

Statements from an article by Agurtxane Urraca

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Although her training had a Western orientation in general, her most characteristic work is essentially African. In effect, although all her teachers impressed upon her that to be a good artist one needs to be in the European sphere, Quin was determined to express her "Africanism". In fact, her sojourn in Paris made her even more aware of the fact that she is not European, which differentiates her art from that of the artists of the ancient continent.

After this visit, her sculpting changed. Quin discovered something new within herself, something latent that had always been there but which had not yet developed. From then on her works reflect the vibrations of Africa more intensely. Now her works, full of energy, had a new light and demonstrated a dynamic aggression. In contrast with her earlier work, it is more robust, solid and relaxed (peaceful). Her sculptures became more abstract and later surrealistic; distinguishing them from the earlier rounded, ordered and disciplined forms. She gave vitality to her figures through the contrast of vertical, horizontal and diagonal elements. Elongated and aggressively pointed forms emanated from the anxiety (inquietude) of the artist's own emotions.

Quin's beginnings in the art world are reflected in a wide thematic and technical variety of drawings, watercolours, paintings and reliefs. Maureen Quin declares that on reflection she senses the strong influence which Mary Stainbank has had in her work as well as the influence of her teachers in London, Robert Jones and Harold Parker. She also recognizes that it was in England where she "made physical contact" with the magnificence of the sculptures of Henry Moore which mark the first abstract and figurative step in her sculpting production, leaving an everlasting echo in her work. "Like Henry Moore, nature and the human figure are sources of infinite interest for me" the artist confessed.

Maureen Quin devotes many of her sculptures to mythological themes, above all to the human figure (busts, torsos...) and to the animal world, the majority of which is true to reality and based on the observation of the object. She has sculpted a large variety of African animals which for her bear testimony to the natural beauty of her country. For example, in Pretoria she created many studies, drawings and sculptures of cheetahs, an animal species which is nearly extinct. However, this artist is better known for her semi-human/semi-animal forms, an interesting peculiarity of her work and an inexhaustible source of inspiration. Quin says that it is the emotions, tensions, soul and spirit of Africa reflected in her works which differentiate her work from that of European sculptors. She also states that she has her roots firmly planted in the landscape of her country. Having been impressed by the rock formations of the area where she grew up, her figures reflect all the vigour and power of this landscape. In this way she has combined in a singular manner her recollection of the outline of the hills with the human figure, creating forms which the sculptor considers to be particular characteristics which identify her art. Full of natural creativity, Quin seeks a way of expressing her feelings towards life and nature and a personal response towards the world in which she lives in the form of sculpture. In this way the artist has developed a particular style which reflects an obvious Western affinity with an African foundation.

As Quin matured the forms have changed progressively from the original subdued model ("Growth") to a more voluminous figure ("Sister", "The Victim"). What is particularly interesting of her more recent works, "The Hunt Series", is the interaction between slender forms and a voluminous and organic sensation, as well as an innate vitality which amazes the observer. Quin explains that her compositions appear as entities in space, combined with a certain power and tension which impregnates the sculpture with energy. She also reveals that throughout her life she has been bound to three-dimensional forms in space and the spaces which they leave behind. What also stands out is the care she shows in the creation of each work, discarding whatever she considers to be insignificant or not essential and leaving only the important part of the human figure with its correct atmosphere. Her works constitute without doubt a solid investigation of the form and the spirit of man. Figures which often appear to be deprived of matter (substance) succeed in scanning (search, survey) the horizons (limits) of time. Quin says that when she models, she "engages in dialogue" with her sculpture and so, although there had been a preconceived idea, the image, little by little, acquires its own personality until it respects this sculptor – sculpture dialogue.

The most outstanding pieces of her artistic production are without doubt the twelve bronzes of the series, "The Hunt", completed in the nineties and with which Quin had reached her maturity. It is as if she had succeeded in fusing the abstract and figurative world of Henry Moore, the surrealism of Giacometti and the worlds of Africa, all mixed with the most intimate essence of the artist herself.

The figures are half animal and half human with great extremes, slender and muscular, and appear to bear their souls on the outside. Although each sculpture is independent, they all relate to the relationship between the hunter and the hunted, at times appearing to reflect a carnal intimacy. The ideas revolve in turn to the battle and human survival. The message of this series, a sequence of heroic images, is universal: man and his self-destruction, the tragic evolution of humanity, a real psychological and moral penetration of our present world. Here man reflects the force of adrenalin in order to live the basic life, after which emerges the ego and then man discovers sin and misfortune after which appear the feelings of compassion. Finally the tragic hero succeeds in escaping from his violent and primitive nature and embraces his own humanity by way of love and sacrifice. With the heroic act of the hunt comes the killing, the loss and the feeling of guilt. Man loses his innocence, reacts and then discovers himself.

It is as if Quin seeks a way of expressing the modern anguish of her country. The artist, horrified by the inhumanity of man towards his fellow man and the uncontrolled and irresponsible destruction of the natural environment in the name of progress, of power and of ambition, has attempted to "model" this feeling. The aggression captured in these bronzes also reflects the difficult political and social situation which has confronted and still does confront South Africa. The hope which comes from religious faith is obscured by this major theme.

Quin confesses; "finding an artistic (sculpting) solution for my thinking about these problems has not been easy. I had to explore many avenues before I found a way to express the vision which I have so desperately wanted to represent in a tangible form."

In 1996 the South African poet, Robert Berold of Grahamstown, on seeing "The Hunt" declared, "This is, in its archetypal form, the most complete expression of our tormented history which I have ever seen in South African art"