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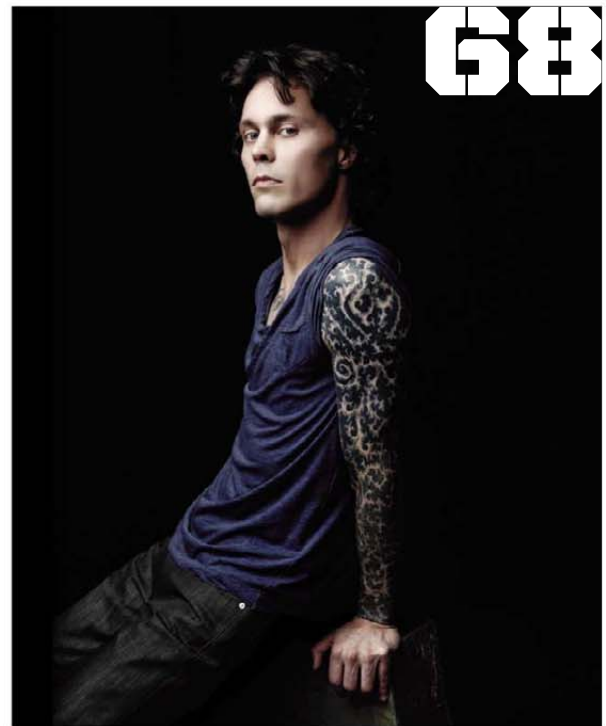
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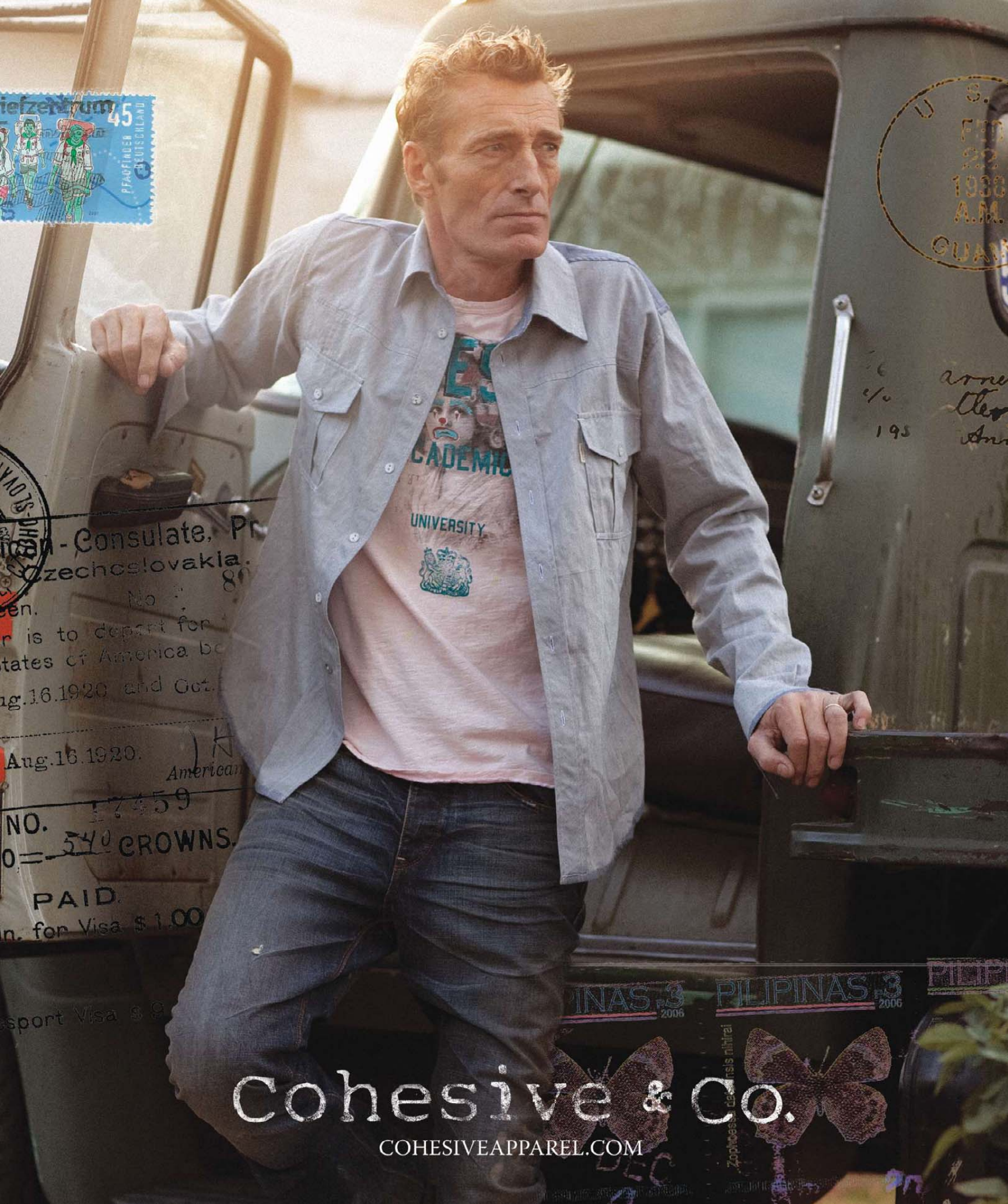




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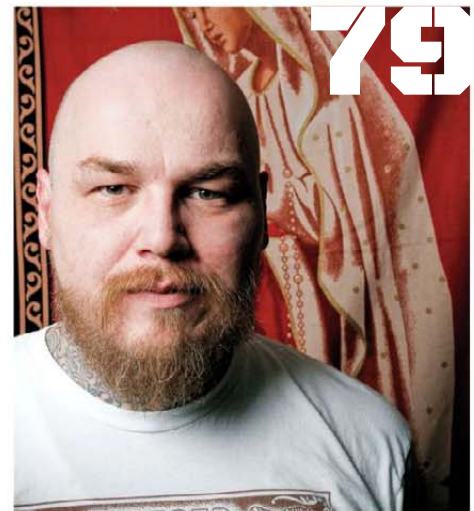
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← A taxidermy wolf, an albino squirrel, and a lamb all made appearances at this month's shoot with Kat Von D, courtesy of the collection of the *LA Ink* queen herself. "It was all rather civilized," says photographer **James Dimmock**. "Kat was an absolute sweetheart." No stranger to tattoos, Dimmock recently completed a full sleeve of a dragon and an angel that extends from his neck to his wrist. "I wanted a European dragon, which was quite hard to find. I worked with a great guy, Erick Diaz at Asylum Studios in Williamsburg, Brooklyn." Dimmock's work appears in *GQ*, *Esquire*, *Rolling Stone*, *ESPN*, *Entertainment Weekly*, and others.

When it comes to uncovering the story behind the celebrity, writer **Rebecca Swanner** is our go-to woman. **→** Her previous cover stories, featuring Pink, Brody Dalle, and Chester Bennington, have revealed a side of them the public usually doesn't see. This month, we sent her to hang with Kat Von D and talk *LA Ink*, tattooing, fame, and more. "Kat maintains a surprisingly sweet, down-to-earth presence and is genuinely more interested in the arts she pursues than making headlines," Swanner reports. When she's not writing for *INKED*, Swanner stays busy writing poetry and maintaining her Etsy boutique, Secret Marmalade, which features her hand-knit items. And while she still doesn't have any tattoos, she's finally settled on a design. It's a step!



← We sent L.A. photographer **Russ Quackenbush** to hang with Chief Marcel Melanson and the Compton Fire Department (page 72), and luckily nothing burned down. That doesn't mean Quackenbush is ready to hang up his camera and pick up a fire hose. "Since I was 16, I knew I wanted to be a photographer. If I had to choose another career, I'd have to say something in industrial design or landscaping." We're still working on getting Quackenbush tattooed. "I don't have any tattoos at the moment, but I find myself inching closer and closer to the needle," he says. "My father and all his bike club friends had plenty of tattoos, so it's not something I haven't seen before." Quackenbush's work has appeared in *Fast Company*, *Details*, *Men's Journal*, *Ray Gun*, and others.

This month's fashion shoot (page 58) at the Ace Hotel in NYC **→** could have easily turned into a drunken bash. "It was definitely one of the more fun shoots I've had," says photographer **Marley Kate**. "The Ace hotel was insane. Mix that with a bunch of models, a Jägermeister machine, minibar, and poker set, and we had a pretty amazing time." Kate got her first tattoo at age 16, a blue rose with three stars and a hummingbird. "Everyone thinks it's a turtle. It kind of sucks, but also makes me laugh at how random it is." Kate has several other tattoos, including card suits on her wrist, "So Classy" inside her lip, and a heart on her middle finger. "They are all pretty small, like little charms; most of them look like jail tattoos." Her work appears in *Nylon*, *Nylon Japan*, *Vibe*, *Complex*, *New York Times Magazine*, and others.



Sinful



letter



Kat Von D, last seen here writing her Editor's Letter. If seen, notify us immediately.

Our idea for this month's issue was simple: Let Kat Von D do all of the work! The most famous tattoo artist in the world already juggles everything from her show, *LA Ink*, to her shop, High Voltage, to book projects, makeup lines, and more. Surely she could handle being guest editor and putting together the February issue of INKED?

We were right. With one sweep of her tattooed arm, Kat cleared our calendar and laid down who she wanted to feature this month, including bands, artists, tattooers, and other friends and influences from her life. With her direction, we tracked down rockers HIM (page 68) and 69 Eyes (page 48) and *LA Ink* tattooer Dan Smith's band, the Dear & Departed (page 36). We interviewed Kore Flatmo (page 79), one of Kat's favorite tattoo artists, and profiled painter Kevin Llewellyn (page 26) and Brazilian tattoo artist Camila Rocha (page 28), a new addition to the High Voltage staff. Then we talked to Kat (page 40) about life, tattooing, *LA Ink*, and handling the high pressure of fame—especially when some magazine in NYC dumps their entire issue on you!

Hail to the chief!

Jason Buhrmester
Editor



To make sure you don't miss the hard work Kat put into this issue, we labeled the features she picked with this icon.

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PAST PRAISE

First, let me say that I truly enjoy your magazine. I have eight tattoos, the most recent being one done by Jordan Ross. I just finished reading your article about Braddock, PA, mayor John Fetterman [November], and I was touched. I need to find the kind of passion that he has. I wanted to say that I truly admire INKED for printing John's story, and I hope it brings people to Braddock. I'm originally from Philadelphia, and I intend on visiting Braddock in June. I will bring my children in the hopes that it will inspire them.

Tabatha L. Gaudet
Minot, ND

TURN IT UP

I had heard some buzz on satellite radio surrounding the release of new albums from Alice in Chains and La Coka Nostra. As a big fan back in the day I was curious, but skeptical. Upon purchasing your magazine that covered both bands [October] and reading the articles, I went to my local music store and purchased both CDs. (Yes that's right, CDs—no downloads, rips, or burns. Old school—style.) The open honesty in both interviews comes across in both albums, in their respective genres. Thanks for being a link for some real shit! Both albums make you want to

jump around, grind it out, sit in an angry chair, get pissed, and put on some shitkickers and kick some shit.

Andrew Schroeder
Hamilton, Ontario

PRICK UP

I really enjoyed reading the Ami James article [October]. I always saw him as a rude prick. I liked that he got to speak his truth and let people know what was really up with the show. More power to you, Ami. Good luck. And INKED, you are by far the best tattoo magazine I have bought and keep buying. Good job, INKED.

Albert Maldonado
San Dimas, CA

SANDSTORM

My name is Spc. Justin Liller, and I just came across your issue of INKED that had the story on tattooing in Iraq [September], and I thought it was awesome. My roommate and I have been trying to make our entire open wall one big tattoo collage and are having trouble finding tattoo magazines here in Iraq. I was writing today to ask if you at INKED by chance had old issues that you would be willing to donate to our efforts. If so, thank you.

Spc. Justin Liller
Camp Taji, Iraq

[Editor's note: Watch your mailbox!]

SUGGESTION BOX

I just wanted to make a lil' request for this amazing person to be considered for one of your issues: Mr. Travis Barker! I'm a huge fan and a huge fan of your magazine. I think he would be



READER OF THE MONTH
ALEXIS LOWERY
Manhattan Beach, CA

perfect. Much love.

Kristen Ponce
Los Angeles, CA

[Editor's note: We're working on it!]

I have a suggestion to do a spotlight on Lyle Tuttle Tattooing in San Francisco. Tanja Nix is amazing. She bought the shop from Lyle a long time ago.

Peter Markowicz
San Francisco, CA



WRITE TO US! Got something to say? Send all letters of praise, notes of complaint, story suggestions, and other comments to letters@inkedmag.com. All submissions should include the writer's name and address. Letters may be edited for clarity, length, and content.

INKED LIFE

My First Ink

NAME: Tiffini Truth

OCCUPATION: Model-dancer

HOMETOWN: Calgary, Alberta

My first tattoo was a small, black fairy on my lower back that quickly developed into a back piece. It was done by an underground tattoo artist. My favorites are the "truth" and "faith" written on my inner arms. Those are a reminder every day of what is most important to me. They've helped me through some hard times, and now it's all love. I look at them now and smile—that's when you know you got a good tattoo.



EAST COAST TAKEOVER

Tattoo legend Mister Cartoon is tough to track down, even in his hometown, Los Angeles. Operating in a private studio with word-of-mouth clients, most of those lucky enough to land time in his chair are celebrities such as Eminem, Mena Suvari, and Beyoncé. Now East Coast tattoo fans will have a rare chance to get tattooed by Cartoon when he takes up a limited residence at Hotel Marcel (hotelmarcel.com), a boutique hotel in New York City. The hotel will feature Cartoon as the first artist in their new program, MOAR—Marcel Original Art on Rotation. Cartoon's residency at the hotel included two weeks in November and continues with another two weeks in February, culminating with the unveiling of an art installation designed by Cartoon on a 40-by-20-foot exterior wall of the hotel. Even better, hotel guests will be allowed to skip Cartoon's one-year waiting list.



WALL FLOWERS

INKED is a damn fine magazine and now it's fine art. Photos from the pages of this magazine shot by photographer Warwick Saint recently joined the work of other world-renowned photographers at PhotographersLimitedEdition.com. The Austria-based service offers prints by photographers such as Timothy White, Rankin, Christian Whitkin, and Howard Schatz. The site includes six different INKED prints, each \$5,800 and a whopping 40-by-50 inches, big enough to cover any hole in your living room wall.



RECORD BREAKER

When Los Angeles tattooer Jeremy Swan decided to break the Guinness World Record for most tattoos completed in a single day, he didn't know what he was getting into. "Guinness hadn't updated the record, so I assumed that Oliver Peck still had it at 415," he says from Broken Art Tattoo, his shop in the Silver Lake neighborhood of Los Angeles. "I announced on my site that I was going to try it, and then found out the real record was 801. I did a backflip!" After some thought, Swan decided to carry on and chose Friday the 13th of this past November as the lucky day. "When I started at midnight, I was falling behind. I realized two of the designs took too long, so I simplified them on the fly." By day's end, Swan had set a new record of 875 tattoos. With the fun out of the way, Swan is ready to get back to serious tattooing. "I just want to keep accomplishing personal artistic goals: tattooing, painting, making music, writing, being there for my wife and kids. That's it for me."

CARTOON, MATTHEW DEAN; WALL FLOWERS, WARWICK SAINT



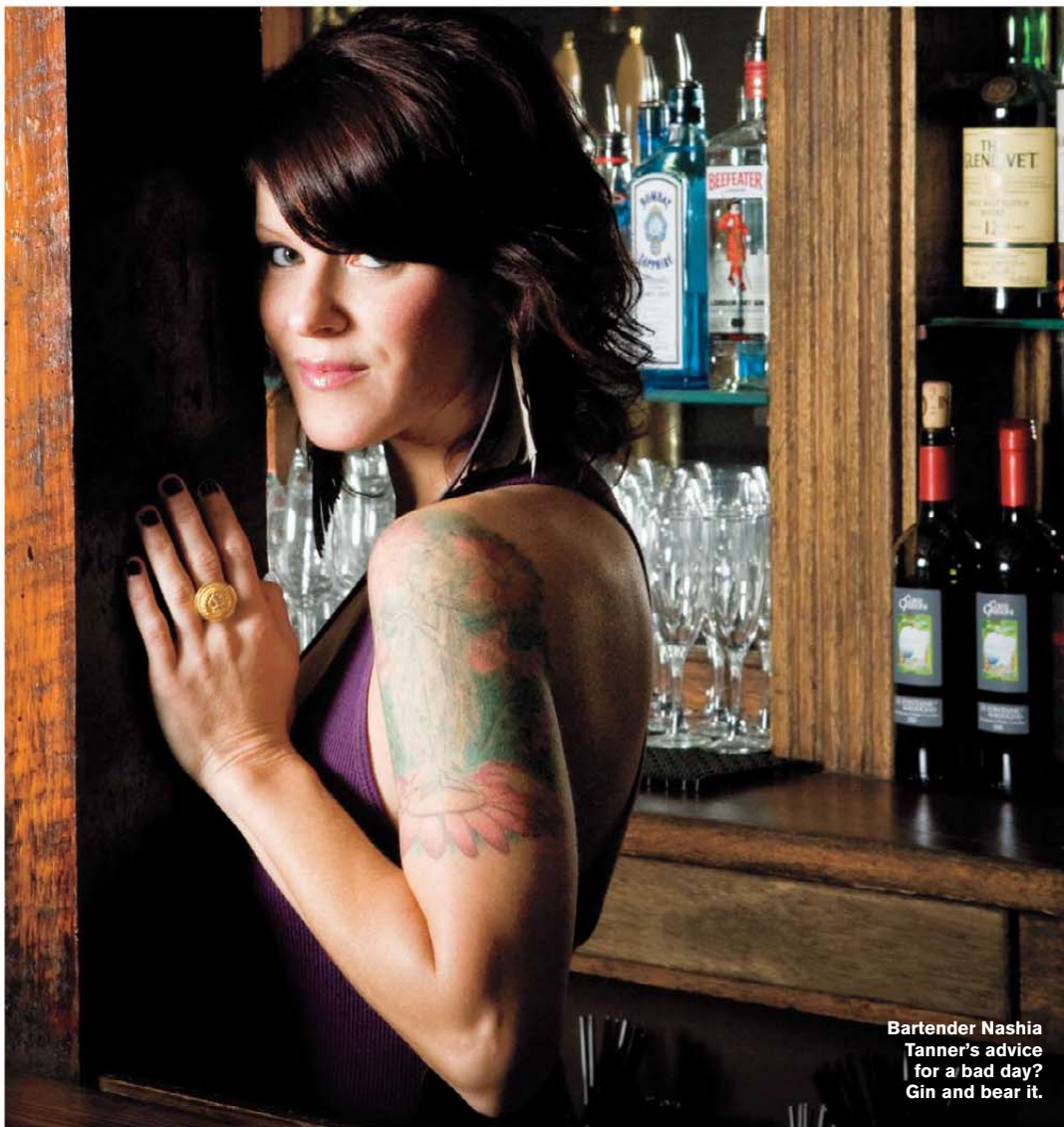
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Bartender Nashia Tanner's advice for a bad day? Gin and bear it.

GIN CITY

Classic cocktails are coming back, and gin is leading the way.

You might not know it, but you are living in the second coming of the cocktail. Go to almost any bar and you'll see things on the menu that you've never heard of (macerated pear, anyone?) mixed with other things you've never heard of (tangerine shards?). All this macerating and sharding of perfectly good ingredients is an attempt to put a modern culinary stamp on the classic cocktail. But we wouldn't be where we are today without gin.

Back in the day, the juniper-flavored spirit was the first-choice ingredient for pioneering and creative bar-keeps who saw it as the only "pure" base to use when mixing drinks. And, thankfully, gin is keeping up with the times. "A couple years ago I would have said that mostly

older patrons were drinking gin," says Nashia Tanner, a bartender at Philadelphia's Pub & Kitchen. "But now, with the craft cocktail scene booming, I see a lot more young people getting started with gin-based classic cocktails."

But what if you hate gin? Although the pine tree flavor and lack of high-end options have been known to rub a few drinkers the wrong way, there are now more options and flavors to choose from. "I'm seeing a lot more mom-and-pop gin makers that are producing really high-quality gins," says Tanner. So instead of opting for another boring old gin and tonic, why not venture out and try something new? "If your bartender has blood orange bitters, you have to try a Negroni. It's just so, so good!" —Cory Jones



Salty Dog

Made with 4 ounces grapefruit juice, 2 ounces gin, a salted rim, and a lime wedge to garnish, this refreshing gin cocktail should overtake Wheaties as the new breakfast of champions. Start your day off with one or two of these and you're a winner in our book.



Gin Rickey

This cool, dry drink was invented by Civil War vet Colonel Joe Rickey—who was a drinker, not a fighter (apparently). Just pour 1.5 ounces gin into a tall glass with a few ice cubes. Squeeze in half a lime, fill it to the top with soda, and live to fight another day.



Negroni

People either love or hate this concoction made with equal parts sweet vermouth, Campari, and gin and served with a lemon twist. If you love it, congratulations. If you hate it, you may want to go back to drinking school.



Martini

You already know this classic cocktail, but don't be fooled by bastardized versions that involve vodka or limoncello (simply putting "tini" on the end of a cocktail name does not make it a martini). The real thing is 2.5 ounces gin and a half ounce of dry vermouth garnished with a lemon twist or olives.

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IN YOUR OWN SKIN,
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SOUND ADVICE



OK GO
Of the Blue Colour of the Sky
[Capitol Records]

Most people know OK Go more for the choreographed treadmill work of their YouTube sensation video than their actual music. For the uninitiated: The L.A.-via-Chicago band build wild disco-jam pop songs that sound as if The Strokes were crammed through a Prince filter. On their latest, the drums are big, the bass slinky, and the vocals soaring. Start with “Need-

ing/Getting”; the beat thumps and singer Damian Kulash wails, “It don’t get much dumber than trying to forget a girl when you know that you love her” before things crumble into a dub jam. “White Knuckles” is a rump-shaker with hand claps and funk riffs, and “All Is Not Lost” is indie rock ABBA—in a good way. The big, dreamy “In the Glass” is a great closer. It just needs a video.



MOTION CITY SOUNDTRACK
My Dinosaur Life
[Columbia Records]

If *My Dinosaur Life* has a theme it’s about a breakup and whether Motion City Soundtrack singer Justin Pierre really wants to care about it. On opener “Worker Bee”—a blast of Blink-182 riffs (whose Mark Hoppus produced this album)—he sings, “It went from no good to fucked up to over.” Later, on “Her Words Destroyed My Planet,” he shrugs off the pain, telling an ex, “I finally

shaved off my beard/Sold my Xbox to Jimmy down the street/I even stopped smoking weed” while wild synths and guitars back him up. The Weezer-ish “Motherfuckers” is a rocker in which Pierre lifts a middle finger to bullies and warns, “You need to leave me and my sensitive homeboys alone.” You’ve been warned.



FUCKED UP
Couple Tracks
[Matador Records]

The career of Fucked Up has been, well, fucked up. The Canadian band blew up the formula for hardcore with the album *Hidden World*, played stunt gigs such as performing for 12 straight hours in NYC, then released *The Chemistry of Common Life*, a massive wall of noise complete with violins. Despite that, this two-CD collection of B-sides and alternate versions of tracks stretching back to

2002 sounds shockingly cohesive. “Neat Parts,” a blend of power pop and hardcore steam, is built around a beat stolen from the Undertones, while tracks such as the fist-pumping “Generation” and the sentimental “I Hate Summer” are the closest Fucked Up come to straight-up punk. Damn good.



CRIME IN STEREO
I Was Trying to Describe You to Someone
[Bridge Nine Records]

We’re counting on the writer who coined *grunge* and *emo* to come up with a word for the new breed of bands like Muse, Dredg, Brand New, and Crime in Stereo that fuse everything from hardcore riffs to indie rock melodies. Regardless of the genre’s yet-to-be-determined name, Crime in Stereo does it well. “Not Dead” marches forward

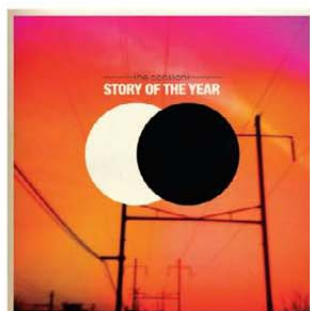
on a muddy riff until the chorus erupts into a volley of grunge-style “hey”s as singer Kristian Hallbert wails, “I’m not dead but you’re losing me.” The band’s melodic hardcore roots surface on “I Am Everything I Am Not,” built around twitchy guitar and a fist-pumping chorus, while Hallbert unleashes a Cobain-like scream on the explosive, melodic “Type One.” Whatever you call it, we like it.



VAMPIRE WEEKEND
Contra
[XL Recordings]

On paper, there’s nothing likable about Vampire Weekend, a band made up of Columbia University students who describe their sound as “Upper West Side Soweto,” a reference to their blend of preppy indie rock and Afrobeat. But somewhere in their xylophone and harpsichord racket and seeming worship of Paul Simon’s *Graceland*, there is an odd earnestness that

works. Rhythms are what drive this band, and they vary from Brazilian funk to wild dancehall. “Holiday” races around offbeat ska that breaks into keyboard flurry, while opener “Horchata,” an ode to the Mexican beverage, is built around tribal drumming and African chanting. All the while, singer Ezra Koenig weaves his boyish voice through the rhythm. Make it your next guilty pleasure.



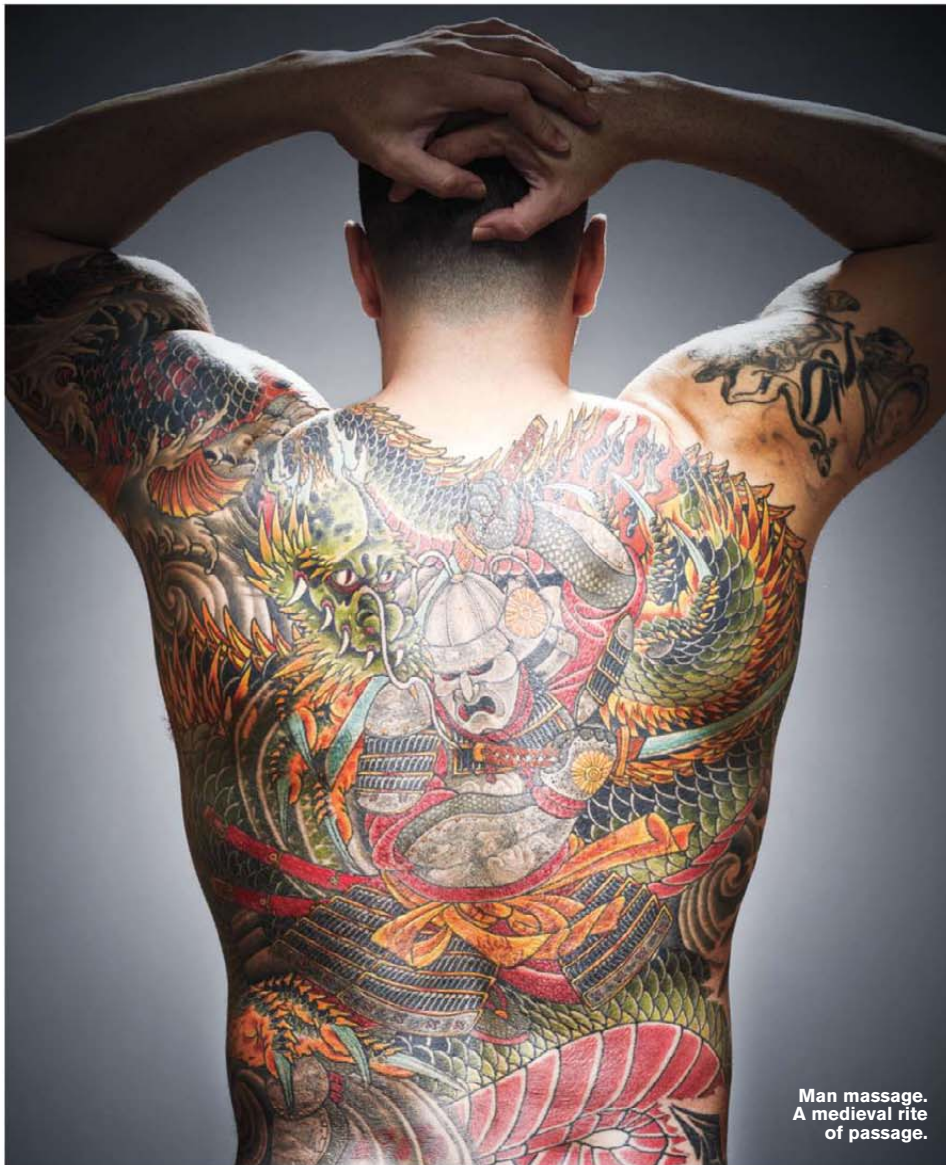
STORY OF THE YEAR
The Constant
[Epitaph Records]

Those who accuse Story of the Year of identity confusion have the story only half right. While the St. Louis band is a Warped Tour regular and releases albums on punk label Epitaph, the truth is that SOTY has more in common with radio rock bands such as Hoobastank and Chevelle. That doesn’t change on their fourth album as producer Elvis Baskette

(who also worked with Chevelle) helps SOTY crank out at least a half dozen songs that fit perfectly on any modern rock dial. Try “Ten Years Down,” with its perfect riff and huge chorus, or “Holding on to You,” a midtempo ballad that builds from a piano riff until singer Dan Marsala wails, “I found a way to make it through/Holding on to you.” It’s rock radio fodder of the highest caliber.



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SMOOTH MOVES

The trick to getting a massage is knowing how to give one.

When the back piece finally heals, celebrate with a massage. Lots of gyms and spas are offering shorter services for a discounted price (thank you, recession!), but the “I’ll do you if you do me” approach also works well around a certain February holiday. To begin, “turn off your phone, find a warm, quiet place, and turn on some relaxing music,” suggests Christine Sage Johnson, director of the Ocean Spa at Loews Santa Monica Beach Hotel. Next, you’ll need some lubricant. Check out the options we found at right, or—if you don’t mind smelling like a salad—just use the olive oil from your kitchen, suggests Johnson. Rub the oil between your hands, then start on your partner with one of the simplest techniques, called *effleurage*. “Glide your hands along the back in long, smooth strokes, following the contours of the muscles. Keep repeating, varying your pressure and speed,” Johnson says. Obviously, the longer the massage the better, but aim to give for at least 15 minutes before you ask to receive. And for those of you who can’t find a giver, there’s no shame in mechanical assistance; see right for two options we like. —Jennifer Goldstein



HoMedics Quad Extreme Massager

Handheld massagers are great for focusing on sore spots, says Johnson. And the compact shape of this rechargeable handheld option (\$15; homedics.com) makes it easy to use on your own shoulders—or those of your partner.



Cowshed Horny Cow Massage Oil

If you’re hoping to get lucky, this slippery stuff (\$28; conradusa.com) is way classier than the “warming oil” in the neon package next to the condoms. It has rose, patchouli, and cinnamon oils—all of which are said to increase arousal.



Human Touch iJoy 2580 Massage Chair

“Nothing can replicate the healing touch of hands,” says Johnson. But with three built-in massage programs and the ability to replicate rolling, kneading, compression, and percussion, this powerful chair (\$799; amazon.com) comes pretty close.



Melvita Kinésis Massage Oil

Since you want just a little slip, not frat party entertainment, this organic oil (\$32, usa.melvita.com) comes in a spray bottle that makes it impossible to overlubricate. Plus, it has lavender, which helps with relaxation, according to Johnson.

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GAME ON



BIOSHOCK 2

Systems: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC

Real estate in Rapture must be at an all-time low. Ten years after Andrew Ryan's empire of individualism was disrupted, a new figurehead has taken over the underwater city. With an ex-priest rallying deranged citizens to the new leader's cause and an army of Big Sisters enforcing a rigid view of humanity, each player becomes a rogue Big Daddy who must extinguish the movement. Armed with a big fuck-off drill, superpowered plasmids that harvest the energy of the elements, and a rivet gun, your lumbering hero has the mettle to match the lightning-fast strikes of the relentless Big Sisters. Once your menacing monstrosity sets the world right, jump back in time with the BioShock 2 multiplayer, a series of death matches that take place during the fall of Rapture.



DARK VOID

Systems: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC

Pilot-for-hire William Grey should have known better than to fly across the Bermuda Triangle. His plane inevitably goes down over the legendary trouble spot, and he's teleported to a parallel dimension dominated by an alien race known as the Watchers. Joining other human survivors, Grey must find a way back to Earth while fending off attacks from his oppressors. His preferred method of warfare? Jetpack. With rockets strapped to his back courtesy of Nikola Tesla (don't ask), Grey takes the fight directly to his technologically superior enemies, scaling aerial fortresses, jacking UFOs, and blasting off to safety when gun battles go wrong. Dark Void's unique vertical combat takes getting used to, but once you master the jetpack, the high-octane combat unleashes your inner Rocketeer.



ARMY OF TWO: THE 40TH DAY

Systems: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PSP

Here's the setup: Two steroid-shooting, joke-spewing mercenaries are in Shanghai for a routine mission. When the city comes under siege from a rival private military contractor, the cocky duo ditch the bravado and prepare for the worst. Escaping the chaotic disaster zone won't be easy, with buildings collapsing around them, panicked civilians running for their lives, and a hail of gunfire that makes Afghanistan look like Club Med. Working in tandem, players must coordinate attacks, avoid shooting bystanders, and make tough moral decisions as they battle through the ravaged ruins. With the spoils of war, players can fine-tune their weapons with scopes, barrels, grenade launcher attachments, bigger clips, and even decorative paint jobs. Finally, a zebra-striped AK-47 to match your tattoo.



MASS EFFECT 2

Systems: Xbox 360, PC

The original Mass Effect had everything the *Star Wars* prequels didn't: an engaging intergalactic plot, badass protagonists, and universal acclaim from fans and critics alike. The sequel to this mind-blowing action RPG doesn't waste any time in kicking ass. When human colonies start disappearing from outer reaches of space, Commander Shepard assembles a new squad to take on the mysterious organization responsible for the genocide. It won't be easy. A sense of dread hangs over Shepard's every move, and one wrong decision could cost you an ally, your ship, or even Shepard's life. With explosive new weapons, intuitive squad commands, and a new starship at your command, at least you'll have a fighting chance. And if you see Jar Jar Binks, please kill on sight. —Matt Bertz



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TOY STORY

At some point your body will be a used-up canvas of tattoos without an inch of space left for ink. Rather than kidnap someone else to use, transfer that art love to a Munny by Kid Robot (\$10, kidrobot.com). Artists everywhere paint and draw on the 4-inch blank plastic toys (tattooer Julie Becker did the Trippy, right, and Josh Woods the Bub, far right) and even get together for a three-day Munnyworld convention. In addition to Trippy and Bub, the latest additions to the Munny family include Raffy and Rooz, animal-like critters begging to be redesigned. Give Rooz the knuckle rocker you always wanted.



PHONE HOME

Phone calls just don't cut it anymore. We need smartphones that can tackle e-mail, Twitter, and Facebook, play music, plus find us a place to drink and help us get home afterward. Sony's Xperia X10 smartphone (about \$800) uses a variation of the Google Android operating system to sync everything from your Gmail and Google Calendar accounts and access applications such as Google Maps. The device also includes an 8-megapixel camera, 4-inch touch display, Wi-Fi, 3G, and GPS. We aren't sure, but we think it also makes phone calls.



SIT ON IT

Maybe it's the memories of past sessions, but we can't pitch old skate decks in the trash. Neither can the designers at Deckstool (deckstool.com), a company that makes stools from old decks. Choose a premade stool (\$199), or send them your shredded decks and they'll build a custom stool (\$179). They're a perfect place for parking your ass while your ankle heals.

MUNNY: SHANNON MORAN



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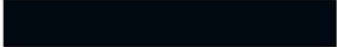


Clockwise from far left: *The Severed Hands of Nikki Sixx*, collection of Nikki Sixx; Kevin Llewellyn; *Black Poinsettia*, collection of Kat Von D; *Victoria Hyndman of Amsterdam*, collection of Mr. and Mrs. Eric and Nicole Schmidt.



GET REAL

Los Angeles painter Kevin Llewellyn's work is a study in punk rock realism.



It's 6:30 p.m. in Los Angeles, and Kevin Llewellyn is apologizing for his morning voice. If his math is correct, the realist painter has gotten roughly 24 hours of sleep over the past three days—but they've been strange hours at best, accumulated sporadically, in fits and starts.

"It's crazy. I've been painting [Nikki Sixx of Mötley Crüe] almost every single second I've been awake," Llewellyn explains, clearing what's left of the morning voice from his throat. "It's an old master portrait," he continues between coughs. "You know, like a van Dyck."

Except Llewellyn's oil painting of the bassist standing shirtless in a dark coat with lapels made of raven wings isn't exactly the type of subject matter Sir Anthony van Dyck was working with as a 17th-century court painter.

But that's Llewellyn's style. While other realists stick to bowls of fruit, he's all about portraying modern raw elements (conjoined fetus skulls and pierced, weathered strippers) through the refined and elegant brushwork of the old masters. "Yeah, it seems like the realists today don't paint things like a naked girl with her legs behind her head or the Virgin Mary crying blood," Llewellyn says. "Well, there are a lot of realists who paint the Virgin Mary—but not like that."

Most realists also don't live a lifestyle that offers such muses. Sure, Llewellyn is into timeless techniques, reading art history books, and dropping into museums to study the classics in person. "But at the same time, I love things like punk rock shows, strippers, and all the crazy shit that goes with it," he says, trailing off into a boyish laugh. "That whole punk rock lifestyle and the whole old masters, baroque thing have been so ingrained in me that I didn't really have a choice about it."

For Llewellyn, while the artist lifestyle has come with an immortality obsession and dream of living on like van Dyck, the punk rock lifestyle has come with a penchant for tattoos. "Like right now, I don't care about fame or being known—it's all about making a body of work that will last for hundreds of years. And I think that's the same thing with all my tattoos," explains Llewellyn, who has work from Shawn Barber, Henry Lewis, and others. "I get all these skulls—you know, stuff that reminds me of my mortality and that I'm not going to live forever. But through the art your soul goes into every single piece. So in that way, the tattoos are just another reminder of: Paint your ass off." —Ellen Thompson

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DESTINATION: SÃO PAULO

Brazilian tattooer Camila Rocha gives a guided tour of Brazil's biggest city.

When São Paulo tattooer **Camila Rocha** relocated to Los Angeles, she brought a bit of Brazil with her. Now stationed at **Kat Von D's High Voltage Tattoo**, Rocha arrived with her traditional Japanese tattooing style, some São Paulo charisma, and a solid list of tips for navigating Brazil's biggest, richest, and busiest city. "We have spots for fashion, nightlife, rock music, alternative cinemas, restaurants, and art galleries for street artists," says Rocha, her excitement almost as strong as her Brazilian accent. "Oh, and my favorite, graffiti artists." We caught up with Rocha and asked her to spill on her hometown's "it" spots, including where to hang out, where to shop, and where to eat a fine Brazilian meal in a 100-year-old fig tree. Yes, we're serious. —Ellen Thompson



📍 BEST GALLERY FOR LOCAL ART

Rocha catches up with São Paulo's latest street artists—and her friends—behind Choque Cultural's doors (choquecultural.com.br, Rua João Moura 997). The gallery, which has become a stomping ground of sorts for the city's next generation of graffiti, tattoo, graphic design, and illustration artists, is littered with sculptures, portraits, and other forms of mixed media. If you want to see where São Paulo's art scene is heading, just check out Chivitz's graffiti. He fuses street life and skate culture with cubism in the form of charming caricatures. And Rocha can't help but talk up the work of Yumi, who does some wild stuff with plastic.

📍 BEST DINNER IN A TREE

Beef and a gigantic, 100-year-old fig tree: those two things alone can draw anyone into A Figueira Rubaiyat (rubaiyat.com.br, Rua Haddock Lobo 1738), a traditional upscale restaurant built around the base of an enormous fig tree. But for Rocha, it's the *feijoada* that makes the place. "This dish was invented in the slave times and is made in a clay pan," she says of the moderately salty, but not spicy, traditional stew thick with beans, jerked beef loin and tongue, sausage, bacon, and pork ears, tail, and feet. "They make it with the highest quality ingredients, and it is the best recommendation I can give for trying *feijoada* in a classy restaurant." 📍



📍 BEST TATTOO SHOP

When in São Paulo, you can't hit up just any tattoo shop, and that's why Rocha often points friends in the direction of Led's Tattoo (ledstattoo.com.br, Av. Ibirapuera 3478). "These guys are responsible for one of our biggest international tattoo conventions in Brazil," she says. "I really respect Sergio 'Led' Maciel, the shop owner. He has a big crew of amazing professionals." The artists tattoo everything from traditional to Japanese styles and everyone from locals to Brazil's celebrities.



📍 BEST LOCAL DRINK

"São Paulo is famous for being a gastronomic city, there is no mistake!" Rocha says. "Almost everywhere, you can find good places with good drink options and different Brazilian tastes. But I need to say, if you go to Brazil you must try a caipirinha." It won't be hard to find the drink, made with a fermented sugarcane liquor (*cachaça*), sugar, and lemon, since it's Brazil's national cocktail. "It's awesome!"



📍 BEST SPOT TO SEE IT ALL

Even though locals will argue that 46-story Edifício Itália (Av. Ipiranga 344) is the tallest building in São Paulo, it's actually the second, behind Mirante do Vale. (A forgivable mistake since Mirante do Vale sits in a valley and is closed to public visitation.) But Edifício Itália does have "a great São Paulo view," according to Rocha. "And you can enjoy it from a restaurant [Terraço Italia] on the top of the building!"

KNUCKLE DOWN



From top: Room 101 Silver small and large black rhodium rings, both custom order, room101silver.com; Good Wood black-and-gold two-finger ring, goodwoodnyc.com; Spragwerks AK-47 three-finger ring, spragwerks.com; Melody Ehsani The Chain two-finger ring, karmaloop.com; Lazaro Soho two-finger dagger ring, 212-219-8494.

STYLIST, MEGAN TERRY



PEAS CORPS

Clockwise from top left:
Stussy gray peacoat, stussy.com; I.N.C. Cambodia peacoat, macys.com; Cloth Logic Peacoat Classic, tulle4us.com; Volcom Ackrite coat, volcom.com.

STYLIST, MEGAN TERRY



Clockwise from left:
Volkswagen Jetta
TDI; Fisker Karma;
side view of Fisker
Karma; side view of
Volkswagen Jetta TDI.

GREEN GETS FUN

If your local farmer's market starts a racing league, these two cars will rule it.

Volkswagen Jetta TDI Cup Street Edition

2.0-liter turbo-diesel four-cylinder
140 horsepower
\$25,000

Fisker Karma

2.0-liter four-cylinder
260 horsepower
\$87,900

A few years ago, if you were asked to name two things that were *not* synonymous with auto racing, Volkswagen Jettas and diesel engines wouldn't have been bad answers. After all, Jettas were sensible sedans, and diesel engines provided admirable gas mileage but were in no danger of being adopted by NASCAR. Today, however, the Volkswagen Jetta TDI Cup runs races with specialized versions of the diesel four-doors that complete the entire season—it lasts six months—on about two tanks of fuel.

Enter the limited-edition Jetta TDI Cup Street Edition. Outside, it looks almost exactly like the racer, but without the numbers, ad decals, and dents caused by dickhead competitors. The chrome front end is replaced by a sleeker grill and wide-mouth intakes, while wider side skirts, a ball-sier rear bumper, and 18-inch wheels complete the sporty look. A 2.0-liter, 140 horsepower turbocharged clean diesel produces 236 lb-ft of torque, which is a slight disappointment since the power plants in the track cars enjoy a 30 horsepower upgrade. But that doesn't mean the package is all show and no go; stiffer suspension, borrowed from the sporty Jetta GLI, makes cornering a lot

more fun, and the larger brakes make for quicker emergency stops when you find yourself rounding a corner straight toward a preschool playground. Inside the cabin, Interlagos bucket seats cradle you and your passenger up front, and the leather steering wheel is mated to paddle shifters on models equipped with VW's awesome DSG tranny (a six-speed manual is also available). Go ahead, take 'er for a joyride—Ma Nature won't mind.

Also fast, and also green, the Fisker Karma is billed as the world's first "luxury plug-in hybrid electric vehicle." Well ... okay, sure! Underneath the hood, there's a 2.0-liter, 260 horsepower turbocharged four-cylinder that runs on standard gasoline. Big deal, right? Thing is, it doesn't drive the wheels—it charges the batteries that power the drive train. The result, according to Fisker, is 408 horsepower and a space shuttle-like 959 lb-ft of torque. All for a killer 67 mpg. But don't pull out the neck brace quite yet—the Fisker Karma isn't slated to hit the streets 'til next fall. And with the estimated \$87,900 price tag, it will take the entire salaries of you and your roommate to afford one. But tell him to think of all the money you'll save on gas! —Ky Henderson

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INKED PEOPLE

“My husband is always telling me to get filler, asking me if I’m going to get sleeves. I don’t really care about that stuff—I just get what I want.” —*Tara Levitin*

TARA LEVITIN

Old keys and tiny faucet handles. A pocketknife and a wolf tooth. Where others see antique oddities, Tara Levitin sees jewelry. The rising star designer behind Leviticus Jewelry finds inspiration in anything from a book of watercolors to music for an old movie—the stranger the jumble, the better. “I do stuff on a whim,” she says. “If I feel like making this, I’ll make this.”

Born in Texas, Levitin relocated to Los Angeles, where she received a degree from the Fashion Institute of Design & Merchandising. After graduation, she bounced to New York City and back to Texas, where she began designing her line of handmade jewelry, Leviticus—in honor of Levi, her brother who died in 2005—as a means of staying home with her daughter. The company grew bigger, thanks to fans such as Rachael Ray and Pixie on *LA Ink*, and these days Levitin is focused on building internationally and expanding her online shop. “I know that people want to touch and try it on before they buy it. That’s my biggest thing—getting everything out there,” she says.

Levitin says her tattoo inspirations and ideas are “almost like my jewelry, because I’ll get an idea or I’ll see something I like and I’ll think on it. It’s a bit different with tattoos, though, because I’ll make myself sit and think about it for at least five months before I get it.” Her journey into the self-expression of ink began with her first tattoo: two stick figures based on a Radiohead album logo done by a “biker guy at a tattoo shop in Houston.” Her mother cried. Levitin, on the other hand, had no regrets—she was hooked. At least 12 more followed.

If Levitin does have a regret when it comes to her ink, it’s only that her favorite one is on the back of her arm, which means she can only catch a glimpse of it in a mirror. If she could do it over again, the image of the vintage girl in the window would be placed front and center so Levitin could see it as often as she liked. “My husband is always telling me to get filler, asking me if I’m going to get sleeves,” she laughs. “I don’t really care about that stuff—I just get what I want.” —*Mary Toto*



From left: Darren Parkinson,
Dan Smith, Cortney Miner,
Jimmy Walsh.




 KAT VON D
APPROVED!

THE DEAR & DEPARTED

Dan Smith is living two dreams at once. When he's not fronting the New Wave-inspired rock act The Dear & Departed, he's busy at his other gig as a tattooer at High Voltage Tattoo in Los Angeles—a job that's immortalized him on the reality show *LA Ink*. "It is difficult to balance two full-time jobs, but even though I'm insanely busy with the show, the songs still manage to get written," Smith says, adding that his two worlds recently collided when Kat Von D came to visit TD&D in the studio. "The show isn't going to last forever and it was an opportunity I had to take when it presented itself," he acknowledges before adding, "I'm so lucky to be able to spend my time doing two things that I love."

Smith was originally born in England and bounced around New Zealand and Australia before forming The Dear & Departed in Orange County, CA, in 2006, out of the ashes of his old metalcore act. Although Smith, drummer Jimmy Walsh, and guitarists Darren Parkinson and Cortney Miner have only been a band for a relatively short period of time, they've already toured with everyone from Tiger Army to AFI—despite having more in common musically with artists like The Cure and The Church. "To be honest, we haven't really ever been about that southern California scene, so it's interesting to be thrown into the mix," Smith says with a laugh when asked what it's like for the band to perform at festivals like the Vans Warped Tour. "My favorite stuff to listen to are British bands like The Stone Roses or The Cure."

Those influences are clearly present in the band's new EP, *Chapters*, which sees them channeling the ghost of Ian Curtis despite the fact that it was produced by New Found Glory's Chad Gilbert. "I really think these songs are a much better representation of who we are than our previous recordings," Smith says. From the anthemic pop of "Tambourine Love" to the brooding ballad "There for the Taking," *Chapters* is a breakthrough mix of Brit rock with muscle. So is Smith worried that his reality TV status might affect his band's credibility? "I don't really see any negative aspects to being on *LA Ink*. As far as the show goes, I'm just trying to do my best to represent tattooing the way I think it should be done." —Jonah Bayer

SKRATCH

Southern California custom car guru Skratz laughs cautiously about the flowing script across the front of his Skratz's Garage T-shirt that reads, "I ain't the best but I'm better than you." After a pause he admits, "Well, it's kinda true." And he makes a damn good case for it.

Skratz is best known for his skill as a pin-striper from his four-year stint on TLC's *Overhaulin'*. But unlike most others in the world of kustom kulture, he can do just about anything: frames, suspensions, sheet metal, wiring, painting, bodywork, welding. "That's where my name comes from," he says, "'cause I do everything from scratch."

As a rule, where there are hot rods, there are tattoos. Even pin-stripping, Skratz's specialty, shares similarities to tattooing—from its protected craft and specialized tools to the act itself. Skratz grew up in a family of mechanics but didn't discover pin-stripping until later in life, after hanging out with tattooer buddy Oliver Peck at Elm Street Tattoo in Dallas. "I was down at the shop one day and they started messing around with pin-stripping brushes," he explains. "So I went and bought some brushes and paint and

worked on that instead of tattoos."

Skratz picked up his first tattoo, the iconic logo for Clay Smith Cams, in the '90s. Now he's pretty well-covered, and tattooer Sid is finishing up his back piece of a giant Oldsmobile motor. "I don't get that much car stuff anymore," says Skratz. "It was all mostly car-related at first, and now I have wacky stuff, like an eagle with no head that Oliver did." The rest of his work comes from Baby Ray, Eric Maaske, Sam Chamberlain, Chad Lambert, Geoff Horn, and Jens out of Old Bones in Sweden.

If it's not obvious yet, Skratz doesn't spend much time in the first few gears. He has worked with companies such as Tyler Surfboards, Bell Helmets, Barry Grant carburetors, and Cherry Bomb brand mufflers, and has collaborated with names as wildly different as Roger Miret (Agnostic Front vocalist and Dirty Devil brand clothing founder) and Christian Audigier (infamous Ed Hardy bedazzler). He's owned a garage since he was 19 and sleeps less than four hours a night. All of this isn't to say that Skratz is the best—but there's a hell of a good chance he's better than you. —Patrick Sullivan





I AM NOT

Kat Von D

She has a hot Hollywood tattoo shop, a hit television show, a best-selling book, and a rock star boyfriend. Now the most famous tattoo artist on the planet is trying to find herself in all of the madness.

BY REBECCA SWANNER
PHOTOS BY JAMES DIMMOCK

OUTSIDE THE GUNMETAL GRAY DOOR OF A NONDESCRIPT NORTH Hollywood building lies a colorful doormat and a kitschy frog statue, the kind you'd find on the front porch of a house in the suburbs. Both read "Welcome." This is not the entrance to the Monastery, Kat Von D's private photography studio. Less than two feet away, there is another door with another doormat. This doormat is plain and beige, featuring large black letters that simply proclaim: "GO AWAY."

Kat whips around the corner in a convertible black Bentley with the top down, exclaiming, "I'm so sorry I'm late!" She was, after all, running a whole four minutes behind. The world-famous tattooer and star of TLC's *LA Ink* pulls into the garage, finishes a Red Bull, and opens the side door to her studio. She saunters up the stairs past walls lined with an array of religious artwork and greets Oscar the pit bull at the top. It's here that the room opens up to an airy, four-story loft with 10-foot ceilings and giant windows that allow the afternoon light to flood over statues of the Virgin Mary and images of Jesus on the cross lining the ledges and bookshelves.

Kat grew up in a religious family, but the decor isn't meant to pay homage to those times. The family belonged to the Seventh-Day Adventists, a religion that typically shuns ornamentation and jewelry. "I remember my sister liked rosaries growing up and my parents were like, 'You can't wear that because it's idolatry.'" Another area of the loft has been sectioned off for her latest passion, portrait photography, partially ignited when boyfriend Nikki Sixx gifted her a new camera. After snagging a cigarette, Kat eases into a gilded, thronelike chair, and I settle into a plush Victorian sofa with Oscar sitting proudly next to us.

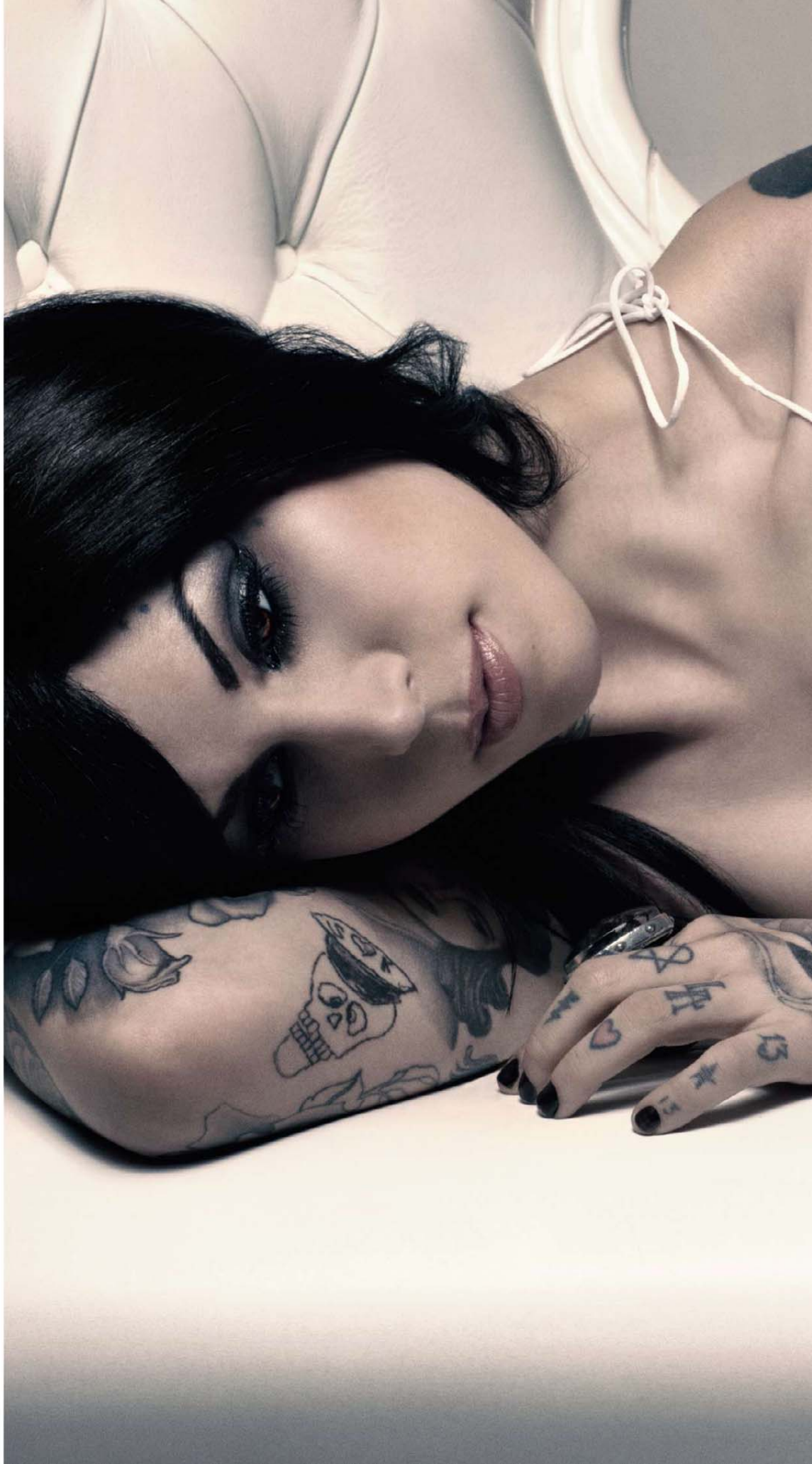


In photos and on the show, Kat's features seem to have an angular, hard edge. But face to face, she's infinitely softer. The sharpness fades away, replaced with a feminine beauty that's just not as apparent on the small screen—perhaps because of the way the film crew lights her AC/DC-inspired Hollywood tattoo studio, High Voltage. And the tattoos, which pop in photographs, blend with her skin in such a way that you'd think this is how she came out of the womb. But in her nearly all-black getup, with a long knit cover-up, a slinky top that reveals a striped black-and-white bra, and vinyl pants, she still looks like—with the exception of flip-flops—rock royalty. And she should. Kat owns a successful tattoo studio in the heart of Los Angeles, *LA Ink* draws in an average of about three million viewers a week, she has tattooed dozens of well-known celebrities, written a book that made the best-seller list, and banked enough cash to afford a top-of-the-line car and a house in Hollywood. Not bad for someone who's just 27.

In 1982, when Katherine Von Drachenberg was born, life wasn't nearly this glamorous. Her parents, who both hailed from Argentina, had relocated to Mexico so her father, a doctor, could be closer to her grandfather, who was teaching medicine there.

The Von Drachenbergs were far from rich, but that didn't matter. "I have to say, my happiest moments, other than right now, would be that time in my life. It was as simple as it gets." Life revolved around family and religion instead of pop culture. On the weekends, the Von Drachenbergs played the piano, visited grandparents, and sang hymns. "We didn't have a TV. I didn't see MTV until I was 16, at a friend's house." Her grandmother is an oil painter and a pianist obsessed with Beethoven, and she inspired Kat to follow in her creative footsteps. Though sometimes she hated it, Katherine and her older sister, Karoline, practiced the piano for an hour or two each day, and she spent most of her free time playing with her siblings and sketching. Even a cursory glance at her early work would reveal she has a natural talent, but Kat didn't think it would take her anywhere. "I wanted to become a doctor when I was little. My dad was my hero and I wanted to be like him. He would say, 'Why don't you be an artist when you grow up?' And I would say, 'Dad, that's unrealistic. Aside from being an architect, there is just no way you can make a steady career out of art.'"

When Kat was 4, her parents moved the family to southern California. "It was kind of a fluke we were born in Mexico, because my dad always had the idea that America was a better place to raise kids." On the way to their new home, Kat was treated for the first time to music that wasn't classical or from the church when her father stopped at a gas station in the States and purchased cassette tapes featuring the music of Dolly Parton, Johnny Cash, and Elton John. "I remember driving from McAllen, Texas, to California with my dad translating 'A Boy Named Sue' to all of us. My mom, when she came to America, didn't speak any English, and music was one of her ways of learning it." Years later her father took





Thomas Wylde dress; Hellmuth ring; Kat's own bracelet. Previous page: Alexander McQueen dress, courtesy of Chic Little Devil; Dolce & Gabbana shoes; Carrera y Carrera blue gem gold ring; Amrapali snake bracelet; Kat's own bracelet.



Thomas Wylde
dress; Hellmuth
black stone ring;
Kat's own spider
ring and bracelet;
Fendi black
platform pumps.

“I REALLY HATE THE
DIRECTION THE NETWORK
DECIDED FOR THIS SEASON.
THE LAST THING I WOULD
EVER WANT IS FOR PEOPLE
NOT TO TAKE THAT SHIT
WITH A GRAIN OF SALT.”



her mother to Vegas and they ended up meeting Dolly Parton. “I remember how stoked my mom was because she said Dolly Parton was so nice to her. That was probably my first experience with understanding the idea of fame because we didn’t have that growing up. Like, Jesus was famous, but I wasn’t going to meet him.”

Fame is not something that sits well with Kat. But it’s something she’s had to come to terms with. “I never wanted to be on *Star Search*. I just saw [*Miami Ink*] as an opportunity to be a good representation of tattooing.” But despite her well-meant intentions, once she joined the cast, she found herself rejected by a portion of the tattoo community. “Tattooers definitely have their opinions about me or their perception of me, and I felt that a lot of that wasn’t coming from a place of love. There’s nothing that makes me different other than my situation, but I had to come to terms with [that fact that this life] isn’t normal, and from this point on there are just things I can’t do like I used to. I try to separate myself from the tattoo politics. Tattooing is hard enough, and you don’t need other people’s egos affecting your ability to create.”

She doesn’t only have to deal with her dissenters; she also has to figure out how to work effectively with the cameras around. “It’s pretty frustrating. When we’re filming, everything takes twice as long as it would in real life.” To capture enough footage for one hour-long episode of *LA Ink*, the film crew must film for five days—usually from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. A lot ends up on the cutting room floor. “Sometimes it’s discouraging because I’m doing a tattoo and the chemistry between me and the client is so compelling and for whatever reason, it gets cut. That’s the stuff that’s out of my control,” she says.

Her lack of control over the editorial direction of the show is one of the reasons she’s angry about the most recent season, the second half of which launches this month. “I really hate the direction the network decided for this season. The last thing I would ever want is for people not to take that shit with a grain of salt. And that’s the thing—people believe whatever they see on TV. The network wanted it to be drama-derived, and that was everything I stood against. I was crying every day, like, ‘I can’t believe they edited me saying that. Girls are going to think that’s the right behavior.’ I just have to do my best and, at the end of the day, whatever happens is out of my control. But I still battle with it.”

Cue the entrance of the shop’s new manager, the very blond Aubry (who just happened to be on the second season of *Rock of Love*), and tattoo artist Paulie, who moved from Brooklyn but never fit in. There’s also the auditioning of new artists Kat had never met, like Amy. The tattooers fans see aren’t, for the most part, the ones who work at High Voltage when the show isn’t filming. But letting go of two of her favorite costars wasn’t something she wanted to do. “They made me get rid of Hannah [Aitchison] and Kim [Saigh]. That was so hard. I told the network, whatever it takes, I’ll do anything. In the end, Hannah and Kim understood it was in no way my decision. Unfortunately, you have the Jon and Kates and all the other attention-seekers that cause viewers to watch the shows, and that’s the direction they wanted.”



o stay content when the cameras are going, she keeps her focus on her tattooing, a passion she discovered at 14 when her friend Oliver Guthrie asked her to tattoo his leg with the iconic Misfits skull. "It was magical. The instant I started tattooing that kid, I was like, this is what I have to do." Guthrie ended up becoming a tattoo artist himself, and it wasn't long until Kat got her first tattoo, an Old English style *J* on her ankle for her then-boyfriend, James. Not long after, she ran away from home with James, taking a bus all the way to Georgia. The bond didn't last. After a few months, she moved back to California, and they drifted apart. But the tattoo remains. And after fading out of Kat's life 10 years ago with her wondering if he was still alive, James showed up at the last stop on her book tour for *High Voltage*. "It was like staring at a ghost. I instantly recognized his voice. I still feel a lot of love for him in those times, but I'm a different person."

James isn't the only ex whose name is emblazoned on her body. Over the years, she's had the names of many of her boyfriends tattooed on her including "Orbi," a tribute to her time with Alex Orbison, Roy Orbison's son. With the exception of the profile of her ex-husband Oliver Peck on her thigh, she's kept them all. But she didn't laser off the portrait of Peck because she harbors any ill will toward him or because she's upset that he set out to (and did) top her Guinness World Record of tattooing 400 people in one 24-hour period. "I think Oliver is one of the coolest-looking guys I've ever met, and by far, one of the most interesting people I've ever met. But it was a big part of my leg and it was hard to work around."

At 16, she got a job tattooing at Sin City in San Bernardino. After two years of learning to tattoo through trial and error, she was able to enjoy a proper apprenticeship. "It was so exciting and scary because it was such a ghetto part of town—a lot of crazy activity going on. There was a lot of ruffraff and drinking and drugs and guns." She was also living with a prostitute. "I met her at the movie theater and I didn't know, obviously. I didn't have a car and she lived close to the shop. She exposed her lifestyle to me and it was really sad to witness because she had two beautiful kids who were already affected by her addiction to drugs and all that stuff."

It was at Sin City that she acquired the moniker Kat Von D. "I would always write out Katherine Von Drachenberg, which I love. But this kid would come around a lot and he abbreviated it to Kat Von D. I always disliked it because I was a fan of Von Dutch, the painter, and I always associate Von D with Von Dutch and I felt that it was already taken. But it stuck." After all, Von Drachenberg is a bit of a mouthful, and Kat herself was sent home in the first grade because she couldn't spell her own last name.

After a year and a half at Sin City, Kat was searching for something more serious and scored a job tattooing with Pete Costa at Blue Bird Tattoo in Pasadena. "I got the job by accident because he needed some time off. He was the only guy working there. To me, this was like, 'This is L.A.! This is big-time!' But it was, compared to what I was doing."

It was there that her tattoo skills greatly improved as she started to understand the difference between a good tattoo and a great one. After her stint at Blue Bird, she bounced around, working at a handful of other shops until she landed at Clay Decker's True Tattoo in the center of Hollywood. This is where she fortuitously met tattoo artist Chris Garver. The week she started, Garver was getting ready to leave for what would become *Miami Ink*. After a few fun months at True Tattoo, she received a call from Garver asking her to be on the show. At first, she felt welcome, but those feelings soon faded as Kat butted heads with the shop's owner, Ami James. So when approached with the opportunity to return to Los Angeles and star in her own series, she jumped at the chance. And while we don't get to see them onscreen very

often, she's very proud of the crew she's put together at the shop: Jeff Ward, Khoi Nguyen, Nate Fierro, and others who have dubbed themselves "The B Team." "Those guys are better than me at tattooing in so many ways. I did that on purpose. I don't want to be a big fish in little water," Kat says. "We have a certain amount of camaraderie that I haven't experienced in any other shop. ... Tattoo shops have camaraderie like a brotherhood. There's this thing that joins you. I think that's why I loved tattooing so much. I always wanted that and didn't have it with my family as much as I like to think I did."

That camaraderie extends to the friends, bands, and other clients she tattoos at High Voltage. Recently, she started giving away some of her 50 machines as gifts—bestowing one with a Deutsch Mark to Motörhead's Lemmy Kilmister and a heartagram machine she used in a music video with HIM to her close friend Bam Margera. "I look at each tattoo machine and think about how I've made thousands of tattoos with it." Tattoos on such people as Margaret Cho, Jared Leto, and Jesse Hughes from Eagles of Death Metal.

After each of the tattoos Kat inks, she puts her feather quill pen to paper and writes about the experience, recording that person's story in her journal. "A friend of mine once asked, 'How do you deal with all the death and heavy stuff?' If I don't get my thoughts out I carry them with me, and that stuff can fester. I went through a really gnarly depression last year learning how to balance it. The journaling has helped me process a lot of those thoughts." The world will get to see some of these private musings when she publishes a year's worth of entries in a second book, scheduled for release this fall. Kat will personally select and footnote the entries and photograph each person.

Of course, Kat doesn't just give tattoos. One of the most recent ones she received was a portrait of musician and friend Johnette Napolitano, done by Dan Smith of High Voltage. "I used to drink through my tattoos a lot. I think that was a major part of getting this far. Because now, as a sober person, it's definitely been a challenge getting tattooed. I suck at it." She drank an entire bottle of tequila just before getting her back tattooed with the words "Mi Vida Loca," but recommends that people don't drink when they're getting inked. "You're probably not going to make the best choice if you're under the influence of something. Aside from that, it's really annoying for the tattooer. It's hard to do a straight line when someone is puking on themselves."

And perhaps her most well-known tattoo, the one of the Hollywood sign written in red lipstick, involved another tattoo no-no. "I totally ripped that off some cool rocker chick. I was working at True Tattoo and she came in. She was like, 'I want to get the New York Dolls logo, but instead of saying New York Dolls, I want it to say Hollywood.' I'm like, that's a genius idea. I ended up getting it. I never thought I'd run into her again. But then I did at the Beauty Bar and I'm like, 'Oh, hey,' with my fucking midriff showing. I'm trying to hide the tattoo, but I'm sure she's seen it. If I saw her again, I'd be happy to do it for her. We can be twinsies." That tattoo is just one of the many that will compose the bodysuit she's working up to completing, minus the chest. "Eye contact is important, and if you've ever had a conversation with a guy ... I think boobs are distracting enough."

But despite all her connections with the glamorous life and the fact that she stars in a hit show on television, Von D remains a very private person. She built the Monastery because she wasn't comfortable shooting models she didn't know at her house. The conversations she most enjoys with her clients are those that happen off-camera. And when not at work, she's usually focusing on one of her many projects, be it her makeup line with Sephora (she's involved with everything from selecting the color palettes to designing the product packaging), the documentary she's been filming about love, death, and tattooing, the singing lessons she's been taking, or just taking the time to draw and play Beethoven on her piano.

When she does go out, she prefers to surround herself with family, her boyfriend, and her few close friends—those who know her by a different name. "When I hear someone call me Katherine, I know it's probably a friend or family. It's weird to say, but I am not Kat Von D." ■



Alexander McQueen dress,
courtesy of Chic Little Devil;
Marlies Dekkers black panties;
Fendi black platform pumps;
Kat's own bracelet.

Hair & Makeup: AnnaRose Kern
Stylist: Laura Duncan
for OpusBeauty.com
Prop Stylist: Jamie Dean
for TheMagnetAgency.com
Location: Smashbox Studios

DEAD MEN



From left to right:
Archzie;
Timo-Timo;
Jussi 69;
Jyrki 69;
Bazie.
Photos:
Ville Akseli
Juurikkala

WALKING

VAMPIRE ROCKERS 69 EYES WANT TO INFECT THE U.S. WITH THEIR GOTH 'N' ROLL.

BY
BRAD
ANGLE

"The late '80s were a very magical time in New York," says Jyrki 69, the singer for Finnish gothic rock-and-rollers 69 Eyes. "There were clubs like the Limelight, the Ritz, and CBGB, and I'd see my idols like The Ramones and Johnny Thunders on the streets." For a period of six years, the then-wide-eyed glam rock teenager would save enough money to make pilgrimages from Helsinki to the Big Apple and soak up as much of the Reagan-era rock scene as he could. These experiences not only inspired him to form 69 Eyes, but also helped establish the band's aesthetic and lyrical themes, the latter thanks in no small part to Jyrki 69's dabbling in NYC's goth underground.

"People were always telling me, 'You look like a vampire, with your blue eyes and white skin.' I was even a member of the Count Dracula Society of New York," Jyrki 69 recalls with a laugh. "So when we started the band we naturally explored vampires and horror movie themes."

KAT VON D
APPROVED!



From left to right: Timo-Timo; Bazie; Jyrki 69; Jussi 69; Archzie.



“PEOPLE WERE ALWAYS TELLING ME, ‘YOU LOOK LIKE A VAMPIRE, WITH YOUR BLUE EYES AND WHITE SKIN.’ I WAS EVEN A MEMBER OF THE COUNT DRACULA SOCIETY OF NEW YORK.” —JYRKI 69

Since forming in 1989, 69 Eyes' sound has evolved from the gritty street glam of Hanoi Rocks and Guns N' Roses to the Sisters of Mercy meets '80s hard rock style for which they're now known. But Jyrki's fascination with the undead remains a focal point of their lyrics, as heard on 69 Eyes' latest record, *Back in Blood*. "With this record I decided to bravely go where no goth-and-roll guy had gone before, and make a concept record about vampires," says Jyrki with another laugh.

And his timing couldn't be better. When producer Matt Hyde (Slayer, Monster Magnet) discovered *Back in Blood's* concept, Hyde couldn't contain his excitement. Jyrki recounts, "Matt said, 'That's great! We have this new movie in the states called *Twilight*, and it seems like they're already promoting you guys!'"

To help give *Back in Blood's* first single, "Dead Girls Are Easy," the appropriate blood-sucking flavor, Jyrki enlisted old friend Bam Margera (who also directed 69 Eyes' diabolical "Lost Boys" video, from 2004's *Devils*). "I first met Bam about 10 years ago, when [Finnish rock band] HIM was becoming very popular and bringing a lot of people to Finland," says Jyrki. "Now it seems like every time Bam and I hang out, we get wasted and talk about him directing a video."

Margera fleshed out the "Dead Girls Are Easy" concept with sexy vampire girls and tattooed fans. A close look at the video will reveal that the extras are full of ink featuring the 69 Eyes logo and gothic ankh symbol. "They're actual fans with real tattoos," says Jyrki. "It's the ultimate sign of appreciation."

To reward that appreciation and celebrate the release of *Back in Blood*, the band held an online contest in which fans submitted photos of their 69 Eyes tattoos, which were judged by Jyrki's longtime friend Kat Von D. Coincidentally, the two were first introduced around the same time Jyrki met Margera, thanks again to HIM singer Ville Valo.

"Kat was in Finland to see HIM, and that's when I first took notice of this beautiful tattooed American," says Jyrki. "It wasn't until later that we became friends and I saw her portrait tattoo [work], which is *extraordinary*."

Jyrki's connection to tattoos reaches back to the same late '80s NYC scene that spawned his musical inspiration. Back then tattooing was still banned within the city limits. So with the help of his friend Jupiter, who had some tattoo connections (and has since become a tattooer in her own right), Jyrki hopped a bus to New Jersey, where the art was legal. When they arrived on the other side of the Hudson River, Jyrki followed Jupiter down a flight of stairs into the basement shop of now-legendary tattooer (and current proprietor of Brooklyn's Flyrite Studios) Elio Espana.

"It was very exciting," says Jyrki. "He put on Led Zeppelin's *Houses of the Holy*, which brought even more mystique to an already spiritual experience."

For his first tattoo, Jyrki wanted something discreet and "romantic—that a girl would discover if she was lucky enough," he says with a laugh. So Jyrki had Espana sketch a small, full-color 3-D heart, which he tattooed on the right cheek of the singer's butt.

To this day, that "glammy valentine" has been his sole tattoo, a fact that may soon change if Kat Von D gets her hands on Jyrki's backside.

"When we were in L.A. recording *Back in Blood*, I talked with Kat about updating my heart," says Jyrki. "The schedules haven't worked yet, but she promised to do it. It'll be cool ... but maybe I should ask Elio if he approves first!"



INKED GIRL

SAMANTHA HUMPHREYS

If you're not down to work hard and play hard, then Samantha Humphreys can't be bothered. "That's just the way I've always lived my life," says the 26-year-old Los Angeles-based graphic designer who has recently broken into the movie industry. "It's always been about pouring myself into something, like a film project, for, like, four months or so, and then being able to balance it with something fun," she explains.

Most recently, Humphreys has been working in the art department on the movie *Spider-Man 4*. And as soon as the project wraps up, she'll be back to playing hard. "It's funny, though, because when I say *play hard*, people usually go right to partying and alcohol and shit," she says, trailing off to a giggle. "But I'm actually completely sober. I don't drink or do drugs or anything like that." Instead, during her off months Humphreys can be found under the needle of artists and friends such as Nick Baxter and Nathan Kostechko at Coil Tattoo Gallery in L.A. and Tim Kern at Tribulation Tattoo in NYC.

"Oh, I couldn't tell you how many tattoos I have," she says. "Because how can you really count them? Like, is a sleeve just one or all the parts?"

However you count them, there's one by Kostechko on her left shoulder that leads into a family-themed sleeve, inspired not only by her dedication to art, but also by her time in India studying Hinduism. The slender, four-armed body of Saraswati, goddess of creativity, stands with two heads.

"One head is mine," Humphreys says, "and the other is my sister's. It's great because we're so alike, yet so different. She doesn't have a single tattoo." —Ellen Thompson

PHOTOS BY ARI MICHELSON
STYLED BY BORY TAN



“It’s always been about pouring
myself into something ...
and then being able to
balance it with something fun.”









MM Couture leather vest;
Victoria's Secret underwear;
stylist's own boots. Page 55: H&M
suspenders; Victoria's Secret
underwear; stylist's own hat.

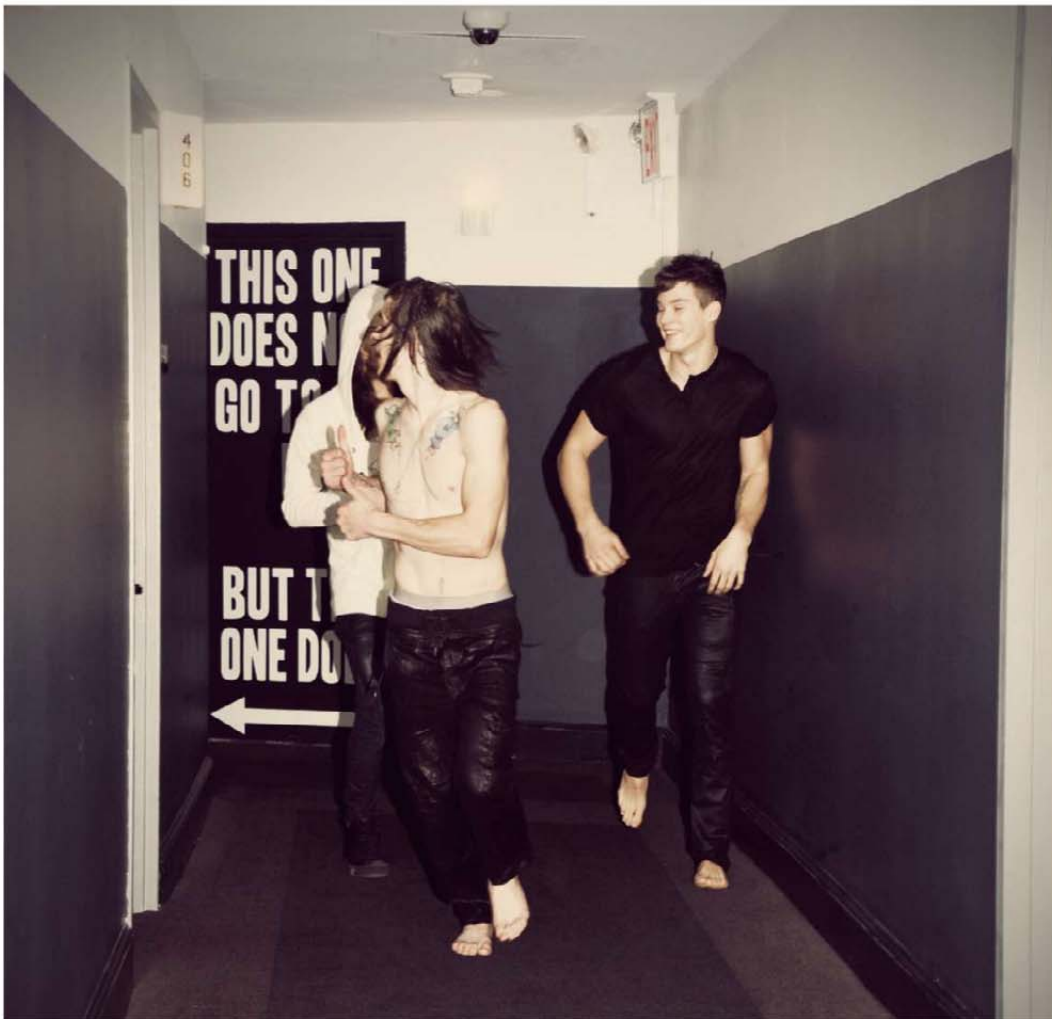
Makeup: Amy Chance for Urban
Decay/CelestineAgency.com
Hair: Christian Marc for Rene
Furterer/CelestineAgency.com



NEW YORK DOT.J.S

PHOTOS BY MARLEY KATE
STYLED BY JULIE WILLIAMS

On Joey, G-Star coat; Converse shirt. On Read, G-Star jacket and top; Sue Ellen suede pants; Tracey Tanner bracelet; Mars and Valentine earrings and rings.



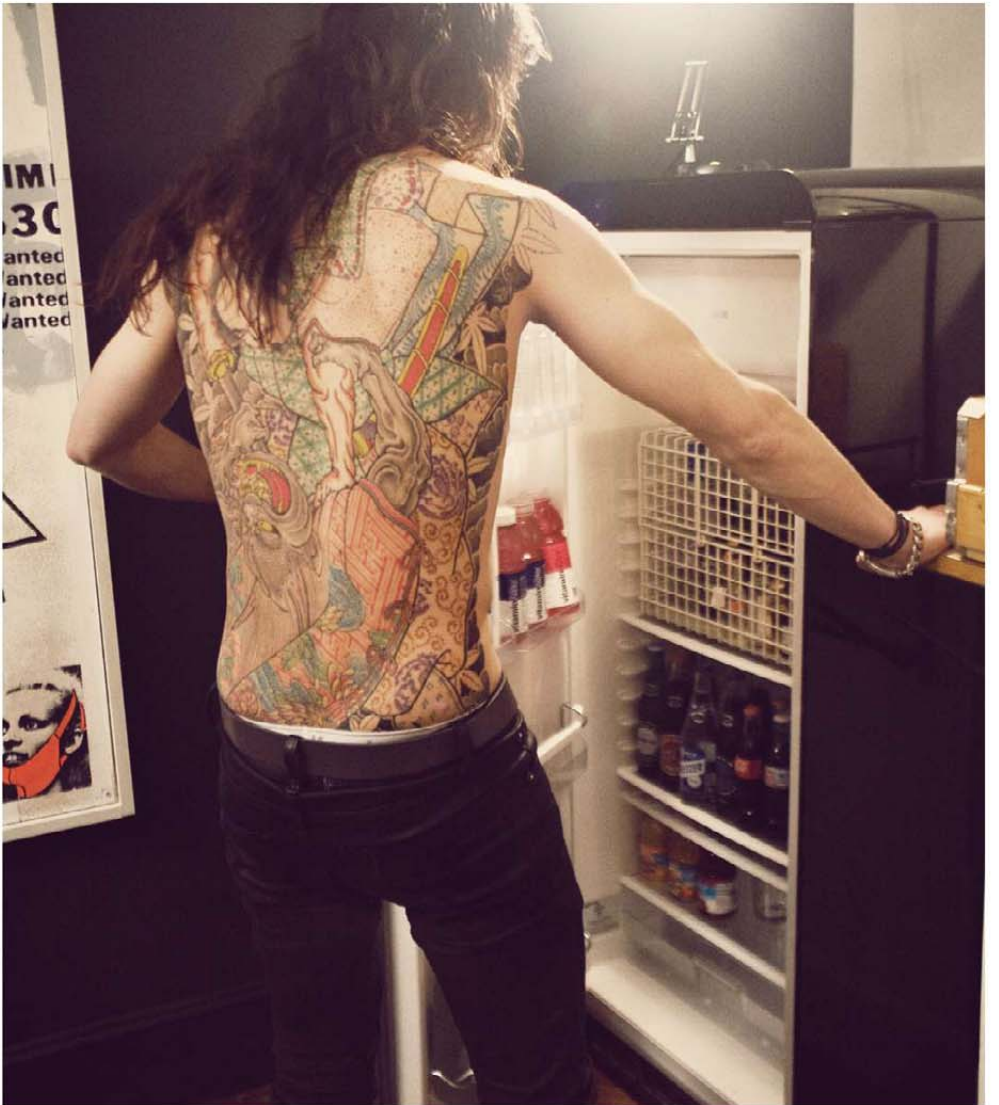
Top: On Gabe, Oak pants; S2VS tank; his own belt. On Read, Ca\$hmere dress; Karen Walker belt; G-Star blazer; C. Viviani necklace (available at The Future Perfect). Bottom: On Joey, Rochambeau top; Andrew Buckler pants. On Gabe, Andrew Buckler pants; Digby & Iona necklace. On Robert, Andrew Buckler shirt; Levi's jeans; Keds sneakers.



On Joey, G-Star pants and jacket; Converse top; Russian Criminal T-shirt; Duckie Brown boots. On Gabe, Levi's jacket; Lina Osterman jacket and jeans; Digby & Iona necklace; Duckie Brown boots. On Robert, Pudel jeans; BBlessing shirt; Bess vintage jacket; Chris Habana necklace; Keds sneakers.



On Joey, G-Star top; Chris Habana necklace; Unconditional jeans. On Read, Andrew Buckler top; Sue Ellen pants; C. Viviani necklace (available at The Future Perfect).



Top: On Gabe, Rochambeau top; Levi's jeans. On Read, Ca\$hmere dress; Giuseppe Zanotti boots; Chris Habana necklace. Bottom: Pudel jeans; G-Star belt.



Top: On Gabe, Levi's jeans; his own belt; Digby & Iona necklace. Bottom: On Robert, Andrew Buckler shirt; Levi's jeans; Keds sneakers. On Gabe, Andrew Buckler pants; El Real top; Billy Reid shoes. On Read, Daryl K top; Levi's jeans; Pour La Victoire boots; Tracey Tanner cuffs; Malene Birger bracelet.





On Joey, Unconditional jeans; G-Star top; Chris Habana necklace. On Read, Andrew Buckler top; Sue Ellen pants; C. Viviani necklace (available at The Future Perfect); Tracey Tanner cuff. On Robert, Pudel Jeans; Keds sneakers; Andrew Buckler top; his own bracelets. On Gabe, Surface2Air T-shirt; April 77 jeans; his own shoes.



ON LOCATION Imagine hitting the best rock clubs, checking out lowbrow artists on display at up-and-coming galleries, and browsing a history museum—all in one night. That's the idea behind a stay at New York City's Ace Hotel, where these photos were shot. For the museum fix, Ace's historic rooms (the building dates to 1904) are scattered with vintage furnishings, custom pieces, and antiques curated by design firm Roman & Williams. The art comes from artists such as Brooklyn-based graphic guru Mike Perry and duo Doug Cunningham and Jason Noto, who got their start designing skateboards. There's even a Michael Anderson mural composed of hundreds of graffiti stickers in the lobby (check out page 61 for a glimpse). So where does the rock 'n' roll come in? Take your pick: the lobby bar that looks like a stage set, the turntables parked next to stacks of vintage records, or your own iPod (all the rooms have stereo docks). With all that going on, plus the Breslin Bar and Dining Room—a carnivore's delight from the crew at The Spotted Pig—there's really no reason to take to the streets.



Opposite page: On Gabe, Pudel jeans; Diesel shirt; Vans sneakers; his own belt. On Read, April 77 jeans; Levi's tank top; Daryl K blazer; Tracey Tanner cuff; Malene Birger bracelet. On Joey, Andrew Buckler pants; Diesel hoodie; Billy Reid shoes. This page: On Gabe, G-Star shirt; April 77 jeans. On Robert, Rochambeau top; Levi's jeans; his own bracelets.

Models: Joey for Major Model Management; Gabe for Ford Models; Read for Muse NYC; Robert C. Nelson. **Hair:** Jordan Long with Exclusive Artists/Kérastase Paris **Makeup:** Erin Green **Location:** Ace Hotel





VILLE VALO

The HIM singer on getting clean, his new album, *Screamworks*, hanging with Kat Von D, and his tip for a good first date. Hint: Bring Bam Margera.

BY JON WIEDERHORN

When HIM frontman Ville Valo asked *LA Ink's* Kat Von D to tattoo three hedonistic writers on his right forearm—American author Charles Bukowski, French poet Charles Baudelaire, and Finnish novelist Timo K. Mukka—the characters were supposed to represent role models for Valo's own decadent lifestyle. Between 1997 and 2007, the Finnish singer had spent only “about two weeks sober,” and while his drinking didn't impair his creativity or productivity, it certainly decimated his health. In September 2007, when HIM finished mixing the brooding, metallic *Venus Doom* album, Valo was at death's door.

“I went to a doctor who said I was going to have heart failure if I didn't stop drinking and that I should go into an emergency room right away—to which I replied, ‘That sounds great, but I don't have the time because I've got interviews to do,’” Valo says.

Soon after, the singer did check into a celebrity rehab center in Malibu, CA. And to the shock of many, he completely sobered up. He's been clean now for two and a half years, and today the hedonists on his arm are a reminder of how low he's liable to sink again if he's not careful. But while getting sober has greatly improved his physical health, it's come at a price. Not going to bars has left him with nowhere else to go, and being unable to dull his emotional pain with alcohol has made him feel anxious, depressed, and vulnerable. These emotions are evident in abundance on HIM's new album, *Screamworks: Love in Theory and Practice*, a bittersweet disc that shivers with melancholy and clamors for redemption.

Catchier and more sonically eclectic than *Venus Doom*, songs like “Shatter Me With Hope” and “Ode to Solitude” are still loud, rife with buzzing power-chord volleys, cutting guitar lines, and granite-solid beats. But much of the music is woven with darkwave keyboards, layered guitar, and piercing pop hooks. And while Valo still mopes and screams like a cross between a depressed goth and a teary emo brat, his vocals are generally as infectiously tuneful as Depeche Mode's Dave Gahan.

The evening after his 33rd birthday, the clearheaded vocalist picked up the phone at his home in Helsinki to talk with INKED about his history with tattoos, the creation of *Screamworks*, why he almost drank himself to an early grave, and how he still smiles at funerals.

INKED: Your band logo, the heartagram, is a popular tattoo. Where did it come from?

VILLE VALO: I came up with that design on the day I turned 20. I remember showing it to people and saying, “Now I finally got a cool logo for the band.” It's ridiculous the amount of people I've seen it tattooed on over the years. It's a great honor.

Were you intentionally trying to combine a symbol of love with one of evil? The irony of it is

that the pentagram is only the symbol of the devil in Christian propaganda and in Hollywood cinema. If you search for the origins of that symbol, it doesn't necessarily have to do with any religious forces. And I'm not a religious person, so for me it was just a combination of Mötley Crüe's *Shout at the Devil* coming together with something like “Let Me Be Your Teddy Bear” by Elvis Presley—something overly cheesy and sentimental combining with something way more macho.

What was your first tattoo? In 1998, I met a dude at the Roxy in Helsinki who played in a couple bands. I didn't even know he was a tattoo artist at first. He did this little heart on my right wrist. That was a test to see how it would feel and what it was all about.

Obviously you passed the test. That's when I decided to do my whole left arm. I went from the most minimal thing to the biggest thing possible. It took months and months to finish because we were on tour a lot. Also, every time we got together we had the tendency to listen to Motörhead and get drunk. The sessions were short because it's hard to hold a tattoo gun while totally off your head.

When did you become friends with Kat Von D?

We were working on [2005's] *Dark Light*, which we recorded in Silverlake, CA. And I had an idea to have a big emblem tattooed on my back that would be the cover of the album. One of my mates told me about Kat and I didn't know her work at all, but we set up a date at the Rainbow. The funny thing was, we were sitting next to one another for 90 minutes before noticing each other. Neither of our cells were working and then I just heard a friend of hers say, “Hey, Kat,” and I thought, Oh fuck, she's been sitting here the whole time.

Why didn't Kat tattoo your back for the album?

For some reason Kat and I started working on another idea, a portrait of a Finnish author named Timo Mukka on my arm. Originally, I was going to dedicate my right arm to all the authors that had inspired me. But we only got so far as to do him, Baudelaire, and Bukowski. And then I got the eyes

of Edgar Allan Poe on my back. Kat did one and her ex-husband, Oliver [Peck], did the other one.

Do you and Kat see each other often? We recorded the new record in Los Angeles, so I got to hang out with her a couple times, but she's a busy woman and a workaholic like me, so whenever we have the chance to hang out, I don't want to make her work. It's been about a year since she's done ink on my skin. There's a picture of Klaus Kinski sucking his thumb with a naked chick that she did on the left side of my navel. He's one of my favorite actors and one of those egomaniac lunatics that I admire. And then she also did a portrait on my breast of Maya Deren, a '40s surrealist filmmaker.

What do you think will be your next tattoo? I think it depends who's doing it. I've always said to Kat that I'm her canvas. We've got a list of ideas—we just need to find the time. But I'm not in a rush. I've got plenty of ink in my skin, and I think my main goal and mission is to one day do my legs myself.

Are you any good at tattooing? No, I'm shit. But no one's gonna see my legs anyways, so I can just doodle on them. I was just thinking of writing my favorite lyrics on them so whenever I'm taking a poop I can read some [Arthur Rimbaud] or something. The thing is, when I was drinking I never had the courage to get myself the equipment. I was always afraid I'd wake up with something ridiculous like the word "pussy" on my face the morning after a party. And that would hurt like hell to remove.

Have you had any tattoos removed? One drunken night back in the day, I had my then-fiancée's first initial tattooed on my ring finger. I later removed it with cigarettes by using my finger as an ashtray for a while. We were on tour and it got infected really easily, but it's nearly gone.

Screamworks is much poppier than Venus Doom. I think of it as a cathartic scream of creation—being laid bare and completely honest without being afraid what people might say about you. I wanted the album to have the similar uplifting melancholy of Depeche Mode. The songs are kind of bittersweet and sad, but they're still something you want to party to and dance to. And production-wise, I wanted to find the sweet spot in between Depeche Mode and Guns N' Roses or The Cult.

A lot of the lyrics are about tragic relationships. Have you given up on love? I think I'm between relationships in the sense that I'm sincerely hoping there will be one someday. So let's say I'm hopeful every five minutes, then I lose hope and I have to pick up a guitar and write a song. Then I'm maybe hopeful again for the next five minutes.

At least as a single guy you don't have to feel guilty about scoring goth groupies. I've never been into one-night stands because they're way

too much of a hassle. I don't find it to be worthwhile for anybody just to go in a pub and pick up somebody, go somewhere, do the dirty deed, and then tell somebody to fuck off. I don't feel that to be sensitive; I don't feel that to be rock 'n' roll. I just feel it's really disrespectful towards everybody involved. I've yet to experience a good one-night stand, but maybe I've just had bad ones.

If you're not hitting bars or picking up women, what do you do with your spare time? What spare time? I've turned from an alcoholic into a workaholic, and I've been concentrating so hard on writing music that it's hard for me to do anything else. I haven't read anything in about a year, and when I try to mellow out and watch a film I can only watch it in five-minute spurts because I have to pick up the guitar. I'm a moody fucker and I'm not comfortable in my skin, so if I don't work and get a new song done, I feel like I ain't worth shit. I validate myself with music, and whenever I write something new it gives me purpose and an excuse to exist. So whenever I have writer's block, I'm always hell to be around.

Did being sober change the way you approached the music for Screamworks? I think so. I was coming out of a very dark spot and trying to learn to live again, but without alcohol, which is really difficult because suddenly you're not numb and you feel everything. You're like a raw, open nerve. I saw a bit of a glimpse of hope of a better tomorrow and tried to write about that. The whole vibe of the album is fairly tragic in a positive sense. It's about me understanding that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, but not being quite sure whether it's an oncoming train or not.

How did your drinking get so out of control? I tend to be a rather excessive person, so I just wanted to see how far I could go, and how methodical I could be in my insanity to try to reach new levels of feeling like shit. I had the stress of working on an album and I had a relationship that was falling apart at the same time 5,000 miles away, so I self-medicated to the point where my only sustenance was alcohol. I had to wake up in the middle of the night and drink a six-pack of Pabst or Stella Artois just to be able to sleep the next two hours, and then I'd be shitting and vomiting blood and trying to work at the same time.

What made you finally decide to get help? I was just ashamed of myself because I was doing all the things Ozzy Osbourne was probably doing—passing out at the table during important record company dinners. I just realized that music means more to me than a bottle of beer. It was a crazy time, but I think it's very important for any self-respecting rock 'n' roller to be able to experience shitting blood. It's very character-building.

Did you ever feel suicidal? When you are in the throes of liquor, you are being suicidal. As Ozzy

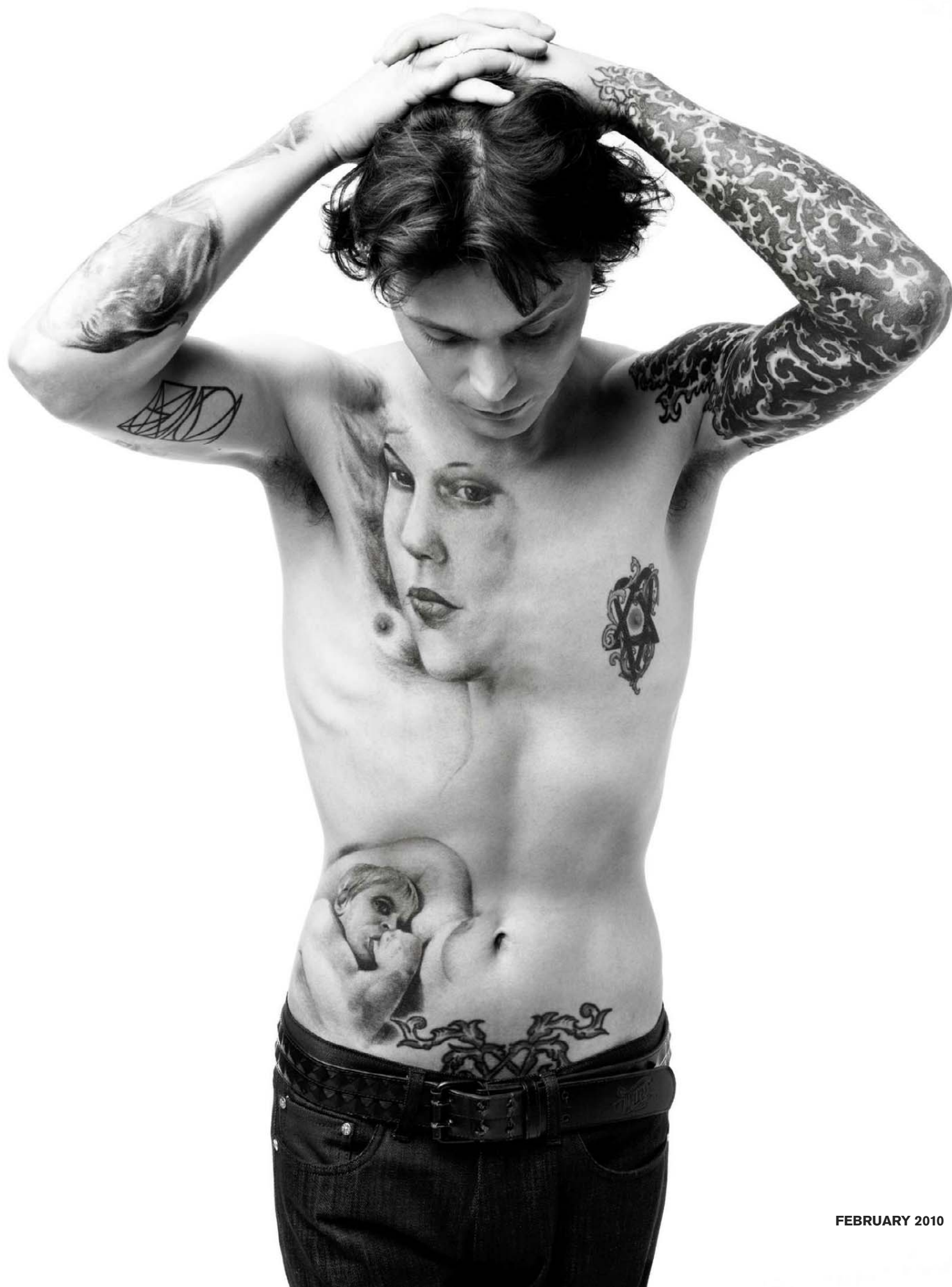
said [in "Suicide Solution"], "Suicide is slow with liquor." And I think smoking as many cigarettes as I did is kind of premeditated, conscious, very stupid, slow suicide, in essence. I've had self-destructive thoughts as well, but that's the classic Nietzsche thing where thoughts of suicide help you through many a sleepless night. I think everybody at some point in their lives thinks about how the world would be when they're gone. But I'm still here, and I think, just out of spite towards life, I don't want to go. It's gotta be life that takes me away, not me.

Many people who become sober find God in the process. Are you still an atheist? As much as I've always been. In America there are very, very few rehabs that are not affiliated with the 12-step program, which is basically religious. It holds up to Christian values, and the steps are that you have to believe in a power higher than yourself. And you say the serenity prayer. I always said, "Ozzy, give me the serenity" to do this and that instead of "God." But I never went to the A.A. stuff after I came out of the prison I was in. The Malibu experience was invigorating, but I still don't feel that any part of me is willing to accept any of those scriptures that have only caused a lot of pain and suffering in so many people's lives and 99 percent of all the wars.

In times of tragedy, isn't it hard to make sense of life when you don't believe in anything? No, because for me, death is a celebration of a life hopefully well lived. I'm the guy at funerals who smiles and remembers the good things. When my grandma died and people at the funeral were weeping, I smelled the pancakes she used to make and the cigarettes she used to smoke and I heard the sound of her flip-flops on the floor.

Do you have any vices left? Smoking. I've been trying to cut down for a long time, but it just doesn't seem to work. I'm so stressed out I smoke three packs of Marlboro Lights a day, but now I only smoke one-quarter of a cigarette. A couple puffs and it's gone, which is an incredible waste of good tobacco.

Give us one crazy story about hanging out with Bam Margera. There are so many to mention, but they all include illegal stuff. I remember in 2002 I was seeing a lady who was based in New York. One day I flew in to see her, and when I got to the airport I called Bam, and he said they were having a big party at their house. So he rented me a limo to pick me up at this girl's apartment in New York and drive us over to Pennsylvania. The limo pulls up and I opened my eyes and there are mini-ramps and all the skaters and everybody from *Jackass* just going crazy, shattering windows and mirrors and getting fucked up while Bam's parents are shouting at everyone not to break things. It was like being in a movie. That was one of the wildest parties I've ever been at, and it was a good first date. ■





THERE ARE EIGHT MILLION WAYS TO DIE ON THE STREETS OF COMPTON, CA.
DEPUTY FIRE CHIEF MARCEL MELANSON LIVES TO STOP THEM.

BY CHAUNCEY HOLLINGSWORTH
PHOTOS BY RUSS QUACKENBUSH



ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF LOS ANGELES, THE CITY OF COMPTON has just been hit with a 7.8-magnitude earthquake. The situation is grim. Power is down throughout the city, as are landline telephones, cell phones, Internet connectivity, and the entire 911 emergency system. Almost every area highway is reporting damage ranging from moderate to severe, and rail lines have sustained severe damage. Multiple fires are burning throughout the city even as damage to water lines has left water pressure low or nonexistent. Hundreds of citizens need shelter, and getting assistance from surrounding communities is not an option.

Welcome to hell on earth.

Marcel Melanson is concentrating on a panel of radios, the communications interface for Compton Fire Station 3, as he works on a laptop. Lean and good-looking with close-cropped black hair and skin the color of sand, he is perhaps the antithesis of the stereotypical firefighter. He has no gut and no mustache (unless you count the one tattooed down his index finger). The tattoo of flames and wind bars that snakes up his arms and the Japanese kabuki masks that peek over the edges of his black shirt collar seem almost perverse against the backdrop of his crisp fireman's uniform, as if a maelstrom of furies is bursting out from beneath his otherwise professional exterior. Leaning back, his fingers tuck away at the keyboard as he works through a series of error messages. With his striking hazel-green eyes, he looks more like a futuristic fleet commander or the leader of an alien legion than the deputy chief of the Compton Fire Department.

A clipped burst of static comes through on the radio: at last, a clear connection. "Loud and clear, over," says a terse voice. Melanson nods with satisfaction.

This dire screenplay is a drill for the Compton Fire Department, where 33-year-old Melanson is deputy chief—one of the youngest in the nation to hold that rank. In southern California, where earthquakes are common and the 6.7-magnitude Northridge quake of 1994 killed at least 57 people and caused about \$20 billion in damage, the scenario is all too real. A multiagency report from 2008 found that southern California has a 97 percent chance of suffering a similar quake within the next 27 years.

"You know it's going to happen one way or the other," says Melanson. "It's like anything else—if you have a craft, you want to practice your craft. If we never got to use our skills, it'd be great, but the fact of the matter is that we do, and we know it's going to happen."

Working in one of the five busiest fire departments in California, firefighters in Compton practice their craft more than most. The department—84 employees, four fire stations, nine frontline emergency vehicles—handles an average of 10,000 emergency calls per year. The department's average response time? Four minutes and 30 seconds.

That made them the perfect choice for *First In*, a reality TV series on BET that follows Melanson and his fellow firefighters as they battle everyday calamity on the streets of Compton. Around Los Angeles, even the firefighters moonlight in the entertainment industry, but the difference between Melanson and other reality TV stars couldn't be more stark. While Heidi and Spencer eat ice cream and shop for Uggs in *The Hills*, Melanson and his crew saw through security bars and kick open doors so they can run into burning buildings. They are the first on the scene in the most terrifying moments of Compton citizens' lives and deaths.

RIDE-ALONG: THE STREETS

A ride-along sounds suspiciously like a drive-by, but it's the only way that "probies"—aspiring firefighters who endure an 11-month probationary period prior to becoming volunteer firefighters—can learn the trade. By riding along on fire trucks and shadowing firefighters on their emergency calls, the probies are able to familiarize themselves with firsthand encounters while the experienced veterans monitor the action.

Like most people in southern California, Melanson spends much of his day in an automobile, and an extended ride-along is the only way to interview him. From Fire Station 3, he will drive his government-issue Dodge Charger with tinted windows to his administrative office at another fire station—a cluttered,





COMPTON

Pierce



21

Deputy
Fire Chief
Marcel
Melanson
at work.



Clockwise from left: Melanson at work; Melanson with wife, Emily, and kids, Gunnar and Cody; Melanson speaks to members of the Los Angeles County Fire Department Explorer Program.

wood-paneled room that looks like the principal's office in an antiquated elementary school, a place where Melanson seems particularly out of place. Then he's off to another town to attend a meeting with fire officials, then back to the fire station. In transit, his two BlackBerry smartphones are in a state of constant agitation, and he excuses himself to field phone calls, e-mails, and texts from both the department and his wife. Believe him when he says he loves his job; his persistent animation is incredible. He does not stop for coffee or food the entire day, yet his energy never flags.

The city of Compton is an area of 10 and a half square miles that is home to about 100,000 people and approximately 75 known gangs. It is the acknowledged base of the Crips and the Bloods, two of the most notorious street gangs in the world, whose territories more or less evenly divide the city. According to data tabulated from FBI figures, it was the 12th most dangerous American city in 2009.

"Compton has a rich gang history. The sad part is, it defines Compton," says Melanson. As we drive past one-story houses and tidy yards that look as if they might belong to any south L.A. subdivision, he's eager to point out how the real Compton varies from the version put forth by gangsta rappers N.W.A. in their genre-defining classic *Straight Outta Compton*. "The Crips didn't start here. The Crips started in South Central L.A. as a group of individuals who were associated with the color blue because of the school color of the high school they went to. The Bloods started here in Compton because there was a group of individuals that was tired of getting beat up by this other group of individuals, the Crips, so they started their own gang. It became the Bloods, and the color of their high school was red. That's where it all began, the red and the blue. It's that simple."

Melanson shows me a drive-through funeral home where mourners can

stop under a carport to sip a latte and pay their respects as they observe the deceased in a long, bank-style window. On another block, a man in a white T-shirt, jeans, and bright orange patent kicks comes out to the car. A professional comedian named Louie G., he explains that the house next to his was gutted by fire; he met Melanson when he was putting out the flames. "He saved my house," he says. "This guy's a real-life hero. Everybody likes the show. But who do they like? Who do they know? Mr. Tattoo." We pass a group of Hispanic men in cowboy hats breaking in a small, brown colt in the middle of the street. They pay us little mind, but the horse stares with wide and crazy eyes, as if to acknowledge that this whole scenario is just a bit out of the ordinary.

Melanson outlines the biography of Compton: how the whites took flight in the '50s and '60s as blacks moved in, how the Hispanic population is now predominant but is haphazardly represented because of the often uncertain citizenship status of its members. A lover of history, Melanson talks about the origins of the first civic fire departments and medieval firefighters in Japan, from whom he first acquired his love of tattoos.

"When I was about 16, somebody related [the idea of] the fireman as a modern-day samurai, a public servant," he says. "So I started reading about them and what they did, and in that same era, among the working class, there were people who were firemen. They were heavily tattooed like the samurai were, and that would show their bravery. And when you go back to other times and places where people were heavily tattooed, it was a ritual, it was a rite of passage. It was to show bravery—it showed that you could endure pain. In line with Japanese mythology, they would tattoo dragons on themselves that were surrounded by water. The dragon is a protector, and they would surround it by water to protect them from being burned."

Melanson at his desk at the fire department's administrative offices, though he works mostly in his vehicle.



“PROFESSIONALLY, IT TOOK SOME THOUGHT TO BE TATTOOED BECAUSE IT ISN'T THE NORM TO SEE A FIREMAN FULLY SLEEVED WITH THEIR NECK TATTOOED. ... I KNOW THAT PEOPLE SCRUTINIZE EVERYTHING THAT I DO BECAUSE OF IT, AND I GUESS I WAS WILLING TO ACCEPT THAT SCRUTINY. I LOOK AT THAT SCRUTINY AS A CHALLENGE FOR ME TO STAY ON MY GAME.”

So it's fitting that Melanson's first tattoo was a Japanese-style dragon among waves on his hip. “A friend of mine did it at his house with a homemade gun with a guitar string,” Melanson laughs. “I've gained a little weight since then so I thought it was going to blow up to be Puff the Magic Dragon, but it still looks good.”

Like the man himself—the sleeved-out bad-boy role model, the fireman who smokes cigars, the family man with a wife and two kids who drives a custom lowrider Cadillac while listening to Johnny Cash—Melanson's tattoos are a contemplation of opposing elements. On one arm, arching flames and a skull wearing a firefighter's hat—“you know it's a ghetto fireman because it's got a gold tooth”—on the other, smooth black wind bars, water, and dice.

As a child of a black mother and a white father who divorced when he was a toddler, this duality extends deep into his identity. “My whole life, I've never fit in,” he says. “I was always too white or too black. People that are multiracial know exactly what I mean because I lived in the black neighborhood with my mom and I was known as the white boy, and then I moved in with my dad in an all-white neighborhood and I'm the black guy. To this day, there are people who are disappointed because I'm not black enough or because I'm not white enough, or I'm too white or I'm too black. I've always been on the fringes.”

As a permanent outsider, he embraced tattooing without hesitation. “What I've gone through in life has aided me in being tattooed,” he says. “You're an outcast, for lack of a better term, when you decide to be fully sleeved, especially when you decide to tattoo your neck. You've crossed that line. I think there's even a line beyond that when you do your throat, you do your face. I look at that like, Whoa, that's a little crazy. But because I've lived my whole life as an outcast, it wasn't a big mental block for me to go and be tattooed.”

The prejudice and judgment that was heaped on him because of his race

has morphed into a different form now that he's a fireman. A profession known for its traditionalism, the American fire service prides itself on its uniforms, on its status as community heroes and role models. It's long forgotten its medieval Japanese predecessors, if it ever acknowledged them at all.

“Professionally, it took some thought to be tattooed because it isn't the norm to see a fireman fully sleeved with their neck tattooed. I knew that I was going to be scrutinized. I knew that there were going to be people who believed it wasn't professional. I know that people scrutinize everything that I do because of it, and I guess I was willing to accept that scrutiny. I look at that scrutiny as a challenge for me to stay on my game. I guess I was lowering people's expectations on purpose,” he laughs. “Coming in under the radar.”

Not all fire departments allow their members to be tattooed, and Melanson has encountered many peers who openly question his qualifications as a representative of the field.

“I hear it all the time: ‘Is that the best look for the fire service?’” says Melanson. “We all wear a uniform where we're so much alike that we have a unified front. Do tattoos make you that different to where you can't fit in? We should be a representation of everybody, and are we potentially going to rub somebody the wrong way? I understand that side of it. It's a valid point. I get questioned very often about professionalism.”

One wonders if the questioners would continue their line of thinking if they saw the firefighter emblazoned on Melanson's back climbing into the mouth of a raging blaze as skulls emerge from the smoke around him, or the Maltese cross on his wrist, an ancient symbol of firefighting.

“The knights from Malta were fighting against the Saracens and they wore this cross on their armor,” he says. “The Saracens used fire when they fought.”



Scenes from Compton Fire Station 3 and the training facility where firemen stage emergencies on the burn tower.



“SOMEBODY RELATED [THE IDEA OF] THE FIREMAN AS A MODERN-DAY SAMURAI, A PUBLIC SERVANT. ... IN [THE SAMURAI] ERA, AMONG THE WORKING CLASS, THERE WERE PEOPLE WHO WERE FIREMEN. THEY WERE HEAVILY TATTOOED LIKE THE SAMURAI WERE, AND THAT WOULD SHOW THEIR BRAVERY.”

RIDE-ALONG: THE FIREHOUSE

The next night at the firehouse, Melanson and his fellow firefighters Wayland Davis and Shon “Halvo” Halvorsen are hanging out in the kitchen—Halvo dicing steak in preparation for the firehouse’s chili cook-off, Davis nursing a sore shoulder. A mixed martial arts fight is on the TV in what serves as the fire station’s living room. It’s a slow night. Unlike the summer evenings documented on the show, November’s chill means that fewer people are outside drinking, drugging, or shooting. The conversation quickly goes to what the men have seen when the nights aren’t so kind.

“Remember the train versus taxi cab?” Halvo asks Melanson. They use the term ‘versus’ when two things collide: train versus taxi cab, vehicle versus motorcycle, vehicle versus pedestrian. There’s rarely a question as to the winner. “There’s shit where there are body parts everywhere, but that doesn’t really affect you like some other kind of things affect you,” Halvo continues. “Remember when that family got killed? That was probably the gnarliest thing I’ve ever seen. Drunk driver hit this family that was at a taco stand, the dad had just got a promotion at his job, took his whole family out for dinner. Mom and dad, four kids, killed ‘em all.

Babies hanging out of cars, the whole family wiped out. People who saw it were passing out. It was just carnage. They didn’t know where all the body parts were. It took ‘em hours to take the people from underneath the dashboard.”

Burnout comes suddenly. “We had a captain who had gone for 30 years and he saw a kid get taken out with an AK-47,” Halvo says. “A child, 5 years old—blew his head off like a watermelon—walking with his mom in the center of town. Just random violence, shooting at someone else and a stray bullet hit him. We have a saying, ‘Everybody’s got a limit.’ Even firemen have a limit of how much they can take in terms of the job. That captain finally said, That’s it. He left that scene and retired. You wonder where your limit is.”

The horrors of the job are immediately dismissed and the talking stops on a dime when the loudspeaker beeps three times and a dispatcher announces a call. The feel is almost military as we run to the engine and pile in, a band of brothers going on a mission. Part power, part exhilaration, part pride, it’s every boy’s dream to be where Melanson is, looking down at the road ahead as the sirens blare, the driver blasts the air horn, and cars pull out of the way for a real American hero. ■

INKED SCENE

"It wasn't until I started getting exposed to the older, more soulful aspects of tattooing that I realized this was my calling. ... It dawned on me one day that I was the luckiest guy in the world."

—Kore Flatmo



KAT VON D
APPROVED!



When did you decide to get work done at a real shop? About two weeks later, I walked into some tourist trap on the boulevard and picked something off the wall, just like everyone does, I think. It was a design by comic book artist Bernie Wrightson. It's this beautiful *Master of Macabre* cover of one of his comic books. I asked the tattoo artist where I should put it, and he said I should put it on my sternum—right in the middle of my chest. That killed me. It was the most painful experience I have ever had. Occasionally I'll see that and it reminds me of how little we knew back then, as a group.

Do you ever think about covering them? One is partially covered because new work went around it, but I didn't want to forget where I started. In the course of my time, so many changes have happened and it's easy to forget those early days, so I keep them.

It sounds like you got off to a bad start, so why did that draw you into tattooing? The experience is what matters. I started getting involved in tattooing in 1989 or 1990. If your friends got into tattooing six months before you, you ended up being the guinea pig. I remember a friend of mine saying, "Hey, let me put this on you." Up until then I had hardly any interest in tattooing at all. It was actually getting the first couple that really got me interested.

How did you end up tattooing professionally? I started at a dive on Hollywood Boulevard. It was one of the many tourist traps. They had airbrushers up front and tattooers in the back. My job was selling jewelry and T-shirts to tourists, but I also did these paint-on tattoos. Then a person approached me and asked me if I wanted to apprentice. We quickly moved down to Sunset Boulevard. It took about six months to build this shop called Purple Panther. It was a rough place with a lot of problems early on. The shop is still there and it's under different management. I hope mentioning it doesn't besmirch its name. That was 19 years ago.

Was it tough starting out in that kind of environment? I'm sure a lot of people in tattooing share the same story where they're thrown into it and you really don't have much of an apprenticeship because the people around you really aren't living up to their responsibilities. I had maybe a month and a half of practice before I started working every day. I was opening and closing without any supervision, and that's not a good way to start. But in some ways I was incredibly fortunate to get around these people who allowed me to get involved with tattooing.

Did you know right away that you had found your career? That moment didn't come in for a couple years. It seems kind of taboo for a tattoo artist to say that they weren't born to do it. But in my case, I had dropped out of college and was just living and trying to figure things out. All of a sudden it started happening to me. It was cool because it

KORE FLATMO

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INKED: Can you describe the first time you stepped into a tattoo shop?

KORE FLATMO: I was about 15. I went with an older friend of mine to a place in La Puente called Fat George's. It's really famous in southern California, where I grew up. It was kind of tough and a little scary. I feel lucky that it was my first place because it's such an important part of southern California tattooing.

When did you get your first tattoo? It was three or four years later, when I was 19. I had just moved out to Hollywood. My first tattoo was done in an apartment on the floor in a really run-down place on Cherokee. My friend was a little too ambitious and chose a design from the great fantasy artist from the '70s and '80s, [Patrick] Woodroffe. He had a book called *Mythopoeikon*. It was this lizard wrapped around a planet. It was airbrushed and multimedia—really beautiful. You should see what I got on my back. [Laughs.] He carved me up and it took, like, a month to heal. But he was a good friend of mine and tattoos are about more than just how they look. The meaning of the tattoo is important.



“When I see Kat [Von D] on David Letterman, I think it's a good thing. If people try to say something hurtful or ignorant, I'm happy to straighten them out.”



was very difficult and I had to work seven days a week, 12 hours a day. I was the shop slave as the apprentice, and our shop had a drug problem. It wasn't until I started getting exposed to the older, more soulful aspects of tattooing that I realized this was my calling. When I started really getting that personal satisfaction from the work, I was already two or three years in. It dawned on me one day that I was the luckiest guy in the world.

Why did you end up moving from California to Ohio? All those stories start with a girl, and so does this one. A young lady who was from Cincinnati had moved to Hollywood. When she moved back, I took a vacation out to see her. At that point, I had already grown tired of the pace of Hollywood. It's this 24-hour drive of who you know, who are you tattooing, and even what concert you were attending. That was never really my thing. When I visited this girl, I

noticed that the cost of living was maybe half of what it was in Hollywood. I moved here and rented a single apartment with just a drawing table and lived really simply until I met my wife, Brenda. That's what kept me here. I have been with her now for 14 years.

What is it like sharing a studio with your wife? Even though we work in the same studio, we have completely private areas. It allows you to talk about things when you get home because you really haven't spent all day together. That's a saving grace. But we definitely understand each other more because of the shared frustrations that go along with tattooing. I know this is going to sound biased, but I consider her a really strong artist. If I didn't, it would be really hard to be with her. I love her in every other capacity, but I really don't like bad tattooing. So if she wasn't good, that would be a problem for me.

PluraBella is a private studio without a sign. Do you ever miss the traditional shop experience? I do, and I'm able to mix that in through extensive travel. I get a bit isolated, and I have a really heavy workload. Four months will go by in the blink of an eye just working through what I have to do. But we have built in probably three to four months of travel a year. Over the last 10 years, I've been to eight different countries and have tattooed in something like 50 or 60 different shops. That fills in that need. You miss the camaraderie. Tattoo artists are good storytellers. So I get a dose of it, but then after about a week or two, I'm ready to come home.

What is it about bigger custom pieces that appeals to you? My overall goal is to work holistically on the body. I always take into account the person's unique physiology, and the larger-scale stuff demands it. It presents a compositional challenge

“I just finished my third guitar for Jack [White] for The Dead Weather. Every time he starts a new band, he gets a new guitar. ... I’ll say this about Jack: He understands what it is to be an artist.”



to create a homogenous, complete picture. My personal goal is bodysuits. That’s what I see as the acme of tattooing. When you’re able to get clients that are willing to commit on that level and have the wherewithal, both financially and mentally, you can achieve those goals. I spent the first five or 10 years doing a lot of portraits. I was known as the portrait guy. That was fine then, but for me the most difficult and rewarding work is the larger stuff. The ultimate is a complete bodysuit done by one individual. I have gone so far as to do both arms, the back, and some legs. But my clients almost always have some previous work from someone else, and as of right now I haven’t completed one.

What are you currently working on outside of tattooing? Right now, I’m halfway through carving a one-off guitar for the Gretsch company. I have actually done three of those for Jack White of the White Stripes, one of which appeared in the documentary *It Might Get Loud*. The people at Gretsch saw it and they commissioned me. I have also done a lot of engraving. I hand-engage plates for making prints. I do a lot of painting and charcoal. One new thing I have been doing is making my own drawing boards. I just cut really nice pieces of Masonite and draw on them with Sharpies and sell them as originals.

Is it tough working for rock stars? I just finished my third guitar for Jack for The Dead Weather. Every time he starts a new band, he gets a new guitar. Even though he’s playing drums in this band, he got one. *[Laughs.]* I’ll say this about Jack: He understands what it is to be an artist. He understands that I’m a tattooist and he understands the time frames I work in. But I recently worked on a movie called *The Expendables*. I designed the logo, and at one point you see Mickey Rourke as a tattoo artist and all the stuff in the back is mine. I was tattooing the individual behind the movie a lot, but we had a bit of a falling out. I can’t take any of that personally.

How did you meet Kat Von D? I was on one of my return trips to L.A. visiting my family. I had drawn a set of flash back in ’99 or 2000 and I was going around to shops selling it. I walked into a shop in Acadia and there was this really striking-looking girl there. At that time, she was really into certain Mexican cinema actresses from the ’30s and ’40s and she dressed in a vintage way. She was really nice and she actually bought two sets of flash. I had that feeling I was going to know her for a while. I have been around Kat through all of these changes, and it has been amazing to watch.

Has she ever asked you to come on her show? She has, but she knows that I’m uncomfortable with being on television. It’s not for me. As nice as it is for her to ask, it’s even nicer of her to understand when I decline.

What is your view on tattoo TV as a whole? I have no problem with the shows. I think the controversy is starting to die down now, but three or four years ago, it’s all people would talk about. People knew that [Kat] and I were friends so they would gripe to me. I don’t think it harms tattooing in the least. I think it has helped it. I think that the amount of good that those shows have done for bringing in business to the average tattooist far outweighs any minor problems with it that people might have. People complain because they think it’s going too mainstream, but I know something about the history of tattooing and the role certain artists have played in pop culture. Look at George Burchett in England. He was widely known throughout the entire country. Look at Lyle Tuttle in the ’70s, and look at Paul Booth in the ’90s. When I see Kat on David Letterman, I think it’s a good thing. If people try to say something hurtful or ignorant, I’m happy to straighten them out. —Stan Horaczek

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Back row: Brian Bruno; Josh Brown; Mike Rennie. Front row: David Boisineau; shop manager Keith Harper; Jason Hobbie.

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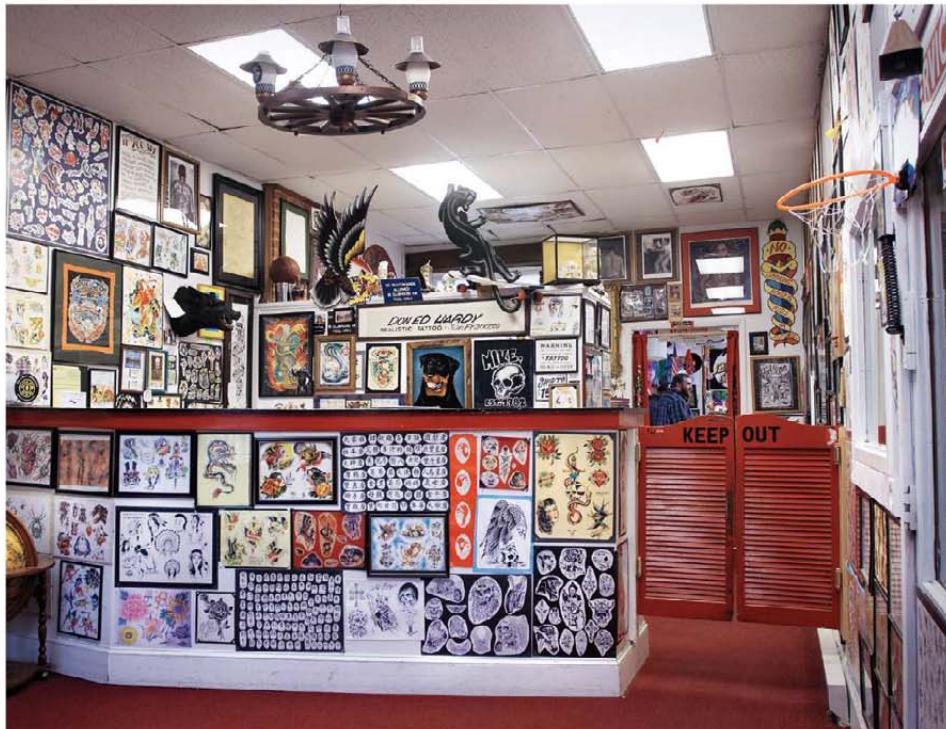
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It's flooding in Richmond, VA. Torrential winds and a hurricane warning have the locals sick, flustered, and bailing water out of their basements. But the downpour hasn't stopped tattooer Jason Hobbie and the rest of the Absolute Art crew from trudging to the shop to tattoo.

"It's still raining," Hobbie says. "It's crazy, man, there was, like, a hurricane up the coast all the way through here. There has been pouring-down rain for, like, the past three days. It's just a mess." His laid-back style doesn't seem to let a little precipitation interrupt his daily flow. "We'd never close the shop. Everybody that works here is on their own agendas. If they have appointments they'll be at the shop, if they don't have appointments they don't necessarily have to be here. Everybody's coming

and going and doing their thing."

After apprenticing under Crazy Ace Daniels at Way Cool Tattoos (now located in Toronto), Hobbie opened the Absolute Art Tattoo shop in 1992, and would eventually join with silent partner Timothy Hoyer as the shop expanded. The staff, which included Hoyer for many years, now includes six accomplished artists—Hobbie, David Boisineau, Josh Brown, Brian Bruno, Mike Rennie, and Zac Vining. "Everybody here is so established. Brian Bruno is super-well-known for doing traditional Japanese work. So he has that specific clientele looking for him. Josh Brown is known for his American traditional," Hobbie boasts. "All the bases are covered here. I feel super-blessed to be working with such well-rounded tattooers—some of the



Clockwise from above: tattoo by Brian Bruno; interior of Absolute Art Tattoo; tattoo by Jason Hobbie; tattoo by Josh Brown; tattoo by David Boisineau.



best tattooers in the world. It's nice to know, as a business owner, that no matter who walks in the door at any time, no matter what they want, they're going to end up getting a really good tattoo."

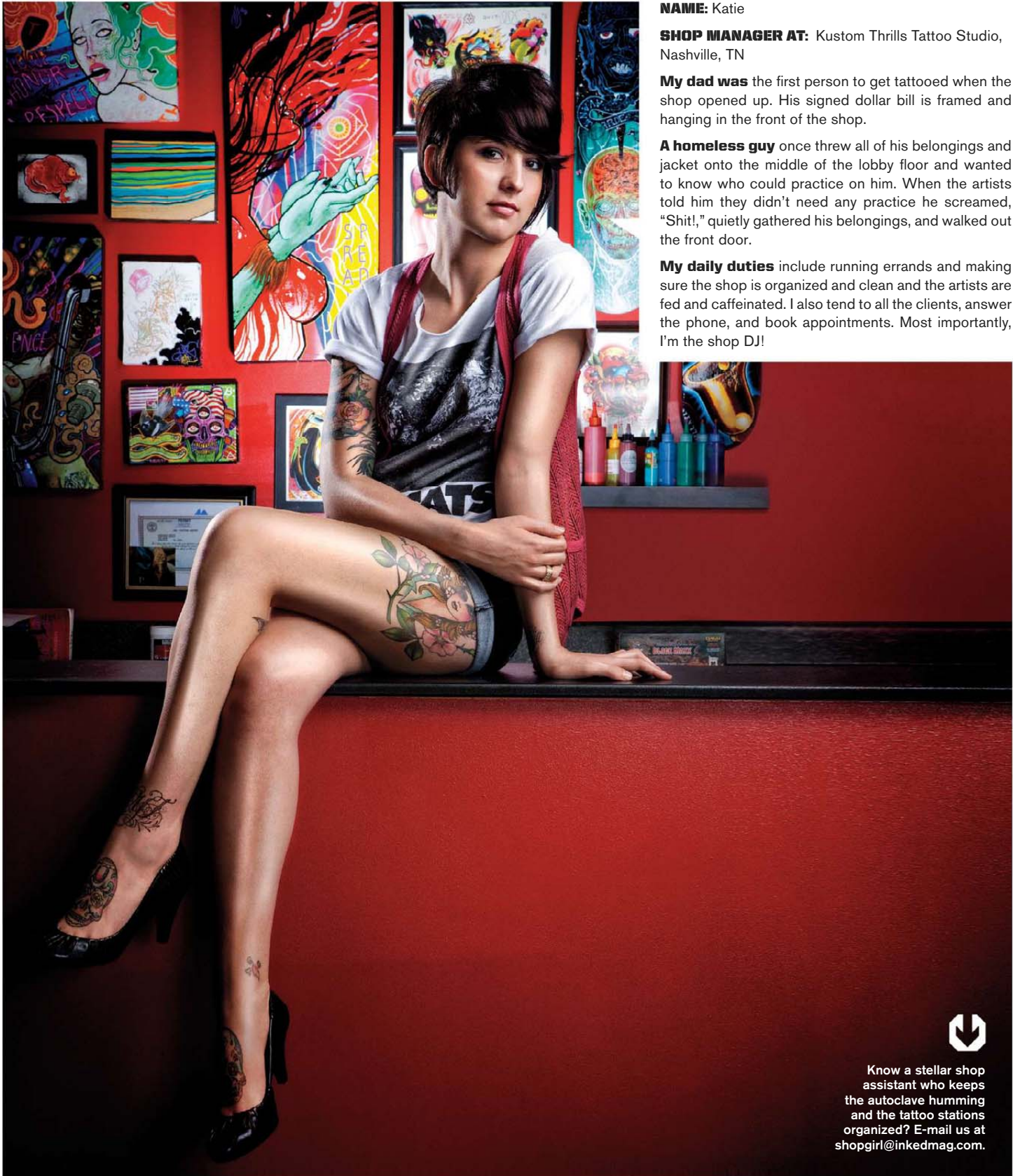
Located in the heart of the Virginia Commonwealth University campus, and amongst a hotbed of music clubs, Absolute sits in the eye of a storm of VCU coeds and rocked-out skateboarders. "There's an art school right over here. We get a lot of students," says self-taught tattoo vet Josh Brown in his Southern twang. Brown boasts that 50 percent of his clients are VCU students. According to artist Mike Rennie, the staff caters to the hardcore crowd, college kids, and walk-ins, as well as the growing number of people who demand custom work.

"Some of the guys that work at the shop used to play in hardcore bands and punk rock bands. All of us grew up on that music," Hobbie says. "And we were all involved in skateboard culture. The ties helped us build a following. We get the clients that were in those circles." Two doors down from the shop is a hardcore music club and venue; every time there's a show, the line cuts right in front of the shop. That's not bad action.

"A lot of bands come through Richmond and play at some surrounding clubs. So they'll come through the shop," Hobbie explains. "Evan Seinfeld of Biohazard has been tattooed here a few times. He and his wife, porn star Tera Patrick, were here about a year ago on business, and we all met up and chilled. Unfortunately I couldn't get

her in my chair. She was working, so she didn't want to get tattooed at the moment. Evan and I have always stayed in touch ever since we met, and he was crashing at my house instead of sleeping in the van."

All the artists who call Absolute Art home consistently revel in the environment in which they are stationed—floods and all. The theme seems to be: A great college town; a great southern community; a great natural place; great music; a great place for tattoos. Brown continues as to why location is key. "Oh man, you can get anywhere. We can be down at the beach in two hours. We can be way up in the mountains in less than an hour. We can be in a big city in no time. I mean, it's all right here." —David Diehl



NAME: Katie

SHOP MANAGER AT: Kustom Thrills Tattoo Studio, Nashville, TN

My dad was the first person to get tattooed when the shop opened up. His signed dollar bill is framed and hanging in the front of the shop.

A homeless guy once threw all of his belongings and jacket onto the middle of the lobby floor and wanted to know who could practice on him. When the artists told him they didn't need any practice he screamed, "Shit!," quietly gathered his belongings, and walked out the front door.

My daily duties include running errands and making sure the shop is organized and clean and the artists are fed and caffeinated. I also tend to all the clients, answer the phone, and book appointments. Most importantly, I'm the shop DJ!



Know a stellar shop assistant who keeps the autoclave humming and the tattoo stations organized? E-mail us at shopgirl@inkedmag.com.



INKED HOLIDAY BASH

The INKED Holiday Bash at Club BLVD in New York City helped collect donations for Toys For Tots. Evan Seinfeld hosted and drinks were provided by 360 Vodka and SIN Energy Drink. For more photos, go to inkedmag.com.





REPEAT OFFENDER

RedLetter1 in Tampa, FL, is an amazing tattoo shop built inside a converted cigar factory. The gorgeous space includes an art gallery that recently featured Repeat Offender, a solo exhibit by artist Tes One, who blends graffiti and digital graphic design. **For more photos, go to inkedmag.com.**





SAN JOSE TATTOO CONVENTION

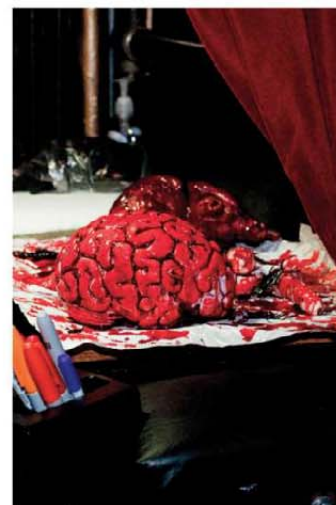
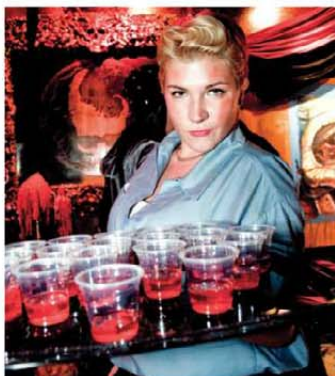
Anything that comes out of State of Grace tattoo in San Jose, CA, is worth checking out—including the team's amazing tattoos, untouchable publishing projects, and the annual San Jose Tattoo Convention, dubbed A Convention of the Tattoo Arts 2009. This year's event included appearances by ink heavyweights such as Grime, Scott Sylvia, Jack Rudy, Beppe, and others, alongside life painting by Mike Giant and an appearance by 77-year-old tattoo legend Thom Devita. [For more photos, go to inkedmag.com.](http://inkedmag.com)





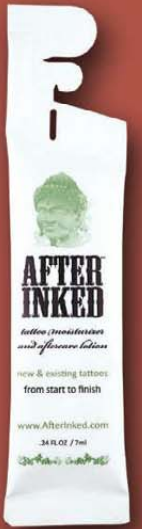
LAST RITES HALLOWEEN PARTY

Paul Booth's Last Rites tattoo shop is scary enough on a regular day, let alone Halloween. For this year's bash, the crew offered walk-in tattoo appointments—a first ever—along with live painting, horror movie screenings, a costume contest, and a midnight "Kool-Aid" toast. Luckily, we survived. **For more photos, go to inkedmag.com.**










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THE ART OF REBELLION

The line between tattooing, motorcycles, and art is as blurred as an old "1%" tattoo. Harley-Davidson celebrated that relationship with The Art of Rebellion, a gallery exhibit celebrating 10 artists handpicked by Harley for their bond with motorbikes. The exhibit, held at La.Venue in NYC, featured art by Dirty Donny, Frank Kozik, Art Chantry, Tara McPherson, The Pizz, and others. All of the artists painted a Harley Iron 883 gas tank, and proceeds of their sale benefited the CUE Art Foundation. **For more photos, go to inkedmag.com.**



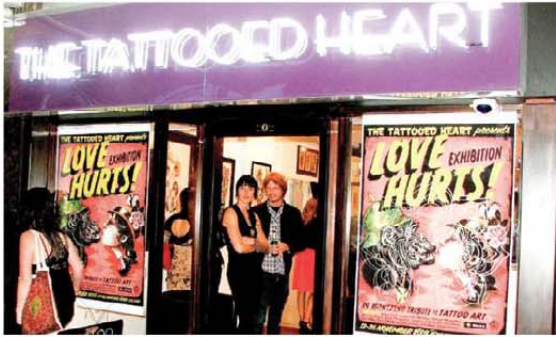
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LOVE HURTS

When we received a postcard from our friends at New Zealand's Tattooed Heart shop, we were ready to pack our bags and get out of NYC. The Auckland shop recently hosted Love Hurts, a broken-heart-themed exhibit featuring work by tattooers Adam Craft, Seth Wood, Liesje, Tom McMillan, Hamish McLoughan, and others. We'll visit next summer. Promise. **For more photos, go to inkedmag.com.**



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MEG MCNEIL

Love & Hate Tattoo, 322 W. McDowell Rd., Phoenix, AZ, 602-973-4093 myspace.com/loveandhatetattoo

Tattooer Meg McNeil was born into art. "I was born in L.A. but when I was 5 we moved to northwest Washington into a 150-year-old barn," she says. "My dad is an architect. [The barn] has been an ongoing project throughout my whole life. It's been pretty rad." McNeil began tattooing at MadHouse in Bellingham, WA, but relocated to Phoenix, where she lays down traditional American tattoos at Love & Hate. "I'm inspired by so many great tattooers, past and present. Steve Boltz, Derek Noble, Mike Wilson, Chris Winn, John Montgomery, Oliver Peck, Rick Walters, Sailor Jerry, Owen Jensen—way too many to list, for sure."



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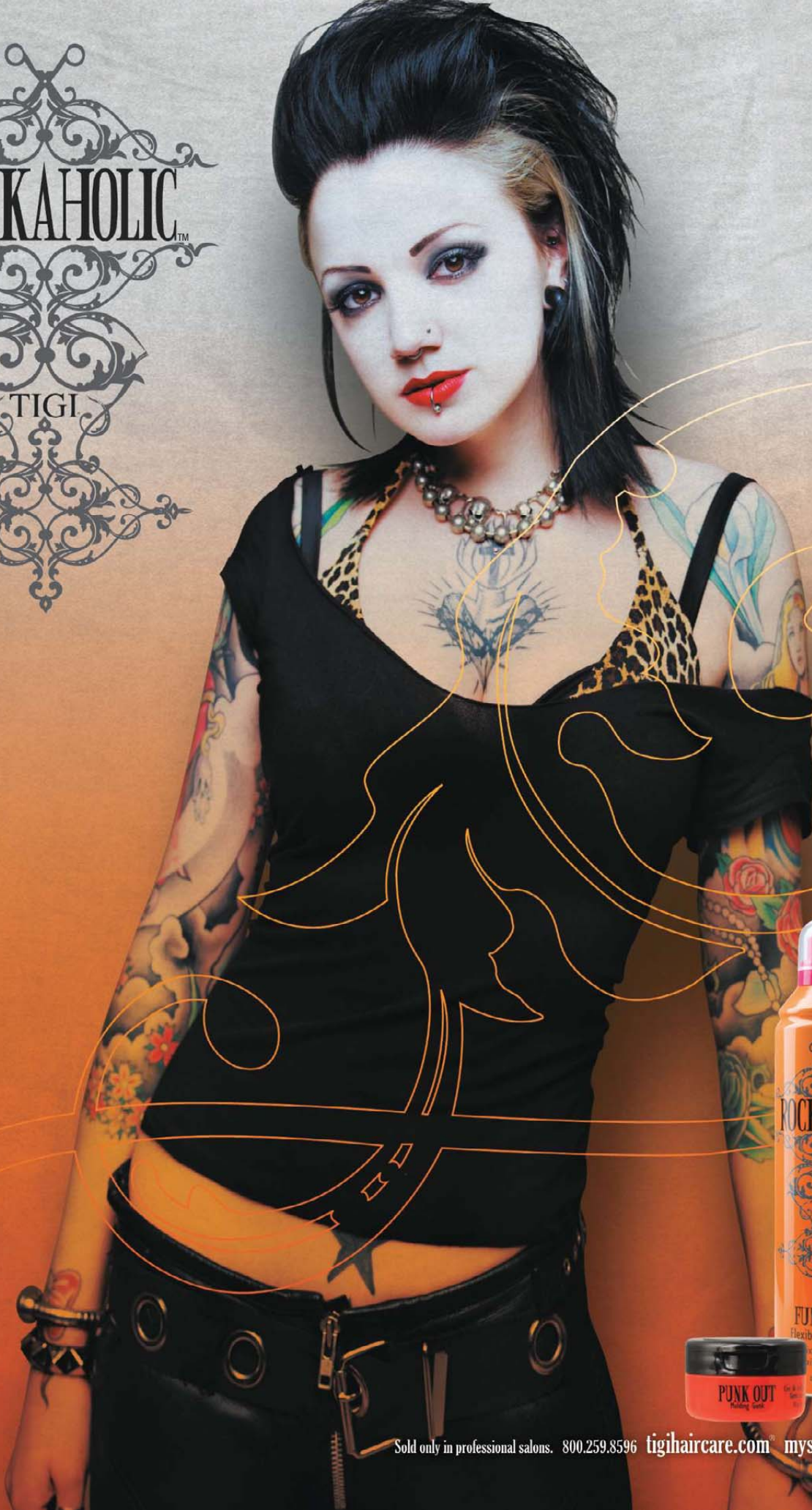
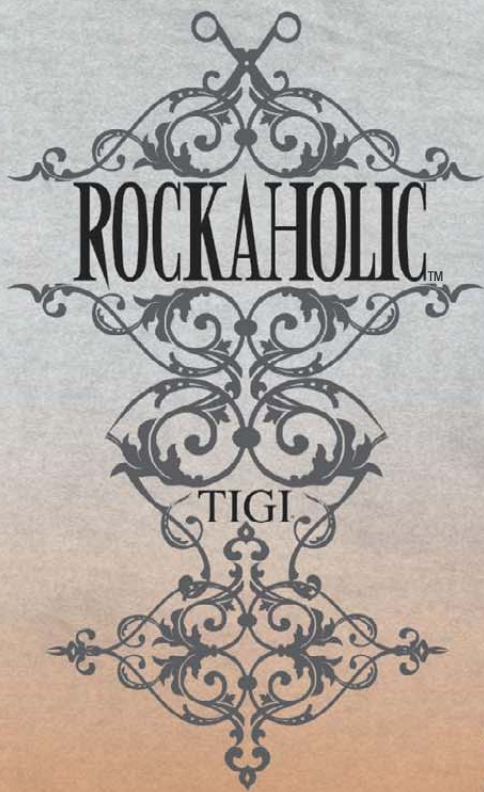
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