take walks a lot because I’m always collecting information. I live in [Brooklyn’s] Bed-Stuy; I speak with many of the drug dealers, pimps, prostitutes—I have conversations with all kinds of people. They hustle. I don’t judge them. I take their energy with me and figure out ways to employ it in my work. It helps me to stay connected to what I would call real life. In the same way, I know a bunch of wealthy collectors now. That energy, too, goes into my work. I like intersecting those worlds. I see them as reciprocal.

BP: Before you were supporting yourself as an artist, you worked with at-risk youth.
NMQ: Yeah, I was a counselor at this place [in downtown Manhattan] right off of Canal Street. Young kids, from 13 to 18, interfacing with the criminal justice system, many of them facing jail time.

BP: What was your objective, working with these kids?
NMQ: I found a direct link to functional illiteracy. Many of them couldn't read or write. They knew how to navigate their limited surroundings. I taught a literacy class even though I had no training in it whatsoever. At first it was rough: kids cussing me out, threatening me.

BP: They were probably suspicious that you were trying to brainwash them or something.
NMQ: I wanted to show them a different route in life without compromising their experiences, how to translate what they'd learned into the workforce. Let's say one of the kids had been selling drugs. I'd tell him, "OK, so you know how to build a clientele, manage your money, schedule. People go to business school to acquire these skills. There's nothing wrong with your aim. There's something wrong with your target."

BP: Would you ever take them to galleries?
NMQ: All the time, because I knew they didn't feel comfortable in spaces like that. I taught them that the gallery is open to the public. You don't have to pay to walk in. Just look around. I remember I took a group to Metro Pictures one day to see a Gary Simmons show. We looked at the price list. They couldn't believe someone could sell an artwork for $90,000. They'd never been exposed to these opportunities.

BP: But you were also teaching them how to read and write?
NMQ: We would walk by random restaurants—Subway, McDonald's, Wendy's—they knew all the places. But then we'd get back to the classroom and I'd write out the same names on the chalkboard and the kids couldn't read it. They only knew the names from the logos. They had memorized the signifiers.
But I'd also try to highlight the beauty in that, how they'd created their own language to survive. Language is just a code you have to crack in order to navigate the world. And there's a plurality in language. I'll never forget the day this kid read his first sentence. It made me cry. I hugged him and said, "Now you have something no one can steal from you: your education. That's intellectual property." So, yeah, I worked with at-risk youth for ten years.

BP: Who is an artist that has had a profound impact on you?
NMQ: I love how Caravaggio manipulated light, how he's able to place figures within darkness. Hey, Caravaggio was an at-risk youth. He'd get into duels and have beef with people.

BP: When I interviewed John Currin last year, he told a story about Caravaggio and Guido Reni almost getting into a fistfight about who invented raking light.
NMQ: See! Caravaggio was a ruffian, but also a very talented painter. John Currin is also an influence, and Lucian Freud and Jim Dine. I love Jim Dine's drawings of tools and the way he renders a necktie. He knows how to control the weight of a line.

BP: Marlene Dumas says that to draw something is to show its resistance.
NMQ: Often you add weight to a line in order to show tension. Look at a painting like John Currin's Big Hands [2010] and you see how he's captured the weight of her shoulders. Currin understands fragility and tension.

BP: Can we talk about the emotional presence in your paintings?
NMQ: I believe in life you are an amalgam of numerous experiences. You are built from a history of joy, sadness, ups, and downs. I'm trying to articulate the essence of that. All of that added up together is nothing more than a forest that stands in front of the truth. So I'm walking through the forest trying to get there. Subjective perception is simply allegiance—unknowingly—to your own ego. And your ego disallows you from seeing the collective interdependence of all people.

BP: You said that you get visions sometimes.
NMQ:I get visions almost every day. The vision is a picture of a whole image. I never write them down. And I never forget them. Every piece I've made was born from a vision. I'm talking about the style of work I make now. Earlier on I was obsessive, trying to make intellectual connections and show theoretical underpinnings behind the work. It was tiring and laborious. I didn't want to live my life that way. I wanted to be free. I went to therapy for four years to deal with the loss of my mother, the loss of my family. What was that pain about? The detachment does something to you.

BP: For people who don't know your personal history, you had a pretty traumatic family experience in high school.
NMQ: My mom passed away when I was a freshman in high school, my first month at boarding school. I went back to Chicago for the services and then returned to school. Thanksgiving came around and when I went home to see my family, the apartment was empty. My four older brothers and my dad had left without notifying me as to where they were going.

BP: So you never saw them again?
NMQ: Only last year did one of my brothers, Charles, finally contact me after hearing this podcast I did. He didn't know what happened to our father. I learned that my brother Richard had died of AIDS and that my other brother was a full-blown alcoholic living on the streets. I asked Charles a lot of questions. I told him that I forgave him, but I don't think we can ever have a relationship again. Not after that kind of rupture. Listen, I was very lucky as a kid. I was showered with love. My mom used to pray over me, pray over my body. She would ask God to watch over me after she was dead and gone. To this day, I believe that my mother conspires for my success. Whatever happens to me in life, things always seem to work out.

BP: You have a new piece called Ethan [2016], where the body originated from an image of Ai Weiwei.
NMQ: It's not about his biography at all. I like how you can see time and gravity on his body, a body you imagine was once strong. The real Ethan was a tough guy I knew from Chicago. We lived in the same project building. He was nice to me, but you didn't want to get on his bad side. He was very burdened by his circumstances. Ethan had a sad disposition. He was a tumbler, like me. I did gymnastics for 13 years. So Ethan and I would do back flips together. I was always a better tumbler than he was, which may be why I won his admiration. Ethan was sort of a protector for me.

BP: Were you a tough guy?
NMQ: Not really. But you had to be tough in that community. You couldn't let anyone take you short. I was in this group called the Jesse White Tumblers. Jesse White is the Illinois Secretary of State who started this program to get kids off the street. Most of my teammates were from the projects—primarily the Cabrini-Green projects—and some of them were superbly dangerous. We used to perform at the Chicago Bulls halftime shows. I even got to meet Michael Jordan.

BP: While Jordan was still in the NBA?
NMQ: Yeah, man. Our locker rooms were right next to the players'. We'd come out into the hallway to stretch, and out would roll Michael Jordan, Scottie Pippen, Dennis Rodman. I was five feet away from Michael Jordan! I had never seen a physical specimen like that. The guy was beautiful. He was built like a machine. A lot of kids in the projects would try to get on the tumbling team. You got paid. They'd travel us around. We'd sign autographs. My mom first put me onto tumbling. She brought me to Mr. McClain, our grammar-school gym teacher, and said, "I want you to watch over my baby so he doesn't get caught up in these streets." Eventually I became the team captain.

Nathaniel Mary Quinn's work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at Pace Gallery in London and the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts in Brooklyn. He is represented by Rhona Hoffman Gallery in Chicago, Litvak Contemporary in Tel Aviv, and M+B gallery in Los Angeles, where his latest solo show runs from May 13 through June 25. Watch Bill Powers interview Nathaniel Mary Quinn at Frieze New York here.

M+B

NEW YORK

11 Artists Poised to Have Breakout Years in 2016

Text by Jerry Saltz
Photographs by Bobby Doherty
April 22, 2016

For our Art and Design issue, New York has been examining the art world's recent past — tracing the identity-politics revolution; catching up with Richard Prince, the Warhol of the Instagram age — and it's present, as we sit down with James Franco to let him make a case for his art and get a crash course in today's market from a Sotheby's advisor. And now we look to the future: ahead, 11 artists, selected by senior art critic Jerry Saltz, who are poised to have breakout years, along with a sampling of their work.

Nathaniel Mary Quinn, Painter, 38
Quinn's intensely vivisected Frankensteinian faces and viscously spliced figures make a nation of loved, colorful portraits. Bold shifts of scale, fungal surfaces that slide between smooth and gloppy, and attacks on integrated pictorial wholeness.

'Still/Moving' Plumbs Collector's Eclectic Psyche

By John Thomason
April 1, 2016

"Still/Moving," the second part of the Norton Museum's two-pronged exhibition of the collection of local arts patron Beth DeWoody, is less whimsical than last year's predecessor, "The Triumph of Love," which focused on contemporary art and sculpture. But it's arguably more impactful.

Like any great exhibit of a personal collection, "Still/Moving"—which derives its name from its two mediums, photography and video—is both random and controlled. Rather than surveying a century of art or offering a meditation on the zeitgeist, "Still/Moving" derives its meaning from the collector's personality and politics, as they are shaped and defined by the decisions of Norton curator Tim Wride and curatorial assistant Rachel Gustafson.

Certainly, Wride had an enormous trove of material from this generous and eclectic collector, culling 200 pieces from an estimated 3,000-plus photographs and videos—from Robert Capa to Cindy Sherman, Diane Arbus to Cecil Beaton, Robert Mapplethrope to Bernd and Hilla Becher. The result is selection of works that, as the curator's statement expresses, "take risks and also demand a bit of risk from the viewer."

This statement applies most prominently to DeWoody's affinity for provocative nudes, like Nobuyoshi Araki's untitled Polaroid of a naked woman bound in a dark room, leaving the morbid backstory to our imagination. DeWoody is drawn to works in which the human body, at its most elemental, is as mysterious as an abstract painting and as fungible as putty—from Andre Kertesz's classic fun-house distortions of the human form to Mapplethorpe's modernist vision of the male profile and Mason Rader's "Be Good!," which merges three bodies into a pretzel and carries with it a feminist subtext.

Indeed, Wride's theme-driven journey through DeWoody's collection reveals a collector unafraid to engage spectators on issues of race, gender and sexuality, clustered among more benign—but no less compelling—areas of interest such as architecture, fashion and celebrity. There are works that directly confront homelessness, prostitution, gun violence and third-world poverty, finding visual poetry amid the squalor. Such juxtapositions are central to the works' success: Nathaniel Mary Quinn's video "Simply Beautiful" artfully counterbalances sounds from battlefield carnage atop images of disadvantaged African-American youth, and lays jaunty cartoon theme music over shots of vacant inner-city buildings. It's a potent statement of rage from the front lines of Black Lives Matter.

Not that middle-class comforts are any consolation. Skepticism over the supposed pleasures of the American dream manifests in Gregory Crewdson's untitled high-def print of a bus driver beckoning a child from a sidewalk outside her home at night, a work of ambivalence that, to my eyes, implies menace lurking underneath the manicured lawns of suburbia. James Casebere's "Subdivision With Spotlight" is a photograph of the artist's miniature model of a planned community, with its soul-crushing assemblage of uniform Stepford homes. And Jen O'Malley's "The Attic" is another creepy Polaroid, an image of a shadowy stairwell that will look ominous to anyone who's seen her share of horror films.

Most of these artists' names might not be familiar to most viewers, and their discovery is one of the excitements of "Still/Moving." Even works chosen by established artists are generally less iconic and therefore fresh; the Chuck Close photo in the show is not an extreme close-up of a face but of a sunflower. The Andy Warhol sextet of identical, color-tinted images is not of Mao but the Red Hot Chili Peppers, shot in the twilight of the artist's career. "Still/Moving" engages even the familiar in new contexts, thereby forming novel relationships to the work around it.

As a cinephile, though, I was most drawn to the videos in the exhibition, particularly the experimental collages that repurpose, and redefine, clips from film history. Johan Grimonprez's brooding agitprop "Doubletake" finds a correlative in the films and persona of Alfred Hitchcock, who creatively peaked in the 1960s, with the Cold War panic of the era and its doom-laden bluster about a nuclear winter. Phoebe Collings-James' mesmerizing mash-up "The Descent" is a work of giddy film-history deconstructionism, with nine miniature screens simultaneously projecting images of characters descending steps forward and backward, drawing parallels between "The Battleship Potemkin," "The Untouchables," the animated "Cinderella," "The Exorcist," "Paranormal Activity," "American Psycho" and more.

November 30, 2015

UNREALISM

Presented by Larry Gagosian and Jeffrey Deitch

December 2–6, 10 AM – 7 PM
Opening reception: Tuesday, December 1, 5–8 PM

The Moore Building
Miami Design District
191 NE 40th Street
Miami, FL 33137

Larry Gagosian and Jeffrey Deitch Collaborate to Present an Exhibition of New Figurative Painting and Sculpture in the Miami Design District

UNREALISM celebrates the recent revival of interest in figurative painting and sculpture. The exhibition features the work of more than fifty of the most original and compelling artists working in figuration from the 1980s to the present. The title points to the challenge of portraying contemporary reality where the real is often confused with the unreal.

The exhibition focuses on an emergent wave of painters and sculptors who are exploring new approaches to figurative imagery. In doing so, they are also generating renewed interest in innovative precursors.

Artists exhibited include:

John Ahearn
Jia Aili
Njideka Akunyili Crosby
Pawel Althamer
Kai Althoff
Sascha Braunig
Cecily Brown
Glenn Brown
Francesco Clemente
Joe Coleman
Dan Colen
George Condo
John Currin
Mira Dancy
Peter Doig
Marlene Dumas
Nicole Eisenman
Jana Euler
Rachel Feinstein
Urs Fischer
Eric Fischl
Jonathan Gardner
Apostolos Georgiou
Duane Hanson
Barkley L. Hendricks
Jamian Juliano-Villani
Hayv Kahraman
Y.Z. Kami
Sanya Kantarovsky
Kurt Kauper
Karen Kilimnik
Martin Kippenberger
Jeff Koons
Ella Kruglyanskaya
Tala Madani
Kerry James Marshall
Tony Matelli
Meleko Mokgosi
Chris Ofili
Djordje Ozbolt
Elizabeth Peyton
Richard Phillips
Richard Prince
Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Lee Quinones
Neo Rauch
Walter Robinson
David Salle
Chéri Samba
Wilhelm Sasnal
Jenny Saville
Julian Schnabel
Dana Schutz
Emily Mae Smith
Swoon
Henry Taylor
Kon Trubkovich
Michael Williams
Chloe Wise
Lynette Yiadom-Boakye
Lisa Yuskavage
Zeng Fanzhi
Jakub Julian Ziolkowski

(Continue to page 2)

Figuration is one of the oldest art forms, but it is continually evolving, reflecting contemporary concepts of human identity. Figurative art responds to technical innovations like printing, photography and digital reproduction, but the ancient craft of rendering the figure renews itself with each subsequent generation. The artists featured in *UNREALISM* work within the figurative canon without becoming academic. They are able to make a venerable tradition in art completely of our time.

UNREALISM will take place over four floors around the atrium of The Moore Building, a 1921 Art Deco-style, former furniture showroom that is also the current home of the ICA Miami.

Larry Gagosian and Jeffrey Deitch have been colleagues since 1979 and have worked with many of the same artists. *UNREALISM* is their first collaboration. In October of this year, Gagosian Gallery opened its fifteenth location in Mayfair, London. Jeffrey Deitch's most recent curatorial project is "The Extreme Present," one of the inaugural exhibitions for the new Aishti Foundation in Beirut.

The exhibition preview will take place on December 1 from 5–8pm, along with the celebration of GARAGE Magazine No. 9. *King of Arms*, a procession and performance by Rashaad Newsome, will pass through the Design District from 6:30pm to 7:30pm.

King of Arms Krew (Miami Chapter) Mass Processional Performance will include members of the Miami Bike Life Crew, who will perform ambitious stunts on ATVs, dirt bikes, and sport bikes; the Florida Memorial marching band, which will play an original score by Newsome; The King of Arms Vogue Knights, Newsome's New York-based vogue troop; the King of Arms Float; and a troop of locals who share Newsome's reverence for custom car culture.

GARAGE Magazine No. 9 features a cover designed by Rem Koolhaas, the architect of the recently inaugurated permanent home of Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in Moscow. The issue also includes texts on celebrated artists such as Alexander Calder and Bridget Riley, panel discussions featuring the likes of David Adjaye, Shane Smith and Marc Newson, and an array of dynamic augmentations with the GARAGE App: readers can experience the movement of Calder's sculptures from the printed page, play Japanese collective Chim Pom's specially designed arcade game or activate their Super Rat, and enter the sonic world of cyborg artist Neil Harbisson.

The Miami Design District, developed by Craig Robins in partnership with L Real Estate, is a neighborhood dedicated to innovative fashion, design, art, architecture and dining. It features distinctive architectural projects by Sou Fujimoto, Aranda/Lasch, Johnson Marklee and other leading young architects; and public commissions of art and design by John Baldessari, Buckminster Fuller, Zaha Hadid and Marc Newson.

For further information please contact the gallery at newyork@gagosian.com or at +1.212.744.2313. All images are subject to copyright. Gallery approval must be granted prior to reproduction.

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Please join the conversation with Gagosian Gallery on Twitter (@Gagosian), Facebook (@GagosianGallery), Google+ (@+Gagosian), Instagram (@gagosiangallery), Tumblr (@GagosianGallery), and Artsy (@Gagosian-Gallery) via the hashtag #UNREALISM.

Gagosian Gallery was established in 1980 by Larry Gagosian.

M+B

THE ROOT

17 Brilliant Black Artists Featured at Art Basel in Miami

By Julie Walker
December 6, 2015

Black art matters here at Art Basel Miami Beach, Dec. 3-6, 2015, the premier art show in the United States. During a time when "Black lives matter" has become a rallying cry for people across the country, it is important to remember that black artists have been contributing to social-justice movements from the beginning of time. They chronicle the challenges we face and the inequality we deal with, while also celebrating the lives we live. It has been said that art is colorblind; whether true or not, here at ABMB, black and brown artists enjoy healthy sales and enormous adoration.

Many of the works at the Jack Shainman Gallery, which represents a roster full of black artists, sold out. While the biggest names in the art world show at ABMB, several other black artists are on view at the more than two-dozen satellite art fairs that revolve around the big show. A viewer would be hard-pressed to walk into any show here in Miami and not spot artwork from someone of color—or, for that matter, not spot someone of color walking the show. One such show, the Prizm Art Fair, is completely devoted to black artists.

National Mary Quinn with two of his works: *Big Bertha*, 2015, and *Class Photo*, 2015

Nathaniel Mary Quinn

Nathaniel Mary Quinn's work was shown at the Rhona Hoffman Gallery at ABMB. Quinn told The Root that he is proud of what he has accomplished, given his hard life growing up in a broken family in public housing on the South Side of Chicago. He told Artsy, "I hope to convey a sense of how our experiences, both good and bad, operate to construct our identities. I also want to portray a mutual relationship between the acceptable and the unacceptable, the grotesque and what is aesthetically pleasing."

NATHANIEL MARY QUINN: *Back and Forth*

September 11 – October 24, 2015

Reception for the artist:
Friday, September 11, 2015, 5 – 7:30 pm

Nathaniel Mary Quinn, *Junebug,* 2015
Black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel, oil pastel, oil paint, paint stick, acrylic silver leaf on Coventry Vellum Paper, 50 x 50 inches

Rhona Hoffman Gallery is pleased to present ***Back and Forth*,** the first solo exhibition with New York-based artist **Nathaniel Mary Quinn.** Fractured features, spliced patterns, and shrunken or distended proportions merge together to create Quinn's abstract-figurative works on paper. While seemingly assembled from collage, each of the ten artworks in the gallery is meticulously created directly on the flat plane of the paper surface to achieve the illusion that they are formed from exterior sources. His working methods are rooted in free association and intuition, evident in his use of color and pattern to either emphasize or recess certain facial feature.

Quinn's works are highly autobiographical and the genesis of each figure emerges from an intimate vision that reverberates with unresolved memories, feelings, or associations from his past experiences. A Chicago native, Quinn's upbringing in the Robert Taylor Homes public housing was deeply impactful; violence, abandonment, and poverty were familiar obstacles in his personal narrative. In combining that history with an exhaustive range of source materials into his practice, his figures balance between grotesque and beautiful- threatening and alluring. Through this amalgamation, the regenerative human nature of surviving trauma, thriving against opposition, and fostering an identity are made palpable on the rendered bodies and faces.

The figures also enliven topics and issues in his contemporary socio-cultural moment. There is a dialogue in the contorted and collaged figures that places Quinn in a constellation of artists such as Francis Bacon, Lucien Freud, and Neo Rauch. However, Quinn's practice and artistic intention remains oriented in his present day, where the specters of the past collide with the present context.

An interdisciplinary artist based in Brooklyn, New York, **Nathaniel Mary Quinn** (b. 1977, Chicago, IL) received a MFA in Painting and Drawing from New York University and a BA in Art and Psychology from Wabash College, Indiana. Quinn's work was first introduced to the public in a group exhibition with Artists Space Gallery in 2002 and through the Bronx Museum of the Arts in 2004. In 2014, Quinn had a critically acclaimed solo exhibition, "Past/Present" at Pace London Gallery. He is the recipient of the Lorraine Hansberry Artistic, Performance, and Fine Arts Award and a two-time winner of the National Arts Club Prize. Past exhibitions have included the Museum of Contemporary and African Diasporan Arts, New York; Rush Arts Gallery, New York; The Bronx Museum of the Arts.

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CHICAGO READER

Nathaniel Mary Quinn's portraits recreate the grotesque specters of the Robert Taylor Homes A series of large-scale abstracts bring the past vividly to life.

By Annette Elliot
October 13, 2015

Nathaniel Mary Quinn remembers drawing the fluid black outline of a cowboy on the drab walls of the apartment in the Robert Taylor Homes where he lived as a child. In the concrete public housing high-rise, adventures came to life, carefully copied from the pages of his favorite comic books. His father, an illiterate gambler from Mississippi, taught him how to draw on brown paper bags from the neighborhood grocery store.

"He would tell me to draw from my shoulder," Quinn recalls. "He would take the erasers off the pencils and tell me never to erase. Every mark has meaning. If you make a mistake, make use of that mistake and turn it into something that can work for you."

In a series of large-scale abstract portraits currently on view at Rhona Hoffman Gallery, the artist captures grotesque specters from his past in black charcoal, oil pastel, gouache and acrylic gold leaf. Disfigured and distorted faces stare mournfully out at the viewer. Cursed by unsettling metamorphoses, whether a prominent pig snout or the flaring nostrils of an enraged bull, the characters simultaneously repel and attract.

Memories from the artist's past continue to haunt him. "Walking down the street, I get a vision. I never write them down because I never forget them. My visions are often memories I continue to hold on to, the manifestation of an indelible mark made on me by certain experiences."

Quinn was the youngest of five boys. His mother, crippled after suffering two strokes, managed to support her family with disability checks from the government. He remembers the constant struggle to pay the bills. "I imagine the rent was maybe 50 dollars a month, and the people who lived in the projects struggled to pull together 50 dollars each month." In the winter, the family would often turn on the oven to heat the apartment to avoid paying the electric bill.

Ms. Lykes, 2015
COURTESY OF RHONA HOFFMAN GALLERY AND THE ARTIST

Quinn paints figments of memory, both real and unreal. Like a surgeon, he meticulously constructs the fractured geometry of the face with charcoal, construction paper, tape and an X-Acto knife. "We are all trying to keep it together. We fight to convince spectators of what appears to be a seamless existence, but inside is tension, rupture and things that don't quite fit. That is the raw you. I want to paint that."

In Ms. Lykes, a portrait of one of Quinn's grammar school teachers, a sour-looking woman sits with her hands demurely crossed in her lap. She wears a delicate satin blouse embroidered with crimson flowers. Her face is ripped open by a large snout, her eyes cast askew. Quinn has not forgotten Ms. Lykes or the hurt she inflicted when she discouraged him from applying to Culver Academies, a private boarding school in Indiana.

"I recall Ms. Lykes, in particular, remarking 'You jus' gonna go to DuSable High School like the rest of dem niggahs.' DuSable High School was never considered a particularly good high school—or even a safe one for that matter. It was seen as the school for the 'project kids,' the poor kids who did not have a future. Ms. Lykes certainly could not see, or refused to envision, that I might be admitted into a fancy boarding school for rich kids."

Today he lives in Brooklyn, in a small two-bedroom apartment in Bedford Stuyvesant. Brown paper covers the walls on which he draws a delicate outline of a face. He often paints for 48 hours without sleep to keep up with the demand for his work. In his paintings he returns to his childhood apartment, or what he remembers of it, the articles of clothing scattered on the floor, a half-eaten loaf of bread, and a two-liter Royal Crown Cola.

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MODERNPAINTERS
ART / ARCHITECTURE / DESIGN / PERFORMANCE / FILM

Vision Quest: An artist channels his past through his painting

By Mike Pepi
September 2015

Vision Quest

An artist channels his past through his painting

BY MIKE PEPI

"THAT'S KENNY-RAY!"

A slim man emerges from a composite of several faces sandwiched in between swathes of fur and a gray coat. This particular figure is delicately laid on a white background. He is disfigured but poised, gazing back from perfectly modeled eyes. In his painted form, Kenny-Ray is the product of a revelation by Nathaniel Mary Quinn, a Chicago-born artist working in New York. He was also, about two decades ago, Quinn's neighbor in the Robert Taylor housing projects on the South Side of Chicago. "I hadn't thought about Kenny-Ray since I was 13 years old. He was a good friend of the family, but he wasn't like most of the guys in the community, who were gangbangers or hustlers. He was a nice, wholesome guy." Kenny-Ray was fixed in Quinn's subconscious, waiting to be the subject of a practice that is obsessed with the cathartic release of images from his past.

"Most of my work comes from visions," Quinn says. "I'm just a medium through which things are passing." These are from within, pulled out by the artist's profound faith in exploration of the self. While Quinn's visions look inward to the artist's memories, they resonate with the untidiness of identity at large and have become a fruitful source of raw material. "They arise without warning—those quirky, weird situations that we cannot possibly orchestrate," he explains during a recent visit to his bedroom studio in a three-story brownstone in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. "When I receive the vision, I have no idea of its meaning. The one thing that does stay with me is this visceral impulse to make it. Once I act on that, the work tells me what it is about." Quinn grows visibly excited as he dives into his process. His tempo quickens. "The exploration of the self is by far the most interesting subject."

His meticulous process acts as a vehicle of sorts for this rich psychohistory. In the work's final form—collage-like in appearance, but actually a flat picture plane—various plots of fabric, skin, or objects compete to constitute the identity that a viewer might ascribe to it. Quinn makes these highly personal images evocative for all audiences. Each subject has a haunting complexity, an effect that is amplified by its rendering. He assembles his patchworks in chunks, obscuring his view of the rest of the composition with heavy paper before he pulls it back to reveal the unfolding character. The separate components are rendered with an exacting degree of verisimilitude.

The artist's hyperrealist tendency is a function of both his classical training and his foundational encounters with drawing. The bulk of his works are made on paper, using a combination of gouache, oil stick, paint stick, and charcoal, materials he has long worked to master. "The sharper your skill set is, the more effective you are in communicating—but the soul has to be there," he says. "My father used to remove the erasers from pencils. He would say, 'Draw with confidence. Make use of every mark.'"

An early talent and fervor for depicting the figure stayed with him throughout his academic education and his early work. He was a standout talent in grade school, and it was his skill that produced a path out of the Robert Taylor houses and eventually to NYU for a master of fine arts. Still, it took a shift in approach over the last two years to cultivate the energy that now characterizes his efforts. "Before, I was making pieces about race relations, the critique of hip-hop culture. I thought I had to make that work because I'm a 'black artist,'" he explains. "One day I just thought to myself, you know, I don't enjoy my studio practice." He abandoned work with explicitly political overtones and transitioned to an approach that mined his past, in which memory is key. "It's about the overall atmospheric factors that play a part in one's identity. What that actually looks like, and how it affects you," he says. In this way, Quinn's work is equally about race, but the issues that come up, channeled through a deeply personal lens, are put into sharper focus. "By virtue of being an African-American," he offers, "that identity is going to bleed through my work."

Accordingly, his influences are a mix of the formally apparent and conceptually idiosyncratic. Quinn has stated an

Monique, 2014. Charcoal, oil pastel, paint stick, and gouache on Lenox paper, 36 x 43 in.

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"Most of my work comes from visions. I'm just a medium through which things are passing."

outright reverence for the quietly confident lines of Indian artist Tyeb Mehta, and references to Francis Bacon seem to loom over most discussions of his work. But many influences transcend fine art: the production quality of Kanye West or the fluidity of Richard Pryor and Redd Foxx. "An artist should have the same type of punch," he says. "I have a conviction about humanity, and it just so happens that I express it through my artwork."

The themes of abandonment, death, and loss permeate his visions, a reflection of his upbringing in a notoriously violent section of Chicago. In the provocatively titled "Black Jesus" series, completed for Rawson Projects in February, Quinn turned the Lower East Side space into a partial reconstruction of his mother's living room. The front of the gallery featured a domestic setting complete with a television playing one of the two videos made for the show—a mix of archival footage of housing projects, scenes of urban violence, and gospel music. In the back, Quinn projected a short film, *When Sunday Come: Memory*. It shows a woman entering a tenement bedroom to pray over her child: "Please, in the name of Jesus, watch over my baby boy / When I am dead and gon'...."

The entire ensemble harks back to the Christian faith that sustained his early childhood. "I just didn't feel like the Jesus hanging on my wall had what it took to deliver me from the evils that my mother wanted to protect me from," he recalls. In the center of the dark gallery hung Quinn's *Black Jesus*, dimly illuminated by votive candles. "I painted the Jesus that

FROM LEFT:
Nathaniel Mary Quinn, 2015.

Black Jesus, 2015. Charcoal, gouache, oil pastel, oil paint, and paint stick on Coventry vellum paper, 74¼ x 44 in.

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I thought would be strong enough to get me and my mom through the projects." Quinn's *Black Jesus* is conspicuously well endowed, with a gold chain and boxing gloves. "He is confronting you. He is not going to wait passively." He stands on holy ground, and has the cloven hooves of a sheep. Even with the biblical iconography, it's far from the meek Christ who would turn the other cheek.

While working on *Black Jesus* he received the vision for *Junebug*, an erstwhile uncle channeled into a painting that he will show at Chicago's Rhona Hoffman Gallery. Everything Quinn knows about Junebug is from his mother's secondhand stories. He wore inexplicably dapper clothes and possessed a quick temper and a loud personality, traits that Quinn integrates using specific iconographic choices. For *Junebug*, the defining feature is a bull nose complete with a massive gold ring, a signifier of his uncle's material wealth and bombastic nature.

These days, Quinn is working on several pieces at once, a production schedule dictated by the fickle nature of his chief source of inspiration as much as by a recent uptick in his exhibition schedule. In September he will have his solo show at Rhona Hoffman, followed by outings at Luce Gallery in Turin, Italy, and M+B gallery in Los Angeles. During our last visit, he was in the midst of producing a series of works on paper for Rhona Hoffman.

FROM LEFT: *Kenny-Ray*, 2013. Charcoal and gouache on Lenox paper, 50 x 38 in.

King Kong Ain't Got Nothing on Me, 2013. Charcoal, gouache, and oil pastel on Coventry vellum paper, 86½ x 61½ in.

These new pieces represent a seamless transition from his first solo exhibition in London, where Pace Gallery mounted "Past/Present," featuring several new works on paper from 2014. In *Motorcycle Pig*, 2014, a massive green arm swings down from the torso. The charged figure is punctuated by a precise rendering of materials ranging from fur to metal armor, ornamentation atop an already unreal composite of signs from Quinn's visions. Gorilla feet terminate the hairy legs that emerge from what appears to be an armored breastplate colored teal. Here, the irregular patchwork of facial elements typical of the artist's figures is dominated by a hog's snout. The entire conglomeration sits beside a vintage motorcycle.

While such works represent the bulk of his recent output, it is of little interest to Quinn why certain visions manifest themselves as, say, a work on paper or a video, lending a degree of psychologically indebted chance to the future of his practice. "To explore this world," he says, "you have to have a sort of blind faith." The images he sees are fleeting and spontaneous—"I never write them down. But I never forget them," he says. The work's function can't be determined either. To assume such an intent would contradict Quinn's belief in the messy, indeterminate nature of identity. "There is a real sense of freedom when you lose self-control. Once you give something a label, then you stop exploring it because you already think you know what it is." MP

PACE LONDON

PRESS RELEASE

Nathaniel Mary Quinn

Past/Present

6-10 Lexington Street
London W1F 0LB

5 September – 4 October 2014

Opening: Thursday 4 September, 6-8 pm.

Pace London is delighted to present *Past/Present,* an exhibition of new works by Brooklyn-based artist Nathaniel Mary Quinn from 5 September to 4 October 2014 at 6-10 Lexington Street.

Quinn's vivid, large-scale paper works are an assemblage of facial features which can be read as abstract-figurative works. The pieces deal with the complex construction of identity, inevitably influenced by past memories and present experiences, but executed in the moment.

"My work arrives somewhere between abstraction and figuration; the cuts and breaks in the image seem to have an independent life within each work. Not simply the happenstance of a meeting place, the gap or break is a type of functional geometry, opening up spaces within and between imagery. My work is the result of a highly instinctual and visceral activity, without the guidance of a plan." Nathaniel Mary Quinn, July, 2014.

The artist takes great interest in mixing media, subverting the traditional use of black charcoal, oil-paint, paint-stick, gouache, oil pastel and cardboard onto the same surface. Although reminiscent of Synthetic Cubism, Quinn's works function outside of these historical references and reveal themselves as autobiographical, narrative and representational. The 'hybrid creatures' that appear in these distinctive compositions are formed from a mixture of family portraits, popular articles, and advertisements.

The artist's personal history has a tremendous influence on his work. Reflecting on his difficult upbringing and the challenges he faced in his young life⊕ losing his mother at a very young age and later being abandoned by his father and brothers⊕ every work is a conscious endeavour to free his mind from excessive introspection. Quinn aims to explore his own human identity and life experiences, which have formed and continue to shape his character.

Highlights of the exhibition include *Diane*, a small piece that features an assembled portrait presenting both geometry and softness, yet robustly exaggerated by contorted and flattened surface manipulations. A fleshy mouth and a necklace would call to mind an archetypical female character, yet the viewer is left disorientated without clear, immediate gender identification.

The constant fracture between faces and the body correlate to Quinn's past and present experience; a cathartic and personal practice through which he gives life back to his subjects.

The unique interplay of subject, form and medium that can be seen in Quinn's work conveys the artist's own sense of artistic freedom. The work sits in tension on the boundary of what can be seen as purposely grotesque or aesthetically pleasing, presenting both beauty and melancholy.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Nathaniel Mary Quinn was born in 1977 in Chicago, US. Having received his Bachelor of Fine Arts from Wabash College, Quinn obtained his Master of Fine Arts from New York University. Quinn's work was first introduced to the public in a group exhibition at Artists Space in 2002 and through The Bronx Museum of the Arts in 2004. He is the recipient of the Lorraine Hansberry Artistic, Performance, and Fine Arts Award and a two-time winner of the National Arts Club Prize. His work has been exhibited in a number of one-person and group exhibitions: one-person exhibitions include *Hybrids: The Windows Exhibit* at the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts (MoCADA), Brooklyn, *The Magic Stick* at Rush Arts Gallery, New York and most recently, *Species* at Bunker 259, Brooklyn. Group exhibitions include *The Mythic Female* and *Macro-Micro* at Satori Gallery, New York, *American Beauty* at Susan-Inglett Gallery, New York, *Corpus Americus* at Driscoll Babcock Gallery, New York, *"Look At Me: Portraits from Manet to the Present,"* at the Leila Heller Gallery. He currently lives and works in Brooklyn, NY.

PACE

Pace is a leading contemporary art gallery representing many of the most significant international artists and estates of the 20th and 21st centuries. Founded by Arne Glimcher in Boston in 1960 and led by Marc Glimcher, Pace has been a constant, vital force in the art world and has introduced many renowned artists' work to the public for the first time. Pace has mounted more than 800 exhibitions, including scholarly exhibitions that have subsequently travelled to museums, and published nearly 450 exhibition catalogues. Today Pace has ten locations worldwide: four in New York; two in London; one in Beijing, one in Hong Kong and two temporary spaces in Menlo Park, California and Zuoz, Switzerland. Pace London inaugurated its flagship gallery at 6 Burlington Gardens with the exhibition *Rothko/Sugimoto: Dark Paintings and Seascapes*, in 2012.

Pace London at 6-10 Lexington Street is open to the public from Tuesday to Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. www.pacegallery.com/

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Image: Nathaniel Mary Quinn, *Diane*, black charcoal, oil-pastel, oil-paint, paint-stick, gouache on Lenox Paper 94 cm x 94 cm (37" x 37"), 2014.

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HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE

Nathaniel Mary Quinn's Disfigured Portraits Would Make Even Francis Bacon Shudder

September 9, 2014

Gazing upon a series of Nathaniel Mary Quinn's paintings feels like staring into a Ripley's-esque hall of medical oddities and botched surgeries, situated alongside the black sheep and circus performers themselves who'd banded into a cast of outcasts. And yet the multimedia hybrids feel above all truthful. The portraits -- bulging, distorted and ripped to shreds -- capture something real about our bruised senses of self. Something we often look away from.

Quinn's series "Past/Present" features large scale works combining black charcoal, oil-paint, paint-stick, gouache, oil pastel and cardboard. Somewhere between Wangechi Mutu and Francis Bacon, the works are as intoxicating as they are repulsive, like a stranger you're eager to know though already frightened by. Quinn's images possess a perpetual sense of now-ness, as if capturing a person at a particular moment, tangled up in all the moods, memories and whatever else happens to be lingering in the air.

(Detail) King Kong Ain't Got Nothing On Me, 2013, black charcoal, gouache, oil pastel on Coventry vellum paper

When did you first start creating art and how did it affect other aspects of your life?

As a child, my mother allowed me to draw on the walls of our apartment. She would just clean the walls and let me draw again, repeatedly. My work seems to investigate my childhood upbringing, my past experiences, and my humanity.

Since 2002, soon after earning my MFA from New York University, I embarked on an artistic pursuit of creating work predicated on black identity, racial and gender politics, or a critique of mainstream culture. I presumed that such was the correct path for me. Two years ago, I disengaged from that path. My conviction for such issues lacked the potency necessary for sustaining my studio art practice. Moreover, I had come to accept that I was unhappy with my art practice. There was something more that I wanted to explore, although I had no scathing idea as to what such a conviction looked or felt like. Then, I began making work based on my visions, absent of any knowledge as to what these visions meant. I simply had a visceral response to these visions. For the first time in more than ten years, I was consumed by a confident sense of happiness and completeness. I felt like a child in a magnificent playground.

By this time, I had stopped making preliminary sketches. The visions were so explicitly clear, that making pre-sketches was unnecessary. After completing my first body of work, it had dawned on me that instead of composing a theory upon which my work would be based, my work would reveal to me what I, on some known or unknown level, continue to endure. My work would function as a sound reflection of my identity and human experience. My work reveals unresolved issues as related to my family, my childhood experiences, and the link between such experiences and my current disposition. My work allows me to explore the power of being present, while bringing to surface buried memories culled from my childhood experiences and upbringing in Chicago. In this journey, I acknowledge the pain and sorrow that I continue to endure, the sense of progress that I enjoy, and the sense of deliverance upon which I stand.

My work is also influenced by my upbringing in the Robert Taylor Homes of Chicago, which were, for many years, one of the most infamous and dangerous tenement housing complexes in the nation. I was the youngest of five boys. By the time I was fifteen years old, my other brothers were already young adults, along with being high school dropouts, drug addicts, and alcoholics. My parents were illiterate. My mother, Mary Quinn, was crippled due to having two strokes. My father, Joe, frequented pool halls for the sake of gambling in order to feed our family.

By my eighth grade year, I won an academic scholarship to attend Culver Academies, a private boarding high school in Indiana. Soon after the start of the school year, my mother passed away. The following month, upon arriving home for Thanksgiving break, I found an empty apartment. My family was gone, and I have not seen them since.

I wondered why I had such an obsession with creating jagged, fragmented, discontinuous portraits and figures. Now, I am beginning to understand: the dilemma of unresolved abandonment, separation, and attachment issues prevalent in my identity and sub-consciousness. Yet, there is something redemptive within this context, of separate, seemingly unrelated, parts mending themselves together, managing, somehow, to achieve a sense of cohesion and solidarity. Such was compounded with relationships I found between my work and Cubism, as well as the works of artists like Francis Bacon and Neo Rauch. The works of Francis Bacon are especially powerful for me, where his expressive and graphic approach creates a relationship between the grotesque and the beautiful.

Clown, 2014, black charcoal, oil-pastel, oil-paint, paint-stick, gouache on Lenox Paper

What information goes into these portraits and how do you translate this information into image?

My portraits and figures tend to be based on people that I knew during my childhood. In some cases, they represent people that I currently know. However, it is a bit more complicated than that. People do not exist without that which creates them, without that which influences their behavior, their belief-systems, their conditioned thought patterns. I am more interested in what is underneath. I want to convey all that is hidden.

And, of course, all of my portraits and figures are extensions of my identity. Perhaps I would not be who I am without these people. The real dilemma rests in understanding the link between my experiences with these people and my current disposition as a human being. Hence, my studio practice is inundated with exacting my focus on being as free as possible from all conditioned thought patterns and belief-systems. This requires the removal of excessive thinking, for it is our “thought-mind” that happens to be poisoned with illusions that are not true, but appears to be true due to the amount of emotional energy that we invest in such illusions. For example, in my work, I explore the reasoning behind what may appear to be feelings of worthlessness. By all means, I was, in fact, abandoned by my family when I was fifteen years old. Therefore, logically speaking, as a fifteen year old, the bridge is not that wide between being deserted by the only people who proclaimed and demonstrated their unwavering love for you and the notion of not being worthy of authentic love and compassion: “If your own family doesn’t want you, then who will?” But, is this true?

As an adult, I now realize the existence of other explanations behind their sudden and abrupt departure: severe lack of money, poverty, being evicted, forthcoming violence. However, it is nearly impossible to understand this as a child. Before you know it, and against your will, your mind develops a belief-system that impedes upon your ability to function happily. For years, I ruined all of my significant relationships and friendships on the promise of this belief system: “How can I be sure that you won’t abandoned me if my own family deserted me?” And I feel this everyday and put it into my work, to create what I feel, within the context of being present, of embracing my state of being, in order to get underneath it all, to explore it, to uncover, as much as possible, the inner-workings of my identity. This is a highly grotesque process; yet, it is very beautiful because of the power of self-acceptance, even against a collective perception that works relentlessly to convince you to believe in the benefits of hiding your scars and bruises.

Monique, 2014 black charcoal, oil-pastel, oil-paint, paint-stick, gouache on Lenox Paper

Your works also toy with gender in interesting ways. Can you explain what argument you're making in this respect, if any?

I am not making an argument in my work as it relates to gender. I employ any visual reference necessary for the creation of my work. I presume gender comes into play as a result of my mother. In some way, I am always painting and drawing my mother, especially being that I lost her when I was fifteen years old. Many people can relate to this. That sort of pain never leaves you. You can only turn down the volume of the pain, but the sound never goes off. I continue to yearn for her, so perhaps she is coming through my work, somehow, presenting herself in various ways.

This show reminded me of Mickalene Thomas' recent exhibition “Tete de Femme,”which similarly explored the fractured geometry of the face. What similarities and differences do you think apply?

Mickalene Thomas’ work carries a significant amount of weight. Her paintings seem to explore the historical means by which beauty is articulated on canvas. Her collage-like paintings place black women within a narrative from which black women were traditionally excluded. Her 2012 exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum, “The Origin of the Universe,” highlighted the prowess in Mickalene’s artistic career; in some cases, porcelain skin and blonde curls – as evident in the works of Gustav Courbet, for example, were replaced with beautiful black women, bringing to surface the malleable and expressive nature of femininity. It is wonderful that such beauty is being delivered through the subject of black women, and Mickalene is masterful at this.

This past June, her recent exhibition, “Tete de Femme,” at Lehmann Maupin Gallery, presents a relatively fresh and courageous direction for Mickalene –- not a departure; instead, a development from her previous work –- and such may have been developed in her studio practice, particularly as this growth seems to be related to her work with models, make-up, various photo sessions, and experimentation with collages. The persistence in Mickalene’s acute interest in creating correlations between art history and the present moment remains to be relevant.

Although, visually speaking, there are similarities between my work and that of Mickalene Thomas’ in “Tete de Femme,” there are, indeed, differences worth noting.

“Tete de Femme” appears to be the first public exhibition of such a development in Mickalene’s work, and while various correlations can be made between her work and mine, the exploration in my work stems from a different place, and the development with my particular body of work began three years ago –- before “Tete de Femme” publicly existed.

Clearly, my work carries influences from Cubism; however, my aim is to explore my humanity and to become more aware of the link between various past experiences and my current disposition. In this effect, there exists no primary interest in positioning black men or women within an exclusive narrative. My work is not governed by the exploration of Cubism and contemporary subject matter. My work is governed by the exploration of my present human existence and the personal history by which it has been informed.

Where do you find inspiration outside of the art world?

I find inspiration in music and film. In particular, I watch many Youtube videos of hip-hop producers working in the studio as they make beats for new rap songs. I especially enjoy this one video clip of Kanye West working in the studio. He seems incredibly free, working in the moment, feeling the energy of the music that he is creating, being completely liberated by the sound and the bass. This also seems to be true of various musicians, such as D'Angelo, Stevie Wonder, and Raphael Saadiq. When you listen to their music, you sense the existence of effortless energy, where excessive thought is not, or was not, a part of the equation.

And I have an obsession with watching films where the protagonist is seemingly outgunned, or intellectually challenged, or diminutive in a certain fashion. Films that come to mind are "Forrest Gump" and "Shawshank Redemption," for example.

Pig, 2014, black charcoal, oil-pastel, oil-paint, paint-stick, gouache on Lenox Paper

My parents were illiterate. As a result, along with other reasons, I have struggled, throughout my life, with feelings of inferiority as they relate to my level of academic intelligence, and I know what it feels like to so eagerly want to escape a place that did not seem rightfully suited for you, a place in which you felt trapped with no means of escape. However, like in the films, redemption, somehow, is achieved, and hard work has a great deal to do with it.

If you could compare your artistic process to another activity -- making spaghetti, performing surgery, riding a bicycle -- what would you say and why?

I always say that my studio art practice is equivalent to surgery because there are so many intricate and highly important processes necessary for making one of my pieces. I spend long, arduous hours to perform at optimal levels in order to achieve a perfection that is suitable for me, and, like any surgeon, mediocrity is not an option. And I have an obsessive compulsion for order and organization. I am addicted to processes being clean and sharp, absent of mishaps and mistakes. For the body of work at Pace London, I arrived to a point where I worked every single day, Monday through Sunday, from 10 a.m. to 4 a.m. –- for three and a half months, non-stop.

Quinn's "Past/Present" runs from September 5 until October 4, 2014 at Pace Gallery in London. See more work from the exhibition below.

M+B

Time Out London

Nathaniel Mary Quinn: Past/Present

September 8, 2014

The large paper works of Nathaniel Mary Quinn are driven by past personal experiences

Akin to grotesquely beautiful manifestations of profound inner visions, the large paper works of Nathaniel Mary Quinn are driven by past personal experiences, from losing his mother as a child to being abruptly abandoned by his father and brothers. Using whatever means necessary to express his visions, he brings together images from photographs, advertisements, as well as combining numerous types of media such as black charcoal, oil paint, gouache, and more. The key piece on display is Diane, an assembled portrait with fragmented facial features not unlike works of Synthetic Cubism, and inspired by the memory of the woman who informed him of his family's departure.

M+B

The INDEPENDENT

Nathaniel Mary Quinn: Artist who grew up in Chicago poverty chooses London for first show

By Nick Clark
September 4, 2014

When Nathaniel Mary Quinn was growing up in one of Chicago's poorest housing projects he would be regularly woken by gunshots fired by warring gangs outside.

Three decades on, he has shaken off a troubled upbringing – abandoned by his family at the age of 15 – to become a "rising star" of the New York art scene. And his gallery has chosen London to make his big debut.

Mr Quinn's exhibition Past/Present opened in Pace London, the UK arm of one of New York's most prestigious galleries, on Friday.

"It's exciting and scary," he told The Independent. "It's the American dream, I'm very excited. I wasn't on the radar for a long time. People seeing my stuff this year was seeing it for the first time. Now they're raving about it."

The show runs for a month and includes new work in oil and charcoal from the Brooklyn-based artist which come to terms with his troubled upbringing.

Quinn arrives in London, 20 years after escaping gunfire and gangs

He said: "The gallery was thinking about how to mobilise my career and thought London was the best place to start. The art world here embraces artists in my position more."

While he is almost completely unknown in London, there is a lot of buzz around Mr Quinn in New York especially after Pace chose to represent him in May.

Dexter Wimberly, who came across the artist's work in his role as an independent curator in New York, said: "Nathaniel is a rising star; he's beginning to get the recognition he deserves for his work. As a young artist he has a huge future ahead of him. Coming to the attention to Pace Gallery is an amazing step forward for his career."

Mr Wimberly, who is now director of strategic planning at Independent Curators International, said buzz had begun a year ago at two shows featuring Mr Quinn's work, which had key people from the art world attending. These included a trustee of the Whitney Museum of American Art and a powerful gallerist who had collaborated with Jeff Koons.

Yet the New York art scene is a world away from where Mr Quinn, 37, grew up. He was raised in the poverty-stricken projects, the equivalent of UK housing estates, on the south side of Chicago, buildings which have subsequently been torn down.

'Diane, 2014' by Nathaniel Mary Quinn (Damian Griffiths)

"Where I lived was populated by gang violence, I grew up seeing shootings and killings. Everyone living there was a witness to poverty and crime. You knew at a young age you could be killed," he said.

Growing up, conditions were hard, with the lights constantly being disconnected, and his family turning on the oven to heat the apartment.

He managed to avoid joining a gang, although most of his friends did. He was known instead for his art, something he had done since a small child.

"I've been making art my entire life," Mr Quinn said. He learnt to draw by copying comic books and he became known as an artist in the neighbourhood.

"I've always wanted to be an artist; there was never any question about that in my life. All my friends knew me as an artist. I was challenged to art duels by other kids."

He secured a scholarship to a prestigious private college Culver Military Academy in Indiana at the age of 15, which would prove his way out of the projects. "I woke up there and heard birds singing, and I knew I was in a different land altogether; I was accustomed to waking up to gunshots."

Yet his mother died a month after he joined Culver, and then weeks after that he returned home to find his father and four brothers had left. He has not seen them in the 22 years since. "My life since that was not good. I was drinking a lot and in constant distress and pain," he said.

After high school, college and then graduate school he worked as a substitute teacher and then taught at-risk youth in the criminal justice system.

Less than a year ago his art career took an "upward swing," when he started painting about issues from his upbringing and his family history and he could give up his day job. "I find making art now thrilling. It used to feel like a job, but now it feels fun and challenging."

He added: "The whole thing about the buzz is surreal. It feels like I'm getting a gain in my life that is equivalent to all I have lost in my life. I've lost my entire family, my sense of belonging. Now I feel God is giving it to me back tenfold."

Past/Present opened in Pace London, the UK arm of one of New York's most prestigious galleries, on Friday.

M+B

AnOther Magazine

An Unusual Artist: Nathaniel Mary Quinn

We take a look at Nathaniel Mary Quinn's new exhibition Past/Present at Pace London

By Max Fletcher
September 4, 2014

Who? Nathaniel Mary Quinn is a Brooklyn-based artist who has become known for his work in collage and mixed media. Born in 1977 in Chicago, Quinn's childhood was very difficult – his mother died when he was young, and he was later abandoned by his father and brother. His desire to explore issues relating to his fraught personal history informs much of his art. As a consequence, his work can be quite shocking, but it retains a sense of grace and aesthetic accomplishment, which, Quinn says, is the result of his efforts to avoid excessive introspection.

"Quinn's work can be quite shocking, but it retains a sense of grace and aesthetic accomplishment...the result of his efforts to avoid excessive introspection"

What? Pace London are exhibiting a new collection of Quinn's work in his solo exhibition Past/Present. These new works see Quinn working in a manner not dissimilar to synthetic cubism, combining images from multiple sources (ranging from family photographs to cuttings from articles and advertisements) in order to create large-scale images of grotesque figures, which he refers to as 'hybrid creatures'.

Why? In this exhibition, Quinn furthers his exploration of issues relating to contemporary identity. Although his works are very personal, they are also deeply in touch with trends in public life and are especially concerned, in their use of pop cultural imagery, with changes in the modern media landscape. His creation of fragmented and often schizophrenic feeling collages is in part a refection of a culture at odds with itself, unable to assemble the noise and confusion of its media into any kind of unity. But despite the deep sense of anxiety that informs them, Quinn stays level headed enough to render the images with astonishing technical skill and dexterity.

Past/Present is at Pace London from September 5 to October 4.

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HUNGER TV

The Interview: Nathaniel Mary Quinn

By Jesc Bunyard
August 27, 2014

Nathaniel Mary Quinn is known for producing large-scale paper works, which explore the construction of identity through complex assemblages and collages. Situated somewhere between abstraction and figuration, Quinn's practice is influenced by memory and an urge to work. The figures are often a mixture between the grotesque, often due to the collage process, and the serene. We meet Nathaniel Mary Quinn to find out more about his practice and his upcoming exhibition at PACE London.

You describe your subjects a 'hybrid creatures'; can you explain a little more about this?

My subjects are just an amalgamation of images that I cull from various resources, memories, and visions. In the most uncertain way, I put them together – the images, photographs, memories, visions – and they appear to be "hybrid creatures" representing much of what I experienced during my upbringing in Chicago as well as what I experience today.

You have a lot of different influences within you work, not all of them happy. How do you use these memories within your work?

Well, I don't exactly use my memories in a way that is intentional; I believe that making an intentional use of such memories would be rather pretentious and dishonest. One is not usually certain of one's memories because one's memory tends to be rather inaccurate; this is so because most people employ an unconscious means by which to illuminate their memories. My process is predicated on random "visions" or feelings that I receive and feel. I never know the meaning of such visions; I never know the premise of my feelings; I always know, without any ounce of hesitation, that I possess a visceral response to my visions and must create them. I never make preliminary sketches; I do not excessively plan in preparation for making the work. I just find images that come close to reconciling the components of my visions and, from start to finish, use the images as a collective resource for completing the pieces, making all of my marks and edits on the surface of the paper. The path from start to finish is never clear, but my faith in the end result is relentlessly clear. Nonetheless, during the process of creating, the work begins to reveal to me what I continue to endure and withstand. Fractured and cohesive memories from my childhood and early years in Chicago – matters I have not thought about in years – begin to collect in my mind, and it becomes relentlessly clear what the work is about. More accurately speaking, it becomes clear that the work is a direct reflection of the pain, loss, happiness, and happiness that I continue to endure, negotiate, and enjoy.

Is your work completely taken from personal memories, or do you work from other sources as well?

I work from photographs a great deal, but my work is a reflection of my personal memories. I do not think of a memory and decide to make a work about it. I receive a vision that initially possesses no immediate meaning or understanding; yet, I am overcome with this insatiable urge to make a work that reflects the vision, to actually draw and paint the vision. The visions are not crystal clear, but the emotional resonance between the vision and I is extremely palpable. I begin the process of making the work; I use photographs as source material for making the work; the process of making the work reveals that I am re-creating a memory based on real life experiences. For example, the work in the show, "Diane," began as a vision. For some reason, I saw this vision of a woman with big, black hair and luscious red lips, holding a rose in her hand, along with having flowers in her hair. While I did not know the meaning of this vision – I could not understand my sincere, unwarranted commitment to this vision – I, without doubt, had to make a piece to reflect it.

You mix a lot of media, such as charcoal and gouache. Can you explain a little about your process?

I use black charcoal – and many different grains of black charcoal to achieve a certain effect – gouache, paint-stick, oil paint, and oil pastel on paper. My process is similar to sculpture; I construct my subjects; I use many materials because such is necessary for the construction of my subjects. Basically, I use whatever necessary to create my work. An incredible amount of work goes into creating my pieces because I have a high level of integrity about my work and I never compromise anything. Never. I work from 10:00am until 3:00am or 4:00am every day. A short day for me is working from 10:00am until 12:30am or 1:00am. I take three to four short breaks – fifteen minutes or so per break – then, back to work.

Your works recall the photocollage pieces by John Stezaker, is this a conscious influence?

I love John Stezaker's work, but his work is not a conscious influence. There appears to be a formal underpinning to his process; my process of the breaking and splitting and re-structuring of the faces and the figure is directly related to my experience of being abandoned by my family, which required a great deal of re-structuring in my life. I am much better these days. The volume of my pain in relation to losing my family is extremely low, but the pain is still there, and it expresses itself in many different ways. I never felt as though I had a great deal of stability in my life in regards to my relationships with people. It is difficult for me to form secure connections with people; I do not know what it is like to be a member of a family; I yearn for acceptance by other people; I am quite insecure at times; I am completely comfortable in being alone because I feel the safest when I am alone. My work is influenced by much of this, which is realistically related to my humanity.

You blur the lines between abstract and figurative, which recalls the paintings of Francis Bacon. There is also a shared element of the grotesque. Has Bacon been an influence in your practice?

Francis Bacon has always been an influence in my work. His paintings are free and liberating; it appears that his work is not bound to the conventions of painting. Rather, it appears that Bacon was investigating his personal identity and humanity, his existence and emotional bandwidth. So, it appears that the grotesque is quite beautiful; yet, most people invest a great deal of energy in avoiding the grotesque, especially that which rests within themselves. The so-called grotesque nature in the loss of my family now functions as the fuel of my artistic production. The grotesque disposition of poverty, gang shootings, drug trafficking, and my direct and indirect affiliation with such conditions now function as a subconscious gateway into worlds that provide the visions for my work. My humanity is the result of the grotesque, along with experiences of happiness, achievement, and progress. As a human being, I am beautiful because of such experiences, both the grotesque and the aesthetically pleasing and acceptable. So, I possess the courage to embrace it, to share it with the world. I believe that Francis Bacon did this as well, along with Lucien Freud, and artists like Adrian Ghenie, Li Songsong, and Neo Rauch also, I believe, operate in this similar vain, which is why I find an incredible amount of freedom in their work.

Your works are beautifully grotesque. Do you consciously aim to blur the boundaries between aesthetically pleasing and the surreal?

I do not consciously blur the lines between the grotesque and the beautiful. I try to be conscious about making work that is a reflection of me, and since I am a combination of all that is grotesque and beautiful, my work would reflect such, but an incredible amount of courage is required for such an outcome. It would be more accurate to state that I aim to embrace the truth of my shortcomings, beauty, downfalls, achievement, and everything else that contributes to my existence as a human being. To embrace the contractual agreement of life – during the unconscious moment of being born into the world and signing the contractual agreement of your imminent death with your first gasp of air – is a courageous effort, and I maintain to adhere to such courageous effort throughout my career as an artist. Therefore, I embrace with pride and joy the synthesis of my good and my bad. I don't exactly attempt to make something that is aesthetically pleasing; I don't know what may be aesthetically pleasing to the eye of another. I just attempt to make work that is honest. Being honest is being aesthetically pleasing; it may hurt and cause some sense of jarring, but it's authentic.

One of my favourite works in the exhibition is 'Diane'. Can you explain more about this work?

"Diane," like all of my work, began as a vision. For some reason, I saw this vision of a woman with big, black hair and luscious red lips, holding a rose in her hand, along with having flowers in her hair. While I did not know the meaning of this vision – I could not understand my sincere, unwarranted commitment to it – I, without hesitation, had to make a piece to reflect it. As I was making the work, it all made sense to me: upon coming home for Thanksgiving break and finding my apartment empty and my family gone, never to see them again, my next door neighbor, after asking her for further details, informed me that my family had made their departure two weeks prior to my arrival. She was stunned that nobody updated me about this matter. I now remember her having big, black hair; she kept fake roses and other flowers in her apartment, which always had a dim light, like an urban cave; she always wore a pink or light blue house robe. More importantly, her public personae was harsh; however, in her private life – sometimes, she would come to our family's apartment to give us food, like bread, sugar, and butter; the extension of generosity was common practice amongst families in the Robert Taylor Homes, the tenement housing projects where I grew up – she was quite open about her vulnerable disposition, her severe lack of money and resources, her sadness, her exhaustion. Even as a child, I knew that she was filled with trouble. And she was as gentle as conceivably possible in the face of my abandonment, although she could not help me; she had to bear witness to my journey into a troubling darkness due to her severe inability to provide resources for my temporary survival. Yet, she was a rose during one of my darkest hours. Her name was Diane.

What other works are you showing at PACE London?

I am exhibiting thirteen works in the show; the show is a one-person exhibition, my first show with the gallery. Some of the highlights in the show are "King Kong Ain't Got Nothing On Me," "Ms. Chairs," "Chainsaw Master," "LaLa," "Slim," "Motorcycle Pig," "Monique," and, of course, "Diane."

What's next for you?

I anticipate having works in the Frieze London Art Fair with Pace Gallery this upcoming October.

Nathaniel Mary Quinn: Past/Present will run from 5th September till October 4th at Pace London, Lexington Street

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Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Diane, 2014
black charcoal, oil-pastel, oil-paint, paint-stick, gouache on Lenox Paper
37 x 37 inches (94 x 94 cm)
unique
(NQ.14.001.37)

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Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Motorcycle Pig, 2014
black charcoal, oil-pastel, oil-paint, paint-stick, gouache on Lenox Paper
60 x 44 inches (152.4 x 111.8 cm)
unique
(NQ.14.005.60)

M+B

JUXTAPOZ ART+CULTURE

NATHANIEL MARY QUINN AND THE FAMILY OF MAN

By Sasha Bogojev
August 2017

DURING THIS TIME WHEN PEOPLE share inspirational quotes on social media in an effort to create better, wiser images of themselves, it feels good to chat with someone who lives a genuinely inspiring story, the kind of person who not only has theories about how life works, but backs them up with amazing, anecdotal personal experiences. Nathaniel Mary Quinn grew up in some of America's toughest projects and eventually made his way to the top of the fine art world, a journey full of substantive stories. From how he dealt with abandonment and the loss of his mother, to his ability to recognize and explore opportunities, all the way to how he perceives people and their behavior, his thoughts and stories are as intriguing as his captivating paintings. Built from memories and visions, both harsh and pleasant, these parts of an unfinished puzzle nudge each other, shaping both the artist and his subjects. Painfully real, indisputably relevant, and stripped of any unnecessary embellishments, Quinn's work proves that equal acceptance of perceived strengths and flaws makes us all stronger.

***Sasha Bogojev*: As you've probably been asked many times already, tell us a bit about your upbringing and about how you ended up being an artist?**
Nathaniel Mary Quinn: Well, I grew up on the South Side of Chicago in a family of five. I had four brothers and I was the fifth child, all boys. We were a lower working class family living in these tenement housing developments called Robert Taylor Homes. They were kind of gang infested, lacking resources, a lot of drugs and poverty, and all that. But from as far as I could remember, I was always interested in art. I was always drawing.

Do you remember any particular moment when you decided you wanted to be an artist?
The earliest moment that I can remember was when I was copying an image from a coloring book of superheroes. I remember having this keen sense of awareness that I was actually able to duplicate something that I saw. I didn't know how this was possible, but I felt this is something that I can do and something I enjoy doing. That feeling really stuck with me.

How did your family react to your affinity for drawing?
I was always drawing on the walls of the apartment, and, of course, my mom would spank me to try to teach me a lesson. One day, I was making a drawing, and my brother Charles saw it, but when my mom wanted to spank me for it, my brother stopped her and said, "Wait. Don't spank him. Look at the drawing." She looked, and they were both very pleased. He says, "Mom, I think Nate has some real talent here, and I think we should let him continue drawing."

So that was your first studio?
Yeah, the walls of my project apartment were my first studio, that's right. I would draw on the walls, and my mom would wash the walls and would let me draw again.

Did your teachers notice your talent and give you support?
Yeah, yeah. There were these two teachers—Mrs. Filtcher and Mrs. Jackson, who were two very important people in my life. They put me in a special class with a few other students and tutored us on science, math, public speaking, art and that sort of thing. The assistant principal at that time was Mrs. Hunter, and she told me about this really cool high school called Culver Academies. But my family couldn't afford that, so the only way I could attend was if I got full scholarship. So I said, "Ok, let's do it!" and two weeks later, I was accepted.

So you stayed there for four years?
Yeah. After my first semester at the high school, I got the word that my mom passed away. That was a hit. It was so shocking that I kind of convinced myself that mom went on a vacation. I couldn't stomach the reality that she was gone.

Did you continue school after that?
I did, but one month later I went back home on a bus for Thanksgiving, and when I got home, I found the apartment door opened. There wasn't anything in there except a few articles of clothing. I haven't seen my family since. My four brothers and my dad. Yeah, that was it.

So that all happened within a month?
Just like that. And at that moment, I knew I was faced with a major choice—either I stay in that community and die young, or I go back to this private boarding high school and I just see where that road takes me.

Sounds like you were good at making right decisions and taking these life opportunities.
Absolutely! I never took anything for granted, and I still never take anything for granted today. When I'm presented with an opportunity, it doesn't matter how big or small, if I can do it, I'll do it. You can ask my wife—Quinn never complains. Quinn just gets it done. And I've always been that way. I had no choice, I had nowhere to go. If I failed, I'd be on the street, homeless. I had no family. It was all on me. Who was I gonna complain to?

How did moving to New York influence your work?
When I came back to NY, I found a cheap apartment in Bed-Stuy and I got a job painting the interiors of public schools. After that, I got a job as a teacher, working with at-risk youth, which I did for ten years. I would work until 7:00 p.m., come home and would make art in my little bedroom or whatever from 9:00 until midnight. And I did that for ten years. I would just focus on becoming a better artist.

Did the work look like anything you're making today?
Nothing like it. It was completely different. I mean, it was always figurative, but it was more natural figures, you know, straight forward, representational stuff. But I kept working all the time. I always focused on just being better as an artist.

Did you get to show or sell any of that work?
Nah, I didn't sell anything. I mean, I sold few pieces here and there, like one piece for $200 or $150, and would have two or three sales a year. But it was nothing close enough for me to be a full-time artist.

M+B

opposite
Richard
Black Charcoal, gouache, oil pastel, oil-paint and paint Stick on Coventry Vellum Paper
38" x 50"
2014

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When did things start changing?
In 2012, I became a private tutor to make some extra money. There was this one kid I was helping, and his mom, Regina, offered to show my work at her brownstone in Brooklyn to help me get some exposure. By that time, I had four paintings and I wanted to finish the fifth, but I only had, like, five hours to make something. I knew I could not make a painting, so I thought I'd make a drawing. Normally, I would look at photographs and think about how they related to each other, but I didn't have the time for all of that, so rather than draw the entire face, I'd just reduce everything and focus on what's important. I'd just draw the slither of the eye and the slither of the nose, and maybe part of mouth. And I thought I'd fill in the gaps with some watercolor. And when I was done, when I revealed the whole image, I couldn't believe I made this. It blew me away! I never did anything like that in my life. Ever! It didn't even feel like I made it, it felt like somebody else made it.

Did you do it in one go?
One go! It took me four hours. And that piece was *Charles*. Cause it reminded me of my brother Charles who I haven't seen since I was 15 years old. And also, it was the most fun I had at studio practice. So about 20 people came to the salon, and sure enough, everybody gravitated towards that piece. Everybody! Yeah, it was like the heavens were opening for me.

Did you continue working that way straight away?
After that, I made six more of these drawings with the same passion, 'cause my conviction had changed now. When I made that piece, I didn't do any preliminary sketches. I didn't even think about it. I just worked. And the work that came out was the reflection of my brother. So that let me know that my true convictions must lie with my family. So I thought my work can be an expression of that. But also the expression of human identity and re-understanding how our experiences dictate the

"MY WORK IS A REPRESENTATION OF WHO AND WHAT WE REALLY ARE."

below
Terry
Black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel, oil pastel, oil paint and paint stick on Coventry Vellum paper
50" x 40"
2016

opposite (from top)
Mama in Winter
Black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel and oil pastel on Coventry Vellum paper
20" x 20"
2017

Mama in Fall
Black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel and oil pastel on Coventry Vellum paper
20" x 20"
2017

M+B

construction of our identity. 'Cause for me, humans look like my work. That's who we are. It was like exposing the internalized world of a person, very crudely put together.

What happened next?
My friend, William Villalongo, an artist himself, was blown away with the works. Now, I trust his reaction and his excitement 'cause I had known Will for seven or eight years, and in that time, he was trying to convince me to be a stand-up comedian [laughs]. But I'm in debt to him for life 'cause he really gave me his best to help me have a career. He put me in a group show with Susan Inglett gallery and in a solo show at the gallery Bunker 259. Afterwards, Marc Glimcher from Pace Gallery comes by my studio, and two weeks later, he calls me saying they would be very happy to give me a solo exhibition at Pace London. So my first breakout show was a solo exhibition at Pace London in September, 2014.

You recently had a show at Half Gallery in NYC that was about your mom. How did that one come to be?
The show opened on May 2, 2017, and it's like an ode to my mom and the relationship between my mother and I. My middle name is Mary, but that was my mom's first name. I took her name 'cause she never had formal education, so now all of my degrees say, "Nathaniel Mary Quinn". So now my mom has a college degree and master's degree and her name is on the walls of the gallery, because my ultimate goal in life is to be remembered as an inspiration for future generations of artists. On a personal note, I wanna be the polar opposite of what happened to me—I was abandoned and forgotten. Now I have the opportunity to be remembered and *never* forgotten.

Do you have any major goals for your life or your career now?
I guess the next step for my career and life is to gather more institutional support from museums and stuff. I'm in a few museum collections now, but I wanna get into more, and do more museum shows. Also, I'd like to get more critical press on my work, and that's why I was so excited about this opportunity with *Juxtapoz* magazine. It gives me opportunity to talk about my work from a more critical perspective.

Yeah, it seems like your life story always takes over in your interviews.
There is no doubt that my work is about my family. But also, it's about the complexity of humanity and exploring the wide spectrum of colors of humanity. In our society, in the world at large, we have many belief systems, but what ties us together is our humanity. No one is exempt from the waves of life. We all experience loss, happiness, we go up, we go down, and we have various experiences that impact who we are and what we may become. Pain feels the same way to everybody. It's a what binds us all together. And I'm interested in exploring that. And you have to be a highly empathetic person to be able to embrace the journey with human complexity. That's why, in my work, I do images of people that I actually knew, so they become the platform from which I can talk about the larger scope of the idea about visualizing human assets. It's one thing to talk about humanity, but it's another thing to be about humanity. You

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left
Von Williams
Black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel, oil pastel on Coventry Vellum paper
16" x 21"
2016

above (clockwise from top left)
Mama in Summer
Black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel and oil pastel on Coventry Vellum paper
20" x 20"
2017

Choir Rehearsal
Black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel and oil pastel on Coventry Vellum paper
20" x 20"
2017

Ethan
Black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel and oil pastel on Coventry Vellum paper
36.5" x 36.5"
2016

Space Monkey
Charcoal with stumping and erasing, gouache, pastel, and paint stick, with incising and additions of oil paint and gold metallic leaf, on white wove paper
14" x 16"
2015

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learn to understand about compassion, integrity, character, loss, all because of your direct dealings with another individual. You learn to live with abrupt changes in your life and they impact your identity as a human being.

Did you feel that the current politics in the US affect your work in any way, or are you staying focused on humanity in general?
The current political situation further emboldens my work and gives it more weight. I tend to believe that Trump is in the office because he is a reflection of the collective consciousness of the American people. He is the embodiment of the social media era in which we live. Social media created the new mantra of the love of attention, and if there is one thing that Trump loves, it's attention. But he is the reflection of America at large. People are using media platforms like Instagram to express these deeply embedded insecurities under the guise of being cool, accepted and special. The reality is, though, that you don't feel special, you don't feel accepted and you don't feel cool, because you don't want to embrace who you really are. And my work is a representation of who and what we really are. And if you can embrace that, all the jagged edges of yourself, all the disjointedness, the chaos, the grotesque, the beauty, you'll be much more secure and you'll be set free.

below
Fifteen
Black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel, oil pastel and acrylic gold powder on Coventry Vellum Paper
11" x 14"
2017

opposite
Over Yonder
Black charcoal, soft pastel, oil pastel, oil paint, paint stick and gouache on Coventry Vellum Paper
34" x 34.5"
2015

Do you feel any extra pressure or responsibility being where you are in the predominantly white male art world?
The only thing I do have a conviction about is being a pillar of hope and inspiration for other black and brown folk who may want to have a career in art. I'd like to show them that this is possible. The bedrock of prejudice and racism is the notion of superiority. So blacks are inferior and whites are superior, right? Which is false, no truth in that at all. A superior race would be if I was walking down the street and I saw another guy just take off in flight. And he starts flying. Now, that motherfucker is superior to us! Also, to me superiority means that you are superior in every way. But that's not the case. Because if you were superior in every way, then any given white artist should be better at making art than I am. And I know that's not true. So no, I don't feel any kind of pressure to prove myself to white people or anything like that. I never felt like that. I never thought, "I need to present my best self cause who I am naturally isn't good enough."

I was thinking more about being a role model to younger kids, as you had mentioned.
I wanna be an inspiration to them so they can see there is a black guy from the hood of Chicago, whose parents couldn't read or write, whose brothers were all drug addicts and alcoholics, and that motherfucker, that nigga right there, is now rising up in what is considered as one of the world's most elite fields, fine art. Do not let racism or prejudice stop you from achieving your dreams 'cause far too many people of color have died so that I can have what I have today. People have fought for us, for the future, to get the life that we rightfully deserve, not only as black people but as citizens of America. As human beings. As far as I'm concerned, your skin color is dictated by the amount of melanin in your skin, which then can protect you from the rays of the sun, perhaps preventing your ass from getting skin cancer. It's a protection barrier for your body. That's it. Making other kind of interpretations is a dangerous slope.

Where do you see yourself in 30 years?
30 years from now? I'd like to believe that I'd be in museum collections and foundations, that I'd have a number of major museum shows and retrospectives too. I'd like to be in a position where I can have my own foundation where I can give money to students to go to school, with particular focus on black and brown students, making sure they can go to school without having a financial burden, to make an impact on the education of young people. And after that, of course, dead [laughs].

JUX

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M+B

ELLE

NATHANIEL MARY QUINN

By Jennifer Krasinski
November 2016 Issue


Elaina, a 2016 mixed-media work on vellum.

NATHANIEL MARY QUINN

This Brooklyn-based painter juxtaposes diverse fragments of pop-culture imagery to create powerful figures and faces.

BY JENNIFER KRASINSKI

Her hair is jet-black and wild, dissolving into a foggy gray background, and her face is composed—or is it decomposed?—to appear more a puzzle than a person: a man's sharp eye and bulbous nose; an ape's mouth; a carved cheekbone and full lips. Her polka-dot blouse is cut away to reveal a woman's bare back. This is *Elaina*, one of the vivid and troubling figures with which painter Nathaniel Mary Quinn has made his name.

On first sight, Quinn's works appear collaged, assembled in part with bits of photographs and magazine clippings and interrupted by colorful, abstract brushstrokes daubed here and there. A closer look reveals that, in fact, every element in the work has been painted or drawn by the artist's own hand with hyperrealist precision in a variety of media: charcoal, soft and oil pastels, gouache, and paint stick.

"I don't paint portraits," Quinn says, standing in his studio at his home in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. "I paint what is not seen. I paint the internalized world of a human being." His compositions mirror the complexity of the human psyche: a fractured, yet somehow seamless, whole. The tricorn hat and eagle's beak of *Lamont;* the scarlet fez and comic-book cutout of *Zechariah;* the mismatched side-eyes of *Rosey*—his characters are multifaceted concoctions. If there ▷

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ART SHOW

Van Williams, 2016.

Sister Odell, 2014.

is any truth to identity, these figures seem to imply, it's how constructed it is.

"What's behind the work is something that's very passionate, very real, and very visceral," says Dexter Wimberly, curator and executive director of Aljira, a Center for Contemporary Art, who gave Quinn an exhibition at Brooklyn's Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts in 2013. He also notes that the figures Quinn conjures are often based on people he knows, or once knew. "He's pulling from his background, his history, where he grew up, and really using the work as a way to tell those stories."

Born in 1977, Quinn was raised in the Robert Taylor housing projects on Chicago's South Side, a community plagued by poverty and violence. "I'm from a place where most of my friends were drug dealers," he says. Although his parents couldn't read or write, they always supported and encouraged their son's preternatural gifts for art.

When he was very young, his mother would let him scribble on the walls of their apartment, then wipe them clean so he could do it again. His father put together a makeshift studio for him in the kitchen pantry. Every Saturday, he would draw with his son, coaching him, telling him to keep his hand loose

Kenwood, 2016.

and free, and to use every gesture. "Never erase," Quinn recalls him saying, "Every mark you make is there for a reason."

Quinn's mother died when he was a teenager; he added her name, Mary, to his own to honor her. Soon after, when the 15-year-old was away at boarding school, his father and brothers moved out of the family apartment without telling him where they went. Quinn came home to find the door ajar—and has never reconnected with them since. Initially traumatized, he has said that he now accepts their abandonment as a sort of deliverance from the lives of hardship that other members of his family have led. He went on to study art at Wabash College in Indiana and New York University, but he still refers to his father as "the best teacher I ever had."

Those lessons in trusting his own hand and gut stayed with him. "Everything I make comes from visions," Quinn says. "I never make preliminary sketches." When he begins a new painting, he doesn't know who he's bringing to life until, at some point, the painting tells him. Perhaps it's this fluid relationship with his own subconscious that gives his paintings something of the embattled gravity of the Surrealists' "exquisite corpses" and the montaged physiques of Dadaist Hannah Höch's absurd characters.

Quinn's most recent figures weren't born of the past. Rather, his mind's eye has refocused on the present. This November, at the Luce Gallery in Turin, Italy, he will exhibit new paintings propelled by a vision of the people who live in his neighborhood. "Every piece is going to be a reflection of this current world—a world that will cease to exist two or three years from now simply because of gentrification," Quinn says of the changes he sees. "I want to record it." ■

M+B

whitewall

ARTIST TO WATCH: NATHANIEL MARY QUINN

By Charlotte Boutboul
August 16, 2016

When we visited Nathaniel Mary Quinn he was still living at his Bed-Stuyvesant apartment where he had a room he used as his studio. More recently he bought a house in Crown Heights where he now uses the parlor floor as his studio. The price of his paintings has increased by around 660 percent in the last three years. When we were there, some of those paintings, mostly evocative expressionist portraits with an abstract twist, were hanging in the living room.

“All these works are gouache and black charcoal on paper. Everybody thinks it’s like traditional collage and appropriated images from a magazine glued onto paper, but that’s not the case. Everything is applied by hand: I either drew it or painted it onto the actual paper itself,” he told us.

Quinn’s portraits look collaged but are in fact organically composed. He amasses pictures sporadically from the Internet, newspapers, and magazines and cuts out individual features that he then draws directly onto the work using construction paper to create sharp traces. He insists on not removing these rough edges. “I use the accidental cuts as an instinctual response onto the work,” he said.

When done with one part of the drawing, he covers it and maps out the next section of the piece. “I can’t see what I just did anymore, so I don’t have any idea how this part of the portrait is going to land until I remove it for the first time. What that does is that it functions on a more psychological level because human behavior is based on symmetry,” he said.

Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Space Monkey
17 X 14 inches
Black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel, oil pastel, oil paint, paint stick, acrylic gold leaf on Coventry Vellum Paper

To some, Quinn’s process of free association may defy classical notions of beauty. The human brain is known to have an ingrained attraction toward symmetry arising from nature that can be witnessed as the central black hole of a galaxy, for example, or the gracious proportions of the unfolding feathers of a peacock. The Harvard mathematician George David Birkhoff (1884–1944) even developed a theory of aesthetic value based on symmetry, “clearly separable from sensuous, emotional, moral or intellectual feeling.” This means one’s eyes would instinctually and objectively pick up on objects and images that the brain can interpret in depth, space, and context. Through symmetry, the brain is drawn to understandability and predictability, yet Quinn’s process is the exact opposite of that—it is volatile and unforeseeable, even to him.

“If you make yourself blind to what you’re doing, you can no longer depend on what makes sense. It becomes about memories that start to come up in play. They emanate from the storage of your subconscious. Once the work is complete. it tells me what it is,” Quinn said.

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The artist grew up from the 1970s onwards as the youngest of five boys in the Robert Taylor Homes in Chicago, one of the most infamous housing projects in the country for its problems of drugs, gangs, violence, and extreme poverty. Planned for 11,000 inhabitants, the project housed up to 27,000 people and included six of the poorest U.S. census areas.

Like the majority of the inhabitants of the homes, his parents were illiterate and his four brothers high school dropouts. Quinn stood out as a bright student with a talent for drawing, which allowed him to receive a scholarship to attend Culver Academies, a boarding school in Indiana. One month through the new school, Quinn received notice from his father that his mother had passed away. One month after the funeral he returned to visit on Thanksgiving only to find the door open and the house emptied. He never heard from his family again until 2016, when to his surprise he received a call from his brother Charles, who saw Quinn on youtube in a popular podcast called “The Brilliant Idiots”, where Quinn was a special guest discussing his art practice. His brother explained some of the circumstances regarding his abandonment and family. This was the first and only conversation Quinn had with his brother.

Despite the circumstances that turned him into an orphan at 15, Quinn managed to finish high school and attend Wabash College, double majoring in art and psychology, and later completed a master’s of fine arts at New York University. He landed a job in New York with at-risk youth while painting on the side.

“I was teaching professional development to young kids involved with the juridical system. I was trying to find ways for them to identify skills from the street that they could implement into the workforce. If you sold drugs for five years, that means you know how to move a product, you know how to build a clientele, you know how much to charge, you know how to save money, you probably are pretty good at managing money, and a lot of people have to go to business school to learn these same skills but you learned them on the street,” he told us.

By then Quinn had gotten married and his situation was stable: He worked during the day from 11:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., went home, spent time with his wife, and was then off to the studio room to paint from 9:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. “To have a job and be able to pay my own rent, I was happy. I didn’t complain about working late at night. As far as I was concerned, I was blessed,” he said.

His artmaking was drastically different from today, as a small canvas hanging by one of the living room doors testifies. It is a more figurative portrait, well crafted but unnoticeable unless someone points it out to you, as Quinn is doing. “My previous art practice was this: excessive thinking, heavy on theory. A great part of it was based on having to make art that was a response to racial politics and black culture.”

In 2013 the mother of one of a kid he was tutoring privately saw his former work and decided to organize a salon featuring four of his paintings. The day of the salon Quinn made the fourth work: “It was the day that I was supposed to deliver the work and there’s no shipping company, nothing, this is me carrying the paintings and walking. I had five hours. So I thought I would do something with paper, because I knew I could draw faster than I paint.”

That afternoon *Charles* (2013) was born, as well as his current process. Without any particular intention or questioning, Quinn followed a recent vision he had experienced, an incoherent memory of his past. Once he was done, he recognized his brother, which left him “blown away.” At the salon the 15 people who had shown up gravitated toward Charles, which would have been sold to the host’s husband for $3,000 had the man managed to follow up on the payments.

The next two years saw a cascade of tumultuous events around Quinn’s art. When his old mentor and fellow artist William Villalongo saw *Charles*, he was amazed and took the initiative of showing the new works to Dexter Wimberly, Director of Strategic Planning at Independent Curators International (ICI) who decided to feature them in the windows of the *Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts* (MoCADA) during the summer of 2013. Wemberly followed up by including the works in his next curated exhibition at Driscoll Babcock Galleries, “Corpus Americus,” in December 2013. At the same time Villalongo presented his protégé’s work at Susan Inglett Gallery in his exhibition “American Beauty.” Given that some pieces were selling, Villalongo organized later another solo show entitled “Species” at Bunker259 from January through February 2014. In the meantime, Beth Rudin DeWoody from the board of the Whitney Museum had bought two pieces displayed at Driscoll Babcock Galleries and decided to feature a new work by Quinn in the Whitney Museum’s VIP auction on May 8, 2014, for which made a work on paper — black charcoal and gouache — entitled “Richard.” “At the Whitney auction my work got the second highest sale of the night. What was like $5,000 became like $14,000. I was still teaching, though, because I thought this could end tomorrow, this could be a fluke, beginner’s luck,” Quinn remembers.

Yet by that time his work at Susan Inglett Gallery had been mentioned in the New York Times and positively reviewed by *Afropunk* and *Bloomberg Businessweek*. He had also met art patron Peggy Cooper Cafritz, who had been more effective than the former interested buyer in purchasing *Charles* (2013), along with *Wretched* (2013), for her personal collection. Quinn had also been introduced to curator Fairfax Dorn,who connected him with Marc Glimcher who got him a solo show at Pace Gallery in London, “Past/Present,” which ran in 2014. It was only when the news of the show was announced that Quinn quit his job. The show was a hit.

Rhona Hoffman Gallery and M+B are those predominantly representing Quinn in Chicago and Los Angeles respectively.. The former introduced his work at this year’s ADAA Art Show, while the latter featured him at the Armory and is organizing his first solo show in Los Angeles next May. Although Quinn currently does not have gallery representation in New York, it seems clear that his portraits are bound to circulate more internationally, as they are presently being showcased in Milan by Brand New Gallery while M+B has already planned to follow the L.A show, and Luce Gallery is planning one in Turin, Italy, next November.

Although a certain pride can be read on Quinn’s face when he mentions these important upcoming shows, one can also distinguish a restless expression that could be misinterpreted as uneasiness. It is evidently not in his nature to take things for granted.

“No one remembers the money. People remember what you did. People remember the cultural impact you made and why you were here. That’s what people remember.”

In resuscitating his childhood memories on paper, Quinn believes he is addressing the complexity of identity. “I think that most human beings are very crude because of our varying experiences. There’s always good and bad, high and low, gain and loss, but those polarizing realities are necessary for the creation of our identity. I’m just going to lay my wounds bare. This is pain, this is anguish, this is a reflection from being ripped. I’m not fully mended, you see, but there’s beauty in that. I’ll be the first to tell you I’m insecure in some places. But I also think true confidence is when you can accept your shortcomings. There are people who go out of their way to present this idea that they’re perfect. That’s insecurity to me. True confidence is when you can just accept who you are.”

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Los Angeles Times

Review

From housing project to gallery wall: Nathaniel Mary Quinn's portraits put subjects in a new light

By Sharon Mizota
May 25, 2016

By turns monstrous and whimsical, Nathaniel Mary Quinn's portraits at M+B are fractured, richly inventive images of former residents of the Chicago housing project where he grew up. They are somewhat reminiscent of the work of Wangechi Mutu, although rather than using found imagery directly, Quinn draws or paints from various sources — photographs, comics, history painting, fabric patterns and more — putting them all together in distorted collisions resembling faces.

"Super-Fly" features a hairline that looks like Superman's and a red-and-blue garment, but everything in between comes from somewhere else: a bulbous, pink cartoon nose, photorealistic brown-skinned eyes, ears and lips (all apparently from different sources), and a black-and-white image of an emphatically cocked arm clad in a delicate print. The portrait tweaks the notion of the singular, indomitable superhero, injecting it with a jaunty come-what-may panache. This make-do aesthetic also resonates with the work's reference to the 1972 blaxploitation film "Super Fly," the story of a drug dealer who orchestrates his own second chance.

Nathaniel Mary Quinn's "Super-Fly," 2015.
(Nathaniel Mary Quinn / M+B Gallery)

Although portraiture as collage is nothing new — see Cubism or Surrealism — Quinn's works add dimension to the tradition. Yes, we all contain multitudes, but these portraits give depth and texture, both flattering and unflattering, to subjects rarely seen in contemporary art. I was reminded of the totally different work of photographer Dawoud Bey, who seeks to give his sitters — often kids from poor neighborhoods — the gravity and stature of Renaissance portraiture. Quinn does a similar thing, granting his subjects a complexity they often don't receive in other places.

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ARTSLANT Los Angeles

Piecing It All Together: Nathaniel Mary Quinn Transfigures a Shattered World

By Sola Agustsson

May 31, 2016

Nathaniel Mary Quinn's fragmented portraits recall his childhood growing up in the Robert Taylor Homes, a notorious housing project in Chicago. His new series Highlights, now on view at M+B in Los Angeles, features highly personal works that reflect on his upbringing and the people he knew who were able to escape the violence and poverty so many experienced in the now demolished project.

Highlights
Nathaniel Mary Quinn
M+B
612 N. Almont Dr., Los Angeles, CA 90069
May 13, 2016 - June 25, 2016

Though his pieces resemble collages, they are in fact improvised paintings. Quinn does not do initial sketches of his works, preferring to paint using a process of free association based on internal visions and emotions that arise when thinking about a particular subject matter. He uses combinations of charcoal, pastel, gouache, and oil paint on vellum to create a pastiched style that is truly his own.

The abstract, distorted figures encompass both grotesque and innocent imagery reflecting many facets of the human experience. The works are intimate and embracing of binaries: good and bad, male and female, past and present. Quinn's work gives reverence to all aspects of the individual experience. "The journey of those living in difficult communities like that of The Robert Taylor Homes is reflected in all of humanity. No human is impervious to pain and loss, to despair and grief, to suffering and longing. Such a disposition does not exist, and all experiences are, indeed, relative to one's own unique set of circumstances," the artist told me.

Quinn was the youngest of five brothers born to illiterate parents. His father provided for the family with gambling earnings from pool halls. His brothers were all high school dropouts, many of who succumbed to addiction and alcoholism. Quinn, a precocious artist, received a scholarship in eighth grade to a prestigious boarding academy in Indiana. His mother, who was crippled from two strokes, died soon after he left, and when Quinn returned home from school one Thanksgiving, he found his entire family had abandoned him. He was 15 then, and he hasn't talked to his family in the two decades since. He says he believes now their abandonment may have been a blessing in disguise. After graduating high school, Quinn received a BFA from Wabash College and an MFA from New York University. He now lives and works in Brooklyn, NY.

The specter of childhood runs through Quinn's work, with cartoon fragments spliced into many of his pieces. Quinn first began making art by copying comic books in his youth. He infuses superhero illustrations into his portraits because he thinks people he knew who were able to escape the projects are superheroes in their own right, saying:

One's escape from a community akin to the Robert Taylor Homes is predicated on a mutant-like feat, where the psychological barrier and its very purpose were deconstructed and, somehow, rebuilt. The shapes and forms in my work, the works' marriage of that which is beautiful and that which is grotesque, of a Frankenstein-like framework of cut parts and components by means of intense rendering and painting, all give rise to the journey of such a difficult, yet necessary, human transformation.

One subject who made it out of the housing projects cycle is "Rosy," a nickname for the artist's best friend, who won a scholarship to the same boarding school he attended. "It was rather strange meeting a chap like Rosy; most of the boys in the Robert Taylor Homes were incredibly tough and, at times, rather dangerous, although, obviously, they were not born this way: the interlacing factors of the community were efficient enough to bring about a certain conditioning that made empty the sanctity of life and optimistic prospects of one's future. Rosy never succumbed to such conditioning, which could, perhaps, be attributed to a collective set of influences: the love, compassion, and discipline of his mother," Quinn said of his friend. Rosy now enjoys a successful career in the Midwest.

Nathaniel Mary Quinn
Antoine Jackson, 2016

Though these portraits are singular depictions of people Quinn knows personally, they relate to larger universal themes of human resiliency. The collagist structure conveys the fragmentation inherent in an individual's collective experiences. Influenced by Cubism, Francis Bacon, and Neo Rauch, Quinn is drawn to artists who meld seemingly disparate elements into a cohesive whole.

"My aim is to, firstly, create, but to also reflect human capacity for all that exists," says the artist. "The various structures in my work—the layering of shapes and forms, of color and tone, of lines and that which may be described as decorative—are reflections of the complexity of human existence, of presenting such reflections on the same plane, all at once, to be fully embraced by the viewer, and by which the viewer will be confronted."

—Sola Agustsson

Sola Agustsson is a writer based in Los Angeles. She studied at UC Berkeley and has contributed to Bullett, Flaunt, The Huffington Post, Alternet, Artlog, Konch, and Whitewall Magazine.

M+B

ISSUE

Nathaniel Mary Quinn

Interview by Dexter Wimberly
Images by Michael Mundy

May 13, 2016

"OTHER PEOPLE MIGHT LOOK AT MY WORK AND BELIEVE THAT THERE'S TRADITIONAL COLLAGE TAKING PLACE. THERE'S NO COLLAGE. EVERYTHING IS DRAWN OR PAINTED BY HAND. IT'S TWO-DIMENSIONAL SCULPTURE."
— NATHANIEL MARY QUINN

I met Chicago-born artist Nathaniel Mary Quinn in 2013 and have had the pleasure of working with him on a number of exhibitions. I recently talked with Quinn about new developments in his career, the new challenge of being a recognized artist and Highlights, his upcoming exhibition at M+B Gallery in Los Angeles. Known for portraiture that blends sophisticated painting and drawing techniques to achieve the fractured, disorienting appearance of collage, Quinn's highly-coveted work depicts an array of people from his childhood who had an indelible influence on his life. Sitting in his new studio in Brooklyn, NY, the artist discusses the lessons he's learned, the importance of humility and the transformative power of imagination.

Dexter Wimberly: Quinn, we've known each other for a few years now, and during that time quite a lot has happened for you. I know it's been a really strange and interesting journey. Can you give me a capsule of what has happened in your career during the past two or three years?

Nathaniel Mary Quinn: First, in the last three years I went from being a full-time teacher to being a full time artist. Second, I made a transition from being an obscure artist to being acknowledged and discussed, becoming more known. My work has become more recognizable to where viewers can identify, "That's a Mary Quinn." Third, I graduated from having community-based exhibitions—i.e. coffee shops or people's brownstones, which were significant shows for me—to having exhibitions in reputable galleries. I even have a museum show coming up in 2018 in South Carolina at the Halsey Institute of Art at the University of Charleston and had a prior installation that you curated at the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts (MoCADA) in Brooklyn, New York.

DW: Making that transition from obscure to recognized is both rewarding and challenging in many ways because with recognition come scrutiny and criticism. Some artists begin to change under the weight of that. Change isn't necessarily a bad thing. Change can be good. But from your perspective, how has this shift in your recognition and acknowledgement affected you both personally and in your work?

NMQ: I feel happy. Personally, it's exciting. It really is. There's a saying that because a gallery gives you a show, it validates your work. I understand that concept but don't subscribe to it. I believe that true validation comes from within in the very beginning—it's just icing on the cake that other people get on board. Artistically, it hasn't changed my work at all. I just always focus on pushing my art. Because I am a full-time artist now, I have more time to push it further, but I'm not trying to appease the audience or give them what I think they may want. I try to remain extremely authentic no matter what, in the way I would have if none of this had happened.

DW: I remember our first encounter and visiting your studio a few years ago—I immediately had a positive reaction to your work. I've also been quite fascinated by the scale of some of the new pieces. A lot of artists have the tendency to work in a particular size range, but you've been able to use scale to your advantage. I recall seeing your exhibition at Rhona Hoffman Gallery (Chicago) last September and was very moved by the fact that the smallest works in the show had so much power and energy in them. How are you making these decisions about scale and content?

NMQ: Everything I make is born from a vision, a visual idea, that becomes the blueprint for the work. In that vision, all details are provided: the subject, the way the subject is constructed, the color palette, shape, form and size of the work. If it calls for a large-scale work, then that's what I do, but if it calls for something small, I do that. At some point, I had this appetite for doing small works. I really wanted to explore a more intimate relationship with my work, and small scale allows that to happen because you're up on it the whole time. I wanted to make the small works as powerful as the big works. I think there's a permeating ideology that small works tend to be less strong. But if you think of a painter like Vermeer, all of his paintings were small but he had very powerful and beautiful textures and ways to control light in such a small scale. I think that's as time consuming, laborious and challenging as making a large work.

DW: And for those who are not as familiar with your practice, I want to talk a little bit about what's behind it. Could you talk to me about your subject matter?

NMQ: My upcoming show is titled Highlights, and every piece in it represents a figure who has transcended or overcome in a way. These are people I actually know who transcended very dire circumstances and managed to get out of the community from which I come, the Robert Taylor Homes in Chicago. That doesn't mean that they all became teachers and lawyers. Many of them went on to just get regular jobs, but they didn't fall prey to the volatile monstrosity of the community we shared. A lot of the images have comic book superheroes attached to them because, to me, the subjects are heroic. They are uncanny. These are highlights: those who were lifted, who lifted themselves.

DW: We're here in your studio, so tell me a little about your process—the materials you use to make your work.

NMQ: I use black charcoal, gouache, oil pastel, oil paint, paint stick, sometimes acrylic gold or silver powder. I work from photographs, and I pretty much manually render everything. Other people might look at the work and believe that there's traditional collage taking place. There's no collage. Everything is drawn or painted by hand. I use construction paper to produce form or shape with sharp edges. Or I use other materials that can be adhered to the surface of the paper without ruining the work. It's two-dimensional sculpture. My process is intuitive, so I never make preliminary sketches of anything. It's like being a surgeon. I use an X-Acto knife everywhere and cut right on the paper. It's an insane amount of work.

DW: Being an artist in your position is quite exciting. There's a lot of demand for your work now and a lot of demand put on you—you're working with multiple galleries in different ways. As you mentioned, you have a museum show coming up in 2018. Between then and now, one can only imagine what will happen. Can you talk to me about one or two lessons that you've learned in this process of going from being obscure to being recognized?

NMQ: Lesson number one: always say "thank you" and "I'm sorry". Those are two of the most powerful statements that you can use in any field, particularly in the art world, because people help you. I'm in a binary position: on one hand I could say, "My work is so good that people just want to buy it." But on the other hand I can say, "The work only sells because the market decided to support it." So I tend to go with the latter of the two because art is very subjective. You don't know if what you're making is particularly strong, but somehow you hit a nerve or a collector who will support it. A lot of artists are exceptional, but the market doesn't support their work for some reason. So when you get opportunities, say thank you. Show gratitude.

Another thing is being very disciplined. I have a nice, tight schedule. Don't forget to live a bit and be completely transparent with people. Under-promise, over-deliver. That's how I live. And it's okay to say no. Just be genuine. Show love to other people. Support and celebrate other artists, curators and directors. Those are some of the lessons I've learned and have been very effective for me.

DW: What are some of the challenges you're looking forward to overcoming as an artist?

NMQ: I just want to make better work. I don't feel like my work is good enough. Every waking moment I have a real anxiety about that. Everything I make is an inspiration for making really good work, but I haven't achieved that yet. There's no way. I can feel it in my gut. I'm getting there, but I want to be able to achieve it before I die. If I could just make one good piece in my lifetime, I would be a happy man. That's more than money, more than fame. The money thing is cool, but it doesn't affect me. When I come to my studio, I still feel like the same insecure guy. Fear is personified in my studio practice every day. And you know what the fear says? "I don't think I can render that jacket. I don't know if I'm good enough." Every day.

DW: It's good to hear someone talk about vulnerabilities in such an honest, forthright way. I sense that in your work, that you're channeling that vulnerability. There's a sensitivity to your work that I don't find with a lot of other artists. You're not simply painting someone as they appear in a photograph, or as they wish to appear.

NMQ: Right, I'm painting what's real, and what is oftentimes real is the unseen. You can buy a new car and think, "I see it physically in front of me: a brand new car." But the car doesn't symbolize what's really happening. What's really happening is that you just spent a lot of money with the hope of enhancing your self-esteem. Or I can say that I just bought a house—you see it here, physically. What's really real, though, is I just found a way to solidify the roof over my head because I'm afraid of being homeless. That's the truth. So I'm interested in painting the truth. Not what I see, but what I don't see. In order for me to see that, I have to feel it. I have to get into harmony with you. That tends to be the reason why people from my past are my best subjects, my best models, because I spent time with these people. I know them. I have a linked fate with them.

DW: In your work, you're depicting people who are both alive and passed away, but I don't get the sense that you're treating the living any differently than you're treating the dead.

NMQ: That's right—we're already dead now. That's just nature. The earth produces plants, animals and humans. We all go through this cycle. My mom passed away when I was 15 years old. Until this day, when I think about my mother the feeling that comes over me is the same feeling I had when she was alive. She seems very real to me. And here's the thing: nobody's higher than another person. That's why I love charcoal so much. I feel like I am one with that material. We're all from the same origin, from the earth. And the conclusion you come to is twofold: on one hand, I ain't shit. I am no better than a tree or a roach. But at the same time, I'm very special because there's only one Nate Quinn. God saw fit to give me life, but I'm just like anybody else.

DW: To me, a fantastic artist is someone who reminds us of our connectedness to the rest of the world and also of our littleness. Only certain people are open to being reminded of their smallness.

NMQ: The one beautiful thing we all possess is imagination. That is a tool given to humans by the universe, a tool that will allow us to envision for ourselves the kind of future that we can achieve. Some may argue that this is a Westernized ideology, that this kind of talk doesn't happen in third world countries. I get it. I can't quite dispute that, but I went to Belize for the first time and saw little children playing with dirt. Happy, man. I saw kids happily playing with dirt. I've seen kids in America with much more who were far less happy. Those children decided to use the most powerful piece of technology, their imagination and create for themselves a different reality. Beautiful. They were playing with nothing. I will never forget that. Imagination is not tactile, but it impacts you. And then you work toward it. Via faith, belief and hope, you just keep working toward it.

M+B

ARTNEWS

‘Art Derives From Everything in Life’: A Talk with Nathaniel Mary Quinn

By Bill Powers
May 12, 2016

Bill Powers: Do you consider your paintings to be portraits?
Nathaniel Mary Quinn: In many respects a portrait is an attempt to duplicate a visual physicality. I’m trying to bring to the surface what I feel; it’s more of a psychological excavation of the internalized world of a human being.
BP: The clothing depicted in your work often harks back to an older era. Is that intentional?
NMQ: Chicago is known for being a cold city. It’s called the Windy City not only because of the harsh weather but in part because of the city’s politics. I grew up there, in a very impoverished community. When you grow up poor, you make attempts to communicate to the public that you’re not as poor as people may think you are. That’s why you might wear a fake-fur hat or a fake-fur coat.

BP: And what’s interesting about that projection to you, as an artist?
NMQ: I find that these types of figures are not normally represented in the art world because they are from the ghetto or the periphery of culture. But that doesn’t mean that these people are any less important. I love the idea of putting a pimp on the walls of the Whitney. And I did it! When [collector and Whitney trustee] Beth DeWoody invited me to be a part of their annual auction, I donated a piece called Richard [2014], which was named after my brother, who was big into fashion. He went out of his way to show people that he wasn’t broke. I presented him as a real gangster-like pimp.

BP: You enjoyed the subversive aspect.
NMQ: Absolutely. And I don’t change who [my subjects] are. I don’t try to make them more palatable to any given audience.

BP: How do you start one of your paintings?
NMQ: I normally start with the nose or the nucleus of the piece. It could be the neck or the hat. I’m looking for harmony. The composition has to be well balanced.

BP: Hailing from Illinois, were you influenced at all by the Chicago Imagists?
NMQ: I’m very much influenced by music production. I mean, obviously I’m influenced by painters as well. However, art derives from everything in life. I take walks a lot because I’m always collecting information. I live in [Brooklyn’s] Bed-Stuy; I speak with many of the drug dealers, pimps, prostitutes—I have conversations with all kinds of people. They hustle. I don’t judge them. I take their energy with me and figure out ways to employ it in my work. It helps me to stay connected to what I would call real life. In the same way, I know a bunch of wealthy collectors now. That energy, too, goes into my work. I like intersecting those worlds. I see them as reciprocal.

BP: Before you were supporting yourself as an artist, you worked with at-risk youth.
NMQ: Yeah, I was a counselor at this place [in downtown Manhattan] right off of Canal Street. Young kids, from 13 to 18, interfacing with the criminal justice system, many of them facing jail time.

BP: What was your objective, working with these kids?
NMQ: I found a direct link to functional illiteracy. Many of them couldn't read or write. They knew how to navigate their limited surroundings. I taught a literacy class even though I had no training in it whatsoever. At first it was rough: kids cussing me out, threatening me.

BP: They were probably suspicious that you were trying to brainwash them or something.
NMQ: I wanted to show them a different route in life without compromising their experiences, how to translate what they'd learned into the workforce. Let's say one of the kids had been selling drugs. I'd tell him, "OK, so you know how to build a clientele, manage your money, schedule. People go to business school to acquire these skills. There's nothing wrong with your aim. There's something wrong with your target."

BP: Would you ever take them to galleries?
NMQ: All the time, because I knew they didn't feel comfortable in spaces like that. I taught them that the gallery is open to the public. You don't have to pay to walk in. Just look around. I remember I took a group to Metro Pictures one day to see a Gary Simmons show. We looked at the price list. They couldn't believe someone could sell an artwork for $90,000. They'd never been exposed to these opportunities.

BP: But you were also teaching them how to read and write?
NMQ: We would walk by random restaurants—Subway, McDonald's, Wendy's—they knew all the places. But then we'd get back to the classroom and I'd write out the same names on the chalkboard and the kids couldn't read it. They only knew the names from the logos. They had memorized the signifiers.
But I'd also try to highlight the beauty in that, how they'd created their own language to survive. Language is just a code you have to crack in order to navigate the world. And there's a plurality in language. I'll never forget the day this kid read his first sentence. It made me cry. I hugged him and said, "Now you have something no one can steal from you: your education. That's intellectual property." So, yeah, I worked with at-risk youth for ten years.

BP: Who is an artist that has had a profound impact on you?
NMQ: I love how Caravaggio manipulated light, how he's able to place figures within darkness. Hey, Caravaggio was an at-risk youth. He'd get into duels and have beef with people.

BP: When I interviewed John Currin last year, he told a story about Caravaggio and Guido Reni almost getting into a fistfight about who invented raking light.
NMQ: See! Caravaggio was a ruffian, but also a very talented painter. John Currin is also an influence, and Lucian Freud and Jim Dine. I love Jim Dine's drawings of tools and the way he renders a necktie. He knows how to control the weight of a line.

BP: Marlene Dumas says that to draw something is to show its resistance.
NMQ: Often you add weight to a line in order to show tension. Look at a painting like John Currin's Big Hands [2010] and you see how he's captured the weight of her shoulders. Currin understands fragility and tension.

BP: Can we talk about the emotional presence in your paintings?
NMQ: I believe in life you are an amalgam of numerous experiences. You are built from a history of joy, sadness, ups, and downs. I'm trying to articulate the essence of that. All of that added up together is nothing more than a forest that stands in front of the truth. So I'm walking through the forest trying to get there. Subjective perception is simply allegiance—unknowingly—to your own ego. And your ego disallows you from seeing the collective interdependence of all people.

BP: You said that you get visions sometimes.
NMQ:I get visions almost every day. The vision is a picture of a whole image. I never write them down. And I never forget them. Every piece I've made was born from a vision. I'm talking about the style of work I make now. Earlier on I was obsessive, trying to make intellectual connections and show theoretical underpinnings behind the work. It was tiring and laborious. I didn't want to live my life that way. I wanted to be free. I went to therapy for four years to deal with the loss of my mother, the loss of my family. What was that pain about? The detachment does something to you.

BP: For people who don't know your personal history, you had a pretty traumatic family experience in high school.
NMQ: My mom passed away when I was a freshman in high school, my first month at boarding school. I went back to Chicago for the services and then returned to school. Thanksgiving came around and when I went home to see my family, the apartment was empty. My four older brothers and my dad had left without notifying me as to where they were going.

BP: So you never saw them again?
NMQ: Only last year did one of my brothers, Charles, finally contact me after hearing this podcast I did. He didn't know what happened to our father. I learned that my brother Richard had died of AIDS and that my other brother was a full-blown alcoholic living on the streets. I asked Charles a lot of questions. I told him that I forgave him, but I don't think we can ever have a relationship again. Not after that kind of rupture. Listen, I was very lucky as a kid. I was showered with love. My mom used to pray over me, pray over my body. She would ask God to watch over me after she was dead and gone. To this day, I believe that my mother conspires for my success. Whatever happens to me in life, things always seem to work out.

BP: You have a new piece called Ethan [2016], where the body originated from an image of Ai Weiwei.
NMQ: It's not about his biography at all. I like how you can see time and gravity on his body, a body you imagine was once strong. The real Ethan was a tough guy I knew from Chicago. We lived in the same project building. He was nice to me, but you didn't want to get on his bad side. He was very burdened by his circumstances. Ethan had a sad disposition. He was a tumbler, like me. I did gymnastics for 13 years. So Ethan and I would do back flips together. I was always a better tumbler than he was, which may be why I won his admiration. Ethan was sort of a protector for me.

BP: Were you a tough guy?
NMQ: Not really. But you had to be tough in that community. You couldn't let anyone take you short. I was in this group called the Jesse White Tumblers. Jesse White is the Illinois Secretary of State who started this program to get kids off the street. Most of my teammates were from the projects—primarily the Cabrini-Green projects—and some of them were superbly dangerous. We used to perform at the Chicago Bulls halftime shows. I even got to meet Michael Jordan.

BP: While Jordan was still in the NBA?
NMQ: Yeah, man. Our locker rooms were right next to the players'. We'd come out into the hallway to stretch, and out would roll Michael Jordan, Scottie Pippen, Dennis Rodman. I was five feet away from Michael Jordan! I had never seen a physical specimen like that. The guy was beautiful. He was built like a machine. A lot of kids in the projects would try to get on the tumbling team. You got paid. They'd travel us around. We'd sign autographs. My mom first put me onto tumbling. She brought me to Mr. McClain, our grammar-school gym teacher, and said, "I want you to watch over my baby so he doesn't get caught up in these streets." Eventually I became the team captain.

Nathaniel Mary Quinn's work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at Pace Gallery in London and the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts in Brooklyn. He is represented by Rhona Hoffman Gallery in Chicago, Litvak Contemporary in Tel Aviv, and M+B gallery in Los Angeles, where his latest solo show runs from May 13 through June 25. Watch Bill Powers interview Nathaniel Mary Quinn at Frieze New York here.

M+B

NEW YORK

11 Artists Poised to Have Breakout Years in 2016

Text by Jerry Saltz
Photographs by Bobby Doherty
April 22, 2016

For our Art and Design issue, New York has been examining the art world's recent past — tracing the identity-politics revolution; catching up with Richard Prince, the Warhol of the Instagram age — and it's present, as we sit down with James Franco to let him make a case for his art and get a crash course in today's market from a Sotheby's advisor. And now we look to the future: ahead, 11 artists, selected by senior art critic Jerry Saltz, who are poised to have breakout years, along with a sampling of their work.

Nathaniel Mary Quinn, Painter, 38
Quinn's intensely vivisected Frankensteinian faces and viscously spliced figures make a nation of loved, colorful portraits. Bold shifts of scale, fungal surfaces that slide between smooth and gloppy, and attacks on integrated pictorial wholeness.

'Still/Moving' Plumbs Collector's Eclectic Psyche

By John Thomason
April 1, 2016

"Still/Moving," the second part of the Norton Museum's two-pronged exhibition of the collection of local arts patron Beth DeWoody, is less whimsical than last year's predecessor, "The Triumph of Love," which focused on contemporary art and sculpture. But it's arguably more impactful.

Like any great exhibit of a personal collection, "Still/Moving"—which derives its name from its two mediums, photography and video—is both random and controlled. Rather than surveying a century of art or offering a meditation on the zeitgeist, "Still/Moving" derives its meaning from the collector's personality and politics, as they are shaped and defined by the decisions of Norton curator Tim Wride and curatorial assistant Rachel Gustafson.

Certainly, Wride had an enormous trove of material from this generous and eclectic collector, culling 200 pieces from an estimated 3,000-plus photographs and videos—from Robert Capa to Cindy Sherman, Diane Arbus to Cecil Beaton, Robert Mapplethrope to Bernd and Hilla Becher. The result is selection of works that, as the curator's statement expresses, "take risks and also demand a bit of risk from the viewer."

This statement applies most prominently to DeWoody's affinity for provocative nudes, like Nobuyoshi Araki's untitled Polaroid of a naked woman bound in a dark room, leaving the morbid backstory to our imagination. DeWoody is drawn to works in which the human body, at its most elemental, is as mysterious as an abstract painting and as fungible as putty—from Andre Kertesz's classic fun-house distortions of the human form to Mapplethorpe's modernist vision of the male profile and Mason Rader's "Be Good!," which merges three bodies into a pretzel and carries with it a feminist subtext.

Indeed, Wride's theme-driven journey through DeWoody's collection reveals a collector unafraid to engage spectators on issues of race, gender and sexuality, clustered among more benign—but no less compelling—areas of interest such as architecture, fashion and celebrity. There are works that directly confront homelessness, prostitution, gun violence and third-world poverty, finding visual poetry amid the squalor. Such juxtapositions are central to the works' success: Nathaniel Mary Quinn's video "Simply Beautiful" artfully counterbalances sounds from battlefield carnage atop images of disadvantaged African-American youth, and lays jaunty cartoon theme music over shots of vacant inner-city buildings. It's a potent statement of rage from the front lines of Black Lives Matter.

Not that middle-class comforts are any consolation. Skepticism over the supposed pleasures of the American dream manifests in Gregory Crewdson's untitled high-def print of a bus driver beckoning a child from a sidewalk outside her home at night, a work of ambivalence that, to my eyes, implies menace lurking underneath the manicured lawns of suburbia. James Casebere's "Subdivision With Spotlight" is a photograph of the artist's miniature model of a planned community, with its soul-crushing assemblage of uniform Stepford homes. And Jen O'Malley's "The Attic" is another creepy Polaroid, an image of a shadowy stairwell that will look ominous to anyone who's seen her share of horror films.

Most of these artists' names might not be familiar to most viewers, and their discovery is one of the excitements of "Still/Moving." Even works chosen by established artists are generally less iconic and therefore fresh; the Chuck Close photo in the show is not an extreme close-up of a face but of a sunflower. The Andy Warhol sextet of identical, color-tinted images is not of Mao but the Red Hot Chili Peppers, shot in the twilight of the artist's career. "Still/Moving" engages even the familiar in new contexts, thereby forming novel relationships to the work around it.

As a cinephile, though, I was most drawn to the videos in the exhibition, particularly the experimental collages that repurpose, and redefine, clips from film history. Johan Grimonprez's brooding agitprop "Doubletake" finds a correlative in the films and persona of Alfred Hitchcock, who creatively peaked in the 1960s, with the Cold War panic of the era and its doom-laden bluster about a nuclear winter. Phoebe Collings-James' mesmerizing mash-up "The Descent" is a work of giddy film-history deconstructionism, with nine miniature screens simultaneously projecting images of characters descending steps forward and backward, drawing parallels between "The Battleship Potemkin," "The Untouchables," the animated "Cinderella," "The Exorcist," "Paranormal Activity," "American Psycho" and more.

M+B

THE ROOT

17 Brilliant Black Artists Featured at Art Basel in Miami

By Julie Walker
December 6, 2015

Black art matters here at Art Basel Miami Beach, Dec. 3-6, 2015, the premier art show in the United States. During a time when "Black lives matter" has become a rallying cry for people across the country, it is important to remember that black artists have been contributing to social-justice movements from the beginning of time. They chronicle the challenges we face and the inequality we deal with, while also celebrating the lives we live. It has been said that art is colorblind; whether true or not, here at ABMB, black and brown artists enjoy healthy sales and enormous adoration.

Many of the works at the Jack Shainman Gallery, which represents a roster full of black artists, sold out. While the biggest names in the art world show at ABMB, several other black artists are on view at the more than two-dozen satellite art fairs that revolve around the big show. A viewer would be hard-pressed to walk into any show here in Miami and not spot artwork from someone of color—or, for that matter, not spot someone of color walking the show. One such show, the Prizm Art Fair, is completely devoted to black artists.

National Mary Quinn with two of his works: *Big Bertha*, 2015, and *Class Photo*, 2015

Nathaniel Mary Quinn

Nathaniel Mary Quinn's work was shown at the Rhona Hoffman Gallery at ABMB. Quinn told The Root that he is proud of what he has accomplished, given his hard life growing up in a broken family in public housing on the South Side of Chicago. He told Artsy, "I hope to convey a sense of how our experiences, both good and bad, operate to construct our identities. I also want to portray a mutual relationship between the acceptable and the unacceptable, the grotesque and what is aesthetically pleasing."

NATHANIEL MARY QUINN: *Back and Forth*

September 11 – October 24, 2015

Reception for the artist:
Friday, September 11, 2015, 5 – 7:30 pm

Nathaniel Mary Quinn, *Junebug,* 2015
Black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel, oil pastel, oil paint, paint stick, acrylic silver leaf on Coventry Vellum Paper, 50 x 50 inches

Rhona Hoffman Gallery is pleased to present ***Back and Forth*,** the first solo exhibition with New York-based artist **Nathaniel Mary Quinn.** Fractured features, spliced patterns, and shrunken or distended proportions merge together to create Quinn's abstract-figurative works on paper. While seemingly assembled from collage, each of the ten artworks in the gallery is meticulously created directly on the flat plane of the paper surface to achieve the illusion that they are formed from exterior sources. His working methods are rooted in free association and intuition, evident in his use of color and pattern to either emphasize or recess certain facial feature.

Quinn's works are highly autobiographical and the genesis of each figure emerges from an intimate vision that reverberates with unresolved memories, feelings, or associations from his past experiences. A Chicago native, Quinn's upbringing in the Robert Taylor Homes public housing was deeply impactful; violence, abandonment, and poverty were familiar obstacles in his personal narrative. In combining that history with an exhaustive range of source materials into his practice, his figures balance between grotesque and beautiful- threatening and alluring. Through this amalgamation, the regenerative human nature of surviving trauma, thriving against opposition, and fostering an identity are made palpable on the rendered bodies and faces.

The figures also enliven topics and issues in his contemporary socio-cultural moment. There is a dialogue in the contorted and collaged figures that places Quinn in a constellation of artists such as Francis Bacon, Lucien Freud, and Neo Rauch. However, Quinn's practice and artistic intention remains oriented in his present day, where the specters of the past collide with the present context.

An interdisciplinary artist based in Brooklyn, New York, **Nathaniel Mary Quinn** (b. 1977, Chicago, IL) received a MFA in Painting and Drawing from New York University and a BA in Art and Psychology from Wabash College, Indiana. Quinn's work was first introduced to the public in a group exhibition with Artists Space Gallery in 2002 and through the Bronx Museum of the Arts in 2004. In 2014, Quinn had a critically acclaimed solo exhibition, "Past/Present" at Pace London Gallery. He is the recipient of the Lorraine Hansberry Artistic, Performance, and Fine Arts Award and a two-time winner of the National Arts Club Prize. Past exhibitions have included the Museum of Contemporary and African Diasporan Arts, New York; Rush Arts Gallery, New York; The Bronx Museum of the Arts.

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M+B

CHICAGO READER

Nathaniel Mary Quinn's portraits recreate the grotesque specters of the Robert Taylor Homes A series of large-scale abstracts bring the past vividly to life.

By Annette Elliot
October 13, 2015

Nathaniel Mary Quinn remembers drawing the fluid black outline of a cowboy on the drab walls of the apartment in the Robert Taylor Homes where he lived as a child. In the concrete public housing high-rise, adventures came to life, carefully copied from the pages of his favorite comic books. His father, an illiterate gambler from Mississippi, taught him how to draw on brown paper bags from the neighborhood grocery store.

"He would tell me to draw from my shoulder," Quinn recalls. "He would take the erasers off the pencils and tell me never to erase. Every mark has meaning. If you make a mistake, make use of that mistake and turn it into something that can work for you."

In a series of large-scale abstract portraits currently on view at Rhona Hoffman Gallery, the artist captures grotesque specters from his past in black charcoal, oil pastel, gouache and acrylic gold leaf. Disfigured and distorted faces stare mournfully out at the viewer. Cursed by unsettling metamorphoses, whether a prominent pig snout or the flaring nostrils of an enraged bull, the characters simultaneously repel and attract.

Memories from the artist's past continue to haunt him. "Walking down the street, I get a vision. I never write them down because I never forget them. My visions are often memories I continue to hold on to, the manifestation of an indelible mark made on me by certain experiences."

Quinn was the youngest of five boys. His mother, crippled after suffering two strokes, managed to support her family with disability checks from the government. He remembers the constant struggle to pay the bills. "I imagine the rent was maybe 50 dollars a month, and the people who lived in the projects struggled to pull together 50 dollars each month." In the winter, the family would often turn on the oven to heat the apartment to avoid paying the electric bill.

Ms. Lykes, 2015
COURTESY OF RHONA HOFFMAN GALLERY AND THE ARTIST

Quinn paints figments of memory, both real and unreal. Like a surgeon, he meticulously constructs the fractured geometry of the face with charcoal, construction paper, tape and an X-Acto knife. "We are all trying to keep it together. We fight to convince spectators of what appears to be a seamless existence, but inside is tension, rupture and things that don't quite fit. That is the raw you. I want to paint that."

In Ms. Lykes, a portrait of one of Quinn's grammar school teachers, a sour-looking woman sits with her hands demurely crossed in her lap. She wears a delicate satin blouse embroidered with crimson flowers. Her face is ripped open by a large snout, her eyes cast askew. Quinn has not forgotten Ms. Lykes or the hurt she inflicted when she discouraged him from applying to Culver Academies, a private boarding school in Indiana.

"I recall Ms. Lykes, in particular, remarking 'You jus' gonna go to DuSable High School like the rest of dem niggahs.' DuSable High School was never considered a particularly good high school—or even a safe one for that matter. It was seen as the school for the 'project kids,' the poor kids who did not have a future. Ms. Lykes certainly could not see, or refused to envision, that I might be admitted into a fancy boarding school for rich kids."

Today he lives in Brooklyn, in a small two-bedroom apartment in Bedford Stuyvesant. Brown paper covers the walls on which he draws a delicate outline of a face. He often paints for 48 hours without sleep to keep up with the demand for his work. In his paintings he returns to his childhood apartment, or what he remembers of it, the articles of clothing scattered on the floor, a half-eaten loaf of bread, and a two-liter Royal Crown Cola.

M+B

MODERNPAINTERS
ART / ARCHITECTURE / DESIGN / PERFORMANCE / FILM

Vision Quest: An artist channels his past through his painting

By Mike Pepi
September 2015

Vision Quest

An artist channels his past through his painting

BY MIKE PEPI

"THAT'S KENNY-RAY!"

A slim man emerges from a composite of several faces sandwiched in between swathes of fur and a gray coat. This particular figure is delicately laid on a white background. He is disfigured but poised, gazing back from perfectly modeled eyes. In his painted form, Kenny-Ray is the product of a revelation by Nathaniel Mary Quinn, a Chicago-born artist working in New York. He was also, about two decades ago, Quinn's neighbor in the Robert Taylor housing projects on the South Side of Chicago. "I hadn't thought about Kenny-Ray since I was 13 years old. He was a good friend of the family, but he wasn't like most of the guys in the community, who were gangbangers or hustlers. He was a nice, wholesome guy." Kenny-Ray was fixed in Quinn's subconscious, waiting to be the subject of a practice that is obsessed with the cathartic release of images from his past.

"Most of my work comes from visions," Quinn says. "I'm just a medium through which things are passing." These are from within, pulled out by the artist's profound faith in exploration of the self. While Quinn's visions look inward to the artist's memories, they resonate with the untidiness of identity at large and have become a fruitful source of raw material. "They arise without warning—those quirky, weird situations that we cannot possibly orchestrate," he explains during a recent visit to his bedroom studio in a three-story brownstone in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. "When I receive the vision, I have no idea of its meaning. The one thing that does stay with me is this visceral impulse to make it. Once I act on that, the work tells me what it is about." Quinn grows visibly excited as he dives into his process. His tempo quickens. "The exploration of the self is by far the most interesting subject."

His meticulous process acts as a vehicle of sorts for this rich psychohistory. In the work's final form—collage-like in appearance, but actually a flat picture plane—various plots of fabric, skin, or objects compete to constitute the identity that a viewer might ascribe to it. Quinn makes these highly personal images evocative for all audiences. Each subject has a haunting complexity, an effect that is amplified by its rendering. He assembles his patchworks in chunks, obscuring his view of the rest of the composition with heavy paper before he pulls it back to reveal the unfolding character. The separate components are rendered with an exacting degree of verisimilitude.

The artist's hyperrealist tendency is a function of both his classical training and his foundational encounters with drawing. The bulk of his works are made on paper, using a combination of gouache, oil stick, paint stick, and charcoal, materials he has long worked to master. "The sharper your skill set is, the more effective you are in communicating—but the soul has to be there," he says. "My father used to remove the erasers from pencils. He would say, 'Draw with confidence. Make use of every mark.'"

An early talent and fervor for depicting the figure stayed with him throughout his academic education and his early work. He was a standout talent in grade school, and it was his skill that produced a path out of the Robert Taylor houses and eventually to NYU for a master of fine arts. Still, it took a shift in approach over the last two years to cultivate the energy that now characterizes his efforts. "Before, I was making pieces about race relations, the critique of hip-hop culture. I thought I had to make that work because I'm a 'black artist,'" he explains. "One day I just thought to myself, you know, I don't enjoy my studio practice." He abandoned work with explicitly political overtones and transitioned to an approach that mined his past, in which memory is key. "It's about the overall atmospheric factors that play a part in one's identity. What that actually looks like, and how it affects you," he says. In this way, Quinn's work is equally about race, but the issues that come up, channeled through a deeply personal lens, are put into sharper focus. "By virtue of being an African-American," he offers, "that identity is going to bleed through my work."

Accordingly, his influences are a mix of the formally apparent and conceptually idiosyncratic. Quinn has stated an

Monique, 2014. Charcoal, oil pastel, paint stick, and gouache on Lenox paper, 36 x 43 in.

M+B

"Most of my work comes from visions. I'm just a medium through which things are passing."

outright reverence for the quietly confident lines of Indian artist Tyeb Mehta, and references to Francis Bacon seem to loom over most discussions of his work. But many influences transcend fine art: the production quality of Kanye West or the fluidity of Richard Pryor and Redd Foxx. "An artist should have the same type of punch," he says. "I have a conviction about humanity, and it just so happens that I express it through my artwork."

The themes of abandonment, death, and loss permeate his visions, a reflection of his upbringing in a notoriously violent section of Chicago. In the provocatively titled "Black Jesus" series, completed for Rawson Projects in February, Quinn turned the Lower East Side space into a partial reconstruction of his mother's living room. The front of the gallery featured a domestic setting complete with a television playing one of the two videos made for the show—a mix of archival footage of housing projects, scenes of urban violence, and gospel music. In the back, Quinn projected a short film, *When Sunday Come: Memory*. It shows a woman entering a tenement bedroom to pray over her child: "Please, in the name of Jesus, watch over my baby boy / When I am dead and gon'...."

The entire ensemble harks back to the Christian faith that sustained his early childhood. "I just didn't feel like the Jesus hanging on my wall had what it took to deliver me from the evils that my mother wanted to protect me from," he recalls. In the center of the dark gallery hung Quinn's *Black Jesus*, dimly illuminated by votive candles. "I painted the Jesus that

FROM LEFT:
Nathaniel Mary Quinn, 2015.

Black Jesus, 2015. Charcoal, gouache, oil pastel, oil paint, and paint stick on Coventry vellum paper, 74¼ x 44 in.

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I thought would be strong enough to get me and my mom through the projects." Quinn's *Black Jesus* is conspicuously well endowed, with a gold chain and boxing gloves. "He is confronting you. He is not going to wait passively." He stands on holy ground, and has the cloven hooves of a sheep. Even with the biblical iconography, it's far from the meek Christ who would turn the other cheek.

While working on *Black Jesus* he received the vision for *Junebug*, an erstwhile uncle channeled into a painting that he will show at Chicago's Rhona Hoffman Gallery. Everything Quinn knows about Junebug is from his mother's secondhand stories. He wore inexplicably dapper clothes and possessed a quick temper and a loud personality, traits that Quinn integrates using specific iconographic choices. For *Junebug*, the defining feature is a bull nose complete with a massive gold ring, a signifier of his uncle's material wealth and bombastic nature.

These days, Quinn is working on several pieces at once, a production schedule dictated by the fickle nature of his chief source of inspiration as much as by a recent uptick in his exhibition schedule. In September he will have his solo show at Rhona Hoffman, followed by outings at Luce Gallery in Turin, Italy, and M+B gallery in Los Angeles. During our last visit, he was in the midst of producing a series of works on paper for Rhona Hoffman.

FROM LEFT: *Kenny-Ray*, 2013. Charcoal and gouache on Lenox paper, 50 x 38 in.

King Kong Ain't Got Nothing on Me, 2013. Charcoal, gouache, and oil pastel on Coventry vellum paper, 86½ x 61½ in.

These new pieces represent a seamless transition from his first solo exhibition in London, where Pace Gallery mounted "Past/Present," featuring several new works on paper from 2014. In *Motorcycle Pig*, 2014, a massive green arm swings down from the torso. The charged figure is punctuated by a precise rendering of materials ranging from fur to metal armor, ornamentation atop an already unreal composite of signs from Quinn's visions. Gorilla feet terminate the hairy legs that emerge from what appears to be an armored breastplate colored teal. Here, the irregular patchwork of facial elements typical of the artist's figures is dominated by a hog's snout. The entire conglomeration sits beside a vintage motorcycle.

While such works represent the bulk of his recent output, it is of little interest to Quinn why certain visions manifest themselves as, say, a work on paper or a video, lending a degree of psychologically indebted chance to the future of his practice. "To explore this world," he says, "you have to have a sort of blind faith." The images he sees are fleeting and spontaneous—"I never write them down. But I never forget them," he says. The work's function can't be determined either. To assume such an intent would contradict Quinn's belief in the messy, indeterminate nature of identity. "There is a real sense of freedom when you lose self-control. Once you give something a label, then you stop exploring it because you already think you know what it is." MP

M+B

HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE

Nathaniel Mary Quinn's Disfigured Portraits Would Make Even Francis Bacon Shudder

September 9, 2014

Gazing upon a series of Nathaniel Mary Quinn's paintings feels like staring into a Ripley's-esque hall of medical oddities and botched surgeries, situated alongside the black sheep and circus performers themselves who'd banded into a cast of outcasts. And yet the multimedia hybrids feel above all truthful. The portraits -- bulging, distorted and ripped to shreds -- capture something real about our bruised senses of self. Something we often look away from.

Quinn's series "Past/Present" features large scale works combining black charcoal, oil-paint, paint-stick, gouache, oil pastel and cardboard. Somewhere between Wangechi Mutu and Francis Bacon, the works are as intoxicating as they are repulsive, like a stranger you're eager to know though already frightened by. Quinn's images possess a perpetual sense of now-ness, as if capturing a person at a particular moment, tangled up in all the moods, memories and whatever else happens to be lingering in the air.

(Detail) King Kong Ain't Got Nothing On Me, 2013, black charcoal, gouache, oil pastel on Coventry vellum paper

When did you first start creating art and how did it affect other aspects of your life?

As a child, my mother allowed me to draw on the walls of our apartment. She would just clean the walls and let me draw again, repeatedly. My work seems to investigate my childhood upbringing, my past experiences, and my humanity.

Since 2002, soon after earning my MFA from New York University, I embarked on an artistic pursuit of creating work predicated on black identity, racial and gender politics, or a critique of mainstream culture. I presumed that such was the correct path for me. Two years ago, I disengaged from that path. My conviction for such issues lacked the potency necessary for sustaining my studio art practice. Moreover, I had come to accept that I was unhappy with my art practice. There was something more that I wanted to explore, although I had no scathing idea as to what such a conviction looked or felt like. Then, I began making work based on my visions, absent of any knowledge as to what these visions meant. I simply had a visceral response to these visions. For the first time in more than ten years, I was consumed by a confident sense of happiness and completeness. I felt like a child in a magnificent playground.

By this time, I had stopped making preliminary sketches. The visions were so explicitly clear, that making pre-sketches was unnecessary. After completing my first body of work, it had dawned on me that instead of composing a theory upon which my work would be based, my work would reveal to me what I, on some known or unknown level, continue to endure. My work would function as a sound reflection of my identity and human experience. My work reveals unresolved issues as related to my family, my childhood experiences, and the link between such experiences and my current disposition. My work allows me to explore the power of being present, while bringing to surface buried memories culled from my childhood experiences and upbringing in Chicago. In this journey, I acknowledge the pain and sorrow that I continue to endure, the sense of progress that I enjoy, and the sense of deliverance upon which I stand.

My work is also influenced by my upbringing in the Robert Taylor Homes of Chicago, which were, for many years, one of the most infamous and dangerous tenement housing complexes in the nation. I was the youngest of five boys. By the time I was fifteen years old, my other brothers were already young adults, along with being high school dropouts, drug addicts, and alcoholics. My parents were illiterate. My mother, Mary Quinn, was crippled due to having two strokes. My father, Joe, frequented pool halls for the sake of gambling in order to feed our family.

By my eighth grade year, I won an academic scholarship to attend Culver Academies, a private boarding high school in Indiana. Soon after the start of the school year, my mother passed away. The following month, upon arriving home for Thanksgiving break, I found an empty apartment. My family was gone, and I have not seen them since.

I wondered why I had such an obsession with creating jagged, fragmented, discontinuous portraits and figures. Now, I am beginning to understand: the dilemma of unresolved abandonment, separation, and attachment issues prevalent in my identity and sub-consciousness. Yet, there is something redemptive within this context, of separate, seemingly unrelated, parts mending themselves together, managing, somehow, to achieve a sense of cohesion and solidarity. Such was compounded with relationships I found between my work and Cubism, as well as the works of artists like Francis Bacon and Neo Rauch. The works of Francis Bacon are especially powerful for me, where his expressive and graphic approach creates a relationship between the grotesque and the beautiful.

Clown, 2014, black charcoal, oil-pastel, oil-paint, paint-stick, gouache on Lenox Paper

What information goes into these portraits and how do you translate this information into image?

My portraits and figures tend to be based on people that I knew during my childhood. In some cases, they represent people that I currently know. However, it is a bit more complicated than that. People do not exist without that which creates them, without that which influences their behavior, their belief-systems, their conditioned thought patterns. I am more interested in what is underneath. I want to convey all that is hidden.

And, of course, all of my portraits and figures are extensions of my identity. Perhaps I would not be who I am without these people. The real dilemma rests in understanding the link between my experiences with these people and my current disposition as a human being. Hence, my studio practice is inundated with exacting my focus on being as free as possible from all conditioned thought patterns and belief-systems. This requires the removal of excessive thinking, for it is our “thought-mind” that happens to be poisoned with illusions that are not true, but appears to be true due to the amount of emotional energy that we invest in such illusions. For example, in my work, I explore the reasoning behind what may appear to be feelings of worthlessness. By all means, I was, in fact, abandoned by my family when I was fifteen years old. Therefore, logically speaking, as a fifteen year old, the bridge is not that wide between being deserted by the only people who proclaimed and demonstrated their unwavering love for you and the notion of not being worthy of authentic love and compassion: “If your own family doesn’t want you, then who will?” But, is this true?

As an adult, I now realize the existence of other explanations behind their sudden and abrupt departure: severe lack of money, poverty, being evicted, forthcoming violence. However, it is nearly impossible to understand this as a child. Before you know it, and against your will, your mind develops a belief-system that impedes upon your ability to function happily. For years, I ruined all of my significant relationships and friendships on the promise of this belief system: “How can I be sure that you won’t abandoned me if my own family deserted me?” And I feel this everyday and put it into my work, to create what I feel, within the context of being present, of embracing my state of being, in order to get underneath it all, to explore it, to uncover, as much as possible, the inner-workings of my identity. This is a highly grotesque process; yet, it is very beautiful because of the power of self-acceptance, even against a collective perception that works relentlessly to convince you to believe in the benefits of hiding your scars and bruises.

Monique, 2014 black charcoal, oil-pastel, oil-paint, paint-stick, gouache on Lenox Paper

Your works also toy with gender in interesting ways. Can you explain what argument you're making in this respect, if any?

I am not making an argument in my work as it relates to gender. I employ any visual reference necessary for the creation of my work. I presume gender comes into play as a result of my mother. In some way, I am always painting and drawing my mother, especially being that I lost her when I was fifteen years old. Many people can relate to this. That sort of pain never leaves you. You can only turn down the volume of the pain, but the sound never goes off. I continue to yearn for her, so perhaps she is coming through my work, somehow, presenting herself in various ways.

This show reminded me of Mickalene Thomas' recent exhibition “Tete de Femme,”which similarly explored the fractured geometry of the face. What similarities and differences do you think apply?

Mickalene Thomas’ work carries a significant amount of weight. Her paintings seem to explore the historical means by which beauty is articulated on canvas. Her collage-like paintings place black women within a narrative from which black women were traditionally excluded. Her 2012 exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum, “The Origin of the Universe,” highlighted the prowess in Mickalene’s artistic career; in some cases, porcelain skin and blonde curls – as evident in the works of Gustav Courbet, for example, were replaced with beautiful black women, bringing to surface the malleable and expressive nature of femininity. It is wonderful that such beauty is being delivered through the subject of black women, and Mickalene is masterful at this.

This past June, her recent exhibition, “Tete de Femme,” at Lehmann Maupin Gallery, presents a relatively fresh and courageous direction for Mickalene –- not a departure; instead, a development from her previous work –- and such may have been developed in her studio practice, particularly as this growth seems to be related to her work with models, make-up, various photo sessions, and experimentation with collages. The persistence in Mickalene’s acute interest in creating correlations between art history and the present moment remains to be relevant.

Although, visually speaking, there are similarities between my work and that of Mickalene Thomas’ in “Tete de Femme,” there are, indeed, differences worth noting.

“Tete de Femme” appears to be the first public exhibition of such a development in Mickalene’s work, and while various correlations can be made between her work and mine, the exploration in my work stems from a different place, and the development with my particular body of work began three years ago –- before “Tete de Femme” publicly existed.

Clearly, my work carries influences from Cubism; however, my aim is to explore my humanity and to become more aware of the link between various past experiences and my current disposition. In this effect, there exists no primary interest in positioning black men or women within an exclusive narrative. My work is not governed by the exploration of Cubism and contemporary subject matter. My work is governed by the exploration of my present human existence and the personal history by which it has been informed.

Where do you find inspiration outside of the art world?

I find inspiration in music and film. In particular, I watch many Youtube videos of hip-hop producers working in the studio as they make beats for new rap songs. I especially enjoy this one video clip of Kanye West working in the studio. He seems incredibly free, working in the moment, feeling the energy of the music that he is creating, being completely liberated by the sound and the bass. This also seems to be true of various musicians, such as D'Angelo, Stevie Wonder, and Raphael Saadiq. When you listen to their music, you sense the existence of effortless energy, where excessive thought is not, or was not, a part of the equation.

And I have an obsession with watching films where the protagonist is seemingly outgunned, or intellectually challenged, or diminutive in a certain fashion. Films that come to mind are "Forrest Gump" and "Shawshank Redemption," for example.

Pig, 2014, black charcoal, oil-pastel, oil-paint, paint-stick, gouache on Lenox Paper

My parents were illiterate. As a result, along with other reasons, I have struggled, throughout my life, with feelings of inferiority as they relate to my level of academic intelligence, and I know what it feels like to so eagerly want to escape a place that did not seem rightfully suited for you, a place in which you felt trapped with no means of escape. However, like in the films, redemption, somehow, is achieved, and hard work has a great deal to do with it.

If you could compare your artistic process to another activity -- making spaghetti, performing surgery, riding a bicycle -- what would you say and why?

I always say that my studio art practice is equivalent to surgery because there are so many intricate and highly important processes necessary for making one of my pieces. I spend long, arduous hours to perform at optimal levels in order to achieve a perfection that is suitable for me, and, like any surgeon, mediocrity is not an option. And I have an obsessive compulsion for order and organization. I am addicted to processes being clean and sharp, absent of mishaps and mistakes. For the body of work at Pace London, I arrived to a point where I worked every single day, Monday through Sunday, from 10 a.m. to 4 a.m. –- for three and a half months, non-stop.

Quinn's "Past/Present" runs from September 5 until October 4, 2014 at Pace Gallery in London. See more work from the exhibition below.

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Time Out London

Nathaniel Mary Quinn: Past/Present

September 8, 2014

The large paper works of Nathaniel Mary Quinn are driven by past personal experiences

Akin to grotesquely beautiful manifestations of profound inner visions, the large paper works of Nathaniel Mary Quinn are driven by past personal experiences, from losing his mother as a child to being abruptly abandoned by his father and brothers. Using whatever means necessary to express his visions, he brings together images from photographs, advertisements, as well as combining numerous types of media such as black charcoal, oil paint, gouache, and more. The key piece on display is Diane, an assembled portrait with fragmented facial features not unlike works of Synthetic Cubism, and inspired by the memory of the woman who informed him of his family's departure.

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The INDEPENDENT

Nathaniel Mary Quinn: Artist who grew up in Chicago poverty chooses London for first show

By Nick Clark
September 4, 2014

When Nathaniel Mary Quinn was growing up in one of Chicago's poorest housing projects he would be regularly woken by gunshots fired by warring gangs outside.

Three decades on, he has shaken off a troubled upbringing – abandoned by his family at the age of 15 – to become a "rising star" of the New York art scene. And his gallery has chosen London to make his big debut.

Mr Quinn's exhibition Past/Present opened in Pace London, the UK arm of one of New York's most prestigious galleries, on Friday.

"It's exciting and scary," he told The Independent. "It's the American dream, I'm very excited. I wasn't on the radar for a long time. People seeing my stuff this year was seeing it for the first time. Now they're raving about it."

The show runs for a month and includes new work in oil and charcoal from the Brooklyn-based artist which come to terms with his troubled upbringing.

Quinn arrives in London, 20 years after escaping gunfire and gangs

He said: "The gallery was thinking about how to mobilise my career and thought London was the best place to start. The art world here embraces artists in my position more."

While he is almost completely unknown in London, there is a lot of buzz around Mr Quinn in New York especially after Pace chose to represent him in May.

Dexter Wimberly, who came across the artist's work in his role as an independent curator in New York, said: "Nathaniel is a rising star; he's beginning to get the recognition he deserves for his work. As a young artist he has a huge future ahead of him. Coming to the attention to Pace Gallery is an amazing step forward for his career."

Mr Wimberly, who is now director of strategic planning at Independent Curators International, said buzz had begun a year ago at two shows featuring Mr Quinn's work, which had key people from the art world attending. These included a trustee of the Whitney Museum of American Art and a powerful gallerist who had collaborated with Jeff Koons.

Yet the New York art scene is a world away from where Mr Quinn, 37, grew up. He was raised in the poverty-stricken projects, the equivalent of UK housing estates, on the south side of Chicago, buildings which have subsequently been torn down.

'Diane, 2014' by Nathaniel Mary Quinn (Damian Griffiths)

"Where I lived was populated by gang violence, I grew up seeing shootings and killings. Everyone living there was a witness to poverty and crime. You knew at a young age you could be killed," he said.

Growing up, conditions were hard, with the lights constantly being disconnected, and his family turning on the oven to heat the apartment.

He managed to avoid joining a gang, although most of his friends did. He was known instead for his art, something he had done since a small child.

"I've been making art my entire life," Mr Quinn said. He learnt to draw by copying comic books and he became known as an artist in the neighbourhood.

"I've always wanted to be an artist; there was never any question about that in my life. All my friends knew me as an artist. I was challenged to art duels by other kids."

He secured a scholarship to a prestigious private college Culver Military Academy in Indiana at the age of 15, which would prove his way out of the projects. "I woke up there and heard birds singing, and I knew I was in a different land altogether; I was accustomed to waking up to gunshots."

Yet his mother died a month after he joined Culver, and then weeks after that he returned home to find his father and four brothers had left. He has not seen them in the 22 years since. "My life since that was not good. I was drinking a lot and in constant distress and pain," he said.

After high school, college and then graduate school he worked as a substitute teacher and then taught at-risk youth in the criminal justice system.

Less than a year ago his art career took an "upward swing," when he started painting about issues from his upbringing and his family history and he could give up his day job. "I find making art now thrilling. It used to feel like a job, but now it feels fun and challenging."

He added: "The whole thing about the buzz is surreal. It feels like I'm getting a gain in my life that is equivalent to all I have lost in my life. I've lost my entire family, my sense of belonging. Now I feel God is giving it to me back tenfold."

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AnOther Magazine

An Unusual Artist: Nathaniel Mary Quinn

We take a look at Nathaniel Mary Quinn's new exhibition Past/Present at Pace London

By Max Fletcher
September 4, 2014

Who? Nathaniel Mary Quinn is a Brooklyn-based artist who has become known for his work in collage and mixed media. Born in 1977 in Chicago, Quinn's childhood was very difficult – his mother died when he was young, and he was later abandoned by his father and brother. His desire to explore issues relating to his fraught personal history informs much of his art. As a consequence, his work can be quite shocking, but it retains a sense of grace and aesthetic accomplishment, which, Quinn says, is the result of his efforts to avoid excessive introspection.

"Quinn's work can be quite shocking, but it retains a sense of grace and aesthetic accomplishment...the result of his efforts to avoid excessive introspection"

What? Pace London are exhibiting a new collection of Quinn's work in his solo exhibition Past/Present. These new works see Quinn working in a manner not dissimilar to synthetic cubism, combining images from multiple sources (ranging from family photographs to cuttings from articles and advertisements) in order to create large-scale images of grotesque figures, which he refers to as 'hybrid creatures'.

Why? In this exhibition, Quinn furthers his exploration of issues relating to contemporary identity. Although his works are very personal, they are also deeply in touch with trends in public life and are especially concerned, in their use of pop cultural imagery, with changes in the modern media landscape. His creation of fragmented and often schizophrenic feeling collages is in part a refection of a culture at odds with itself, unable to assemble the noise and confusion of its media into any kind of unity. But despite the deep sense of anxiety that informs them, Quinn stays level headed enough to render the images with astonishing technical skill and dexterity.

Past/Present is at Pace London from September 5 to October 4.

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HUNGER TV

The Interview: Nathaniel Mary Quinn

By Jesc Bunyard
August 27, 2014

Nathaniel Mary Quinn is known for producing large-scale paper works, which explore the construction of identity through complex assemblages and collages. Situated somewhere between abstraction and figuration, Quinn's practice is influenced by memory and an urge to work. The figures are often a mixture between the grotesque, often due to the collage process, and the serene. We meet Nathaniel Mary Quinn to find out more about his practice and his upcoming exhibition at PACE London.

You describe your subjects a 'hybrid creatures'; can you explain a little more about this?

My subjects are just an amalgamation of images that I cull from various resources, memories, and visions. In the most uncertain way, I put them together – the images, photographs, memories, visions – and they appear to be "hybrid creatures" representing much of what I experienced during my upbringing in Chicago as well as what I experience today.

You have a lot of different influences within you work, not all of them happy. How do you use these memories within your work?

Well, I don't exactly use my memories in a way that is intentional; I believe that making an intentional use of such memories would be rather pretentious and dishonest. One is not usually certain of one's memories because one's memory tends to be rather inaccurate; this is so because most people employ an unconscious means by which to illuminate their memories. My process is predicated on random "visions" or feelings that I receive and feel. I never know the meaning of such visions; I never know the premise of my feelings; I always know, without any ounce of hesitation, that I possess a visceral response to my visions and must create them. I never make preliminary sketches; I do not excessively plan in preparation for making the work. I just find images that come close to reconciling the components of my visions and, from start to finish, use the images as a collective resource for completing the pieces, making all of my marks and edits on the surface of the paper. The path from start to finish is never clear, but my faith in the end result is relentlessly clear. Nonetheless, during the process of creating, the work begins to reveal to me what I continue to endure and withstand. Fractured and cohesive memories from my childhood and early years in Chicago – matters I have not thought about in years – begin to collect in my mind, and it becomes relentlessly clear what the work is about. More accurately speaking, it becomes clear that the work is a direct reflection of the pain, loss, happiness, and happiness that I continue to endure, negotiate, and enjoy.

Is your work completely taken from personal memories, or do you work from other sources as well?

I work from photographs a great deal, but my work is a reflection of my personal memories. I do not think of a memory and decide to make a work about it. I receive a vision that initially possesses no immediate meaning or understanding; yet, I am overcome with this insatiable urge to make a work that reflects the vision, to actually draw and paint the vision. The visions are not crystal clear, but the emotional resonance between the vision and I is extremely palpable. I begin the process of making the work; I use photographs as source material for making the work; the process of making the work reveals that I am re-creating a memory based on real life experiences. For example, the work in the show, "Diane," began as a vision. For some reason, I saw this vision of a woman with big, black hair and luscious red lips, holding a rose in her hand, along with having flowers in her hair. While I did not know the meaning of this vision – I could not understand my sincere, unwarranted commitment to this vision – I, without doubt, had to make a piece to reflect it.

You mix a lot of media, such as charcoal and gouache. Can you explain a little about your process?

I use black charcoal – and many different grains of black charcoal to achieve a certain effect – gouache, paint-stick, oil paint, and oil pastel on paper. My process is similar to sculpture; I construct my subjects; I use many materials because such is necessary for the construction of my subjects. Basically, I use whatever necessary to create my work. An incredible amount of work goes into creating my pieces because I have a high level of integrity about my work and I never compromise anything. Never. I work from 10:00am until 3:00am or 4:00am every day. A short day for me is working from 10:00am until 12:30am or 1:00am. I take three to four short breaks – fifteen minutes or so per break – then, back to work.

Your works recall the photocollage pieces by John Stezaker, is this a conscious influence?

I love John Stezaker's work, but his work is not a conscious influence. There appears to be a formal underpinning to his process; my process of the breaking and splitting and re-structuring of the faces and the figure is directly related to my experience of being abandoned by my family, which required a great deal of re-structuring in my life. I am much better these days. The volume of my pain in relation to losing my family is extremely low, but the pain is still there, and it expresses itself in many different ways. I never felt as though I had a great deal of stability in my life in regards to my relationships with people. It is difficult for me to form secure connections with people; I do not know what it is like to be a member of a family; I yearn for acceptance by other people; I am quite insecure at times; I am completely comfortable in being alone because I feel the safest when I am alone. My work is influenced by much of this, which is realistically related to my humanity.

You blur the lines between abstract and figurative, which recalls the paintings of Francis Bacon. There is also a shared element of the grotesque. Has Bacon been an influence in your practice?

Francis Bacon has always been an influence in my work. His paintings are free and liberating; it appears that his work is not bound to the conventions of painting. Rather, it appears that Bacon was investigating his personal identity and humanity, his existence and emotional bandwidth. So, it appears that the grotesque is quite beautiful; yet, most people invest a great deal of energy in avoiding the grotesque, especially that which rests within themselves. The so-called grotesque nature in the loss of my family now functions as the fuel of my artistic production. The grotesque disposition of poverty, gang shootings, drug trafficking, and my direct and indirect affiliation with such conditions now function as a subconscious gateway into worlds that provide the visions for my work. My humanity is the result of the grotesque, along with experiences of happiness, achievement, and progress. As a human being, I am beautiful because of such experiences, both the grotesque and the aesthetically pleasing and acceptable. So, I possess the courage to embrace it, to share it with the world. I believe that Francis Bacon did this as well, along with Lucien Freud, and artists like Adrian Ghenie, Li Songsong, and Neo Rauch also, I believe, operate in this similar vain, which is why I find an incredible amount of freedom in their work.

Your works are beautifully grotesque. Do you consciously aim to blur the boundaries between aesthetically pleasing and the surreal?

I do not consciously blur the lines between the grotesque and the beautiful. I try to be conscious about making work that is a reflection of me, and since I am a combination of all that is grotesque and beautiful, my work would reflect such, but an incredible amount of courage is required for such an outcome. It would be more accurate to state that I aim to embrace the truth of my shortcomings, beauty, downfalls, achievement, and everything else that contributes to my existence as a human being. To embrace the contractual agreement of life – during the unconscious moment of being born into the world and signing the contractual agreement of your imminent death with your first gasp of air – is a courageous effort, and I maintain to adhere to such courageous effort throughout my career as an artist. Therefore, I embrace with pride and joy the synthesis of my good and my bad. I don't exactly attempt to make something that is aesthetically pleasing; I don't know what may be aesthetically pleasing to the eye of another. I just attempt to make work that is honest. Being honest is being aesthetically pleasing; it may hurt and cause some sense of jarring, but it's authentic.

One of my favourite works in the exhibition is 'Diane'. Can you explain more about this work?

"Diane," like all of my work, began as a vision. For some reason, I saw this vision of a woman with big, black hair and luscious red lips, holding a rose in her hand, along with having flowers in her hair. While I did not know the meaning of this vision – I could not understand my sincere, unwarranted commitment to it – I, without hesitation, had to make a piece to reflect it. As I was making the work, it all made sense to me: upon coming home for Thanksgiving break and finding my apartment empty and my family gone, never to see them again, my next door neighbor, after asking her for further details, informed me that my family had made their departure two weeks prior to my arrival. She was stunned that nobody updated me about this matter. I now remember her having big, black hair; she kept fake roses and other flowers in her apartment, which always had a dim light, like an urban cave; she always wore a pink or light blue house robe. More importantly, her public personae was harsh; however, in her private life – sometimes, she would come to our family's apartment to give us food, like bread, sugar, and butter; the extension of generosity was common practice amongst families in the Robert Taylor Homes, the tenement housing projects where I grew up – she was quite open about her vulnerable disposition, her severe lack of money and resources, her sadness, her exhaustion. Even as a child, I knew that she was filled with trouble. And she was as gentle as conceivably possible in the face of my abandonment, although she could not help me; she had to bear witness to my journey into a troubling darkness due to her severe inability to provide resources for my temporary survival. Yet, she was a rose during one of my darkest hours. Her name was Diane.

What other works are you showing at PACE London?

I am exhibiting thirteen works in the show; the show is a one-person exhibition, my first show with the gallery. Some of the highlights in the show are "King Kong Ain't Got Nothing On Me," "Ms. Chairs," "Chainsaw Master," "LaLa," "Slim," "Motorcycle Pig," "Monique," and, of course, "Diane."

What's next for you?

I anticipate having works in the Frieze London Art Fair with Pace Gallery this upcoming October.

Nathaniel Mary Quinn: Past/Present will run from 5th September till October 4th at Pace London, Lexington Street