

Marc Quinn

Fondazione Prada

Milan

May 5th - June 10th 2000

The Fondazione Prada opens on Friday, 5 May, in Milan the first one-man show dedicated to Marc Quinn (London, 1964) in Italy. Considered one of the most interesting exponents of "Young British Art", Quinn occupies an independent place in contemporary British art: he does not belong to any particular group or movement, although he shares "what is important common preoccupations of 'YBA' - he says - to bring real life into art, not just art about art. (...) I think we are more obsessed with real life. Art before was too much about art and not reality".*

The exhibition, conceived by Marc Quinn for the exhibition spaces of the Fondazione Prada, consists of three works which are here being shown for the first time ever: the sculpture *Continuous Present*, 2000, the sculptural group *Peter Hull, Selma Mustajbasic, Jamie Gillespie, Alexandra Wetsmoquette, Tom Yendel, Catherine Long, Stuart Penn, Helen Smith: Group Portrait*, 1999-2000, and the installation *Garden*, 2000. In richness and complexity the exhibition represents an important occasion for reviewing the artist's creative development, characterised "by the myth of unification which is opposed to the idea of separation and hence to duality, - the duality between life and death, before and after, exterior and interior - and in which the mechanism of life is a dialectic between antagonistic but co-present polarities. Where each moment always risks being transformed into its opposite: the active into the passive, the positive into the negative, the nothingness, the abyss, death, and the void into vital signs, into an art that is both essence and absence of life."**

The exhibition opens with the sculpture *Continuous Present*, 2000, a kind of time machine consisting of a reflecting stainless steel cylinder, round which revolves slowly a human skull supported by a metal arm. Turning on its own axis, it completes a revolution once every thirty minutes. The spectator, as he approaches the work, is reflected on the metal surface of the cylinder, and the coincidence between his reflection and that of the skull establishes the contact between his present and his future that is a kind of metaphor of the existential journey of each individual. "The mirror surface constantly represents - explains the artist - the present moment: it's always 'now', in the same way we always live in the present. And even if time passes and we die it's the present that counts."*** The reality of living and dying are superimposed by the reflecting surface. They coincide. They are simultaneously placed on the same level. This simultaneity, which transcends the temporal interval between the two poles of existence and places them on the same optical and artistic level, is achieved by recourse to anamorphosis, a visual technique developed by painters in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. The technique permits two images, one manifest, the other hidden, to exist in the same painting and to become simultaneously visible, and hence to co-exist, depending on viewpoint and the change in perspective.

Peter Hull, Selma Mustajbasic, Jamie Gillespie, Alexandra Wetsmoquette, Tom Yendel Catherine Long, Stuart Penn, Helen Smith: Group Portrait, 1999-2000, is a gallery of sculptural portraits consisting of eight marble figures. Portrayed nude and life size,

they represent four men and four women. All eight statues portray human beings deprived of one or more limbs as a result of birth, illness or accident. The work as a whole is a further reflection by the artist on the relation between the inside and the outside dimension, a theme tackled by Marc Quinn in previous sculptures which had recourse to his own bodily image. What interests the artist is the fact that the beauty and integrity of the soul is not automatically reflected in physiognomy and in physical characteristics and the expansion to the relationship between classical and contemporary sculpture. The classical sculpture, even if it comes down to us in fragments, in bodies with limbs and body parts lopped off, succeeds in communicating a beauty which is typical of the heroes and deities of the ancient world. The contemporary sculpture tends to reinterpret the figures of our own time, which possess the same fragmentariness as that of an absolute beauty, thus setting aside their bodily configuration which has no value compared to the inward spiritual essence: "I want to make sculptures which are a celebration of the sitters and make a connection with the able body people as well. The idea of inside does not reflect the outside as well".*** The statues are portrayed in classical poses, which recall the ancient figures of gods and athletes, dominated by the dynamic character, the lively gestures of the models who are shown engaged in sporting activities, in order to express their will power through action and movement: " I have tried to reconcile two different models, the antique one and the living one, by giving them a positive image. (...) The gesture imprinted in the marble is a way of bringing to the light the interior aspect, the form that impels and supports it".*** The visual perception of these astonishing bodies disorients the observer, whose initial reaction of surprise from a formal point of view gradually gives way to the discovery of the real dimension of a disabled body, yet one imbued with a strong charge of energy and emotion by which they are sublimated, making them appear as mythical personages suspended in a timeless atmosphere: "I do not think they are Gods - explains the artist - but they are certainly heroes. They symbolise transcending loss in these sculptures and that is what I got from the sitters when I met them. In the sense they are heroes and also they both lost and found and that is what attracting in them".***

Garden, 2000, is a real botanical garden, full of plants and flowers coming from all over the terrestrial globe. They are displayed in full bloom, and are potentially eternal: an unreal dimension that cannot exist unless produced artificially. In fact the plants have been subjected to a process of freezing that maintains them in an immutable state: they can neither grow nor perish. This Garden of Eden, realised thanks to the application of advanced technology, is hermetically sealed in a large closed environment constructed of isolating panels and linked to four refrigerator units. Inside it is furnished with mirrors, and a corridor separates the visitors by heated glass wall from the tank with walls of transparent acrylic framed in a structure of stainless steel. What appears to the visitor, whose image reflected in the mirror walls is transported as it were "through the looking glass" into this inaccessible world, is a landscape of wonders. Spread over a lawn are three trees, a cactus, a blossoming cornel tree, a banana plant, coming from distant countries with different climates, such as America, Asia and Europe, as well as many different types of flowers, which form splashes of different colour alternating with small plants. All these plants and flowers, about a hundred, are maintained in a state of maximum splendour by being immersed in twenty-five tons of liquid silicone fallen at a temperature of minus 20

degrees Celsius. They fill the tank, producing the enchantment of continuous spring. Immersed in silicone, that has the property to remain liquid and transparent at freezing temperature, the plants are frozen in this special environment in such a way as to keep them in a state of suspended animation: “The flowers - the artist says - physical atomic structure is the same as before, it is not replaced.”*** An extraordinary eternal flora exists in the absolute space of the garden. Immortalised by being placed in a state of frozen suspension and held in ephemeral equilibrium between symbolic and natural death, the flora gives concrete expression to a timeless dimension: “The flowers, when they freeze, become pure image. They become an image of perfect flower, because in the reality their matter is dead and they are suspended in a state of transformation between pure image and pure matter”.*** Absolute beauty and infinity co-exist because reunited by the miracle of an impossible garden: it is the materialisation of paradise lost, finally visible but no less inaccessible than before. It brings back to the observer the dream of perfection enclosed in the myth of the forbidden garden:“ The whole idea of the frozen garden is a form of cultural narcissism and it is to do with the fact that you are mortal, that is why you want something of perfect ”.***

The book published by the Fondazione Prada to coincide with the exhibition is conceived by Marc Quinn himself, and consists of a dizzying kaleidoscope of contrasting images: classical sculptures, old paintings, scenes of war and disasters, road and air accidents, portraits of the disabled, works of contemporary artists, scientific photos and a selection of works and photographs by the artist himself. The book represents a multi-perspective introduction to the subject-matter of Quinn’s works, to which all the images are linked by multiple associations. The kaleidoscopic sequence of the images is accompanied by readings that help to illuminate this journey without boundaries of space and time. The texts consists of essays by Germano Celant and Darian Leader, conversations of the artist with the individuals portrayed in the marble statues and an interview between Marc Quinn and Germano Celant.

* Simon Hattenstone, “Blood brother”, “The Guardian”, 25 October 1999..

** Germano Celant, “Marc Quinn: sulla via dell’Eden”*, introductory text to the book of the exhibition.

*** Interview of the artist with Germano Celant in the book of the exhibition.

Exhibition info

<i>Title:</i>	Marc Quinn
<i>Location:</i>	Fondazione Prada
<i>Address:</i>	Via Spartaco 8, Milan
<i>Dates:</i>	5 May - 10 June 2000
<i>Opening hours:</i>	Tuesday to Sunday, from 10.00 am to 7.00 pm; closed on Monday
<i>Admission:</i>	Free
<i>Publication:</i>	Fondazione Prada
<i>Information:</i>	Fondazione Prada - Tel. 02-546 70 216, Fax 02-546 70 258 www.fondazioneprada.org info@fondazioneprada.org
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