

Life

Behind the scenes of the Tagging Along street art walking tour

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TORONTO STAR / KEITH BEATY

Alley off McCaul St. (north of Dundas St. W., south of Baldwin St.), two pieces by “Chuck,” part of the 9Lives crew: Pascal Paquette, left, said graffiti crews are a lot like traditional art collectives. “It’s very much like a Group of Seven,” he said. The crews usually share similar styles and subject interests while bringing something of their own personal artistry into the mix.

By: Jennifer Pagliaro Staff Reporter, Published on Thu Mar 22 2012

“That’s new,” says Toronto-based artist [Sean Martindale](#), stopping in the middle of our tour

He points the graffiti speech bubble and letters spelling “Love is stronger than fear” in black paint, tucked in a back alley off McCaul St. north of Dundas.

It’s one of many surprises in the undiscovered crooks and crannies of our communities, more visible now that spring has sprung, uncovered with the help of tour guides Martindale and fellow artist [Pascal Paquette](#).

The pair has been expertly guiding Torontonians on the *Tagging Along* street art walking tour in conjunction with their collaborative [NOW](#) series, now on at the AGO.

PHOTOS: [Street art in the city](#)

Together, the pair points out all kinds of back-alley artistry, such as commissioned murals in Chinatown, or the right-under-our-noses variety, like the word “Hope” inset and painted red on a telephone pole where layers of staples have been removed.

Sometimes, works pop up over night along the tour route, where Martindale and Paquette are

discovering them for the first time, too.

The two said there are still lots of misconceptions about graffiti in Rob Ford's Toronto: that it's all vandalism, that it's a symbol of gangs in the neighbourhood or that it can't be considered art.

"The big part of it all is to reclaim your alleys," Paquette said. They want people to embrace the graffiti and street art in their backyards by learning to understand it — who put it there and why?

"I think that's the magic, just demystifying this whole thing," Martindale said.

While graffiti often lives in juxtaposition with the environment — bright-coloured murals and tags jumping off blank, brick wall canvases — street art can be many things, like a well-placed sticker or statue that blends into a streetscape, drawing meaning from placement or interaction with the space.

As someone who's learned to interact creatively with his environment — like turning pasted posters into "urban planters" to add a little green anywhere — Martindale said it's nice to be surprised by found art.

"I love seeing those small little unexpected interactions," he said.

And as the weather warms up, discovering outdoor works of art is another reason to enjoy your neighbourhood — or someone else's.

"We can play a more active role in our communities," Martindale said.

You can join the Tagging Along tour for free on March 24 from 2 to 4 p.m., leaving from the Young Gallery at the northeast corner of the AGO.

Parkdale

There's a laneway just south of Queen St. W. and Cowan Ave. (it becomes Milky Way). Take it going east all the way to Dufferin.

Queen West

Take Sudbury St. from Queen St. W. (where it was recently extended across from The Gladstone) and head south-east. Look to your right (south) on the noise wall by the train tracks.

North of Dupont

There's a neat freight train viewing spot at the very end of Primrose Ave. Also check out the south façade of #2 Primrose Ave. where there are interesting graffiti pieces.

The "Keele Wall"

A landmark in the north/west. From the corner of Bloor St. W. and Indian Rd., head north and turn in the parking lot behind the Pet Value and Midas.

East

One of the best spot in the east is the [Evergreen Brick Works](#) (550 Bayview Ave.). Head there and look inside the heritage section of the complex.