

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Richard Corliss, 'Why Steve McQueen Is One of the TIME 100', TIME, April 24, 2014



With his outsider art films, culminating in *12 Years a Slave* he forced viewers into a new way of seeing, and feeling, the body and soul in extreme distress

To a half-century of moviegoers and TV fans, the name Steve McQueen meant a terse cowboy with squinty blue eyes. He starred in *The Magnificent Seven* and *Bullitt*, loved racing motorcycles and fast cars and died of cancer at 50, in 1980.

Then, in 2008, came *Hunger*, the spare, scalding film biography of IRA volunteer Bobby Sands, who starved himself to death in protest against his British captors. Festival and art-house audiences took admiring notice of the fiercely disciplined central performance by Michael Fassbender, and of the film's director, an Englishman of Grenadian descent. Viewers had to do a little brain shift and realize he had the same name as the old movie star. Now there was a new Steve McQueen. *That* Steve McQueen.

The record is mute on whether *our* Steve McQueen, growing up in the London suburb of Ealing, experienced any recriminations, advantages or confusion over the coincidence of names. But he did have challenges in pursuing his calling. At 13, dyslectic and wearing a patch over his amblyopic "lazy eye," he was shunted into a class for manual laborers. Securing a spot at NYU's film school, which had trained Martin Scorsese, Oliver Stone, Joel Coen, Vince Gilligan, Ang Lee, Spike Lee and many other worthies, McQueen got reprimanded by his professors — "They wouldn't let you throw the camera up in the air," he recalled — and soon split. Even after he won acclaim as a visual artist, his father kept urging him to get a proper job.

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All his life, McQueen, 44, has been teaching his teachers — and as a filmmaker his audiences — to see his dark, stark, sensuous vision of humanity. That artistic persistence paid off two months ago, when, with *12 Years a Slave*, he became the first black director to win the Oscar for Best Picture. What's more impressive is that he achieved mainstream acclaim while working boldly and resolutely in the backwater of high culture's visual arts.

He first attracted attention with his 10-min. silent film *Bear* (1993), in which he and another nude black man circle each other with menacing or erotic intent. The 1995 *Five Easy Pieces* shows a woman walking across a tightrope — in his words, “the perfect image of a combination of vulnerability and strength.” *Deadpan* (1997) reconstructs the famous scene from Buster Keaton's *Steamboat Bill Jr.*: the façade of a house falls on a man who isn't hurt because an upper-story window is open. These studies of the body in motion or at rest earned McQueen the Turner Prize, Britain's most prominent art award, for the “poetry and clarity of his vision, the range of his work, its emotional intensity and economy of means.” This was 1999, and he was 30.

<http://time.com/75524/steve-mcqueen-time-100/>