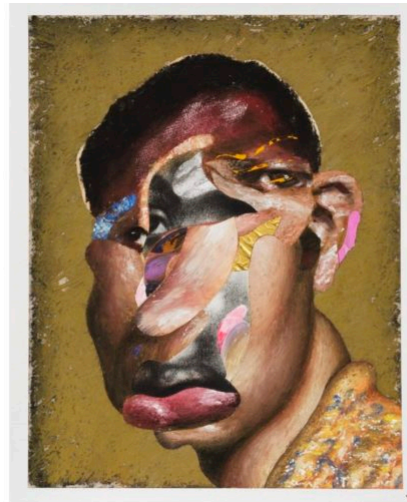


GAGOSIAN

LA WEEKLY

NATHANIEL MARY QUINN AT GAGOSIAN BEVERLY HILLS

Shana Nys Dambrot



Nathaniel Mary Quinn, How Come Not Me, 2019. Black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel, oil pastel on Coventry Vellum Paper, 16 x 13 in. © Nathaniel Mary Quinn. (Rob McKeever / Courtesy Gagolian)

Shortly before the opening of his new show at Gagolian Gallery in Beverly Hills, New York-based artist Nathaniel Mary Quinn gave an in-depth walk-through of the exhibition, his first with the gallery. Artist talks like this tend to focus on the meaning, the narrative and/or symbolic intentions of the artist, or other aspects of its “about.” Tellingly, Quinn spoke almost entirely of its “how” instead.

A detailed recounting of studio practices and an evocative, almost performative description of the engineering of the work’s many layers and his hyper-specific material choices and thus certain requisite techniques, as well as a quasi-scientific engagement on his part for what it is possible to achieve with the right approach, made it clear that for Quinn the “about” is in fact indelibly embedded and directly expressed within the complex experimentation with the “how.”

Even the exhibition’s title, *Hollow and Cut*, despite its emotional flavor, refers more so to the artist’s relentless, patient process. Oil stick, gouache, charcoal, pastel and more is all applied with hands not brushes. There is an elaborate taping-off of certain passages and whole sectors, a compartmentalization by thirds of each composition, a building up from off the surface, a rubbing down here and there, an on-surface alchemy unfolding between abutting mediums, and endless contouring, distressing, and perfecting of imperfections that one senses could go on forever were it not for the arrival of the gallery shippers to the studio.



Nathaniel Mary Quinn, C'Mo and Walk With Me, 2019. Black charcoal, gouache, soft pastel, oil pastel on Coventry Vellum Paper, 50 x 38 in. (Photo: Rob McKeever / Courtesy Gagolian)

Each painting is divided into thirds, and although each one follows a portrait format (some the bust, some full body) each section has its own distinct character and flair, and often its own configuration of materials. Quinn is basically playing Exquisite Corpse with himself by working this way. And in fact another Surrealist party game is invoked in his “performance drawings” in which he works simultaneously with both hands to create a portrait. Both “games” are intended to access the subconscious mind and to elicit from it strange images of deeper truth, and so they do.

At this point in the artist’s practice, he is engaged in a deep dive into his studio process, filtering influences from Cecily Brown to Adrian Ghenie, Guston, and Velasquez into his quest to always be a better painter. However, there was and there remains a rich dimension of content and meaning in these small- and medium-scale (and one large, his most physically ambitious to date) paintings and mixed media drawings — something hinted at by the psychological aspects of his instances of Surrealism, but also in the character of his choice of the portrait as his idiom.

It all began with his mother, and while other figures from life and literature appear in the invisible spirit of the work, in so many ways it still is about or at least for her. And in this work exists this personal heartfelt love, plus a vibrant appreciation for art history, the choice of psychologically salient processes, and the actions of excavation, accumulation, juxtaposition, experimentation, intuition, and obsession. In style and substance, it is the perfect confluence of Quinn’s own search for individuation, and will surely remind viewers of their own path to the same.



Nathaniel Mary Quinn Hollow and Cut. Courtesy Gagosian (Photo: Jeff McLane)



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