

TRANSCRIPT
ONOMATOPOEIA

Van der Plas Gallery: Street Art on the Lower East Side

[TAPE] [What would you say to people who say that graffiti is not art?](#)

ADRIAN VAN DER PLAS: Well, a lot of it isn't art, you know, it is mostly an expression, you know, and again, out of hundreds of 1000s of people, there's just a handful, which can really create something of an aesthetic or of a meaningful expression.

SARAH THOMAS OXTOBY And Adrian Van der Plas has gotten pretty good at figuring out who those people are.

ST: I'm Sarah Thomas Oxtoby, and this is Onomatopoeia- a podcast about the people and places of New York City. In this episode, the Van der Plas Art Gallery on the Lower East Side.

ST: Van Der Plas,

as he goes by, stands somewhere around just under six feet, has welcoming eyes and a kind smile. He has on a business shirt, jeans, and Birkenstock sandals, with black socks on.

He has a vibe.

He is originally from Austria.

AV: I'm not so familiar with art back then. And now I'm, of course, deeply into the art business.

ST: Van der Plas started in the restaurant business.

[TAPE] [In New York, in Woodstock. Adrian's restaurant, that was in the early 80s. I got sort of disenchanted. Is that the right word? I was kind of done with the trade, and I was looking for something new. The first thing that came to mind was art.](#)

ST: At first, Van der Plas sold commercial art - the kind of stuff from well-known artists who are household names.

ST: That's back when he had a gallery in Gramercy Square. He was there for 23 years.

[TAPE] [AV: I was not really happy, being driven to create art for the tourists.](#)

ST: And then Hurricane Sandy hit....

[TAPE] [AV: I lost everything.](#)

ST: That's when Van der Plas relocated his gallery to the Lower East Side, and created a space dedicated solely to street artists. He is drawn to the way they utilize disposed materials they find around the city, and turn it into artwork.

[TAPE] [AV: The city becomes their Canvas.](#)

JASON MCLEAN: I don't think there's any rules. I think you know, in some ways, you stand out. You do something different, you know.

ST: That's Jason McLean. He's a Canadian street artist. He's currently exhibiting at the Van der Plas Gallery. Taken directly from the Van der Plas website, Mclean's exhibit, called "As seen on TV," "references familial interactions, economic situations, and mental health, remarking on the refined freedom that comes with pondering the phenomena of time and mortality."

[TAPE] [ST: What would you say to people who say that graffiti is not art?](#)

JM: Yeah, like, like my mom. Yes it's true. My mom doesn't like graffiti. And I was trying to defend it to her the other day.

JM: I mean, not like, I'm totally open to anything as graffiti, but I think there's different aspects of, like, who's been at a place and who's visited something and come back, it's like, it's like a message board in some ways.

[TAPE] [ST: Okay, so we're outside the gallery now. Is there something Van der Plas is drawn to, something he can point out and just talk about?](#)

AV: Well, Jason mentioned to me, and I almost painted over, is this writing here. "That was Then, This is Now," it was written.

AV: And it's signed by Pesoneto. I have no clue but Jason already knows that this is an important artist.

ST: It looks like a painted on piece of paper. Ripped out of a notebook. And glued on the wall.

AV: Keep it simple, you know?

ST: This episode of Onomatopoeia- was created by me, Sarah Thomas Oxtoby. Onomatopoeia is a production of the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. Joanne Faryon is our executive producer and professor. Original theme music by Lee Feldman. Other music by Blue Dot Sessions. Our graphic was designed by Sunni Bean. Special thanks to Columbia Digital Librarian Michelle Wilson.