

# Nathaniel Mary Quinn. Split Face

Oct 7, 2023 — Mar 11, 2024 | Museo Novecento, Museo Stefano Bardini, Florence, Italy

*I like to think that my work reflects uninhibited harmonious diversity - at times fluid and seam/ess, at times grotesque and discordant - but, sure/y, an embrace of reality as it is and the pursuit of what is possible. Rather than being a "collage" mentality, it's an "expressionist cubism" mentality, where one is able to embrace the rainbow-like spectrum of humanity, and as such, reflect our internalized words as a people.*

— [Nathaniel Mary Quinn](#)

Museo Novecento is delighted to announce *Split Face*, a monographic exhibition by [Nathaniel Mary Quinn](#) (Chicago, 1977), an artist known for his composite portraits that test the boundaries between abstraction and figuration in a style that recalls techniques from the historical avant-gardes (from 7 October 2023 to 11 March 2024).

The exhibition, curated by Sergio Risaliti and Stefania Rispoli, is the artist's first monographic exhibition in both Italy and Florence, and will involve the Museo Stefano Bardini and Museo Novecento.

"An important exhibition that brings for the first time in Florence and /ta/y a monographic exhibition of one of the most disruptive artists on the international scene," said Deputy Mayor and Councillor for Culture Alessia Bettini. "A double stage that features the art of [Nathaniel Mary Quinn](#) in declination between Museo Bardini and Museo Novecento, putting us in front of more than portraits to real two-dimensional sculptures. A dialogue between Renaissance inspiration, Cubism, and Surrealism that becomes a composition strongly anchored to current events and the every day, to faces, to people, to the breakdown of the personality and characters of each. And Florence, once again, is ready to highlight its expressive power."

"Challenging the canon of beauty that dominated portraiture until the 19th century, [Quinn](#) treads the path blazed by the great masters of the 20th century, including Picasso and Bacon, and promotes the freedom to interpret the human figure, composition, balance and psychological investigation, and formulates an anti-academic language that is always original and unsettling - affirms Sergio Risaliti, director of Museo Novecento - His arrival into Florence is like that of a boxer in the Botticelli room at the Uffizi: a challenge to the canons of Renaissance beauty, as was that of Picasso's Cubist faces or Bacon's swollen, boneless figures, a painting that challenges our ability to abandon preconceptions in knowing the other."

Presented along with masterpieces by Donatello, Pollaiuolo, Della Robbia, and those by Felice Casorati, Virgilio Guidi, Carlo Levi and many others, there will be more than fifteen of the artist's works, from his studio and prestigious public and private collections. *Split Face* is a unique opportunity to showcase a selection of [Quinn's](#) works, including several new paintings created specifically for this exhibition and in direct response to Florentine Renaissance portraits and Italian 20th century masters, to the public. As with the past forays of John Currin, Glenn Brown, Luca Pignatelli, Anj Smith, Emiliano Maggi and Rachel Feinstein, the artistic directors of the Museo Novecento are innovating and proposing a dialogue between the works of one of the most advanced figurative artists, [Quinn](#), and the Bardini Museum, whose collection and museological organisation are the result of an eclectic passion for classical, medieval and Renaissance art, as was that of the art dealer and collector Stefano Bardini.

Nathaniel Mary Quinn's works, at times grotesque and monstrous, are executed with meticulous attention to detail, exceptional painterly quality and technique, and a flair for hyperrealism and cartooning. All these aspects, combined with a strong expressive power and tension, create a sense of disorientation and bewilderment in the beholder. The faces seem to be cut out, like images sliced into pieces and then recombined to match the artist's intentions for the face of the subject portrayed.

Quinn explores the construction of memory and perception with references to his persona! and familial history. In his practice, he blends people and events close to him with images from magazines, comics or found photographs; he juxtaposes references to the figurative tradition, from Modernism onwards, with the most contemporary visual culture, combining low and high culture. His visual language is also fueled by experiences in the fields of music, literature, and psychotherapy, and once again he makes montage - the "cutting and sewing or pasting" pioneered in both art and fashion by the 20th century avant-gardes - the focus of his artistic work. Ultimately, Quinn confronts us with contemporary reality, how it is communicated to us and how we experience it, how we construct and represent our lives and the lives of others. His portraits are a temporal concentrate that stitches together past and present, persona! memories, and fragments from a collective archive taken from the most disparate media to create an exquisite corpse.

Looking at works such as Marna, Joe, James Brown, Mr. Nightmare, or Split Face, we are invited to abandon our aesthetic models that often imprison the psychological complexity of the subject, sometimes even disturbing, in a countenance that is always reassuring in terms of balance and harmony. These works have none of the smoothness and formal correctness of specific contemporary images, still inclined to exploit classical and Renaissance forms through fiat quotations of postmodern spirit, but appear as a traditional 'cocktail' that can be brutal and violent, 'anti-graceful,' to borrow the title of a famous 1916 Carlo Carrà painting. Within the Museo Bardini, whose collection and museological arrangement is the fruit of merchant Stefano Bardini's eclectic passion for classical, medieval, and Renaissance art, Quinn's works shout and reaffirm their belonging to the world of reality and truth.