



**ARTIST**

Billy Quinn

**TITLE**

Billy Quinn in his Studio with Examples from the 'Saints Series'

**DATE**

1992

**DIMENSIONS**

13 in H x 19.5 in W

**MEDIUM**

Cibachrome

**CATALOGUE NUMBER**

1992.027

**CURRENT LOCATION**

1620-5C

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**BILLY QUINN**

**BORN**

1954

**BIRTHPLACE**

Dublin, Ireland

**GENDER**

Male

**CITIZENSHIP**

Ireland

**CULTURAL HERITAGE**

Irish

**LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP**

Artist-in-Residence, 1992

**LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS**

Contact Sheet 75/76

Contact Sheet 97

A Just Image: Selections from the Light Work Collection

## ESSAYS

Artist Billy Quinn sees beauty in honesty, and his artistic pursuits focus on the idea of being honest and completely open about one's sexuality. The Censorship Wars have created a cultural atmosphere of repression around the topics of sexuality, while the AIDS epidemic has demanded an increase in openness and honesty concerning the subject. What results is a contradiction- repression and honesty make odd bedfellows. One of the ways in which Quinn has chosen to represent sexuality in the wake of the AIDS crisis is with the forms and aesthetic qualities typical of religious iconography. There is no denying the power and beauty in religious painting, and Quinn uses it in making his saints for the Twenty-first Century. Quinn's saints' mores and credos are a departure from those of Saint Catherine or Peter- they don't practice abstinence, but safe sex. They are not sequestered people, but active and contributing members of society. Their beauty is born not from denial of earthly passions and pursuits, but through honestly acknowledging them. Quinn's Saints resemble their historic counterparts in their stance and in that they hold an object or relic of their choice. The subjects are life-size, and the backgrounds are comprised of glowing 22K gold leaf and silver. But it is here that the similarities with Christian Saints end. Many of Quinn's subjects are HIV positive, and while pervasive prejudice would tend to align them with the 'taboo' or sinners, in Quinn's images the subject has salvation and sanctification. Last spring, a close friend of Quinn's died of AIDS, and Quinn had the responsibility of preparing the young man's body for cremation. This experience caused Quinn to contemplate the link between sexuality and spirituality and in turn sexuality's link to death. Quinn illustrates these links through portraying a gay couple's sexuality with text from a pamphlet about cremation. This juxtaposition exposes the trauma of a friend's death as a result of sexual intimacy. In the same series, Quinn included the more general relationship between living and dying and he did so by celebrating the mundane and often disregarded aspects of living that had new meaning in the wake of his friend's death. Billy Quinn's artworks are autobiographical and biographical portraits which focus on the need to be accepting and honest about the 'sexual self.' Through portraiture, Quinn creates expressions of his own life's experience, while also commenting and reacting to the larger cultural climate. Quinn approaches the topic of sexuality with the intention of exposing the repression while also hoping to weight the scales back to a position of honest acceptance. Billy Quinn is originally from Ireland and now resides in New York City. He participated in Light Work's Artist-In-Residence program in May, 1992. Amy Hufnagel (c)1992A Just Image As it plays out in the headlines, justice means equality, fairness, and the rule of law. Yet beyond the events broadcast on television and the news alerts flashed instantly to laptops and PDAs, there is a large realm of justice that eludes reporters. Throughout daily life - at home, in school, doing errands, tending children, making dinner, playing sports - perceptions of justice often float just below the radar. The Light Work Collection offered plentiful proof that photographers frequently make images of routine daily life and its relationship to a sense of justice. However, as members of the Fine Arts 395 "Art and Identity" class noticed, scholars seldom extend the concept of justice into aspects of living that are legal, but sometimes ethically questionable. Counselors, social workers, and therapists seem to take over where the justice system stops. Nevertheless, the line between the legal system's purview and personal life is not fixed. Class members were careful to insist that the law is often less subtle in its grasp of situations and unaware of complexities than are the images included in this show. Nowhere in the law is it written that by embracing a stereotype one can sometimes achieve influence skin to contesting the mold. Thoughts and feelings such as these coalesced as the subject of this exhibition. Work and family emerged as sites where what is fair is not always what is equal, and what is equal is not always fair. However fair or unfair, the triumphs and annoyances one experiences at work mostly fall below the threshold of the law. It is conventional wisdom, not the IRS, which suggests that wealth carries no guarantee of happiness. Creating this nuanced exhibition about justice in everyday life led the class into hearty and un-nuanced discussions about the slights, snubs, and rebuffs of an ordinary day. The students chose the title A Just Image for this exhibition before they read about the expression in Roland Barthes' Camera Lucida. With the phrase, he and they recognize that art coaxes the world of appearances to create symbols signifying ideas for which there are no words. Just an image becomes A Just Image. Mary Warner Marien A Just Image: Selections from the Light Work Collection is the result of a collaborative effort by thirty-one Syracuse University students enrolled in Professor Mary Warner Marien's "Art and Identity" course. The exhibition examines the Fall 2007 Syracuse Symposium theme of justice. The students chose images from the Light Work Collection, considering the personal and societal meanings of justice. They have created an interactive exhibition, where, as the students write in the exhibition catalogue, "ironically... the viewer is still judging." A Just Image invites viewers to explore the photographs and rethink their definition of justice. As the students of the "Art and Identity" course discovered, though justice is a universal concept, it does not necessarily carry the same meaning for everyone. This can be seen in the different perceptions of stereotypes, families, occupations, and leisure activities, which are some of the topics examined by the class. According to the students, "The Pictures we have chosen require more than just superficial judgment; they require the viewer to acknowledge their own stereotyped projections." Roslyn Esperon