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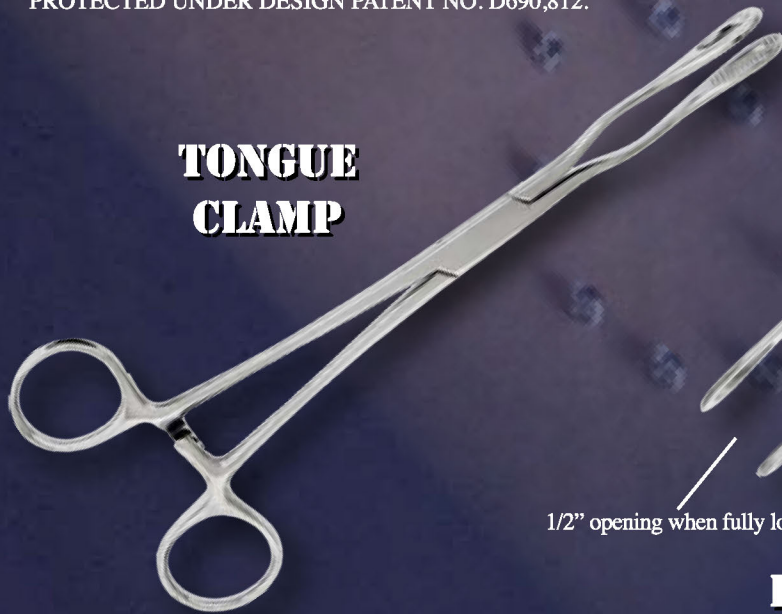
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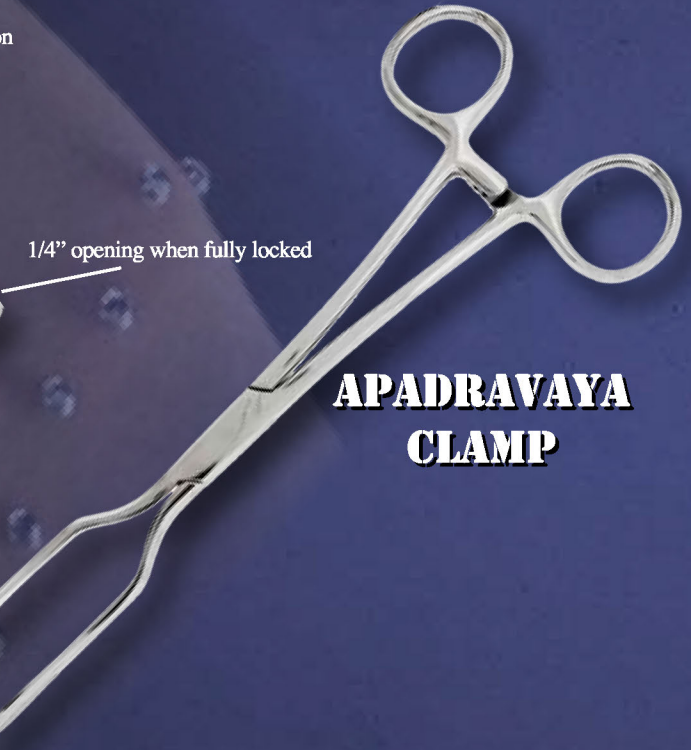
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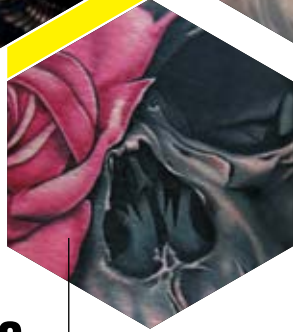
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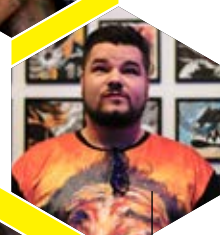
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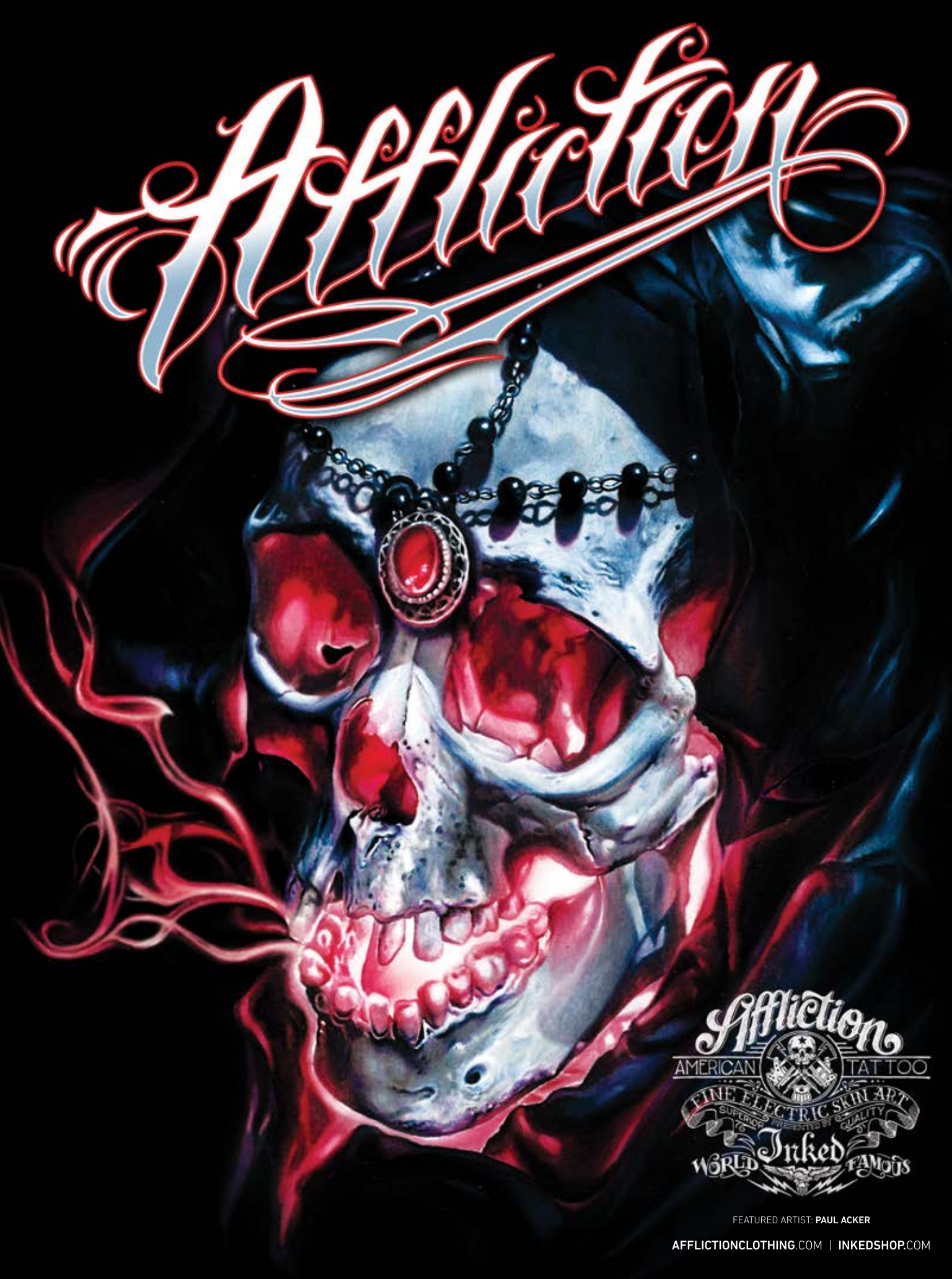
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When did you start tattooing? 2004.

How did you get into tattooing? My older sister was planning to get her first tattoo. During her tattoo I sat on the couch just staring at all of these different images thinking that someone did these, realizing that it wasn't just someone, there was a huge collection of art from tons of artists. I then thought to myself, "I want to do this." Already having art as my number one hobby, I went home and was motivated to refine my drawing skills. A few weeks later I eagerly returned to that shop and requested a job. I was 15, so that didn't work out. But I got some wise advice not to give up and keep working on my art. One year later I returned to get my first tattoo with a portfolio in an attempt to showcase my potential. I was offered an apprenticeship. It was the coolest fucking thing in the world.

What is the overall environment at Kustom Kulture? I would have to say a whole lot of fun; I freaking love my job! I own the shop with my boyfriend and we have put together an amazing crew, including my sister. It's definitely a comfortable environment, lots of laughs...lots.

What brought you to work in black and grey? I like the look of black and grey tattoos; it's clean and classic. I think it ages great and always looks timeless.

When do you find yourself using color? I think each tattoo has the potential to either be better in black and grey or be better in color; it all depends on the project.

How do you see the black and grey scene evolving? To be honest, I'm not really sure; I just want to do a better tattoo each time and not get too comfortable. It's good to have a niche, but it's better to always push past your expectations and constantly work on improvement. That's the best kind of evolution I can think of.

What other media do you work with? Lately, I have been focused on putting all of my energy into tattooing. I've done some acrylic paintings and airbrushing over the years and dabbled in clay sculpting, charcoal, and oil pastels, but now, when I have time, I love to draw with graphite. When it comes to tattoo projects, Photoshop is my go to.

How have you branched out from tattooing? I have taken art to a more serious level because of tattooing. It's no longer just for shits and giggles, although I do a ton of that anyway. [Laughs] Tattooing has opened up so many opportunities to travel for conventions. I have recently had the honor of joining the FK IRONS pro team. This was a huge goal and I can't be more excited about it. I just intend to really keep

leaving my tattoo fingerprint all over and hope to inspire fellow artists as they inspire me!

What tattoo artists do you admire the most? Niki Norberg, Ralf Nonweiler, Domantas Parvainis, Sergio Sanchez, Carlos Torres, Stefano Alcantara and there's too many! I might just have to do some sort of global scale mind control takeover and absorb all that talent!

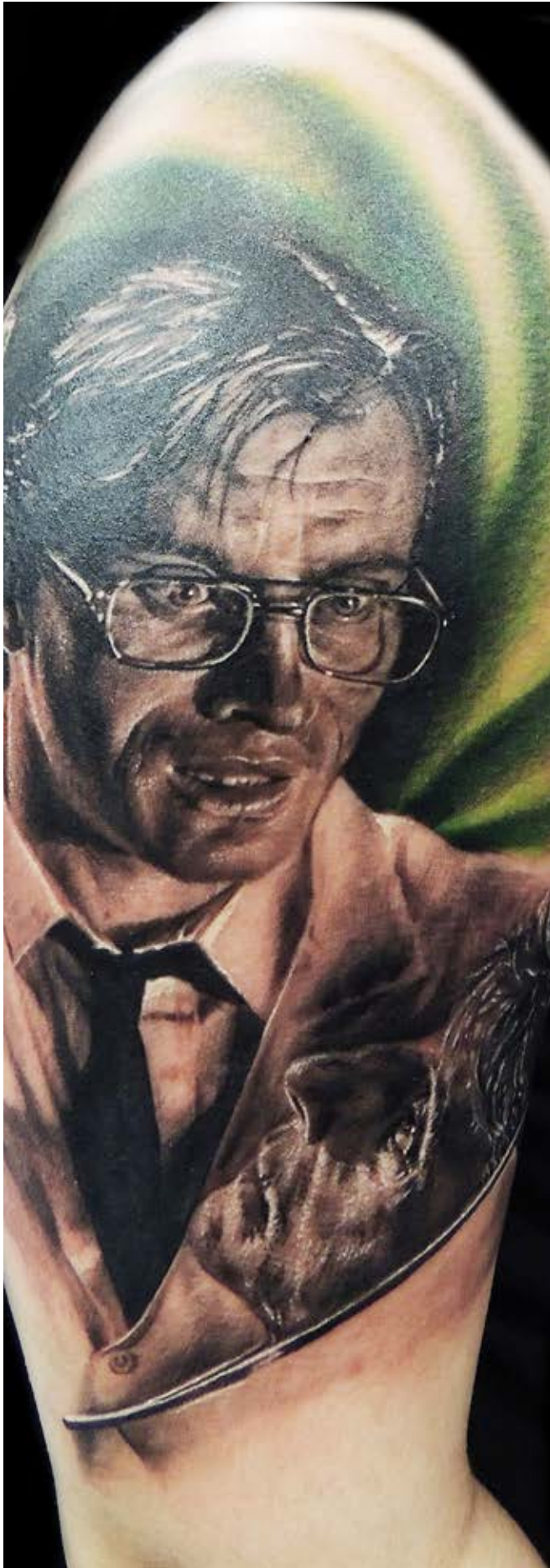
What kind of tattoos do you look forward to doing? I look forward to doing some fucking groovy black and grey realism projects; I love doing big portraits, or any realism on a large scale! It's crazy fun!

Before someone gets a tattoo what advice do you give them? For realism, a quality reference photo is mandatory and crucial, for portraits of a family member or pet as well. No phone pictures. I said no! And for famous people or characters or general ideas, I think it's best to let the artist choose the photo references; it will result in a better tattoo and a better layout. Trust your artist.

Is there a tattoo you haven't done yet that you are dying to do? There are plenty! The amount of possibilities is endless. I would love to do a James Bond themed sleeve; there are so many awesome characters and cool action scenes and babes that it would make for a killer montage.









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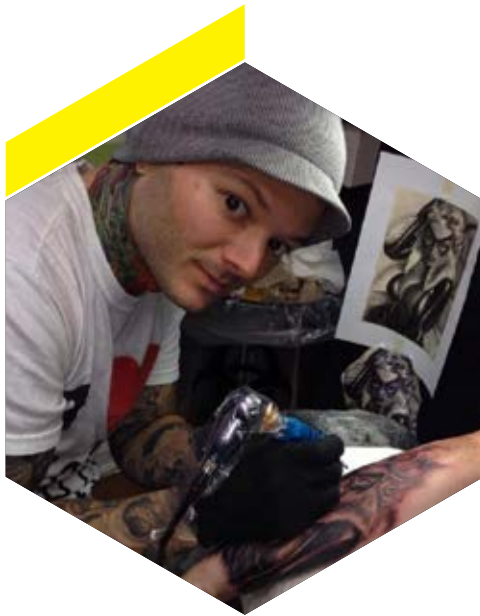
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What year did you start tattooing? I've been tattooing a little over five years now.

What was your first shop experience like? I apprenticed at a street shop that focused on cheap tattoos at high volume. The shop was near a military base and survived by tattooing all the soldiers. I look back and cringe at some of the practices that went on there, but I learned a lot in that first year, even if some of it was what not to do.

What is the tattoo scene like in Maryland? It's a mixed bag. We've got a lot of talent in our area, and that can be really inspiring. Halo (of *Ink Master* fame,) and Casey Anderson are both phenomenal artists and they are both in pretty close proximity. Unfortunately, Maryland has some pretty lax regulations regarding tattooing, so you see some stuff that makes you cringe for quality and safety reasons. Being near Baltimore, we see the whole spectrum of clients at my studio and I think that's really important. Obviously, everyone loves the large format work and the clients that sign on for a 15-hour masterpiece, but having a healthy amount of walk-ins for script and jammers keeps you sharp and keeps you humble.

What led you to work primarily in color? I just like all the options that color gives you. Different palettes can really change the mood of a piece and you can do so much with texture.

When do you find yourself working in black and grey? I'm always down to do a black and grey piece. It's all about what the client wants and what serves the piece best. Black and grey can be a lot less forgiving and forces you to really focus on the strength of your image and your light values.

What are some of the major subject matters you like to tattoo? I'm mostly known for realism and abstract work. I love tattooing dark and horror related stuff. I really enjoy doing animal portraits and I'm very into bio-organic.

What inspires you as an artist? Other artists inspire me a lot. The boundaries of what is possible in tattooing are being broken and redefined all the time. Starting out, I really looked up to Joshua Carlton; his work had a definite influence on my own style. I also admire the work of Paul Booth and Guy Aitchison. Inspiration comes from outside the industry all of the time from a variety of places.

What sets you apart from other artists? I could give some touchy-feely answer about the nature of my art, but really the main thing that starts to set an artist apart is their work ethic. I'm not afraid to say that I bust my ass doing what I do. If I'm not tattooing, I'm drawing or doing research; I'm painting; I'm taking a class. I, personally, don't think that there is any substitute for a good work ethic if you're looking to excel.

What other media do you work in? I love to paint and work mostly in oil media, but occasionally will use acrylics. I've started to get into digital painting as well.

How have you branched out from tattooing? Not far beyond my painting and owning a studio. However, I have a lot of things that I want to do and will as the time becomes right. I think it's important to think big and go for the gold.

Before someone gets a tattoo what advice do you give them? It's important to do research and find the best artist for what they want. Most of all, speak up! It's going to be on you for a long, long time and I wouldn't rely on the artist reading your mind.











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SARAH MILLER

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How long ago did you start tattooing? I started in 2006 while I was in college. I was a broke sophomore and one of my classmates was a tattoo artist-Ashley Claypool. She convinced me to start tattooing and took me under her wing. And the rest is history!

Do you have any special training?

I have a Bachelors of Science in graphic design from the Art Institute of Pittsburgh. I always took extra classes and I never stopped my education, even after graduating.

What conventions have you done recently or are planning to do this year? What conventions haven't I done?

Some interesting conventions this year include shows like Philadelphia, Milan, and Frankfurt, where I was invited to attend several other conventions overseas, such as the Amsterdam show in Holland, and Barcelona, Spain. Playing it more close to home, I've been to the Washington DC Expo, United Ink in Long Island, and the Asheville Tattoo Expo in North Carolina. The upcoming shows I will be doing include the Ink Life Tour in El Paso; Westchester, NY; Tattoo Voodoo in New Orleans; Steel City with Shane O'Neill Productions; and Hell City Phoenix to name a few.

You were a contestant on *Ink Master*. How was the experience overall?

Overall I would say it was very positive, and at the time, very grueling. I could compare it to a boot camp for

artists. We didn't have much down time and I was introduced to a lot of new media for art that I normally would not have picked up. It's made me take a step back and really be critical of my own work, more so than before, so that every tattoo I do I try to do better than the last.

What led you to work in realism? I've always been drawn to more realistic art, especially the painters in the Neo-Classical movement in 1800s France. The Romantic period and the Art Nouveau period also captured my attention before I even knew I would start tattooing. From my first tattoo to now, I've wanted to take what I loved about those periods of art, and apply them to what I work on today.

What other media do you work in? In the past, I've worked with a lot of different media: oils, acrylic, and digital. Going into this year, I'm challenging myself even more by branching out into comic books. I just started my own comic book company and our first title is *The Valkyrie's Wode*. I've always been drawn to mythology, in particular, Norse, Greek, and Asian. The story is something that I've been working on with my fiancé for over two years, and it's finally coming to fruition. I have a group of amazing artists that are helping make this dream a reality--I'll be co-penciling the comic book and doing all the color myself.

Do you approach portraits in the same

way you approach other subjects? For the most part, I would say yes. Once a design is complete and I start the process, I generally work in a systematic manner. I find towards the end of the tattoo or even close to the middle, it takes a different turn, building up subtle gradients and I start using colors you wouldn't think about to get a particular effect that could even be labeled "hyper-realistic."

Do you take your own photo references? When I can, I do. If a client comes to me with an existing photo or illustration that they want tattooed on them I stay as true as I can to the reference, but change it to make it more dynamic. I find that taking your own photo references enhances the end result.

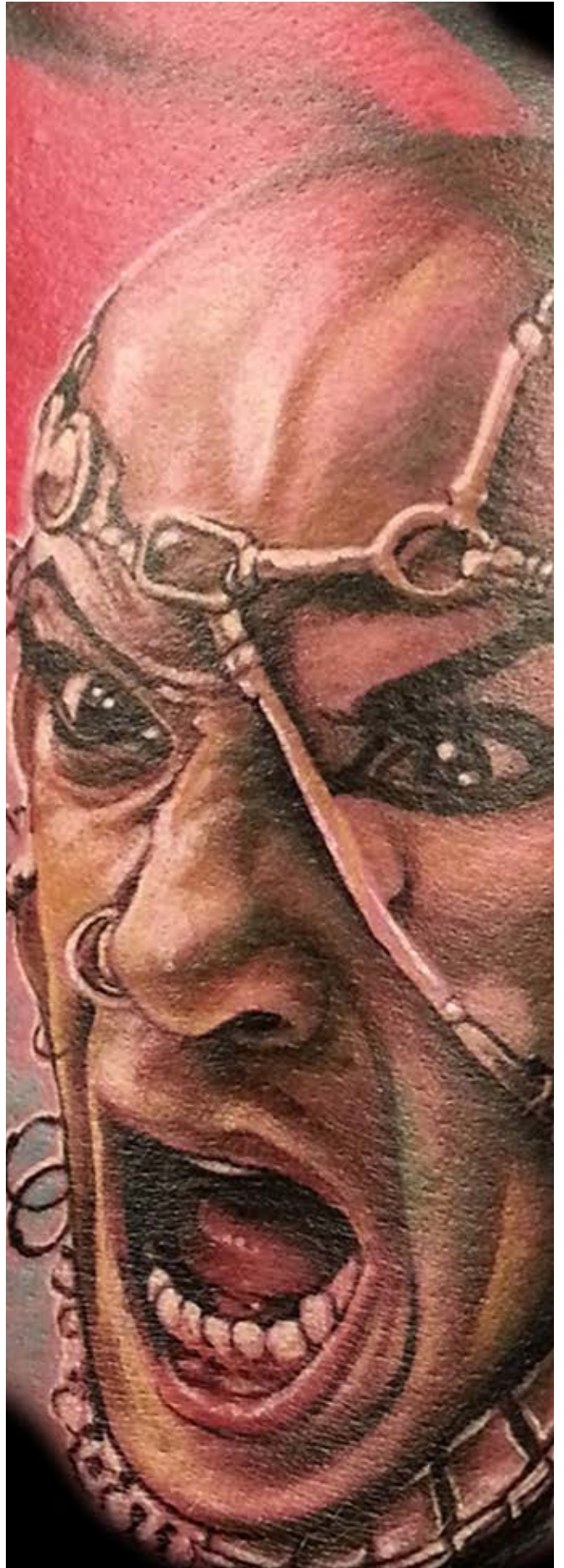
What kind of tattoos do you look forward to doing? Mainly portraits, but I want to expand into doing more illustrative art with portraits as the main subject matter.


What has been one of your favorite pieces to tattoo? I really can't choose; I've done so many that I adore. I have a few favorites: the princess from *Braveheart*, Katniss from the *Hunger Games*. Mostly portraits that I've done are my favorites. I really like the portrait of Pink that I did as well. I like taking a portrait and adding elements to it to turn it into something more to capture the essence of the character or person.











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PHATT GERMAN

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What year did you start tattooing?
January 2007 back in Sweden.

How did you get into tattooing? I grew up with tattoos and art; it was constantly all around me. My mother brought me with her when she got tattooed by Henning Jorgensen at Royal Tattoo in Denmark. I was four, so that's 26 years ago. I started to get tattooed very early on and that sparked my interest in tattooing.

Do you have any special training? No, no formal training. I was taught how to paint and appreciate art by my grandfather, who is an amazing artist. By having a lot of tattooed people in my family and around me whilst growing up I learned how to draw tattoos when other kids drew stick men and fruit bowls.

You are originally from Sweden, but now work in the UK. How are the two tattoo scenes in those countries different from one another? I think it's a bit unfair to compare any other country's tattoo scene to the British. The UK has an amazingly rich tattoo history and it's a very progressive and creative scene over here. That's also why my family and I chose to come here. Saying that, Sweden has a very strong traditional bond and I think some of the best traditional, old school artists in the world are Swedish. The beauty of tattooing is that it's organic and it evolves and changes from year to year, if not even from month to month. Almost every

week or so I discover a new artist that just blows my mind, so it's constantly moving forward.

What led you to work in realism? It's only in the past two years or so that I've headed more towards realism. I think traditional styles, neo-traditional or any illustrative type of work is more difficult to do well than realism. So I guess it's more comfortable and relaxing for me to do realism. You have your reference picture there like paint by numbers. Whereas when you tattoo something you've drawn yourself you need to come up with light sources, shadows, color schemes, etc. As with realism, there are so many different types of it: hyperrealism, stylized realism, minimal realism, etc. Realism only takes up about 60-70% of my time though.

What subject matters do you prefer? If I have to choose one it would be skulls, like a million other artists. There's just something about skulls that I love. You can do them in so many different styles, shapes and ways, and it's always interesting. If I sit down to just draw something, I'll draw a skull.

What inspires you as an artist? My family, just knowing that I have to support them makes it really important for me to push myself to get better. I never struggle with inspiration though. I love tattooing so much; I've been doing it six to seven days a week for over seven years now and I always

feel inspired. My wife and I talk a lot about tattoos and art and she's really motivating and genuinely interested in tattoos so that makes it easier as well. I still draw most nights for at least four to five hours, too. I think that's extremely important to keep progressing and finding new ways and ideas.

What other media do you work in? I draw with graphite and paint with watercolors. I used to paint with oils, but I haven't done that for a while; hopefully I will take it up one day. I'm really into Pro and Copic Markers at the moment. I like the illustrative, flat look and their color range.

What tattoo artists do you admire most? Nikko [Hurtado] and Paul Acker with their technical perfection; Dan Sinnes, Khan, Matthew James, King Carlos, Carlos Torres, Sneaky Mitch, Benjamin Laukis...Man I could go on forever; there are so many insanely great artists around now.

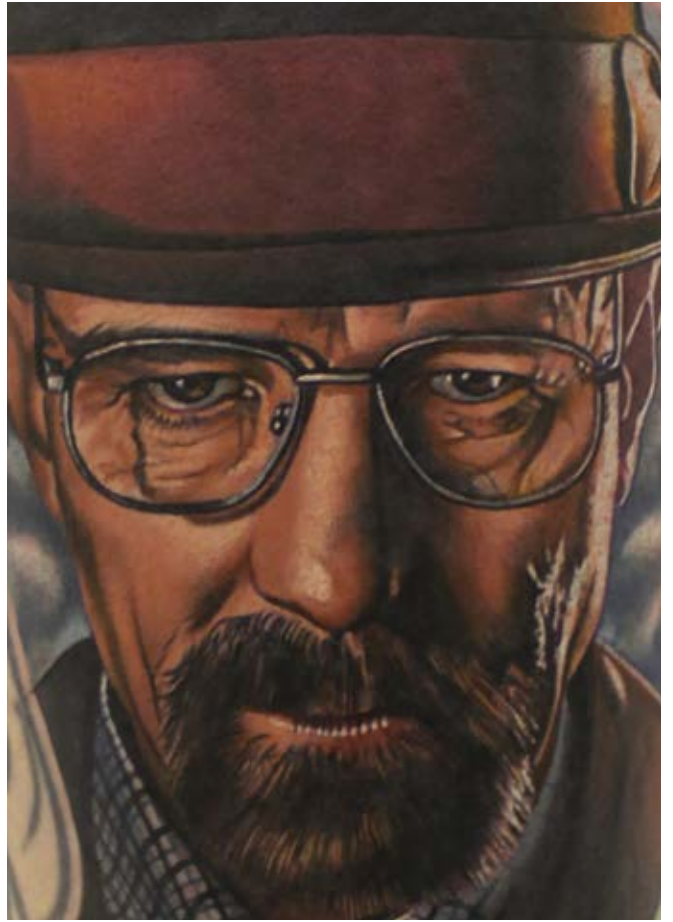
Is there a tattoo that you haven't done yet that you are dying to do? The perfect skull, maybe. I'm still looking for the reference though. I'm also still waiting to do the portraits of my sons on my wife, no pressure there.

What has been your favorite piece to tattoo? I honestly try to keep it to one of the latest pieces I've done. I did a portrait of Walter White from *Breaking Bad* last year which is still one of my favorites, mainly cause I loved the show so much.









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How did you get into tattooing? I've been tattooing since I was 16. I started out of my house; I bought equipment off the Internet and I pretty much did everything wrong in the beginning. I worked my way to pay through college and I fell in love with it. By the time I was 18 I found a real studio and pretty much had to restart everything.

Your online bio says you originally wanted to go to school for special effects. Yeah, I've always just been interested in art in general. I thought special effects was where I wanted to be. I wanted to be a stunt man. I don't know why, but I just thought jumping out of a building would be cool.

Have you ever jumped out of a building? I have, but it wasn't necessarily the right way to do it.

What was your first shop experience was like? My first shop experience was pretty much terrible. I worked at a garage that had a Harley Davidson mechanic in it and they decided that they wanted to add a tattooer. I was 18 years old and they hired me. All I did were eagles and Harley Davidson bar and shields all day long. It was awful.

Yet now you own your own studio, Ascend Gallery. I opened it about three years ago. I spent three months on the road by myself just driving, thinking about life, and doing guest spots around the country. When I got back, I just felt like the studio I was at wasn't right for me to grow. I had a good opportunity so I was able to move home by my family and start up my new path.

Can you describe Ascend Gallery in one word? I think the name does it: ascending. It's just always forward progression.

Are there any artists that you look up to? Oh, there are plenty of people. You've got guys like Dave Tevenal, whose work ethic is through the roof, and Timmy B who literally has changed the way that people perceive what you can do with tattoos. It's just amazing to see people take something that you thought couldn't grow and find ways for it to get bigger and better.

Is there anyone that you would like to tattoo? Honestly, I'm waiting for my dad to tell me that I'm good enough to tattoo him. He keeps telling me that the day I get good enough I'll get to add a piece to him.

What tattoo artists have tattooed you?

I've been tattooed by some phenomenal people: Jonathan Penchoff, Nathan Evans, Neil England, Russ Abbott, Shane O'Neill, Scotty Munster...I'm in the works of getting some work by Timmy B. Paul Acker and Chase Tafoya have tattooed me. Kyle Proia has done a lot of work on me. John Williams, Rodney Raines, there's too many people. It keeps going.

And you have had multiple layers of tattoos over the years. Oh goodness, yeah. I've had two sleeves lasered off of my right arm and I'm working on my third. My left arm, this is my second sleeve. My chest has been redone three times. I'm in the process of doing my stomach for the third time. I'm probably going to laser my ribs. I was pretty much body suited before I was 21.

What made you want to continuously start over? I think I have commitment issues. I always seem to change and find new things to add. Like anything else, it's art that can be ever evolving. There's no need to ever call it done.

Do you have any upcoming projects that you're working on? I have three or four clients that are in the process of letting me start sculpting out their body suits, so I'm really excited to take on a lot of large projects. Lately, I've been doing a lot of two-day appointments with clients. It's just super fun to get way deeper involved into work and things like that.

Do you have any current apprentices? We do have an apprentice. He's more of a studio apprentice underneath all of us here at the shop. His name is Christopher MacDonald and he's come a long way. He's actually a traditional style tattooer, which is about the one style I don't really delve into. It's actually quite interesting and comical trying to teach him how to do traditional, but I think he's going to come out very good at the end of this. And obviously having the other five guys in the studio right at the helm really helps a lot.

What do you look for in an apprentice? With both my apprentice and my employees, I would take a desire and a passion first. The right attitude and right drive will carry you way farther than a natural ability. If you have that drive, that fire and that passion in you, you can learn to go beyond your means, but if you just have a natural ability a lot of times people burn out on that or they never really push themselves.

So I would much rather take on a young guy that really wants it.

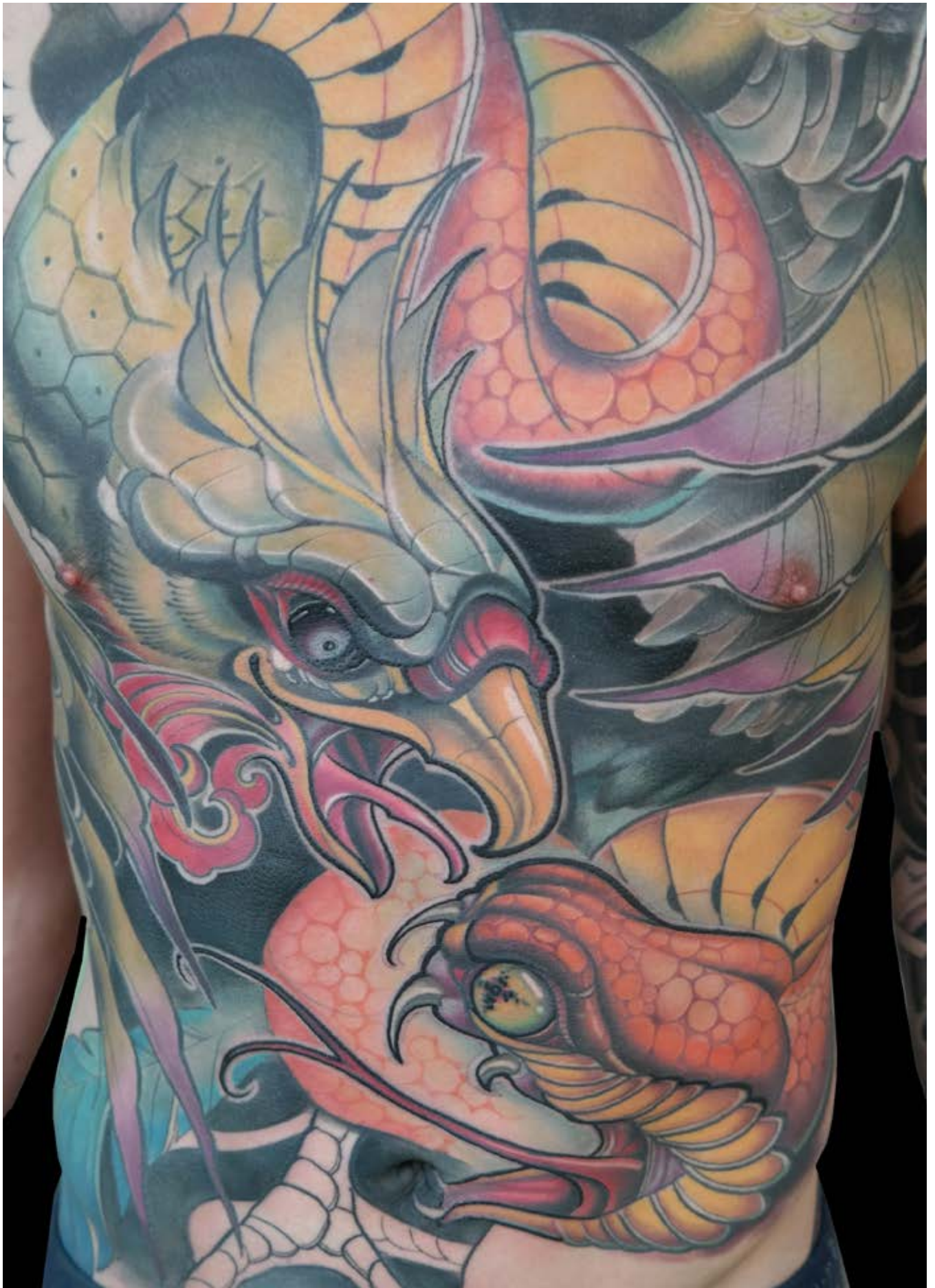
Is there a certain style of tattooing that you would want to branch out to? Well, the one thing that I don't really show very often, but I really enjoy, is traditional Japanese. I really like the elegance, flow and timelessness of it. I do enjoy it a lot, so I really tend to not show it too much so I never get bored of it.

Is traditional Japanese something that influenced you to start taking on these large-scale pieces? Absolutely. I mean just the elegance and the dynamic nature, it's just so beautiful to see images fit a human body so naturally and so nicely. You actually almost lose the look of a person and just see a wall of art. I feel it's no longer a tattoo on a person, it's just a gorgeous piece of artwork.

If you could do any tattoo that you want, what would it be? Right now, I really want to try to do a large-scale evolution, to transpose from single-celled organisms to essentially trying to figure out what the next thing beyond us would be and to tell a chronological story involving all of that. I love that imagery; I love the ideology and I think that would be a super fun piece to take on.

How would you say the reputation of tattoos has changed since you've been in the industry? You can't compare what it is today to what it was 20 years ago. You did have more of a family camaraderie in the past, but I also feel that there were a lot of negatives to the way that they did things back then. I think it was really shut in and secretive when, nowadays, it's kind of an open book, which is bad because it spawns so many potential new artists. On the other end it has created such a wealth of knowledge and just a growth explosion in the talent pool that it has taken tattooing somewhere that was never believed to be possible.

Do you think that the tattoo industry is currently being portrayed well in the modern world? I think that tattooing is a great thing right now. The knowledge is awesome; the way in which certain means and media are portraying it is negative. I think that the industry as a whole, and the community involved in it, is educated enough to be able to look past some of the absurdities that are attached to it at the moment.







FUSION

A detailed illustration of a woman with long brown hair, looking upwards and to the left. She has several tattoos: a small blue design on her cheek, an anchor on her neck, and a large, intricate blue design on her shoulder. A large pink flower is tucked into her hair. In the bottom left corner, there are three tattooing tools: a blue bottle, a purple bottle, and a black machine. The background is a dark, ornate circular frame with gold and silver scrollwork. The word 'FUSION' is written in a large, blue, stylized font at the top left.

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What year did you start tattooing? '96.

How did you get into tattooing? I had a neighbor and a cousin that were tattooed, and this fascinated me as a kid. When I was 15 the chef at my father's restaurant had a lot of tattoos, and it was this that made me decide to enter a tattoo shop and get a small first tattoo. I loved the whole experience. Somewhere round '93 or '94 I got tattooed by the late David Kotker of No Hope No Fear. I got more interested in the aspect of tattooing itself and he showed me how to build a machine and to make needles.

What was your first shop experience like? There were some circumstances that gave me the opportunity of a shop space at a fair rate early in my career. I had not even been tattooing for a year. I had no customer base like I have now, so I had to do something to overcome the long winters. I started doing a lot of conventions and worked part time in a tattoo shop (Wildcat Tattoo) in Antwerp. I worked seven days a week for a long time and did many conventions. This was necessary if I wanted to get people to know my work and come to my shop at the far end of Belgium. I was still in the learning process and had no definite style at that time. I tried everything until I found what I was most comfortable with.

What is the tattoo scene like in Belgium? I appreciate the support and allegiance of the Belgian tattoo

scene. There are many talented tattoo artists in Belgium that support each other and work towards making sure Belgium has a presence in the international tattoo community.

What led you to work in a more abstract form of tattooing? It is what felt most comfortable to me, something I could manage. I wasn't very good at realistic or color; I didn't enjoy doing it. So I started making a lot of Pacific style tattoos. I explored these styles for many years, learned as much as possible about the history and meaning of it, but I felt after many years it was restraining me. I learned I liked geometry a lot and learned how to work with Photoshop. I wanted to use this in my work and see how far I could go with it, so I started integrating this more and more with the Pacific designs, evolving to what I am doing now.

How should a client approach getting an abstract tattoo? They should be open-minded and allow the artist to take some key elements and create a piece of custom art. They must trust in the artist they choose to make them a one of a kind piece of art.

What kind of imagery are you looking at with abstract tattooing? I like to combine organic elements: plants, flowers, insects, or more ornamental elements. But for the real geometric work, it's not so much looking at imagery; it's more about logical thinking and insight in composition. With

monochrome geometric tattoos you depend on composition to make it work. I make a lot of custom patterns, and the style and complexity of the patterns progress with my understanding of geometry and composition, not from seeing imagery.

You work mainly in black work, when do you find yourself using color? I liked monochrome with just some touches of color for a very long time. I still love doing this, as it is a nut I haven't cracked completely yet, but I started working more with color and want to incorporate this more into my work.

What inspires you as an artist? Geometry, although inspirational, is not the only thing that inspires me. The challenge of mixing geometry with the human form, making a visual impact using geometry, and mixing static with organic all inspire me.

What kind of tattoos do you look forward to doing? I look forward to tattoos that serve as a challenge artistically; not only in design but also in it's over all composition with the body.

Before someone gets a tattoo what advice do you give them? My advice to a new collector of tattoos would be to think beyond the perimeters of a normal tattoo, think more about the overall composition of the design on your body. Search well to find the right artist, compare styles and portfolios, and don't be afraid to travel to get work done.











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DEREK TURCOTTE

Robertson Tattoo Company Inc.
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What year did you start tattooing? I started tattooing in 2004 when I was 18.

How did you get into tattooing? I always liked art. I was always drawing and painting as a kid. One of my buddies suggested trying to tattoo, so I sought out the local tattoo shop and asked for an apprenticeship. I brought in a full sketchbook and luckily scored an apprenticeship from Cyé Delaney.

What was your first shop experience like? I had a great experience. I started at Diablo Tattoo in a small beach town; it was a pretty chill, seasonal shop. Cyé showed me the ropes and I also learned how to skateboard better, snowboard and airbrush that year.

What is the tattoo scene like in Canada? The Canadian tattoo scene is great; there are so many inspirational artists up here in the north. I am grateful to be a part of the scene here and am constantly learning and motivated by the driven artists around me and throughout Canada. Everyone is helpful and pushing for our entire industry to be better and pushing the envelope.

Do you have any special training? I had an airbrush apprenticeship with Blake McCully of Cross-Eyed Airbrushing when I was 20ish. He gave

me a better understanding of controlling an airbrush, lighting, contrast and art in general. He's definitely one of Canada's most influential airbrushers on steel and motorcycle art. I'm grateful to have learned from him.

How do you describe your style? It's hard to say, but perhaps an animated realism look: bright colors and not super focused on portraying an exact photo but making it fun to look at as well.

When do you find yourself using black and grey? I do black and grey occasionally, more in classic religious themed pieces or occasional black and grey portraits.

A lot of your work features animals. Are they one of your preferred subject matters? Wildlife has always intrigued me and I have a lot of fun tattooing and painting wildlife. I love seeing animals in their natural habitats; they have been and always will be one of my preferred subject matters.

What sets you apart from other artists? I guess my airbrushing may set my work apart as I often approach tattooing in a similar process. I pay attention to little details, as well, which was also developed through hours of painting and studying artists like Robert Bateman or H.R. Giger.
How have you branched out from tat-

tooing? Tattooing has led me to meet lots of cool people in all walks of life; it probably makes me a more social person than I may have been if things went differently. Tattooing has given a lot back to provide for me and my beautiful girlfriend and daughter. I hope to keep progressing and evolving my tattoo capabilities.

What tattoo artists do you admire most? Nikko [Hurtado], Randy Englehard, Rich Pineda and Mike DeVries. In the Canadian scene John Wayne, Damian Robertson, Mike Brito and Eric De L'Etoile. For illustrative guys, James Tex and Steve Moore are always inspiring to watch what they are creating.

What kind of tattoos do you look forward to doing? Anything comic, movie or nerd based, always. Any kinds of wildlife or cool cartoon ideas are super fun. Anything where I have freedom to have fun with it is a fun project.

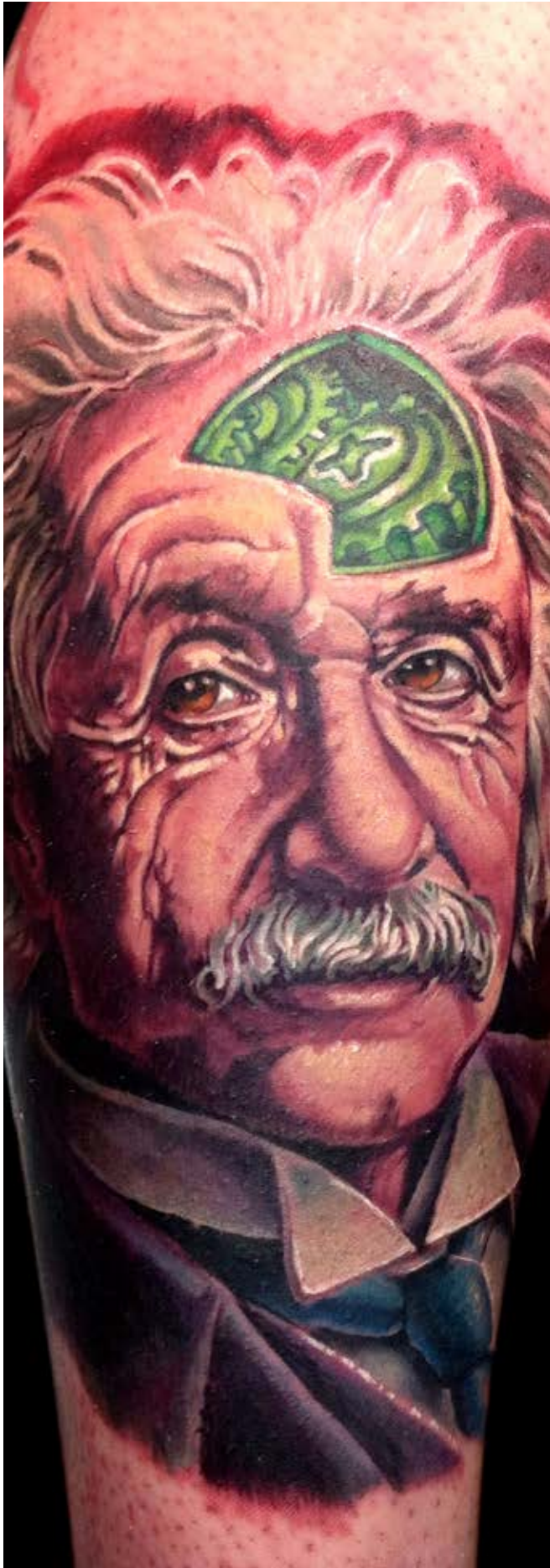
Is there a tattoo that you haven't done yet that you are dying to do? I would love to do a Darth Maul or Darth Vader tattoo.

What has been one of the strangest pieces you've tattooed? I'm working on a trippy sleeve of a boom box chasing a microphone.









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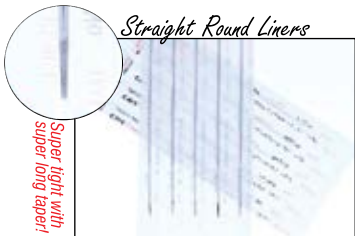
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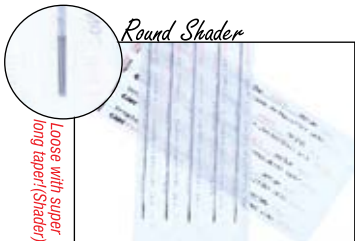
Straight Round Out Liners

Super tight with Extra long taper!



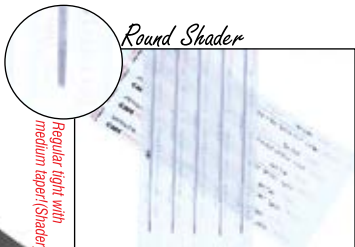
Straight Round Liners

Super tight with super long taper!



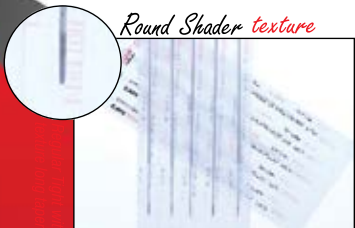
Round Shader

Loose with super long taper! (Shader)

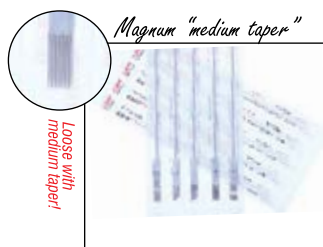


Round Shader

Regular tight with medium taper! (Shader)



Round Shader texture



Magnum "medium taper"

Loose with medium taper!



Magnum "long taper"

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DEREK BILLINGSLEY

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What year did you start tattooing? I started in 2010 in Oklahoma City with Tony Garcia, my mentor.

How did you get into tattooing? I started wanting to tattoo at eight-years-old. It's been a lifelong journey for me and everyday is a reminder of where I came from.

What was your first shop experience like? I went through a traditional apprenticeship and it was tough but I wouldn't change it for the world. It molded me.

Do you have any special training? I guess going through a traditional apprenticeship nowadays is actually special. [Laughs]

You seem to travel quite a lot. What are some of the shops and conventions you frequent? I love traveling. It keeps me sane and constantly inspired. I enjoy the change of scenery and the lifelong friends I've made along the way. I frequent so many different shops it's hard to say. It's constantly evolving.

You seem to work primarily in a neo-traditional style. What led to that? I grew up being infatuated with American traditional tattoos. I always enjoyed using real life references and drawing with more realistic proportions, so I basically combined both of those to create what I do. I don't classify myself to any style. I really just want to create

good, clean, solid tattoos with lots of black.

Where do you see traditional tattooing going? In a way it's going in a good direction for sure with so many talented artists tattooing nowadays. On the other end, the absence of real apprenticeships has really tarnished a lot. Kids who have been tattooing for a year are opening up shops and having apprentices when they have no business trying to teach anyone, the blind leading the blind. There is no respect and that's truly sad. I'm just a dude who loves tattooing and wants everyone to get along, enjoy the ride, and do it with the upmost respect. Self-entitlement is a major problem. We aren't owed anything. If anything tattooing has given me so much.

What makes a good traditional tattoo? Clean bold lines, minimal palette with skin showing and lots and lots of black.

You also work primarily in color with red appearing in the majority of your pieces. What led you to that particular aesthetic? Red is the shit. It's bold and strong. I don't know really, just looks rad to me.

What inspires you as an artist? Music really inspires me a lot and pushes me in a certain direction. I owe a lot to music.

What other media do you work in?

Mostly watercolor, but I'm always interested in learning new things.

How have you branched out from tattooing? I have really been pursuing other avenues with tattooing. I have a clothing line that has been in the works for a while and should be out first thing next year. I have been doing designs for people for a while and wanted to take that next step.

What tattoo artists do you admire most? One of my closest friends inside and outside of the industry is Dave Tevenal. That dude is a machine who pumps out the best shit. He has held me down since day one and I owe him a ton. So here it is Dave, a big thank you from me to you!

What kind of tattoos do you look forward to doing? Anything that gives me a direction and leaves it open for creativity. I love tattooing so much; I'm stoked to be doing this every single day. I really enjoy strong, powerful, tough images.

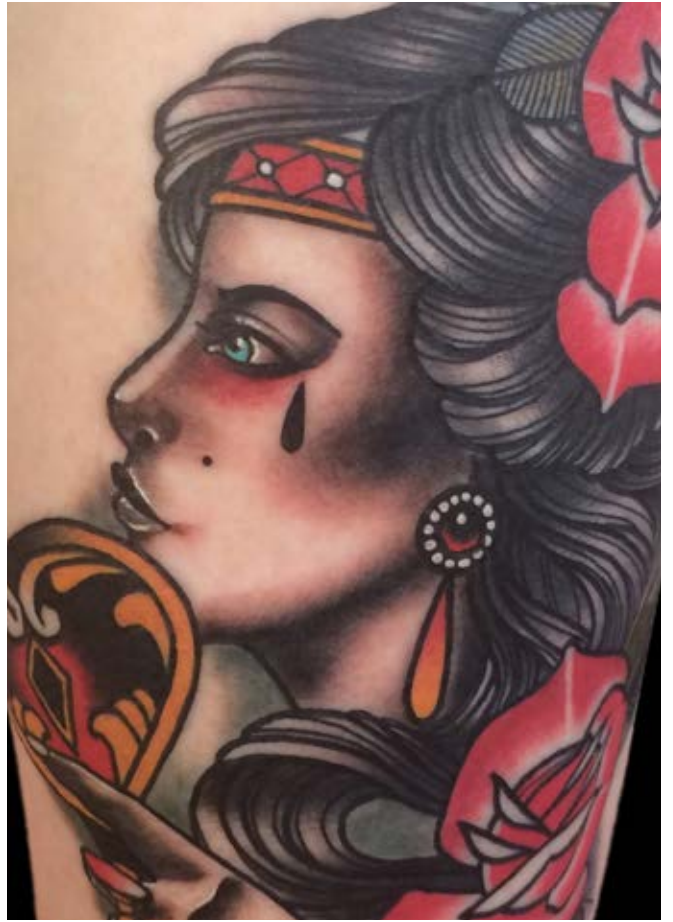
Before someone gets a tattoo what advice do you have for them? Do your research and really find an artist's work you love and can stand to be around for lots of hours. It's forever.

Is there a tattoo that you haven't done yet that you are dying to do? Eagles. Yeah, eagles are tough. Oh yeah, and all the grim reapers!











Nikko
Hurtado

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3501 North Ponce de Leon Blvd.
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What year did you start tattooing? I started tattooing directly out of high school in 2001 and took my apprenticeship throughout my senior year of high school. I had enough credits to go to class for half the day and the other half of the day I would go to my apprenticeship at a local tattoo shop.

Your work is mostly realism black and grey that is very smooth and clean. What drew you to this style and subject? When I first started I really didn't like black and grey. It wasn't until a few years in that I came to appreciate it when I started working with Joshua Carlton and Monte in Indiana. After working with them and seeing it done properly, I fell in love with it. I was drawn to black and grey because I feel I can achieve more depth and detail with it. To me it has a more timeless appearance and in my opinion a properly done black and grey tattoo can be really moving.

We really enjoy checking out your work for the technical part of your shading. Do you use pre-made grey wash or do you create your own mix with black ink and water? In the beginning I would use black ink and water. Now I really like using the pre-mixes. At this point I do not have one specific one that I am loyal to. I like to use different ones from different sets and do my own thing with them.

Your color work is really good as well, but we do not see it coming from you

very often. Do you just prefer to work with the values of black and grey?

I have been focusing on black and grey for a while now and as of late it's primarily what people come to me for. I am not opposed to color, however, I feel a lot of pieces truly will look better, have more depth, and last longer in black and grey. I have been getting more people asking for pieces in color and if I feel I can achieve the proper amount of depth within those pieces I will take them on. As for what is more difficult, that depends on the piece. If I were to choose what is the most difficult for me I would say color portraits.

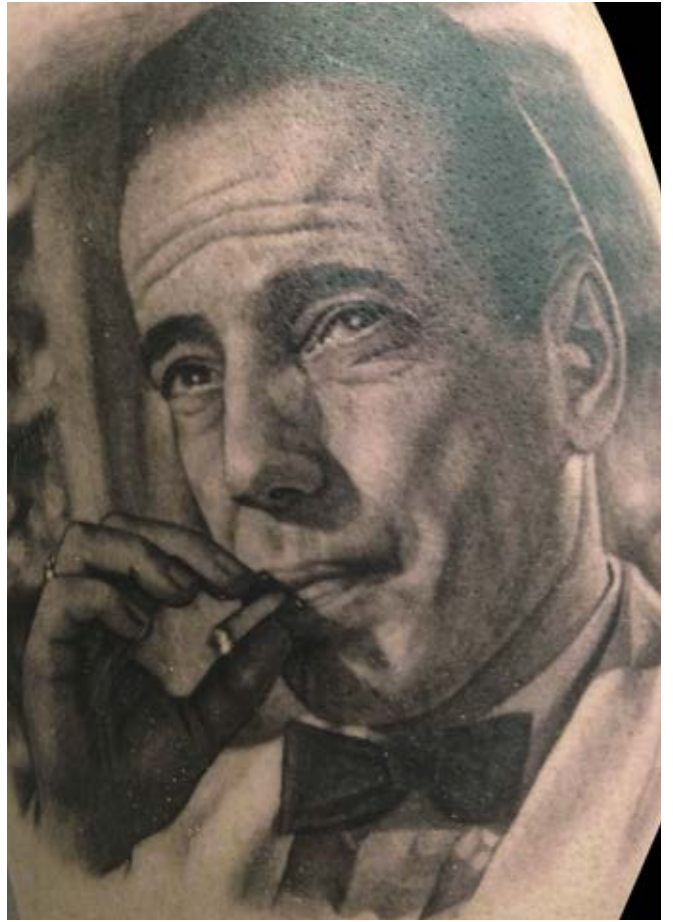
Is there any specific kind of tattoo you would not do for a client? Yes, there are definitely tattoos I won't do. Anything racist or on private parts. Or if the client wants the technically impossible done and won't understand that what they are wanting will not work. My worst client will sit there and constantly make passes at me, move around, whine, complain about price, come in drunk and not tip. My perfect client will be someone I gel with who allows me to be an artist, tells all their friends and family to come in, competes at conventions and tips, of course.

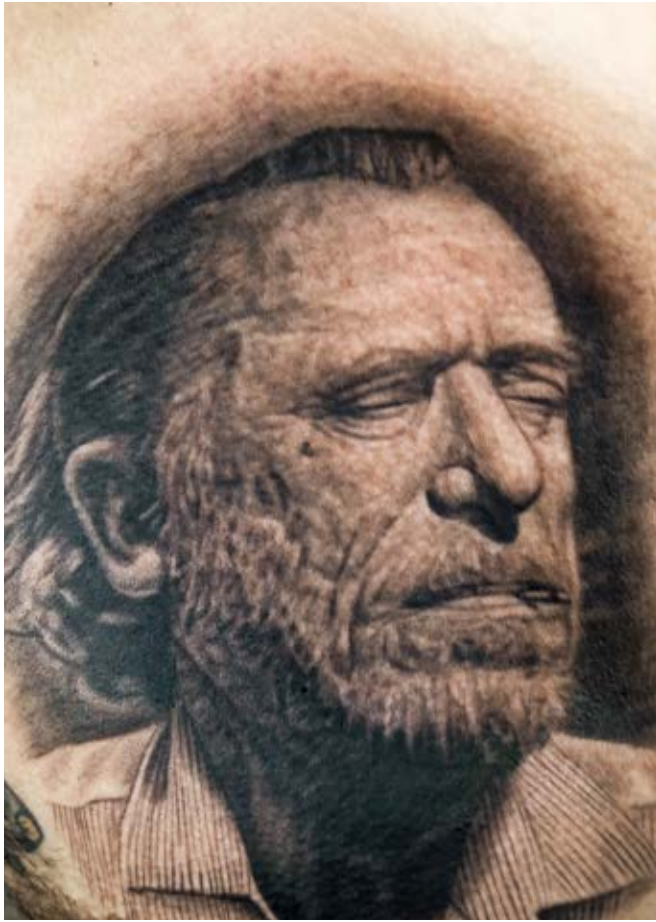
So if you have the freedom to do a certain tattoo with any subject, body placement or style, what would it be? What I would like to do at this point are more black and grey back

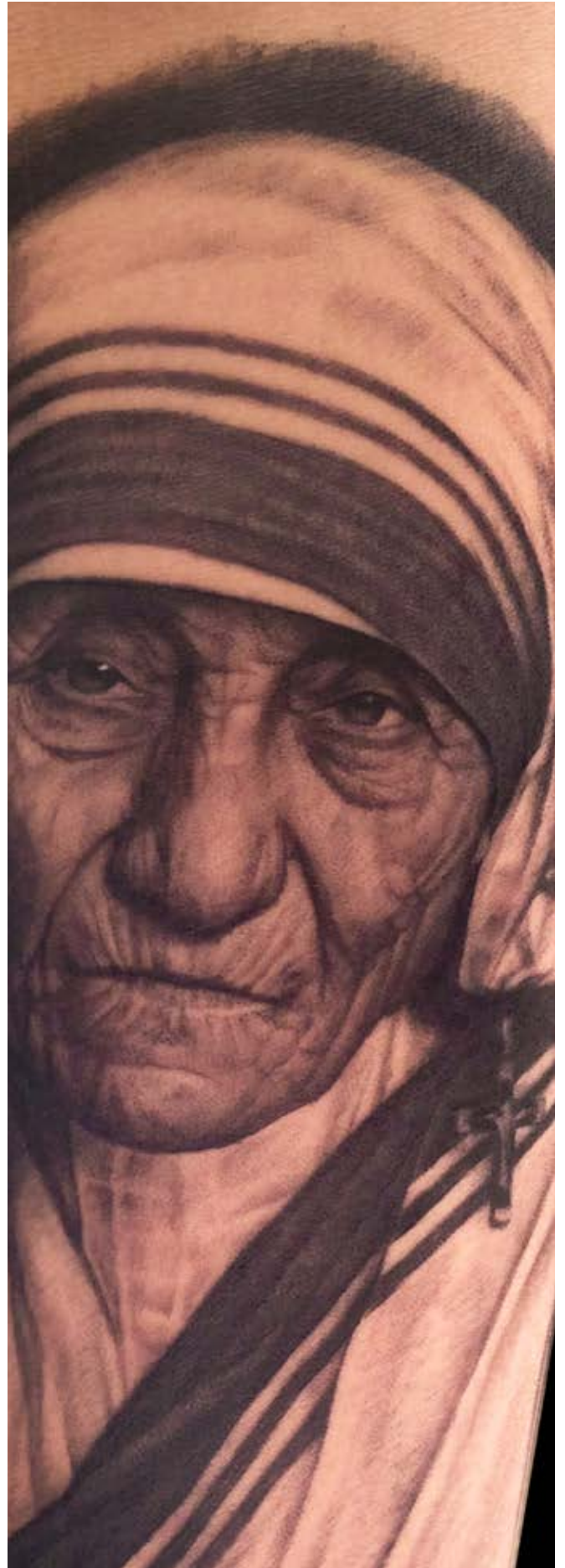
and thigh pieces. Preferably larger images that are more readable at a distance and not really one specific subject. Just where the piece fits the body and there isn't ten pounds of ideas in a two pound bag. I also really enjoy the trash polka style. I like the combination of really loose elements along with the tight refined detail. It's extremely fun to do and I enjoy the process of not only tattooing but designing them.

Are there any projects or plans that you are currently in the process of that we might expect from you in the near future? Yes, I would like to give a shout out to my fiancée, Bart Andrews. He is a wonderful artist and one of my inspirations as well. He continually pushes me to do better and compliments me not only as an artist but a person. As for current projects, this past year Bart and I hosted the Cape Fear Tattoo & Arts Expo. He created it four years ago and I had the privilege of co-hosting it with him this past year and for years to come. I feel very happy to be able to contribute to the expo and we are looking forward to having an excellent fifth year in April, 2015! Also, I would like to announce that Bart and I are currently planning on opening our own studio within the next year. Be on the lookout for Unity Tattoo, more details to be announced shortly on our websites.











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JOE MATISA

Kiss of Ink
515 Hamilton Avenue
Trenton, NJ 08609
www.ilbaciottattoo.com

What year did you start tattooing?

I started my apprenticeship under my father at 13 years old. I started tattooing full time in 2007 at the age of 17.

What was your first shop experience like?

When I was much younger, I wasn't living with my father and life for me at that time was rough. Then, when I got a little older and moved in with my dad, I was able to get a taste of what shop life was really like. At first I thought it was really intimidating, but at the same time also really interesting.

What are some of your favorite subject matters to tattoo?

I really like tattooing comic books and cartoons. I also really like doing cover ups because they force you to think outside the box.

You own two tattoo shops, Kiss of Ink and Ink Junction. What led you to owning both shops?

When I was still in high school, my parents started taking really frequent and long trips to Virginia. After a little while they started opening shops down there and staying longer and longer. Then one day they didn't come back and said that they were staying down there and that the Trenton shop was mine. I could either try running the business all on my own or they would sell it to

someone. I decided to try running the shop and everything ended up working out really well. The shop is constantly busy and so am I, so I think I did a pretty good job. Then after a few years my business partner Kenny and I started going out and looking to expand. Eventually we found the spot we're in now in Flemington and after about a month of planning and getting everything together we opened in the end of 2011.

What are the overall shop vibes in each studio?

Trenton is always wild and fast paced. There are always people around because we're located on a street that has a lot of foot traffic. As for Flemington, it's the complete opposite. That area is way more mellow. It's a quiet, small town. We have our own parking lot and the location is a little more private.

What inspires you as an artist?

Video games, comic books, my dad and other tattoo artists.

What sets you apart from other artists?

I like to try everything, and I like to do a lot of things that break the boundaries for stuff that a lot of other tattoo artists don't want to try. I also think that my experience working on a walk-in basis definitely made me more well rounded. Before I was on the show *Best Ink* I wasn't taking appointments;

I was working on clients first come first serve and that requires a lot of thinking on your feet. There was no planning before hand; it was all done day of, right before the tattoo.

What other media do you work in?

I like to do a lot of digital art, a lot of digital painting, watercolor, and colored pencils. I also like to do music related stuff; writing and recording for hip hop tracks that I make in my spare time.

What tattoo artists do you admire most?

Carlos Torres, Phil Garcia, Steve Butcher, Nikko Hurtado, Jeff Gogue, Bez, Dmitry Samohin and a shit ton more.

What kind of tattoos do you look forward to doing?

Anything comic book related, really gnarly cover-ups, and some cool portraits...and baby daddy names!

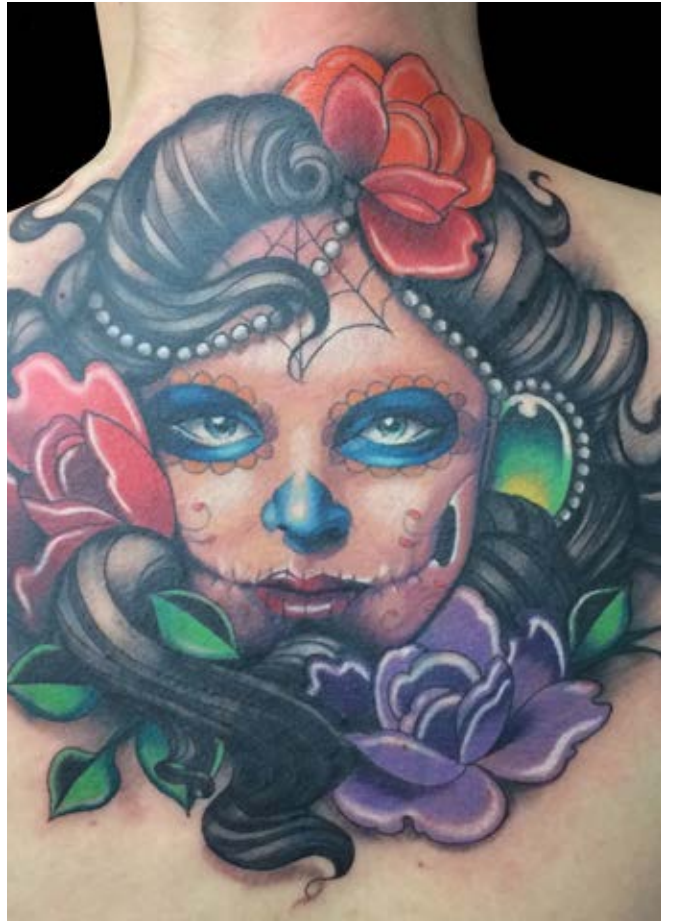
Is there a tattoo that you haven't done yet that you are dying to do?

Tons. Pokémon, superheroes, celebrity portraits, and really anything else that sounds awesome. I'm really not picky. I don't ever pick and choose what I do and don't want to tattoo. I am down to do anything and everything, as long as there's someone out there who wants to get it tattooed!









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What sets Kamil Tattoos apart from the average tattoo shop?

Kamil Mocet: I wanted to set up a shop for artists where they could come and make enough money to live off of. We don't work on percentages here. There is a flat rate for the day, and the artists can do as many tattoos as they like during that day. I think it's really important that the artists make a decent living, so they can focus on what is important, and that is pushing themselves artistically to be the best they can be. I really want to invest in that talent, and to help it flourish.

Jairo Carmona: This is the first time that a shop has felt more like an artists' collective than a normal tattoo studio. We don't have a shop front; from the outside you wouldn't know that it's a tattoo shop. I feel like we get more time to improve our own styles and be the best we can be to the customer.

What is the overall environment of the shop?

Mocet: It is a very relaxed and chilled out environment here in the shop. We don't do walk-ins, only custom tattoos by appointment, so there is no pressure on the artists to do things they would rather not. Despite every artist working for themselves, we also work as a team. We push each other to do our best, offer tips and work on improving our skills constantly.

Debs: As soon as you walk in the door you are greeted by our lovely studio manager, Basia, who has the most amazing and bubbly personality, you just can't help but feel welcomed. We try and make the customers as comfortable as possible here. From an artist's perspective, it's a relaxed environment, the guys are very fun to be around and so helpful. It never really feels like 'work' which I believe is great for both the customer and the artist.

What drew you to want to work at Kamil Tattoos?

Debs: Kamil offered me the apprenticeship out of the blue after seeing my artwork, and I was just so excited to be working under such a great artist. Kamil has given me the opportunity to be the artist I want to be, I have creative freedom and I'm working with friendly people who have so much to give. I feel like me again!

Carmona: I've been a big fan of Kamil's work ever since I started tattooing. My goal as a tattoo artist

has always been to earn the respect of the artists I most admire. I also like that I don't have to pay a percentage to the studio. I pay a flat fee, which means that they care more about me rather than the money that they make from me.

What qualities should an artist have to be a part of Kamil Tattoos?

Mocet: All of the artists that work here are already established; they have their own client base and are known for whichever style they specialize in. It's a place where we can push each other, work together and be inspired by each other. So really we look for artists who can get in on this because it's a great attitude to have! We all want to be better artists.

What is it like having a tattoo studio in London?

Mocet: London is such a great city to have a tattoo studio in; it's a very forward thinking and cool city. Everyone has tattoos; there is a big scene for it so it makes sense to be here. Also for people travelling from outside of London, it is very easy with the public transportation that London offers for any client to reach us.

Who are some of the guest artists that frequent Kamil Tattoos?

Mocet: Tofi [Torfinski], Mark Bester, Filip Pasioka, Piotr Deadi Dedel, and I'm excited to say that there will be more to come in the future with our new expansion.

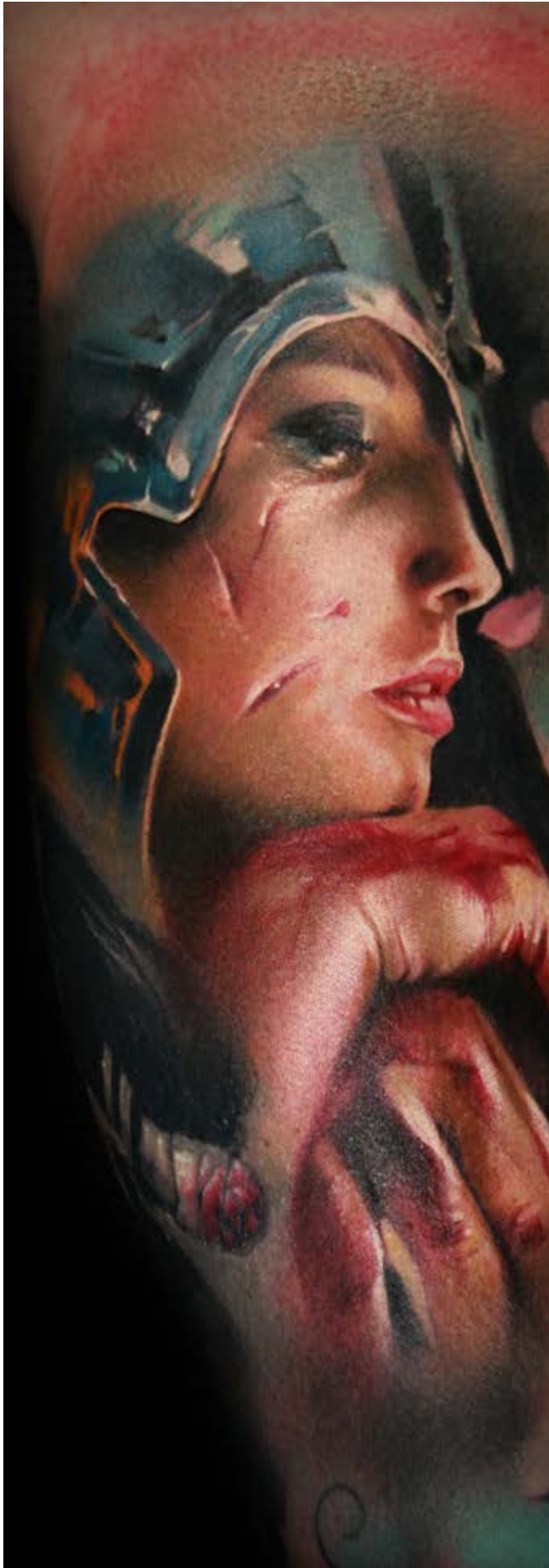
What have been some of the best overall shop experiences you all have had working together?

Mocet: It feels like a family here; we can share a joke and get to work without feeling the pressure of being 'at work.' Every day is a good experience being around the most talented people whom I can learn from and call my friends

Debs: For me the best overall experience would be having the opportunity to work under [Kamil Mocet], an artist who's work I really admire, and being around other fantastic artists. Even though I am a full time artist now, I will never stop learning from these guys.

Carmona: Having spent time with the other artists in the studio, it's become apparent to me that the quality of the artists' work is exceptionally high. Every day brings new challenges and lessons.









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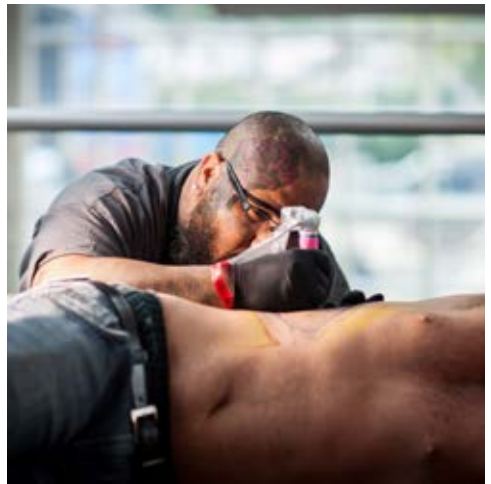


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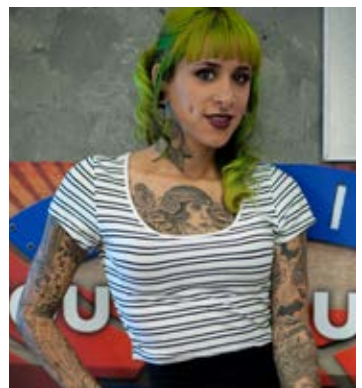
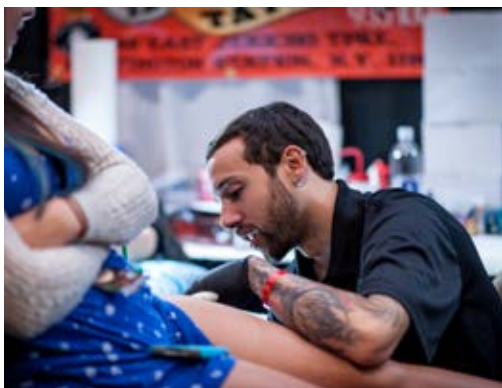
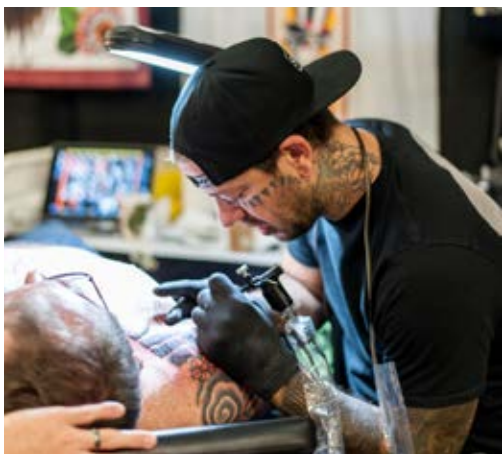


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UNITED INK FLIGHT 914

United Ink: Flight 914 is one of the top tattoo conventions in the state of New York and brings artists like Jose Perez, Jr., Megan Jean Morris, and Myke Chambers from all over the world to participate. This year attendees got a chance to see not only a Miss United Ink contest, but a Mr. United Ink as well. The Artist Hanger and Fusion Project displayed work from experienced and aspiring artists alike making the whole weekend one to showcase some of the hottest talent around. With a cannoli truck parked outside, who could ask for anything more to top off a weekend?



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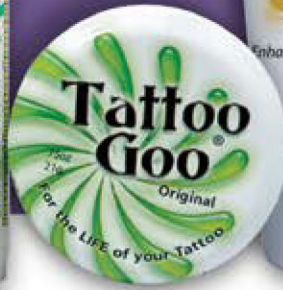
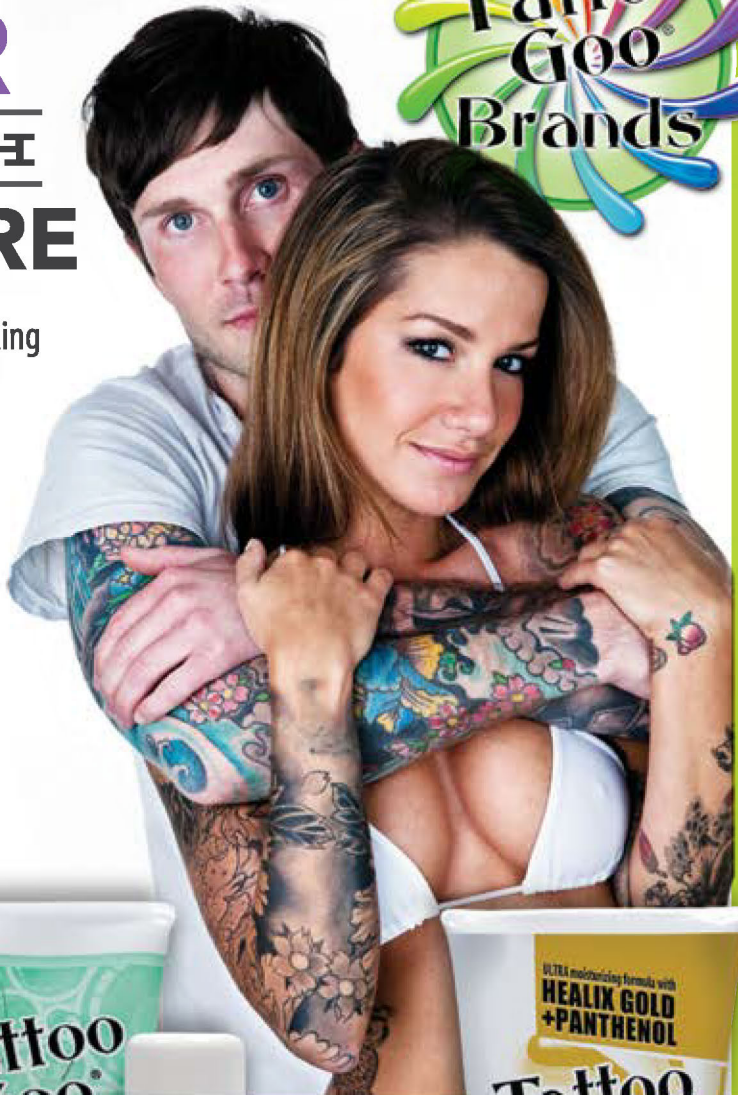
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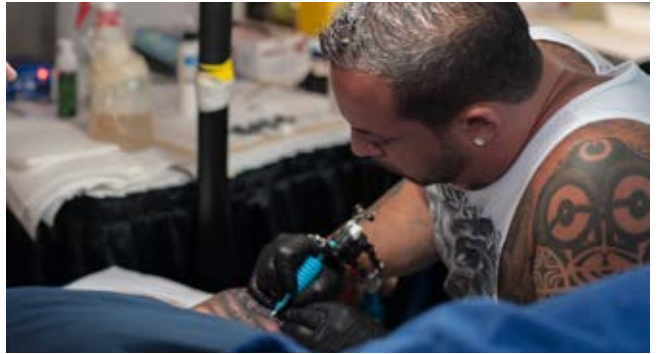
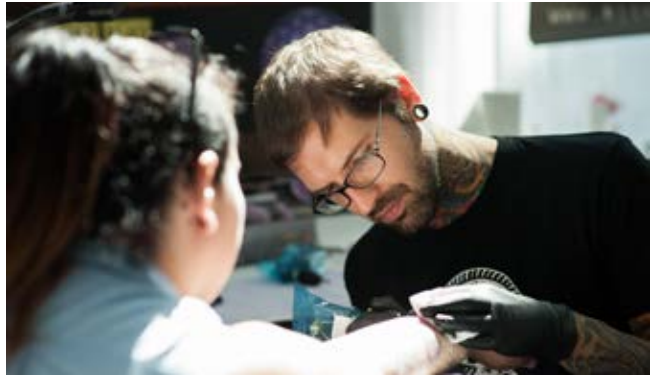
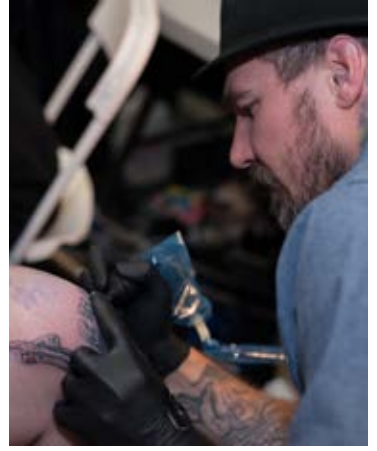
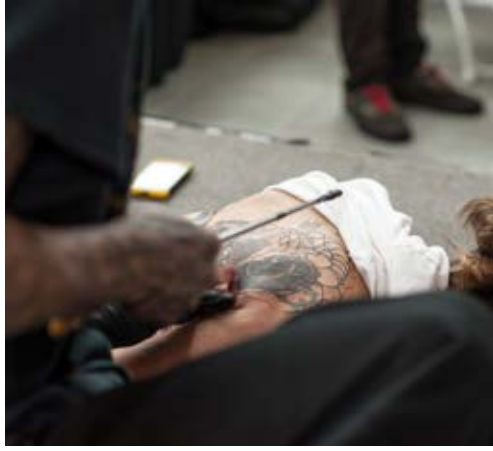
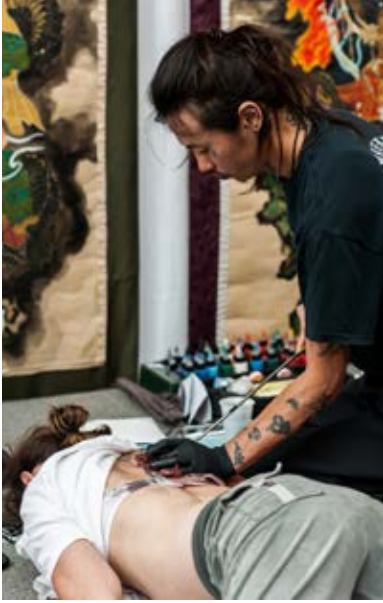
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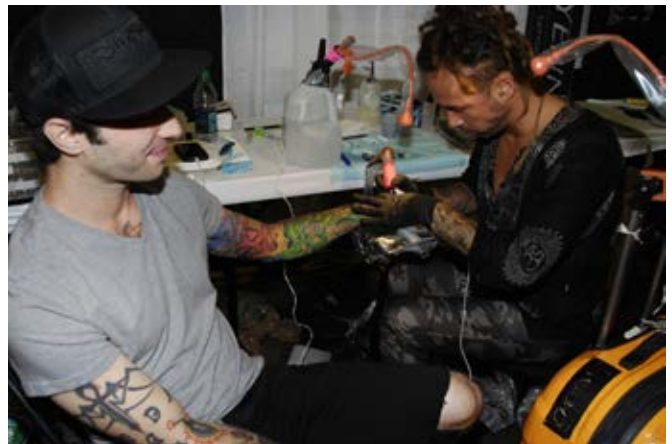
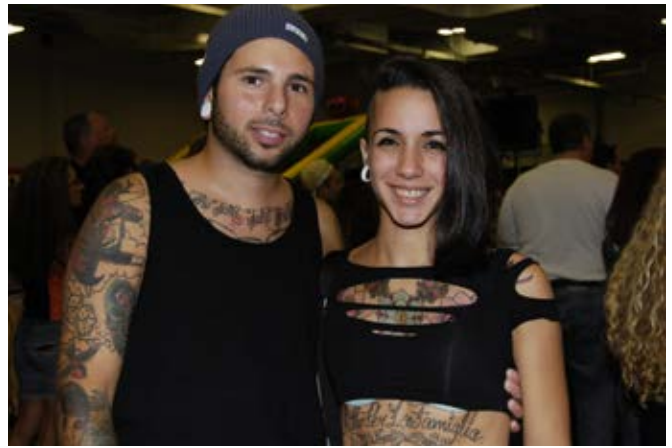
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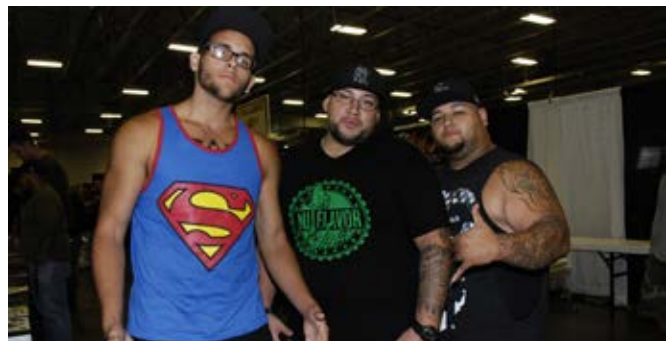


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INKED OUT NEW JERSEY

The 2014 Inked Out NJ tattoo convention proved to be the busiest and most successful weekend of the convention's history. Hosted each year by esteemed tattooist Mario Barth, attendees had the chance to get inked by top-notch artists like Mike Demasi and Big Meas. If that wasn't cool enough, Raquel Red put on an insane burlesque show and meet and greets with scene celebs, like cast members of *That Metal Show* took place amongst all the excitement. 2014 was a big year for Inked Out NJ, so 2015 is destined to be huge. Don't miss out!





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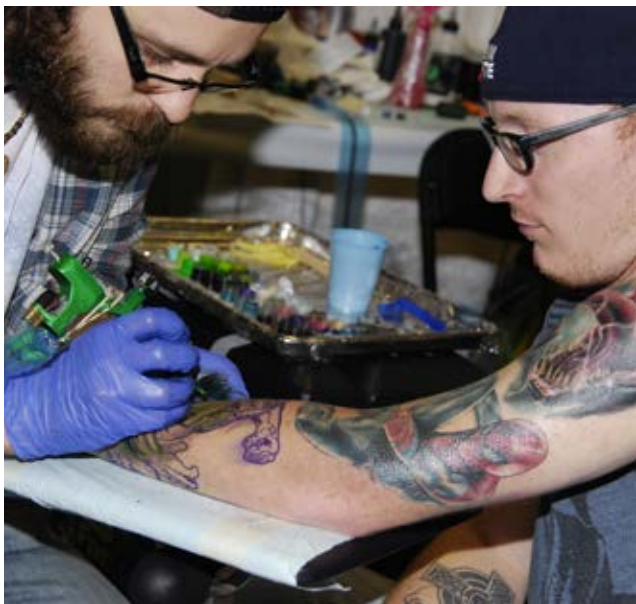
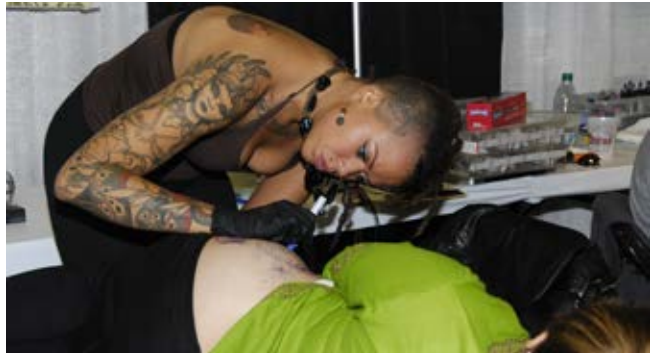
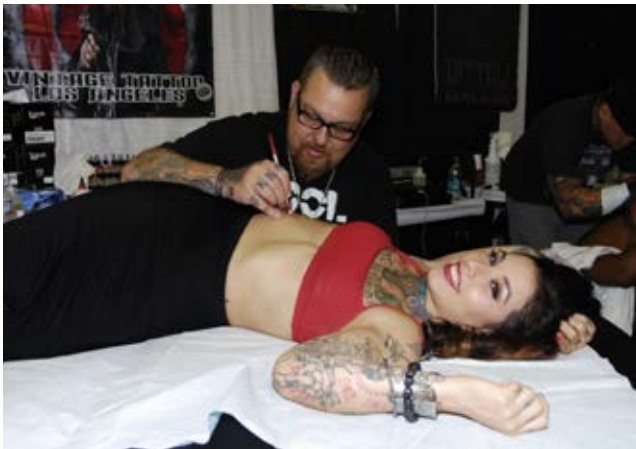
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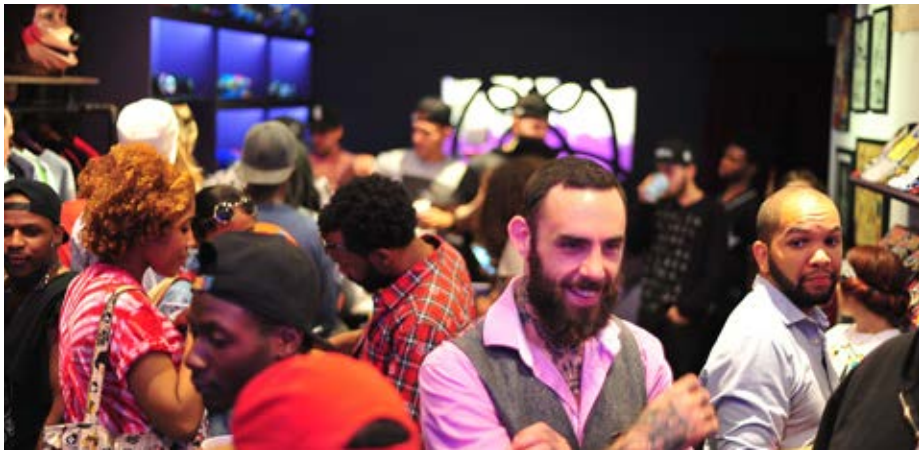




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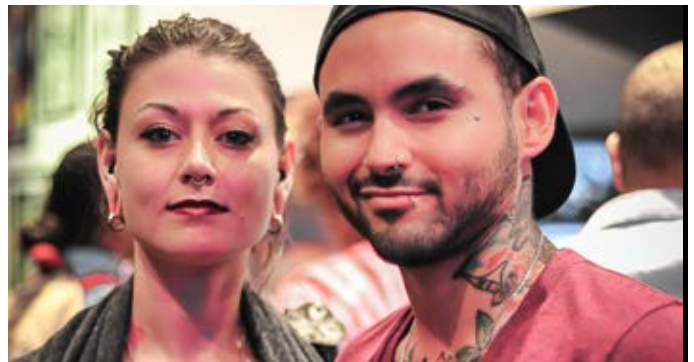
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DAVEE BLOWS

Globe-trotting tattooist Davee Blows kicked off Labor Day weekend with his "100 Panthers Vol. 1" gallery opening at Mishka's flagship store in Brooklyn. Tattooers, collectors, and locals gathered to view the 30 panther paintings Davee had worked on during his travels. Patrons were not only given the opportunity to purchase the original prints on display, but they could also get their hands on the very limited Mishka x Davee Blows collaboration tee. Missed out? Keep your eye out for Vol. 2.



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HELL CITY PHOENIX

Hell City Phoenix is a "tattoo vacation;" nothing beats hanging out and partying with friends at the Arizona Biltmore during a tattoo show. Durb Morrison is respected for his choice of tattooers at his shows, but he is also praised for picking such a cool place for his summer show. Our favorite entertainment was the Suicide Girls Burlesque show. (Heck yes to cosplay and underpants.) There's a Hell City in May and August next year so if you'll be in Arizona or Ohio check out hellcity.com.



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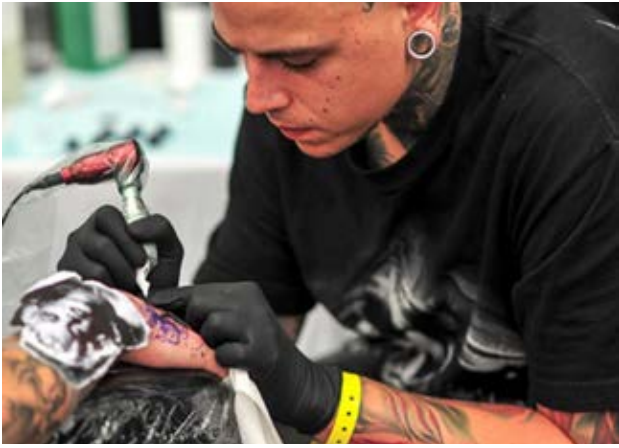
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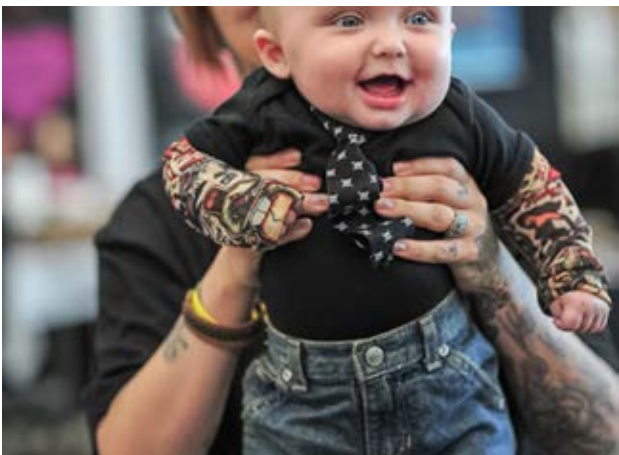
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WILDWOOD TATTOO BEACH BASH

Do you like high quality ink, thrill shows, and swimsuit contests right off of the ocean shore? Then the Wildwood Tattoo Beach Bash is the convention for you! This year clients came out to get some rad ink by amazing artists like Johnny Nobody, Danny Lepore, and Joe Matisa. Aside from adding some new artwork to their collections, attendees were also able to catch some pretty crazy suspension shows, take several body modification seminars, and get some one-on-one time with Eddie Munster himself, Butch Patrick. Stop by next year to catch one of hottest conventions on the East Coast!





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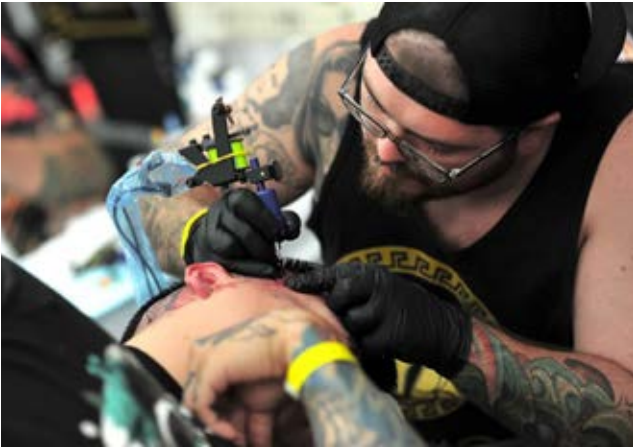
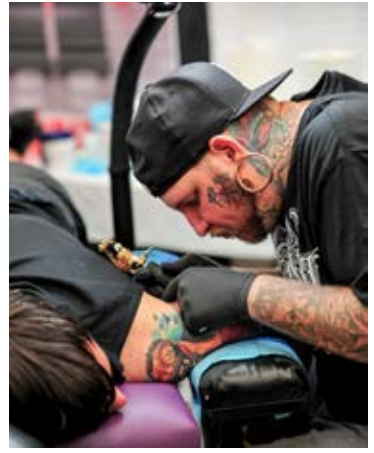
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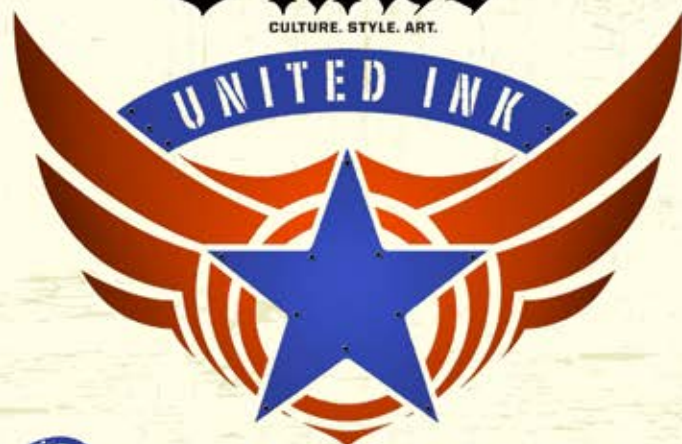
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