

Whitewall
July 13, 2023

GAGOSIAN

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Nathaniel Mary Quinn Untangles Truth, Memory, and Perception at Gagosian Paris

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Nathaniel Mary Quinn, "Super Jet," 2023, charcoal, gouache, and soft pastel on Coventry vellum paper, 60 x 44 inches, © Nathaniel Mary Quinn, photo by Rob McKeever, courtesy of Gagosian.

Cubism Informs New Familial Explorations

Through July 29 in Paris, **Gagosian** is presenting **Nathaniel Mary Quinn**'s first solo exhibition in the city at its Rue de Ponthieu gallery. Entitled "The Forging Years," Quinn's new works explore the subjectivity of the truth and how it hinges on our memory and perception, sparked by his own familial stories and memories.

The artist's recognizable distorted faces—painted as though they were made from collages and warping tools in digital creation platforms—exist in intimate scale and slightly larger ones, their poignant features captured in a carefully-selected mixture of mediums like gouache, oil paint, charcoal, paint stick, oil pastel, and soft pastel. Quinn dives into his own memory to consider

how the stories he holds near to his heart might actually be just that—stories. He draws on concepts of philosophy, psychology (including **Suzanne Imes**’s thoughts on Gestalt theory), and artists from the past like **Rembrandt**, **Francis Bacon**, and the basic concepts of cubism.

To learn more about his captivating figures and the stories behind them, *Whitewall* caught up with the New York-based artist just ahead of the show’s opening.



Installation view, Nathaniel Mary Quinn, “The Forging Years,” © the artist, courtesy of Gagosian.

WHITEWALL: This marks your first show in Paris. Did that inspire you in any way?

NATHANIEL MARY QUINN: I wouldn’t say Paris influenced this series, but what helped to initiate a particular fire and reconsideration of my artistic practice was doing a deep dive into cubism—Picasso and Braque, in particular.

What influenced me at the time was how the figures seemed to emerge from a collection of cubes [*laughs*]. That was so mind-blowing to me. It’s weird, I just never fully understood that. It’s instant genius, the man was way ahead of his time. Cubism to me is like the dawn of cinematic technology and CGI. That is what cubism was. It was way ahead of its time. It’s ground-breaking shit.

WW: To be able to represent with minimal shapes something that everyone will see as something they are describing is a revolution.

NMQ: It’s so powerful. So, I made a cubist work. I studied how to do it. I gave intense visual attention to those works. I mean, really looking at them very closely. And it was a simple shape that stood out to me, this shape [*gestures*] boom, boom, boom. That’s the size of a cube, see, like a square. And the works had special depth. So, it looks like the cubes, which eventually will form this figure, receded into the background of this two-dimensional plane. That’s awesome. You want to connect everything and you have to remain committed to the process and make very sound choices and make sure everything falls together.

“You have to remain committed to the process”



Nathaniel Mary Quinn, "Super Jet," 2023, charcoal, gouache, and soft pastel on Coventry vellum paper, 60 x 44 inches, © Nathaniel Mary Quinn, photo by Rob McKeever, courtesy of Gagosian.

WW: How do you see this new work as a reflection of your artistic journey so far?

NMQ: As an artist, I spend an incredible amount of time to myself. I spend most of my life in the studio making work. When I work, I listen to music or podcasts. I listen to both sides of everybody's story—republican, democrat, liberal, conservative, I listen to every argument, and all kinds of other stories, as well.

Then, something began to be highlighted for me, which was, you have these people who may be talking about things or a topic, but they don't really know the truth. There's just a great deal of contributions being made to a story, but nobody really knows what happened, they're just making contributions based on what they saw somewhere—and I found that to be intriguing.

WW: How so?

NMQ: Gaining an understanding of that forced me to rethink my experience when my mom died. For years I lived with this particular story about my mother's death, and I just took it as truth. But it dawned on me for the first time that I don't actually know what happened really. All I know is what people told me.

What I do know is this: my mom did die and it has something to do with my oldest brother's drug addiction and it has something to do with them buying drugs on credit from local drug dealers. I know that to be true. But I don't know when it happened. I don't know if he knew these guys or not. I don't know if he'd gotten drugs from these guys before. I don't know exactly what the drug dealer said to my mom... if they banged, if they kicked the door in. I don't know how it transpired. I don't what my mother was feeling after being confronted by these guys.



Nathaniel Mary Quinn, "The Getaway," 2023, oil paint, oil pastel, and gouache, on Coventry vellum paper, 37 x 30 inches, © Nathaniel Mary Quinn, photo by Rob McKeever, courtesy of Gagosian.

“We’re all caught up in a whirlwind of narratives and stories, none of them exactly being based on any real truth.”

Some people say she died while she was on the sofa. Others think she died while she was in the tub—which is why I have the painting of the woman hanging out of the tub. I don’t know the details because I never saw a police report and I never saw another report and I never spoke to an eye witness. The only eye witness who could tell me and the other eye witness who could tell me is gone, because they’re on drugs...

So that’s what gave me the idea to do a show, to revisit this narrative of challenging my own myth about the circumstances surrounding my mother’s death. And that’s it. That’s really at the crux of the inspiration behind this body of work. We’re all caught up in a whirlwind of narratives and stories, none of them exactly being based on any real truth.



Nathaniel Mary Quinn, "Intruder," 2023, charcoal, gouache, and soft pastel on Coventry vellum paper, 8 x 15 inches, © Nathaniel Mary Quinn, photo by Rob McKeever, courtesy of Gagosian.