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EMILY RANDOLPH

Katherine Quinn Provides Creativity Mentorship through the Anthony Quinn Foundation

Arts education, from performing to visual and literary, is severely underfunded in schools across the U.S. and worldwide. Just like sports' programs, the arts are first on the chopping block when funds are short, yet, like sports, they are an integral part of personal development. Thankfully, there are private initiatives trying to bridge the gap. One such enterprise is the Anthony Quinn Foundation, named after the legendary actor and artist, and founded by his widow Katherine Benveniste Quinn.

At the time Katherine lost Quinn in 2001, she was a young woman with two small children, Antonia and Ryan. She could have followed a different path, keeping out of the spotlight, yet she loved Quinn and wanted him to be remembered not only as a brilliant actor, but also as an accomplished and prolific artist. Given Katherine's talents as a hard working, highly organized and dedicated person, and the fact that she had worked with Quinn for over a dozen years, there was no more suitable person to step up to this formidable task.

Quinn was a complex man with a legacy that needs to be honored and preserved. On top of this, Katherine wanted his life to inspire and guide young people interested in the arts and to expand their world to new



Above: Anthony Quinn painting in his New York studio, surrounded by his works, 1987. Courtesy of the Anthony Quinn Foundation.

Left: Anthony and Katherine at their new home in Bristol, RI, 1998. Photo by Mary Ellen Mark, courtesy of the Anthony Quinn Foundation.

Opposite: Anthony sculpting while daughter Antonia watches, 1995. Courtesy of the Anthony Quinn Foundation.

opportunities. With all this in mind, Katherine created the Anthony Quinn Foundation, now celebrating its tenth anniversary, with a central mission of advocating for arts education in personal development as an integral part of the improvement of social, economic and cultural systems. It provides scholarships—129 to date—and subsequent fellowships to high school students, as well as sponsors exhibitions and creative retreats with access to Quinn's staggering private art collection—work that he collected as well as the over 5,000 pieces of his own creation. The Foundation orchestrates all this with a large team of dedicated volunteers.

Along with her determination to show the world Quinn's artistic talent, Katherine is equally driven to encourage young people in the arts as a way to flourish and have a successful life, regardless of their ultimate career choices. She wants them to have interpersonal experiences and hone their skills in the arts so that they may be better prepared for the world.

Through the Foundation, Quinn's legacy of creativity and his ability to triumph over adversity, inspires others. From an early age, Quinn faced daunting challenges. He was born during the chaos of the Mexican revolution in Chihuahua, Mexico, in 1915 in extreme poverty, living in a mere shack. As an infant, he was smuggled into El Paso, TX while hidden under a pile of coal, an experience that left him with a fear of suffocation. He was also born with a speech impediment. Later, when he was eleven, his father, a film cameraman, was run over right in front of Quinn at their family home. In addition, he endured years of prejudice. His father, Francisco, was half Irish and



half Mexican, while his mother, Manuela, was of Mexican and Native American descent. With his Irish last name and Latin American looks, he was often considered an outsider by both the Irish and the Mexicans. During the beginning of his acting career, prejudice followed him by way of the roles in which he was cast: always the villain or immigrant.

Despite these immense challenges, Quinn pursued his art as a young boy—and he found support and encouragement. He won \$100 for a bust he sculpted of Abraham Lincoln. Pivotal, in high school he won an internship for his architectural drawings with the celebrated Frank Lloyd Wright. Wright became his mentor. He advised Quinn that he would never be successful if he did not fix his speech impediment, which would require an operation. Quinn followed his advice, had the surgery and received therapy. Speech lessons graduated to acting lessons, which Quinn paid for through janitorial jobs. He found he excelled at acting and when Quinn ultimately had to choose a path—being an architect or an actor—Wright guided him to acting as the paycheck Quinn was offered was larger than Wright would pay. Quinn would make some 200 films, garner two Oscars, an Emmy and the Cecil B. DeMille Lifetime Achievement Award. Throughout his acting career, he still pursued art, sculpting and sketching in between filming and while on location.

Wright had a guiding philosophy: *A successful architect did not build to the size of man, but to the size of man's spirit.* This made a lasting impression on Quinn, and it's easy to see how he translated it to his own life. His spirit was extraordinarily large and everything that he built, from a film career to sculpture, was larger than life. Quinn eventually turned his lifelong long love of creating art as a full-time pursuit in the 1980s.

The Foundation acts as a mentor, just as Wright was for Quinn. There is a rigorous application process, according to Tom Roberts, the Foundation's Scholarship Chair (as well as author, producer and senior lecturer of history at the Rhode Island School of Design). Every applicant receives a review of their application and with careful notes of their strengths and suggestions for areas of improvement, regardless if the applicant is successful in securing a coveted scholarship. In this way, each applicant has guidance and encouragement, as opposed to a flat out rejection.

Creativity, believes Katherine, can be taught and fostered. To this end, the Foundation



The idea of the Foundation would have made Quinn smile, as he truly loved children. Katherine experienced first hand how he guided their own.

bestowed eleven scholarships this past year. Recipients range from poets to musicians. Not all recipients end up following a career in the arts, but the aim of the Foundation is to empower these young people with choices and help them think creatively and explore. It opens the world a little wider.

Notably, one recipient is now with a symphony orchestra, inspiring young people to follow in his footsteps every time he plays. Another is in medical school, deciding not to follow a career in sculpture, though he was so talented that Katherine has kept one of his pieces as a prized personal possession. Yet another student came from a small town in Wyoming and wanted to dance. The Foundation helped him secure a summer dance program placement at Juilliard. He is now in college there and on his way to becoming a professional dancer. All the stories are inspiring. All the students receive exposure to experiences they wouldn't have without the Foundation. No one knows how the course of their lives will be changed, but changed they will be.

Katherine, who is at once modest, polite and thoroughly engaging, also leads creative retreats for high schoolers at her home where Quinn's vast art collection is housed, along with his working studio. She creates a laid back but powerful experience whereby she encourages the children to pick up Quinn's tools, feel his sculptures, see the colors, study and ask questions. Her hope is that they will dream big and the Foundation can guide them to reach their goals.

The idea of the Foundation would have made Quinn smile, as he truly loved children. Katherine experienced first hand how he guided their own. For instance, Quinn collected sculptural eggs and kept them on display by their kitchen table. They were to be handled and touched. As they sat together at a meal, Quinn would have the children select an egg—just one—and they would carefully study it together. They would look at its grain, its color, feel its weight. What did the artist want to show, he would ask. And there were countless teaching opportunities throughout the day as

Quinn found beauty in everything, no matter how simple or luxurious. He was childlike in his wonderment and enthusiasm. Everything deserved respect, study and celebration. And he quite literally loved the road less travelled, preferring to cut his way through bramble than take a designated path. As Quinn himself said on the BBC television series, *Ten Who Dared*: “Most of us live our lives trying to play safe, taking few risks. As children we are used to constant challenges from other kids—the games of ‘I dare you’ that force us to find courage to expand our world. But as we get older, fewer and fewer know how to turn the game into a way of life. This knowledge is the key to daring on the highest human level—an artistic level.”

Through the Foundation, Katherine also created the Anthony Quinn Award, started in 2015 on the anniversary of what would have been Quinn’s 100th birthday. The award is given to individuals who have made a significant impact in the arts. The last award recipient was *Hamilton*’s creator, Lin-Manuel Miranda, a man very much related in spirit to Quinn and the



Left: Anthony Quinn on set while filming *Guns for San Sebastian*, 1968. Courtesy of the Anthony Quinn Foundation.

I think my grades were good, because I wanted to be allowed to be in the school play every year. The values you learn when you’re involved in creative endeavors in school apply to the rest of your life.”

Katherine Quinn loved Anthony Quinn’s complexity, his enthusiasm for life, and his staggering achievements in the arts. She is carrying on his legacy, helping young adults reach their full potential, changing lives, and in turn becoming a legend and mentor herself, even though she is surely too humble to think so herself.

Emily Rudolph is a Newport, RI artist, jewelry and fine china designer whose works are in private collections around the world.

goals of the Foundation. In a CBS *This Morning* interview, Miranda said, “I think [the arts] saved my life... it pointed me in a direction.

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