

Marc Quinn & Gerry Fox

'I went to see him in his studio and there were pots of blood boiling away on stoves'

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PHOTOGRAPH BY EVA VERMANDEL

Gerry Fox 43

is a Bafta award-winning documentary maker best known for his films about contemporary artists. Originally from South Africa, he studied visual arts at Harvard. He lives in London with his baby daughter Frankie

Back in 1998, I went with my then-girlfriend to a dinner at Marc's house and it was stuffed full of people such as Brian Eno and Malcolm McLaren. It made a particular impression on me because Marc is my age. So here was this guy, my contemporary, who was friends with all these extraordinary people.

We didn't talk much at that party, but at the time I was working for *The South Bank Show*, and when Melvyn Bragg asked me to produce four films about artists, I immediately thought Marc would be a great subject. The film we made became quite legendary

because in it Marc makes a sculpture of a head out of his own faeces and the film follows the entire process, from when he sits on the toilet to the finished artwork. I remember going to visit him in his studio to see this enormous smelly thing taking shape and there were pots of blood bubbling away on stoves; I was blown away by how weird Marc's whole world was.

It was over dinner in Milan one night that our friendship was really cemented. I was sitting there eating when suddenly I felt a terrible stabbing pain in my abdomen. Marc noticed that I had gone this horrific green colour and called an ambulance immediately. Then he came with me to the hospital and sorted out everything with the staff, who didn't speak any English. It turned out that I had renal colic, which in terms of pain is the closest a man can experience to labour. It was agony and there was nothing I could do except wait for the stones to pass.

It was then that I realised Marc is not only a gifted artist but also a wonderfully good-hearted person. I've made friends with him in a way you do quite rarely later in life. I've been making documentaries about artists for the past 20 years and during that time Marc is the only really firm friend I've made. He is always really supportive and it's great to bounce ideas off him. He's one of those people who looks after his friends and is always buying their work.

We share the same sense of humour and can gossip like a couple of girls. I think Marc likes the fact that he can call me

Painful memory: Fox's friendship with Quinn (left) was sealed when the artist called an ambulance for him after a night out in Milan



when he wants and be as rude as he wants. We both have small children now, and we go on holiday together quite often with our families – we've been to Egypt and earlier this year we went to Ibiza. He asked me to be godfather to his son, which I think is the greatest privilege.

Marc Quinn 44

is a sculptor best known for Allison Lapper Pregnant, the statue occupying the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square. He lives in London and has two children

The first thing I noticed about Gerry was that he'd painted his toenails purple. He used to wander around in flip-flops and I thought, "Wow, this is a different kind of TV producer." Gerry is very cultured, yet wears it very lightly. You can have a lot of silly fun with him but you can also have a great conversation with him about art and culture; he's very knowledgeable.

We go away with each other quite a lot and he's a great person to play jokes on

because he's so good-natured, he never takes anything badly. Once when we were in Italy I got the lady in charge of the hotel to ring Gerry and tell him there weren't enough rooms and that we were going to have to share a single room together. He was clearly horrified at the thought of sharing a single bed with me and believed it all the way to the hotel. He plays tricks on me, too. We talk a lot – about once a week, or sometimes more, depending on how busy we are; and we do love to gossip.

This summer we went to Ibiza together. Gerry went wild – he went out to DC10, the nightclub, and all sorts of places. He's much more of a raver than I am. These days I like to be in bed by 3am at the latest; Gerry was out all night with the teenagers.

Now he's got a baby and he's taken to family life really well. It's quite funny watching him go through the whole thing. There's not much advice you can give someone about having a child for the first time – I just find it quite amusing to watch the reality of it dawn on him.

There's nothing about Gerry I would change, but sometimes I can find myself getting a bit annoyed with him because he doesn't stand up for himself; other people sometimes take advantage of his good nature. I also think he undervalues himself.

When we made our film, not only was Gerry a good and easy person to work with, he had a lot of very good ideas. We did some weird things in our film, such as filming babies swimming underwater – he was totally open to experimentation. That's why I think it's really good that he's made the transition to becoming an artist himself. He's always made great films about other artists but actually he's got great artistic feeling – it's about time he made something himself rather than documenting other people. ■

Gerry Fox, *Living London* is at 176 (www.projectsace176.com) from 31 January until 20 April. Marc Quinn is at *White Cube* (www.whitecube.com) from 24 January until 23 February