

Welcome to the third episode of OUTPUT Gallery's podcast. We started with an origin story, followed by an artist interview with Joseph Cotgrave, but if you missed that or any of those, all you need to know is that OUTPUT Gallery is a small space in Liverpool City Centre that opened in April 2018. OUTPUT Gallery works exclusively with creatives from or based in Merseyside, it has a high turnover of exhibitions and it aims to support its art scene and raise the profile of local artists. My name is Gabrielle de la Puente, and I run the space. I've started a podcast series in response to lockdown and this weird time where lockdown has lifted but not that many people are going to exhibitions and events. As such this podcast series is an attempt to allow people to engage with exhibitions and artist's ideas from afar. We still want you to get to know the artists we work with, and so going forward, we will be publishing interviews with artists on their work, their show at OUTPUT, behind the scenes processes and inspirations, and their experience of being part of our local art scene. So in this episode we are joined by Lo Tierney. Tierney is a freelance illustrator from and based in Liverpool whose work often takes the subject of intersectional activism, supporting different communities in LGBTQ+ and disabled rights. So, just to start off, because it's what I've been asking everyone - how are you, and how has lockdown been on your end?

I think for me, lockdown has been a little bit mixed. I've always realised that because I'm a massive extrovert, a lot of the way that I network is interactive, in real life, with people. So lockdown has been a challenge for me in that sense. But at the same time, I've been lucky, because I've been able to go to my day job and that's totally helped keep me sane. If I was stuck in me house I'd be going off me rocker.

A lot of people have been – it's been a lot to handle, hasn't it. But you've still been able to go in and out of the house.

Yeah pretty much, and I've been making my artwork at home, so I just got all my stuff from my studio, and I've got a big room upstairs. I live with three lads and we've got the attic room, so because it's quite a big room, I done a little makeshift studio space and made all my work there. It turned out pretty well, actually.

Have you found it quite productive?

Yeah, I think I wasn't quite as productive for the past month or so, but I'm getting back into it again, it's really nice.

I think there has been a lot of pressure on people to just- to make brand new work now that they've got this space and time and focus, but it's been hard for people. Mentally, financially...

Yeah, I've been alright financially, sometimes it's more mentally. Like, I just want to go out and see people. But then because my day job, I work with vulnerable people, I know I've got to be safe. So it's one of them where I want to see my mates but at the same time I want to be safe. Even today, I've had a few mates phone me and they're like, Lo, what are you doing for your birthday? And I'm like- uh... I'd say I'm doing a little picnic but knowing me, about 60 of me mates would arrive at once and I'd be on para, yeah. So I thought I'll just invite ten of my closest mates so I'm not as para.

We should mention on this podcast that it is your birthday, so happy birthday! One thing that I've been asking people is, what has your relationship been like with art and creativity, from the start? Were you creative when you were younger?

Yeah, so I remember when I was little, I used to love the Biff and Chip books as a kid. It inspired me to draw my own little story, it's funny actually. Because we were learning about Africa in school, I done this story called Kate Goes To Africa. It was just about this little girl called Kate and her family going to Africa and seeing all this culture. But it was one of them where like, that kicked off something in me, because I really love drawing. So I've always really been into it since I was a young kid. I never knew it was something you could actually get paid for until I was about 16 myself, because I didn't know what I wanted to do when I finished school and college. But because I done A-level graphics, our tutor invited a local illustrator in, before we were due to break up for Christmas. And the illustrator was Laura Kate Chapman, and she was showing us all of her work and she was telling us what life was like as a freelance illustrator, and I just remember turning round to me best mate and going ahh, I want to be an illustrator! So I've pretty much stuck at it, and that was 11 years ago, you know what I mean?

So what did she say the life of an illustrator was going to be like?

I think the thing that really got my attention was when she said you could be your own boss. I thought ooh, I like that. I'm not saying this in an unprofessional way but I hate being told what to do so I love being my own boss, in that regard. Do you know what I mean?

I'm exactly the same, I love being self employed. So then - the conversation you heard from her, and maybe the graphics teacher as well, did that make it more comfortable when you went on to do BA illustration? You did it at John Moore's University, is that right?

Yeah, it was a really funny story actually, because my first year was actually spent in Manchester Met. So, yeah, it was funny because I was going to go to Preston originally, but my foundation tutor was like - go to Manchester instead, it's got more art galleries, it's more cultural. So I thought alright, so I went to Man Met for my first year to do illustration and animation. But I felt like the course wasn't really for me, so I ended up getting in touch with the HR people at Uni and I went eeyar, I'm not really enjoying me course. Is there any chance that I can transfer to John Moore's Uni and do me last two years there? And they were really helpful so I was able to move back home and go to John Moore's and do the last two years there. It was quite interesting, it was one of them where I think like, if anyone could learn anything from that it's just to make sure you know what Uni you're going to - you've got to research it.

It's hard to know, though. Even as much as you read once you are on the course you can never quite... it's always going to be different.

That's true.

So what were you making when you were on your BA?

It's mad actually, I only really got my style - the one I've got now - when I was doing my final project, in my final year. I used to draw in black and white all the time using fine-liner pens. The project that I was doing, my tutor looked at it and went, oh that's good but try making your drawings a bit more fluid and try using paint pens. And I thought ooh I've got some paint pens in the house. That's literally how I developed my style - it's proper mad. If it wasn't for that, I don't know where I would have gone with my illustration if he didn't give me that advice. So yeah, it's proper mad, I used to draw with outlines and everything and if you see my work now I hardly even use any outlines. It's mad.

That's true, isn't it.

It's mad, I see it going from strength to strength every day. So it's like, I'm building a style that I can look at and actually be proud of.

Yeahhh. Do you ever just - I feel like I'm skipping ahead a bit - even now, do you break out of that style?

Ooh, occasionally. I don't really do it so much with my client work but I'll experiment a bit with my personal work. Sometimes I'll do like regular fine line drawings, especially if I get ideas for tattoos I want to get, I'll sketch out tattoo ideas. Literally since lockdown I've been like ah, I've only got two tattoos but I want to get more. I got my last one in January and I thought back then, yeah, that's alright, that's me done for a while. Now I want to get more added on, so I'll do the odd sketch of what tattoos I want to get, just because it's fun. I love playing with collage as well, with my personal work because I think, if I put images together in a surreal way, then that gives me inspiration of what kind of surrealistic artwork I can draw then. Before the activism work, I was doing more surrealistic work. It's inspired by Eileen Agar, Leonora Carrington, a little bit of Salvador Dali but I prefer the women surrealists better.

You mentioned it briefly, but what was your final project like in University?

There was a film that I loved, when I was around 18 or 19, and it was this Czechoslovakian film called Daisies. It's about these two women, and they're in this male-dominated society, but it's one of those quirky arty films. It doesn't really have a plot to it, you just follow these two women causing all these mad pranks and getting old rich man to buy them nice food and everything. But it's- I don't know how to explain it, visually it's such a gorgeous film, because the director Věra Chytilová incorporated collage and... have you ever been watching something and it's like a 3D effect with red this side, blue this side?

I know what you mean.

It had that effect as well and I love that because I think it's so Tumblr. I just love the whole Tumblr aesthetic even though it's all ten years old. I thought - how can I translate Daisies in with my style, make it modern, for my final project in Uni? I ended up making one of those little concertina books, and I done illustrations of different quotes from the film. There's not really that much dialogue but when there is dialogue it's like, "why do people say I love you? Why can't people just say, egg?" it's dead random and I absolutely love it. My tutor was like, grab a few quotes and illustrate them and we'll do a little concertina book and a few prints and stuff. And I was like yeah, go 'ead then. That's when I started playing around with Posca pens, because that's what I usually use. I was just playing around with them and I thought yeah, I really enjoy these. I was a little bit intimidated by them at first because they weren't fine-liners but as soon as I got into them I was like yeah, what fine-liners? Don't know them!

It's quite a jump isn't it. So after University, what was the transition like from student to freelancer? How did that go?

You know what, I was so lucky, right. A few months before I finished Uni, me and my friend went into this little art cafe called The Atrium, and that was later known as the Court Room cafe, but what happened there - they used to have drawing sessions on, because my mate had work up in the Atrium she went, ahh Lo, let's come to the Atrium, it's so much better than the Tate! Agreed... haha. It was really nice because it was dead chill, the woman running the session was lovely and I ended up making mates with a woman called Kirsten, we just got on really well. So fast-forward, after I finished Uni, she inboxed me and went hey Lo, I've got a studio space in Victoria Street and we're looking for new people, are you interested in coming in and checking it out? And I thought yeah, alright then. But at the time because I was skint, I didn't have a job or nothing, I thought I'll just go and have a look to be polite. But I remember going in and falling in love with the whole place instantly. I thought, I don't care if I go in my overdraft, this is an investment. I was really lucky because I just finished Uni, joined the studio, and even though at first I was a little bit apprehensive of having a studio because I had no projects, the guy

that ran the studio, Tony, said why don't you try and build up a portfolio and extend what you've got? So I'm like, alright then yeah, so I started doing that and then I think because there was loads of people in the studio, I had mutual friends that'd come in, more and more people got to know my work then. So it meant that I was able to build up a client base, even though I was starting out.

That's ideal.

I wouldn't have known where I'd have been if it wasn't for that studio. Because I think having a studio space gave me that focus to carry on with my art and my creativity and stuff. It's something I love doing, I enjoy it, it's a bonus that I'm getting paid or it.

It's ideal I think - a lot of people miss out on that social support when they leave a University course. You moved to Road and got to continue it, with people who are quite experienced and a little bit older. So that must have been a plus.

Oh, so good. It was really nice as well because I was the baby of the group. Everyone was older and had more experience so it was like they were mentoring me, to get the best out of me. I honestly think that's helped so much. From being in the studio I got to know so many different people where I've got jobs through word of mouth, that's how I ended up working with the Whitechapel Centre doing workshops, that's how I managed to get into freelancing... just thinking of another example, that's how I ended up doing the artwork at the Walker Art Gallery, you know the coming out exhibition? One of the staff at the Walker actually knew one of the people through the art studio, so when there was an exhibition on, she came on and said oh Lo I love your gay cards, can you do something like that for our exhibition? Because we all had a bit to drink I thought she'll probably forget tomorrow. And then a few weeks after she inboxed and went, are you still interested? And I went, oh go on, yeah! I was like, oh my god, it's actually serious! I got straight into work and as soon as the preview was on for the Coming Out exhibition I remember finishing my day job, I was cleaning at the time - sweaty, un-glamorous, thinking this preview is not going to be a big thing - I go in there and there's loads of posh people around, everyone's round in the foyer, I'm there like oh my god, I should have done my make-up! I thought like, this is a big thing, and I'm part of it. I never expected that to happen. It was such a beautiful little experience as well, I think that experience inspired me to start veering more into activism than into surrealist work.

That makes sense. Let's go backwards a little bit, you said a lot there that I think people listening might not be familiar with. So the Coming Out exhibition, it was in 2017 I think? It opened around the time of Liverpool Pride in the Walker Art Gallery which is one of the major spaces in the city, a little more on the traditional side. So for them to do an exhibition like this was quite interesting. It was celebrating 50 years since male homosexuality was decriminalised, and you did work as a part of that. So what was the work you did?

How it all started - I done these LGBT themed cards, because as a queer person myself, I go into shops and see all cards aimed at straight people. I thought, I can't be doing with that. I designed these cards saying like, Gay Is OK, Trans & Proud, NB Is Lovely - for non-binary - and I did 7 different designs and put them up on my Etsy. Because I was promoting it, the Walker must have come across it and thought - that's boss, that! So they said to me, the designs I had, instead of doing them as cards can you print them out as A3 prints for us so we can have them hung up in the workshop area in the gallery? And I was like yeah go 'ead, that's sound that, so I had that up and they said can you do black and white versions that we can use as colouring in sheets? And I was like, go on then! So I done that and then once I done that they were like, can you run workshops for us, as well? And I said, of course! I really loved it because all the staff was dead nice, it was just a really lovely chilled out vibe. It was nice running the workshops and getting to know loads of different people, as well. I remember some dude,

specifically, he's from here but he lived in Greece. He came back to Liverpool for a week and he heard that this workshop was going on and he was an artist as well, so he was making all these really interesting collages. Getting the colouring in sheets, cutting out the letters and really playing around with it. It's just things like that, it's why I love being an artist. I get to meet so many different people and I'm a sociable outgoing person anyway, so it's right up my street.

That's perfect. I know a few artists who aren't though, and a lot of galleries nowadays are expecting you to do workshops as a part of your exhibition or your inclusion in a group exhibition, and I think a lot of people struggle with it. But it's nice to hear that it fits well into your practice and your personality as well.

Yeah, it's mad because I get a lot of people saying that to me. They'll look at my artwork, and they'll go - I've never seen an artist whose artwork matches their personality so well. I know what they mean, it's really colourful and I love being colourful. I think that's a really nice thing for people to say, I feel like I don't have to talk all the time. Sometimes if I just want a little break I'll be like, I've got some artwork here, and let the artwork do the talking.

One of the projects you also worked on is Spectrum, which is a project that was in existence before it came to OUTPUT, the collection of work you decided to exhibit. Can you tell us a bit about that?

I got the idea early last year because I thought, I've done loads of activism on feminism and LGBT issues and I always thought, as an autistic person, I was thinking how have I not done work about celebrating autism yet? So I think what I wanted to do, I wanted to make it a little community thing. So I put a status up on Facebook and said, hey guys, I've got this idea for an exhibition, it's about celebrating autism and celebrating everyone because every person with autism is different than the other. We're literally not the same at all. If that was the case, I'd be boss at maths, do you know what I mean? I'm dead socially awkward and stuff. What I wanted to do, I put it up on the facey and went, if anyone here is autistic and wants a portrait drawing of them to be part of this exhibition, send's a DM. So I think 18 of me mates inboxed me and said, I'll have a go, so I said, alright, sound. I said send us a reference photo so I can get your face on point because I'm a massive perfectionist when it comes to portraits. But at the same time, send us a bit of writing about your experiences of autism and the stereotype that you look at and think, oh that's a bit outdated. Just to get everyone's perspective and stuff, because how I see autism is - it's not a bad thing, it just means that you get to see the world different. So, I wanted to see how all my mates and all my peers saw the world with their own eyes.

(background noise)

I think this might be me maccies, hang on a minute...

Don't worry at all. For any listeners - because it's Lo's birthday they have ordered a maccies breakfast and have been expecting it to come at any moment. So as you were saying - the people you got the reference photos off also sent a bit of writing?

They sent a little bit of info just talking about their experiences of autism. So I said to them, mention the worst thing about autism first, and mention what stereotypes do your head in, and then end it on a happy note and say what's the best thing about being autistic. Because it's one of them, we do get discriminated an awful lot, but there's so many good things about being autistic. Personally I love the fact that I'm creative, I love the fact that I'm a bit eccentric to be honest as well. Even the other aspects of being autistic, with executive function, like being organised and stuff, I tend to struggle with that more than I struggle with socialising. But it's one of them where I think OK, I struggle with this so I'm going to

try and work around it, so I'm not stressing myself out all the time. It wasn't about spreading the word about autism, it was more promoting acceptance. As if to say - we're here, and we're just as sound as youse, innit?

Even though you say it wasn't to spread awareness, personally when I saw the exhibition and I could read the paragraphs from each of the portrait subjects, I learnt so much from it that I was like - oh, I didn't realise that was a part of being autistic. I think even just by nature of having an exhibition it was quite successful in doing that as well, just as a bonus.

I was dead nervous doing my first solo show because I'd never had any experience of curating whatsoever. So it was one of them where I was like, trust your gut, just put them up. I was asking you wasn't I like, what should I do with these? And you were like-

It's interesting, every artist that I work with goes about it in a different way. So sometimes artists are like, very much just the artists, and they don't really have an idea of how they want it to be in the space. I've had artists before drop their work off and be like - I'll see you at the opening. Because they're like, you can deal with it. Not in an offhand, lazy way or anything, but just for them it's not as important. They're like OK, that's your job, you can deal with it. Then I've got other artists who want to come into the space, be left alone, they'll do everything and I might be there once or twice just to show them where the drill is. With other artists it's a little more collaborative, or like you I think, who took time to think about what would work best. You drew out a plan if you remember, which was really helpful, and then because of Coronavirus we were able to install it early and carefully, I painted bits and you did bits and it worked out well. If people haven't been to the show, or they haven't seen any pictures and this podcast is the first time they're hearing about it, how would you describe the exhibition? What did you end up doing with the space?

What I done, I ended up drawing 18 portraits overall, of each of my mates who's got autism, as if to say - there's this massive spectrum of us, no two autistic people are the same. And then, as well, what I really wanted to do was include an interactive piece. So I did two big massive boxes, and one of the boxes said - how do you cope with your autism? And the other box said, what makes a good autism ally? So I'd love it if people saw that and thought, I'll write an answer down and put it on the wall. I'm hoping that if I get enough responses, I want to start illustrating a little zine about what everyone says and illustrate their experiences. It gives me more excuse to draw doesn't it!

Definitely. So some of those answers to the questions came in through the internet as well because unfortunately, a few days after your show opened, lockdown started! So technically I think you have had the longest OUTPUT exhibition, just by nature of it existing over all this time. It's kind of funny - OUTPUT is known for such a high turnover of exhibitions and sometimes they're like 12 days long, or 18 days long, and yours has been on since March, and it's the end of July.

I didn't even think that until you mentioned it to me, I was like, oh yeah! How cool is that!

It's just funny. What do you think makes a good ally, then? For anyone listening?

I'd say what makes a good ally is just being respectful of autistic people and don't invalidate their experiences. What I mean by that is like, say if there's a loud noise, it doesn't seem that loud to everyone else - I've got somewhere where there's been a loud noise and I'm like, bleeding' ell that's loud, that. And all my mates turn round going, it's not that loud Lo, behave! And I'm like well, it's loud for me, I'm autistic! I've got sensory overload! So that's what I mean when I say like, there's a lot of things

that autistic people struggle with that are subtle. For me it's my executive function and when people don't have that understanding they just tend to brush me off, like, I'm disorganised or I'm stupid. It's not the case, they're just things I tend to struggle with more than socialising. In my old day jobs when I have struggled with my executive function, I've had other co-workers not be that understanding towards me. And I get frustrated and it's like - I'm just as frustrated as you guys! It does kind of suck, but I think that's why stuff like Spectrum is so important. So people that might not have autism might go in and learn a bit, you know what I mean? But also learn that acceptance, as if to say, autistic people aren't that different to the rest of us.

There was a good twitter thread the other day from someone who had just taken the time to describe what it had felt like for her, if there was a loud noise, for example. I think she said she was about to get out of bed and a pneumatic drill started to go outside, and it really jarred her to the point where she couldn't even text her boyfriend to come up and close the window. Something I learned from that thread is that it affected her into the next day, as well. I know this is going to be different for everyone but the next day she felt she was still quite disorganised because of the effect of what had happened the day before. For me, I didn't realise something could last that long.

Yeah. I get like that sometimes but I don't even realise it's because of the sensory overload. I'll feel a little bit burned out... I'll get in like a weird mood and I'll think, why am I in a weird mood? I've had a good day. And then I'll think back and I'm like oh, it must be because I had that sensory overload, it's had a weird little knock-on effect. Where I'm not my usual bubbly self. But you'll have to send me that twitter thread, I'd like to see that.

Bringing it back to the whole remit of the gallery as something that only works with people from or based in Merseyside, what has your experience been like of the Liverpool art scene? How have you found it?

It's mixed, in my opinion. I think there could be a lot more, it's not that big, which is a shame, because it's boss. I do love it. I do think with Liverpool... you've got London haven't you, and London's like, the trendy art capital. I do like it don't get me wrong. There's something about Liverpool, it just does its own thing. We don't really follow trends. I see a lot of other LGBT artists and they're dead brave to call out massive organisations that should know better, and I think yeah - Liverpool's got that fire and isn't scared to just be itself. That's all the artists as well, you know what I mean? I think the art scene that we do have is small but it is nice and I really like it. They've welcome me with open arms so I'm not complaining!

That's true, you've had a show at the Walker, a solo at OUTPUT gallery...

Never thought I'd end up having work in the Walker so I'm like, nice one, thanks lads!

I think partly through the art scene as well, you are part of Artists Against Rampant Transphobia as well? How has that been.

I feel quite bad actually because I haven't been able to catch up on it that much, I think it's more the other members that are more involved in it. I do want to get back into it though because I love everyone in the group, and I love what they all stand for, because while I'm not trans I've got a bunch of mates that are trans. I'm non-binary myself, so it's something that- it does mean a lot to me.

I think, for me, it fits quite well in what maybe your practice is moving towards, as applying art to activism and social groups. For people's well-being and empowerment. It makes sense that you would be a key part of that group.

When you said empowerment, I feel like that's what I want my work to be summed up as - empowerment. Especially because I, myself, have been discriminated for my autism, my sexuality, I've been discriminated for looking too femme, and it's one of them that's like - well actually, I don't have to put up with this. I think because I know how horrible it is to be discriminated I want people to look at my work and feel empowered. I want them to look at it and be inspired to open up and stand up for themselves, that's so important.

Definitely. Maybe a good way to end then, would be to ask, have you made anything new in lockdown? Or what are you hoping to work on next?

Ooh, very interesting! I've just done loads of sketches throughout lockdown. I made a few new prints, I had a personal favourite. Me and my mates had this conversation about the pandemic and how it all came about. I said, wasn't it the bat soup? And he said apparently bat soup in China is what rich people end up eating, because it is seen as a delicacy. So anyone who is working class in China don't really have it. Me mate Kyle was telling me that all these rich people was eating the bat soup and then jetting off to different places. He was going, do you know what they remind me of, the rich people? And I went, what? He went, they all remind me of the rats that spread the plague. And I was like oh my god, you've just give me an idea for an art piece! He went what do you mean, and I went, I'm going to draw rich people are rats. So I drew Richard Branson as a rat, with Rich People Are Rats, and sold it as prints. A few people have bought it and I'm like, get in there! And then the art studio that I'm at, we had this little Zoom session, it was drink and draw and we ended up talking about Danny DeVito. We were all fuming that he wasn't in Detective Pikachu. So I ended up drawing Danny DeVito as Pikachu and I wrote Danny DeVitochu, I was so proud of that as well. What else... I've been a little bit excited about trying some things I've never tried before. I have a friend called Peter and he's so creative, he's been doing loads of lino prints, he's been making loads of drawings and paintings. He said to me that he got fabric paint and what he wants to do is decorate his clothes, jackets, shoes. And I'm thinking ooh, I want to do that! I put a status up last month saying, does anyone want their jackets decorating? Me mate from Birmingham inboxed me and said he'd bought himself a new jacket, so if I sent it to you would you paint it for me and I'll give you dough for it? I was like, go 'ead! If you've got lockdown, I'm going to use lockdown to see how well I can do other things, on fabric and stuff. I love fashion, and I thought it just makes sense to combine them both.

Totally makes sense! Fab. I hope you have a lovely birthday. Thank you for speaking to us today. The next episode that will follow on from yours is the next exhibitor, so it will be an interview with Chila Kumari Singh Burman, and we'll go on from there. So these have been our catch-up episodes of everyone who has already exhibited. We have so many more to record in the future, getting to know different artists. My hope is to speak to all the artists who have shown since 2018 and have this archive of all the different artists who have exhibited at OUTPUT and all these different conversations.

I've had mates who have exhibited at OUTPUT and I'd love to see what they end up talking about, it's so exciting!

That's the plan! So thank you so much, thank you for listening. Where can people find you?

My instagram is @lotierneyart, it used to be loistierney93 but I thought - I had a bit of a name change, because I thought Lo just sounds cooler. So it's @lotierneyart on instagram, Facebook and twitter.

And then you can find OUTPUT Gallery at [@outputgallery](#) on instagram and twitter, and [outputgallery.com](#). If anyone's got any questions send me an email on output@thekazimier.co.uk. Bye for now!