

NATHANIEL  
MARY  
QUINN

If you’ve ever tried to put a puzzle together, you know that feeling when you go to lock one piece with another only to discover it doesn’t fit—you’ve done the puzzle incorrectly. But when putting the pieces of your life together, there are no seamless transitions. Artist Nathaniel Mary Quinn knows this.

Quinn was born in Chicago in 1977; “a difficult upbringing” is how to describe his formative years. Coming from a broken home in the projects, Quinn found his opportunities were limited. His way out came in eighth grade with a scholarship at a private boarding school in Indiana. That same month, Quinn lost his mother and was abandoned by his four brothers and father; he was only 15. Realizing school was his saving grace, he graduated with honors from Wabash College in 2000 and went on to complete his Master of Fine Arts degree from New York University in 2002.

Quinn then moved to Brooklyn, where he worked for ten years as a professor, tutor, and mentor for at-risk youth. Still, moonlighting as a figurative artist, he just couldn’t quite grasp or quell the gnawing emptiness that seemed to follow him.

Between 2012 and 2013, Quinn went to therapy for his abandonment and separation issues. It was around the same time his catharsis would extend to his artwork. His epiphany came



*The Borrower*

PIECES OF ME

WORDS BY HANNAH ROSE PRENDERGAST  
ARTWORK COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

one day in a state of automatism; on his canvas he recognized his estranged brother, Charles. And suddenly, another piece of the puzzle fell into place.

Joining key facial elements of the eyes, nose, and mouth with fragmented figures copied by hand and sourced from fashion magazines, family photographs, comic books, and Google Images, Quinn is reconstructing his past using large-scale, mixed-media portraiture.

Familiar faces resurface from childhood memories to overlap with the people Quinn meets today. But one he visits the most:

his mother, Mary. Often recalling her likeness, even later adding “Mary” to his own name, Quinn forever shares his success with the woman who encouraged him to be the be artist he could and would be.

Quinn brandishes the triumphs that come with beating the odds, saying, “I am the nightmare of my enemies, of societal and political conditions that were specifically designed for my destruction, of teachers who described my future as bleak and dire, of people who thought that having a full-time career as an artist was an impossibility.” Had things not been set up for him to fail, Quinn admits, “I would not have had the necessary

*Homeboy Down the Block*





resiliency and courage to fight for my dreams as an artist.” He goes on to explain that losing everything at such a young age made him impervious to criticism and able to take risks—critical ingredients for any artist, really.

Technically, Nathaniel Mary Quinn’s work is somewhere between Autobiographical and Collage Art, referencing the movements of Expressionism and Cubism, with Baroque-era inspirations including Rembrandt, Velázquez, and Caravaggio; his contemporaries are cited as Adrian Ghenie with his knack for

defacing people and the Social Realism of Neo Rauch. And though Quinn demonstrates that we are the sum of our experiences, his art is gestalt in nature, if you place more importance on the arrangement of the puzzle than the content.

In addition, Quinn’s work explores the many faces of one person. It’s a look at ourselves from every angle—the good, the bad, and the ugly—sans filter, brought to life using black charcoal, oil paint, paint stick, gouache, soft pastels, and oil pastels.

*America’s Next Top Model*



*Night Model*

Quinn has over 30 group exhibitions and 16 solo shows under his belt, as well as permanent collections on display at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; The Art Institute of Chicago; The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; and the Brooklyn Museum.

With features in British Vogue, W Magazine, Forbes, Dazed and Confused, and The New York Times, among others, Quinn is a fixture in the glossy pages he borrows from.

If you’ve ever tried to put a puzzle together, you know the frustration of when you expect a piece to click into place and it doesn’t—akin to, let’s say, life not going your way. Allow Nathaniel Mary Quinn to show you some of the most beautiful puzzles aren’t so easily solved.