

Marc Quinn, Emotional Detox

The series *Emotional Detox: The Seven Deadly Sins* (1994-95) incorporates an interesting theme. The works were first displayed at the *Art Now* exhibition in the Tate Gallery in London in 1995. The Groninger Museum has the series on permanent loan.

Emotional Detox: The Seven Deadly Sins is based on Quinn's own body. The artist made use of photographs of himself in various poses with certain expressions and emotions. From these, he carefully selected certain postures and parts of his body,



from which he moulded torsos. These torsos were cast in lead and finished with drip-lines of blue wax. They appear to represent a state of decomposition: detached limbs, crevices and cuts. The rough directness is reinforced by the imperfections that occur during the dynamic process of casting; the inevitable side effects of granularity and fissures have not been glossed over or concealed.

The first part of the title, *Emotional Detox*, refers to the emotional process of detoxification: Quinn was attempting to free himself of an addiction to alcohol. The use of material is very striking here: lead is poisonous!

The group of sculptures, as the subtitle indicates, refers to the seven cardinal sins that were formulated by Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica*: lust, greed, envy, anger, sloth, avarice, and pride. However, the sculptures are not a literal translation of this symbolism. The Seven Deadly Sins are essentially classical busts from the history of art. At the same time they suggest an art-historical tradition of characteristic heads and distorted faces in much the same style as Honoré Daumier, Xavier Messerschmidt, George Grosz, and Arnulf Rainer.

The busts evoke a certain recognition that is directly undermined by the specific use of materials and the combination of detached parts and emotions of the artist. The theme is a personal representation of an emotional cleansing process in which the body assumes all kinds of positions of protest. The blue wax streams give a subtle undertone hinting at the passage of time. The message is not only a physical but also a mental one: it is a quest for stability and purity. In the new context that has thus occurred, the sculptures refer to a process, passage of time, the contrast between inside and out (feelings and exterior appearance).

The question could arise as to whether these sculptures - modelled on Quinn's own body and emotions - are only the representation of an autobiographic process of an individual artist or whether they have universal significance to the viewer due to the arousal of a recognisable emotion. A number of important works from Quinn's oeuvre provide possible answers to this question.

After creating several portrait busts, Quinn came to the conclusion that he could not designate any universal theme in this way. Because he did not know the figure in question, he could not fathom his or her true identity. This is why, from then on, he restricted his work to himself and his own body.

In 1991, he made *Self*, a cast of his own head filled with his blood, 4.5 litres of it - the amount of blood in an adult human - which was tapped from him during the period May to September. The work *You Take my Breath Away* (1992) consists of a skin, made of latex, suspended from a ceiling.



The loose shreds of latex return in the complete figures of *No Visible Means of Escape* (1996). *12.5 % Proof* dating from 1993 (Municipal Museum, Arnhem), which is a work that attracted much attention at the Sonsbeek manifestation in 1993 and also aroused much aversion, consists of a container of 'privalite' glass that becomes transparent when an electrical current is passed through it. This occurs now and again, at random, and is determined by a computer inside the container. When this happens, a human form becomes visible (Quinn's body, of course), out of which a red fluid (red wine) spurts. The outside world can gather a glimpse of what happens inside: a disconcerting scene of drunkenness.



At first sight, Marc Quinn's works have something repulsive or tend to evoke a slight shiver. This applies to both the form – shreds of skin, detached limbs – and the use of material: lead, mercury, blood, and faeces. But, on further

examination, it becomes clear that the works deal with fundamental issues. Quinn is working constantly on a message that transcends the individual point of departure (of his own body, emotions and processes of change).

Ultimately, he only uses his own body because this is what he knows best, in comparison to other impulses.

The old 'ego' is replaced by a new 'ego' in *Emotional Detox*: a kind of alchemistic process, in which the poisonous alcohol is replaced by the equally poisonous lead. Isn't everyone subject to a similar continuous process of change?