

How Many People Does it Take to Make Art Work?

Nate Freeman

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Partners, gallerists, assistants, dancers, zombies. An artist's practice is full of collaborators—five of New York's most vital young artists share theirs.

It seemed strange to publish this story, which appears in the print version of GARAGE Issue 18, about family, community and collaborators given that living in quarantine has changed the ways we interact with the world. (For the most part, these shoots could not take place today.) We asked the artists to let us know where they were quarantining, what their version of community looks like now, and the ways in which the quarantine has changed their process if at all. Their answers are below.



Nathaniel Mary Quinn

Nathaniel Mary Quinn doesn't need a whole big group of people helping him out while he's at the studio. The Chicago native seeks only the approval of one person: his wife, the actress Donna Augustin-Quinn. Since he first started making paintings—fabulous distorted depictions of bodies, neo-Cubist explorations of the face—she has been his first viewer, sounding board, and editor. “My wife sees everything I make, and I trust her judgment and assessment, you know?” Quinn said. And her role is not just a casual support position: She is officially Quinn's studio manager. “I don't exactly have a factory of assistants or anything of that nature...we manage everything together as a team, a loving team,” he said. Even when big museum directors come calling—and they have; his work is included in the permanent collections of the Whitney Museum, the Hammer Museum, and the Art Institute of Chicago—he says he leans on her wisdom and discretion first and foremost.

“Donna and I are quarantining in our home in Brooklyn. Everybody in my community is staying-in-shelter, although there have been a sprinkle of people who seemed unmoved by the gravity of the pandemic and its associated risks. Initially, during the nascent stages of the outbreak, as the world underwent its profound shift from that which was impeccably tenuous to that which is monumentally and historically shattering, I was stopped in my tracks for about four weeks. I could not make art. I just kept reading and watching everything about the coronavirus, the pandemic, and the tremendous sorrow and pain that enveloped the world. After some time had gone by, I became increasingly embedded in my studio practice. It seems that the magic of creating has given me intermittent respite from ‘The Happening.’ Somehow and somehow, I know that the surreal and profound impact being endured by the world is flowing through my hands, into my work—not that I’m making works specifically about our current existence—but; conversely, the works certainly bear the weight and internalized acceptance of the world’s current state, while I pursue accepting it, letting go of it, dismantling concepts of control, and becoming as peacefully present as humanly possible. And yet, I am persistently thoughtful—for compassion and empathy never slumber—as we hope for and await better days, a sense of deliverance and relief that seems a day late and an hour short after each and every passing day and critical hour.” —April 24, 2020