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The 6 Rising Artists You Must Know In 2018

by Diane Solway
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It's hard to shake one of Nathaniel Mary Quinn's assembled faces once you've seen them: A kaleidoscope of facial features as if glimpsed in a funhouse mirror, they begin with the visions that come regularly to him. "I never write them down because I never forget them," says the artist, 40, who recently joined New York's Salon 94 gallery, with whom he'll have a solo show next fall. "All I

know is that I have this visual response to make them. That's primarily what drives me. The work is telling me what it is; I'm just this puppet."

Though his portraits appear to be collaged, they are actually hand drawn by Quinn and based on the mood board of photographs he's gathered online or from magazines. But each time he paints a new feature, he covers the rest of the work so that he concentrates on that part of the picture. Only when he removes all of the covered bits does he see how the components have come together.

The artist grew up in the 1970s as the youngest of five boys in the Robert Taylor Homes in Chicago, one of the most infamous housing projects in the country. His brothers were high school dropouts, but Quinn, a bright student with a knack for drawing, won a scholarship to attend a boarding school in Indiana.

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While he was away at school, his mother died; a month after the funeral Quinn, then only 15, returned home only to find that his father and brothers had abandoned him. Orphaned, he survived by strenuously applying himself at school so that he could keep his scholarship. He never heard from his family again until 2016, when out of the blue, he received a call from his brother Charles, who had seen Quinn on YouTube discussing his art practice on a popular podcast called “The Brilliant Idiot.” His brother half-heartedly explained how the family had dispersed; Quinn hasn’t spoken to him since.

Much of his work, he says, “is about my trying to seek a resolution to my childhood; It’s my way of recreating my family so that they can continue to exist. Formally speaking, I wanted to find a way to create a stronger marriage between the grotesque and the seamless, between chaos and organization.” Quinn taught at-risk youth following his graduate studies in fine arts at New York University, before turning full-time to painting in 2015. Once he arrived at his approach, Quinn’s career took off. He was featured in a group show in 2013 at the Susan Inglett Gallery, several of his works were acquired by the art patron Peggy Cooper Cafritz, and he had breakout solo shows at Pace Gallery in London, Rhona Hoffman in Chicago, M + B in Los Angeles and Half Gallery in New York.

In addition to his Salon 94 show next fall, Quinn will be included in a group exhibition at the Drawing Center; in 2019, he’s set to make his Paris solo debut with the gallerist Almine Rech. His creative breakthrough, he says, followed several years of therapy, during which he realized that his abandonment was, in some ways, his saving grace. “I was given a chance because I was rescued from what could have been my doom. And as it turns out, that experience gave me a history of information that would someday become the bedrock for my career. Look at all the stories I can tell through my work now.”



Nathaniel Mary Quinn, *Buck Nasty Players Haters Ball*, 2017.
Courtesy the artist and Salon 94.