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Finding Equilibrium

International sculptor Lorenzo Quinn's new work pushes the boundaries of scale and space and tackles important causes. It is also a statement about his progression as an artist, some 20 years into his career, writes Kathryn Tully

From now until next May, one of Lorenzo Quinn's most celebrated sculptures, *Give and Take III*, will be sitting in London's Berkeley Square to mark the opening of *Equilibrium*, a new exhibition of his work at Halcyon Gallery in Mayfair.

For Quinn, the message behind *Give and Take* made it right for the square. "We live in a superficial society and for those of us who have been given a lot, it's time to give back. *Give and Take* is very much about that," he says, before adding, "For any artist, being part of a public environment is the greatest thing that can happen to you. It's part of the legacy."

At 43, Quinn may seem rather young to be worrying about his legacy, but then he has been asking himself a lot of questions recently. "It's a very philosophical time in your life," he says. "You start asking what's your purpose here? Where do you come from?" These questions spawned *What Came First?*, one of the most important new pieces in *Equilibrium*, depicting the bronze figures of a man and a woman curled up at the centre of two marble, egg-shaped hemispheres.

Quinn decided to create the piece while celebrating his 20th wedding anniversary in Polynesia with his wife, Giovanna, and it took him nine months to complete. "It's a very important piece of work for me because it talks about this perfect balance that we have to have in life," he continues. "There's a lot I could say about this work, but I don't want to say it. I hope it will be self-explanatory."

He says the piece evolved from ideas he explored many years ago in *Stairs of Life*. That sculpture features *Etnos*, a young man climbing the stairs, *Tunios*, in mid life, standing at the top, and *Vernios*, the old man, having made his way down the other side. "Now I'm *Tunios*," he says. "I am getting towards the top of the stairs, and I feel that when I get there, all these questions will be even more intensified."

Loving supportive relationships are a recurring theme in Quinn's work, something deeply influenced by his own family, to whom he is devoted. "I can't imagine life without my family," he says. "I get a lot of inspiration from my wife and three children and that's a crucial part of what I do." But that theme is subverted in another new sculpture in the exhibition, *Home Sweet Home*, which highlights domestic violence. Visitors enter a darkened room to find the white figure of a woman huddled in a barbed wire nest. The sound of a tap dripping represents the fact that every second a woman is being abused somewhere in the world.

It is a cause that he and his wife feel passionately about and that he felt compelled to highlight. "An artist has to reflect the times he lives in," he says, pointing out that he became an artist primarily because he has things to say. "Right now, unfortunately, domestic violence goes on in many societies and homes. I had to make it and I'm very happy I did."

Quinn's work may be figurative, with his emotive depictions of human hands and figures, but his sculptures are all about the message. It is why his

poetry, often the inspiration behind a new piece, always appears alongside his sculptures. "Why do you have to have a person in the middle of the room explaining what a sculpture is? Why can't it come directly from the one who created it?", he asks, explaining that the poetry also begins a crucial dialogue. "People say 'Look, I understand where you're coming from, but I see something else in this sculpture'. I love it when that happens, because sometimes I haven't seen that."

Still, works such as *Home Sweet Home* are a departure for him because many of his sculptures celebrate much broader and aspirational themes of love, tolerance, harmony and understanding. He is not into public art that exists for its shock value. Instead, he wants to encourage people to ditch their myopic world view, to appreciate other people and give thanks for what they have. He wholeheartedly believes this is possible. "I'm an optimist," he says. "I believe that the glass is half empty, not half full."

Quinn has also been experimenting with much larger monumental works of late, another feature of his new work in the exhibition *Equilibrium*. For Quinn, the excitement comes just from the physical possibility of creating something bigger than he ever has before in his foundry. "I'm working on a scale now which was unimaginable to me even a year ago," he says. "Any of these projects alone could keep me working for five to six years."

This may present new creative and logistical challenges, and the requirement for much larger spaces, but that is not always a limitation. Sometimes certain large spaces, such as the Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno, become his inspiration for a monumental work (see page 12). Still, he says he has always been fascinated by the interaction between a sculpture and its surroundings, something he famously explored in his piece *Legacy*.

The sculpture in Sant Climent de Llobregat, Barcelona, depicts a tree formed from hands holding branches laden with cherries. The number of cherries will grow over the years, along with the town's population. "I love the idea of sculpture being alive," he says. "I hate the idea of doing an inauguration and then the sculpture just dying." He likes to stay involved in the places where his work is sited, one reason why he recently sculpted a special version of *Give and Take* for a Reach Out to Asia charity auction event in October in Doha, Qatar, a place that is home to several of his works. The sculpture raised \$500,000.

It is no surprise that Quinn, so earnest about having a positive impact on the world and striving to do better, is pondering his future, when in fact he has crammed more into the last 43 years than many people do in a lifetime. He studied at the American Academy of Fine Arts in New York and began work as a surrealist painter, commissioned by the United Nations at just 21. His father was the Oscar-winning actor Anthony Quinn, himself an accomplished artist, and he briefly followed his father into acting. He even dabbled with singing, recording a few songs with Quincey Jones.



Give & Take III in Berkeley Square
Photography by Chris Lee,
Getty Images



LORENZO QUINN AT THE GALLERY

Equilibrium, the major solo exhibition of works by the international sculptor Lorenzo Quinn, opened to the public on 18 November and continues until 31 January 2010. The artist will be speaking to visitors to Mayfair's Halcyon Gallery about his dramatic new monumental sculptures and giving insight into his inspiration, poetry and technique between 11.00am–4.00pm on Saturday 21 and Wednesday 25 November.

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Alongside master figurative sculptors such as Michelangelo, Bernini, Carpaux and Rodin, he says that Salvador Dalí has been a pivotal influence. In fact, he played him in the 1990 film *Dalí*, to considerable critical acclaim. "At first I was a surrealist painter and then I got to play him in a movie, which made me realise that there's only one Dalí and it definitely wasn't me," he jokes. "That's when I turned to sculpture." He adds, more seriously, that he never really loved acting. "The only thing that I was willing to suffer for was art."

He made his first symbolic sculpture in his New York studio in 1989. "I was just making a sculpture of a Michelangelo drawing, but I was looking at it, thinking 'well, what is man really without woman?'" The resulting Adam and Eve, in which Quinn sculpted the figure of Eve inside Adam's torso, is still one of his most popular works today.

Just five years later, the Vatican commissioned him to create a sculpture of Saint Anthony to commemorate the saint's 800th birthday, now in the Basilica del Santo in Padua, Italy. Quinn is still humbled by that commission. "Five million people go there every year, so it's amazing. The hand has been rubbed so much that the bronze is completely golden now. It's not mine any more, it's the Basilica's, so it's very special."

Since then, he has exhibited across five continents and has new exhibitions planned in 12 countries. In Spain, where he now lives, he recently unveiled *Looking to the Future in Sitges*, a memorial to the founder of Bacardi, Faccundo Bacardi Masso. Other important works include *The tree of life* at St Martin's Church in Birmingham, UK, a memorial to those killed during the Second World War.

Quinn has a long history of working in the UK and *Equilibrium* is the product of his long-standing relationship with Halcyon Gallery's President Paul Green, who remembers the day he first met Quinn ten years ago in Barcelona. "I walked into an exhibition and there he was," he recalls. "I liked his grittiness and the fact that he knew what he wanted. Most importantly, his work had a real resonance with me and with the other people who saw it."

Green's expertise in the placement of art in architectural settings has led to work on many projects with artists, enabling them to express themselves and realise their visions. He shares the dreams with each artist, committing to support them and building a unique relationship. In the case of Lorenzo this enables him to produce monumental sculptures to be placed in public locations in some of the most important sites in the world.

For Green, the motivation is to work closely with artists to create works of art that will enhance and enrich the environment for the enjoyment of all.

For Quinn artistic drive comes, in part, from his famous father and his desire to prove himself. He was incredibly close to his father, who died in 2001, and says being Anthony Quinn's son was a personal privilege but a public burden. "I wish I still had him with me. I could have asked him many more questions when I started out, but I'm a very proud person and I didn't. It was stupid because, in the end, he was my father, he was there to help. But I wanted everyone to see that I was doing this on my own."

Some 20 years later, he is still anxious to improve. Three weeks ago he was in the Vatican, marvelling at the art, but also the artists. "It makes you feel very small and meaningless, but you still have to do it, because you can learn so much. The artists may be dead, but their spirit is still there. It's quite incredible, the imprint they have left on the world."

It got him thinking about his legacy again. "I'm not saying that's what I strive for in every sculpture, but I do think about it," he says simply, with no pretense or ego. "I just think that I really have to do my best because this work will be around when I'm not here to defend it anymore."