

## Quinn's legacy in arts lives on

Anthony Quinn Foundation works to preserve the late actor's vision for an art-conscious society — and helps young artists realize their dreams through scholarships



*Kathy Quinn poses with one of her late husband's many sculptures that fill a large shed on the family's Bristol estate.*

BRISTOL — Anthony Quinn didn't believe in repeating himself. The bigger-than-life actor and artist, who lived out his final years in Bristol, was always looking for something new to discover.

That credo even applied to the East Bay Bike Path.

"He didn't like to ride his bicycle both ways — out and in," said his widow, Kathy Quinn, at the family estate on Poppasquash Point last week. "He'd ride anywhere — the road or the bike path — and then call for (the housekeeper) to come pick us up. He didn't want to be bored doing the same thing twice."

Mr. Quinn was always afraid of becoming a caricature of himself — someone who won an Oscar and then rested on his laurels, she said. "He could have gone around doing 'Zorba (the Greek)' impersonations the rest of his life. But he always wanted to say something new, do something new."

And so he did. When he started getting typecast in movies as an ethnic thug in the late-'40s, he moved his family from Los Angeles to New York and "learned to act," said Mrs. Quinn. His career quickly turned around. Later in life he took on a new challenge when he started sculpting in his mid-'50s.

"He dared himself constantly to take risks. He loved being around kids because of that," she said. "He loved their fearlessness, he loved their daring."

And now those kids will reap the benefits. Mrs. Quinn started the Anthony Quinn Foundation in an ongoing effort to support arts education and to honor the legacy of her late husband, who died in 2001 at 86 (Friday, June 3, is the 10-year anniversary of his death). The Foundation held its inaugural award reception at the Rhode Island State House in March, giving out about \$20,000 in scholarships to six high school students.

"It's not something he established in his lifetime and it's not necessarily about Anthony Quinn," said Mrs. Quinn. "It's just his life as an inspiration — his curiosity, his passion, his dedication. It would be tragic for that to not be remembered by passing it on to other kids."

The nonprofit Foundation maintains that art is essential to learning and creative thinking. "There are so many studies done on how the arts help, how kids work through problems of self confidence with critical thinking skills. It's not even something that's questioned anymore," said Mrs. Quinn, who was heavily influenced by Daniel Pink's "A Whole New Mind." The book convinced her that America is falling behind in its nurturing of creative thinkers — and that slashing funding for the arts in our schools is shortsighted.

"That's why we became so great — a nation of inventors and innovators — and if the arts is left out of schools then that's going to go by the wayside," said Mrs. Quinn. "I took my kids out of Bristol schools for that reason." (The couple's two children — Antonia, 17, and Ryan, 14 — transferred to Wheeler School. Antonia is now at Tabor Academy in Marion, Mass., while Ryan attends Providence County Day.)

Money through the scholarships is raised through donations, grants and fundraisers, such as one planned this summer at the Bristol estate which will be attended by Mr. Quinn's old friend, Bill Cosby. Mrs. Quinn's staff is small — just her and Executive Director Benjamin Bergenholtz, plus an advisory board — but the Foundation's goal is to expand every year in hopes of reaching more kids throughout the country.

"I have to start small," she said. "You can't change the world overnight, but you can do it one kid at a time."

## Art fills every space

The sprawling property, with its several barns and sheds, provided Mr. Quinn with the space he needed for storage and to work. One shed is full of his larger paintings and sculptures — including a glowering, 10x10-foot self-portrait he was still working on when he died. Much of the portrait was spray-painted, which baffled local art suppliers when he was buying materials to work with. “Art for him was really playful,” said Mrs. Quinn.

Although there are many actors who paint or sculpt, Mr. Quinn’s work was taken seriously by many art critics. In 1978 or ’79, a gallery owner from Hawaii showed interest in his work, which Mr. Quinn had been creating just for himself to hang on his walls. “The first show was in Hawaii in 1981 and they sold everything,” said Mrs. Quinn.



*Anthony Quinn was still working on the self-portrait on the far wall of this shed when he died in 2001 at 86.*

The works are steeped in the influence of 20th-century artists such as Picasso and Rodin, but also African and Indian art. Mrs. Quinn said she needs to “edit” down the works into a core collection that travels to museums, but stays with the family forever. Mr. Quinn’s art doesn’t belong to the Foundation but to the family trust, which is also managed by Mrs. Quinn.

On occasion she’ll host a school art class to tour the property for inspiration. “I love kids coming in here to touch. I don’t let them climb on the sculptures, but he wanted to have his art work touched,” said Mrs. Quinn, who recalled the time a blind woman came to her husband’s first exhibition.

“She came up to him and said, ‘Mr. Quinn, I just want to tell you that I felt every one of your sculptures. You really understand the inside of people.’ He was speechless.”

## Treasured his books

More original art can be found in a nearby workshop, which also includes a large portion of his book collection — about 10,000 volumes and heavy on art. Mrs. Quinn is trying to find an East Coast home where the public can access the books as a collection. She’s grateful to Roger Williams University, which provided her with three archivists who categorized the entire collection.

“The collection is important as a whole. It’s not as important when you start taking things apart. As a whole, it tells the story of his life,” she said, noting that Mr. Quinn treasured his books and considered it an insult when a borrowed volume wasn’t returned to him.

Taking in all the books, sculptures, paintings, “found art” and drawings that fill the estate — the Foundation is working to digitize for online use over a thousand sketches Mr. Quinn left behind — one might wonder how a man of his advanced age was able to fit it all in.

“He managed his time so well,” said Mrs. Quinn, adding that her husband was good at delegating, managing things in his head and multitasking. A photo on a wall inside the home illustrates her point: It shows Mr. Quinn simultaneously talking to his agent, writing a script and having his face painted white by a very young Antonia.



*Kathy Quinn laughs while showing the script to the first play her late husband, Anthony Quinn, took part in when he was 17 or 18. Even at that young age, he was changing lines.*

## Loved Poppasquash, Bristol

But he did slow down enough to enjoy his surroundings. Everyone who comes to the estate calls it a “magical” place, said Mrs. Quinn, and her husband thought Poppasquash was paradise. He loved walking the beach, the bike path and Colt State Park — even if he made a few detours along the way.

“We were in Colt State Park one day and he said, ‘I wonder if we could get back to Poppasquash through the woods?’ We went down Clam Shell Road and we cut across. There wasn’t a path, but we made a path,” said Mrs. Quinn, adding that her husband insisted they return the following day with rose clippers to cut through the bramble.

But then he would come back and get to work again. Another painting had to be made, another sculpture had to be molded, and he never stopped challenging himself creatively. Before he died he told Kathy that she should always grow, always change.

“His mantra was as you get older, you stop being daring. You do what you think you’re supposed to do. If Anthony Quinn didn’t do something every day of his life to further his talent — keep those notes, sketch those drawings — he wouldn’t have been where he was. He was sketching and studying when he was 86 years old,” said Mrs. Quinn, who doesn’t draw a distinction between her late husband’s acting or artistic ability.

“I don’t think one could have happened without the other,” she said, adding that Mr. Quinn’s zeal for creative expression opened doors for him throughout his life.



*A family photograph of Anthony Quinn working on one of his sculptures. “I never met anybody half his age who had that kind of energy and creative curiosity,” said Kathy Quinn.*



*One of Anthony Quinn’s many sculptures inside a workshop. The Anthony Quinn Foundation is looking to find a home for the late actor’s book collection, which numbers about 10,000 volumes.*

The Foundation wants to help more kids do the same. She points to her son, Ryan, who’s good with poetry and taught himself several different musical instruments.

“When he’s in a mood he sits down and it’s his way of making himself feel better. Everyone should have that in their life. So many people don’t live out their desires to play an instrument or paint, even if it’s just a hobby,” she said.

“You need that creative side to help the rest of you flourish.”

*For more about the Anthony Quinn Foundation and its scholarship program, visit [www.anthonyquinnfoundation.org](http://www.anthonyquinnfoundation.org).*