

MoMA RETROSPECTIVE EXPLORES THE AVANT-GARDE ANIMATION, CINEMA, DRAWING, AND GRAPHICS OF THE RENOWNED MOVING-IMAGE ARTISTS AND DESIGNERS THE QUAY BROTHERS

Exhibition Features Over 300 Pieces Including Never-Before-Seen Cross-Disciplinary Works and a Complete Film and Video Retrospective

Quay Brothers: On Deciphering the Pharmacist's Prescription for Lip-Reading Puppets

August 12, 2012–January 7, 2013

The Michael H. Dunn Gallery, second floor; The Museum of Modern Art's first floor; and Titus Theater Galleries

Press Preview: Tuesday, August 7, 2012, 10:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. Invitations to follow.

NEW YORK, July 12, 2012—The Museum of Modern Art presents ***Quay Brothers: On Deciphering the Pharmacist's Prescription for Lip-Reading Puppets***, the first major retrospective encompassing the full range of work by the Quay Brothers, August 12, 2012–January 7, 2013. The identical twin brothers have labored together in their London studio, Atelier Koninck, for over 30 years, creating avant-garde stop-motion puppet animation, live-action films, and graphic design that challenge easy categorization. *Quay Brothers: On Deciphering the Pharmacist's Prescription for Lip-Reading Puppets* presents the full scope of their achievements: animated and live-action films (including never-before-seen early work), puppets, décor, drawings, paintings, graphic projects, calligraphic works, and installations. The exhibition is organized by Ron Magliozzi, Associate Curator, Department of Film, The Museum of Modern Art.

As filmmakers, stage designers, and illustrators in a range of genres, the Quays have penetrated many fields of visual expression for a number of different audiences, from avant-garde cinema and opera to art for publications and television advertising. Beginning with their student films in the late 1960s, they have produced over 70 moving image works, including two feature films; music videos for Peter Gabriel, Michael Penn, 16 Horsepower, and His Name Is Alive; dance films; documentaries; and signature personal works such as *Street of Crocodiles* (1986), the *Stille Nacht* series (1988–2010), *The Comb [From the Museums of Sleep]* (1990), *Institute Benjamenta* (1995), *In Absentia* (2000), and *The Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka* (2012).

They have also designed sets and projections for opera, drama, and concert performances, including Tchaikovsky's *Mazeppa* (1991), Eugene Ionesco's *The Chairs* (Tony-nominated design, 1997), Richard Ayre's *The Cricket Recovers* (2005), and recent site-specific pieces based on the work of Béla Bartók and Kafka.

Mr. Magliozzi remarks, "The Quay Brothers' work comes from a unique personal aesthetic rooted in disguised meanings, creative accident, marginalia, and collage. Although that may seem a bit obscure at first, the Quays have actually made some wide-ranging and far-reaching

excursions into both the classics and pop culture, which museumgoers will at last have a chance to view as a whole.”

Born in 1947, Stephen and Timothy Quay were raised in Norristown, Pennsylvania, outside Philadelphia, in a rural area where they were exposed to the thriving culture of local flea markets containing the kind of dusty detritus that would become the stuff of their films. An early encounter with naturalist painter Rudolf Freund, an artist renowned for his cover illustrations for *Scientific American* and *Life Magazine*, bolstered the twins’ artistic inclinations and provided a model for the consuming work ethic they would later adopt. A selection of Freund’s influential work, including his assignments for *Scientific American* and his art for Time-Life, will be on view, highlighting this previously unrecognized influence on the Quay’s art.

In 1965, at the age of 18, the Quay Brothers began seven years of study to become illustrators, graduating from the Philadelphia College of Art (PCA) in 1969, and London’s Royal College of Art (RCA) in 1972. While at PCA the twins happened upon an exhibition of Polish posters, and they were instantly attracted to the radical designs and the foreign world of European opera, drama, music, and cinema that they revealed. This was their introduction to the visual language and European subjects they would quickly adopt, and also, through the influence of vanguard European cinema by the likes of Luis Buñuel and Walerian Borowczyk, to the medium of film. During their last year at PCA, the twins won their first professional job, the design of an album cover for the American rock band Blood, Sweat, and Tears. Unfortunately their original version, featuring the group standing headless in a field, was altered by Columbia Records with the hasty re-addition of the band members’ heads—both versions of the cover are on view in the exhibition.

Returning to the United States in 1973, the Quay Brothers spent six years creating illustration work, including art for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and filler for *The New York Times’* music review; book covers for American suspense and science-fiction novels; and gothic drawings of surgery and cattle mutilation for Hugh Hefner’s men’s magazines. Their most prestigious assignment during this period was for the Anthony Burgess novel *A Clockwork Testament or Enderby’s End* (1975), which featured a dozen black-and-white drawings of the title character in stages of disintegration. Their most sustained projects of this period were a series of covers for the Dutch and British editions of the works of authors Louis-Ferdinand Céline and Italo Calvino, featuring variations on the figurative “extinct anatomies” and *noir* graphics that would surface most expressively in their films.

Throughout this period of sporadic work and frustrated ambition, the twins experimented with graphics and nurtured their growing enthusiasm for avant-garde drama and music through hypothetical designs for posters, books, and record albums that they admired. Notable among these were gymnastic autoerotica for *Mishima* (1971); tortured anatomy studies for *Ul Abnormalna* (c. 1981); several *Enzyklopedie der Modernen Kriminalistik* credited to obscure 19th-century criminologists; and faux theater posters for the work of German language playwrights,

such as Thomas Bernhard's *Der Ignorant und der Wahnsinnige* (c. 1981), Peter Handke's *Kaspar* (c. 1980), Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *Die Physiker* (c. 1981), and Hartmut Lange's *Hundprozess* (c. 1980).

In the 1970s the Quay Brothers created their most important work on paper with a series of more than a dozen pieces in pencil called The Black Drawings, through which they created an ur-text that served to define the visual palette of their future moving image work. Titled with obscure references to French wines, electroshock, sports, Holocaust history, Franz Kafka, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, and their own travels in Europe, the drawings are *noir* set pieces, each with the requisite blend of angst, sex, and violence. The twins' earliest puppet films, *Nocturna Artificialia: Those Who Desire Without End* (1979) and the Kafka adaptation *Ein Brudermord* (1980), came directly from these works. The Black Drawings mark the point at which the twins were ready to step away from illustration to film and begin to establish themselves as the poets of gesture and alienation they have remained, in every medium they have touched, in subsequent years.

In the 1980s graphic art became a sidebar for the Quays, as they gradually turned to filmmaking full time—though they brought to the moving image visual motifs they initially explored on paper. The elegant line and lettering of calligraphy is an enduring element in their work in all mediums. On film, it is celebrated in *The Calligrapher* (1991), memorialized in *In Absentia*, and figures significantly in their set design for *The Cabinet of Jan Švankmajer* (1984), *This Unnameable Little Broom* (1985), *Rehearsals for Extinct Anatomies* (1987), and the music video *Long Way Down* (1992). The practice of calligraphy extends to movement in their films as well, where it translates to the choreographic quality of the camera and mise-en-scène for dancers in the ballet films *Duet* (1999) and *The Sandman* (2000), to the choreographed decapitation of the hero in their film *Street of Crocodiles* (1986), to the uncanny *pas de deux* of mannequin and rabbit in *Stille Nacht II: Are We Still Married?* (1992), and to the dance-like direction of their actors in the features *Institute Benjamenta* and *The Piano Tuner of Earthquakes* (2005).

Their signature style, a mix of stop-motion, live-action, and graphic effects combined with sensual emotional content and intellectually stimulating subjects, has found expression in diverse genres: arts programming for British television (*Igor, the Paris Years Chez Pleyel*, 1982; *Leos Janáček: Intimate Excursions*, 1983); museum documentaries (*The Phantom Museum*, 2003; *Through the Weeping Glass*, 2011); adaptations of Swiss writer Robert Walser (*Institute Benjamenta*) and Jewish author Bruno Schulz (*Street of Crocodiles*); expressionistic melodrama (*In Absentia*; *The Piano Tuner of Earthquakes*); dance films; horror-themed pieces (*Rehearsals for Extinct Anatomies*, 1987) and science fiction (*Maska*, 2010).

As they have previously done for classical and avant-garde drama, opera, and site-specific performance, the Quay Brothers continue to adapt their aesthetic to new mediums. In recent years they have replicated their visionary environments for gallery display in the form of miniature décor boxes, called *Dormitorium* (2006), and as peephole installations, such as *Coffin of a*

Servant's Journey (2007), which are on view on the Museum's first floor and in the Titus Theater Galleries.

SPONSORSHIP:

Major support for the exhibition is provided by MoMA's Wallis Annenberg Fund for Innovation in Contemporary Art through the Annenberg Foundation.

FILM RETROSPECTIVE:

An accompanying film exhibition, *Lip-Reading Puppets: The Curators' Prescription for Deciphering the Quay Brothers*, runs August 9, 2012–January 7, 2013, in The Celeste Bartos Theater.

Presented in conjunction with the gallery exhibition, this complete retrospective of the Quay Brothers' film and video works was organized to encourage an appreciation of their versatility across a range of moving-image genres. This series of twice-monthly screenings includes shorts, dance films, documentaries, music videos, commercial spots, and their two feature films. The series opens with screenings of MoMA's new 35mm print of the Quay Brothers' first feature, *Institute Benjamenta* (1995), a luminous black-and-white adaptation of the novel *Jakob von Gunten*, by Swiss writer Robert Walser, one of the literary outsiders whose work has been a major inspiration for the Quay Brothers. This exhibition is organized by Ron Magliozzi, Associate Curator, Department of Film, The Museum of Modern Art.

PUBLICATION:

A publication accompanying the exhibition surveys the range of the Quay Brothers' art, from little-known moving image pieces to works on paper, including graphic design, drawings, typography, and notebooks for films. Essays by Ron Magliozzi and Edwin Carels examine the Quay Brothers' history and practice, and two new projects by the Quay Brothers in the form of text and images provide insight into their working process. Paperback. 8 x 10"; 64 pp.; 60 ills. 978-0-87070-843-5. \$24.95. August

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For downloadable high-resolution images, register at MoMA.org/press.

Public Information:

The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019, (212) 708-9400

Hours: Wednesday through Monday, 10:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m. Friday, 10:30 a.m.–8:00 p.m. Closed Tuesday

SUMMER HOURS June 26–SEPTEMBER 25: Listed above.

Museum Admission: \$25 adults; \$18 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$14 full-time students with current I.D. Free, members and children 16 and under. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs). Target Free Friday Nights 4:00–8:00 p.m.

Film Admission: \$12 adults; \$8 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D. \$10 full-time students with current I.D. (For admittance to film programs only)

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