



Michael McLeer of Brooklyn Made Tattoo, with his new work

TODD MAISEL/DAILY NEWS

vintage Brooklyn

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The grapes may be from France, but this year's Beaujolais Nouveau was bottled with Brooklyn pride.

The wine is released just once a year, primarily by French producer Georges Duboeuf, and the 2011 vintage's label was created by Bay Ridge graffiti artist Michael McLeer, who also goes by the name Kaves.

It's the first time Beaujolais Nouveau, which goes on sale every third Thursday of November, has selected a street artist to design its bottle.

"We wanted to expose people to the celebration of Nouveau and capture the wine's essence, and the energy and unique perspective of Kaves' art seemed to be an ideal vehicle," says Franck Duboeuf, Georges' son and co-proprietor of Les Vins Georges Duboeuf.

McLeer's drawing of a vibrant street corner located between Live and Love Sts. was inspired by his upbringing in Bay Ridge.

A fourth-generation Brooklynite, McLeer still lives in the neighborhood — his four kids even go to the same school he attended — and runs the Brooklyn Made Tattoo shop on 93rd St.

"I'm known as a tattoo artist for doing beautiful neighborhood landscapes and I come up with these surreal streets with lampposts, fire escapes and storefronts," he says. "It brings you back home to your roots and your childhood. We would sit on the corner and congregate and drink some vino."

Bay Ridge tattoo artist designs label for 2011 Beaujolais Nouveau

McLeer, 42, got his start in street art as a teen. He made his way around New York City tagging subway tunnels and was featured in writer Henry Chalfant's collection "Spraycan Art" in 1987.

Even today, fans visiting from as far away as Japan will hop on the R train to visit his tattoo shop.

The 2½-year-old store embodies McLeer's "old soul" spirit. Its walls are filled with memorabilia, including black-and-white family photos and his grandfather's pipes. A jukebox containing his parents' favorite vinyl records sit by the door.

"My grandmother would always tell me these stories about how they danced around Bay Ridge and made music at Woolworth's. I always thought she was famous because she had a record, but she made it at a five-and-dime store."

Like his grandmother, McLeer has also dabbled in music. In the late '80s, he and his brother Adam formed hip-hop/punk band the Lordz of Brooklyn.

Their first single, "Saturday Nite Fever," paid tribute to the John Travolta film that catapulted Bay Ridge to big-screen fame and was later featured on an

episode of "Beavis and Butt-head" and indie film "Gravesend."

"We were alienated coming from this neighborhood because we were so far into Brooklyn and it was always stereotyped as being segregated. I felt like we could be famous or heard if we made art, made music and told our story."

McLeer believes that experimenting with different forms of art is the best way to get his message out there.

"I work in a lot of different mediums and a lot of people say, 'Kaves, you don't want to be a jack of all trades and master of none.' I find that ridiculous."

Most recently, McLeer has taken up filmmaking. Last year, he directed "Shoemaker," a short film with Burt Young, Peter Greene and Bree Michael Warner that was inspired by events at his uncle's shoe shop in the '60s.

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Bottles of the 2011 Beaujolais Nouveau are available at local wine and liquor stores at a suggested retail price of \$10.

"Telling a story as an artist, whether I'm doing it with a spray can or acting, it's still the same thing to me," he explains. "I look at myself more as a Renaissance man. They were actors. They were inventors. They were sculptors. It was just such an interesting life to live."

In January, McLeer is heading to California, where he'll take part in an art exhibition curated by Metallica. He and a small group of artists were personally chosen by the rock group to create paintings based on their lyrics.

While he's out West, McLeer hopes to audition for a role on another big Brooklyn production: "Boardwalk Empire."

"I was made for that show. I've been wearing this hat for 20 years."

Until then, McLeer will be enjoying the holiday season — and plenty of vino — with his family.

"I take my kids and wife up to Pinegrove dude ranch and we do a country Thanksgiving. They get to see horses," he laughs.

"I used to see horses when my father would take me to the track. That was very Brooklyn. This is different, but it's a way to slow it down and celebrate life."