

whitewall

June 24, 2020
By Eliza Jordan

Nathaniel Mary Quinn Won't Succumb to Mediocrity



Nathaniel Mary Quinn, *I Just Remember How Comfortable She Was Sitting On The Porch*, 2019 Courtesy of the artist and Almine Rech Gallery.

Nathaniel Mary Quinn's "Soil, Seed, and Rain" solo show opened in February at Rhona Hoffman Gallery in Chicago. The exhibition of new pieces included works on paper and paintings on linen canvas. Just a few weeks in, it closed early due to the outbreak of COVID-19. Like others around the world, Quinn found himself isolated at home in New York, aiming to stay hopeful while adapting to a new normal.

The couple of months has given Quinn the time he needs to be as present as possible, working in three separate five-hour sessions each day. To many, that's a lot, but to the artist, it's been necessary.

Whitewall spoke with Quinn about not accepting mediocrity, destroying artworks if necessary, and awaiting better days.

WHITEWALL: How are you doing in isolation? Are you able to make work?

NATHANIEL MARY QUINN: Initially, I was not able to work as I was bewildered by the coming pandemic, as I'm sure was the case for the entire world. After about a month, after finding peace with everything—after learning to accept it all—I began embedding myself into my work.

I have been creating small works on paper and linen canvas. On the other hand, quite uncharacteristically, I have destroyed some of my completed works made during the pandemic. I wanted to know what it would feel like to tear up a work after fully completing it. I find solace in the fact that I can just make another work.

WW: How would you describe your creative practice?

NMQ: My overall creative process is the combination of collaborating with my materials and being intuitive and present, fueled by numerous hours of concentrated labor, typically working from 10:00 a.m. or 11:00 a.m. until between midnight and 2:00 a.m.—sometimes until 3:00 a.m.

Mediocrity is unacceptable in my process. All that is successful, or a failure, is carried by me; succumbing to mediocrity and laying blame on something else or somebody else—outside of that which is completely out of your control—relinquishes one's individual power and brings to surface one's own weakness and cowardice.

I listen to podcasts while working. As night nears, I tend to listen to music. My day is divided into three phases; each phase is five hours in length. Phase one is from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.; phase two is from 3:15 p.m. to 8:15 p.m.; phase three is from 8:30 p.m. until 12:30 a.m. This occurs every single day, except for occasional and rare days off and, of course, vacations. There isn't much else in the world that interests me outside of creating.

WW: Has your process changed or adapted during isolation?

NMQ: Somehow, 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 reflective of our current times, but conversely, the works certainly seem to 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 present as humanly possible.

And yet, I am persistently thoughtful, as we hope for and await better days, a sense of deliverance and relief that seems a day late and an hour short.

ALMINE RECH

WW: In those few hours you aren't working, what are you up to?

NMQ: On occasion, my wife and I take morning walks together or run for a mile or two. I have been exercising; normally this happens before I begin working in the studio. I have been reading books and essays by James Baldwin, one of my favorite authors. During the early evenings, I go out into my backyard, sit on the patio, and stare into the deep sky, taking a short break before entering phase three of my studio practice.