

Billy Quinn: An Artist for a Time of Plague
Work from the 1990s

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Declaration

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Introduction

Theoretical Framework, Literature Review,
Thesis Plan

This thesis concerns the work of the artist Billy Quinn during the decade of the 1990s. It was a very productive time for him, and a period during which he returned to a much-changed Ireland having spent a number of years in London and New York. On first looking at Billy Quinn's work, it does not surrender any suggestion of Irish roots but rather of the artistic and intellectual environments of London, New York City and specifically the gay-AIDS support community in New York during the 1980s and early 1990s. It also displays his deep familiarity with Western art, literature and philosophy. Since childhood, Quinn, as he emphasised in his interview, has had a love of reading and ideas. This was the time of AIDS and its devastation. It was a time when Michel Foucault's ideas were discussed and reviewed in the *New York Native*¹ along with statistics about infections and T-cell counts. Foucault's ideas were used as a way of making sense out of the chaos in which the gay community found itself. It provided strategies to combat institutionalised indifference and homophobia. Aiding in that battle was the work of Eve Sedgwick (Sedgwick, 1994, p. 3) and Judith Butler (Butler, 1999). Their writings on gender worked out Foucault's ideas in a way that had immediate relevance for the gay community and its survival. Quinn's work is about AIDS but also about faith and family. It addresses more issues than what a paper of this size allows time and space for.

Billy Quinn was born in Dublin in 1954. In 1973 and 1974 he attended the National College of Art and Design (NCAD) Foundation Year Programme. Before finishing he left Ireland and moved to London. Between 1977 and 1979 he studied for a diploma in fine art at City and Guilds in London. He continued his studies at North East London Polytechnic, gaining a BA in Fine Art and Film in 1982. In 1984 he started an MA in Theatre at the University of London. Shortly after, he went to New York where he lived until his return to Ireland in 1995. In New York, he supported himself with interior design projects and became involved in community activism as an early member of Act Up.² By 1990 he was back making art. From 1990 to 1995 he participated in a number of group and individual shows in New York, Chicago and Atlanta. All these shows were of works mostly concerned with the AIDS crisis and how people responded to it. His work was his response to the crisis. On his return to Ireland he was an artist in residence at the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA)

¹ The *New York Native* was biweekly newspaper published by Charles Ortlieb in New York City from December 1980 until December 1997. It published extensively on AIDS and HIV.

² Act Up, AIDs Coalition to Unleash Power, is an organisation engaging in direct action to influence legal and medical practices that have a bearing on HIV-positive people.

and displayed work with Out Art³ and at the Temple Bar Gallery in 1996 and 1998. During his stay in Dublin he worked on material that contributed to his PhD at East London University. The following year he returned to London and completed his PhD in Fine Art in 2000. The title of his dissertation is ‘More Life: Towards a Vitalist Manifesto or Bifurcation, Pseudopodia and the worm, Jane Seymour and me, even’. Since then he has lived and worked in the Netherlands.

In this thesis, I will use three terms to describe people who express their sexuality with their own gender, namely, homosexual, gay and queer. Before going further, it is worthwhile to define how I use these words or terms. The Oxford Dictionary of English online defines a homosexual as one who is attracted to people of one’s own sex. It also states that the word has its origins in the nineteenth century. In current use it has a vaguely disparaging sense, homo has been used as a term of disparagement, and the word gay is generally preferred (Peters, 2014, pp. 158-160). Gay is defined, by the same dictionary, as a homosexual male. The definition further explains that the word grew in popular usage to mean homosexual male during the sixties to the point where the traditional meanings of the word have largely been lost. Again, from the same dictionary, the definition of queer is ‘denoting or relating to a sexual or gender identity that does not correspond to established ideas of sexuality and gender, especially homosexual norms’. The word was used pejoratively at the end of the nineteenth century, about the same time as the word homosexual was entering the language. In the 1970s and 1980s the word was appropriated as a form of asserting the right to space and to protest against being denied that space. Unless specifically required in a title or classification, I do not use the word homosexual, preferring either gay or queer (Peters, 2014).

Michel Foucault (1926-1984) was a French academic whose work crossed a number of disciplines including history, philosophy and psychology (Kelly, Mark). Michel Foucault’s *The Will to Knowledge, The History of Sexuality* (Foucault & Hurley, 1979) is a foundational text upon which Queer Studies are built and on which I will draw to provide an intellectual framework for the art discussed herein and to explain why it is relevant to understanding Billy Quinn’s work. Quinn is gay and that fact forms how he experiences the world and why he challenges what is still considered ‘normal’. Foucault’s work analysing and deconstructing common understanding and assumptions around sexuality opened up new ways of seeing

³ Out Art was an organisation of gay and lesbian artists who organised art exhibitions in conjunction with pride festivities at various locations in Dublin between 1996 and 2004.

how and why these assumptions came to be held. He argued that they were not immutable facts but cultural accretions. Through his analysis, and in particular with his definition of power, and its uses, he created the possibility of changing our understanding of what is normal and of gender itself. His focus became those who are excluded and whose lives are not considered to be 'normal' (Bernal, Orozco & Molinares, 2016, pp. 113, 114). He died of AIDS in 1984.

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault continued his cultural archaeology, which he applied in previous works to prisoners and the insane. He sought to understand how our understanding of what sexuality is was arrived at and how society maintains and controls that understanding. His focus was homosexuality although his intention was to explore other areas of sexuality; but his untimely death did not allow this to happen (Gutting, 2005, p. 92). He wanted to show how society arrived at a set of rules that, once established, opened up the possibility to transgress. Transgression causes a defensive response, problematising actions that do not conform to the so-called norm, in this case heterosexuality. Foucault asked the question, through what process did homosexuality become a problem (Bernal et al., 2016, p. 115)? He found that over the past few centuries there had been a growth in sexual repression and at the same time an expansion in analysis of sexuality. Subsequent to the Council of Trent, which ended in 1563 and ushered in the Counter-Reformation, confession practice demanded exhaustive detail, not only of actions but of desire itself (Foucault & Hurley, 1979, pp. 18-21). He describes the process:

'The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated; and finally, a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation' (Foucault & Hurley, 1979, pp. 61-62).

The confessional was a place where the believer detailed his errors in thought and deed and the priest analysed the data and assessed appropriate reparation, liberating him from the burden of his sins. Foucault argues that this process of examination was applied outside the Catholic Church through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries during a period in which

there was a focus on collecting information of all sorts about people concurrent with the advent of new fields such as medicine, sociology, psychology and psychiatry. These new sciences developed databanks on the individual. Two methods of seeking truth—through ‘procedures of confession, and [of] scientific discursivity’—are combined (Foucault & Hurley, 1979, p. 65). The result he calls *Scientifica Sexualis*. In confession, we recount our sins in the same way we describe our symptoms to a medical practitioner or therapist who then categorises them and gives a diagnosis because he or she is an expert. In this process, pleasures were grouped into ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’. Heterosexuality was privileged and homosexuality problematised. The Victorian who practised sodomy in the mid-nineteenth century and before broke the law and was a subject under the law. He could be prosecuted and punished. Victorians referred to a man’s ‘character’, but by the early twentieth century his actions categorised him as a homosexual and he was identified as such (Barlow, 2017, p. 50).

Foucault scandalously said power is everywhere, leading many to believe, incorrectly, that he did not believe in oppression. He believed that power is everywhere because it is not a property belonging to an individual or institution or residing in a specific place but rather it is the complex relationship between various parts of society. Power is diffused; therefore, it is everywhere. Consequently, the possibility to resist it is within power itself (Halperin, 1995, pp. 16-17). We all have power. He viewed sexuality not as a natural drive but as a point of intersection for discourses of power. If sexuality is a point of intersection for discourses of power then Foucault could challenge existing assumptions about sexuality as fixed and stable, and facilitate the questioning of those sciences that are based on the idea that it is (Halperin, 1995, pp. 40-42). Arguing in this way allows him to challenge the idea of homosexuality as inherently negative and explains how it supplements heterosexuality as the privileged word (Halperin, 1995, p. 46).

If ideas such as heterosexuality can be challenged, then why not ideas about gender? In the 1990s, building on the work of Michel Foucault, scholars such as Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick developed Queer Theory, which challenged the accepted norms of gender and explored ways in which those norms might be modified (Barlow, 2017, pp. 12-13). Sedgwick stated that upon reading the list of the characteristics that go into the notion of the ‘sexual identity’ and are supposed to ‘organise into a seamless and univocal whole’, but on examination do not hold together and break down into a wide range of possibilities, one realises how reductive the homosexual-heterosexual binary is (Sedgwick, 1994, pp. 7, 8). This is exactly what Judith Butler addressed when she questioned the understanding of

sexuality as being only between a man and a woman and argued that gender as it is understood is in fact also an intersection of discourses of power. We are controlled by these identity categories or classifications, which are instruments of repression (Butler, 1999). She states that ‘gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original’ (Fuss, 1991, p. 21). Earlier in the same essay she comments on the conundrum of ‘being out’ and presents it as one more classification, which is dependent on being in the closet. If there is no closet, one can neither be out nor in. ‘If I claim to be a lesbian, I “come out” only to produce a new and different closet’ (Fuss, 1991, p. 15). Butler is referring to lesbian experience, but it is relevant to gay men.

When it was published, *The History of Sexuality* was attacked by those on the political left both in Europe and the United States because Foucault’s analysis of power as diffuse was interpreted as meaning that political action was all but impossible (Halperin, 1995, p. 26). The catalyst for change in this perception was the advent of AIDS. AIDS and the response to it was a practical demonstration of how Foucault had described sexuality—namely, as ‘an especially dense transfer point for relations of power between men and women, young people and old people’ (Foucault & Hurley, 1979, p. 103). Eve Sedgwick and Judith Butler had been making the same points about gender and relations between men and women, but the AIDS emergency made the gay community see the relevance of that work on gender to its current situation (Halperin, 1995, p. 27). To come down with AIDS was to be revealed. AIDS affected a group who might otherwise have remained unnoticed or hidden (Sontag, 1991, p. 110). AIDS imposed fear on an act, anal penetration. Survival demanded behaviour modification (Sontag, 1991, pp. 158-160). The official response to AIDS was a practical demonstration of what Foucault called ‘bio-power’, or how the state administers knowledge required to produce and regulate life (Halperin, 1995, p. 28). The response from churches, in particular the Catholic Church, government, the pharmaceutical and insurance industries, and initially the medical establishment, was homophobic. AIDS was believed to be an illness experienced by queers and not a threat to the ‘community at large’. Homophobia was also reflected in the society at large, as seen in the reported 172 per cent increase in antigay violence between 1988 and 1992 (Halperin, 1995, p. 32). The intellectually sophisticated founders of Act Up were well aware of the ideas in *The History of Sexuality*, if not directly then indirectly, and applying those ideas provided a pathway to action (Halperin, 1995, p. 16). Act Up was ‘the rising up of the sick against their doctors’ (Halperin, 1995, p. 28). Through their actions they changed how the state regulated their lives and deaths. This is the

background which informs Billy Quinn's work of the early 1990s and will be discussed in the next chapter.

Writing on queer art in Ireland is limited and the literature on Billy Quinn is scarce. Catherine Marshall's short article on Quinn in *Art and Architecture of Ireland Volume V: Twentieth Century* (Marshall & Murray, 2014, p. 400) provides a résumé of his career and neatly encapsulates his practice as a conceptual artist whose work includes 'painting, photography, installation and performance'. The article includes an image of him, *Billy*, from the *Icon* series, in the IMMA collection. The same work is referenced in the IMMA collection survey catalogue (O'Molloy, 2005, p. 154). There are tantalisingly brief comments on Quinn in the catalogue for the controversial travelling exhibition of 1999 to 2001, *Irish Art Now: From the Poetic to the Political*, in Declan McGonagle and Kim Levin's essays (McGonagle, O'Toole & Levin, 1999, pp. 17, 18, 33). McGonagle references Quinn's residency in New York and how his involvement with Act Up and the AIDS crisis influenced his work, and he compares it to the work of Mark Francis, who also participated in the exhibition. Levin's comments are much briefer and focus on Quinn's general concerns with AIDS, abuse and the violence we inflict on each other. In her book *Eroticism and Art*, Alyce Mahon writes insightfully of Quinn's work in the *Icon* series and references the catalogue for *A Plague of Angels*, Quinn's one-man show at the Mindy Oh Gallery in Chicago in January 1993 (Mahon, 2005, pp. 239, 240). Benjamin Nicholson's catalogue essay for *A Plague of Angels* provides the most comprehensive document I can find on the *Icon* works. The only copies I am aware of are in the Billy Quinn file at the National Irish Visual Arts Library and the Billy Quinn file at the archives of the Irish Museum of Modern Art. The essay is quite literary and places these works and the thirty-one people they portray in a personal context and in the context of AIDS and AIDS education (Nicholson, 1993). There are passing references to Quinn's work in both Rob Baker's *The Art of AIDS* (Baker, 1994, pp. 161, 162) and in the *Encyclopedia of AIDS* (R. A. Smith, 2001). In addition, there are a number of exhibition reviews in newspapers in both Ireland and the United States. Irish papers include *The Irish Times* and the *Gay Community News*, and those in the United States include the *Chicago Magazine*, the *Boston Herald*, and *The Irish Echo*, in which his work in the *Irish Art Now* exhibition was attacked as being un-Catholic and, by extension, anti-Irish. These formats do not allow their authors to respond in any depth to the images with which Billy Quinn confronts us. Hopefully this thesis will start that process.

It can be argued that all artistic production is a reflection of the artist's biography. In Billy Quinn's case this is very evident and will be a recurring theme throughout. Growing up

in a suffocating Ireland in the 1950s and 1960s and experiencing abuse at the hands of a family member, being gay, his self-imposed exile in London and New York at the height of the AIDS emergency and his return to a much-changed homeland where he renegotiated his relationship with his father, are all seen in his work. His particular life experiences are his subject matter, with the underlying themes of religion, of being an outsider, of the pain we inflict on ourselves and each other, and being an exile or 'other' both at home and abroad. The artistic milieus he lived in and his academic training provided him with a rich source from which to develop his visual vocabulary.

My thesis is divided into three chapters. The first addresses how Billy Quinn's experience during the AIDS crisis is expressed in his work, in particular in his *Icon* series. I will look at how the political effects of AIDS influenced his work and how it compares to other work being made in New York at the time. In the second chapter I will look at what was happening in Ireland and how the AIDS crisis was addressed there. I will also look at his return to Dublin, his involvement with Out Art and his residency at the Irish Museum of Modern Art. In the third chapter I will look at Quinn's work from the perspective of how it expresses his religious training and the themes of exile and family. I will also look at how his art was received in Boston and how that reception informs the concept of being Irish and inclusion. The thesis will conclude by bringing together the themes addressed and assessing Billy Quinn's contribution to future Irish art.

Chapter One
Billy Quinn, New York and AIDS.
Irish Art in New York.

In this chapter I will address the works in Billy Quinn's *Icon* series, specifically those works shown in Chicago in 1993. These works are informed by the AIDS crisis and the official response to it in the United States and particularly in New York. I will situate these images in the New York environment from two perspectives: first from the perspective of art relating to AIDs produced there in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and second from how Quinn's work compares to art produced and displayed by Irish artists in New York in the same period.

In 1990 Billy Quinn started to exhibit in various group shows in and around New York. His first solo show was entitled *Cremation Series* and held at the Light Work, Syracuse, New York, in 1992. Light Work provided artists with an internship at the end of which they were allowed to exhibit their works. The inspiration for these images was the recent death from AIDS of his lover Jeffrey. After Jeffrey's death, Quinn received literature from funeral service providers offering, among other services, cremation (Ervolino, 1993). I have not found a catalogue or press commentary on this exhibition other than the article cited.

In late 1993 Quinn's second solo show was held at the Mindy Oh Gallery, 300 West Superior, Chicago, IL. Titled *A Plague of Angels*, it was made up of thirty-one assembled laser photographic images of people who had been touched in some way by AIDS, transferred to wood and with gold leaf applied around the figures. Each image is framed by a silver leaf border (Fig.1.1) (Nicholson, 1993). The figures are life-size or near life-size nudes, men wearing condoms and women displaying dental dams, the accoutrements necessary for survival of the sexually active at the time. All are named. They are portrayed with objects associated with them and their lives. On the base of each silver frame are a few lines quoted from their statement about themselves taken from interviews Billy held prior to making the image. Some stand alone and others as couples; some ill, displaying the visible markers of AIDS, and others healthy. They are men and women, gay and straight, some had died by the time their icons were displayed. They represent the iconography of safe sex in the time of AIDS. Quinn added to the series over time.

The icons are a celebration of people living with AIDS and of those who, in the absence of official support, gathered together to help the ill. By 1993 Quinn had lost 120 friends to AIDS (O'Sullivan, 1993, p. 22) and one of the people in the icons, Gene, tells us he has lost 321 friends since he came to New York (Nicholson, 1993). AIDS emerged at the same time as the conservative government of Ronald Reagan came to power in 1981. During his period in office, a part of the Republican Party's core support came from conservative Christian organisations. Reagan and his government acquiesced to some of their views

ushering in an intensification of the so-called 'Culture Wars' of the time. Two art exhibitions were sites of battles during the Culture Wars. The first, *Witness Against our Vanishing*, was an exhibition about AIDS curated by the photographer Nan Goldin at Arts Space in Manhattan, which received a small government grant through the National Endowment of the Arts (Goldin). The controversy was triggered mostly by an angry essay in the catalogue by the artist activist and AIDS patient David Wojnarowicz, in which he raged against institutionalised indifference and described Cardinal O'Connor of New York in unflattering terms. The gallery temporarily lost its grant (Baker, 1994, p. 138). The second exhibition, at about the same time, was an exhibition of work by the photographer and AIDS patient Robert Mapplethorpe called *A Special Moment*. The Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C. declined to hold the exhibition because of fears of a negative reaction to the images from people like Senator Jesse Helms, a Republican from North Carolina and a leading Conservative. The exhibition was displayed in the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati, a bastion of conservatism in Southern Ohio, a northern state but with many of the attributes of the south. Local law enforcement closed the exhibition, and charged the museum director, Dennis Barrie, with obscenity, the first time a museum was so charged. The museum took and won the case (Danto, 1996, p. 152).

In 1987 the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (Act Up) was founded in Manhattan (Act Up, 2014). It started direct action against established centres of power demanding more urgent responses to combat AIDS and the discrimination that it fostered. It was one of several gay organisations along with the Gay Men's Health Crisis that aggressively advocated safe sex and safe sex education as a means of limiting and stopping the spread of AIDS. Safe sex and information on how people might protect themselves was another battleground in the AIDS/Culture Wars. Even within the gay community there were those who demonstrated internalised homophobia by equating gay sex with AIDS and advocating sexual abstinence (Crimp, 1988, pp. 237-271). Quinn was an early member of Act Up and his icons celebrate not only his sexuality but also sexuality in general at a time when its expression was under attack. They also represent, as he states in his interview, the reason for his coming to New York, the front line in the change from permissiveness to reconnecting 'sex and shame in a post-Christian age' (B. Quinn, 2017, p. 136).

The title *A Plague of Angels* appears to be somewhat dichotomous. Angels are the messengers of an almighty God (Catholic Online). They are fallible and fight among themselves, as in the case of Lucifer. The images Billy Quinn has created are of good angels. Yet he calls them a plague of angels, which is a reference to the circumstance of AIDS and

the resulting deaths of so many young people. AIDS called the people portrayed in the icons to become involved and advocate for those afflicted. As Susan Sontag comments, AIDS was not only an illness but one of those illnesses, like the plague, which were and are considered to be God's judgement against a group of people who had transgressed His law. In the case of AIDS, the forbidden acts were sexual (Sontag, 1991, p. 132). In these works, Quinn said, 'It's really a responsibility to honour the people who are exposing themselves' (O'Sullivan, 1993).

By the mid- to late 1980s it was known that the HIV virus caused AIDS. The most effective way of spreading the virus was through anal penetration, injecting the virus via semen into the body of the recipient. The consistent use of condoms reduced the risk of this happening. The virus was also present in vaginal fluids, hence the dental dams to protect participants in lesbian sex. Each of Billy's life-size figures stands against a background of 22-carat gold leaf and each panel is framed in silver leaf. Using 22-carat gold was an extravagance for Billy whose illegal status meant that he supported himself in New York with odd jobs. It is also an indication of the importance he attributed to both the work and the people he honoured. In Anna O'Sullivan's article in *Circa* (O'Sullivan, 1993, p. 22), Quinn says he is unsure as to whether the gold leaf used is 22 or 24 carats (B. Quinn, 2017, p. 141). I use 22 carats. At the bottom of each frame is a quote from the interview Quinn conducted with each of his subjects prior to making their image. They have been transformed by this plague.

This leads me to another source for the title, *Angels in America*, i.e., the two-part play by Tony Kushner which debuted on Broadway in May 1991. The play starts in New York in 1985 and is the story of people living with AIDs. It recounts how people are changed by the experience of AIDS, both the ill and those around them. The central character, Prior, is afflicted and purified by his illness in the first part of the play. In the second part, he is transformed (Baker, 1994, pp. 213-221). This is what Quinn is visualising in the icons, people's transformation. On first visiting heaven, the blessing Prior, the AIDS sufferer, asks for is 'More Life', even though he knows it will mean more suffering. In Quinn's dissertation, he uses the expression 'more life', which is a quote from Sir John Falstaff in Shakespeare's *Henry IV* (W. Quinn, 2000, p. 163).

The people in Quinn's images stand like saints against a gold background as in icons or mosaics such as those in Ravenna (Fig.1.3). Quinn also has in mind images from a later time: that of the Black Death in the mid-fourteenth century, in which almost a third of the population of Europe died (Walters, 1978, p. 71). Death and damnation were familiar themes in the art of the century after the Black Death. In the art of that period, saints also stand

against a gold background. Some were known to be plague saints or martyrs whose image is associated with protection from or survival in the plague. Often, they are represented along with items associated with their suffering; St. Sebastian and his arrows, St. Roche and the dogs and St. Laurence with his grill. This iconography parallels that employed by Quinn, who also draws on the convention in religious painting of portraying saints' faces as untroubled by the agonies of their ordeals, with Christ's face being the only one racked in pain (Walters, 1978, p. 73). In Billy's icons, Gene and Kevin stand with their arms around their shoulders, wearing condoms and a few pieces of jewellery, their dog laying faithfully at their feet (Fig.1.2). In his quotation Gene tells us he has lost three hundred and twenty-one friends, to AIDS. Demmie, the photographer and first icon, presents herself with her camera and tripod holding a dental dam in front of her groin. Aligned like saints in an Orcagna altarpiece, four naked men, all with hats and halos, one holding a dog which also has a halo, stand above her (Fig.1.4). Kelly, the only angel with wings, embraces his partner Martin who sits on a chair, the globe resting on his knee. Kelly tells us, 'For a Long Time my dreams kept me alive'. They wanted to travel the globe but by the time this image was shown, Kelly had died (Fig.1.5). Marie and Ann are having fun. Ann's outstretched hand tweaks Marie's breast, at her feet lie sheets of a text she wrote. Small devotional images fall from above Marie and her quote tells us that she was told these religious images would protect her, but she never felt they did (Fig.1.6). Then there is Mike, singer, activist and author, who turns around to look at us holding a condom over his shoulder (Fig.1.7). His pose is reminiscent of a pin-up of Betty Grable and qualifies for the definition of camp as defined by Susan Sontag (Sontag, 2009, pp. 279, 282) (Fig.1.8). He has brought with him one of the sleeves from his records and a note pinned below the frame which is a quote from the title of a book he wrote entitled, *How to Have Sex in an Epidemic: One Approach*. Michael Callen was an early advocate for safe sex and tells us that in his quote. His icon is on display at the Callen-Lorde Community Health Center in Manhattan. Brian and Rachel stand looking very happy. Brian's quotation lets us know that his illness is more visible without clothes. The purple-red blotches of Kaposi Sarcoma are visible all over his body as if he had been flayed like a martyr. He wears a condom and rubber gloves playing with his nipples. At his feet lay the considerable array of medications he takes daily. Rachel smiles as she plays with her nipples, luggage at her feet perhaps denoting her transient lifestyle or recent arrival from Dublin (Fig.1.9). Lastly there is Billy whose stance is reminiscent of a fifteenth-century Flemish altarpiece panel figure. His left hand points to his sheathed penis and with his right he points out at the viewer. Behind him, encased in a condom shape is the ghostlike shape of his late lover, Jeffrey. His silver

frame decorated with images of friends he has immortalised. He tells us, ‘AIDS pushed me...it pushed all of us...into the realization of our own mortality’ (Fig.1.1).

There are two works in the *Plague of Angels* exhibition that were not icons. One is a memorial to Quinn’s lover Jeffrey and the other a powerful affirmation of life and a determination to continue to live fully and responsibly. The first, *Jeffrey’s Quilt*, is the actual quilt which covered Jeffrey’s bed during his illness. Quinn washed and stretched and then worked on it as a canvas. Variations on the phrase, ‘Honor the living because you know you are going to die’, are superimposed on the quilt in 22-carat gold (Fig.1.10). It is both an object and a performance piece; a source of its power is in reciting the mantra of the script and in doing so generating the soothing effect of a mantra, like the rosary or a litany. A quilt signifies the handwork of a family member, usually a woman, made to keep the body warm. By 1993 when *Jeffrey’s Quilt* was made, the Names Project or AIDS Memorial Quilt was one of the most powerful symbols of those who died. Each quilt measures 124” x 124”, Jeffrey’s is 124” x 94”, was laid end to end and exhibited all over the United States, but most significantly on the Washington Mall, the seat of the government which had failed to respond adequately to the crisis. This work is Quinn’s contribution to the Quilt (Baker, 1994, pp. 129-136).

The second work, *Sodomy Piece*, proclaims, ‘A 38-year-old recently bereaved Irish ex-Catholic (post Christian) H.I.V. negative undocumented alien is safely sodomized by a recently bereaved 33-year-old H.I.V. positive Afro-American Christian’ (Fig.1.11). An image shows the torsos of two naked men, the 38-year-old Billy with his back to the viewer while astride the 33-year-old Afro-American. Billy is guiding the Afro-American’s penis to penetrate his rectum. The statement is imprinted over the image in 22-carat gold. The text, while declaring the message of safe sex, also acts as a veil or a screen through which we experience the image.

In a review of *Plague of Angels* from the *Chicago Magazine* of December 16, 1993, as included in the Billy Quinn file in the National Irish Visual Art Library (NIVAL), the reviewer comments that the show would give Senator Helms a heart attack—a reference to the conservative opposition to anything gay and, in the case of Senator Helms, anything to do with disseminating information regarding safe sex. The reviewer compliments both the artist and the gallery for their courage in showing the material, all of which confirms the real danger of censorship at the time (J. H. Sunward, 1993).

In my introduction, I recounted Billy Quinn’s various academic achievements. In the early 1990s he had not yet started his doctoral studies but even by then he had strong

academic training. He is very familiar with the canon of Western art. His twenty-year experience in theatre management and his love of ideas gave him a thorough grasp of the major movements in literature, film and philosophy (B. Quinn, 2017, pp. 127, 128). His icons are a testament to his familiarity with art history. He is influenced by visual techniques used in sacred art, not only of the Byzantine period but also the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Another major influence is his exposure to the British art scene during his time in London. Gilbert and George's work was well known in the 1970s and 1980s. Living there at the time and having an interest in contemporary art, he was familiar with their work. They used photographs, often but not always of themselves, sometimes nude and occasionally nattily dressed in matching suits (Fig.1.12). Like Quinn's, their subject matter was transgressive, and they proclaimed their queerness with gusto. Their process was similar, starting with a photograph, transferring it to a support material and adding colours. They also worked on a large scale (O'Reilly, 2009, pp. 26-27). Another London source is David Hockney, particularly his *Life Painting for a Diploma* of 1962 (Fig.1.13). To satisfy graduation requirements at the Royal College of Art for a life painting, Hockney took an image from a physique magazine of an attractive male, naked except for his posing pouch, which cleverly both hides and exposes the man's body. Physical culture magazines were thinly veiled gay pornography of the 1950s and 1960s. The man smiles welcomingly at the viewer. Hockney is challenging the usual heterosexual gaze of the female model and the male artist and addresses his own erotic desire. Behind the man is a tube-like structure containing an academic drawing of a skeleton. Hockney is joining the low or popular culture in the use of the physique magazine, with the high art represented by the academic skeleton exercise. In Quinn's *Billy*, he takes the art historical reference of the gold leaf background and the Flemish-like pose and marries them to the image of a naked man wearing a condom. His ghostlike figure encased in a condom contrasting with the very much alive Billy appears to be a direct reference to Hockney (Barlow, 2017, p. 162). The intents of the two works I am comparing are of course very different. Both are irreverent; Hockney teasing the college authorities and Quinn being ironic and celebrating his being alive while honouring his late partner. Francis Bacon was an influence on Quinn's work. It is not immediately evident in the *Icon* pictures. However, like Bacon, there is some evidence of Quinn's awareness of the images made by Eadweard Muybridge, the nineteenth-century photographer who studied the movement of the body with both humans and animals as models. The composition of the two bodies in *Sodomy Piece* is reminiscent of Muybridge's images of wrestlers, which may have appealed to Quinn (Barlow, 2017, p. 71).

Text and lettering had been used in art since at least the cubist period. Pop artists, such as Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Jim Dine and Andy Warhol made extensive use of it both in their paintings and graphic works (Coppel, Daunt & Tallman, 2017, pp. 57-87). The adaptation of graphic design to high art was a well-accepted practice. Much of it was protest art or agitprop art like that of the feminist collective Guerilla Girls (Mahon, 2005, p. 228) or Gran Fury (Baker, 1994, p. 143). Billy Quinn was an early associate of Act Up, which used posters and stickers extensively to advertise their mission, and which created perhaps the most familiar piece of graphic design of the AIDS epidemic—the pink triangle with which the Nazis identified queers in concentration camps and the slogan SILENCE=DEATH below it (Baker, 1994, p. 141) (Fig.1.14). David Wojnarowicz, one of the most celebrated of AIDS activist artists and one whom Quinn held in very high regard and referenced in his dissertation, used this technique most notably in a print diptych of 1990 produced to raise money for Act Up (Coppel et al., 2017, p. 254). Wojnarowicz, like Quinn, was abused as a child. I have referred earlier to his statement of outrage in the *Witness* catalogue, generated by the indifference he saw from the establishment around AIDS, and the loss of friends, in particular his mentor, the photographer Peter Hujar. Wojnarowicz' own illness also had a profound effect on him and his art. When Quinn uses text in his work, he is calling on a well-established practice in AIDS-related art and art in general in New York at the time.

Other sources of inspiration or influence may be found in Visual AIDS and its site (AIDS, 2017), which is perhaps the most comprehensive repository for art produced by artists with AIDS and/or HIV, at least in the United States. Limited to this demographic, it does not include artists who produced art relating to AIDS and who are not HIV-positive. It is also overwhelmingly male in its representation. It does, however, provide a good source for comparing Quinn's work on the subject with other art produced at that time in New York. As demonstrated above, religion is one of the main sources of inspiration for Quinn, as it was for many others who were faced with so many who were ill, dying or dead. Keith Haring's work shows throughout his career a familiarity with religious symbols, which he frequently uses with a grim irony (Haring). One of the most elaborated examples is his Ten Commandments installation in Bordeaux of 1985 (Deitch, 2008, pp. 360-378). A last example is his gold altarpiece *The Life of Christ* in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York (Fig.1.15). Visually, Haring has no relation to Quinn, whose work is far from street art, but they share an interest and awareness of religion. Two other participants in Visual AIDS influenced Quinn:

Robert Mapplethorpe and Felix Gonzalez-Torres for their portrayal of sadomasochism and absence and loss, respectively, which I will discuss in chapter two.

By 1993 Billy Quinn was receiving critical attention, which introduced him to an Irish audience, if it was not already familiar with him. The year 1993 was also one in which new Irish art received some attention in New York. One of the documents which supports this is Anna O'Sullivan's review of 'Irish Art in New York' in the Summer issue of *Circa* (O'Sullivan, 1993), and a second is the May issue of *Artforum* from that year, which focused on new Irish art with articles by four Irish-born critics and one Irish-American critic (McGonagle, Kelly, Fowler, Gibbons & Hutchenson, 1993). In terms of contemporary art in New York, *Artforum* magazine was and is considered prestigious. For the present, my focus will be on Anna O'Sullivan's article in *Circa*. O'Sullivan is currently the director of the Butler Gallery in Kilkenny. O'Sullivan had spent over ten years in New York, first as Director of Performance Art with Franklin Furnace at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, and later as manager of the Robert Miller Gallery in Manhattan. Both these organisations were dedicated to supporting the creation and showing of avant-garde art and art produced by individuals or groups with little agency. Her essay not only manages to include sixteen Irish artists showing in the city and its environs but also references Billy Quinn with these Irish artists. She reviews two group shows of work exclusively by Irish artists, two solo shows and a third group show of American artists in which Billy Quinn participated.

The most prestigious group show was organised at the Grey Gallery at NYU and curated by Tom Weir, a former Visual Arts Director at the City Arts Centre, Dublin. The purpose of the exhibition was to celebrate the opening of the Glucksman Ireland House at NYU. The exhibition, named *Other Borders: Six Irish Projects*, was made of site-specific works by six artists including Dorothy Cross, the collective Blue Funk, Shane Cullen, Ken Hardy, Andrew Kearney and Philip Napier. Shows organised by the Grey Gallery are usually reviewed by the *New York Times* but a search of the online archives did not find a review for this show, even though the *Times* has a record of reviewing Irish art in New York, such as in its review of Willy Doherty at the Grey Gallery by Roberta Smith on September 9, 1994 (R. Smith, 1994).

The second group show, *Fields of Vision: Selected Works by Contemporary Irish Artists*, took place outside New York City at Dickenson College in rural Pennsylvania. The artists included Deidre O'Connell, Liaden Cooke, Denis Farrell, John Kindness, Nigel Rolf, Grace Weir and Catherine Owens, who also helped organise the show with the gallery director. It was organised in a short period of time to coincide with an award to the poet

Seamus Heaney. As O’Sullivan mentions, its location limited its exposure. These two shows demonstrate that contemporary Irish art was well perceived and well represented in New York in 1993. Furthermore, two of the artists shown in these exhibitions were recent participants of the PS1 International Studio Program, Andrew Kearney and Rodney Dickson. The Studio Program was a desirable item on emerging artists’ résumés and one where Ireland was well represented from the late 1980s until it ended in 2004 (MoMA, 2004).

The third group show mentioned by Anna O’Sullivan was *Saints and Survivors in a Time of Plague* at the Lowinsky Gallery, a gallery specialising at the time in photography and curated by Peter Hay Halpert, a well-regarded operative in fine art photography. O’Sullivan mentions three artists in this show by name, Billy Quinn, Anne Meredith and Suzanne Fiol. Meredith is a highly regarded photographer who has focused on a number of subjects having to do with women, one of which is women with AIDS, which she worked on from the late 1980s until the late 1990s (Meredith, 2017) (Fig.1.16). Suzanne Fiol at the time was making work by painting over photographic images, not unlike Quinn. I have not been able to identify any images of her work. She became a prominent impresario in the avant-garde in New York, best known for founding and leading the Issue Project Room in Brooklyn until her death in 2009 (Times, 2009). From O’Sullivan’s essay, it appears that Quinn exhibited some of the same pieces from the *Plague of Angels* show in Chicago. I have been unable to locate a catalogue but have seen an invitation announcing the show as sponsored by a prestigious group called ‘Photographers-Friends United Against AIDS’. This group included, among others, Nan Goldin, Cindy Sherman and Andres Serrano. Billy’s work in the show included at least one of the *Icon* images and the *Sodomy* image, which is illustrated in the magazine (O’Sullivan, 1993, p. 22). The photographers who sponsored this exhibition included some of the most important working at the time in New York. In chapter two, I will discuss the influence of both Nan Goldin and Andres Serrano on Billy Quinn’s work but the point to be made here is that clearly Quinn’s work received recognition from his peers when he participated in the exhibition at the Lowinsky Gallery. It is also interesting that Quinn is exhibiting in a show with American artists and not in either of the two group exhibitions of Irish art. This may be a simple matter of Quinn’s absence from Ireland since the late 1970s and not having cultivated the connections necessary to participate in the small Irish art world. He did notoriously participate in the *Irish Art Now* exhibition of 2000, which was after his return to Ireland (McGonagle et al., 1999). However, many of the Irish artists mentioned here were for periods of time resident in the United States, such as Fergus Delargy, Cathy Owens, and Deirdre O’Connell. In addition, there were a number of Irish artists who had worked

outside of Ireland and/or were participants in the PS1 Studio Program, such as John Kindness in 1990. It does not seem that Quinn's immigration status was a hindrance in participating in shows like *Other Borders* at the Grey Gallery since he declared his status himself in his own image at the Lowinsky Gallery.

Nor does it seem likely that Billy Quinn's transgressive subject matter was a cause for his exclusion from either show. The market for *Circa* was Ireland and yet it illustrated the essay with an image that showed buggery. This suggests a tolerance for transgressive images both at the magazine and in Ireland. Furthermore at least some of the Irish artists participating in the group shows used or could use images which are transgressive. Andrew Kearney, an installation artist, is an example of a gay artist who occasionally uses the male body and transgressive images in his work. Perhaps the most challenging work in the exhibitions was Dorothy Cross' *Amazon* at the Grey Gallery. Using her familiar props, the udder or breast with cowhide, she transforms the tailor's dummy into a totem, which is at once powerful, threatening and amusing. In this figure, she challenges conventional ideas of gender and motherhood. The enlarged breast could be a cyclopean head, a breast or a weapon and the nipple, not so much a source of succour but more like a worn phallic symbol. There is an argument to be made that Cross' work is much more assertive and disturbing than Quinn's buggery, which has the purported aim of serving the ends of sex education. Cross' work is a direct challenge to cherished ideas.

In conclusion, I have attempted to show how Quinn, who went to New York to be nearer what he believed to be the fire of AIDS, established himself as a very credible emerging artist capable of exhibiting in well-regarded venues both in solo and group shows. His commitment to his work and his desire to honour those affected by and helping in the AIDS crisis is beyond question. His use of 22-carat gold leaf in the *Icons* is a testament to that. He did maintain contacts with Irish people in New York but was not considered sufficiently a part of the community to exhibit with other Irish artists. He seemed to accept that he was an artist with a gay identity, as is evident from his subject matter, unlike Andrew Kearney who is at least ambivalent about being identified as gay (Murray, 1999, p. 89). Did Quinn not wish to be identified as Irish? It is possible he wanted to avoid that. Yet, he returned to Ireland a few years later as an artist-in-residence at IMMA and a recipient of an Arts Council Grant, one of a few he received.

Chapter Two

Dublin, The Irish Museum of Modern Art, Family and Leaving Again.

In 1995 Billy Quinn returned to Ireland after an absence of twenty-one years. The next five years were productive for him: a residency at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, the purchase of a number of pieces of his work by IMMA, a number of solo shows in both Dublin and London and the award of a PhD from East London University. In this chapter, I will discuss the art he made and exhibited during his short stay in Ireland. I will give a brief overview of some changes that affected gays and society in general in Ireland and how the country was impacted by the AIDS epidemic. This chapter will concern itself with Quinn's participation in the group show *Pride in Diversity* (the first show organised by Out Art as part of pride celebrations in 1996). I will also examine two of his solo exhibitions at the Temple Bar Gallery in Dublin: first, *Traditional Family Values* in 1996, in which he continues his examination of abuse; and second, *Quinn's Da* of 1998, in which he explores his relationship with his father and issues of generational change and continuity.

The country to which Billy Quinn returned was in the process of significant change. Louise Walsh conveys the change as a sense of optimism and growth in her essay 'Artist-Activist' in *Lesbian and Gay Visions of Ireland* (O'Carroll & Collins, 1995, pp. 171-180). She speaks of the period from around 1980 to 1995, about the same period Billy Quinn was out of the country. In her account, she tells of her personal and artistic progress and the development of lesbian networks throughout the country, north and south. She opens with her recollection of seeing Joni Crone on the RTE television chat show 'The Late Late Show' and how that one event provided her with a positive role model of a gay woman. This incident is an example of the effect of one of the forces of change in the country, television. It allowed a young girl in rural Ireland see an out lesbian in a positive light. The economy improved in the 1990s, and developed into the 'Celtic Tiger' (Hickey, 2011). The beneficial effects of additional funding from the European Union provided more funds for the arts. As a consequence, the Arts Council was able to make money available to organisations like Out Art to organise shows and print catalogues (McKnight & Hutchinson, 1996). As I referenced in chapter one, Irish artists were in a position to hold their own on the international stage and in 1991, with the founding of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, they had a place to exhibit their work (O'Molloy, 2005, p. 29).

Parallel to economic and cultural developments, the movement to change the legal status of gays gathered momentum. Of note is the work of the Irish Gay Rights Movement, which included such people as David Norris and Mary Robinson. Norris and his legal team successfully brought a case to the European Commission of Human Rights against the Irish Government. They received a favourable ruling stating that the Irish laws on homosexuality

contravened the Convention on Human Rights and had to be changed (Rose, 1994, p. 39). The law was eventually changed on June 30, 1993, stating clearly that ‘any rule of law by virtue of which buggery between persons is an offence is hereby abolished’ (Rose, 1994, p. 1).

The scale of the AIDS epidemic was not as great as what had happened in New York, but in many respects its progress and responses to it were similar. Irish society, even by European standards was homogeneous both ethnically and from the point of view of religion. As Andrew Kearney observed, ‘New York is engaged in a multicultural struggle with itself’, which tends to magnify issues (O’Sullivan, 1993). The first AIDS cases were reported in Ireland in 1982. By the end of 1995, 498 cases had been officially counted, 42 per cent of which involved intravenous drug users (Smyth, 1998, p. 661). Diarmaid Ferriter quotes from the AIDS Action Alliance report of 1991 that by the same year, the test for HIV had been administered in Ireland 47,381 times providing 1,086 positive results, of which 203 people had full AIDS with 83 deaths (Ferriter, 2009, p. 505). As Fiona Smyth explains, the initial response came from voluntary organisations. The government was constrained by the fact that homosexuality was against the law and it felt it could not be seen to be encouraging buggery. Persistent pressure from the Catholic Church opposed the least expensive form of controlling the sexual transmission of the virus, condom use. Up until 1993, condoms were legally available only to heterosexual married couples. As late as 1986, Gay Health Action wrote to the Minister of Health, Barry Desmond TD, bluntly advising him that it was doing his department’s work (Action, 1986). By 1990, the government had committed to an AIDS education programme that was to be introduced in schools (Holmquist, 1990). The Irish Catholic hierarchy did not approve of the programme’s content and decided to launch its own AIDS education programme. Many segments, including teachers, did not approve of the Church’s action (Power & Walshe, 1990), and, as within the United States, AIDS in Ireland generated a model for the interaction of discourses of power. The numerous press clippings from the period in the Irish Queer Archive in the National Library allow for a reconstruction of the disagreement between Government and Church. A sense of the extent of change in Ireland is seen in the open disagreement between teachers, who taught in Church-controlled schools, and the hierarchy.

When Billy Quinn returned to Ireland, it was much changed since he had left in 1974. The country was wealthier, and the economy was expanding. Irish people were returning to Ireland rather than emigrating from it. The Catholic Church no longer received the unquestioning fealty from the population as a result of society’s greater exposure to the larger

world and the ongoing revelations of abuse by the clergy of those in its care in schools and other institutions. As of June 1993, gay sex was no longer illegal, removing the threat of imprisonment and police harassment for Irish queers.

The first exhibition in which Billy Quinn exhibited in Ireland was a group show organised by Out Art titled *Pride in Diversity* at the City Arts Centre. Out Art organised exhibitions of gay-identified artists from 1996 through to 2004 at a number of venues including the RHA (Phelan, 2016). Alan Phelan is an artist who did not exhibit in any of the Out Art events but was involved in organising them from 1997. The *Pride in Diversity* exhibition was supported by the Arts Council, Dublin Pride, John McBratney,⁴ the *Gay Community News* and the City Arts Centre. The catalogue design was by Niall Sweeney⁵ and was executed to a high standard. Works in the show were selected by a group of three—Patrick Hall and Therry Ruden, both artists; and Joan Fowler, researcher and critic. The catalogue essays were written by author Gill McKnight and John Hutchinson, a critic and the long-time director of the Douglas Hyde Gallery (McKnight & Hutchinson, 1996). The next chapter will discuss both essays, which deserve attention because of the issues they raise about identity.

The only unifying factor in the exhibited works is the sexuality of the participating artists. Billy Quinn's submission, entitled *Castration*, was a triptych, each panel six feet high and dealing with his experience, as a child, of being abused by a family member over a two-year period (Fig.2.1). The abuse lasted two years but the effect lasted a lifetime. It is an essential element in Quinn's story, which he emphasises in his interview (B. Quinn, 2017, p. 125). The technique he uses is the same as that used in the *Icons* photographs, in this case of himself, cropped and laid against a background of intense vermilion over a ground of gold, on a wooden support. At the base of each panel is the printed story of his abuse in 22-carat gold. In the lower part of the first panel is a photograph of Billy crouching in a fetus-like position viewed from directly above. It looks like a chicken trussed up and ready to be cooked and consumed. This may be the first appearance of a creature Billy later imagines he gives birth to and calls Chicken Man. In the upper part is a horizontal truncated side profile of Billy's body. His erect penis hangs, pointing to the rump of the crouching figure below. It

⁴ John McBratney, a collector of contemporary Irish art, has provided ongoing support of Billy Quinn and his art. He has been generous in providing me with background information and has shared with me his collection, particularly works by Quinn that he owns.

⁵ Niall Sweeney is a graphic designer whose company Pony Box has offices in London. He was the creator of promotional material for The Alternative Miss Ireland and Panti Bliss and other events.

is as if the partial body is menacingly bearing down on the chicken-like image in the lower part of the panel. The text at the base reads, 'When I was child I was incestuously sexually abused nightly for two years'. In the centre panel Billy is viewed from directly above lying on his back. His legs are apart and in his right hand he holds a string with which he has secured his genitals and in his left hand a large knife with which he is about to castrate himself. The text at the bottom declares, 'I fantasized about castrating myself feeling this could free me from the guilt and shame (and pleasure)'. In the third panel, the view is from above and at an angle showing the top of his head and his naked upright body. The castration is complete as he holds his bloody genitals in this right hand and the large and now-stained knife in his left, a wound at his groin. The text reads, 'Sometimes, when I'm afraid, this fantasy returns'. The central figure and the crouching Billy are bathed in light, the other two in shadow. His full face is not shown in any of the images.

Castration was made in the early 1990s, inspired by the recurring, anxiety-driven dreams after the death of his lover Jeffrey. The images are placed in a luxuriantly rich red, made luminous by the gold undercoat. The nightmare is ritualised as if we are witnessing a sacrifice to a vengeful deity. The triptych format recalls religious images of sacrifice and suffering like the *Isenheim Altarpiece* (Fig.2.2). The format also brings to mind Francis Bacon, as does the rich colour, except here the three images tell a story whereas Bacon used the triptych format to inhibit narrative. The presentation recalls Caravaggio or Caravaggio seen through the eyes of Derek Jarman with the rich dark red. This red recalls blood spilt in sacrifice and contaminated with HIV. These panels hark back to the earlier feminist works of Nan Goldin, who captured the awful aftermath of the abuse of women, including herself (Fig.2.3). What Quinn has done is appropriate a format we associate with the sacred and use it to visualise the agony and aftermath of abuse. In doing so, Billy is sacrilegious and thus adds to the shock effect of the piece. The abused is not presented as a one-dimensional victim but a complex person battling with feelings of guilt, pleasure, worthlessness and rage. It is a searing and timely image of an issue, all too familiar in recent years in Ireland. By displaying it, Billy opened up a new space in which to discuss it.

There are other influences at work in *Castration*. Mapplethorpe is an influence in Quinn's work, such as in *Traditional Family Values*, for example. However, Mapplethorpe anticipates rather than shows actual violence, such as in his image of *Frank Diaz* of 1979 (Fig.2.4) and *Watermelon with Knife* of 1985 (Fig.2.5). Representations of body fluids, including blood, are seen in the works of Andres Serrano and Gilbert and George. Billy Quinn knew Serrano in New York. Andres Serrano made a series of images of body fluids in

the 1980s, but he did not actually portray bloody images of figures until his later religious work. Nan Goldin's work is a more likely source of inspiration for Quinn. She captures places where violence took place and the results of battery (Fig.2.6). As with Serrano, Billy Quinn had contact with Goldin, both of whom were involved with the *Saints and Survivors* exhibition at the Lowinsky Gallery. The darkness of *Castration* also recalls the work of Francisco Goya, particularly his *Saturn Devouring His Children* (Fig.2.7). The shadows, visible blood, violence and rage in *Castration* recall Goya's *Black Paintings* and also his *Third of May 1808 in Madrid* in the Prado (Fig.2.7a). In the lower left-hand corner of the latter painting, the heap of recently executed bodies leach blood in a way that recalls the *Castration* piece. The central figure about to be executed, and those on the left await the same fate. The *Third of May* recounts an event at various stages, as does Quinn's work. There are echoes too of Goya's prints, *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*, for example, where there is a sense of the birds pressing down on the sleeping man in the same way as the oppressive torso pressing down on the relatively small Quinn.

The *Pride in Diversity* exhibition received substantial coverage in the Irish national press. Medb Ruane reviewed it in the *Sunday Times* on June 30, 1996, commenting on the works being confrontational but in a positive way. She references the New York feel and theatricality of Quinn's work and relates it back to work in the 1980s by feminist photographers such as Jenny Holzer and Cindy Sherman (Ruane, 1996). The following month, Luke Clancy reviewed the exhibition on July 25 in the *Irish Times*. In a brief paragraph, he identifies precisely what Quinn is doing by appropriating a visual language reserved for saints (Clancy, 1996). In the Fall issue of *Circa*, Jane Tynan reviewed the show. She is insightful when she comments that in *Castration*, 'the pain and horror of the narrative makes real the dismembering of the interior life of the abused' (Tynan, 1996). Comments on the work in general in the exhibition were positive, with particular mention of the work of Andrew Kearney, who previously exhibited in the *Other Borders* show at the Grey Gallery in New York. The video submissions of Mo White's *My Eye* and Louise Walsh's *Swansong* are appreciated, as is Mick Wilson's installation of pillow slips, *Slippage*. The point to be made here is that some of the work displayed in this first Out Art exhibition, but not all, was of a quality high enough to stand on its own. It was made by artists who may have been queer but whose work does not depend necessarily on a space created by and for queers. These artists chose to display their work in a specifically gay environment. The selection of work for exhibitions by groups such as gay artists always raises the question as to the criteria used for its selection and inclusion. Should selection be based purely on the artistic value of the work

or should the purpose and message of the work be the deciding factor? In the case of art relating to AIDS it has been argued by people such as Douglas Crimp that lower standards should apply (Baker, 1994, p. 138). In the case of the Out Art exhibitions from 1995 to 2004 there is a progressive focus on the quality of the art displayed, in large measure as a result of the guiding hand of people such as Alan Phelan, Mick Wilson and Jane Speller.

The subject matter of *Castration* was relevant to Irish society in the 1990s and it continues to be to this day. The detail of a seemingly never-ending stream of institutionalised outrages against children grows and continues twenty years after *Castration* was exhibited. Quinn is not portraying abuse in any institution but within the family itself, where most abuse occurs, and in so doing is opening up a more difficult discussion. The original *Castration* has been destroyed and exists in digital format only, which Quinn claims is acceptable. However, in digital format much, if not all of the evidence of his craft is lost. The torn laser prints and corners that required re-sticking can barely be seen and consequently the textual richness of the work is lost. Quinn tellingly refers to these tears and rips as ‘scarification’ (B. Quinn, 2017, p. 143). His art storage site is his Flickr page from which he disseminates his work without copyright constraints. Although in his proposal for the artist-in-residence programme at IMMA he referred to himself as a Luddite, he has embraced the democracy of the Internet and is well aware of the issues it raises in regard to making art and the art market.

In January of 1996, Billy Quinn had a solo exhibition at the Temple Bar Gallery entitled *Traditional Family Values*. It was opened by his friend John McBratney and received positive reviews in both the national press and *Gay Community News*. The format was a familiar one. Seven people recount their experiences of childhood abuse using the narrative device of a series of photographs with text from the accounts of their experiences superimposed on some but not all of the images. In both the *Icon* series and *Castration* the text was kept to the base of the images, and only in *Sodomy* and *Jeffrey’s Quilt* are the images filtered through the text as they are in the works of *Traditional Family Values*. The exhibition was previously shown at the Mindy Oh Gallery in Chicago and was well reviewed in the *Chicago Magazine* of January 5–15, as was *A Plague of Angels* a few years earlier (J. Sunward, 1995). The press release for the Temple Bar exhibition explains that Quinn’s concept for the work grew out of his awareness that a significant percentage of people with AIDS had been abused as children. These people seek various ways of coping with the result of abuse. On occasion, their healing strategies lead to other problems. As the press release notes, ‘though healed, they were actually healing themselves into AIDS-related death rather than life’. Billy Quinn’s purpose in creating the icons was to honour those with AIDS and

those who were in AIDS support networks. In this show, Quinn is honouring those who have been abused and are in recovery. The title is tongue-in-cheek and a hark back to a slogan of the political right in the United States. Conservatives used the expression to rally people to the defence of ‘traditional families’ with a stay-at-home mother, working father and children. Only in this type of environment could children be secure. The Right argued that this basic unit of society was under threat from alternative lifestyles, such as queer lifestyles. In fact, the Right’s argument privileges the traditional family unit at the expense of less traditional family units. The argument is a continuation of one where heterosexuality is privileged at the expense of other sexualities. Here, Quinn is illuminating the terrors that may occur in traditional families.

Of the stories told, not all are concerned with sexual abuse. Alexander is naked, tied hand and foot to a chair with his plate of food on his lap (Fig.2.8). His punishment for not eating it is not only being held but also the haranguing and threatening of his parents. The text is printed in black type and sometimes gold to make it more legible against the dark background. Covering the images with text forces the visitor to peer into the image, in a sense becoming a voyeur. In doing so we have no choice but to see, as in the fourth image, Alexander’s vulnerable feet bound to the legs of the chair (Fig.2.9). Quinn ensures we do not escape either the image or the story. Doria, sexually abused as a child, has spent her life trying to understand what happened to her. The ideas go around and round in her head and are never resolved. Her images are of her face, tearful, laughing and wistful, and in one, she looks out at us, her face partially hidden by her hand resting on a glass (Fig.2.10). Some of the people who are in the other ‘icons’ make an appearance here. Andy, who appeared with his lover in the *Icon* series, has a story, the horror of which could only happen in a traditional family unit (Fig.2.11). He is lying on the floor, wrapped in a blue and white cover. His uncle started to abuse him when he was nine. He gives a chilling account of how his uncle groomed him and then rationalised his abuse because he knew Andy was gay (Fig.2.12). Kelly, also from the icons, is here with his angel wings to tell us about his guilt at the pain and pleasure he neither wanted nor asked for (Fig.2.13).

As noted earlier, this exhibition was reviewed in both the national and community press. The two most interesting reviews are by Luke Clancy in the *Irish Times* of January 31, 1996, and Medb Ruane’s in the *Sunday Times* on February 4, 1996. Clancy’s review focuses on the visual impact of images and their occasional theatricality. Medb Ruane’s review places these works in the line of text-based art, like that of David Wojnarowicz, Jenny Holzer and others. She perceptively identifies how the work differs from most text-based art. This

type of work emerged in the 1960s, in part as a reaction to abstract expressionism and embraced by people like Jasper Johns. It is a critical component of conceptual art and signals the importance of ideas and theoretical practices above the development of visual forms, perhaps best described by Sol LeWitt in his 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art' (LeWitt, 1967). However, while Billy Quinn wants to get across the idea that abuse comes in various forms, he is also concerned with the visual. As Catherine Marshall says, 'Quinn is a conceptual artist but his work embraces the visual also' (Marshall & Murray, 2014, p. 400). This work is not like Glenn Ligon's where the text obliterates the image and the typeface is placed on top of typeface (Fig.2.14). Nor is it like Jenny Holzer using only text. Quinn uses both. The text draws us to the image as it does in *Sodomy*. We approach it to read it but also to see what is happening behind it. In this way Billy does not allow us to avoid what he is both telling and showing us and makes us voyeurs in the act. To gain our attention he is at times theatrical, using a rich red Caravaggio-like curtain. Alexander tied to the chair recalls forlorn images of tortured saints or even Christ (Fig.2.15). Sarah, dressed in what could be a white nightdress or an adult christening robe is highlighted against dark cordovan backgrounds. Her malformed extremities visible against the dark background (Fig.2.16). The cumulative effect of walking past these images, looking closely to read the text and past the text to the individuals whose story is told, must have been devastating. Those images with no text seem to give the observer temporary respite only to be brought back into the story in the next image and text. By achieving and maintaining a close connection between the image and text and the structure of the stories, he builds up the angst and pain. The play of text and image recalls Kathy Prendergast's text images and maps (Fig.2.17). Prendergast's maps tell histories of the people who founded places with names with the words 'lonely' or 'lost'. Behind the names lie geographic formations, which in turn tell another story of their formation (Murray, 1999, pp. 128-135). Quinn's texts tell a story and the image is the geography upon which that story is written.

The idea for these images came from Quinn learning of the high percentage of abused who went on to become HIV-positive. The link between the *Icons* and *Traditional Family Values* is AIDS. While the AIDS content in *Traditional Family Values* may not be the most prominent characteristic of the images, nevertheless, this body of work and the *Icons* prompt the question as to what other AIDS-related art was produced in Ireland in the mid-1990s. Art relating to AIDS was plentiful in New York. On his return to Dublin, Quinn found a very different environment. Concerns about HIV and AIDS in Ireland are well documented, most particularly in the Irish Queer Archive in the National Library. However, up to now I have

not been able to identify very much art being produced and displayed around the subject. In a recent conversation with Mick Wilson⁶ in Dublin, he commented that there was very little AIDS-related art unless it was produced in the art schools of the time. He drew my attention to an exhibition of his work on the subject as being one of the few. Mick Wilson's show is reviewed in *Circa* by Luke Clancy. The work displayed focused on theory, as to be expected from an artist and academic keenly interested in theory. It was not without a ghoulish sense of humour; in one exhibit lurid artificial flowers are dotted with blue disks and titled *We Are Lesion*, representing Kaposi Sarcoma. Other exhibits included a jar filled with used condoms and labelled as an *On Going Performance Piece* (Clancy, 1995). It is very possible that what AIDS-related art there was, was ephemeral, street art, or performance art, as in the case of the Scottish actor and street performer Thom McGinty, known as 'The Diceman', who died of AIDS in Dublin in 1995 (Miller, 2015).

Billy Quinn's last solo show in Dublin was again at the Temple Bar Gallery, an installation titled *Quinn's Da* in homage to his parents and in gratitude to how they had been able to reach some level of acceptance of him. It is also an appropriation of James Abbott McNeill Whistler's work *Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 1 (The Artist's Mother)* of 1871 (Fig.2.18). *Quinn's Da* is an installation of twenty-one pieces, 60" x 60" laser prints mounted on wood. The chair is matt finished while the remaining surface is high gloss, giving the impression that the chair is floating. When the figures appear, they are also matt finished. The first seventeen images are apparently identical, of a red orthopaedic chair with a cushion, placed in front of a stained radiator and a window covered by a lace curtain obscuring the view. One panel of a red drape hangs to the side of the chair and the floor is covered by a nearly identical red carpet. The setting could be a home or an institution. Each of these panels are identical but clearly the artist intends them to be placed in a particular order since each panel is numbered in 22-carat gold in the lower left corner (Fig.2.19). In the eighteenth image the chair has been occupied by Quinn's father, a man both aged and infirm. Now the curtain is closed so the background is awash in red. In the Whistler image, there is a picture on the wall. Here, there is an insert of Quinn's father's left hand floating at his father's eye level. Quinn told me this hand is a reference to the Catholic tradition of the father blessing the son by laying his hands on him. It also recalls the idea of Christ healing by laying his hand on the ill (Fig.2.20). In the nineteenth image Quinn is supplanting his father.

⁶ Mick Wilson is Director of Research at the Valand Academy of Art in Gothenburg, Sweden.

The struggle to take control of the chair is visualised by overlapping blurred images of Quinn bathed in a bluish light. In place of the picture on the wall is an image of Billy, crouching and laying an egg (Fig.2.21). In the twentieth image Billy is in the chair, dressed in his father's clothes. A backward-looking eye is inserted in the picture's place, the radiator freshly painted and the curtain opened (Fig.2.22). In the twenty-first piece, the chair is once more vacant.

A search for reviews of *Quinn's Da* in the online archives of the *Irish Times* only produced a reference to it in the 'Exhibitions' column on June 27, 1998. The files at neither the National Irish Visual Arts Library nor IMMA make any reference to the showing of the work. Deborah Ballard wrote a review in the July 1998 issue of the *Gay Community News* in which she references Quinn's journey with his father (Ballard, 1998). Anecdotal accounts confirm its power. Catherine Marshall, who opened the exhibition, described how moving it was to see Billy wheel his ailing father round the work during the opening. Mick Wilson, in conversation, also commented on the impression it made on him. As with all his work, *Quinn's Da* makes a healing process visible. It shows a growth of empathy between father and son and the struggle involved in that journey. The chair is not an easy chair but an orthopaedic chair, which helps the occupant heal. For a long time, the chair has no occupant until his ailing father arrives and then father and son struggle and Billy assumes his father's place, even wearing his clothes. Finally, the chair is vacant again. The installation is a metaphor for the development, and, to the extent possible, the confrontation of the father-son relationship. On another level, it is as if Quinn is asking what, if anything, comes after him, or it may be a reference to his inability to return and belong in any one place. Quinn says it is a celebration of the fact that with him, his genetic strand ends, and claims that *Quinn's Da* is a celebration of that (B. Quinn, 2017, p. 149).

Quinn's Da also displays Billy Quinn's understanding of what a photograph is and its power to move us. Roland Barthes pointed out that a photograph represents more than an image. It also represents time and space. It is a record of the thing caught at a particular place and time and as a consequence there is a sense of 'having been there' when we look at photographic images (Barthes, 1977, p. 44). It is how it was and from this we have the sense of longing, which photographs have. At the opening of *Camera Lucida*, Barthes recounts how, when looking at a photograph of Napoleon's youngest brother, Jerome, he realised he was looking at eyes, which had seen the Emperor (Barthes, 1981, p. 3). *Quinn's Da* is an account of what was, of what is past, of a relationship as it was and regret that it was not closer. While Quinn claims the work is a celebration, I believe it contains more than a little sadness. In the same way, the *Icons* are nostalgic because they document many who cannot

be experienced because they are dead, and even with those who are alive, like Rachel, her icon is how she was, not how she is. Later in *Camera Lucida*, Barthes speaks of the effect that becoming aware of being photographed has on him (Barthes, 1981, p. 13). This calls to mind an observation Arthur Danto made about the people in Mapplethorpe's S&M pictures. He says that they trusted him to treat them with respect and let them be comfortable with themselves (Danto, 1996, p. 41). Mapplethorpe understood his leather-clad subjects as Quinn understands those in the AIDS crisis, the abused and eventually his father.

Chapter Three
London Revisited.
Identity and the Continuing Fight for Place.

Billy Quinn's stay in Ireland was both productive and brief. He spent less than two years there, showing and making art. By the autumn of 1997, he had embarked on a fully funded PhD program at the University of East London, from which he had received a BA in Fine Art and Film in 1982. In his proposal for residency at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, he described his homecoming as follows: 'Since returning I've walked around in a stupor, caught somewhere between exhilaration and amazement at the advancement Ireland has made in my absence. Full of my own self-importance I had naively imagined that during 22 years of personal growth the country I had left behind had remained as was' (W. Quinn, 1995, p. 1).

Ireland had not remained as it had over the preceding twenty-two years and experienced an economic growth unparalleled in Europe while becoming a multicultural society (Hickey, 2011). However brief his homecoming was, his work gained attention and when Declan McGonagle, Director of IMMA, organised an exhibition of contemporary Irish art to travel to various cities in the United States and Canada, Billy Quinn was included as one of the thirteen to represent his country. The importance of the exhibition lay not only in the art displayed but in the reaction to Quinn's work in Boston, raising issues of national identity and inclusiveness. Taking the exhibition as a starting point, I will look at the issues of national identity in a rapidly changing Ireland and Quinn's work in that context. Catherine Marshall commented that 'Billy is an Irish artist whose vision is not limited by the constraints of a small island' (Marshall & Murray, 2014, p. 400). His work and intellectual curiosity reflect his exposure to metropolitan London and New York, but at the same time exhibit a vision of Ireland rooted in the 1970s. His regard for James Joyce is reflected in a number of references, and in those he shows a hankering for a lost Ireland. Joyce escaped Ireland and lived in Trieste, Zurich and Paris but his reality was the Dublin he left. Quinn escaped Ireland and lived in London and New York, where he started to process the experience of growing up in Ireland. Unlike Joyce, Quinn returned to Ireland and found it changed. He was an outsider upon his return just as he was before he left. In his interview he creates an image of himself as being slight, timid and bookish trying hard to make friends. He says, 'I wanted people to like me. Even though I find myself utterly unlikeable'. He continues to describe his lack of attachment to the gay community, such as it was, which might have offered some form of support during this painful time (B. Quinn, 2017, p. 145, 146).

In the catalogue for *Irish Art Now*, Declan McGonagle emphasises the extent and depth of change Ireland had experienced in the recent past. Although the artists in the show are not in any sense a group, they all draw on 'the same reservoir of meaning associated with

being Irish and being artists in the world' (McGonagle et al., 1999, p. 124). Compare works and artists in this exhibition with the scene as described by Brian O'Doherty writing about the 'Irish Imagination of 1971' and we have a sense of the dramatic change in Irish art at the end of the twentieth century (Cullen, 2000, p. 268-273). The themes of land, religion and gender are still important, but they are interrogated not as fixed but as fluid elements in an evolving national identity.

Fintan O'Toole describes the centrepiece of the Irish Fair in New York in 1897 as a map of Ireland with soil samples from each county. In his account of the Fermanagh woman's response to it are many of the feelings the Irish had about the land up until very recently (McGonagle et al., 1999, p. 21). The difficulties experienced by the Irish on the land were explored and visualised in the *Creating History* exhibition and catalogue (*Creating History: Stories of Ireland in Art*, 2016, pp. 182, 203-248). Most of the population lived on the land or in market towns dependent on it. The history of Ireland is the history of the loss of land and the desire to regain it, and, having done so, not being able to survive on it (McGonagle et al., 1999, p. 21). Land plays a prominent role in the *Irish Art Now* exhibition. Willie Doherty's *Longing/Lamenting* succinctly captures these ambivalent feelings (Fig.3.1). Caroline McCarthy's *Greetings* tells us she has neither place nor ownership in the traditional landscape of mountains and fields (Fig.3.2). As her head bobs in and out of the video frame she is also calling into question a traditional and cherished image of Ireland. It was an image created and maintained, not only in greeting cards but in the work of Irish artists such as Paul Henry and Maurice McGonagle (Fig.3.3). Alice Maher may not represent the land and landscape but she references the produce of the land. Her *Berry Dress* (Fig.3.4a) is sweet to eat but inside has sharp needles like the thorns in her *Staircase of Thorns*, which came from roses (Fig.3.4b). The land may bring bounty but also pain.

When Declan McGonagle writes about Quinn's work, he contrasts it to the work of Mark Francis, whose art is informed by the internal workings of the body. Francis presents images of cells and sperm-like creatures, such as in his *Undulation (Indian Yellow)* (Fig.3.5). Quinn on the other hand represents the external body, such as in the *Icon* works like *Billy*, which was included in the travelling show. The other Quinn work shown was *Quinn's Da*. At first sight neither of these works have anything to do with the land. *Billy's* work honours people and their journeys to overcome their challenges in various difficult situations. It is the work of one who grew up in Clondalkin on the outskirts of Dublin, and, as McGonagle points out, spent twenty years in London and New York (McGonagle et al., 1999, p. 17). It is worth noting that for Quinn, Clondalkin seemed to be a long way from Dublin although on the

city's doorstep (B. Quinn, 2017, p. 123). Immigration may be viewed as the abandonment or rejection of the land, and in that sense, Quinn's work has a strong connection to the land of his birth because he left it, not briefly but for a long period. There are no exteriors in Quinn's work. His people exist in a heavenly gold, undefined space or in a nondescript room which could be located anywhere. The experience that he represents is one afforded him by leaving Ireland. Being removed from Ireland provided distance and allowed him space to visualise his own experience of abuse and that of others. Separation from his father provided material for *Quinn's Da*. It is worth noting that from a logistical perspective, the inclusion of *Quinn's Da* in a travelling show presented a challenge because of its size. It is a confirmation of the organisers' commitment to Quinn's work that it was included. It consists of twenty-two pieces measuring 60" x 60". Inevitably, its inclusion was at the expense of other works by other artists.⁷

Irish Art Now opened in Boston in the autumn of 1999. The venue was Boston College, a Jesuit university in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. For the five weeks of its run at the McMullen Museum it did not attract very much attention until it was commented on by a columnist at the *Boston Herald*, Joe Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald wrote that 'the folks at B.C., who are now hosting an exhibition that thumbs its nose at the faith they claim to represent... a nude man mimicking saints, hoping to win acceptance. How does it find a home among the B.C. Jesuits?' (Fitzgerald, 1999). His review was quoted in *The Irish Echo* newspaper. The biweekly *Irish Echo* is the leading periodical for Irish Americans and immigrants in the United States. *Billy* was exhibited in a room with a sign outside clearly advising that the image displayed might be disturbing to some. The Catholic Action League and the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH) reacted angrily (J. Smith, 1999). The only work they singled out for comment was Billy Quinn's *Billy* (Fig.1.1). They argued that the tenor of the exhibition was anti-Catholic and, by extension, not authentically Irish. There are a number of works in the exhibition that question traditional values and perspectives of how society was in Ireland. It could be argued that Abigail O'Brien's *Last Supper* is clearly blasphemous and gender challenging with women taking the place of Christ and the twelve Apostles (Fig.3.6). Dorothy Cross's *Saddle* (Fig.3.7) plays with male and female gender markers using phallic-like upended udders; as does her *Kitchen Table* in challenging the ideas of power and that a woman's space is in the kitchen (McGonagle et al., 1999, pp. 66, 67, 37, 39). These and other

⁷ This observation was made to me by Catherine Marshall on June 18, 2017.

works in the exhibition were subversive, but the focus of anger was on the one work exhibited that was obviously queer.

The image of *Billy* is unambiguous and that partially explains why it was the focus of the AOH's anger. Both O'Brien and Cross are women and may not have been perceived to be as threatening as a man. Their work has a sense of surrealism and ambiguity. Billy's work was a photograph, which brings to mind the comment by Robert Hughes on why Robert Mapplethorpe's work drew so much attention. He said that photography 'enrages the moralist' and if Mapplethorpe had painted sadomasochistic images, few would have paid any attention to them (Hughes, 1990, p. 14). Furthermore, Quinn, in print on the image states that it was AIDS and its aftermaths that motivated him to make it. The image of *Billy* appropriated religious art and employed both photography and print to emphasise its message. The underlying energy behind the objection speaks to gender instability, as so eloquently illuminated by Eve Sedgwick (Sedgwick, 1994). The AOH understood this image to be a frontal assault on its beliefs. Quinn claims he was only 'vaguely' aware of the objections to his work (B. Quinn, 2017, p. 153).

In an article titled, 'The Return of the IMMA 13', in the *Irish Times* of November 17, 2001, there is no reference to the response to Billy's work in Boston, nor is it singled out for comment. As mentioned above, when Billy Quinn's two works were exhibited in Dublin, they received coverage but little of it was negative. Interestingly, the only negative comment I have found about Quinn's work had to do with an antipathy towards modern art expressed by Kevin Myers in his column on March 26, 1996, when, with the heading 'Ephemeral Triteness', he wrote the following of *Billy*: 'The Irish Museum of Modern Art is now a temple to that ephemeral triteness called modern art, in which world being infected by AIDS is almost a declaration of artistic talent—there is an exhibition by the artist Bill Quinn, which largely consists of photographs of naked homosexual AIDS-sufferers wearing condoms. Now I will not be emotionally or politically bullied into accepting this as art. Grief unmediated by talent or skill and placed on public display is no more than exhibitionistic self-indulgence' (Myers, 1996). Leaving these comments aside, the press coverage and the response of the viewing public showed a tolerance for queer material, which was clearly not the case in Boston.

As part of the activity around Irish art in 1993 in New York, referenced in chapter one, *Artforum* magazine devoted its May 1993 issue to Irish art and called it 'Ireland's Eyes'. The curator of the *Irish Art Now* show wrote the lead article, entitled 'New History from Beyond the Pale', in which he states that 'Ireland and its artists are in the process of

assembling a new cultural matrix' (McGonagle, 1993, p. 90). In the magazine, John Hutchinson's essay on Dorothy Cross, entitled 'Cross Purposes', emphasises how her work challenges the traditional role of women in Irish society. He references her *Amazon* sculpture, which I referred to earlier, and other works from her *Udders* series, one of which, *Saddle* of 1993, appeared in *Irish Art Now* (McGonagle et al., 1993, p. 98). Billy Quinn is not mentioned in any of the essays, although his work was gaining attention, as evidenced by Anna O'Sullivan's article in *Circa* (O'Sullivan, 1993, p. 22). It may be that McGonagle was not aware of Quinn until O'Sullivan's article in *Circa* of the same year. All the artists referenced in *Artforum* were working in Ireland at the time. What the five critics want to portray in the *Artforum* issue is an Ireland as a place where artists are interrogating anew, and in very different ways, ideas of national identity, gender, sexuality and history. It provides a picture of artists living in a postcolonial Ireland, one which is confident enough to ask these questions and to accommodate queer art. In another Ireland of the mid-twentieth century, much, if not all of the work on display would have been considered 'beyond the pale'.

That there was space in Ireland for queer art was a recent development. In her essay in the catalogue for *Pride in Diversity*, Gill McKnight calls it a 'hard-won space' (McKnight & Hutchinson, 1996, p. 3). Kathryn Conrad, in an essay in *Cultural Studies*, examines how and why and the way in which, during the forging of a national identity in Ireland after 1922, homosexuality was excluded (K. Conrad, 2001). In the essay, she looks at change in the acceptance of queers in Ireland over the twentieth century by first examining the manner in which the diaries of Roger Casement were received by nationalists and condemned out of hand as forgeries. Homosexuality and nationalism were not compatible. Secondly, she addresses the ongoing dispute since 1990 between the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization (ILGO) and the organisers of the St. Patrick Day Parade in New York (O'Hanlon, 2015).

Conrad argues that homosexuality was excluded from the discourse of what it means to be Irish because it was viewed as being an imported contaminant and a consequence of colonialism (K. Conrad, 2001, p. 124). Furthermore, according to her research, Conrad identifies the frequency with which, in the struggle for independence, gays and lesbians are presented as a dangerous foreign species (K. A. Conrad, 2004, p. 16). After independence, she argues that because sexuality, like gender, is not limited to borders it was difficult to control. Homosexuality was viewed as a particular threat to the ideas of solidity and permanence sought in a developing national identity (K. Conrad, 2001, p. 125). A key tool in enforcing the exclusion of homosexuality was the Constitution of 1937, which with the support of the Catholic Church established a patristic legal framework for the new state. The

constitution also marginalised women. Conrad is sceptical of the claim made by Kieran Rose that progress in gay inclusion is largely the result of shedding the consequences of colonialism and allowing the blossoming again of traditional Irish inclusiveness (Rose, 1994, p. 3). Her argument is that economic expansion and outside influences made the Irish in Ireland more confident and more accepting. The argument is supported in an essay by Susannah Bowyer, where she comments that media coverage about Brian, a gay Irish reality TV personality in the 1990s, illustrates ‘how a local cosmopolitan gay sexual identity was celebrated as an icon of a liberal and sexually liberated Ireland’, and how, at the same time, ‘the image of the Catholic priest came to represent a foreign contaminant’ (Bowyer, 2010, p. 801).

The organisers who objected to ILGO’s participation in the New York St. Patrick’s Day Parade were members of the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH), the same organisation that objected to Billy Quinn’s work being exhibited in Boston. The AOH’s objective in both instances was to control the discourse about who can be considered Irish, and its actions in both cases reflected its anxieties around identity (Rose, 1994, p. 32). In both incidents, the AOH was attempting to guard and protect a traditional concept of Irishness that was both Catholic and heterosexual. C. J. Doyle of the Catholic Action League is quoted in *The Irish Echo* as saying that ‘Quinn’s work is among other things a mockery of Catholic devotion to the saints’. He went on to say, ‘Boston College ought to be ashamed of itself for this latest betrayal of the Catholic religion and the Irish heritage of its founders’ (J. Smith, 1999). The identification of Irishness with Catholicism is unambiguous, as is the sense of betrayal felt by the AOH. Furthermore, Conrad points out that Irish Americans as a group had only recently been accepted as part of the predominantly Anglo-Saxon power structure and they were concerned that any hint of progressiveness in the area of gender could be damaging to their newly won position (K. Conrad, 2001, p. 133). These events also reflect that a faction of the Catholic hierarchy and its adherents in the United States identified with more conservative political opinion over issues such as abortion and what was perceived to be unwelcome government intrusion into family life. Perhaps more importantly, part of the Catholic Church’s response to sexual abuse by priests was to make a direct link between abuse and homosexuality. Its simplistic approach was that priests who abused children were gay (Bowyer, 2010, p. 802). The Church was very sensitive to any accommodation to queer art or culture. To allow ILGO to march could also be interpreted as an admission of the presence of queers in the AOH. At the same time, march leaders and the AOH allowed organisations such as NORAID to participate in the parade with banners clearly identifying who they were but

without reference to that organisation's strongly suspected support of terrorism in Ireland (K. A. Conrad, 2004, p. 22). The threat which queers posed to the AOH was perceived as more destabilising to their concept of Irishness than terrorism within the borders of the island of Ireland.

If further evidence of the alliance between the Catholic Church and conservative positions was needed, it is exemplified by the support of Cardinal O'Connor of New York for Rudy Giuliani, Mayor of New York City, in his dispute over the *Sensation* art show. In 1999, the mayor threatened to close the *Sensation* exhibition of Young British Artists (YBA) at the Brooklyn Museum. In the YBA exhibition there was an image of the Virgin with elephant dung attached as her breast and pictures of genitalia cut from porn magazines in the background by the artist Chris Ofili. Both the mayor and cardinal found the work blasphemous, with the cardinal—using language similar to that used about Quinn's work in Boston—claiming it was an attack on religion itself (Vogel, 1999). The parallels between these reactions to perceived threats to a traditional understanding of Irishness are clear.

In the *Sodomy Piece* of 1993 (Fig.1.11), Billy Quinn referred to himself as 'A 38-year-old recently bereaved Irish ex-Catholic (post Christian) H.I.V. negative undocumented alien.' The Catholic Church did not approve of his work nor did Billy approve of the Catholic Church. Quinn may have rejected the teachings and the institution of the Church but his work co-opts its iconography. The AIDS environment brought a familiarity with death to many young people and made them acutely aware of their mortality. Many sought solace, if not in organised religion, then in various forms of spirituality. As mentioned in chapter 1, there are religious themes and a concern with spirituality in much of the AIDS-inspired art of the 1980s and 1990s. Although this undoubtedly affected Billy and influenced him to adopt a religious iconography, it was his upbringing and inculcation into the Catholic Church that was the true source for his religious imagery. In Ireland of the 1950s and 1960s, it was very difficult to separate national identity from the Church. The Church and its rituals permeated life in Ireland. For Quinn, it would have been nearly a spontaneous reaction to use religious imagery when he wanted to honour people. One of the best ways of recognising great good or outstanding service in Quinn's view of the world was to canonise them, so when he wanted to honour people in the fight against AIDs, presenting them as sanctified beings was congruent with his cultural background.

Billy Quinn's connection to Catholic iconography and practice is confirmed in his interview. When discussing the icons and his decision to use Catholic iconography to honour these people, he said, 'And then I thought, well, I really, if I'm going to be true to myself, I

would go into what is my own background and experience, which is Catholic iconography, which is kings, queens, saints and popes mounted in 24-carat gold, you know, up in their celestial goodness' (B. Quinn, 2017, p. 137).

In the image that caused so much offence, *Billy*, the burnished gold background highlights the partially shaded cut-out photograph of Billy. He stands to address us like Rodin's *Saint John the Baptist*. The ghostlike figure behind reminds us of a non-material world. Support figures on top seem to be a form of *sacra conversazione*, as in a fifteenth-century predella. Quinn's nude figures emphasise the humanity of the subjects in not only the *Icon* series but also in the *Traditional Family Values* sequences. Quinn uses nakedness to show his subjects vulnerability in the same way as Christ's nakedness was used as a symbol of His humanity in religious art (Walters, 1978, p. 73). Billy commented to Anna O'Sullivan in her *Circa* article that 'the Irish make the best saints and the best storytellers'; just as, in the same manner, he is a storyteller. Interestingly, his comment is both romantic and quite an old-fashioned perception of being Irish. He continued to speak of confession, saying, in the same article, 'I think of it as more of a Catholic profession than confession. Confession suggests guilt, profession suggests that is just what happened. I refuse to accept guilt, it is so obnoxious and it is so much a part of the tradition of being Irish Catholic' (O'Sullivan, 1993, p. 22). Confession is an important rite of Catholicism and particularly the Irish Catholicism of Quinn's formative years. However, it is a rite of lesser importance in late twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century Ireland (Faith Survey, 2016). It is also clear from this comment that in Billy's mind Irish Catholicism and guilt are closely related. This is one of the parts of Catholicism he does not want, but when he wants to visualise his world he uses its symbols.

In his dissertation, after his summary he places his introduction, which he calls 'Introibo', a Latin word used at the opening of the prayers at the foot of the altar in the Catholic Latin Mass. The opening line is 'Introibo ad altare Dei', or, 'I will go to the altar of God'. It also happens to be a line from James Joyce's *Ulysses*, spoken by the blasphemous Buck Mulligan (Joyce, 1992, p. 1). Joyce is important for Quinn and I am unsure which source prompted the use of the word but it could possibly have been both. Later in the dissertation he uses an orthodox definition and explanation of the Trinity to explain what 'Bifurcation-Trifurcation/Infra-thin' is. Billy has a vision in which humans will bifurcate to reproduce rather than doing so sexually (W. Quinn, 2000, p.155, 162). I am using these examples to illustrate the degree to which Quinn is immersed in cultural Catholicism (B. Quinn, 2017, p. 126).

Quinn's understanding of confession and its workings is very similar to that described by Michel Foucault and discussed above in the 'Introduction', namely, Foucault's 'repressive hypothesis' commentary in *The History of Sexuality* (Foucault & Hurley, 1979, pp. 19-23). Foucault continues looking at how the information-gathering process in confession grew and how its uses crossed over into how we relate our problems to an expert such as a doctor or psychiatrist who, in turn, would identify our ailments. However, the process also identifies us, and once identified we can be managed. The information collected gives power to the collector. Judith Butler related this to the so-called coming out process. Coming out depends on the existence of the closet and demands repeated explanations and exposures that further identify the subject. She refers to this as the 'infinite postponement of the disclosure of gayness' (Fuss, 1991, p. 16). I believe that these processes are parallel and similar and relevant to understanding Quinn's art. His art is both a confession and therapy. He was abused, and telling the story of his abuse in the *Castration* triptych, for example, eases his anguish. By showing his deepest thoughts, he liberates himself and forgives himself. As a gay man, he is also coming out, again and again in his art.

Billy Quinn's interrogation of his experience continues in his PhD dissertation of 2000 entitled, 'More Life: Towards a Vitalist Manifestation or Bifurcation, Pseudopodia and the worm, Jane Seymour and me, even' (W. Quinn, 2000). The issue in his dissertation that I will focus on is Quinn's concern for how his genetic strand will continue after his death. He believes or hopes that mankind is at a point of transition from procreation to bifurcation, like the worm. He admits that his concern may be because of his guilt that he is a 'non-procreative unit' and quotes from Francois Rabelais' work *Gargantua*, in which the father writes a letter to his son, Pantagruel. The father tells Pantagruel of the importance of continuing his 'name and seed' and in so doing notes how it affords a kind of immortality. The dissertation accompanied three works as part of the PhD programme, one of which was *Quinn's Da*. After a wait lasting seventeen panels, which Catherine Marshall called 'a sublime monotony', Quinn's father appears, a struggle ensues, and, Billy takes his father's place and finally the chair is empty once more (Ballard, 1998). As mentioned earlier, this is a visualisation of the distance and absence between father and son and the struggle for reconciliation. The last piece of the twenty-two panels is a recognition of an ending or a termination. There is nothing after Quinn leaves. A concern with continuation is also found in another work of Quinn's in a private collection in Dublin (Fig.3.8). It is a diptych made of laser print photographs and paint on canvas. On the right panel is a room with a chair. The chair is placed in front of a window through which Irish June evening light streams. It is a

rush-seated chair with a back of wooden rails. Over the chair a red shirt is draped. The light is filtered through the window, shirt and chair back. An open curtain hangs to the right of the chair. On the left panel, the room is continued, empty, in shadow, the light catching a white door frame that leads to a darkened empty space beyond. The colour scheme is of cool greens except for the orange reds of the shirt. The collector told me that the shirt is a shirt Quinn used to wear when working in the theatre in London and represents him. The relationship of this work to *Quinn's Da* is unmistakable and one confirmed in his interview. Both works I believe share a sense of melancholy and loss. They also recall a work by the Cuban-American artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres that was exhibited on a number of billboards across New York City in 1991 (Fig.3.9). The image is of his unmade bed, which had been recently occupied by two people, now gone. The empty bed is a reference to the recent death of his partner to AIDS. Unlike other billboards advertising goods, it has no type on it. The black, white and grey image makes people stop and pause, if only for a minute. Gonzalez-Torres demands involvement from the onlooker, both physically and intellectually. He does not place value on the uniqueness of an art object, and for that reason there were at least twenty identical images displayed at the same time. Quinn wants the viewer to stop and look and question the image. His Flickr site has no copyright limitations, showing his mutual lack of regard for the unique art object.

The autobiographical details in his dissertation recount his time in New York and the way the AIDS epidemic there created conditions of such intensity that work from other places seemed not to be relevant. He further comments that since he was not in London during the YBA 'bandwagon', he found it difficult to adapt to the art environment there upon his return (W. Quinn, 2000, p. 158). There is no reference to the art world in Dublin nor what he may have thought of it. A theme throughout this thesis is that there was a vigorous art environment in Ireland in which important work was being produced. The essays in the Out Art catalogues and other catalogues referenced are a window into the concerns of the art world in Dublin in the 1990s. In his essay for the *Pride in Diversity* catalogue, John Hutchinson states that because of the battles won, the community in Dublin has reached a transitional place in regard to the politics of identity. He continues by expressing concern that the content of gay art may become too accommodating (McKnight & Hutchinson, 1996, p. 8). In a later catalogue for the Out Art exhibition *Invisibles*, Mick Wilson considers the dangers that come with queer visibility and quotes Leo Bersani on how the identifying project started in the nineteenth century has reached fruition, i.e., queers can be identified and thus controlled (Wilson, 1997, p. 1). These concerns are not those of survival. They are the

intellectual musings of men and women, confident in the space they have won. This environment is one that Quinn did not recognise as his Ireland. My argument is that upon his return, Billy Quinn found Ireland so profoundly changed that he felt a stranger in his own land despite the fact that its artistic environment and establishment embraced him.

Conclusion

At the outset, it seemed that looking at Billy Quinn's work of the 1990s would be manageable and allow plenty of time and space to address all the works he made during that period. Of course, that has proved not to be the case and some work has been put aside, perhaps for later consideration. Among the works I have not addressed are those based on the masterpieces of Western Art, which display his rich sense of humour and irreverence. What I have attempted to look at represents the major themes that seem to me to dominate his work, i.e., honouring and memorialising heroes in the time of AIDS, acknowledging and respecting his pain and the pain of others, and recovery from familial abuse. He also visualised the cycle of his relationship with his father. Billy Quinn believes he survived an intellectually barren childhood in a family that provided neither physical nor emotional security. Powerful intelligence and great curiosity drove him to explore and imagine different worlds and possibilities. When he left Ireland, he fled, but he took with him an idea of Ireland and the Catholic faith to which he remained attached. He returned to a very different place. As for the Ireland of friendship and networks, he does not seem to have strong bonds of this type, which he confirms in his interview. Only his fraught relationship with his family was retained.

When he started to work seriously on his art, it is as if the attention the *Icons* received was unexpected, and that is how Quinn presents their advent in his interview (B. Quinn, 2017, p. 141). My sense, however, is that given his interests and the backgrounds of some of the people he portrayed, he was at least on the periphery of 'downtown bohemia', where he had developed a network and a sense of belonging for the first time in his life (B. Quinn, 2017, p. 138). As I said earlier, Quinn went to New York to be in the midst of what he believed to be the centre of where a shift from a time of relative freedom to a return to a time of guilt and shame was happening. Getting by as an undocumented person, Quinn applied his creative skills, designing and executing interiors for stores and homes (B. Quinn, 2017, p. 142). He eventually won a green card in a lottery, which changed his legal status and provided residency security. He took an apartment on West 28th Street, and, deciding he wanted to honour those who had chosen life in the face of death in the time of AIDS, he rented a studio nearby and started to make the *Icons*. They are a celebration of courage and generosity. We do not know who is HIV-positive and who is negative or who are the helpers and who are those being helped. Scale, valuable materials and sanctification all attest to the honour he wished to pay them. In making these images Quinn wanted his labour or craft to be visible. He wanted the joints and tares in the laser prints to show. It is his way of honouring people who are not going to regress to a time of judgement and censure. An image of Quinn in his studio on 28th Street gives an idea of the visual impact they had (Fig.4.1). Churches in

Ravenna come to mind, but also these people shine forth reminding me of Yeats in *Sailing to Byzantium*:

‘O sages standing in God’s holy fire
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
And be the singing-masters of my soul.’ (Yeats, 1996).

Quinn, in the *Icons*, immortalised these people who were his network. Although some of the pieces have been destroyed and more are at risk, at least IMMA has one and there are a few in private collections (Nicholson, 1993).

Foucault’s method of analysing how intersections of discourses of power functioned seemed to be almost tailor-made for combating the AIDS crisis (Foucault & Hurley, 1979, pp. 53-73). New York was a concentration of culture, communications and finance that witnessed large numbers of young men dying of an unknown cause. At first it appeared to only affect white gay men. White men are used to having power, but they discovered they had no power as gay men and had to fight to survive. Groups such as Act Up and the Gay Men’s Health Crisis were at the forefront of the fight. Most of the leaders of these groups were familiar with Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* (Halperin, 1995, p. 16). They had in it a blueprint for dissecting discourses of power. They confronted the medical establishment, government, the pharmaceutical industry and organised religion and found them all lacking. Change was achieved and an awareness raised as to the inequality and deficiencies of health care in the United States, energising a debate which continues today. Despite the seemingly endless obituaries and losses, there was a sense of energy, anger and possibility, often expressed artistically in the works of people like David Wojnarowicz and Keith Haring (AIDS, 2017). The theatricality and energy of Billy Quinn’s *Icons* place them in that environment.

By the mid-1990s, AIDS treatments changed the illness from a death sentence to a chronic but manageable illness. In New York it became a disease of the disenfranchised, such as the poor, minorities and drug addicts. The famous, such as Robert Mapplethorpe, Rock Hudson and Freddie Mercury, were no longer the public face of AIDS. The public face of AIDS became a drug addict in Dublin and a migrant worker in South Africa. The gay communities were exhausted from the death toll. Community energy was depleted and what remained was focused elsewhere.

Aware of changes in Ireland such as the equality of all sexual relations before the law, Quinn returned. His regularised immigration status allowed him the possibility to come and go as he pleased. Billy Quinn decided to return to Dublin in large part to be closer to his ailing father and take part in his care (B. Quinn, 2017, p. 144). The opportunity of a residency at IMMA made his return professionally more interesting. As I have said earlier, Dublin had experienced the AIDS crisis on a very different scale but as equally devastating for a community of its size. Contact between Dublin, New York and other centres was relatively easy and facilitated by air travel for all, including that of gay men. As a consequence, AIDS arrived quite early in Dublin, but by the mid-1990s, treatments changed the dynamic of the epidemic there as well.

Billy Quinn found himself in a much quieter environment in Dublin. He had some but very few contacts outside his family. He appears not to have had any connection with artists of his generation. He did attempt to develop relationships with the gay community, which resulted in his participation in the Out Art exhibition of 1996, *Pride in Diversity* (McKnight & Hutchinson, 1996, p. 24). From the proposal he wrote for his residency at IMMA, one has a sense that Quinn felt he would continue the fight in which he participated in New York in Ireland, but he discovered it already had been fought. It was a fight he had played no part in, whereas a well-developed gay community—both in and outside the arts community—had fought the battles and, in the process, formed well-established networks. Billy Quinn was outside of these networks.

While in Ireland Billy Quinn spoke on at least two occasions on national TV as a gay man and an abuse survivor. The abuse he spoke of was the abuse within the family unit, an abuse shrouded in even greater secrecy than the now well-publicised clerical abuse. In the *Castration* triptych, Quinn expresses the horror of abuse, which continues well after the event. He does so using a format and pallet more usually used to honour saints. Here is the self-destruction and guilt that blame brings (Ruane, 1996). The three panels are like three scenes from a play, reporting what had happened, the ensuing psychological turmoil and lastly the subject mutilated but still standing. In the *Icons*, the *Castration* piece and *Traditional Family Values*, Quinn shows an absence of sentimentality or victimhood. In both the *Icons* and *Traditional Family Values*, there is a sense of trust and understanding between artist and subject. With text and image, he engages us but does not preach at us. As Luke Clancy commented about the work, ‘it is respectful of suffering but it is never dour or pious’ (Clancy, 1996).

The absence of moralising makes the images more powerful. In the first panel of *Castration* we meet Chicken Man, crouching in a foetal-like position, defenceless. For Billy, Chicken Man is the personification of the abused. In conversation Quinn explained that the bird is raised to be slaughtered, its eggs taken and consumed. Both chicken and egg have the sole purpose of gratifying others. The chicken is viewed as having no needs. As with Goya's prints of plucked fowl and abused chickens, looking at Quinn's Chicken Man is like having a window into the nightmare of abuse.

In *Quinn's Da* there is an end to the cycle of reproduction and along with that an end to life. In the last panel, the chair is empty again. The cycle may start all over again or it may not, we do not know. Quinn says he is rejoicing that with him is the end of his genetic strand. The comment is a reminder of the rage and hurt that percolate just below his artistic detachment. Yet the sense of melancholy in the empty chair or in the empty room seems palpable too, as is a sense of regret.

If the reviews of the quality of his work, from Anna O'Sullivan's article in *Circa* up to the reviews of his work in Dublin, were indicative of how the art world welcomed him, then Quinn was warmly welcomed. His return to Dublin was professionally successful, though it is possible that his arrival into a small, established community may not have always been welcomed with open arms. Quinn's strongly held opinions may not have facilitated his reception into the local community, but these observations are conjecture on my part and not supported by any real evidence. Regardless, there was a general recognition that Billy Quinn's art was important and merited attention.

It may have been that after London and New York, Dublin's scale was not enough to hold him. It is also probable that despite his critical success there, his childhood associations were just too burdensome for him. The opportunity to work on a PhD must also have been attractive, and so he returned to London. Quinn's limited commercial success meant that he had accumulated a substantial amount of work that needed to be stored and incurred the costs of preservation. He left his unsold *Icons* in safe keeping with a gallery in Dublin. The remainder of his work, including the *Castration* piece and *Jeffrey's Quilt*, was left in the care of his family. The works left with his family were disposed of and no longer exist. It is as if the childhood abuse continued.

The history of editing out queer art is long and now well documented. It is at least as old as Michelangelo's great-nephew changing the pronouns in his great-uncle's poetry and correspondence (Saslow, 1986, p. 13). The gaps are being partially filled by current exhibitions such as *Queer British Art* at the Tate (Barlow, 2017) and *The Other's Gaze*

(Navarro & Perdices, 2017) at the Prado. It is all the more ironic that we are losing so much of Billy's work because of his modest commercial success and the resulting storage expenses. Lack of commercial success can be another form of editing an artists' work. Quinn does not lack self-awareness and one cannot help but sense a relationship to his sense of victimhood and the destruction of so much of his work (B. Quinn, 2017, p. 138). Many art historians have viewed a consideration of an artist's private life as a distraction, although that proposition is now contested (Van Buskirk, 1992, p. 167). Billy Quinn is an artist whose life informs his art. It is nearly impossible to understand it without some understanding of his biography.

Billy Quinn continued to make art in the new century and in so doing caused more controversy by focusing on the plight of the queer in environments other than the traditional Western Christian world. His work has also explored his interest in the canon of Western Art, particularly Dutch art, issues around unique images and his ongoing admiration for Marcel Duchamp. His exhibition of 2010 in Amsterdam, *Maid in Lland*, clearly demonstrates his appropriation of the work of Duchamp, whose ideas intrigued Quinn but of which there is little visual evidence in his work of the 1990s (B. Quinn, 2017, p. 131).

In chapter three I demonstrated that Ireland has been producing art that challenged many of the accepted ideas held about the Irish. Land, religion, gender and family in Ireland have been opened up to interrogation and questioned. Billy Quinn's work goes to the heart of that interrogation when he challenges old ideas of guilt and honours selfless service in a unique manner. His work opens up new venues for discussion of the most secret abuse, the abuse which takes place within the confines of the traditional family. Ireland has had queer artists earlier in the twentieth century, when circumstances dictated that their desires be hinted at rather than stated clearly. The Out Art exhibitions show that Quinn was not unique in using his sexuality in his work, but none of the others met the difficult issues of death, self-loathing and abuse with candour and respect so unambiguously, and in so doing Billy Quinn opened up these areas to future Irish artists.

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Outart
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Billy Quinn (2017), Interview with the artist (Appendix 1).
The interview has been edited to protect privacy.

Billy Quinn (2000), Dissertation for PhD (Appendix 2).
I have read the dissertation at East London University Library. Because of restricted access, it is not available through the British Library. The copy in Appendix 2 was given to me by Billy Quinn without images.

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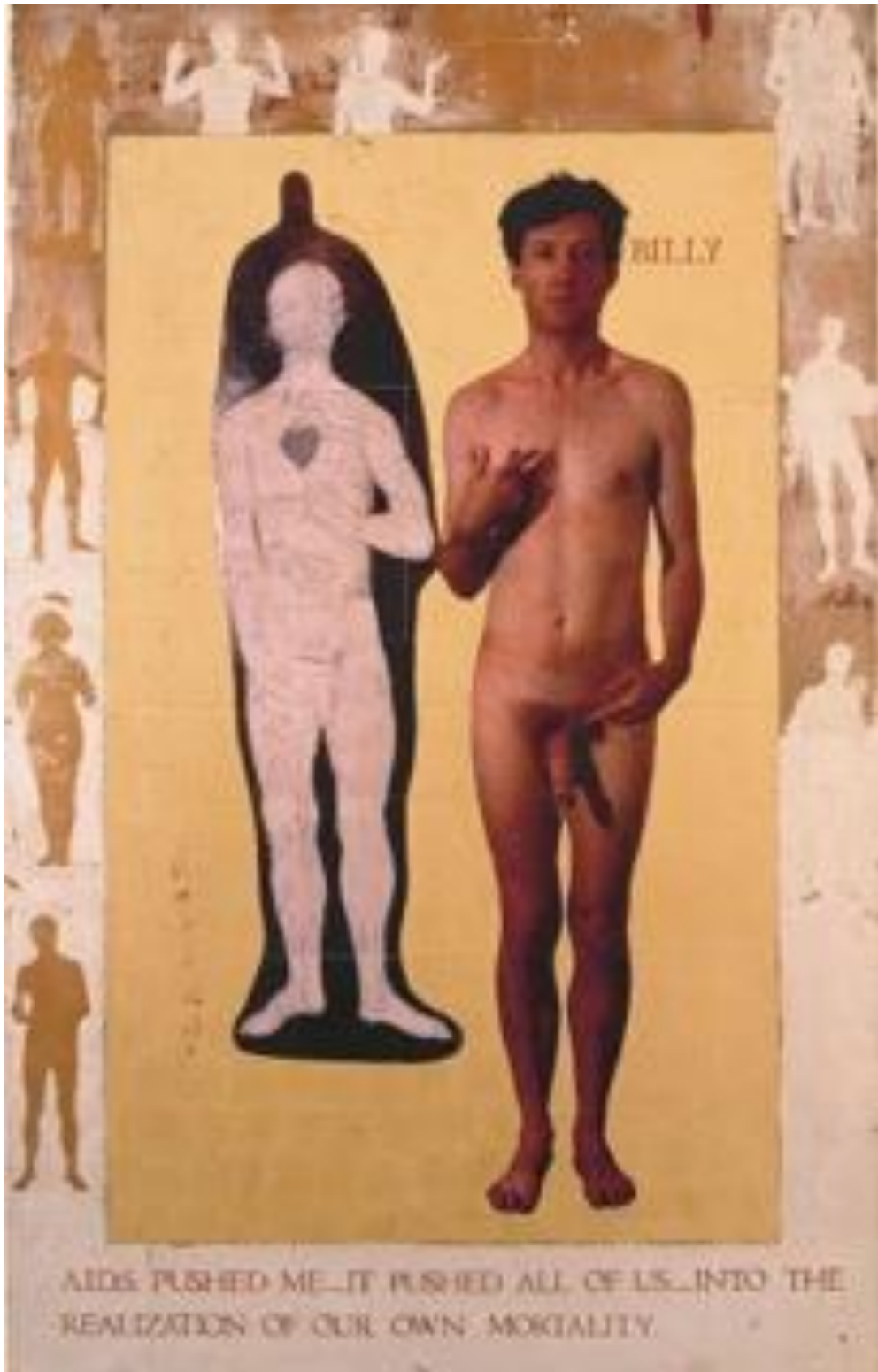


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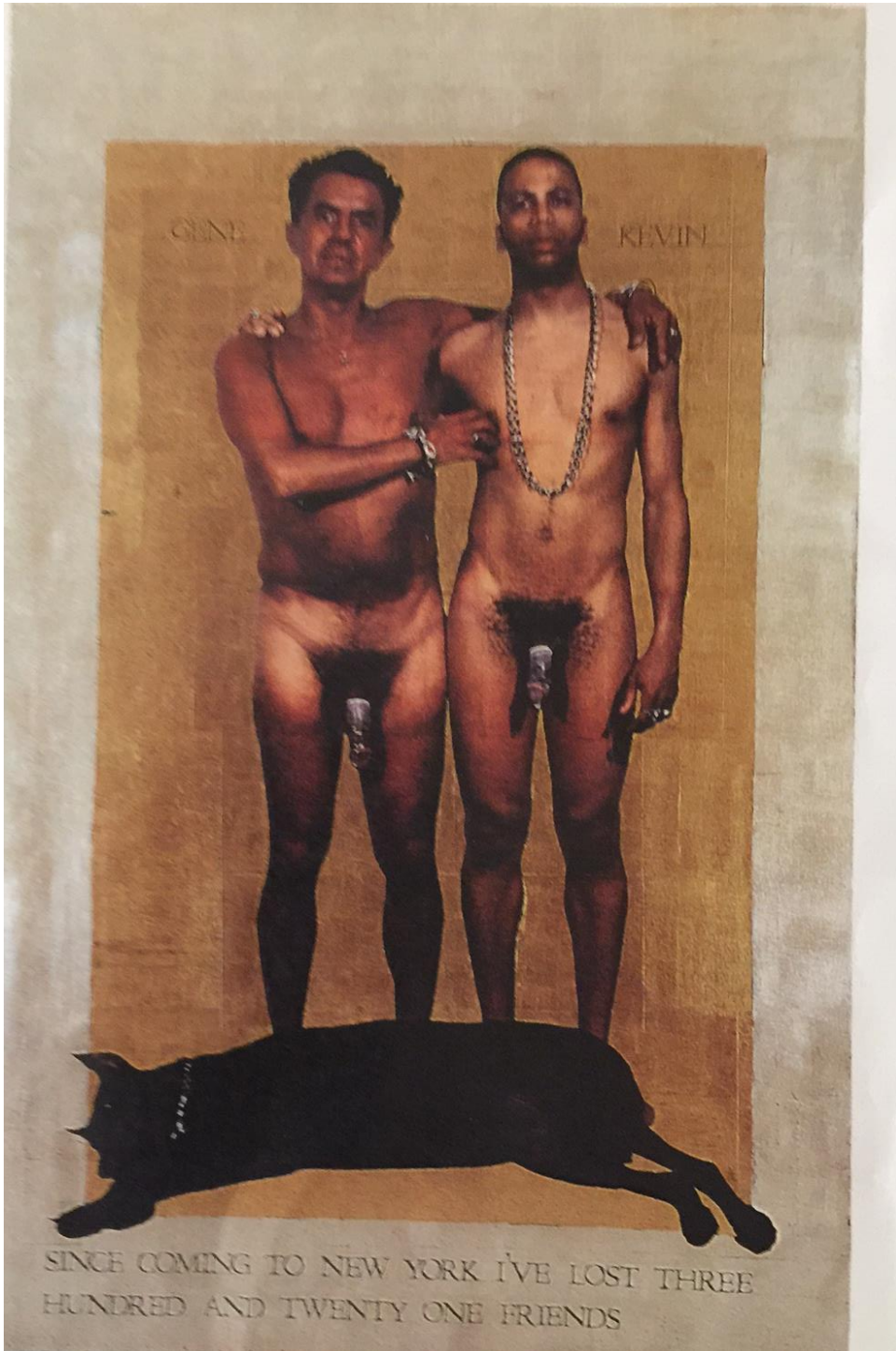


Fig.1.2



Fig.1.3



Fig.1.4

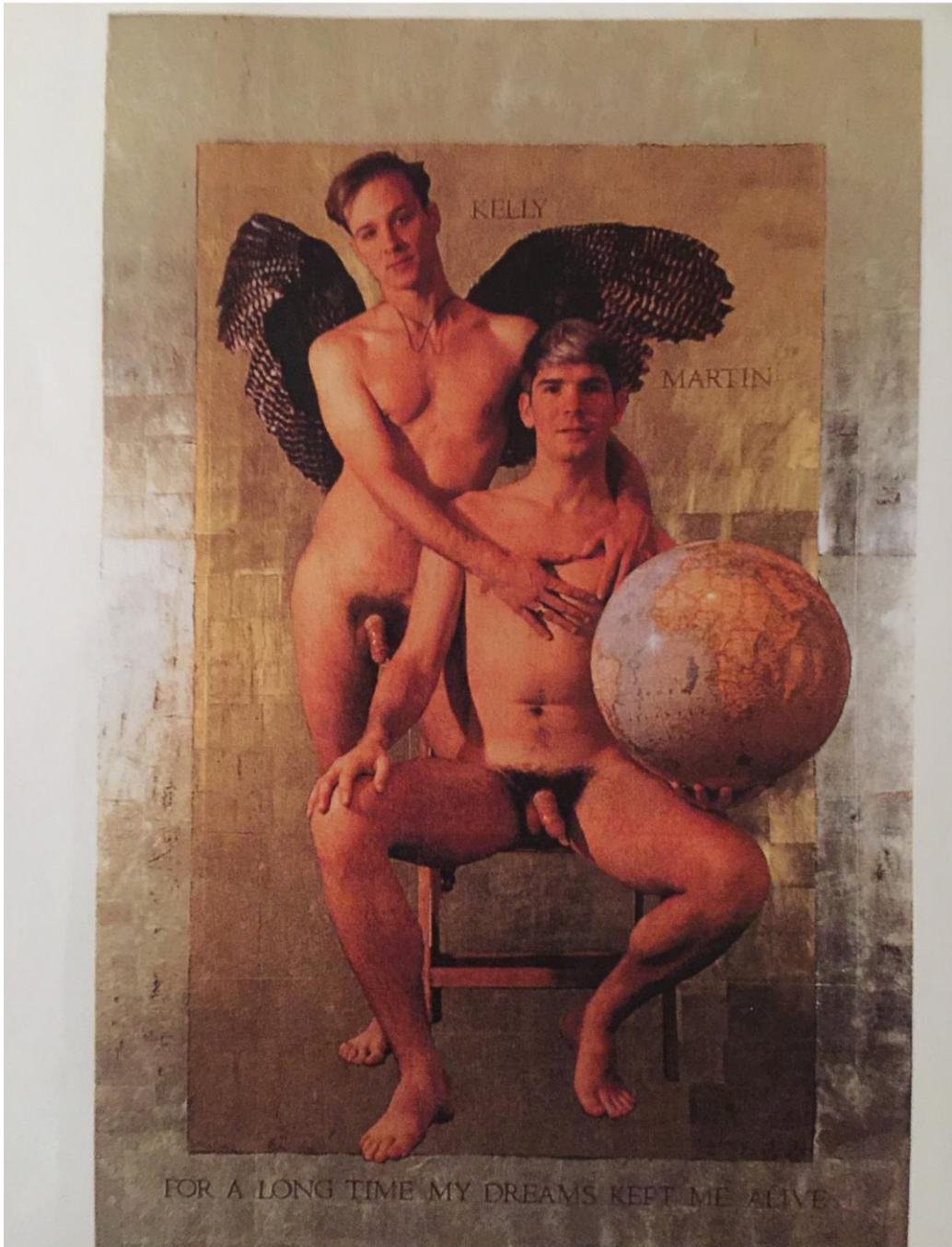


Fig.1.5



Fig.1.6

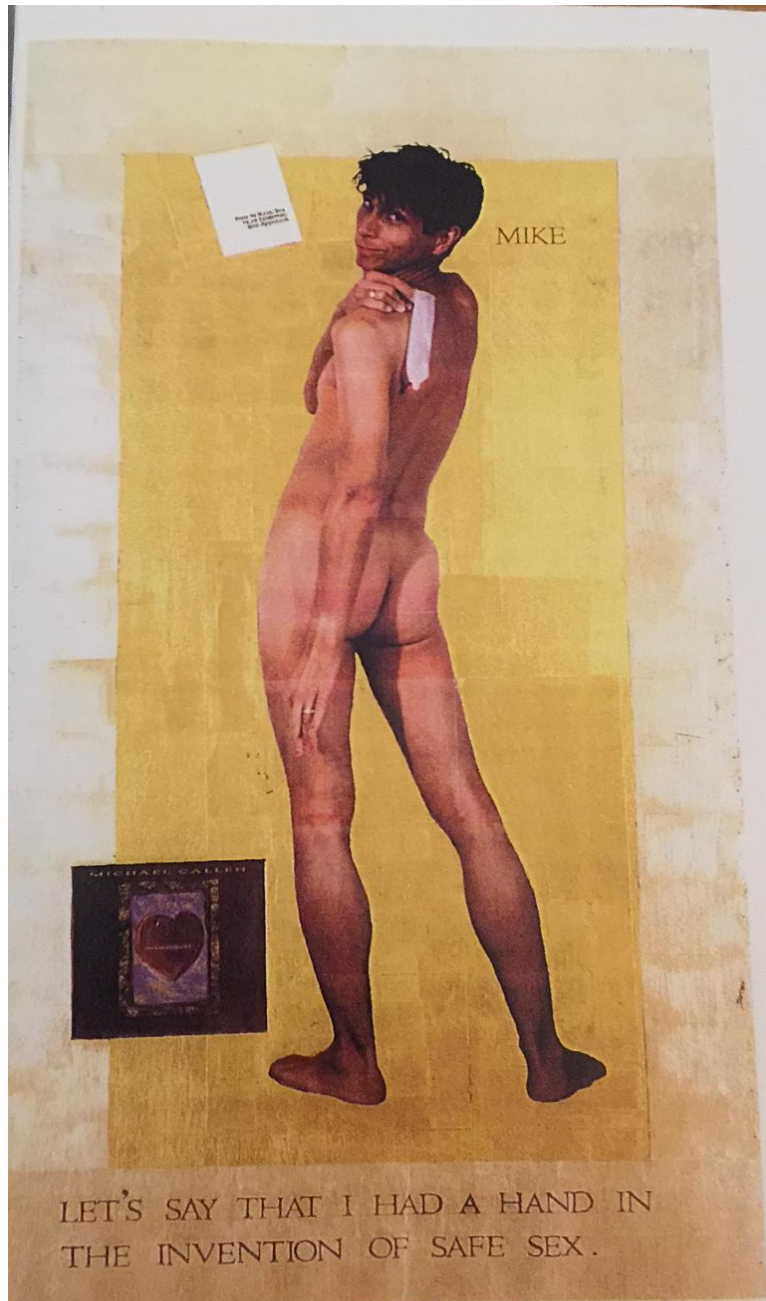


Fig.1.7



Fig.1.8



Fig.1.9

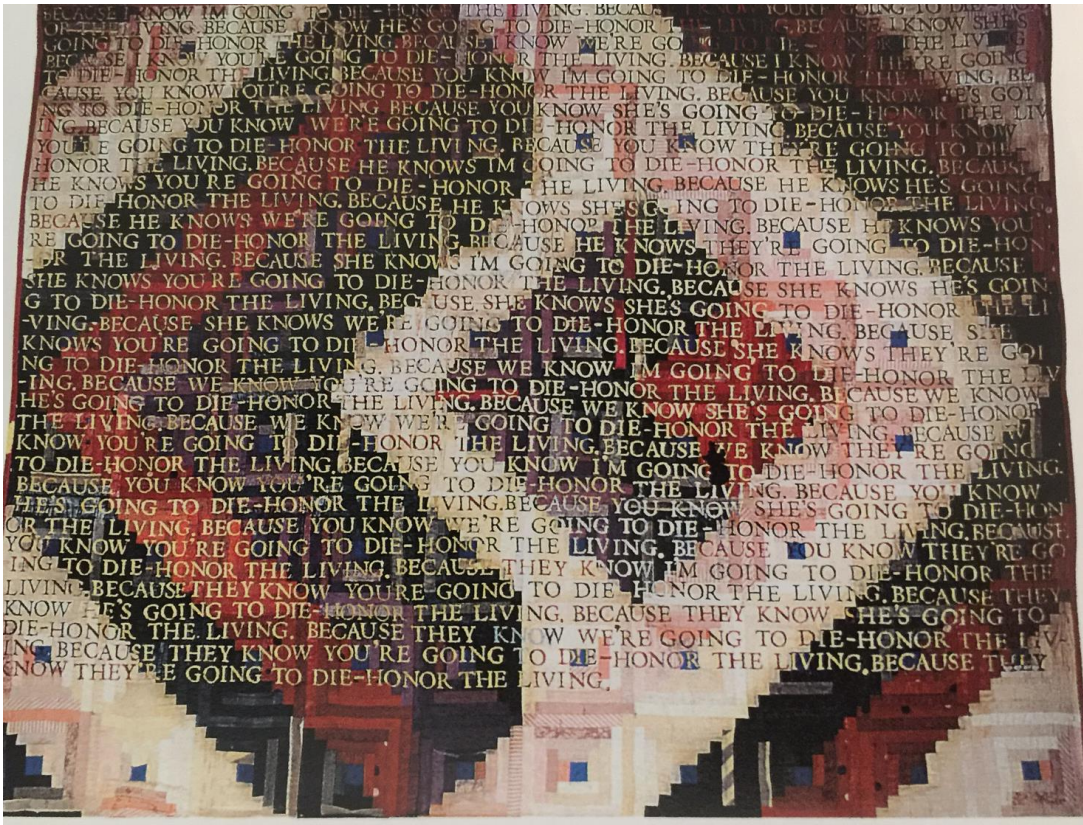


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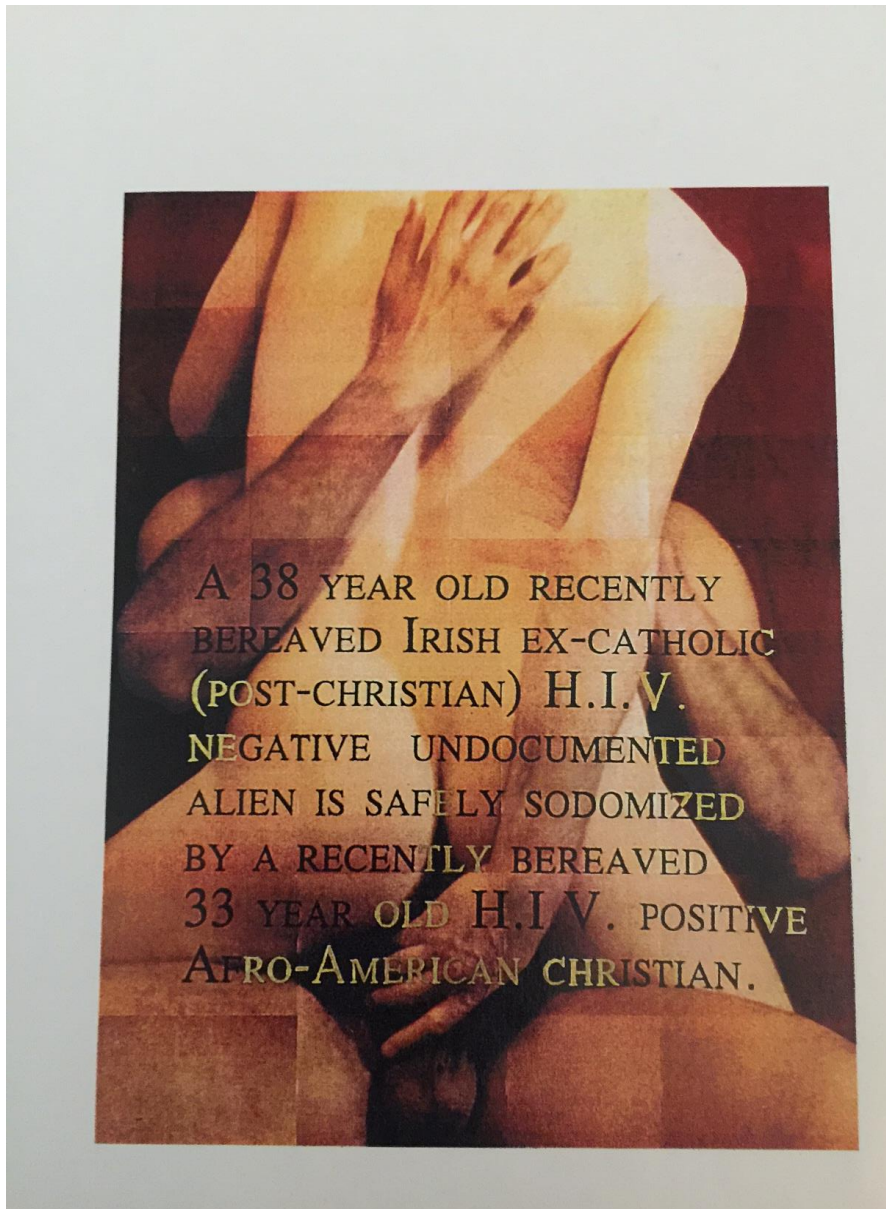


Fig.1.11

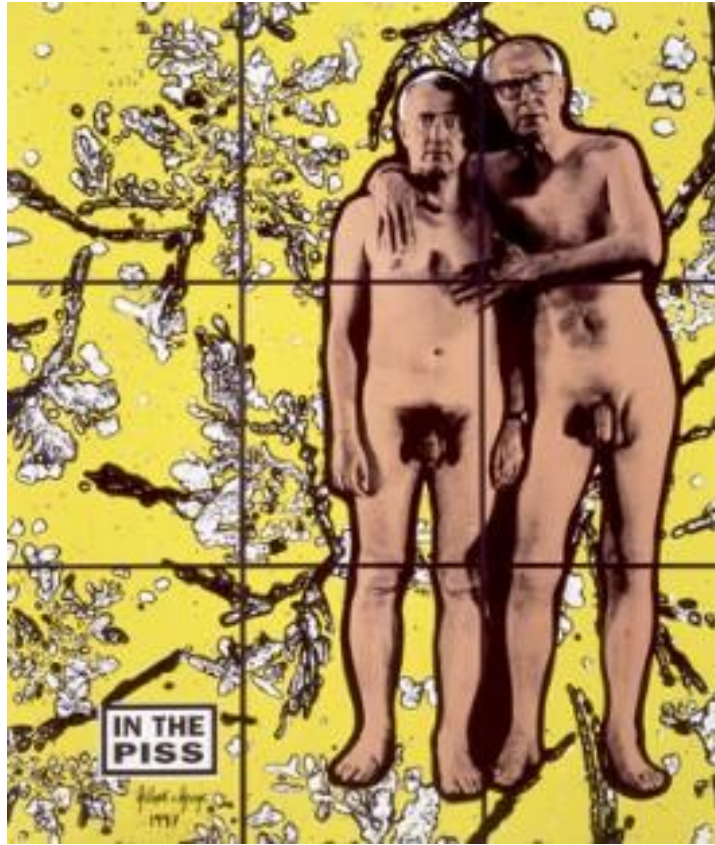


Fig.1.12



Fig.1.13



Fig.1.14



Fig.1.15



Fig.1.16



Fig.2.1

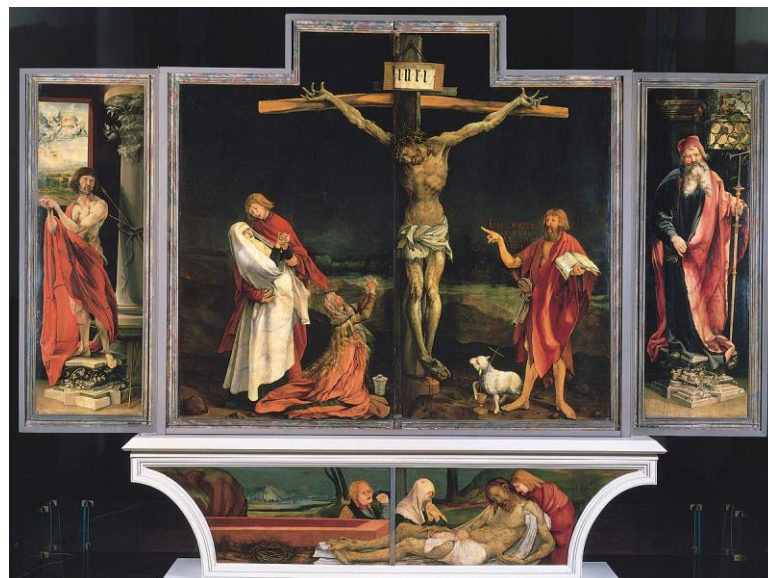


Fig.2.2



Fig.2.3

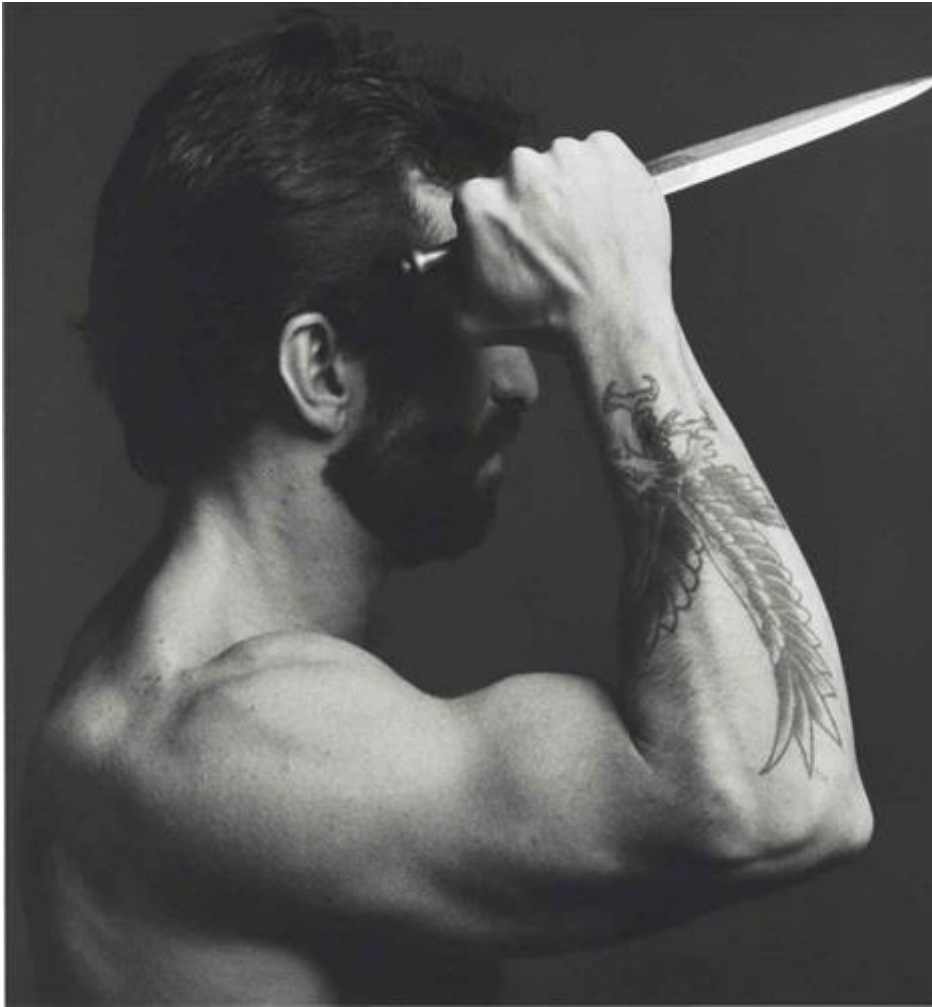


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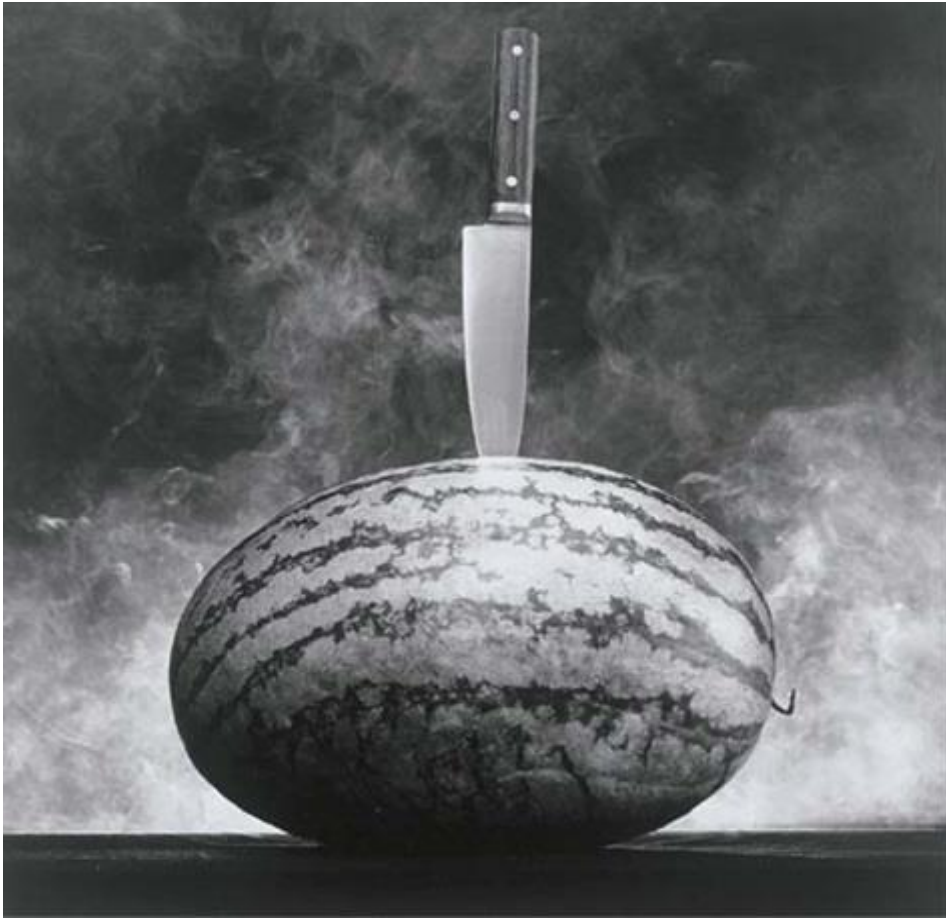


Fig.2.5



Fig.2.6

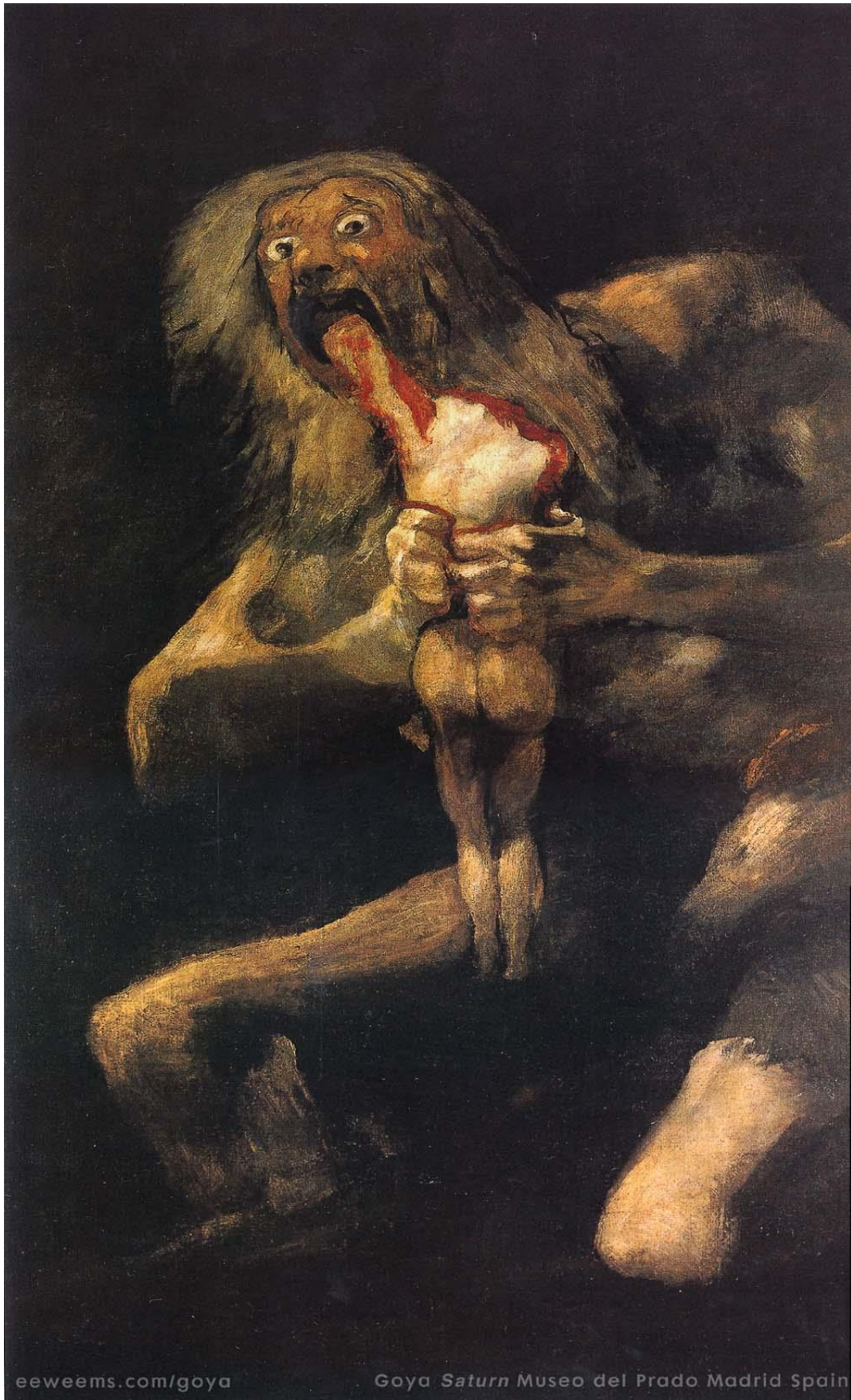


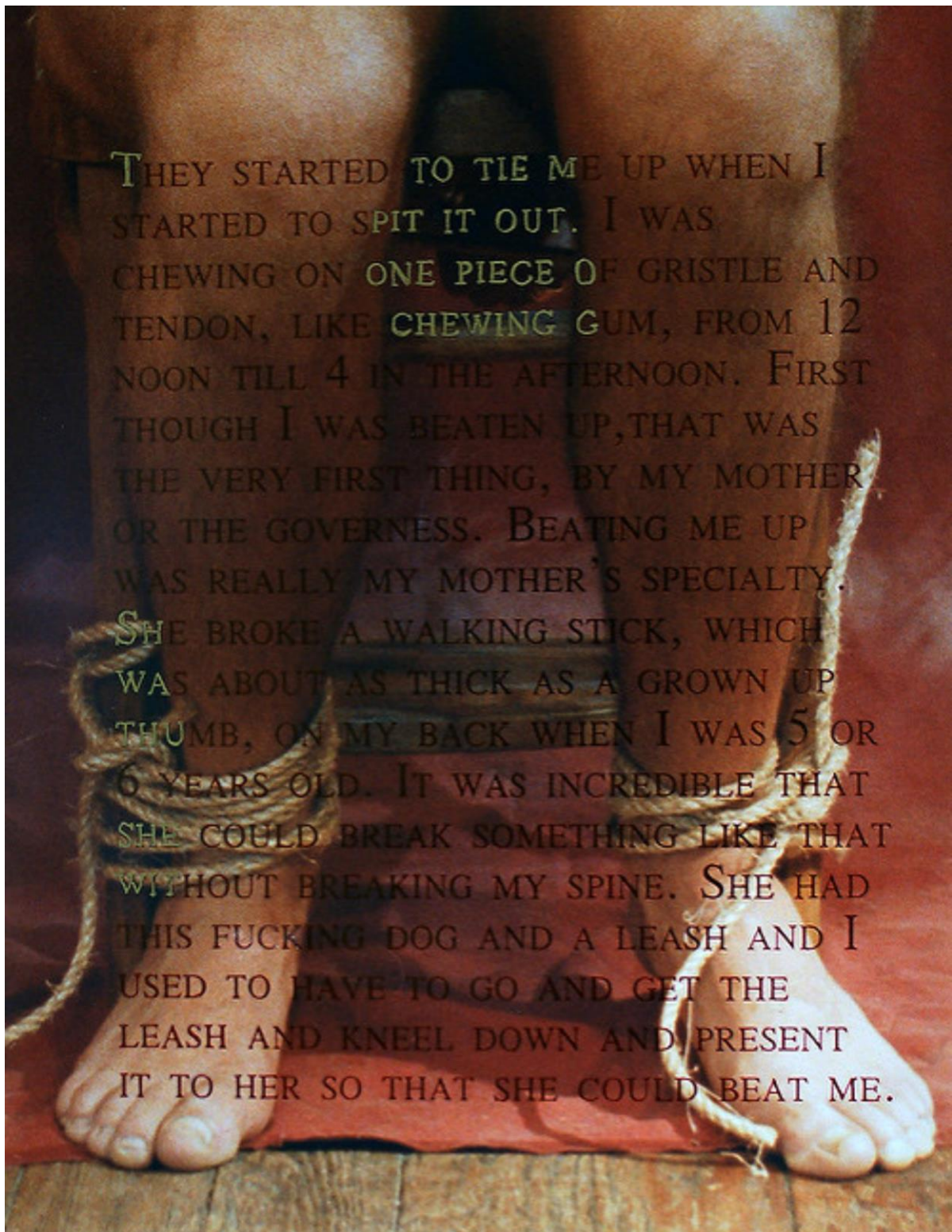
Fig.2.7



Fig.2.7a

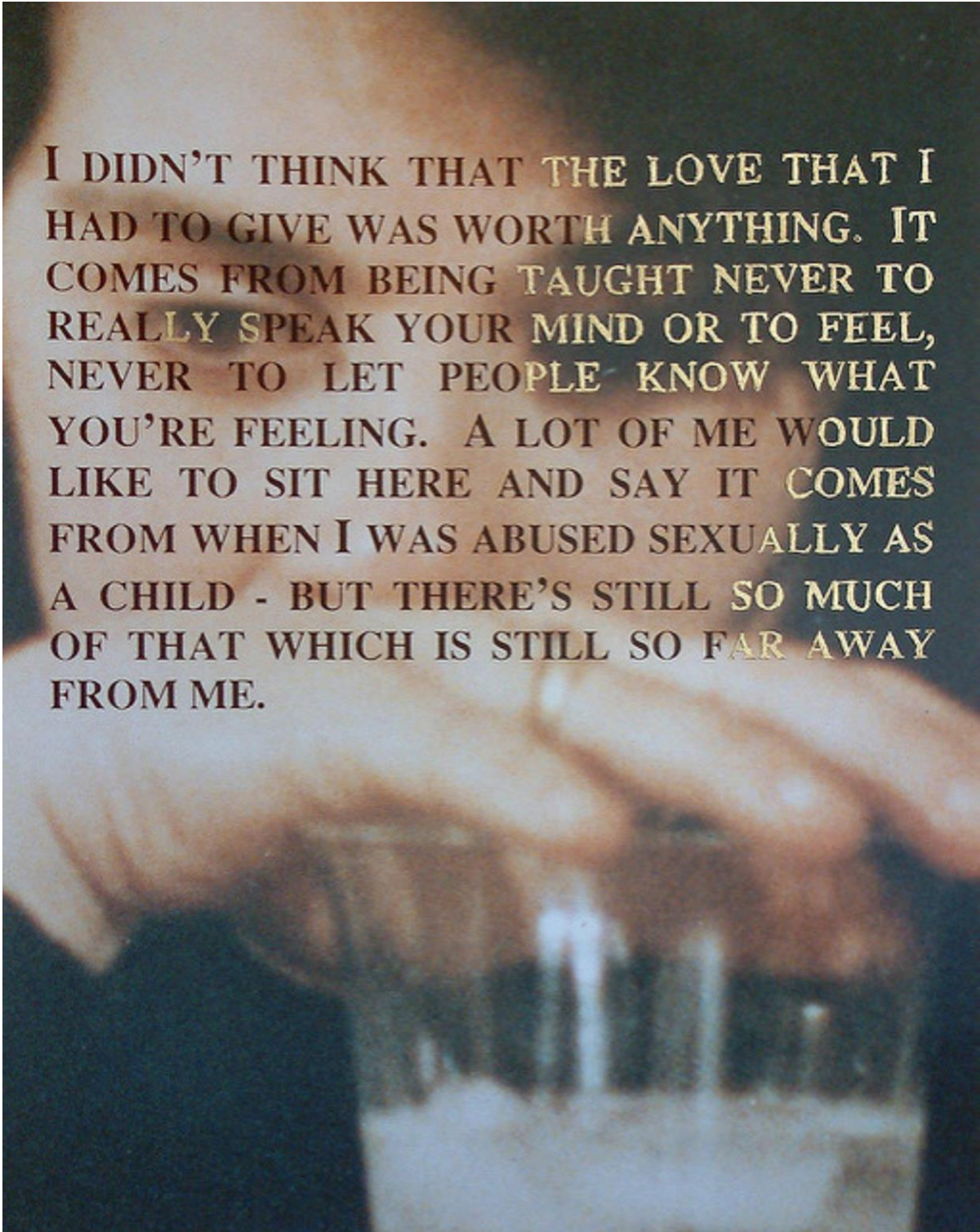


Fig.2.8



THEY STARTED TO TIE ME UP WHEN I STARTED TO SPIT IT OUT. I WAS CHEWING ON ONE PIECE OF GRISTLE AND TENDON, LIKE CHEWING GUM, FROM 12 NOON TILL 4 IN THE AFTERNOON. FIRST THOUGH I WAS BEATEN UP, THAT WAS THE VERY FIRST THING, BY MY MOTHER OR THE GOVERNESS. BEATING ME UP WAS REALLY MY MOTHER'S SPECIALTY. SHE BROKE A WALKING STICK, WHICH WAS ABOUT AS THICK AS A GROWN UP THUMB, ON MY BACK WHEN I WAS 5 OR 6 YEARS OLD. IT WAS INCREDIBLE THAT SHE COULD BREAK SOMETHING LIKE THAT WITHOUT BREAKING MY SPINE. SHE HAD THIS FUCKING DOG AND A LEASH AND I USED TO HAVE TO GO AND GET THE LEASH AND KNEEL DOWN AND PRESENT IT TO HER SO THAT SHE COULD BEAT ME.

Fig.2.9

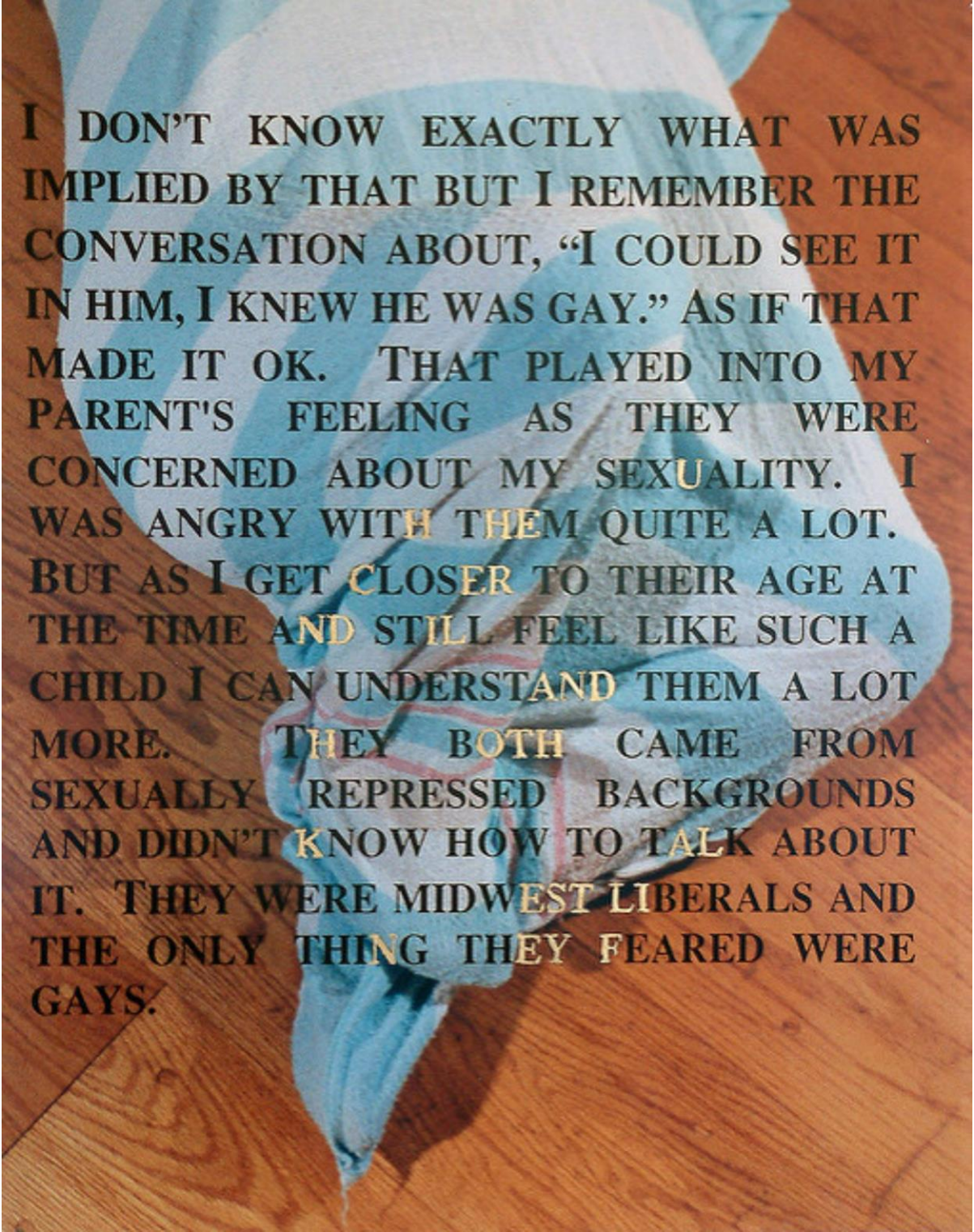


I DIDN'T THINK THAT THE LOVE THAT I HAD TO GIVE WAS WORTH ANYTHING. IT COMES FROM BEING TAUGHT NEVER TO REALLY SPEAK YOUR MIND OR TO FEEL, NEVER TO LET PEOPLE KNOW WHAT YOU'RE FEELING. A LOT OF ME WOULD LIKE TO SIT HERE AND SAY IT COMES FROM WHEN I WAS ABUSED SEXUALLY AS A CHILD - BUT THERE'S STILL SO MUCH OF THAT WHICH IS STILL SO FAR AWAY FROM ME.

Fig.2.10



Fig.2.11

A photograph of a crumpled blue cloth on a wooden floor. The text is overlaid on the image in a black, serif font. The text reads: "I DON'T KNOW EXACTLY WHAT WAS IMPLIED BY THAT BUT I REMEMBER THE CONVERSATION ABOUT, 'I COULD SEE IT IN HIM, I KNEW HE WAS GAY.'" AS IF THAT MADE IT OK. THAT PLAYED INTO MY PARENT'S FEELING AS THEY WERE CONCERNED ABOUT MY SEXUALITY. I WAS ANGRY WITH THEM QUITE A LOT. BUT AS I GET CLOSER TO THEIR AGE AT THE TIME AND STILL FEEL LIKE SUCH A CHILD I CAN UNDERSTAND THEM A LOT MORE. THEY BOTH CAME FROM SEXUALLY REPRESSED BACKGROUNDS AND DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO TALK ABOUT IT. THEY WERE MIDWEST LIBERALS AND THE ONLY THING THEY FEARED WERE GAYS.

I DON'T KNOW EXACTLY WHAT WAS IMPLIED BY THAT BUT I REMEMBER THE CONVERSATION ABOUT, "I COULD SEE IT IN HIM, I KNEW HE WAS GAY." AS IF THAT MADE IT OK. THAT PLAYED INTO MY PARENT'S FEELING AS THEY WERE CONCERNED ABOUT MY SEXUALITY. I WAS ANGRY WITH THEM QUITE A LOT. BUT AS I GET CLOSER TO THEIR AGE AT THE TIME AND STILL FEEL LIKE SUCH A CHILD I CAN UNDERSTAND THEM A LOT MORE. THEY BOTH CAME FROM SEXUALLY REPRESSED BACKGROUNDS AND DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO TALK ABOUT IT. THEY WERE MIDWEST LIBERALS AND THE ONLY THING THEY FEARED WERE GAYS.

Fig.2.12



Fig.2.13

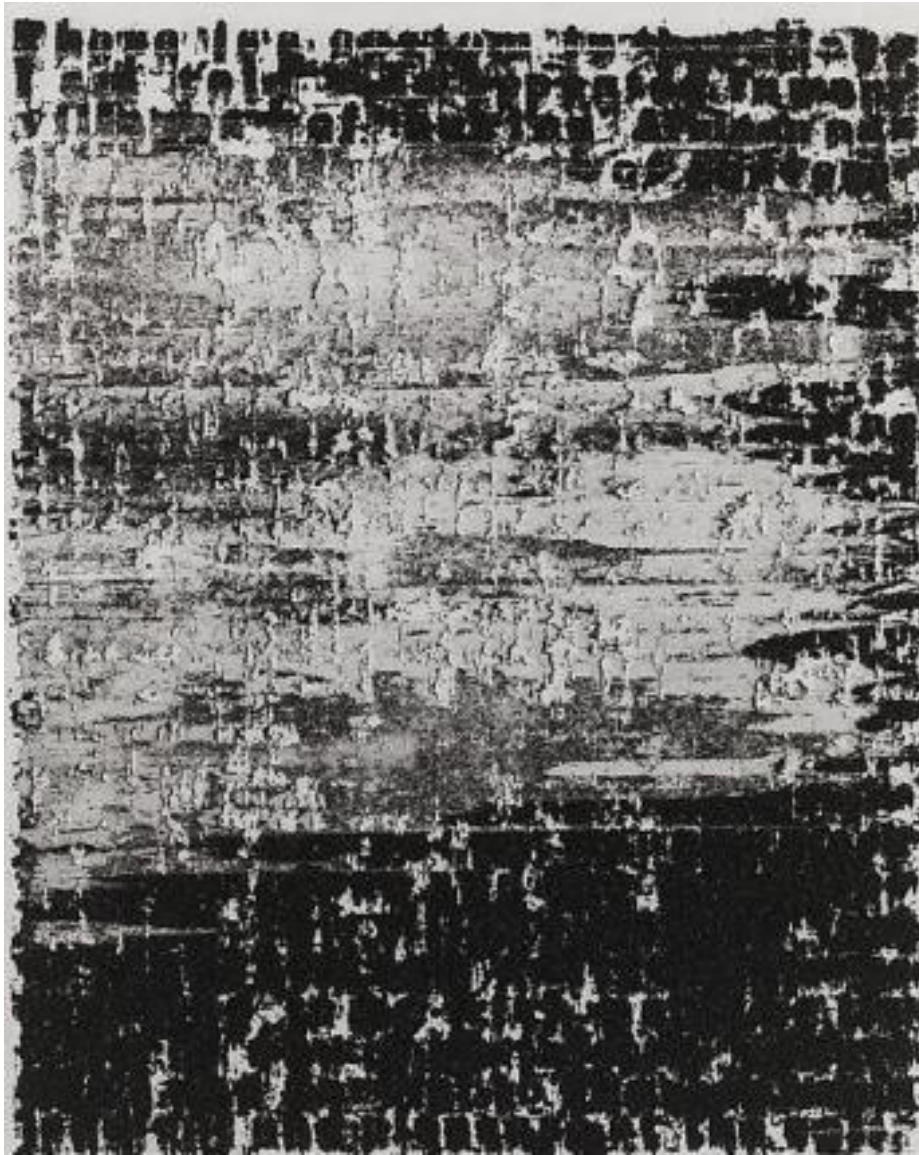


Fig.2.14



Fig.2.15



Fig.2.16

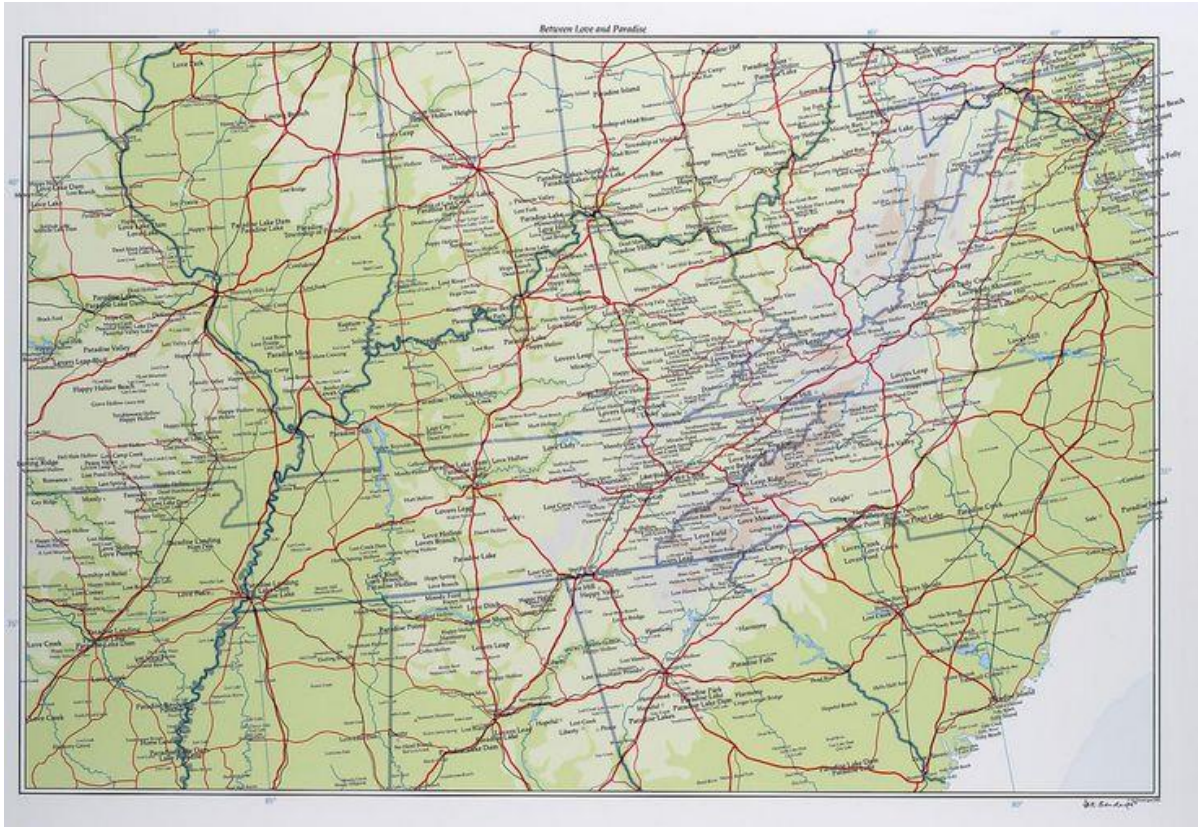


Fig.2.17



Fig.2.18



Fig.2.19



Fig.2.20



Fig.2.21



Fig.2.22



Fig.3.1



Fig.3.2



Fig.3.3



Fig.3.4a



Fig.3.4b

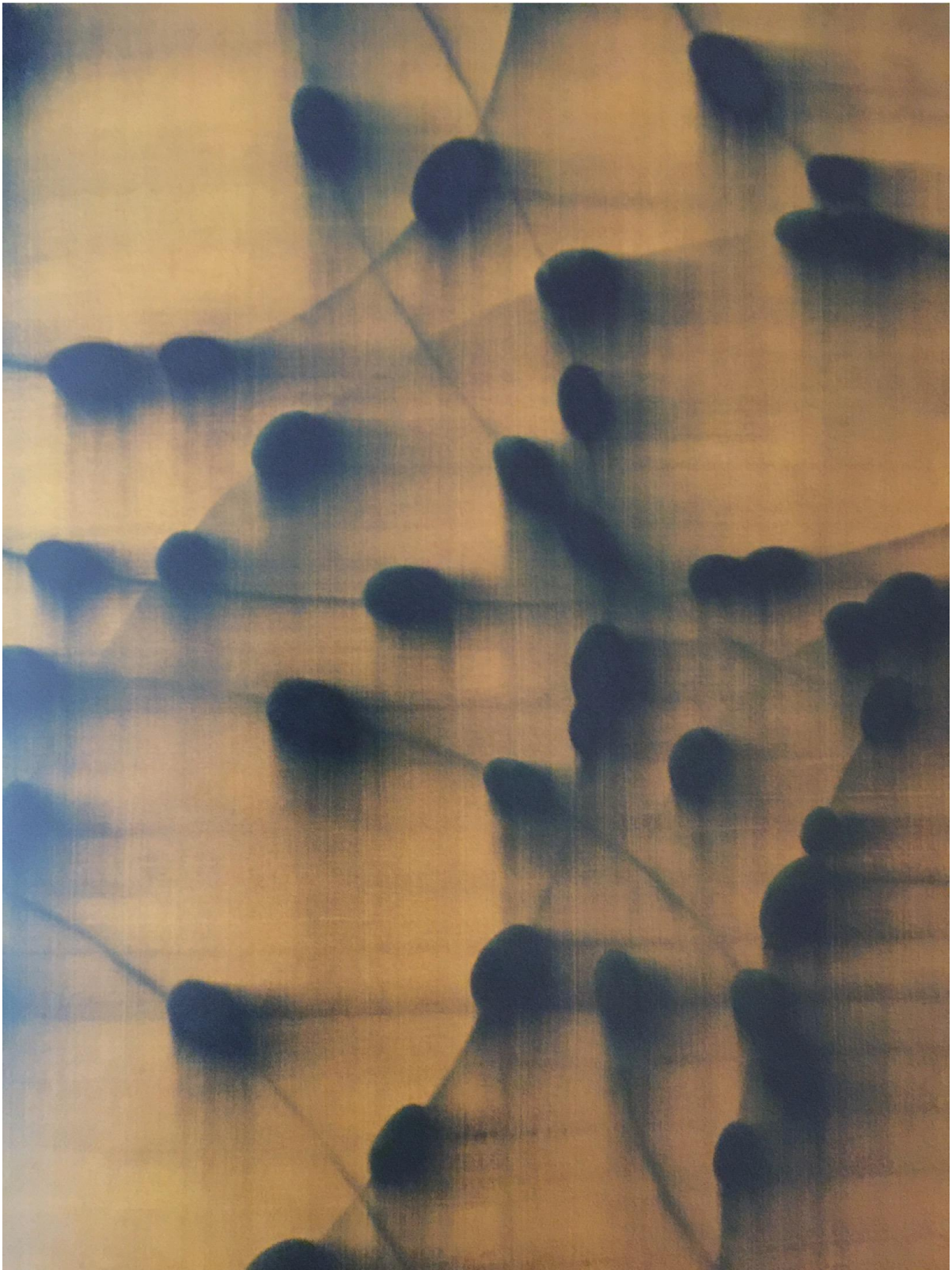


Fig.3.5



Fig.3.6



Fig.3.7

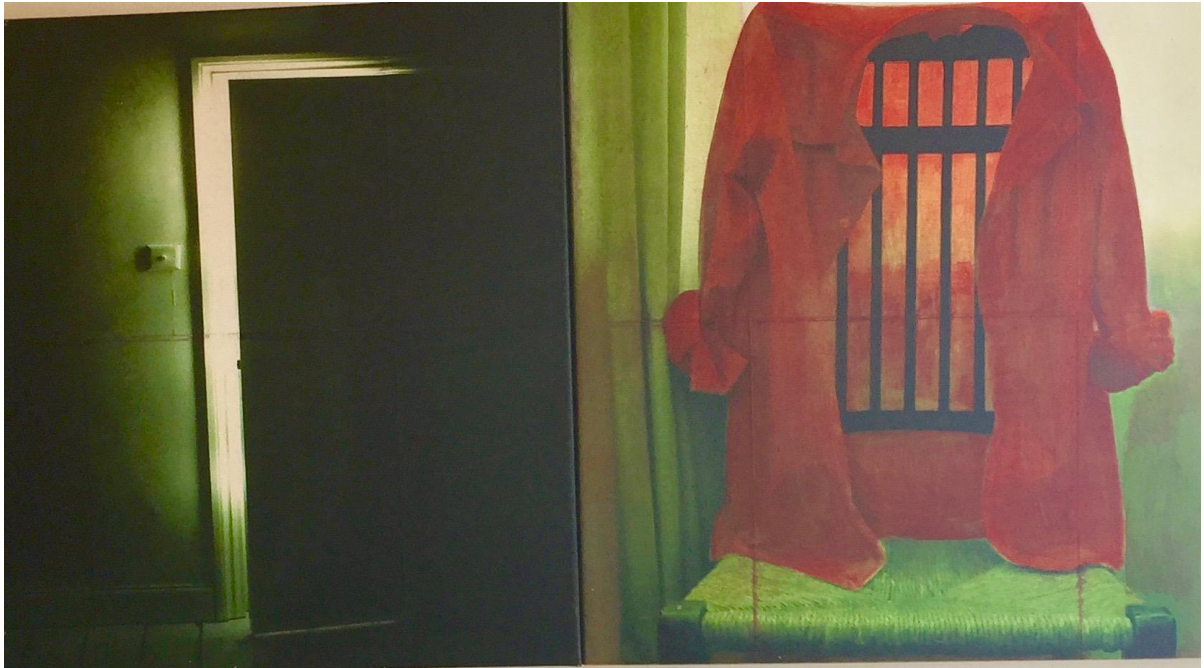


Fig.3.8



Fig.3.9



Fig.4.1

Appendix One

Interview with Billy Quinn, Amsterdam, August 15, 2017

Interview with Billy Quinn
Amsterdam, August 15, 2017

Q: Interviewer
Quinn: Billy Quinn, Interviewee

Q: I'm with Billy Quinn in his home at Amsterdam. It is August 15, 2017. Billy, if we could just start at the beginning, so to speak, you grew up in Dublin. Whereabouts in Dublin did you grow up?

Quinn: Well, I was born in Walkinstown but we moved to Clondalkin when I was about eight, I guess. But I stayed in school in Drimnagh Castle, which was closer to Walkinstown, so we used to—I used to travel down regularly and go back and forth by bus every day. And so I guess I was brought up in Clondalkin more than—

Q: Walkinstown. Yeah. So your experience was basically of Dublin.

Quinn: No. I would say I went to Dublin probably once every two or three years, if that. That would be an excursion and it didn't happen very often. We were very poor.

Q: What did your parents do?

Quinn: My father was an alcoholic barman and my mother—they bought a little shop together but my father drank the profits. And it was—it wasn't making any money, and they rented a house. So we were living pretty much from hand to mouth for most of my childhood.

Q: Right. Yeah. And then did you go to the Christian Brothers?

Quinn: Christian Brothers, yeah, Drimnagh Castle. [Laughs.] Okay, I mean, we're talking gothic horror here, so [laughter] I don't even know if I want to go into this. These people were despicable sadists. My life as a child was terrorised by women going around in what I always deemed were contemporary burkas in Ireland, those women called nuns who used to terrorize the village. And these Christian Brothers, with their leather straps and their discipline and 'spare the rod and spoil the child'.

Q: Exactly, yeah.

Quinn: So it was—and I was a very thin, sickly red-headed, freckled, stuttering child. I couldn't put a sentence together. So I could hardly speak, so I was fairly

traumatised from an early age. It seems something must have happened that drove me to stutter very badly.

Q: Right. And then you went eventually to NCAD.

Quinn: Yeah. Well, that was a struggle as well, just to get going there. My parents did everything they could possibly do to block me. And that—I applied, and in those days there was an exam to get in and you had to sit the exam for two or three days—I can't remember. So there were, I don't know—I don't know how many people there were. There were like 300 or 400 doing the exam and they offered 30 places.

So I got in and my parents were completely shocked. This was not what I was supposed to do. I was supposed to work in the civil service and help support the family and my brothers and sisters. But I at that point wanted to be an artist, so.

Q: Yeah. When did you start making art?

Quinn: It was when I stammered so much. But it really started in school. I used to draw Miss World in a bikini for the other boys and that made me popular. Because you were never popular as a skinny, freckled ginger boy with a stammer. So I could somehow seduce some of the others by drawing this sort of idealised woman in a bikini at a podium. And that made me popular. So I did it for popularity, I guess.

Q: Good.

Quinn: I wanted people to like me. Even though I find myself utterly unlikeable.

Q: Well, that's a perfectly natural desire.

Quinn: Yeah.

Q: And you mentioned to me earlier that you have no recollection of gay Dublin.

Quinn: None at all. No. No. My only sexual involvement as a child/adolescent was being sexually abused by my mother's brother. But my mother set that up, so it happened every night for two years and my mother accepted money from my uncle to put him in my bed. So I did a piece much later on called *My Mother, My Pimp*. And that's really coloured a lot of my struggle with coming to terms with what I am and who I am and how to get through the world.

I'm interested in people like Dr. Robert Sapolsky, who's the head of neuroscience and biology at Stanford University and he does work about how abuse in childhood shrinks the hippocampus and it's irreversible and that this

is the source of abuse and this is what causes mental problems for people who've been sexually or physically abused as children. It's a shrunken hippocampus, which you can do nothing about. Yeah, so it's interesting to then think of yourself wandering through the world with that to start with.

Q: And of course, you've achieved so much that you must've had quite a substantial hippocampus to begin with.

Quinn: Well, I think what happened—I think you somehow compensate. I mean, how do you deal with this? And I think the reason I eventually, at the age of 15, 16, totally overcame the stammer more or less, to the point where by the time I was 40 I could stand up in front of the Swedish Academy in Stockholm or I could stand up in front of 200 people in Chicago in the College of Art and talk about these things. So I think compensation factors kick in, where you somehow manage to overcome these things. And I think it's probably what made me overcome the stammer. I was so determined at that point to break away from the cycle of abuse, even at the age of 14, 15.

Q: Yeah. So after a year at NCAD, you—

Quinn: I didn't do the full year.

Q: You didn't do the full year. Then you went to England?

Quinn: There was a whole—I was a very religious boy as well, which means, you know, when you say what experience did I have with the whole gay thing in Dublin? None, because I was at mass every morning, Catholic. I was a believer. And then, unfortunately, I discovered Albert Camus and Sartre and Andre Gidé and Huysmans and I started reading all these books. And my parents saw me bringing these books—well, first of all, they refused to let me get a library card because they were afraid I would destroy a library book and they might have to pay for it. So it was a struggle to actually get a library card. But when I got it, I started bringing these books home and this made them very worried about, you know, *A Happy Death*, *The Plague*, *The Outsider*, *The Rebel*. You know, they just saw the titles and it scared the shit out of them.

So that was my beginning of being involved with ideas. And also, it was at the time that I was doing—when I was reading those books, I started looking at art in the library too. And it was then I told my parents I wanted to do the inter cert art. And it was six months before the exam. But they let me

do it—the school let me do it as well. And I got an A, so everybody was very shocked at that. And then I went on to do it for my leaving.

So by then I was reading everything from Dostoyevsky through Tolstoy and, you know, Gogol, and I was going in every possible direction. And so that used to scare my parents. But I had no time to think about sex. Sex was something I had done with my uncle and it was something that was abuse and something that I didn't choose. And I didn't have sex again until I was 24, 25. So I was no part of the—

Q: Of that scene.

Quinn: I don't know what was happening in Dublin. I would hear things. I knew there were certain bars and I knew that—you know, I knew that men used to get together in those places. You know, and I'd use a public toilet and I'd see that somebody was peeping through a hole or there was something written on the wall, which I found exciting and repulsive at the same time.

Q: So when you left Ireland, where did you go to first?

Quinn: I had £50 in my pocket and I went to London. No, well, first of all, I went to Liverpool and I did a foundation course there. But an Irish lady friend of mine fell pregnant by some—I don't know, some jock or other, and she couldn't tell him—or she couldn't tell her parents, so I told her to come and live with me and I'd take care of her until she had the baby and then we'd have it adopted and she could go back. So I went to Liverpool to do a foundation course and she came and joined me, so we lived in a room smaller than this, the two of us, for nine, ten months until she had the baby and we had it adopted and then she went back. And then I went down to London with £50 in my pocket.

Q: And you know I spoke to Rachael and she mentioned in our conversation what a wonderful network you developed for yourself in London, of friends.

Quinn: Yeah, I was—[laughs] I was aggressively social. And I was also quite clever, which people liked. I think at the time I was well read and well spoken.

Q: What year was this? Was it the early 1980s?

Quinn: 1974.

Q: 1974? Okay.

Quinn: Yeah. And so I got a job immediately. I arrived in London on a Friday and I started working on Saturday at the London Palladium.

Q: In the theatre?

Quinn: In the theatre. In the morning, I was a cleaner. I cleaned the theatre. And in the evening, I was an usher, so I would show people to their seats or sell the programmes or ice cream during the intervals, or answer their questions or—I would watch them as they were watching the performance. So I'd sit in the aisle or—you know, I had to be there in case there was a fire or a problem, so I'd have to lead them out of there. So it was—so I had a job that started from 9:00 in the morning—no, from 8:00 in the morning till 12:00 and then from 6:00 in the afternoon till midnight, or till 11:00. And I used to go for lunch to a vegetarian restaurant at Regent Street and one day I saw they were struggling with cleaning up and I offered to help them wash up their dishes because they couldn't do it in time and people were complaining. So they said, 'Oh yeah, sure.' So I went in there and washed the dishes and I stayed there for the next three years, washing dishes at lunchtime. Morning cleanup, washing dishes at lunchtime and doing ushering in the evening.

Q: The Palladium was a variety theatre, wasn't it?

Quinn: I saw Frank Sinatra and Count Basie sing with Sarah Vaughan for their last performance. I saw Shirley MacLaine in her big comeback show. I saw John Denver just before he died. I saw everything that was considered to be—Judy Garland—no, I didn't see Judy Garland. That's not true. No, who am I thinking of? Her daughter, Lorna Luft. Lorna Luft. [Laughs.] Her *other* daughter.

Q: Oh, her other daughter. [Laughs.]

Quinn: I saw Liza Minelli as well. But, yeah, it was a big—it was a big eye opener for me, because one of the childhood memories I had was *Sunday Night at the London Palladium* used to be on television and my parents used to watch it every week, with the Tiller Girls and all that shit.

So it was quite something. But then when I was there after a while, I realised I'd have to work for three or four years before I could actually get a grant to go to school. Because otherwise they charged me triple the fees as a foreign student. So I had to work to get a grant. And after about three or four years at the Palladium, then I could apply. But just before that, I went to City and Guilds of London Art School to Sir Roger de Grey, and I showed them my work and I said I'd be interested and they offered me a full scholarship and money to live on and everything.

Q: Very good.

Quinn: So I started there. Once I was there, I started working at the Old Vic, the theatre, which I was assistant house manager there for a year and then I moved on to the National Theatre, where I was for 20 years.

Q: Really?

Quinn: Yeah. Whilst I was studying, yeah.

Q: What does a house manager do in a theatre?

Quinn: Manages the front of house, is in charge of people coming in and getting out and making sure everybody's safe and, you know, that fire regulations and—the front of house.

Q: Okay.

Quinn: Nothing to do with what's on the stage. Except you have to sit with the audience and watch what they do so as they don't cause a fire hazard by sitting on the aisle or that they don't start smoking in the theatre or they don't start a row. I've had somebody die on me in the theatre, of a massive heart attack, and I had to take care of that.

Q: At City and Guilds, did you focus in any particular discipline?

Quinn: [Laughs.] Well, City and Guilds was hilarious because I did very well. I spent the first two years in the life drawing room and drawing from life, you know, six to eight hours a day. And then I was doing very well then, but I went on holiday to New York for a month with a friend named Ben Nicholson, the architect. And so in New York I discovered Duchamp.

Q: What year is this?

Quinn: This is about 1976. No, maybe 1977 or 1978. It was with that Laker Airways, remember?

Q: Oh, yes indeed. Freddie Laker.

Quinn: Yes. And I also went to see Joni Mitchell in concert in Forrest Lawns. So if I was to Google Joni Mitchell in Forrest Lawns, I'd have the exact year. But I think it's maybe 1978. I'm not sure.

And I discovered Duchamp. By the time I came back, City and Guilds was ruined for me. It was just like, they were still getting over the shock of Cezanne.

Q: So what was it about Duchamp that sparked?

Quinn: Oh, the mind. The mind. Just the playfulness. The sardonic humour. The playfulness mainly. You know, this wonderful play with words—and the eroticism, which was—but it was subliminal. And you know, the notion of *The Bride Stripped Bare* and the bachelors grinding their own chocolate. And then them ejaculating and missing and then, you know, there's a scoreboard just telling them how badly they've done. And you know, the whole notion of impotence. So this is what generated Chicken Man for me, this whole idea that we're trapped in this cycle of repetition, of procreation, but also my thesis is that we are now going through an even further development on that and the idea that we're becoming non-procreative units and, you know, as our sperm count goes down and as our potency decreases, we're learning to bifurcate, we're learning to actually do it in a test tube. You know, and it's the demise of gender differences, to a degree. And of course, this fits in with exactly this whole thing of fluidity that's going on now—

Q: Exactly.

Quinn: And that, you know, it's sort of gender dysphoria. So that for me was stuff that just, I wanted to somehow get my grey matter around this idea of how we are evolving and what we're evolving into.

Q: Right. And of course, that's something that you deal with in your PhD thesis.

Quinn: Yes, but it started with—hold on—which I just got a new copy of, but it goes back to—this isn't the one I read in New York. The one I read in New York was Octavio Paz. So you know, it's—and then of course, you know, because I'm a reader, I went straight back to the sources of all this stuff that Duchamp was referring to. So that takes you to Raymond Roussel, to Alfred Jarry, you know, to late nineteenth-century French—the whole idea of the beginnings—almost beginnings of the computer age. Because you're moving slightly away from the industrial age. And do you know *The Supermale* by Alfred Jarry?

Q: No, I don't.

Quinn: Okay. Well, it's about a man falling in love with a machine and the machine falling in love with him. And it's a sex machine, and in the falling in love with the man and the machine, the man is the supermale and so he's capable of sex ad infinitum and he challenges all of the whores in—or there's some scientists who make this experiment to find out how many times he can actually orgasm and they hire hundreds of whores for him to sleep with, but they're replaced

by one woman. They don't realise that. She manages to take their place and he basically fucks her to death and then fucks her back to life again. And so they attach him to this sort of love machine because they think the machine is the only way they can actually figure out what his prowess is. And in him fucking the machine, the machine falls in love with him. So it's a bit like this sort of computer gone mad, and the machine, in orgasming, kills him.

Q: Ah. Actually, the only thing about Jarry that I read actually is that there was something on the senses he wrote, about the various senses, that Duchamp found interesting.

Quinn: Yes, well Duchamp liked all his work. But then he also wrote one which is a reverse *Supermale*, which is *Messalina*, about the wife of Caligula who was also the greatest—who also is the sort of female equivalent of somebody who can have orgasms to the point of death.

Q: I see.

Quinn: And yes, he's been very influential. So it's all there.

Q: So you came back, after a month in New York, to City and Guilds, and you were over it?

Quinn: I couldn't get back to it. It was like—it was like I'd discovered the twentieth century and I was dealing with a group of people who were still in shock because of what had happened in the nineteenth century. So it was just like—and at that point, Duchamp was—I wouldn't say he was new, because he'd died in 1968, 1969. But, you know, it was only in the 1970s and 1980s that there were people who were beginning to get a feel for how important he was.

Q: Right.

Quinn: And the people I was hanging around with at the time were and it was—and they were all studying with—what's his name? Sorry, just one second—they were all studying with—where is he? Where is he? Oh yes, Daniel Libeskind. And you know, this was all very much a part of what was exciting me. And then you go back and suddenly you're back to nineteenth century—you know, we're talking about Turner and you're thinking, well, no, I can't do this anymore. This is not making any sense. Why are you still talking about nineteenth-century painters?

Q: How did you resolve that?

Quinn: I left. [Laughs.] I didn't finish the course. I did two years. But then I went to University of East London and Gillian Elinor. I met her. That's the woman who championed me and invited me back for the doctorate and paid for my doctorate. I met her and I told her this is what I wanted to do and she said, 'Well, come on, we'll take you straight into second year, you don't have to do the first year.' And so I went straight in and I did the degree in two years.

Q: And then after that, you did a master there.

Quinn: No, then I went off and—no. They said I could do the doctorate without the masters.

Q: Okay.

Quinn: They said my exhibition background was enough to allow me to go straight on to the doctoral programme. So it was the first doctorate—I was the test case for the doctorate at the university. I was the first one, so they paid me to do it.

Q: Right.

Quinn: And it was great because I just turned up at her door, basically. There was an ad in the newspaper and I saw 'contact Gillian Elinor'. And it was to teach new media and I thought [huffs], I've never done new media in my life, but hey, why not? So I phoned her and I said, 'Look, Gillian, I don't know if you remember me', and she said [imitating female voice], 'Of course I remember you! You had the highest mark we've ever given to anybody.' And I thought, *okay*. [Laughs.] And I said, 'Well, I'd like to come and see you.' So I went there and I told her that I'd like to apply for this job and she was looking at my CV and she was looking at my exhibition stuff and then she said, 'We can't offer you this job. You have no experience at all in new media.' [Laughs.] And she said, 'But I'd really like to offer you a doctorate. Would you like to come here and do a doctorate and we'll pay you to do it and we'll get you a full grant and we'll get you money to live on and give you a studio for three years.'

Q: That's not bad.

Quinn: And I said, 'Yeah.' But that was in 1997. I'd been living in New York for eleven years before that.

Q: Yes, I wanted to speak to you about that. You mentioned that you went to New York because you thought that we were at a changeover point, from a period of relatively low level of guilt to a period of high level of guilt.

Quinn: No, it was more that we were evolving from universal permissiveness, everything was allowed, to a reconnection of sex and shame in a post-Christian age.

Q: Right. Okay.

Quinn: So I mean, that's how I intellectually explain it to myself. But that's also the story I tell myself. And how much of that is true is up for grabs. And I did have a consciousness of that and I thought it's very much a front line and I want to be there.

Q: By the time you got to New York, you were aware of AIDS and—

Quinn: Yes, completely.

Q: Yes, because you went to New York in 1984?

Quinn: No, I went in 1985.

Q: 1985, yes. Well then, at that time, AIDS was—

Quinn: Oh, we knew about it. I'd already had friends die in London. So it wasn't—Barry McGinn, an actor friend of mine—well, he was my lover—at the National Theatre, died just before I went. And—no, very conscious of it. And again, it was—[laughs] it was turning up in New York, knowing nobody, with—but this time I'd more than £50 in my pocket. I think I had a thousand dollars, and I stayed there for eleven years.

Q: Yes. It's an easy place to stay eleven years, that's for sure.

Quinn: Well, I had a very interesting time.

Q: And you were doing interior decorating?

Q: So when did the icons start appearing?

Quinn: Ah, well that's—now, that was weird. It was like how to start it was the—you know, I mean, you're going through this and you're watching people get sick, you're watching people die, you're watching the phenomenon grow. I was somewhat involved with Act Up. I was going to the first of the meetings very early on, but with Rachael as well. I'd meet Rachael there. Or we'd go to what was called the Healing Circle, which we were doing with Annie Sprinkle and people like that. And you know, it was—it just struck me at one point, I said, well, what can I do about this? And then I thought, well, I really, if I'm going to be true to myself, I would go into what is my own background and experience, which is Catholic iconography, which is kings, queens, saints and popes mounted in 24-carat gold, you know, up in their celestial goodness. And

you know, it was just like, well, I know, and then ask people to put on a condom or a dental dam and stand in front of me naked holding something that they care about, which is in a way like a security blanket. And for them, doing that, the privilege of being allowed to photograph them in such an exposed way, I was going to mount them in 24-carat gold. And then I decided I'd interview them as to why they chose to expose themselves, how AIDS has affected their lives as a person who either is infected or is taking care of somebody. And so it was always open as to who was positive, who was negative, and then there's no—you know, I don't say this person's negative, this person's positive. So you know, you had the anonymity of being one in the crowd and if people asked, I'd say, well, fifty per cent are negative, fifty per cent are positive, so nobody knows who is and who isn't. Unless it was very obvious from the slings and arrows.

Q: Of course. Of course. And I would imagine—from what I remember of that time, that was a characteristic of it, was this mixture of people who were helping and the people who needed help.

Quinn: Yes.

Q: And at times it wasn't altogether clear who was helping whom.

Quinn: Yes. Yes. It's true. And I felt I—I never felt at home in what you would call the gay community. You know, I was a skinny ginger—I'll show you a photograph—

Quinn: And so I never—you know, the Gay Pride march was horrific, as far as I was concerned.

Q: In New York?

Quinn: Yes, I hated it. I felt so not—you know, I wasn't in a jock strap on a—

Q: On a float?

Quinn: No. I couldn't do all that sort of thing. I didn't feel as if I fit in. But for the first time ever, within this community of people suffering, I felt I fit in, which is just like shocking to realise because you realise that you're addicted to victimhood. And that it is possibly to do with the abuse.

Q: But there was—I mean, people used to go around with a copy of—oh God, the woman who wrote about death and dying. I don't remember her name. But I mean, everybody was reading this stuff.

Quinn: There was—Marianne Williamson used to do a course in miracles, and there was that awful Louise Hay, you can heal your—

Q: With the hat?

Quinn: Probably. Louise Hay, yes. Louise Hay, she was the head of the Healing Circle.

Q: Right. Yes.

Quinn: I photographed her in—what's it called—34th Street—

Q: Oh, Madison Square Garden.

Quinn: Madison Square Garden.

Q: Yes.

Quinn: We're getting old. [Laughter.]

Q: Yes, Louise Hay. And she used to have these healing circles. Because I left New York in 1984 and I went to L.A. and she used to have these healing circles.

Quinn: She was in L.A., yes.

Q: She was an appalling woman.

Quinn: Yes. Yes.

Q: But yes—

Quinn: It's funny because I photographed her and then Barbara, her assistant, is one of the icons.

Q: Really?

Quinn: Yes. And that's how I know Annie Sprinkle and that all is—so that's how the icons came about.

Q: But you ended up with fifty of them.

Quinn: I shot fifty, about fifty, maybe even more. And I don't have any of the originals. Everything I've ever made is always lost. And funny, you reminded me of the *Quinn's Da* being on loan. Well, yes, it was on loan. It was on loan from *me* to the museum. And then the museum sent me a thing saying that they couldn't hold onto it any longer, did I want to collect it and I said, no, I couldn't, and then—and I said, 'Well, would you destroy it for me?' and they said they couldn't do that. And then they wrote back to me later and they said, 'Well, would you sign a release?' and I said yes. So I sent a release. So I think when you read that it was on loan, it meant it was on loan from me for the touring show.

Q: Exactly. Exactly. And my sense is—although I haven't been down to the warehouse—it's still there.

Quinn: I'd like to think it was. But they told me they were destroying it. And then of course my sister destroyed all of my—

Q: So you told me.

Quinn: All of my doctoral work.

Q: So getting back to the icons, they were large. I mean, they were ninety-six inches high.

Quinn: Yes.

Q: And I know there's a photograph of you, I think it may be in your studio at IMMA, or Royal Hospital, where you're surrounded by them.

Quinn: No, no, that was my studio on 28th Street.

Q: Oh, okay. Okay. So then the next—I know that you did an internship then in Syracuse.

Quinn: I was artist-in-residence, yes.

Q: Right.

Quinn: Yes, it was at Light Work. It's incredible. I mean, Cindy Sherman went there. What's his name, Serrano went there. You know, it was a prestigious—it was very weird that it happened because I had—none of this career was planned. And just as well, because it was not a particularly impressive career. But nothing was planned. I basically worked for three years, I made life-sized—there were twenty-two, twenty-three of the pieces in my studio. Nobody had ever seen any of them except the people who were in them. And then it just so happened that somebody said, 'Can I bring Peter Hay Halpert to see them?' and I said, 'Sure, who's Peter Hay Halpert? Yeah, bring him along.'

So he came and then he came in and he just walked in the door and he said, 'Can I show these to Simon Lewinsky?' And then Simon came, and Simon just walked in the door and said, 'I'd like to give you a show.' That was it.

And then the other thing was—I think Peter Hay Halpert told Light Work and they came down. And then they said to me, 'We'd like to offer you a residency.' And so this all happened out of nowhere, with no planning, with no going to people, showing them anything. I've never done that. Mainly I think because I'm so fucking insecure, there is no way that I will sell myself.

- Q: Right. So you meet the icons over a long period of time?
- Quinn: Well, yes. They cost about \$1,000 each to make, so—you know, because it was the photography, the wood, the blowing up, the frame, then the 24-carat gold—or it was twenty-two, twenty-two and a half carat. I forget what it is. It's either twenty-two and a half or twenty-four. I thought it was twenty-four. I'm not sure. And silver.
- Q: Yes, because the surround—you have this cornice—
- Quinn: Yes. And so I had to earn that money and I had to pay rent where I was living and I had to pay the studio rent.
- Q: Right.
- Quinn: And I had no money coming in, other than doing these expensive interiors, you know, for Saks Fifth Avenue or, you know, doing Takashimaya, the shop on Fifth Avenue and doing the gold leaf ceiling and—and doing interiors. So that's how I was doing it. And that was exhausting. And so, you know, I could do maybe three or four months of interiors and then I could give myself two months off to work on a few icons. So that's how it went. That's how they happened. But I was also doing the castration piece, the Holy Family piece, lots of other pieces as well. So it was all going on.
- Q: Right. Right.
- Quinn: And whilst I was doing—one of the important parts of the icon series was the conversations I would have, the interviews I would have with the people who were posing for me. Because I would take a line out of their interview and put it into the base of the piece, so they got to make a statement. You know, and it might be about what they were holding and why they were holding it or it might be about how AIDS is affecting their lives or whatever. But whilst doing those interviews—and I had all those in—I've lost all of those as well everything.
- Quinn: So whilst I was doing the interviews, I sort of started to make the connection between people who've been sexually abused and HIV.
- Q: Exactly.
- Quinn: And that a disproportionate number of the people who were positive had been sexually abused as children.
- Q: Yes.

Quinn: So I started to hear their stories. And then I started to say, look, this is so resonating with me because I really recognize that, you know, when you've been sexually abused as a child, your self-preservation instinct is practically nonexistent. You know, you're very—you're self-destructive. So you know, I would like to somehow work around this and so slowly I started building up the—

Q: The family value—the traditional family values.

Quinn: Yes.

Q: One of the really arresting things about that series is the way in which you use print.

Quinn: Yes. It's all very hand done. I always liked this—it was through the icons too, I want the handiwork to show. I want the creases, I want the tears, I want the rips, I want the scarification of the process of doing it.

Q: And in the icons, it shows up very, very clearly.

Quinn: Yes.

Q: Particularly, you know, is that—is it the Demmie image?

Quinn: Demmie.

Q: Demmie. Yes, who you had like a *sacra conversazione* going on up on top.

Quinn: Yes. Yes. Demmie was the first one.

Q: She was the first one, really.

Quinn: Yes, Demmie was—Demmie's interesting. So, you know, it's—and she was a good friend. And she was—she was always there. And I told her the idea and she said, 'Oh, I'll do it.' So she was the first. So I took the photograph of her and she took the photograph of me and that's how that started.

Q: Wonderful. So Demmie and yourself were the first two.

Quinn: Yes.

Q: Now, in her interview, she says, 'This is what I have to give.'

Quinn: Yes. This is it. This is all I am, you know? You know, there's nothing hidden. It's her and her camera and—yeah, she's just—

Q: You know, it's interesting, sometimes artworks, I find myself fantasising as to what's really happening in them. And I look at these fellows on top, you know, these chatting and talking, and I really thought, God, that's a *sacra conversazione* going on.

Quinn: Yes.

Q: And maybe they're her ex-lovers or something.

Quinn: No, it's my ex who died.

Q: Oh, I see.

Quinn: He's the one on the top left with the hat. And we took care of him together to a degree. And I met her through him. So he—it was important for me to put him there.

Q: Right.

Quinn: And I had—you know, I had his photograph, but I never made it—there's a lot I didn't make. And in a way, there's a feeling of having let people down. But you know, there's so much energy went into them.

Q: Yes, I can see that.

Quinn: And it was so exhausting. And then dragging them across continents.

Q: So I was going there. I mean, these things are ninety-six inches high and I think are about almost sixty inches wide.

Quinn: Yes.

Q: And so you brought them back—

Quinn: Well, the worst mistake I ever made in my life—and I can say this without [laughs]—was *ever* taking my work back to my family. My family have *no* interest in art, no respect for art. No respect for ideas, no respect for intelligence. They have—art means nothing to them. And unfortunately, I took it back, and unfortunately, they decided to destroy it. And you know, it's my own fault. You know, I left this very abusive family and I should never have trusted them again. But I did.

Q: Yes. And yet, you went back to Dublin. You came back to Dublin.

Quinn: I was—there were so many things happening around—you know, unravelling of—of life for me. It was a very strange time, but it was also a time where my father started to be quite ill. And I thought, well, you know—and I sporadically had the realisation that you sometimes have to go back and deal with these issues. So the opportunity presented itself, mainly through Anna O'Sullivan and John McBratney, and then the Irish Museum of Modern Art. So I thought, okay, the stars seem to be lining up somehow so perhaps it's time to go and deal with some of these childhood issues of abuse. And I was going back to a very different situation than I'd left from. I'd left with £50 in my pocket and I was going back to the Irish Museum of Modern Art with stuff

that was going into the museum, with shows that were going to happen, with—you know, with two television programmes happening. I was talking about the sexual abuse. I was talking about particularly my mother's deplorable behaviour, to her face. And you know, it felt as if there was a resolution going on, and there was, to a degree. And I wasn't completely aware that abuse involves the whole family, even if they don't know about what's going on, that there is a conspiracy of silence, that there is the demand that you don't break that conspiracy because their very respectability depends on the fact that they're not exposed as being part of a family in which that happens.

So you know, my sister played golf. I mean, I thought, you know, they somehow dragged themselves up the rung of some middle-class ladder and I thought, well, maybe they understand a bit about art and maybe they're smarter than they used to be. But it turned out not to be.

Q: Now, the Castration piece, when did you make that?

Quinn: I made that when I was making the icons. I made that for me.

Q: Right. Well, yes—

Quinn: [Laughs.] I destroyed that because nobody could handle it. It scared the bejeezus out of people.

Q: Well, it's very powerful.

Quinn: Yes.

Q: So it's interesting you have a triptych.

Quinn: Yes. I've got Catholic DNA. I mean, you know, when I say when I started reading Huysmans, you know, I read his writings about the Isenheim Altarpiece. You know, and I travelled across Europe to Colmar to see it.

Q: Which of course it's a plague icon.

Quinn: Yes. So you know, it was hugely important to me. It's in my first thesis. You know, there was Goya and Duchamp and those things have stayed with me.

Q: So what do you remember the reaction to the Castration?

Quinn: Hardly anybody saw it.

Q: But it was down—it was in the City Art Centre, was it?

Quinn: It was. I've no idea how people reacted. I have no idea. I didn't see. I got—I don't know if it was written about.

Q: It was.

Quinn: Was it? Okay.

Q: Yes. Yes, there were a few reviews. There are a number of reviews of that show.

Quinn: Oh, okay. I've never seen them.

Q: Oh, I must, when I get back to Dublin, I'll search and I'll send them, the ones that I have, to you.

Q: So yes, as I said, I'll gather those together and send them to you.

Quinn: But you know, I enjoy having that Myers one, saying I was the worst thing to happen art from Picasso. I like that. And I loved Luke Clancy because he absolutely got what I was trying to do. And I thanked him. I phoned him and I thanked him and we went out to a pretend Edith Piaf concert together. [Laughs.] Weird. He was a very nice man. But I never knew him before he wrote the review. And I hadn't had any—I'd never had a conversation with him. I didn't know who he was. So I didn't influence him in any way. But that he understood it so much, and people said to me, 'My God, how did you get that review from Clancy? He is *the* most difficult—'

Q: Well, he really liked your work.

Quinn: He was—

Q: He understood it, I think.

Quinn: Well, I was just gobsmacked by his reaction.

Q: Medb Ruane too.

Quinn: Yes, Medb was—see, I'd met Medb. So she was probably reacting to me. I don't know. But I'd never met him, so I just—I'd heard by reputation that this man was—

Q: A tough one.

Quinn: Never gave a good review.

Q: Right. And then of course, Anna O'Sullivan was struck by your work.

Quinn: Yes. Yes, she was the one who wrote the article—

Q: In *Circa*.

Quinn: Yes, that introduced me to John McBratney.

Q: Okay.

Quinn: Yes.

Q: So John McBratney was instrumental to some degree in your coming back to Ireland.

Quinn: Yes.

Q: And in terms of—then you started to work as well on Quinn’s Da.

Quinn: Yes. That was the first year of my doctorate, actually, when I was working on that. I was working on it at home first and then I continued it. And yeah, and that’s when my father was dying as well. So it was also part of the process of [sighs] recognising your place in the continuum, which is what I was trying to do. You know, for me it was a shoddy continuum and one of the greatest joys of my life—my mother never understood this and when I tried to explain it to her, it really upset her, but one of the greatest joys of my life was that I never continued the line, that I was a dead end for this abhorrent line of DNA. It was going to go no further with me and I was very pleased about that. My mother was so shocked because I remember—[laughs] I remember, there was a film on television and it was a sentimental film and it was, you know, somewhat about the relationship between father and son and about the continuum and the son having children and the father dying. And I got quite emotional watching it and my mother said to me, she said, ‘I think I know what’s wrong with you.’ And I said, ‘Oh, you do?’ And I said, ‘What’s that, Mother?’ You know, in my passive aggressive sort of way. And she said—she said, ‘I think you really are sad that you haven’t had children and that you haven’t got that feeling of—you know, that—you know, what people have.’ And I said, ‘You just couldn’t be further from the truth.’ And she said, ‘Oh, what is it?’ And I said, ‘No, I’m just really sad that I didn’t have a father.’ And she was just like so shocked. [Laughs.]

Q: Right. Right.

Quinn: Yeah, so—and I said the most fortunate and happiest thing that has happened to me in my life is that I haven’t had children or I’ve never had the desire to have them. I consider that the luckiest thing that’s ever happened to me.

Q: Yet, when I see Quinn’s Da and this—I can’t remember exactly how Catherine Marshall described it, but this repetitiveness, sublime sort of repetitiveness. And then you have all this, the father, and then you have Billy coming in and then you have Billy there in the place, in that chair. And then you have nothing.

Quinn: Yes. But it’s circular. You have to remember that I am the last one and then the chair is empty.

Q: Yes. Yes.

Quinn: It's a celebration of the empty chair. [Laughs.]

Q: It's a celebration of the empty chair, okay, yes.

Quinn: More than the full chair, it's a celebration of the empty chair, the joy, the beauty of the empty chair.

Q: And to some degree, when I looked at that piece with the chair and your red shirt—

Quinn: Yes. They relate, yes.

Q: Do they relate?

Quinn: Yes. Yes, yes—

Q: It certainly resonated.

Quinn: Yes. I mean, I used—for a while, I used chairs as a sort of surrogate—

Q: I'd like to speak very briefly about process here, I mean how you made these images. Now, I see that these ones are—you have them mounted in canvas.

Quinn: Yes.

Q: But prior to that, it appears that you—well, what did you do? Say in the icons?

Quinn: Well, the icons are wood. They were plywood. I wanted to make them as archival as I possibly could. So we were dealing with—it was a new medium at the time. You know, I started the icons in—I think 1989, 1988, 1989 maybe. And laser printing was really at its beginning.

Q: Exactly. It is laser printing, yes.

Quinn: Yes. But it was the only way I could find to do it because I decided, you know, if I was going to make life-sized portraits of men wearing condoms, well, then how the fuck would I do it? And I thought, well, Cibachrome, and I thought, well, first of all, they're prohibitively expensive.

Q: They are very expensive.

Quinn: And second of all, I wanted to work on top of them. I wanted to scratch into them. I wanted to make them more—I wanted them to be softer than a Cibachrome is. A Cibachrome is very hard surface, which I didn't like.

I did one Cibachrome, which is huge and—

Quinn: —was I made quarter life-sized Cibachromes of the person, so the piece is this size. And at that point with computer laser printing, you could blow up—if you went to an industrial machine, if you went—you know, a high-strength industrial machine, you could blow it up four hundred per cent. That was the

maximum you could do. And if you blew it up four hundred per cent, the computer, you could tile it. And so I started to experiment with that and then I realised, well, this is the sort of paper I want. I want this terrible paper. I wanted also to have this soft surface. And also, you know, it's a cut-and-paste job so you have to trim every one and you have to jump one up to the other and you have to—and that's what I was doing. You know, when I was hanging expensive wallpapers for people, that's what I was doing. So I thought, well, you know, this is part of actually what I do. So I was using everything that I'd learned as a tradesman, as well as everything I'd learned at art school. I liked that double thing. But I also liked the fact that you were taking something which was supposed to be like the high end as far as technology was concerned, but then you were using it—

Q: In a sort of craft sense.

Quinn: In a torn-up paper sort of way.

Q: Right.

Quinn: And also, then, you know, when you paste it down, you would then have to lift up all the corners because they wouldn't stick properly. So you had to re-lift them. And in lifting them, you would break the ink and the ink would crack and it would all spread out and then you would have to paste them down, stick them down. Then they'd all be cracked and—and I liked all this damaged surface. And that for me was a big—I did that, I showed some of that when I was doing these other pieces in—

Quinn: —so I removed it.

Q: So you removed the fourth panel—[Referencing the Castration piece which had four panels originally]

Quinn: Yes. I didn't want it to turn into an intellectual exercise. I wanted it to remain visceral and I think it did. But the putting together—I have to find the—

Here, see? Picking apart the—

Q: So the Irish Art Now exhibition, were you aware of the kerfuffle in Boston?

Quinn: Vaguely. Vaguely. I mean, at some point, somebody told me, 'There's trouble in Boston and it's all about your work.' And I said, 'Mm, okay', and they said, 'But it's the busiest show they've ever had.' And I thought, oh, well, that can't be bad. Sorry, I'm going to open the window—

But no, I mean I wasn't involved. I was just aware that I was a troublemaker. But I wasn't involved and I wasn't thinking, oh, this is good publicity for me.

Q: Right. One of the things that I have not dealt with—I just don't have time—is the *Minor Wounds*. And then there was another exhibition that you had in London—Edge or something?

Quinn: *Postcards from the Wedge*.

Q: *Postcards from the Wedge*. So those are two areas that I just sort of—time just doesn't allow me. But in terms of influences, you've mentioned, obviously, Duchamp, Goya.

Quinn: Yes. People I liked. But I loved David Wojnarowicz. I loved—Cindy Sherman I thought was always good. I like what she's doing now. That she's doing in on Instagram, I think that's hilarious. I think that's clever. And I liked what was happening with the Germans, when, you know, Anselm Kiefer and people like that, when New York was producing Pop art and then England was producing Brit art. I liked the *sturm und drang* and the angst of the German—

Q: As opposed to the—

Quinn: Yes, to the commercial aspect of what was happening.

Q: When you were back in Ireland, did you live at home with your family?

Quinn: When I was back in Ireland? Not at that point, no. No, no.

Q: No, you did not. You lived in—

Quinn: In the Irish Museum of Modern Art. And then somewhere else for a short time, and then I went back to London. And then they offered me the doctorate, so I stayed in London. I did go back and take care of my mother for eighteen months and that was—that was a horror story. That was very difficult. And I documented the whole thing.

Q: So that brings us up to—well, almost 2000 really, by the time you finished your doctorate.

Quinn: I finished my doctorate in 2000.

Q: Right.

[END OF RECORDING]

Appendix Two

Billy Quinn, PhD Dissertation, London, 2000

; Summary

Duchamp, Goya, Joyce, and Rabelais. Four forefathers.

Infra-thin: The infinite space between four and fore.

Summarising summarily. The artist feels we are at a point of change. This is a point where we join the rest of the creative universe in making a slow transition from procreation to bifurcation. Whilst he is aware that this hypothesis might be generated by the guilt of being a non-procreative unit he is willing to follow it to its conclusion.

As our reproductive capacity diminishes, as evinced by our sperm count and fertility levels decreasing, coupled with the recent release of the gene pool map and our capacity to clone in the laboratory, a pattern would seem to be developing. Perhaps we are naturally getting in line with the rest of everything (I have trouble with words such as creation as this presupposes a creator).

We get in line by splitting, by extending our pseudopodia into an unknown to feel our way out so that we can divide with some security. The recognition is that to divide in this way is to generate two momentarily weak halves until some growth occurs. This growth is inevitable but sore. So each part moves forward cautiously, not trusting but feeling its way forward. Asking more than trusting. Learning happens and all sorts of images and words are generated that describe this experience. These two separate bodies are aware of each other. They care for each other because the smaller is generated by the larger and the larger feels a responsibility to help the smaller survive, and the smaller wants to make the larger proud. Parenting is like making Art. Both are natural and unavoidable for some, and when you make either you love them and want to see them survive. You make them the best you can within your limitations and send them into the world to fend for themselves.

How do we describe this?

Introibo

Description. Description. Description. The Litany of the Vitalist begins with this intonation. A question is generated or provoked. Describe what? Today's simple answer is appetite.

Most dear Son,

Among the gifts, graces, and prerogatives with which the Sovereign Creator, God Almighty, endowed and embellished human nature in the beginning, one seems to me to stand alone, and to excel all others; that is the one by which we can, in this mortal state, acquire a kind of immortality and, in the course of this transitory life, perpetuate our name and seed; which we do by lineage sprung from us in lawful marriage. By this means there is in some sort restored to us what was taken from us by the sin of our first parents, who were told that, because they had not been obedient to the commandment of God the Creator, they would die, and by death would be brought to nothing that magnificent form in which man has been created.

But by this method of seminal propagation, there remains in the children what has perished in the parents, and in the grandchildren what has perished in the children, and so on in succession till the hour of the last judgement. Then all generations and corruptions shall cease, and the elements shall be free from their continuous transformations, since peace, so long desired, will then be perfect and complete, and all things will be brought to their end and period.

Not without just and equitable cause, therefore, do I offer thanks to God, my Preserver, for permitting me to see my grey-haired age blossom afresh in your youth. When, at the will of Him who rules and governs all things, my soul shall leave this mortal habitation, I shall not now account myself to be absolutely dying, but to be passing from one place to another, since in you, and by you, I shall remain in visible form here in this world, visiting and conversing with men of honour and my friends as I used to do. If the qualities of my soul did not abide in you as does my visible form, men would not consider you the guardian and treasure house of the immortality of our name; in which case my pleasure would be small, considering the lesser part of me which is my body, would persist, and the better part, which is the soul, and by which our name continues to be blessed among men, would be bastardized and degenerate.¹

¹ *The Histories of Gargantua and Pantagruel* by Francois Rabelais. Trans. J. M. Cohen. [The Second Book] Pantagruel. pp.193. Penguin Books. London 1955

Francois Rabelais (1494-1553), a Franciscan monk, gently leads us into this compost heap of musing on the possibilities of regenerating non pro-creatively. Here in Gargantua's letter to his son Pantagruel, he gives us one early description of the gene pool and of the passing on of one's own specific DNA. Although the description is one of passing pro-creatively, the author himself, a non pro-creative unit, bifurcates to achieve the goal of leaving this glorious description. He bifurcates into his two great characters, Gargantua and Pantagruel, and gives birth to an entire universe. This phenomenon of creating a universe is best described by Marcel Duchamp as *Infra-thin*, which he tells us is the infinite space between two sides of the same sheet of paper.

It is also the whiff of a Madeleine that provoked Marcel Proust to write one of the longest musings on memory ever undertaken. I will endeavour to elucidate as we progress, but should say now that this is an attempt to acknowledge a group of bifurcators that have led me to a body of work, and a body of work which has led me to this group of bifurcators - a classic chicken and egg situation, or in this particular case, a Chicken man and egg situation. All will be revealed.

First Digression.

Coincident with this moment of writing (Sunday 4th of June 2000) researchers from the Sanger Centre in Cambridge are negotiating the release of the complete genetic map which would describe DNA in all its glory and tantalising us with digestible morsels.

These permitted leaks reveal the possibility that the entire human race can be traced back to six women (whom the tabloids graphically describe, using celebrity models to define each type), all purported daughters of Eve. Another leak informs us that we are traceable back to our surname through our DNA. For me the most exciting leak is that every strand of our DNA includes all that we know. This would suggest that the brain is not the storehouse of all knowledge and intellect, much as the heart is not the real home of the emotions. It is exciting to imagine the possibility of the tips of your fingers thinking as you type or that you could love someone through the quick under your nails.

Second Digression: autobiographical details.

I began the doctorate in October 1997. It is my intention to complete this course of studies on the 30 Sept 2000.

I returned from New York City two years previous to beginning the course having spent 11 years there working and showing professionally. In that time I had succeeded in mounting many group shows both in New York and other cities such as Chicago and Atlanta including a three person show in the New Guggenheim Building in Soho and a number of solo shows. It was on the strength of this body of work that I was made an offer by Declan McGonagle, the Director of The Irish Museum of Modern Art (I.M.M.A.), to be artist in Residence for 6 months, living and working in the Museum. I accepted. This proved to be a fecund period. After mounting a solo show in Dublin, which was critically acclaimed and having been bought into the national collection, I decided to return to England.

Initially I found it very difficult to resettle in London. I had missed the whole YBA bandwagon and was not even remotely aware as to what had been happening here while I was away. The intensity of the art movement which had germinated during the AIDS epidemic in America had created conditions of urgency there, so particular to the place, that work from elsewhere, seemed to us to miss the 'real' issues.

In the States I had shown with Jenny Holzer, Nan Goldin, Andres Serrano, David Wojnarowicz and Felix Gonzalez Torres all of whom were dealing with the immediate demise of themselves or their friends as the disease ravaged the Arts Communities. Some YBA work filtered across but New Yorkers practically ignored it. This continued to be the case until they had the luck to be banned by Mayor Giuliani when the Brooklyn Museum mounted the *Sensation* show.

One of the lessons I learned from this experience was the universal provincialism of the art world. It seems to me that it is very difficult to take work across cultural boundaries and expect it to find a place. I found that the very extremity of the situation in New York initially made what I had produced there seem operatic compared with the laid back and rather cynical work which dominated the London scene. I knew that I had to find a way to reabsorb what London was and had to offer. The way forward seemed to be to cross fertilize the best of both cultures or the best of as many cultures as one can absorb without becoming an all purpose grab-bag.

In May of 1997 I approached U.E.L. regarding a research position. I had completed my Degree

there in 1982. I was not eligible for the post due to lack of computer skills and background but was amazed when I was made an offer of a fully funded doctorate on the strength of my portfolio.

I expressed interest but then decided to go back to New York, which I did, to continue work. By the end of September the university let me know that the funding was in place so I returned to start the doctorate.

The course itself has turned out to be a perfect choice for allowing me to develop my work. During the first year I put on solo shows in London, New York and Dublin. The Dublin Show, *Quinn's Da* has since been taken by I.M.M.A. and is now touring North America in a group show entitled *Irish Art Now: From the Poetic to the Political*² and includes work by Dorothy Cross, Mark Francis and Willie Doherty amongst others. The New York show was a previous body of work entitled *Traditional Family Values* and the London show was a group of pieces from my *Plague of Angels* body of work. The first of these, *Quinn's Da*, I completed at UEL and was part of my proposal for the Doctoral Programme.

Quinn's Da.

The title of this work refers to *Arrangement in Grey and Black, No. 1 (The Artist's Mother)* of 1871 by James Abbott Mc Neill Whistler, which is more commonly known as *Whistlers Mother*. The piece comprises a 21-part installation.

The first seventeen images are of a red orthopaedic chair against a window with a partially drawn red curtain. The carpet is also red. A net curtain obscures any view out of the window. The wall below the window is peeling and is partially covered by a stained radiator. Each image is discreetly numbered from one to seventeen in the lower left-hand corner in 24-carat gold. Although the images are identical, there is an order in which they are to be presented.

² Catalogue. *Irish Art Now: From the Poetic to the Political*. Essays by Declan Mc Gonagle, Fintan O'Toole and Kim Levin. Merrell Holberton Publishers London. 1999

In the eighteenth image my father is seen sitting in his chair obviously advanced in years and illness. Here the red curtain is drawn closed and the whole background is saturated red. My father sits in profile looking straight ahead to the left. To his left, in the place of the framed painting in the Whistler, is an insert of an image of my father's left hand floating detached at his eye level.

In the 19th. image I'm seen in multiple exposure, naked, by lurid television light, struggling to take my place in the seat. This image jars amongst the predominance of red, being mainly a television-manufactured blue. I am seen in profile and full face. To my left, partially supported by a photographically dismembered arm, is an insert of me, inverted, laying an egg.

By the 20th. image I have taken my place in the same position and am dressed identically to my father. The insert in this piece is an eye (partially photographic partially painted), looking backwards. The curtain has been re-opened and the wall and radiator restored.

Chair 21 is empty.

The images are all high gloss except the figures, which are matte. This causes the figures to seem to float detached from their surroundings, similar to the matte tempera figures against the gold leaf of traditional Icons.

In numbers 1 through 17 and number 21, the empty chairs are painted matte against the gloss background, so they too seem to float, especially when front lit and then viewed from the side. The inserts are also matte against gloss.

The images are composite laser prints mounted on wood and MDF with acrylic, 24 k. gold leaf and UVA and UVB filter varnishes. Each piece is 5-ft. sq. making the chairs and figures life-size.

Indefinitive definitions.

In choosing *Towards* in my title I am hoping to counteract the bombastic connotation of the word "manifesto". I am more drawn to the pseudo-science of imaginary solutions evinced in the work of Raymond Roussel (1877-1933) in his *How I Wrote Some of My Books* (1930) and

his *Impressions of Africa* (1912), the latter being a play about which Duchamp made the claim that it was responsible for all of his work. Duchamp said:

Roussel was another great enthusiasm of mine in the early days. The reason I admired him is because he produced something I had never seen. That is the only thing that brings admiration from my innermost being-something completely independent-nothing to do with the great names or influences. Apollinaire first showed Roussel's work to me. It was poetry. Roussel thought he was a philologist, a philosopher and metaphysician. But he remains a great poet. It was fundamentally Roussel who was responsible for my glass, 'The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even.' (1915-1923). From his 'Impressions d'Afrique' I got the general approach [and] I felt that as a painter it was much better to be influenced by a writer than another painter. And Roussel showed me the way.³

This science of imaginary solutions was fashioned into Pataphysics by Alfred Jarry in his neo-scientific novel, *Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysician*. (1898), a science Jarry defined as that of the particular which would explain the universe parallel to this one. I wish to present the Trinity of Jarry, Roussel and Duchamp as inspirational bifurcators.

I would challenge Duchamp's statement that Roussel had produced something that he [Duchamp] had never seen before. Duchamp acknowledged Rabelais as a major influence. We are still splashing about in that same specific bifurcated gene pool. I posit that if Duchamp saw Rabelais he also saw Jarry and Roussel. Welcome to Infra-thin.

Bifurcation – Trifurcation / Infra-thin.

The numbers one, two and three are prime numbers. They are the only three sequential prime numbers that we are aware of. They are central to the Christian belief system. One is unity, The Father, two is duality, the Son, and three is everything else, defined within that belief system as the Holy Ghost, or, in other words, everything that you cannot explain. By Duchamp's definition, it is the space between the two sides of that piece of paper, and in Proust's book it

³ Marcel Duchamp: 'The Great Trouble with Art in This Century' - interview with J.J. Sweeney published in *The Bulletin of The Museum of Modern Art* vol. xii, number.4. pp.19-21. 1946

is the imaginary universe found between his nostrils and that famous Madeleine. It is also present in the bifurcation of Miguel De Cervantes into the universe created between Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, and most particularly in the work of William Shakespeare who manifested a superhuman ability to bifurcate and from whom the title of this dissertation owes its inspiration. It is the double mask of comedy and tragedy that defines drama, or at least the space between them.

Third Digression: Yahoo.

By what I could discover, the Yahoos appear to be the most unteachable of all animals, their capacities never reaching higher than to draw or carry burthens. Yet I am of opinion, this defect ariseth chiefly from a perverse, restive disposition. For they are cunning, malicious, treacherous and revengeful. They are strong and hardy, but of a cowardly spirit, and by consequence insolent, abject, and cruel. It is observed that the red-haired of both sexes are more libidinous and mischievous than the rest, whom yet they much exceed in strength and activity. Jonathan Swift, 1726⁴

On the Internet there are 12,797 web pages on bifurcation on just one server, Yahoo.com. Cyber space, the new frontier is the product of bifurcation, the language used being binary, and completely generated by the numbers zero and one. At the moment there is some research into the possibility of extending that language by passing binary information through the common leech. What might the universe generated between a computer programme and a leech be called? Infra-thin perhaps.

I confess to being red-haired.

⁴ *Gulliver's Travels*, Wordsworth Editions 1992, p.284

More Life.

I dislike the phrase “Professional Practice”. I do not like the implication of practice or the notion of being professional. I know of no other professional body that would tolerate non-royalties and would be considered to be unreasonable in the request that 2% be deducted from the resale of any work and given to the artist. That this can lead to a debate where the industry suggests that to give such a paltry sum to the originator of the work would destroy the market seems ludicrous to me. So as an alternative title I would like to suggest *Obsessional Doctorate in Studio Work*. Perhaps we can reach a level of bombast to attain towards a manifesto after all!

I have spent the last three years making Art. I have hardly done anything else (excluding satisfying the appetites). In that time I have read three books. One was *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, the second was *Marcel Duchamp. A biography* by Calvin Tomkins and the third was *Shakespeare. The Invention of the Human*. By Harold Bloom. It was in Bloom that I found *Vitalism* defined and where I was reacquainted with one of the worlds great *Vitalists* in the form of Sir John Falstaff. Bloom’s contention, that Shakespeare did not describe humankind in its many and various permutations but, in some cases, invented it, I read initially as hagiographic but now understand as conceivable. This opens the possibility of, “In the beginning was the word”. Here again we find ourselves knee deep in infra-thin, the everything else generated by bifurcation.

*Falstaff: I like not such grinning honour as Sir Walter hath. Give me life, which if I can save, so: if not, honour comes unlooked for, and there’s an end.*⁵

*Bloom: Sir John is the representative of imaginary freedom, of a liberty set against time, death and the state, which is the condition we crave for ourselves. Add a fourth freedom to timelessness, the blessing of **More Life**, and the evasion of the state, and call it freedom from censoriousness, from the superego, from guilt*⁶

⁵ *First Part of Henry IV. Act V / Sc. IV.* .Shakespeare

⁶ *Shakespeare. The Invention of the Human*, by Harold Bloom, pp.288. Pub. Fourth Estate. London 1999

Suggestion for the manufacturing of infra-thin as a literary exercise.

1. Take the complete text of *Ulysses* by James Joyce.
2. Copy it verbatim onto your computer.
3. Employ spelling and grammar tool.
4. Correct all misspelled words using the first offered alternative.
5. Employ the Thesaurus tool.
6. Accept second alternative offered in every case.
7. Make cup of strong coffee (optional) and read.
8. Sleep.

I Bifurcate therefore I AM

Vincent's Revenge is at a very formative stage. Vincent Van Gogh is a sidekick to another character called Chicken Man. I like to think of them as King Lear and the Fool for their generation. They describe the world for and to each other as they encounter it. They seem to inflate and deflate in complementary accord or disaccord (depending on where you're standing). They are both freaks. The former is an angry Post-Impressionist returned from a premature self inflicted grave (actually rudely channeled from) who, at the realization that one of his paintings has been sold for \$58 million, is beefing up in the gym in preparation for his Rambo-esque assault on the sacred houses of the Art establishment. Here I should acknowledge a precedent set by Duchamp when he channeled *Rose Selavy* in a trans-Atlantic seance with Andre Breton.

Chicken Man meanwhile is the pawn in the chess set. He is one of the flunkies or the Suits of Liveries from the Male Apparatus in *The Large Glass*. He is Francisco Goya's Chicken Man from the *Caprichos* when he found himself duped in love by the Duchess of Alba. He later went on to be duped by the Emperor Joseph in *The Disasters of War*. He is the universal fall guy with one significant difference. He has the power to describe what he sees. Together they tilt at windbags.

The Worm

Enter the worm like the serpent entering that garden east of Eden. The worm is the enemy of the Vitalist. The worm is a bifurcator and it is also the symbol for eternity as it swallows its own tail and describes the Ouroboros reminding us that its function is to digest and regurgitate us as compost for the next cycle to begin. This fear is generated by the need of the self to see itself as more than the blip it represents on the continuation of its own gene-pool strain. Hence civilisations and religions emerge from the fear and awe generated. The self has bifurcated into fear and awe and in doing so has spawned Art. We are told that we are top of the food chain. This is patently not so. The Worm is. Enter laughter. Enter tragedy. To laugh and to cry, both describe what it is to live.

I have often asked myself whether it is right to scream out when you are beaten and people trample on you. Wouldn't it be nobler to burden oneself in demonic pride and to face the torturer with disdainful silence? But I have arrived at the conviction that in this last scream there are the last traces of human dignity and confidence in life. By screaming, a man defends his right to live, sends a message to those who are still free, demands help and resistance, and expresses his hope that there is still someone who can hear. When nothing else remains, one must scream. Silence is the ultimate crime against humanity.⁷

And what would the worm know of screaming or laughing when it always has its mouth full of tail? So the three most important rules of continuance are description, description, description. Description, that transgressive act, momentarily lifts us out of that cycle of appetite and presents a sort of freedom. Because of this, the first act of the ascending dictator is to incarcerate all those who describe.

Do I repeat myself like an over enthusiastic real-estate agent? The Litany continues and the hue changes to purple. Purple is the ecclesiastical colour that exposes my DNA as having evolved through a Christian or even, more specifically, a Catholic strain. This needs to be acknowledged regarding the excessive qualities of my work. A type of **More is More** as opposed to the Puritan anti-icon *less is more*.

⁷ *Hope against Hope: A Memoir* by Nadezhda Mandelstam. Trans. Max Hayward. Modern Library, April 1999

Both Rabelais and Duchamp had catholic DNA. Both their bodies of work revolved around the idea of Virginity, the refusal to procreate and feed the worm. Rabelais chose self-castration by sacrament whilst Duchamp ground his own chocolate. He also chose to make the *Journey from the Virgin to the Bride* and even to bifurcate into Marcel Duchamp and Rose Selavy. Arturo Schwarz acknowledged this in his *Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*⁸ when he discusses *Young man and Girl in Spring*. The letter Y in alchemical studies is the symbol of the tree of life. Life is generated by Bifurcation. The root or base splits into two, which in turn splits and on and on. A tree is formed in the same way that a nuclear explosion starts from the splitting of one atom which in a steady bifurcating stream grows outward until it starts to entropy and drop in on itself. This is possibly true of all life.

I need, at this juncture, to clarify my use of this religious reference and, whilst acknowledging this catholic DNA, make clear that this is not presented in a doctrinal capacity. The capital has been replaced by the lower case c. Recently I helped I.M.M.A. acquire another piece of mine on the secondary market from the estate of a collector in Boston. This particular piece could be considered seminal in the development of my work and deals with a number of fractures and my attempt to find the space between them.

It was also the piece that brought me to the attention of the European art scene when it was published in *Circa*, the art journal. It is an image/text piece and as the text describes the image, literally, I will share it with you:

A 38 year old recently bereaved Irish ex- catholic (post-christian) H.I.V. negative undocumented alien is safely sodomised by a recently bereaved 33 year old H.I.V. positive Afro American christian.

I have written the text as it appears in the piece. Already (by 1992) the capital C had been replaced by the lower case. So before continuing these musings on the catholic aspect of the work I produce, and the work I admire, I need to pull into focus this idea of catholic DNA.

⁸ *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, Arturo Schwarz, Harry N. Abrams New York, 1969. Revised edition, 1996

One of the best examples of this theory, which also sits with my Irish appellation, is that of James Aloysius Joyce. Joyce, himself a great masturbating bifurcator made a glorious split into the dual personages of the most famous Jew in Irish history, other than Jesus, Leopold Bloom and his wayward christian son Stephen Dedalus (before the fall). Together they traversed the infra-thin of Bloomsday (16 June 1904). That Joyce would leave Dublin and Christianity behind him never to return to either and then spend all of his life describing both is testament to the idea that they (Dublin and Christianity) were so firmly entrenched in his DNA that even in denial of them is an affirmation.

This would be to accept Duchamp's re-definition of *anti* not as opposed to but as in balance with. So that in the matter of life and anti-life the anti suggests the complement to, rather than a judgement which would suggest opposition. Duchamp extended this notion into taste and anti-taste and his indifference to both.

I posit that central to catholic DNA is the vulgar. I also posit vulgarity as anti-sophistry not in the oppositional sense but in the complementary; they simply balance each other. The space where the vulgar and the sophisticated meet is the region of infra-thin. It is worm consciousness that causes Rabelais to celebrate defecation and appetite in Gargantua and Pantagruel. The same inspired Jarry to open the century by proclaiming *Shitte* in UBU and Joyce to write a love letter to Nora Barnacle proclaiming: *I would recognise my sweet Nora's fart in a roomful of farting women*⁹. I know of no other more romantic utterance in the whole of English/Irish literature. Joyce simply says: although I recognise that you are in essence methane/mulch/compost, I love you.

A question which could be arrived at from these musings is as to whether Duchamp and Joyce managed to transcend their century simply by finding the wherewithal to make the most sophisticated/vulgar work in their separate fields, and in finding the space between both (that being vulgarity and sophistication), transcended their own time to dominate twentieth century art and literature.

It was somewhat bewildering, in this auspicious year (2000) of the opening of the Tate Modern, that in the accompanying orgy of pre-publicity, in which it seemed the Tate was trying to give

⁹ James Joyce; *The Selected Letters*, (ed.) Richard Ellmann, Faber 1975.

a crash course in Modern Art, that the last programme produced by this phenomenon should revolve around the *Urinal*.

It is undeniable that Duchamp is the father of Conceptual Art. Watching the curators struggle still with the questions posed by a piece completed in 1917, whilst Robert Gober has since absorbed *The Bride and Etant Donnes* and already expanded the vocabulary in his Museum of Contemporary Art, MOCA, installation in Los Angeles last year, says something about the space and time that might be needed for the British Art establishment to come into the present, and that the puritan white cube might be their stumbling block.

So this idea that the DNA, of certain artists, itself might have an excessive expression regardless of the rejection of the philosophical and religious creeds that engendered it immediately encourages a new set of questions. How long does it take DNA to absorb an idea so that it becomes part of what is passed down? How long after Luther's proclamation was nailed to the door of the church did the anti-icon aesthetic evolve into the empty white space? What is at that point of changeover? I contend that the meeting of both is the point of pillage, plunder, consumption, digestion, voiding and creativity.

Simulacra, the things we recognise and that resonate for us, are a response to the knowledge held in every strand of our DNA or every fibre of our being. They simply seem familiar to us like the catch-phrase in the chorus of a song. I would now like to consider whether it is enough to allow this phenomenon to lead through resemblance and remembrance into the development of work.

Having spent all my life looking at Art, and been drawn in certain directions due to these resonances, my answer to this question has to be a resounding yes.

That place of pillage also contains all I have chosen to love and hold on to, as well as that which I inherited. What we choose is influenced by that which is inherited but that which is chosen can also be a pulling away from, a response to, inheritance. This is where the individual makes his or her mark on the DNA they inherited and in doing so bifurcates. Bifurcation is inevitable anyway, what is in question here is the degree and the originality of the action. The steps taken by Joyce and Duchamp could only be described as radical. I attain towards this radicalism because at the core of my being it resonates and I find myself aspiring. I aspire

through description. Central to this aspiration is inspiration and the acknowledgement of the inevitability of expiration. I have had many masters.

The Worm Turns.

By way of acknowledgement I now wish to make a list (incomplete) of influences.

Before beginning, I should say that this list could disintegrate into further musings at any turn and the author accepts full responsibility if this happens.

1. Marcel Duchamp
2. James Joyce
3. Francisco Goya
4. Mathias Gruenwald
5. Jacques-Louis David
6. Elias Cannetti
7. Herman Broch
8. Luis Bunuel
9. Pier Paolo Pasolini
10. Andre Tarkovsky
11. Gitta Sereny
12. Robert Gober
13. Cindy Sherman
14. David Wojnorowicz
15. Alfred Jarry
16. William Shakespeare
17. Octavio Paz
18. Jeff Koons
19. Andy Warhol
20. Felix Gonzales-Torres
21. Nan Goldin
22. Francois Rabelais
23. Emile Zola
24. Raymond Roussel

25. Gilbert and George
26. Andres Serrano
27. Daniel Defoe
28. Thomas Hardy
29. D.H. Lawrence
30. J.M.Coetzee
31. The Marquis de Sade
32. Harold Bloom
33. Camille Paglia
34. Samuel Beckett
35. Jan Vermeer
36. William Borroughs

The idea of an order in such a list is unthinkable. To see the likes of Paglia there amongst some of the others must give cause for concern. What is most impressive about her is her ability to plagiarise, to pilfer, and to vulgarise unashamedly and when challenged, to shrug her shoulders, claim Italian descent and some sort of amnesty for having invented opera. I find this tendency in Warhol, Sherman, Serrano, Koons and Goldin too and am in awe of their ability to plunder their most recent history. This accelerated ingestion and digestion of the recent past and present would seem to be an American attribute and one I hope I have acquired (like a virus) in my time spent there.

There is a notable omission in the above list, what of Vincent Van Gogh?

Van Gogh (post-Duchamp) and the Notion of the Fake.

I have no interest in the paintings of Vincent Van Gogh. I have little or no interest in painting for its own sake and can only be pulled in when I see it as a vehicle for ideas.

I consumed his work when I was a teenager but, on discovering Duchamp, lost interest completely. I am profoundly interested in what Van Gogh, his life and myth, represents.

Before going there I need to hold the concept of Fakery up to the infra-thin prism and reconsider it. First of all we need to do away with judgement. Genuine is a word like truth which can be used as a weapon and therefore is immediately suspect. In contrast to the usual definition of

fake as the opposite of genuine we need to consider the possibility of anti-genuine or complementary to genuine. This puts genuine and fake as opposite but equal. Now we can start.

The Tazo Tondo

Van Gogh is probably the most identifiable artist in the history of the world. Here in England his image was being given away to children free in a packet of potato crisps in the form of a tazo (a small plastic disc). He adorns everything from ashtrays to place-mats. He is universal property. Situated between this universal Van Gogh and the isolated mad loner who never sold a painting in his life, and who ended up shooting himself in a field of crows, is the area I want to pillage. The story is similar to the one of the fisherman from Bethlehem who spawned the myth that is responsible for the greatest flowering of Art in the history of the recorded world. Is the relationship between the universal Van Gogh on the tazo in the crisp packet and the isolated mad painter the same relationship that exists between the fisherman and his present manifestation? If so, which is the fake? Is it possible to generate the same without Faith? Does it matter if you have faith in the painter or the representation of the painter in the tazo?

Maybe we should ask Shakespeare to tell us through his prime Vitalist. When Falstaff fakes his death to escape being killed he justifies it in the following way.

Embowelled? If thou embowel me today, I'll give you leave to powder me and eat me tomorrow. 'Sblood, 'twas time to counterfeit, or that hot termagant Scot had paid me, Scot and lot too. Counterfeit? I lie, I am no counterfeit: to die is to be counterfeit, for he is but the counterfeit of a man, who hath not the life of a man: but to counterfeit dying, when a man liveth, is to be no counterfeit, but the true and perfect image of life indeed¹⁰

The idea of Falstaff's secular resurrection is what marks him as a true vitalist. His play here with the notion of Fake/Counterfeit and its complementary is transcendent.

¹⁰ *First Part of Henry IV. Act V / Sc. IV. .Shakespeare*

So that which marks Van Gogh out as a Vitalist is a type of secular resurrection in the imagination of the human race combined with the actual man. The combination of his being and anti-being usher him into mythology. This I posit to be pivotal to the continuum both of History and Art History.

Pseudopodia

Bifurcation is central to the creation myth. Eve issued from the rib of Adam. I like to think of her as a breached birth, coming feet, or rather foot, first. We have a perfect model of Bifurcation in the humble amoeba. Essential to the idea of infra-thin, as described by Duchamp in his notes for the *Green Box*, is the concept of the caste and mould. These complementaries generate infra-thin when fit one inside the other. Infra-thin is, of course, the infinite space between them. This would suggest that in the doubling through bifurcation the split is into matter and anti-matter, or subject and object, and the combination of both complementaries might negate the ego and attain towards infinity or at least towards an entropy which might act as the mulch or seedbed for the process to begin over again. The amoeba puts its best foot forward and feels its way into the world until it finds its footing and the courage to split. This single celled 'Avant-garde' foot moves forward describing the terrain to the body to inform it as to whether it is safe to divide. The rest, creativity itself, is a chain reaction

As for Jane Seymour, she's the fake Dr. Quinn.

Describing description: The Emergence of a body of work in three movements: 1. Minor wounds. 2. More Life. 3. Absorb this.

In my initial proposal I had laid out a plan for a body of work I decided to call *Minor Wounds*. Whilst developing this work I had not allowed for the possibility of how *Quinn's Da* might liberate me. During the christmas break of the second year I was invited to New York to paint 2 Labradors for the head of The School of Art History at *Christies*. This does not appear in my portfolio but with the money earned from this (\$10,000) I bought a *Mac* computer and software and a digital camera which have become primary as the media for my new work. Happy in the knowledge that *Quinn's Da* would be safe (for at least 2 years on the aforementioned tour of North America) and newly endowed with this technological monster I set out to teach myself computer skills and PhotoShop whilst simultaneously making the new work. The added

intimacy of a digital camera and the means to manipulate and print the image at home thus taking Happy Snaps or Boots out of the equation, plus access on the internet to a platform for the *Universal Exhibitionist* was, and is, profoundly liberating. It is around these phenomena that the new body of work is developing. At the moment, I am working towards the completion of 90 large images to present at the end of the doctorate.

To further facilitate this work, and the effort it is taking to complete it, I turned down a second solo show at the Goldstrom Gallery in New York. I have decided that, as an artist, the highest order of Professional/ Obsessional Practice is to make art and that promotion is a matter for delegation. This stance has led to much debate and support from my personal tutors. During the second year I was also given the opportunity to teach for 6 hours a week. I very much enjoyed the activity whilst eventually deciding that I would rather not teach as this absorbs exactly the same energy that is used in the creative process and which I guard very jealously.

Minor Wounds.

Initially I need to refer to what my intentions were as I began the course so I am including a lengthy quote from my proposal where I defined what I meant by Minor Wounds:

“This new work is called MINOR WOUNDS. It deals with the everyday stigmata, the paper cuts, mosquito bites, cold sores and wrinkles of mundane disintegration. Whilst recognising the beauty of time’s assaults on the environment by eulogising and celebrating the majesty of the Grand Canyon, we are encouraged to despise the beauty that time leaves on our faces and bodies as we age. The ‘phase du jour’ on American talk shows is the ‘disease of ageing’. Whilst praising the beauty of a discreetly preserved medieval village in Tuscany and declaring the ugliness of modern Newtown-whatever, we fixate on the banality of youthful beauty and encourage self-mutilation in an attempt to re-achieve it cosmetically, whilst denying the actual beauty of the ageing process.

In advertising we are asked to believe that time stands still and that we transgress by ageing. As in Bunuel’s last masterpiece, ‘That Obscure Object of Desire’ (1977), which presents a different actress/model representing the same ideal and we are encouraged not to notice the

sleight of hand changeover. In his film, Bunuel uses two actresses, the very Gallic Carole Bouquet and the more earthy and sensual Hispanic Angela Molina to play the same object of desire. He interchanges them at will as their character enthralls Fernando Rey as the much older lecherous businessman, oblivious to the bifurcation. Similarly, in advertising, youth is all we are conditioned to see. We succumb.

I am interested in first adopting and then adapting the scale of advertising to my work. My tendency is to work large. My largest piece to date was a 40ft by 20ft painting for the city of Galveston in Texas commissioned by the De Menil family. My photographic pieces all tend to include people at least life-size and lately have begun to be even larger. Recently I completed a photographic piece in The Irish Museum of Modern Art which is 12ft by 16ft.

This phenomenon of advertising methods and space being used as an art site has been exploited recently by artists such as Felix Gonzales-Torres under the auspices of the Andrea Rosen Gallery when he mounted his intensely moving 'Bed piece' in 24 appropriate venues in Manhattan in 1992 to considerable public reaction. (Coincidentally, [almost 8 years later] the work of Felix Gonzales-Torres is on show in London at the Serpentine Gallery, as I write, and the 'Bed Piece' is on display around the city on billboards.) This bed/pillow billboard has entered the Fine Art canon and is currently (Sept'97) on show at M.O.M.A. in 'On The Edge. Contemporary Art from the Werner and Elaine Dannheiser Collection'. Simultaneously some of the original billboards have been remounted in Manhattan. The catalogue for this show asserts:

' On the 16th Of May 1992 an image turned up on 24 billboards around Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx. The blow-up of a light, grainy photograph, showed the upper half of a bed covered with wrinkled white sheets, and topped by two pillows still bearing the imprint of the heads that had laid upon them. Startling by its reticence and delicacy amidst the usual run of advertising, The enlarged picture was also surprising because, as time passed, it became evident that it was not advertising at all. When it first appeared, the transfixing bareness of the layout seemed to be waiting for some text to be dropped in, as is now customary in suspense-based campaigns where a brand's logo is emblazoned across cities before its name or slogan

is revealed. But while people on their way around town waited for some label or pitch to be added to the picture of the bed, nothing happened'.¹¹

This calls to mind a film entitled 'It Should Happen to You' by George Cukor made in 1954 from a screenplay by Garson Kanin. The plot revolves around a small town girl who comes to New York to make a name for herself. Judy Holliday as Gladys Glover uses her meagre savings to rent a billboard on Columbus Circle and has her name emblazoned thereon. This satire deals succinctly with these advertising spaces and their capacity to promote an idea (in this case that of fame) by their very presence. This is reminiscent of the halo of the Bride in 'The Large Glass' which acts as a sort of notice board where the male apparatus can see a visual record or score board of their attempts at coition with the Bride. The Bride's halo is her organ of communication as the billboard is the organ of communication that Gladys Glover uses to express her desire to be noticed or even as her notice to be desired.

I have currently prepared three images that I would like to take onto this scale. I wish to make computer enhanced maquettes to show these 'cold-sore' pieces in-situ. These works are very much about seams and showing what would be traditionally unshowable in advertising-entering the body other than through the orifices, non-invasively. They are also about disjunction, which is one of my ongoing themes, a 'pasted-together' sort of intention that I want to convey about the way we construct our lives and images."

Ideas grow, change, cross-pollinate and, even sometimes, bifurcate.

Towards the end of the first year of the doctorate, whilst negotiating the showing of *Quinn's Da*, I continued to develop the *Minor Wounds* Series. These are still very much a part of what I am doing now relative to *More Life*. They have burgeoned into a body of evidence connected to Vitalism itself. They somewhat represent The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, and as I sit here relatively whole and unscathed they attest to the regenerating power, or self-healing power, of this particular parcel of worm food. While making valiant attempts to place these huge pieces, and manufacturing same in my studio, the effects of my father's sitting in his

¹¹ *On the Edge: Contemporary Art from the Werner and Elaine Dannheiser Collection*, M.O.M.A., New York, 1997

chair, and the heightened acceptance of his mortal state, and by extension mine, was taking its toll and was soon to bring about changes. Initially two attempts were made to place them. I approached both *Artangel* and *Paul Reichman* (the owner of the Canary Wharf Tower) offering them the opportunity of helping me to realise these pieces on the originally intended scale. They both declined.

My proposal to *Artangel* sited the pieces on the fly towers of the *Royal National Theatre*. I was very pleased when 8 months later *Artangel* used the same towers for the first time for someone else's work. That these towers had never been used as the outdoor exhibition spaces that they clearly are, and that I might have had some influence on their being used for this purpose is a very pleasing idea. The synchronicity is also pleasing to acknowledge if this is the case.

These exercises in attempting to place work in a public forum on a gigantic scale were hugely educational. It appears to me that a reputation has to be built prior to achieving this goal so that this sort of venue became accessible through invitation rather than me having to make a cap-in-hand approach.

The Eureka Moment or Absorb This

I am thinking about emergence. These Eureka moments are times over which you have no control. The proverbial *Archimedes in the bath* moments, floating and ruminating, some are sleep provoked. It is disingenuous to say that you don't actually have anything to do with them, because you do. You have to do all the preparation, and I mean more than drawing the bath or getting into the bed. The discredited Arthur Koestler illumines these times beautifully, in *The Sleepwalkers*, when he describes just such moments in the lives of Kepler, Copernicus, Tycho Brahe and Galileo. They come in a flash, they present themselves and you have to be ready to see them, so that they can be taken forward. The work made before that point is the preparation for that moment of change. The keyword is Work.

So Chicken Man emerged almost intact, Athena like, from the head of his father in sleep. He is deep purple in hue, spread-eagled in an imagined secular Passion Play, agape and in ecstasy like a cross fertilisation between a gay porn filmstar and Bernini's *Saint Theresa in Ecstasy*. Even then he had his one amoeba-ish foot intact, although at the time I did not realise why I

had given him only one. The head is mine whilst having an orgasm, manifesting that French *little death*.

He appalled me. I loved him. I had bifurcated and every nerve ending tingled. There was no more self-protection, or further attempt to find or build any. He was somewhat parented by this cross between sex, exhibitionism, and religion which tied in with art, scale, Goya and History and the moment. There is no other explanation for this fracture which generates infra-thin. So Chicken Man and I went walkies.

As for Vincent Van Gogh, he re-emerged in play. As a manifestation of similitude he was teased out whilst I was in learning mode, and trying to teach myself the intricacies of Photoshop. He emerged and remained because he reminded me of Van Gogh, I have come to respect the *but that reminds me of* in every situation. I found myself sitting in between these two strange and alarming characters and knew that they were aberrational twins like the two masks of Drama, or like an obscene Laurel and Hardy. So there is a form of channelling here akin to that between Andre Breton and Marcel Duchamp in their Trans-Atlantic seance. It is more knowing, though not in a cynical way, than that form of channelling espoused by new age practitioners. It is also about fakery.

I know I am not Chicken man, I know I am not Van Gogh. I also know that Duchamp did not think he was Rose Selavy.

Rose Selavy sprang full-grown from the mind of Marcel Duchamp during the late summer or early fall of 1920. Insouciant, mocking, a bit of a slut perhaps, with her talent for elaborately salacious puns, she would lend her name to all sorts of verbal and visual Duchampian artefacts until 1941, when she quietly retired from the scene. Why did Duchamp, who gave freer rein than most men to the feminine side of his nature feel the need to invent a female alter ego? "It was not to change my identity," he once said, " but to have two identities"¹²

That Duchamp managed to see Rose through 21 years, the accepted age for the emergence into adulthood, is remarkable. I have, of recent, seen Chicken man through to Chicken dinner, with a nice glass of Merlot, in a similar if slightly more ignoble trajectory (it was in the cards).

¹² *Duchamp. A Biography*, Calvin Tomkins, Chatto and Windus, 1997, p.231.

If permission was needed for bifurcation, I needn't have looked any further for a more honourable precedent in the history of Art.

We find ourselves back in the land of Infra-thin where Duchamp fits into Rose Selavy like the mould into the caste, or as Duchamp once expressed it, that the mind would grasp an idea like the penis is grasped by the vagina. Bifurcation thrives on the salacious.

It also continues to bifurcate in a rabbit way. Hence there are 90 pieces for absorption.

So, what is in the air then?

I began with the statement that it was a matter of some consideration as to which came first, the Art or the Idea/Question. These ruminations either generated, or have been generated by, visual evidence. Their antecedents are clear but their projection forward remains to be seen. That they form a continuum is hoped for in line with them claiming a lineage. *The Human Genome Project* underway at the *Sanger Institute* in Cambridge and the research led by Dr. Craig Venter of *Celera Genomics* would seem to be pointing the way as our reproductive biology obliges by reducing world-wide fertility and scientists in the lab are cloning animals. That these musings are at their very beginning is patently obvious. So far we have an Irish ex-catholic (post-christian) homosexual who is bifurcating into an oven-ready chicken man and a dead fake post-impressionist painter with a penchant for cutting his ear off and giving it to prostitutes. What is emerging is that there is hope in description, that it is possible to face the worm. And that this face-off can engender a sort of terrible beauty. It is evidently going to take more time to work this one out, and I am going to need More Life.

SELF-EVALUATION OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF WORK OVER THE COURSE OF THE PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE.

In consideration of my initial proposal, and list of aims and objectives enumerated therein, I would like to make the following statement.

I believe I have outstripped my initial expectations and have engendered a body of work and a methodology for continuance that has surprised even me in its energy and clarity. As stated

earlier in this dissertation, it was at the point of finishing and exhibiting *Quinn's Da* that my direction changed or matured and moved off in a more wilful trajectory. I also found that the further I was removed from Time Square, in its role as the hub of the commercial world, the less important it was becoming. Although I have kept some of the means and scale of the commercial cacophony displayed there, the sites themselves have become less important. I also stated earlier that these sites would hopefully be mine by invitation so that the new impetus would be to build a reputation with a body of work so that no effort need be expended in achieving these sites. This puts the emphasis back on the work and the issue of siting becomes something to be delegated. This consideration of the need to develop the skill and the confidence to delegate was a major advancement in my Work Practice.

AIMS

To continue an investigation into the ongoing and irreversible transit through middle to old age and death, and to try to communicate our capacity to endure same with profound beauty and dignity.

To exploit the most developed tools of commercialism to achieve these ends.

Above, in Italics, are my original stated aims.

The completion of *Quinn's Da* at the end of the first year has had an effect on how I work and continue. On the face of it, my initial aims, stated above, would seem to have achieved a type of apotheosis in this work, whilst in reality it marks more of a new starting point for me. It was the point where neither cynicism nor stoicism sufficed to meet or explain what I was trying to communicate. Somehow hope was emerging without the crutch of faith to support it. The cynicism of competing with commercialism by usurping its sites became irrelevant. Similarly, my rant on page 6 of this dissertation, against the phrase Professional Practice, which I have left in as an illustration of the continuing fluidity and immediacy of the learning process, has become irrelevant. There are much bigger worms to dissect. Not forgetting that, when you cut a worm in two, it bifurcates.

OBJECTIVES

- . *To produce a series of exhibitions dealing with the issues as stated above.*
- . *To make a thorough documentation in video, photography and text of the development of these aims and exhibitions.*
- . *To continue liaison with the Mindy Oh Gallery to collaborate on a second catalogue with the same gallery.*
- . *To investigate the possibility of exhibiting in England, having, to date, exhibited only in the USA and Ireland, with the intention of placing Quinn's Da into a London venue before considering taking the piece abroad.*
- . *To research funding through bodies such as Artangel to find possible commercial sites in which to mount the Minor Wounds series. To investigate the possibility of same in New York through my connections there.*

Above, in Italics, are my original stated objectives.

This projected series of exhibitions became the aforementioned three shows in the first year of the doctorate, culminating in *Quinn's Da* in Dublin. My intention was that my father would see it before he would die as he was deemed to be terminal at the time. I was offered a show in Dublin before I managed to finish the piece. I had to go there 2 weeks before the opening to complete it. I wheeled my father around the show in his wheel chair and he cried. When the show was opened by Catherine Marshall, the Head of the Permanent Collection at I.M.M.A., she spoke of the sublime and relentless monotony of the piece relative to the repetition of the 17 empty chairs. It was the acknowledgement of this anti-sentimentality of the work, combined with the profoundly sentimental title, and my realization that I was dealing with the subject of absence, that started my train of thought in the direction of finding a means to pin down presence. It was also at this crossroad that I realized that it would take a massive effort to locate, define and describe the ephemeral qualities of the corporeal. I resolved to forego showing until I felt ready to present a body of work that would somewhat address these issues to my satisfaction and decided to use the remaining two years to achieve that goal. This decision having been made, I determined not to become distracted by any intermediate offers or advances that might be made. That *Quinn's Da* was taken by I.M.M.A. on a tour of North America negated the possibility of showing the piece in London but I did manage to mount a solo show of earlier works here. I also exhibited, on two occasions, in *The East London Gallery* (attached to U.E.L), the newly developing work as *Work in Progress*, and have benefited

greatly from the seminars and discussions provoked by these events. This was further enhanced by the participation and the input contributed by invited guests of the caliber of John Tompson and Geoffrey Keating (The Irish Cultural Attaché).

I was offered the opportunity to teach during the second year and relished the experience. I was an invited speaker at *Matrix 4*, the Doctoral Conference at Central St. Martins, where I gave a talk on my developing ideas and work and this encouraged further invitations. This led to lectures at the Universities of Leeds, Exeter, and Goldsmiths. Having been recommended by Goldsmiths, I was invited to give a talk to the Royal Academy in Stockholm. Again, whilst acknowledging the value and pleasure derived from giving these talks, I would state that my goal is to make and show work and to leave it stand as its own defense. While I am alive I will defend it when called upon to do so, but I would rather be making the next piece, which just might answer all questions and objections raised anyway.

Negotiations regarding a second catalogue to be published with the Mindy Oh Gallery in New York have been put on hold whilst I complete the present body of work. Currently negotiations are being made with Tim Foster to have a catalogue published by U.E. L. to coincide with completion of the doctorate. I collaborated with I.M.M.A. on another catalogue for the touring show (see footnote 2), which is available in bookshops now. Recently I have helped to have two bodies of work put on semi-permanent display on two separate Internet sites.

As to the documenting of the process, I have achieved all my stated objectives.

I find it difficult to finish with such a bland statement of fact. The process is so much more fluid and volatile than this simple achieving of objectives. But in reductive terms this is what has happened, and there exists a body of work, a collection of fragments, that give evidence to questions being asked and formulated. When I consider the litany intoned by the bachelor apparatus in the *Large Glass*, as described by Duchamp in his *Notes and Projects for The Large Glass*¹³. I have the compulsion to amend his litany to one word. His reads:

Slow life. Vicious Circle. Onanism. Horizontal. Buffer of life.

¹³ *Notes and projects for The Large Glass*. Marcel Duchamp. Edited by Arturo Schwarz. New York: Harry N. Abrams 1969

When I read this and remember that Duchamp described the Bride as *the machine with 5 hearts, the pure child*¹⁴, and that the common worm has 5 hearts, coupled with his exhortation that artists of the future were going to have to go underground, reverberations occur. This five-hearted worm child is the future that devours the past. Goya represented the struggle with this same phenomenon in his depiction of Saturn devouring his son in a futile attempt to stop the process. Goya in his description expressed his own approaching oblivion, reminiscent of Mandelstam's scream, on the walls of his house amongst the *Black Paintings* and chose not to include them in an inventory of his works. He retired into his aged deafness, went underground to bifurcate into a continuum that stretches forward to inspire us. Duchamp similarly removed himself, and it was only after his death that we were allowed to know that he had actually continued to bifurcate in secret, to plough his solitary furrow. Then I realize that another mantra is evolving which describes this process. Mine reads:

Description. Description. Description.

Exeunt

Definitively unfinished, 16th June 2000 (Bloomsday)

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