

## Biography

Ged Quinn was born in Liverpool in 1963. He studied at the Ruskin School of Drawing in Oxford, the Slade School of Art in London, the Kunstakademie Dusseldorf and the Rijksakademie, Amsterdam. He has exhibited widely and his work is represented in many collections.

Recent solo exhibitions include Bass Museum, Miami, Florida, USA (2012-13) and Modern Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas (2012). His work was also the subject of Stephen Friedman Gallery's annual solo presentation at the 2012 Frieze Art Fair. Other recent solo exhibitions include Stephen Friedman Gallery (2011) and Wilkinson Gallery (2010).

Recent selected group exhibitions include *Looking at the View*, Tate Britain (2013), *The Future's not what it used to be*, Newlyn Art Gallery, Penzance, Cornwall, UK (2013), *Disaster/The End of Days*, Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris, France (2013), *Beyond Reality*, Rudolfinum, Prague, Czech Republic (2012), *Everywhere and Nowhere*, Reydan Weiss Collection, Oberstdorf, Germany (2012), *Restore us and Regain*, Glasgow School of Art (2010), *Newspeak: British Art Now*, Saatchi Gallery, London (2010) and Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Russia (2009) and *Made Up*, Liverpool Biennial, Tate Liverpool (2008).

In 2014, his work will be included in a two person show with Victor Pivovarov at Galerie Rudolfinum, Prague, Czech Republic.

## Publication

A substantial publication accompanies the exhibition with texts by Michael Bracewell, Dr Brian Dillon and Sarah Virtue as well as colour reproductions of all works exhibited. The publication is co-published with Stephen Friedman Gallery, London and generously supported by Walsall Museums and Art Galleries Development Trust.

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## In Conversation

Saturday 30 November, 2pm  
Join the artist for an informal tour of the exhibition.

Book your free place in advance by calling 01922 654400 or by calling at Reception.

# Ged Quinn

9 October 2013 — 5 January 2014

Exhibition guide

The New Art Gallery Walsall is delighted to present this major solo exhibition of paintings by Ged Quinn which surveys the artist's practice over the last four years. Paintings from private collections in the UK, Europe and America are shown alongside brand new works created especially for this project. The exhibition testifies to the complexity and breadth of the artist's practice and includes landscapes, portraits and still lifes.

Although Quinn has shown extensively in Europe and America, this is his first solo exhibition in a public gallery in the UK since Tate St Ives in 2004 and Tate Liverpool as part of the 2008 Liverpool Biennial.

Quinn is perhaps best known for his large scale landscape paintings. In earlier works, intriguing and elusive narratives nestled subtly within their rural settings. However, in the more recent paintings, these compelling scenarios have evolved significantly. References to European history, mythology and architecture collide with artistic and literary references and acknowledgements to filmmakers from Walt Disney to Jean-Luc Godard and Andrei Tarkovsky. In the newest of the paintings, traditional pictorial devices used to suggest depth or perspective, are playfully challenged by the use of filmic text and explicit engagement with the flatness of the canvas. Contrasts and contradictions abound. Quinn's paintings provide an intellectual

space for an interrogation and critique of historical and cultural iconography fuelled by the artist's own unique perspective.

The richness of Quinn's imagery and the complexity of his work can best be explored through focusing on an example of his recent work. *On Behalf of the Pharmakon* (2012) employs a characteristic landscape setting drawn in this case from Jacob van Ruisdael's *Marsh in a Wood* (c1665). The scenario represented is dominated by the presence of a geodesic dome, designed in the 1950s by architect and visionary Buckminster Fuller and utilised here as a symbol of the failure of the idealism of modernist thinking. The dome was intended as a streamlined, easy to assemble dwelling requiring no internal

supporting structures. Revealingly, it now lies derelict, the graffiti on its weathered and decayed surfaces referencing eugenics and alchemy.

The idealised image of a horse in water carries, as if across the Styx, the ghost of the exiled German writer Thomas Mann, whose work is known for its symbolic, epic and ironic qualities and for his supposed insight into the psychology of the artist and the intellectual. A cross construction lies in the abandoned boat but this is not the symbol of Christian salvation but a symbol for poison. It is accompanied by the hat of Francis Bacon, the 17th century philosopher, poet, scientist and mystic. Bacon is renowned as a thinker for whom the rational and irrational coexist and interplay with each other.

The title itself is intriguing and further indicates the complexity and sophistication of the work, referencing a range of influences from the history and mythology of ancient Greece through to the philosophy of Jacques Derrida. The *pharmakos* is a cultural and social scapegoat, a sacrificial purging of the ills of the social order by the expulsion and destruction of the "useless" member of society. In Derridean terms, it is paradigmatic of the breakdown of any imagined boundaries between the conceptual construct of inside and outside.

A further layering occurs in the progression of the term into *pharmakon* where it represents a drug, a spell-giving potion, a poisoner, a sorcerer or a magician. Through a myriad of sources, Quinn juxtaposes rationality and ritualised spirituality, consecration and de-consecration and the promise of both salvation and failure.

Quinn draws together exiles, outsiders, visionaries and ghosts within the theatrical setting of Ruisdael's landscape, creating highly complex and thought-provoking dialogues and multi-layered narratives. Like many of his paintings, this work possesses a powerful sense of drama and elements of the sinister.

Also on display are much smaller works; enigmatic portraits and intense still lifes which are also resplendent in references to a wide range of source material and are equally as beguiling. Two brand new portraits are inspired by the complex and troubled relationship between poet Paul Celan, a Holocaust survivor, and Martin Heidegger, an influential 20th century philosopher. Celan struggled to reconcile his admiration for the writings of Heidegger with his abhorrence of his sympathy for the Nazis. The two engaged in regular communication between 1951 and 1970. Typically, Quinn's

intriguing portraits of these figures are loaded with broader cultural and political references.

This pairing of portraits appears distinct from other works due to their integral frames. The use of these frames serves to both isolate and highlight the individual portraits as well as evoking a devotional or icon-like presence. They also resemble sound structures used for listening or broadcasting and so add a further conceptual dimension.

The still life genre is also appropriated and subverted by Quinn. Large-scale flower paintings influenced by 17th century Spanish and Dutch still lifes offer a contemporary perspective on the *vanitas* tradition with its underlying reminders of the transience of life and the inevitability of death and decay. Quinn takes on this tradition but provides further layers of symbolism to reflect on concepts of nostalgia and memory. These works are accompanied by smaller, exquisitely crafted compositions of cakes which are mutated into the shapes of military bunkers, built by the Germans to protect the Atlantic coast during the Second World War. Inspired by cultural theorist Paul Virilio's book, *Bunker Archaeology*, published in 1975, Quinn combines these ghostly reminders of destruction and oppression with what might otherwise be comforting, domestic scenes.

Viewers are not expected to be able to recognise and identify the key players and references within Quinn's highly theatrical paintings. What we do encounter are beautiful, compelling yet brooding and darkly haunting paintings that draw us in to consider the relationships between the various elements within the composition. A literal interpretation is not required yet the artist, like a great film director, employs his cast of characters, motifs and symbols to create works of art that are emotive, poetic, intelligent, multi-layered and endlessly thought-provoking.

*Deborah Robinson*  
*Head of Exhibitions*