



Lower East Side gallery showcases artist's lively collection of obituaries and more

By Bob Krasner, *The Villager*

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Adrian Dannatt welcomes the world (by appointment, please) to a personally guided tour of a selection from his art collection at the Miguel Abreu Gallery.

Adrian Dannatt began his career as an actor, well known in his teens in his native England, and has persevered in New York City as a collector — but of more than just art.

As a writer of obituaries — many gathered in print in the just-published compendium “Doomed and Famous” — Dannatt has established himself as a collector of lives. While the author notes the passing of personages both famed and forgotten (if they were ever known at all), he presents all with equal weight and possibly favors the ones he calls “the truly marginal, utterly obscure, mad, bad and definitely worrying.”

“Doomed and Famous” is also the title of an exhibit based on the book that’s on display through March 4 at the Miguel Abreu Gallery, at 36 Orchard St. on the Lower East Side.

With a style that packs more into a sentence than others manage on an entire page (and requires occasional visits to the dictionary), Dannatt deftly reveals not just the details of his subjects' lives but their uniqueness as well.



Adrian Dannatt in the window of the Miguel Abreu Gallery, holding a bust of himself by Karen Caldicott. His book, "Doomed and Famous" is seen in the foreground.

Dannatt knew many of the subjects in the obituaries — but don't bother looking for superstars in the index, as Ultra Violet is the closest to a celebrity obit as you will get.

Artists of note are featured, but what seemingly ties Dannatt's choices together is that these are people who have all made art out of their lives, intentionally or not.

Models, artists, composers, drug addicts, thieves and lawyers find themselves side-by-side for eternity in these pages, having created a lifelong piece of performance art that Dannatt found worthy of committing to history.

Alongside this ephemeral collection, Dannatt has been collecting more solid forms of art, which he has brought up from his Brooklyn basement to the Miguel Abreu Gallery to be shown for the first time.

After writing about art for many years and curating shows for others, and collecting it for longer than that, Dannatt is so delighted to be sharing his collection that he has made himself available to give personal tours of the show (by reservation with the gallery) , which is the only way that you will get into the locked basement that houses an annex to the main floor.



Adrian Dannatt in discussing items in the vitrine, including a book of poetry by Dorothea Tanning inscribed personally to Dannatt.



Adrian Dannatt proclaiming the merits of his book with potential clients.

Being a man whose affinity for conversation matches his love of the written word, you can count on enjoying an anecdote about pretty much any artwork that you choose. Although the show does not include the first piece of art he ever bought — a small Roman head purchased for two shillings at age 11 — it does feature an etching from 1640 and runs the gamut from British Pop Art to New York No Wave to Graffiti Art. It also includes a publication that he refers to as his “my favorite lesbian revolutionary separatist white women publication.”

Rare drawings by Richard Prince and Damien Hirst hang across from French newspapers that feature Picasso's custom art. Incidentally, those are in the grouping of artists who all share the initials "P.P."

Not one to ignore the realities of the art world, Dannatt notes that art can be "rare, but valueless."

He continues, "I love that something that was thrown away can be worth millions. It's interesting that you can assemble a collection for very little money. Not many of the pieces in this show were bought in galleries."

Perhaps one can ponder the value of art while viewing Siobhan Liddell's "Thread."

"It cost 50¢ when I bought one in 1992," Dannatt explains. "We are selling it for 75¢ now. It's a piece of string, hung from the ceiling. You provide the string. We don't give you a certificate of authenticity. Basically, you give us 75¢."



Adrian Dannatt in full tour mode, explaining that the work "Slices" by Richard Smith has only been exhibited once before, at the Guggenheim in 1964.

Dannatt is something of a conundrum, a man whose wardrobe consists only of vintage garments — frequently purchased at thrift stores — but is well-versed in the world of modern art. One does not have to worry about your tour being interrupted by his cell phone, as he does not own one, but he is reachable via email.

Although Dannatt, 57, has no immediate plans to exit this world, he concludes his written collection with his own obituary – which he is quite satisfied with – although his adult children thought he was too hard on himself.

While he has penned his own obit, Dannatt has yet to reveal his epitaph. We humbly suggest that he consider something that he said while musing on his youthful days of stardom, when he was chased down the street by fans eager for his autograph.

“I am,” he stated, “still awaiting my return to the limelight.”



Adrian Dannatt in front of the “Salon Style Wall – a decidedly eclectic arrangement of works from various periods”.