

# 'Nathaniel Mary Quinn'

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Nathaniel Mary Quinn

*Curated by Eric troncy*

The Consortium Museum presents Nathaniel Mary Quinn's first solo exhibition in France, gathering fifteen works unfolding around *The Director* (2019), a painting from the Consortium's permanent collection.

Nathaniel Mary Quinn's practice draws from memories and fragments of found images sourced from magazines, personal photographs, and the internet. In his paintings, he creates composite portraits with mixed techniques (oil, charcoal, gouache, acrylic, and pastel on paper or linen) inspired as much by art history—from Cubism and Expressionism to Francis Bacon—as by his own recollections from fugitive encounters and family moments alike, many of them informed by his childhood in the Robert Taylor Homes housing project of Chicago's South Side. A gifted student who drew obsessively as a child, as a teenager he won a scholarship to attend Culver Academies boarding school in Indiana but soon was stricken by the grief of losing his mother, shortly followed by his abandonment by his father and siblings. He honored his mother's memory by adding her name, Mary, to his full name shortly before graduating from school. Every painting he makes is dedicated to her.

Despite these grievous early setbacks, Nathaniel Mary Quinn pursued a life and career marked by perseverance, discipline, persistence and labor, working as a social worker for many years while continuing his art practice.

While reminiscent of the modernist tradition of collage, his artworks are portraits based on people from his immediate community, "trying to articulate visually that which is often unseen."<sup>1</sup> Nathaniel Mary Quinn's current work often comes to him intuitively, triggered by associations and memories that are reflected in the fragmentary and dissociative aspect of his paintings, very much like the flashes of information that arise naturally in a stream of consciousness in apparently unrelated bits and pieces. These are then recomposed into a whole that combines recognizable fabric patterns, items of clothing, facial features and limbs. In his own words, his work "deals with social issues, but through a more personal filter." Many commentaries on his work focus on (or even stop at) the apparently distorted aspect of his portraits; however, it would be more accurate to describe them as intense compositions where the dissociative aspects of memory are rejiggered to create an outer image reflective of all the disparate and often discordant elements that are constitutive of the self, or the perception thereof, while highlighting empathy and vulnerability. In this, they strive to reconcile the internal worlds of both the artist and his subjects with the reality of the African-American experience, the disjointed visual world of the subconscious with the commonalities of everyday life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, melding the legacy of early modernism together with the reality of our post-internet universe; in the end, finding meaning in the fragmentary nature of our current existence.

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Anderson Cooper, *Gagosian Quarterly*, Fall 2019.