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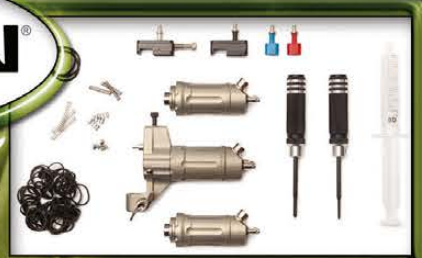
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# THE QUICKENING

Somewhere out in internetland this week (not to be confused with Hinterland—the excellent Welsh crime series that has nothing at all to do with tattoos), I came upon a book by George Burchett called *Memoirs of a Tattooist*. George is a name a lot of you will know even if you don't recognise his work.

The first edition of it came out in 1958 to be closely followed as a mass market paperback (with a fantastic cover) published by Pan in 1960. There's also a quote on the cover from the *Daily Mirror* that runs like this: "It made my skin creep—but I couldn't put it down."

I was drawn in by the cover more than anything and I figured I might pick myself up a copy to see what it was all about. It's not currently in print (and I'm more than pleased to see it's never been published digitally), so my only option was to dig around in some of my favourite places both in the real and online world—and that would be antiquarian book shops.

There are more than a few copies of it around in various formats but if you can find one for less than £150, you looked harder than I did.

The book itself is not 'The Thing' under the 'scope this month though. What warms me the most is that this humble little book from almost sixty years ago can still *be* a Thing. It's a book of some historical value—of that there's no doubt—but it raises the question of exactly why it is.

It's not an online post that got liked a few times (actually it probably is somewhere), it's something that's stood the test of time and not been lost. Not in such a dissimilar way to that in which a tattoo exists, it's here forever and hasn't disappeared with the rolling of a database fuelled by a billion



## WHAT DID YOU CREATE TODAY THAT PEOPLE WILL STILL BE TALKING ABOUT WITH AS MUCH EXCITEMENT AS THE DAY IT WAS CREATED IN YEARS TO COME?



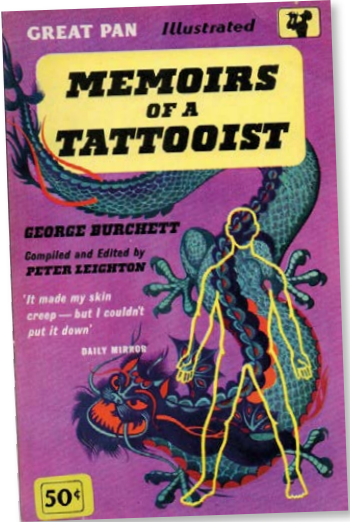
**SION SMITH • EDITOR**  
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@skindeep\_uk

other things submitted to said database that rolled all over it a minute or two later.

There's a lot of value in that for me. It's an odd thing to ask of the tattoo world—"What did you create today that will last forever?" By its very nature, of course it will last forever (albeit in various states of grace), so maybe the question should be "What did you create today that people will still be talking about with as much excitement as the day it was created in years to come?"

Tough question, huh? *Star Wars* falls into that category. Everything Michelangelo ever did falls into that category. A bunch of roses that turned out a lot like a bumper crop of red cabbages... not so much, but there's definitely plenty of ink out there that's just as exciting as it was on day one.

Maybe in the twenty-first century, doing a Highlander is simply too much to ask for, but I think we can all do a lot better than just a few minutes, don't you? ▣



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**12 DUE SOUTH**

Mississippi is not a particularly renowned place on the map when it comes to tattoo shows but the wonderful Matt Stebly is determined to prove otherwise to the world:

**20 TATTOO LONDON (I)**

Open until May 8th 2016, the exhibition 'Tattoo London'—at the Museum of London—aims to show the vitality of the tattoo scene in the contemporary life of Londoners. This issue, we talk to the inimitable Matt Lodder.

**28 MASATO SUDO**

Photographer Masato Sudo is a living legend in the contemporary world of Japanese tattooing. At the beginning of the 1980's he published

one of the most impressive books done so far on the subject: 'Ransho'. Here we look at the sequel in the works.

**36 ROBERT BORBAS**

When it comes to working with single colour ink—and that would of course be our old friend, the black—there are few in the world who can make it sing and dance like Robert Borbas. Sion Smith navigates the forests of Hungary with a trusty old lamp.

**64 THE COMPANY**

Traveling to Asia is one thing, trying to understand its intricacies is quite another. Take Hong Kong, for example. Where do you start? We recruited Vince Yue, owner of The Company Tattoo, to help show us the way.

**70 MY BODY, MY PASSPORT**

Continuing our look at tattooing across the world, this month we dig a little deeper into the lives of Borneo's pirates, head hunters, lumberjacks, planters and tireless travellers. Here, we meet the elders, whose armours of patang or kelingai—tattoos in the local language—represent roadmaps as much as a spiritual protections..

**90 MILAN**

After celebrating its 20th anniversary last year, the Milan Tattoo Convention confirmed its vitality across the weekend of 5-7th February and is already thinking forward with some exciting news for the 2017 edition.

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## A LETTER!

As a recent convert to "having a tattoo" at the grand old age of 58 and reading your mag for the first time, I have to agree with your statement that "the day an artist isn't physically putting ink in your skin is the day the image on your skin ceases to be a tattoo". But being a newbie I would have to add that the actual experience would also cease to be an 'experience'. To miss seeing your artist draw and create the tattoo would be such a waste and I always look forward to my next visit!

Keep up the good work!  
David N.

## TINTIN SPEAKS

TINTIN: The undisputed King of French tattoo artists spoke out to AFP this week, saying the tattoo industry is struggling to win recognition as an art form on a par with painting or music.

"Everything proves that we are artists according to the UNESCO definition," said Tin-Tin.

Coming straight off the back of Mondial in Paris that was held this past weekend, he quotes the UNESCO definition of an artist verbatim: "any person who creates... and who considers his artistic creation to be an essential part of his life, who contributes in this way to the development of art and culture."

In France, those designated as artists: painters, as well as photographers, writers and composers are able to charge greatly reduced VAT rates to their customers.

"For now, [the government is] killing us, considering us as simple merchants," said Tin-Tin.

He has also launched an online petition that has gathered more than 14,000 signatures.

He said the only thing in the way of winning recognition as artists is that tattoo artists "create on the skin. It's a real paradox, but we will win one day," he said.

## NEVER TOO OLD FOR INK

Derbyshire's oldest resident is set to enter the record books by having a tattoo for his 104th birthday. Jack Reynolds, who made the news in summer 2014 as the oldest Brit to brave the ice bucket challenge - plans to get inked on his big day on Wednesday, April 6. Jack, of Hollingwood, near Staveley, is having the tattoo to raise £1,000 for Chesterfield-based Ashgate Hospicecare.

His family say Guinness World Records has confirmed he will be the oldest man to get a tattoo. Nice work Sir!

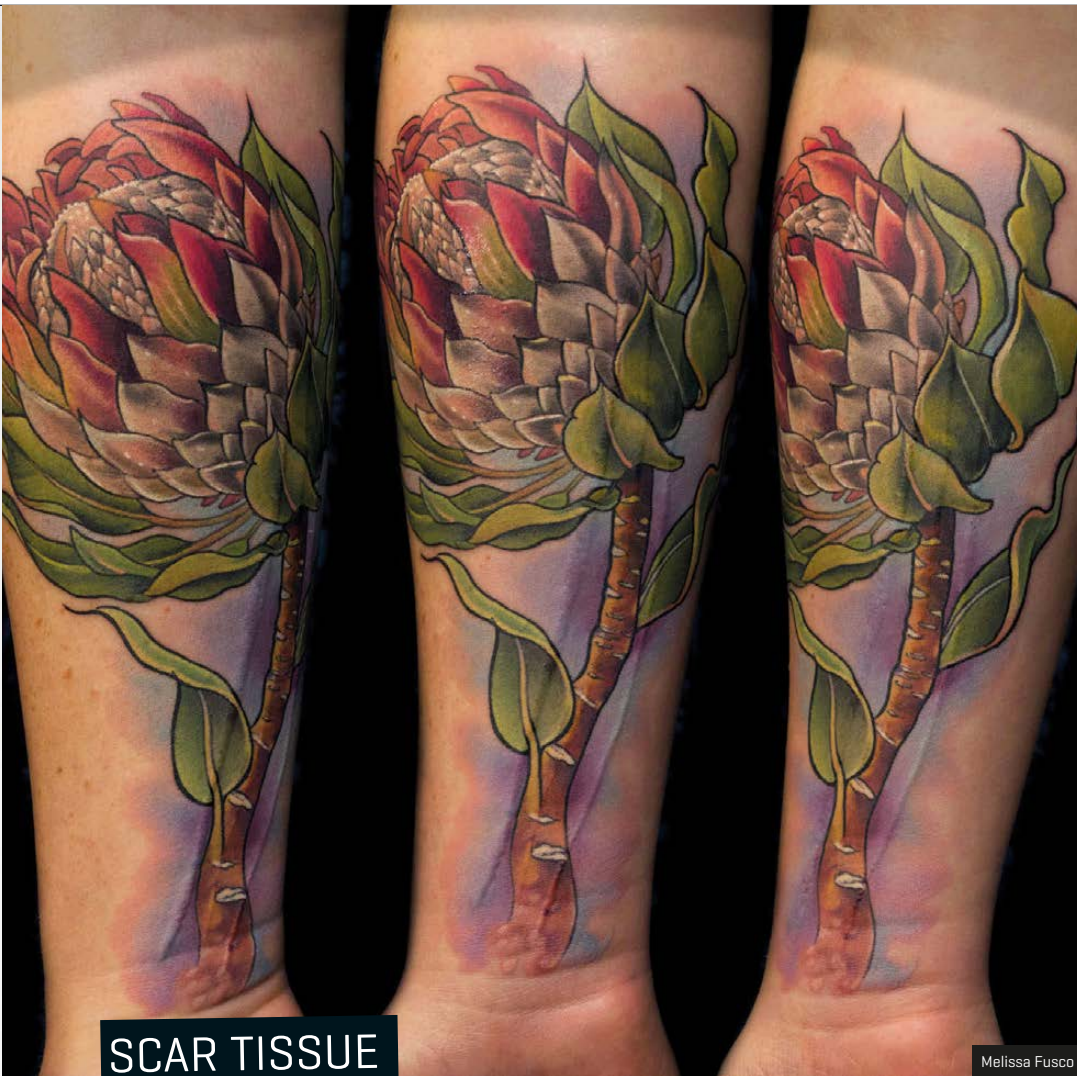
## GREAT BRITISH TATTOO SHOW

### GIVEAWAY

Continuing our ticket giveaway to our Great British Tattoo Show (London: Alexandra Palace), this issue we have another five pairs of tickets to dish out. Simply send a blank email to [editor@skindeep.co.uk](mailto:editor@skindeep.co.uk) with the subject line LET ME IN—and we'll do the rest.

The artist list is now also live over at [greatbritishtattooshow.com](http://greatbritishtattooshow.com)—if you're one of those people who never wins anything and you can't be bothered to enter the comp, there's also some great discounts on ticket prices right now too over at the website.

Come along! With over 300 artists from around the world, great tattoo competitions, entertainment (including Leah Debrincat and Aurora Galore), industry seminars and fashion shows, it's going to be a real blast.



## SCAR TISSUE

Melissa Fusco

**Recently, we've been looking at tattoos that cover up scar tissue—scar tissue of all kinds—just look at this example from Melissa Fusco to see what's possible when you choose wisely. Anyway, this week we also found some good news in the shape of this story from 9News out in Australia**

Tattoo apprentice Whitney Develle (based in Brisbane) posted to Instagram and Facebook last week to pledge one to two days a week giving free tattoos to those eager to conceal old scars and she's been overwhelmed...

The post has gone viral, receiving thousands of likes and shares and due to high demand, Ms Develle has since been forced to amend the original text, offering a total of 50 free sittings in addition to discounted tattoos for everyone else.

She said she found the response "humbling but also heartbreaking".

"I have been up late most nights since with a close friend replying to each and every person," Ms Develle told 9news.com.au. "The hardest part was that statistically, probably 98 percent of those who had written in were people who had self-harmed - the majority of them were too scared to speak with a tattoo-

ist out of fear of being judged."

Ms Develle said that she was first inspired to offer free tattoos after a friend revealed scars from injuries she had self-inflicted while struggling with an eating disorder.

"She told me how much pain it brought her when people would question her about them or make comments. No one should ever have to feel like a public museum for people to ridicule."

"Society looks down at people with self-harm scars and immediately thinks they are unstable or unfit to be amongst the rest of us," she said. "I want to change that stigma. These are grandparents, mothers and fathers, young adults who have moved beyond their days of self-inflicted harm. I want them to know that they no longer have to feel ashamed and that they no longer have to conceal their scars." ▣

*Got a similar story? You know where we are...*

## CONVENTIONS

### INK DAYS ZURICH

**01-03 April 2016**

Mövenpick Hotel Zürich-Regensdorf  
Im Zentrum 2, 8105 Regensdorf  
Switzerland  
[ink-days.ch](http://ink-days.ch)

### INK & IRON TATTOO CONVENTION

**03 April 2016**

The New Bingley Hall, 1 Hockley Circus  
Birmingham B18 5PP  
[inkandiron.co.uk](http://inkandiron.co.uk)

### NORTH LAKES TATTOO SHOW

**09-10 April 2016**

The Shepherds Inn & Auctioneer  
Wavell Dr, Rosehill Estate,  
Carlisle CA1 2ST  
[northlakestattoooshow.co.uk](http://northlakestattoooshow.co.uk)

### TATTOO ART EXPO CORK

**16-17 April 2016**

Montenotte Hotel, Middle Glanmire Rd, Cork  
Ireland

### rites of passage MELBOURNE

**22-24 April 2016**

Royal Exhibition Building  
9 Nicholson St  
Carlton VIC 3053, Australia  
[ritesofpassagefestival.com](http://ritesofpassagefestival.com)

### BRIGHTON TATTOO CONVENTION

**30 April-01 May 2016**

The Brighton Centre  
B M E C P Centre, 10A Fleet St  
Brighton, East Sussex BN1 2GR  
[brightontattoo.com](http://brightontattoo.com)

### LIVERPOOL TATTOO CONVENTION

**07-08 May 2016**

Britannia Adelphi Hotel  
Ranelagh Place  
Liverpool, L3 5UL  
[liverpooltattooconvention.com](http://liverpooltattooconvention.com)

### GREAT BRITISH TATTOO SHOW

**28-29 May 2016**

Alexandra Palace, Alexandra Palace Way  
London N22 7AY  
[greatbritishtattoooshow.com](http://greatbritishtattoooshow.com)

### KERRY INTERNATIONAL TATTOO CONVENTION

**03-05 June 2016**

The Gleneagle Hotel  
Muckross Rd  
Killarney, Co. Kerry, Ireland  
[kerrytattooconvention.ie](http://kerrytattooconvention.ie)

### SCARBOROUGH TATTOO SHOW 2016

**04-05 June 2016**

The Spa Scarborough  
South Bay, Scarborough,  
North Yorkshire YO11 2HD

### NORTHAMPTON INTERNATIONAL TATTOO CONVENTION

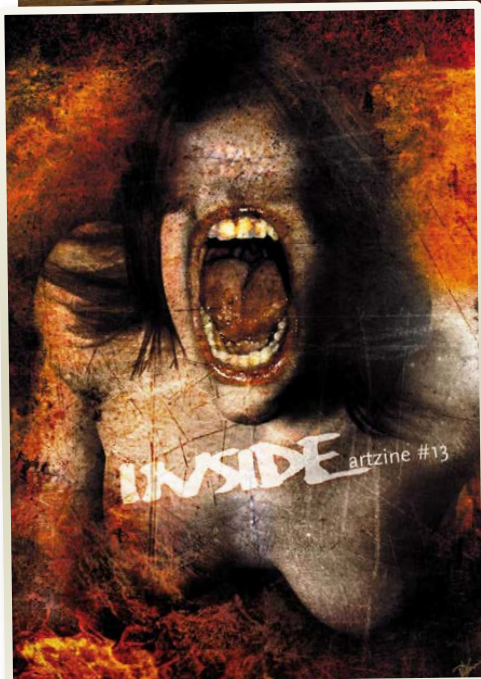
**04-06 June 2016**

Northampton Saints Rugby Football Club  
Franklin's Gardens, Weedon Rd,  
Northampton NN5 5BG  
[northamptoninternationaltattooconvention.com](http://northamptoninternationaltattooconvention.com)

### LEEDS INTERNATIONAL TATTOO EXPO

**04-05 June 2016**

Royal Armouries Museum  
Armouries Dr  
Leeds LS10 1LT  
[leedstattooshow.com](http://leedstattooshow.com)



# INSIDE ARTZINE

**A few years back, we pointed a little spotlight at Inside Artzine as being a magazine totally worth your time and money. The latest issue landed on the desk this week and we figured we would maybe give it another push here.**

Whilst it's definitely a magazine for those who like to dwell on the dark side, there's much to be thankful for inside. Amongst many others, there's work from Robert Steven Connett (grotesque.com) and Seth Anton (sethsiroanton.com)—never heard of these guys? Welcome to the whole point of the magazine—it's a real kickback to the days in which you used to linger over something for minutes rather than click through in less than a second. If you're serious about your art—and particularly the darker arts—give Inside a try. It started out in the early nineties as a photocopied black and white fanzine and developed into a real class act over the years, which is no mean feat while keeping your production values this high.

Tattoo artist or collector—there's plenty of food for thought in here for you. Give it whirl—you won't be disappointed.

**What you need is this:**

inside-artzine.de—where you'll also find some digital samples... but it's not a patch on the real thing in your hands.



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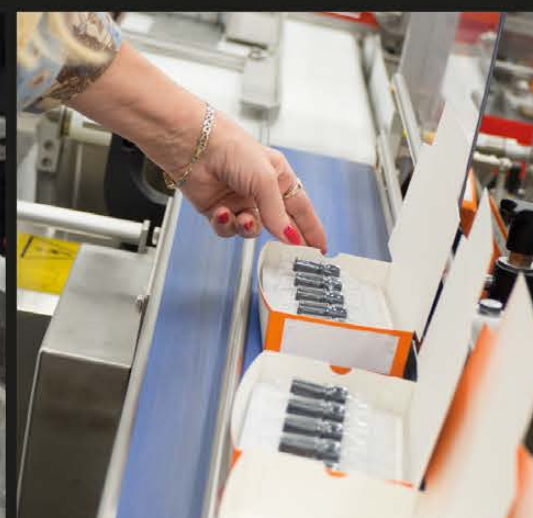


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by  
*Emily B and Guillaume Smash*



**Emily B and Guillaume Smash both work out of a studio called L'Imaginarium** (The Imaginarium) in France—both have their own very distinct styles but we plucked this particular shot from their workload as being something special in that it's a collaboration between the two—and they do a lot of them!

Collaborations are nothing new but it's something that's certainly becoming a 'thing' out in the world. It's worth noting that a great collaboration—such as this—only really works when the two styles complement each other perfectly—to the point in fact, where you can't tell it's a collaboration. (Simone and Volko at Buena Vista are another pairing that work together in absolute harmony).

Aside from this being a great piece of work, it's a real lesson in what you can achieve when you trust your artists and (probably) more importantly, have scoured their portfolio and seen what they are capable of. It's not enough to simply smash two people together just because you like them individually.

Anyway, we love this in every way! Check out more of their collabs—and indeed their individual work—over at their website.

[imaginarium-tatouage.fr](http://imaginarium-tatouage.fr)

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Joe Ankave

Currently working at Dynamo tattoo

# DUE SOUTH

*Mississippi is not a particularly renowned place on the map when it comes to tattoo shows but the wonderful Matt Stebly is determined to prove otherwise to the world*

**Matt Stebly**

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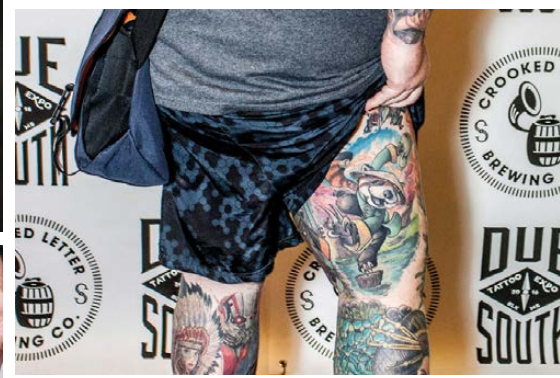


**D**ue South Tattoo Expo is the first of its kind to ever hit the Gulf Coast; it brings a real sense of the tattoo community with a lot of Southern flair. With the second year under its belt, the possibilities for the convention to grow are exponential as ticket sales nearly tripled. It was held at the Golden Nugget Casino Biloxi on January 29-31 where Southern hospitality was on full display ranging from atmosphere, charm and even entertainment. Due South Tattoo Expo is hosted by Matt Stebly and Twisted Anchor Tattoo Gallery of Ocean Springs, Mississippi.

When asked on how Due South Tattoo Expo came about, Matt Stebly offered this:

Images: Ella J. Reese Photography • SHOW PAINTING/POSTER: Johnny Smith





“I had the idea of creating an event that would bring a lot of really talented artists and tattoo artist to the coast. Most people can’t think of ten Southern tattoo artists off the top of their head, and there’s more than that. Due South was a way to bring exposure to those artists, as well as other mainstream tattoo artists from coast to coast. Tattoos are starting to be considered more of a true art form in the last few years. They are starting to lose their negative stigma. The tat-

too industry is filled with more artists now than just ‘tattoo artists.’ Men and women that specialise in putting art on skin are also putting art on canvas, paper, and other mediums. I believe the tattoo industry, as a whole, will become more and more appreciated and considered a true art form like painters and sculptors especially in a place like Southern Mississippi.”

And with that, please enjoy the fruits of Matt Stebly (and crew’s) very intense labour. □

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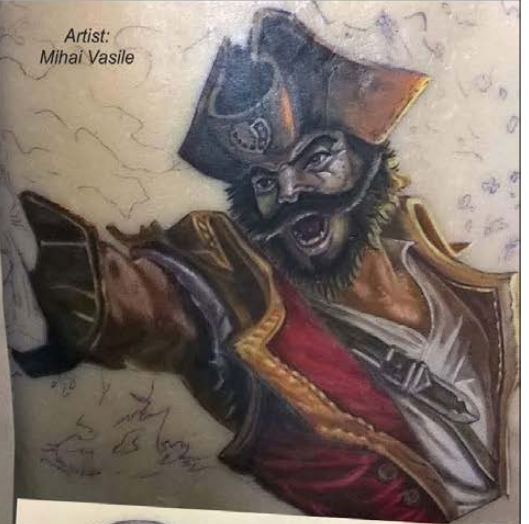
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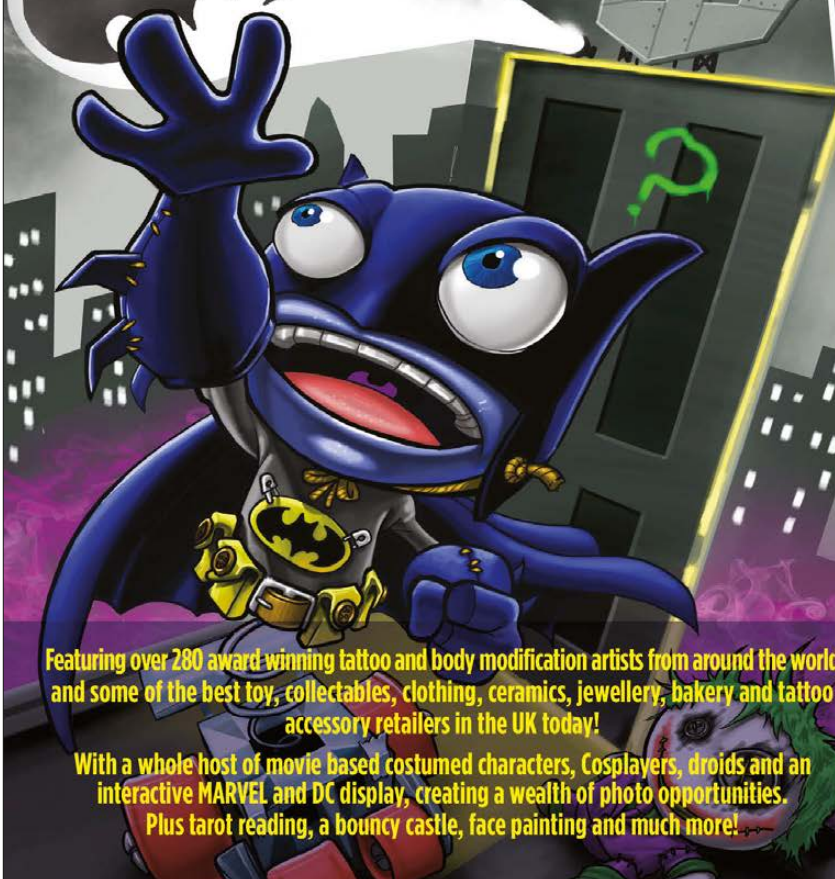
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# PIN-UP GIRLS

*This issue, we are mighty pleased to bring you this damn fine photo-set of Miss Kelly Bakewell who last year was nominated Scottish Miss PinUp 2015. Alongside of this, we are also stoked to introduce you to the work of Kamila Burzymowska:*



**Kamila Burzymowska began her journey with** photography in 2012. She lives in a small city near Warsaw, Poland. She is a tattoo lover and her specialisation is reportage and portrait photography. Recently, she's also begun to shoot rock concerts.

She travels around the country tracking tattoo conventions and hopes that she will soon begin to travel through the whole of Europe.

Kamila graduated from the Warsaw Academy of Photography and this year she will publish her first photographic book with pictures of tattoo artists and tattooed people.

Rather bizarrely, she is also the world's biggest penguin lover.



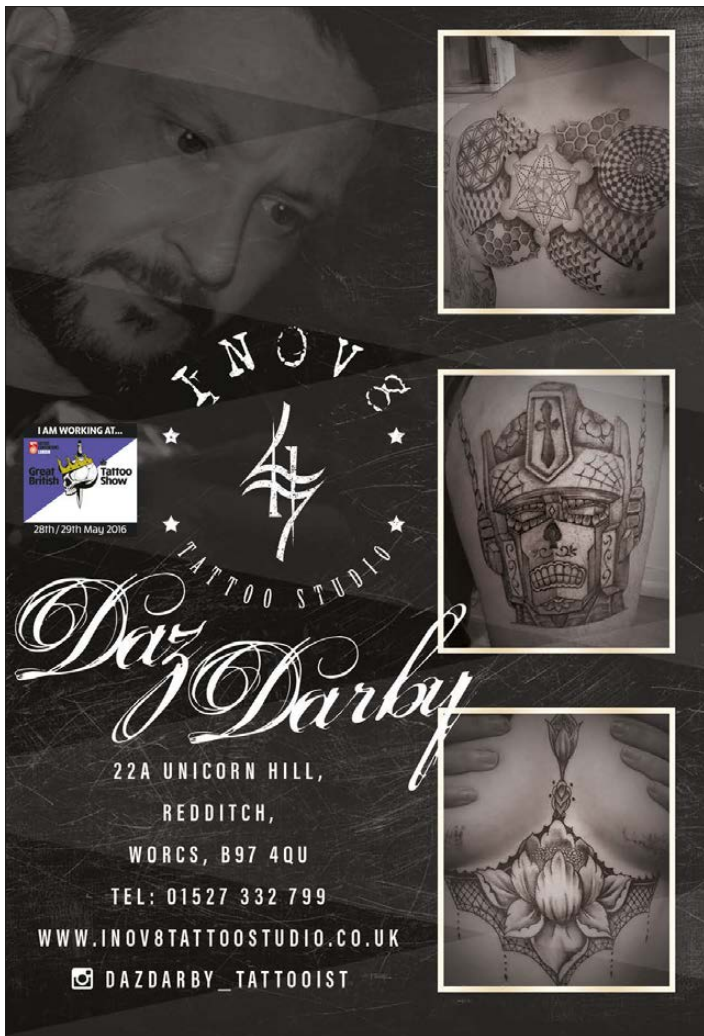




... and a word from our pin-up:

“I’m a full-time pin-up lover. I live and breathe vintage. I’m either dressed in full pin-up clothes or my gym clothes... there is no in between! I won Miss Scottish Pinup at the Scottish Tattoo Convention last year. I just love the idea that you can look classical but mix it up with bright hair and of course my love of tattoos! I’m currently training to be a personal trainer and hoping to get more women into weightlifting the pinup way.

“Most of my tattoo work is done by Lianne Moule, David Corden, Michelle Maddison, Sam Ford and Chantale Coady.” □




I AM WORKING AT...  
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28th / 29th May 2016

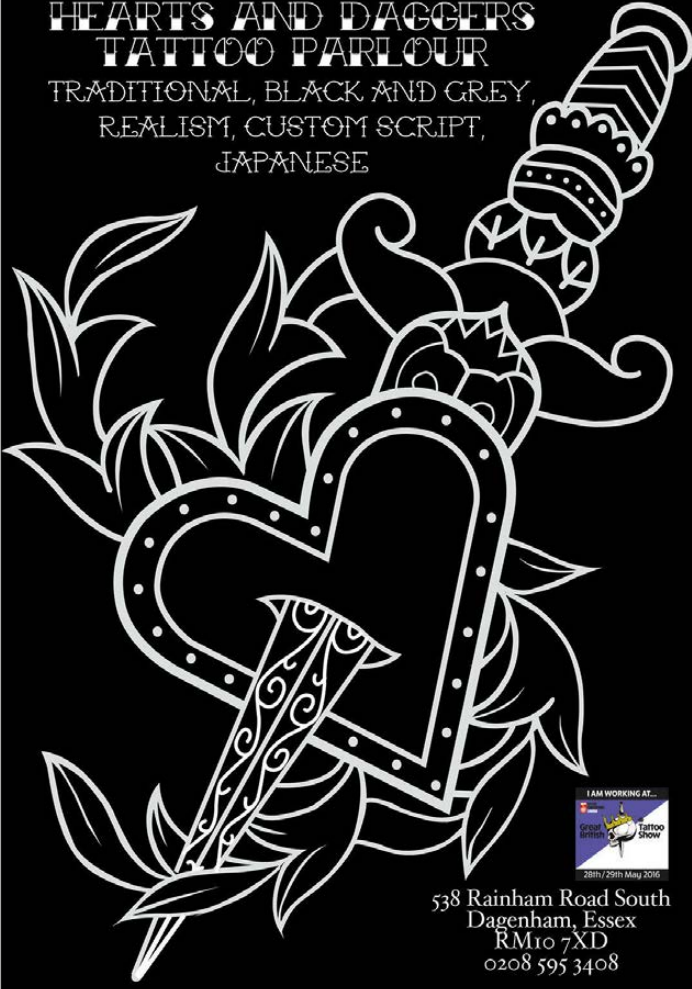
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# TATTOO LONDON

[PART ONE]

*Open until May 8th 2016, the exhibition 'Tattoo London'—at the Museum of London—aims to show the vitality of the tattoo scene in the contemporary life of Londoners. Represented by key artists, it draws a line from the first professional tattooists to what has become over the last century an accessible profession, appealing to the creative youth. It may be modest—but is certainly the first step to a major event—the exhibition stresses the importance of the city of London as being the cornerstone of the development of modern tattooing in Europe. This issue, we talk to Dr Matt Lodder about the city...*



## HOW DID THE EXHIBITION COME ABOUT?

It wasn't the original plan to do an exhibition. The first impetus was that the Museum of London wanted to collect and commission work on paper by contemporary tattooists. Rather than waiting for things to get really old and using them, a lot of museums are kind of collecting things from contemporary society. Then the museum decided to go for a show, curated by Jen Kavanagh, which got set up very quickly.

## WHO ARE THE ARTISTS INVOLVED?

Lal Hardy, obviously, his studio—New Wave Tattoo—opened at the end of the 1970s/beginning of the 1980s, Alex Binnie who opened Into You at the beginning of the

1990s, Mo Coppoletta's Family Business opened around 2000 or so, and then Claudia de Sabe from Seven Doors Tattoo studio, which is reasonably brand new. We have these four amazing artists and four really important studios. Then I've added a little bit of historical context. They assume a few panels that will get us from the very first studios in London at end of the 19th century to some of the post-war artists.

## IS THERE A PARTICULAR THEME THAT DROVE THE CREATION OF THE ARTWORKS?

They reflect their own sense of London and its tattoo culture. So, Lal has produced the flashy of cockney rhyming slang, that's like the old East London slang where one



rhyme replaces another. Alex, who began as a medical illustrator, has done this amazing body labelled with parts of London. Claudia has done a self-portrait reflecting her position as a female tattooist and Mo has produced this amazing work playing on the crest of the city of London which is two dragons, a version of that using Japanese style.

**WHAT'S ON DISPLAY HERE?**

A photographer from the museum went to do some photography in each of the artist's studios. Each artist has also given a cabinet to curate themselves with objects they want to display, filling them with things that inspired them. Machines, inks, objects... there's a little kind of oral history piece too. Jen did interviews with the artists from which she has extracted interesting little quotes and comments. People can also come to listen to things the artists have to say about their own experiences and opinions in a tattooist's chair. That is then framed by historical images that have come out of my research and a timeline: what happened during that 100-year period, between 1880 and 1980, and that creates the modern tattoo culture?

**WHAT PLACE DOES TATTOOING OCCUPY WITHIN THE HISTORY OF LONDON?**

Tattooing has always been part of the cultural fabric of London life. The standard story is that tattooing arrived from foreign practices that were brought back by Captain Cook from Tahiti in the 1770s, but actually, if you look at the record books of dock workers in London docklands in the 1750s, there are accounts of what they didn't call at the time 'tattoos' but 'marks' which are certainly tattoo marks. Designs that iconographically looked like modern tattoos. We know that these dock workers had religious tattoos, names of lovers and other things on them too like bigger pictorial stuff.

The cliché is amongst sailors but of course it's not only amongst them: it's amongst public school-boys, and members of professions, friends and things like that. That's kind of my overall argument that tattooing has always been part of the cultural landscape, certainly of this country and most of Western Europe, in France and Germany too.

**LONDON**



Copyright Alex Binnie. Commissioned by the Museum of London

**IS THERE A STARTING POINT FOR THE HISTORY OF PROFESSIONAL TATTOOING IN LONDON?**

The moment in the 19th century, when you can—as a member of the public—buy a tattoo from somebody, as a commodity, is an interesting break point. That's something that begins to happen sometime in the mid-1880s. Research suggest without a doubt that, Sutherland MacDonald is the first professional artist in London.

**TELL US MORE ABOUT HIM...**

He is the first person that takes tattooing seriously as a profession. He's the first person that advertises himself in the trade directory as a tattooist and he talks about himself as a professional in a magazine article from 1889. He's doing something else as a part-time job in the beginning too, he's the superintendent of the bath house he's running, in the very high end West-end location. He admits he started tattooing people in 1881 and as best we can tell, he began tattooing full-time around 1890. He's obviously a really straightforward artist, he can draw, and he can build machines. He's not the first person to tattoo in London—that's been going on forever—but he's the first person for me at least, who looks like what we would call a tattoo artist today. He is in the right place at the right time to begin to be a professional tattooer.



3.2 Cash Cooper—Image courtesy of Robert Deis



Matt Lodder



Copyright Mo Coppoletta. Commissioned by the Museum of London

## WHY?

London is really where the high end tattooing is going on. MacDonald—and later Tom Riley as George Burchett will do it too—advertised and presented himself as a high-end classy artist. And a thing I think that is an important part of the story of why tattooing catches a particular ‘class’ in the 1880s, is Japan. The future George V got tattooed in Japan in 1881, as did lots of British and European travellers who passed through it after the opening up of the country to the West in the 19th century. It became pretty de rigueur say, if you were a wealthy tourist, to come back with a Japanese tattoo. After opening its market to the foreign countries, Japan is fashionable.

## HOW WOULD MACDONALD WORK?

He always had this private studio in the Hammam Bath—he didn’t have a shop front. He is certainly trying to present himself much like a Japanese studio would. There’s a divan bed and cushions, there is brandy and cigarettes, he injects cocaine to numb the pain. MacDonald would have a consultation with his clients, they would pick a design. There weren’t such things as flash, it’s usually copied work and that’s true with most of the London tattooers. They would collect designs from other medias: Japanese prints, photographs and things cut out of magazines and newspapers,

salon paintings... That would be the design process. With MacDonald’s work you can see where he’s changing things from the original though. For example there is a famous dragon back-piece that

he did: it fits the guy’s back perfectly. It’s kind of like semi-custom work I suppose. The designs are everything from small sentimental things to big back-pieces.

## THERE’S A LOT OF VISIBILITY OF TATTOOED PEOPLE IN LONDON, EVEN BEFORE THERE IS A PROFESSIONAL INDUSTRY...

There’s hints of tattooing going on certainly as we start bringing ‘tattooed exhibits’ from the new world. Sir Martin Frobisher brings over tattooed native Americans. Cook brings back tattooed people from Tahiti... the early performers would have been tattooed abroad probably, like Captain Constantenus in Burma. He was one of the few tattooed performers in the late ’70s of a place called The Aquarium that opened near the Parliament of Westminster in 1876. The original idea was for it to be a very high end amusement hall, a place where you could go and watch operettas. Finally it became overshadowed by freak-shows, magic acts, Vaudeville singers, and as part of that, tattooed women performing on stage. Tom Riley’s wife was one of these attractions. Annie Franck, Emma and Franck De Burgh—these famous American tattooed performers that went on later to work for Barnum too. It all feeds this general sense of exoticism and orientalism that’s just in the culture at the time. They probably helped to promote tattooing in England.



### DO WE KNOW HOW BIG THE PROFESSION GOT?

In 1900, you've got MacDonald, Alfred South and Tom Riley, that's basically it. Riley, by contrast with MacDonald, tattooed out of a booth in the Aquarium, he was a lot more of an everyday tattooist tattooing in contemporary parlours. That's true really for the first half of the century—there's only a handful of tattoo artists, between half a dozen and a dozen professional tattooists. It's not until the 1980s and 90s that we get this huge explosion of tattoo artists that we see today. I don't know how many there are in London today, but I'd have to guess and say at least a hundred. The quality of stuff now is amazing. You can't walk without hitting an amazing studio.

### WOULD YOU GO SO FAR AS TO SAY LONDON PIONEERED PROFESSIONAL TATTOOING IN EUROPE?

I think London certainly has a professional tattoo business earlier than France and Germany. Germany doesn't really get professional tattooing until Christian Warlich, 10-15 years after MacDonald. London had quite a market with money, you can really live as a tattooist if you have people that can afford to pay—and because there is this ability, for people with money to get tattooed, tattooists like Riley, MacDonald and Burchett are advertising in magazines aimed at rich people; that means the tattoo culture developed in a way that it couldn't—or took longer to do—in Italy, France, Germany, and in Scandinavia where it is much more associated with the ports. When we're thinking about this kind of artistic tattooing or the stuff that's a bit experimental or avant-garde, that's certainly happening in London in a way that doesn't quite happen anywhere else for a long time.

### HOW DID TATTOOING EVOLVE OVER THE YEARS?

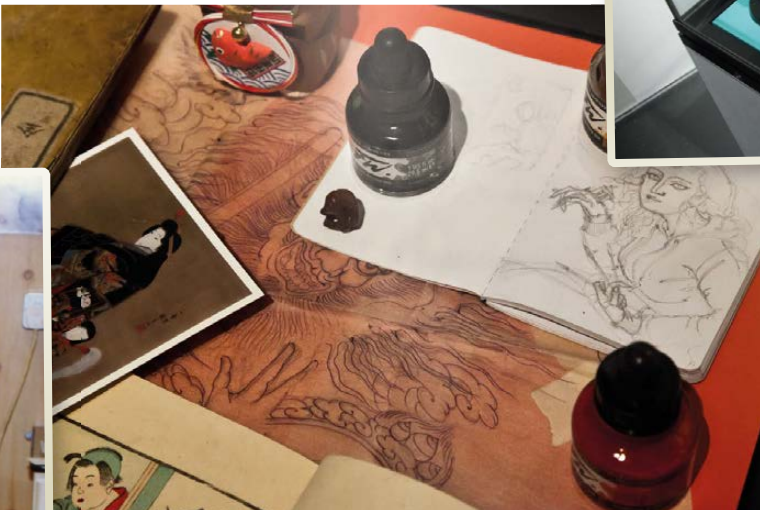
MacDonald, Riley and South have got most of the business sewn up until the end of the Edwardian period, which is around 1910. After that, the fashion among the



3.6 Mr Sebastian—image courtesy of Jeremy L Castle

upper classes starts to wane—that criminological sense starts to increase a little bit more. A lot of the London tattooers end up moving to the ports and the naval bases. That's when George Burchett comes into his own with World War I. There's a huge desire for squaddies and wives, there are a lot of women getting tattooed during and after the war, as memorials, as images to show their patriotism. Burchett becomes this really important tattooer for the Forces. He is really the first guy in Britain doing 'production line' flash tattooing. World War I starts cementing the public imagination between servicemen and tattooing. Then, in the 1950s, there's a





general move towards a visual culture in fashion away from ornamentation and decoration. Decoration and decorativeness become unfashionable. Also the whole thing with the Holocaust, and the use of tattooing by the Nazis, becomes a huge part of the public discourse about tattooing.

Moving on from that, in the 1950s/1960s, the very visible link between tattooing and a particular class or profession kind of kicks in. This is true the whole century but, you don't see tattooing on other people. If they are bank managers wearing a suit, you're not going to see their tattooed backs or arms, but if you're a road worker, you're gonna have your sleeves rolled up and tattooing's gonna be visible. In the mid-70s and particularly with the influence of Ed Hardy, that's a moment again when there is a re-emergence with subcultures and with punk for example, tattooing becomes much more visible.

### HOW DID THE TATTOO RENAISSANCE IN THE US HIT LONDON IN THE '70S?

I don't really like the word 'renaissance' because I want

to stress the continuity. But that said, the '70s is really important. There's a lot happening in America, particularly Ed Hardy. He changed tattooing in many ways. He is this amazing guy with an art-school sensibility, trained in art school, really connected to the history of tattooing; he has this encyclopaedic knowledge about tattoo history and tattoo art at a time when no one else did. I found a business card of his from the early '80s, Hardy considers himself in the period as a 'tattoo ambassador'. It is he who pushed British tattooing forward. Coming to England in 1977, he meets up with Dennis Cockel, Terry Wrigley and tattooed them and they start going to America...

### HOW DOES IT CHANGE THE FACE OF TATTOOING IN BRITAIN?

Lal Hardy calls this the 'New Wave', it really breaks away from the decades of military and flash stuff to do work that's new, vibrant and really cutting-edge. For example Lal's doing this really crazy punk tattooing: even if he doesn't have an art background, he's pushing things in a really strange way. Same with Binnie actually. They bring all this Americana, the kind of interesting cultural melange in tattoo history between black work and new punk ideas, that all mix together in London in the 80s and early '90s in a way it doesn't quite happen elsewhere.

Lal Hardy and Alex Binnie changed how everyone tattooed. The work Binnie was doing practically became the 1990s. London has always been this place where tattoo equals creativity. All of these cities—Paris, New York, San Francisco, etc.—that have youth and subculture, they are places where tattooing can develop because it's where the artists and musicians are. □

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# THE RANSHO PROJECT

*Photographer Masato Sudo is a living legend in the contemporary world of Japanese tattooing. At the beginning of the 1980's he published one of the most impressive books done so far on the subject: 'Ransho'. His beautiful and sophisticated compositions of tattooed bodies magnified the Japanese tattoo artists' work and clearly showed them as true artworks. At that time, in Japan, considering the strong taboo surrounding the practice—tattooing being related to the Yakuza, which is still topical—it was a significant call for the recognition of the craft itself. 30 years later, Masato Sudo blows our eyes again with a second edition of the Ransho project*

## **WHY SUCH A LONG WAIT BEFORE PUBLISHING THIS SECOND CHAPTER OF RANSHO?**

We had the opportunity to meet again with Horiyoshi III and on that occasion, we talked about collaborating on an other chapter of Ransho. In the meantime, I have never stopped working on it even though I never had the opportunity to publish anything between the two books. Which ultimately means that several periods are mixed into Ransho II. Some pictures had been taken twenty years ago, others were done in my studio two to three years ago.

## **WHAT AMBITIONS DID YOU HAVE WITH THIS BOOK?**

Aesthetically, I wanted to make a poster of each picture, something perfect. I wanted also to give a feeling of being connected to the past, carrying this Japanese tradition of nature appreciation... of flowers and seasons. I tried to reach an ideal where the human body merges with natural elements and build up a set.

## **DOES IT EXPLAIN YOUR CHOICE FOR OUTDOOR PHOTOGRAPHY?**

That was an idea we had at the time, with Japanese tattooer Horijin,



for the first Ransho, but doing so is expensive and complicated—there are a lot of restrictions: dealing with the planning of the models, weather problems, light, finding the proper place and taking all your photo studio material there. Nature is also full of surprises. I do really precise scouting and sometimes it turns out that things have changed when we come back for shooting



For this book, the tattooed models are all customers of Horiyoshi III, from Yokohama. In order to avoid repetitions, I had to work a lot on the compositions, the position of the bodies and change my shots. Since Ransho, I didn't even try to get in touch with other tattooers. At the time, Horijin and Horikin had been introduced to me by Horiyoshi III and I think I should respect this way of doing things.

**WHY ARE YOU SYSTEMATICALLY HIDING THE FACES OF YOUR TATTOOED MODELS?**

The face attracts the viewer's attention and that means the attention is no longer concentrated on the details of the tattoo. Finding good compositions is difficult. Before shooting, I prepare drawings of the pictures I have in mind. In order

and I can't find the picture I had in mind. For example, I had a plan for a certain picture but rocks had been moved by the sea and I couldn't find that shot again.

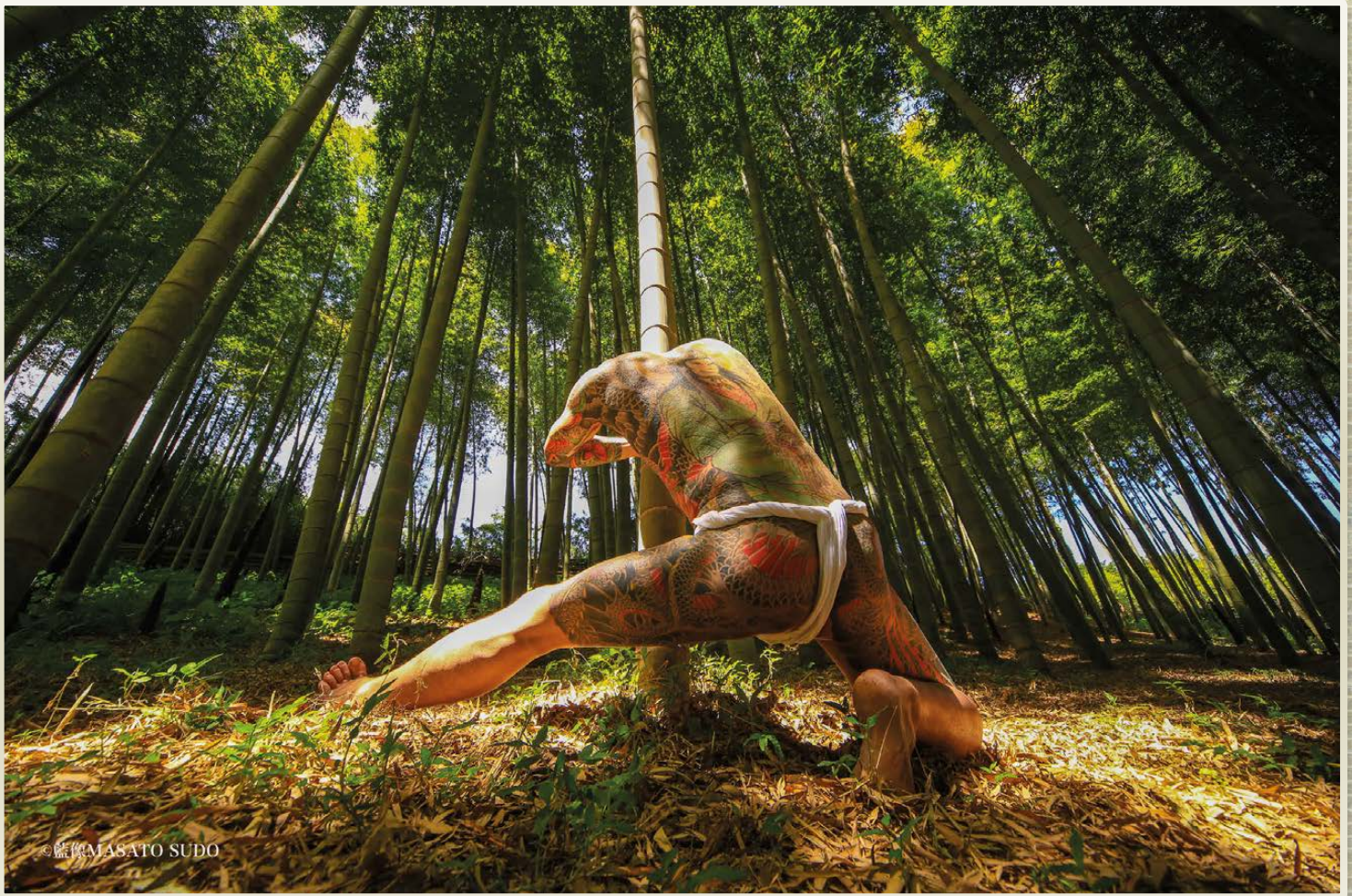
**HOW DID YOU WORK ON THIS NEW RANSHO EDITION?**

My work here is of course, an extension of Ransho. I wanted it to be varied and beautiful at the same time. But for Ransho, two other tattoo artists had participated in the project: Horikin and Horijin, who are now both deceased. They submitted me some models though and the diversity of the tattoos and the styles were therefore natural.

to find inspiration I go to museums and look for sculptures. The poses are sometimes difficult for the models and they are not always very flexible so they may have some muscular aches after the shoot. Horiyoshi III was also helpful by submitting some ideas to me. For example, he suggested that I find a bamboo background for the picture with the tiger tattooed model because it matches.

**THE PICTURE MIXING TATTOO AND MOUNT FUJI IS VERY EMBLEMATIC, CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT IT?**

You might be surprised to find that it happened totally





©藍像MASATO SUDO

by chance. One of the tattooed model was relaxing after a shoot and he struck a pose that I found interesting and finally inspired me. Here in Japan, there are things we can be very proud of and the Japanese tattoo is one of them. In the same way, we are very proud of having Mount Fuji. The Japanese tattoo deserves a lot of recognition and I think we should work on it until the Tokyo Olympic games in 2020.

**YOUR FIRST SHOOT WITH TATTOOED PEOPLE STARTED IN 1978. WHERE DOES THIS FASCINATION FOR THE JAPANESE TATTOO COMES FROM?**

I was attracted by its beauty and its mystery. I had so many

questions like, 'Why do these people get tattooed despite the pain, in places where it will be hidden forever?' What I especially like is the determination of the tattooed people to endure the process until the end—but bodies are not meant to live forever and every day, they get older. That's why I think it is important to photograph them and thus, I want to shoot them at the best moment. You also have the same thing in mind while photographing landscapes but you never know when that 'best moment' is meant to happen.

**LET'S GO BACK TO THE PUBLICATION OF THE FIRST RANSHO. HOW DID IT HAPPEN?**





The book was published on the 1st of April 1985 and it was very well received. The publishing company, Sogakan, instantly understood that the book would be a success and the first day the book came out, they had to print more copies of it.

**HOW DID JAPANESE PEOPLE REACT TO IT?**

It was very surprising. For example, some Yakuza called the office wanting to be photographed. The book also had great success in the homosexual community. Some men would call us because they liked one specific tattooed model and wanted to have more information about him,

his name, his work... A lot of different people got interested in the book.

**DO YOU THINK THE WAY PEOPLE LOOK AT THE JAPANESE TATTOO HAS CHANGED SINCE THE PUBLICATION OF THE BOOK?**

I don't think so, I think that it's even worse. Today, for example, more and more beaches are forbidding access to tattooed people. I don't understand this discrimination. In Japan, the word 'tattoo' is fine but people don't like the word 'irezumi' because it is connected to punishment. I think we should stop using it. I propose that we should use the word 'ransho' instead—it can be translated as 'indigo body'. The master Horijin invented it and I will promote it. I would like him to be recognised before I die.

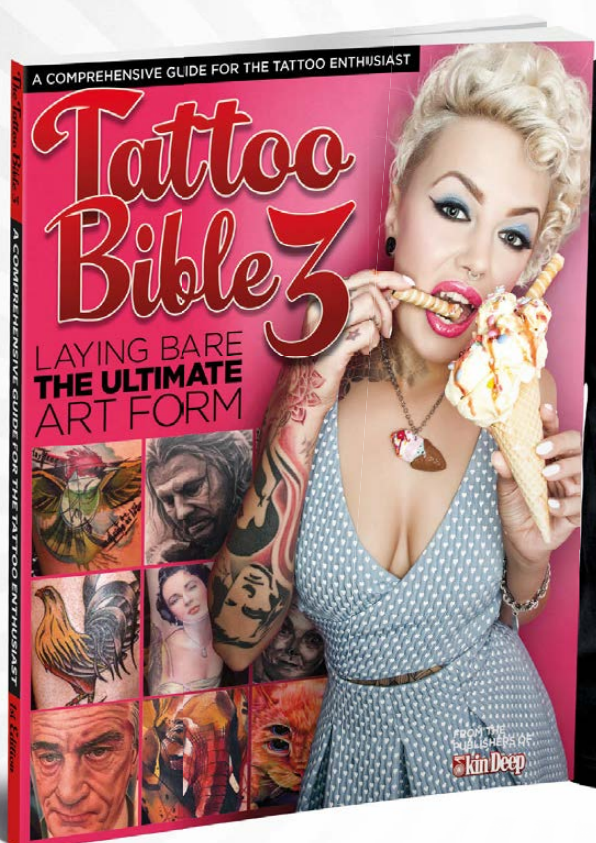
**ARE YOU WORKING ON ANY OTHER PROJECTS?**

I have an idea to do an alphabet with tattooed bodies. It is quite a difficult project though—I would need time and many models sporting full-body tattoos. □

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# INTO THE DARK

*When it comes to working with single colour ink—and that would of course be our old friend, the black—there are few in the world who can make it sing and dance like Robert Borbas. Sion Smith navigates the forests of Hungary with a trusty old lamp...*

**T**here's something about Hungary—and a select few other eastern European countries—that makes people see things differently. My guess is that it's in the folklore. In the next country along (to the right) you'll find the source of Bram Stoker's masterwork, it's not so far out of range that the collected tales of those Grimm brothers couldn't gather material either but it's not without its own very specific set of tales either—they're just not so well known. To illustrate a little:

in Hungarian myth, the world is divided into three spheres: the first is the Upper World (Felső világ), the home of the gods; the second is the Middle World (Középső világ) or world we know, and finally the Underworld (Alsó világ). In the centre of the world stands a tall tree: the World Tree / Tree of Life (Világfa/Életfa). Its foliage is the Upper World, and the Turul bird dwells on top of it, the Middle World is located at its trunk and the Underworld is around its roots.

When you grow up around material like this, it means something.

Enter Robert Borbas—a man who has been tattooing for a scant four years—who is more than well versed in his heritage, that's for



*I STILL LOVE CARTOONS, BUT I FELT I COULD EXPRESS MORE WITH MY 'STILLS' THAN MAKING 2000 FRAMES FOR 3 MONTHS...*

sure. Whether he knows it or not.

The one time animation director who made cartoons for children, soon made his mark as an illustrator for a clique of metal bands (including the mighty Metallica) and eventually found himself with a tattoo machine in his hand working under the massive talent of Zsolt



I STILL DO A LOT OF ILLUSTRATIONS, I'M JUST NOT SUPER ACTIVE POSTING THEM UP. I DON'T WANT TO OVERLOAD MY PAGE WITH DIFFERENT TYPES OF CONTENT

Sarkozy at Dark Art Tattoo—the rest, as they say, is history, so how does a man make the jump from an art form that has possibly the slowest process to create something to what is effectively, one of the most immediate?

“My story with animation was super intense but super short. I was studying at the Contemporary University of Arts in Budapest. I spent three years there and during the last year, I had already started to work for local bands. I was a student and I have two younger brothers who were still studying as well, so I decided to help my parents out... at least in this respect. I tried to make a little money to cover my own daily expenses and slowly, I quit making animations

after I got my diploma.

I still love cartoons—animated shorts especially when its mixed media—but in the meantime, I felt I could express more with my ‘stills’ than making 2000 frames for three months when the result is half as good as one of my more detailed illustrations!

“I was working on several shorts actually—animated advertisements but I have to admit, it’s pretty much not my cup of tea.”

Despite the work as an illustrator rolling in and Borbas holding things together back home, sometime around 2012, all of this work simply disappears from his online portfolio—or rather, it stops: dead in its tracks. An educated guess on my behalf



suggests a lot of work went on behind the scenes here to make it happen quite so seamlessly.

“Ha! It was a lot of work. People were confused when I started to post my first pieces. Some of them even asked if I designed the tattoo and somebody else had tattooed it.

“But after a couple of months—when my illustrations started to ‘disappear’—all the new followers came to visit my social media pages just because of the tattoos. I didn’t really plan this and I actually still do a lot of illustrations. I’m just not super active posting them up. I don’t want to overload my pages with different types of content. I try to focus on showcasing my tattoo work and push forwards with that as much as possible. Illustration is still my love but it became more like a ‘free time’ kind of thing.

“Next year I’m planning to take off at least five to six days a month to spend them doing personal paintings, illustrations and band merchandise. I would like to make at least one or two prints in every two to three months: silk screened, hand numbered and signed. I certainly don’t want to stop any kind of creative activity!

“So besides tattooing, I am still quite active as an illustrator.”



I recall reading online somewhere that amongst Borbas’ influences were Albrecht Dürer and Alphonse Mucha. Dürer I can take on board easily, but Mucha? A subtle one perhaps?

“Well, Mucha was a Czech painter, poster-maker and as far as I am concerned, a genius. His attention to the elegant details yet bittersweet messages behind his works are just perfect.



Mucha is more like a poetic inspiration for me. Sometimes I will incorporate art nouveau-ish elements in my work. I even did some 'reproductions' of Mucha works, but I consider him more like an idol whose life was nothing but a masterpiece in general!"

At which point, I confess that the way—and the subject matter Borbas plays with—is everything I love about tattooing. Keeping with the subject on being influenced, I throw into the arena that my favourite artist of all time is Gustave Dore and I actually see a lot of influence between Borbas and he, and certainly a lot more than the others we have mentioned. Somehow, he was able to tell dark tales without ever being 'messy' about it. All of his work is very simple, unbelievably clean and yet, the stories he tries to tell, spill out of his work every single time—and that's pretty much the effect Borbas has on me. Whether or not Dore is a direct influence, I wonder if it's the

intention with his work to make the tattoo tell a story (as well as be a fine tattoo) long after the tattoo walks away?

"Dore is another hero for me, absolutely. I love every single piece of work he made. Storytelling is hard to do even with words, so sometimes to come up with the right composition, right elements, line weight or effects is hard for me.

"Once I have everything in the right place, coming up with the actual sketch is super fast, but the real thing happens once it's applied underneath the skin!

"Every tattoo belongs to its owner, and changes with the customer. For example, my own tattoos become more and more precious as time passes and that's my aim with my work. It's about showcasing someone's spirit and incorporating elements from my imagination, but the tattoo should work as eye candy too."

Going back to my statement at the beginning





**STORYTELLING IS TOUGH TO DO WITH WORDS, SO SOMETIMES COMING UP WITH THE RIGHT COMPOSITION, RIGHT ELEMENTS, LINE WEIGHT OR EFFECTS CAN BE HARD FOR ME**

about how eastern Europeans appear to think differently, I bring it up here because it definitely comes from the heart rather than being embraced on purpose. It's as though artists who hail from those Eastern countries, who are brought up with truly wild nature, have a lot greater understanding of how to work with darkness than maybe those who come from the west. Maybe it stems from the way they are brought up as kids and from what they are taught...

"I love this question and I'm super happy to answer it.

"I don't want to use the word 'miserable', but middle eastern European countries and the people living inside of them are generally way more pessimistic about life in general. I always try to examine everything from a positive perspective but as you mentioned, this dark, 'bittersweet' thing is definitely in our blood.

"The whole educational system is different

as well compared to the western cultures. For example, art education, especially fine art in schools and universities is super strong. The influence from western cultures in the past 20 to 30 years... talking about pop-art, music etc is super huge and this mixture ended up in a modern and innovative form—it doesn't matter if we call it tattooing or painting.

"It's also worth noting that because the level is so high out there, we are kind of forced to push ourselves and progress as much as we can."

Which is a good point at which to ask if he still finds the time to discover new work to be excited about in the world—new artists who bring new ways of thinking to the world... and if so, just who are they?

"Artists like John D. Baizley who is an excellent illustrator and a mind-blowingly good musician as well are the kind of artists who make the world a more exciting place.



SOMETIMES PEOPLE WILL ASK FOR WEIRD THINGS, BUT I DO TRY TO CONVINCHE THEM TO CHANGE IT - SIMPLY TO MAKE A BETTER TATTOO

“Jacob Bannon, Aaron Horkey, Dan Mumford, Josh Belanger and so many more are out there creating mind-blowing stuff day by day... so for me, checking out their work is always an extra impetus that pushes me to work harder.”

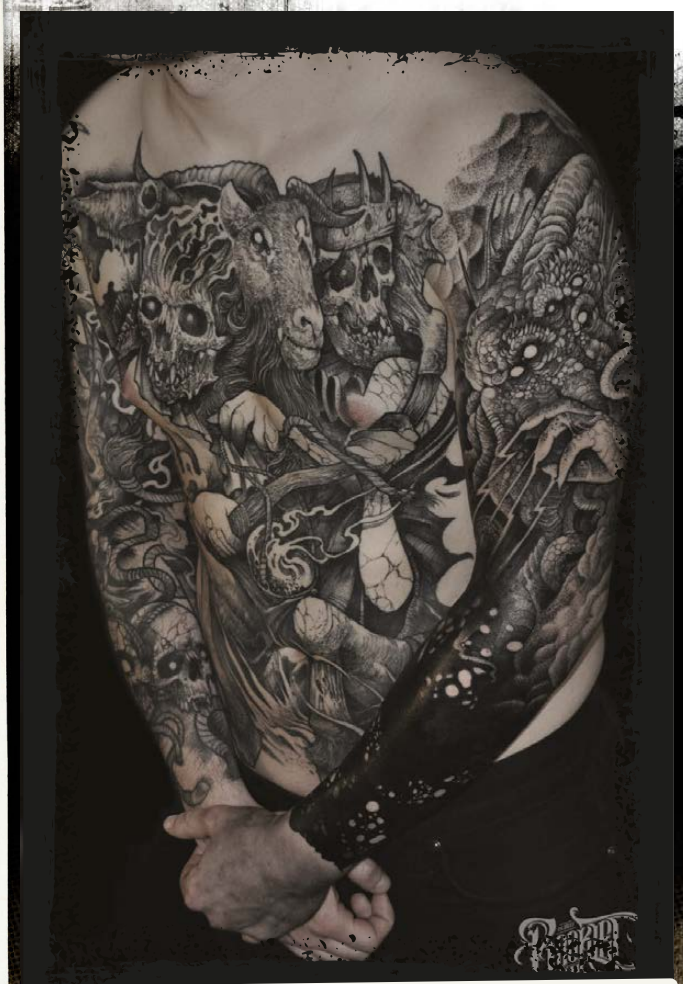
There’s a tattoo that Borbas created a little while ago which I think is one of the finest things I have ever seen. Out of interest—would this be a case of the client giving full creative freedom or is that the client having very exact instructions? It’s absolutely one of the most beautiful tattoos I’ve ever seen and I could ‘read’ it forever. (For those of you who don’t happen to be in the room right now—which is all of you—I’m talking about the chest that depicts the stag and the ravens, pictured above).

“First of all thanks a lot for the kind words, but it’s cool that you mention this piece because

it’s still in my top five favourite pieces I’ve done and I wouldn’t change a single line on it. I’m not saying it’s perfect, sure it’s not but it’s the piece which reflects me perfectly. It lives on a long-time good customer of mine. He gave me the basic idea that the tattoo had to be based on a scene from the TV series, Hannibal.”

“At first, I was worried about how I could make it a cool piece and not an offensive and gross thing on a chest. I hesitated over whether to use this amount of skin tone as negative space and honestly, until the last line, it didn’t look like how I imagined it in my head. But, when I had finished the shading around the woman it just came alive.

“Since then, I’ve used the extremely clean, negative spaces again, but nothing like this. I’m going to make the stomach part of this as well



and I already have some concepts in my head as to how we can connect it together with this one: making it one complex piece which is visually good but also has a super strong meaning.”

Is there always this much freedom with clients?

“A lot of people tell me: ‘Do whatever you want’, which is an extremely huge honour, but it could also end up in a big misunderstanding. So what I prefer is, having at least two to three keywords and a pointer to a couple of my previous pieces of work which the customer is really into as a reference point, and also some keywords of things he/she does not like.

“That’s the best way of working with me. Sometimes people ask for weird things, but I always try to convince them to change it a little to

make a great tattoo in the end.

“I also refuse and reject any kind of racist or sexist related work. I hate Nazi douchebags! Other than that, I’m really open minded to any ideas and I can add my own twist to them.”

So what next? Concentrate on making the studio everything it can be?

“Yes, for now I need to focus on Rooklet Ink as much as possible. I want to build a name for it. I would love to make it an appreciated, high quality studio with a good reputation and with the people I work with, I know it’s possible. They are nothing but joy and inspiration for me.”

On which note, I don’t think we need any more words to describe what you see in front of you here. Now I just need to find my way back home again... ▣

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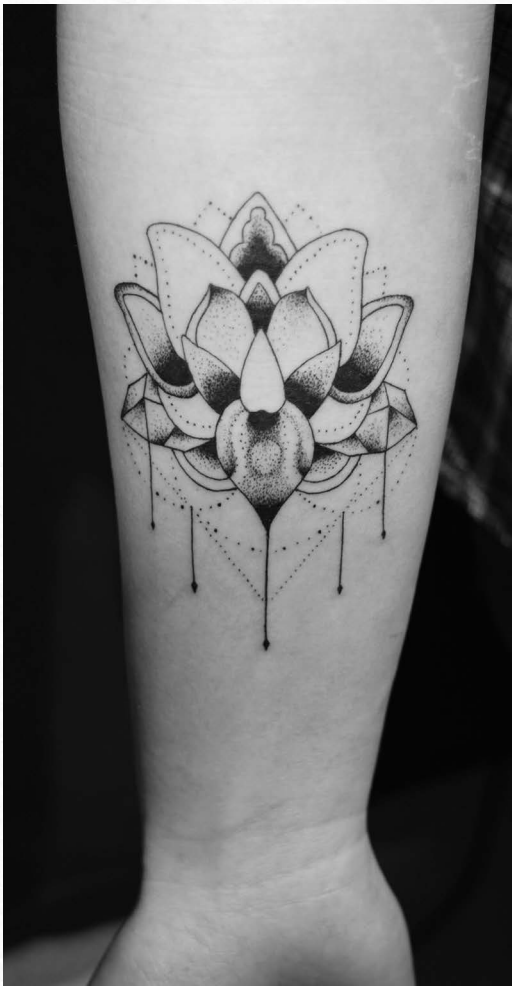
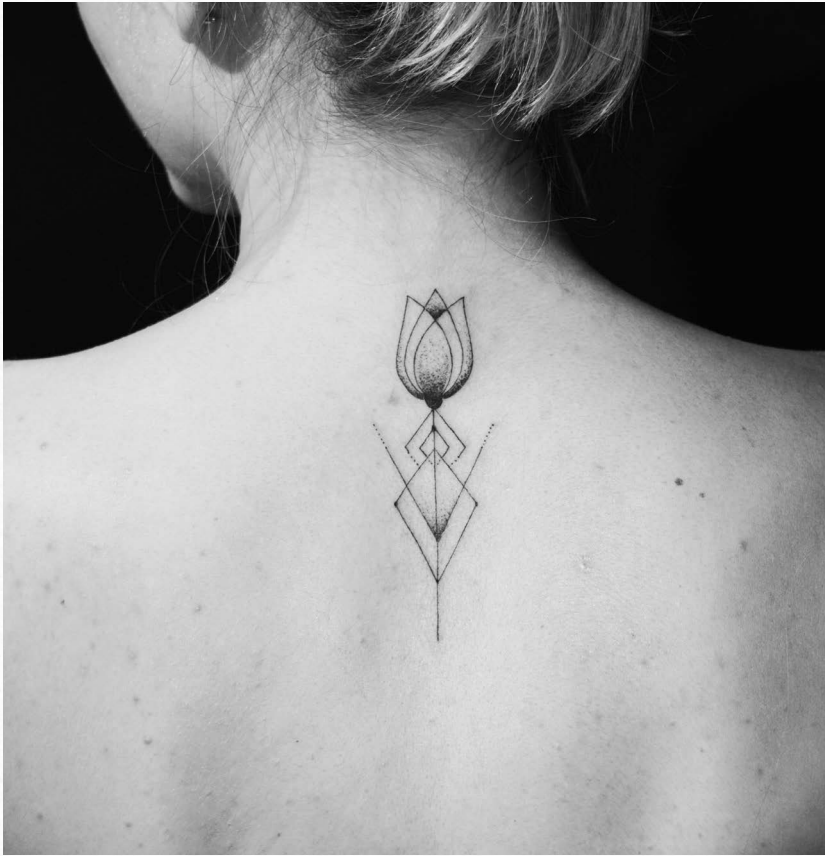
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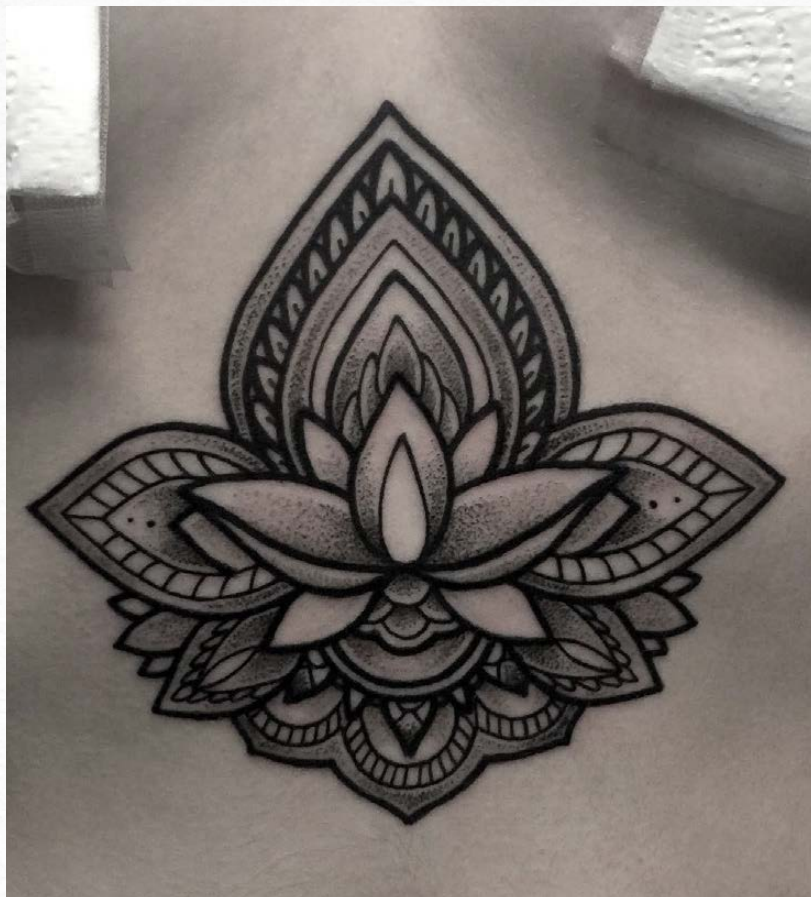
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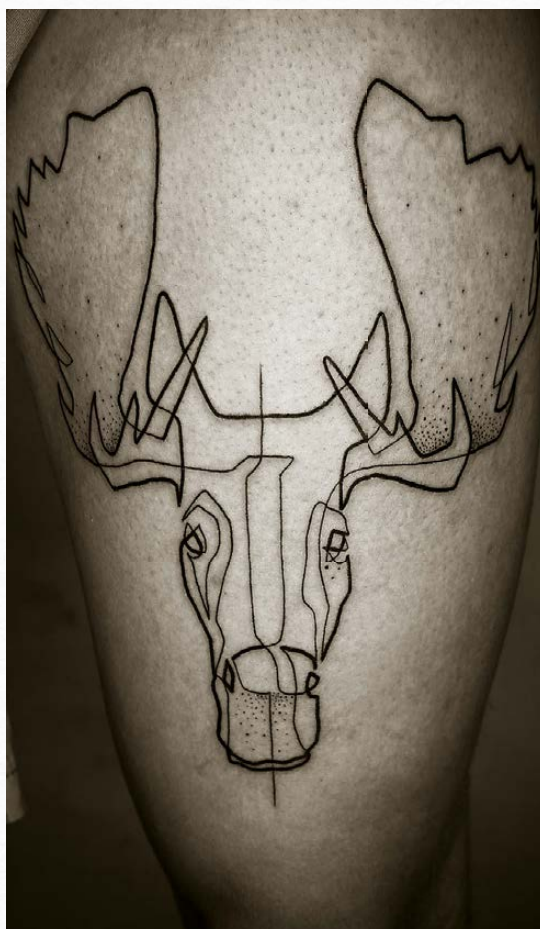
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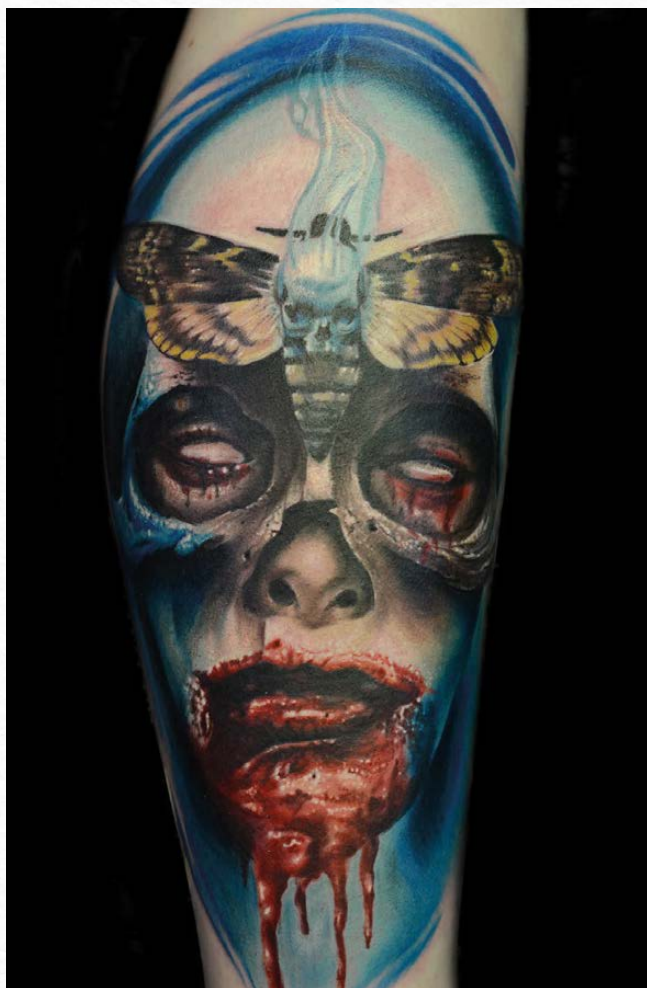
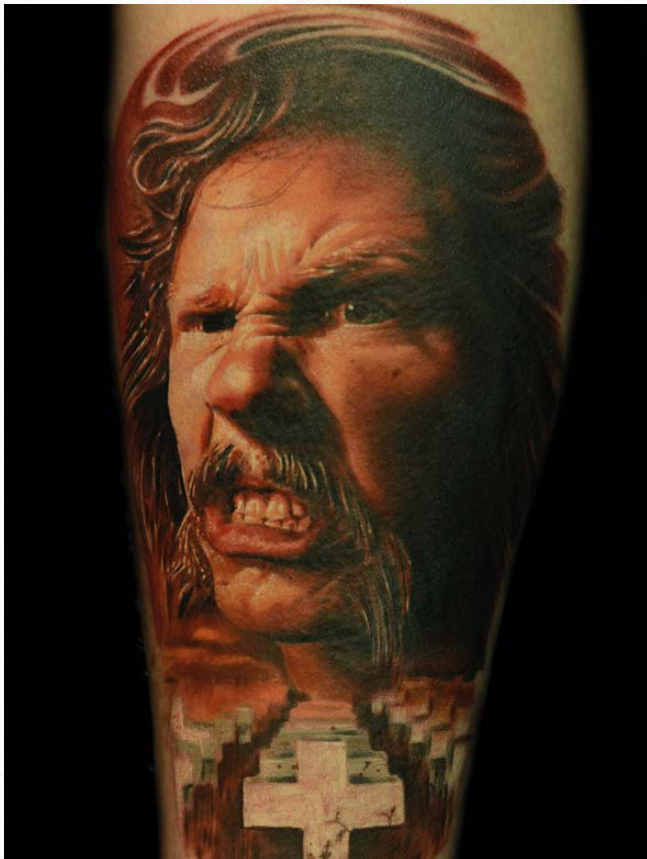
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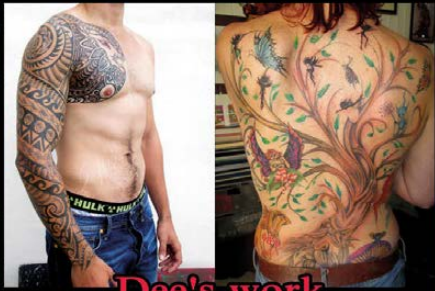
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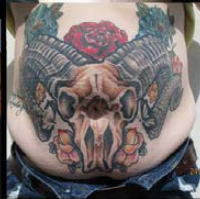
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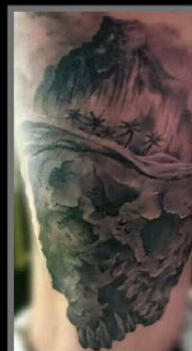
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Jamie's work



# The Company

*Travelling to Asia is one thing, trying to understand its intricacies is quite another. Take Hong Kong, for example. Similar to Japan, tattooing used to be associated exclusively with gang culture. Nowadays, it's popular among the younger population, but still misunderstood—and sometimes feared—by many. So what does it really mean to be tattooed and to work as a tattooer in such a unique and ever-changing landscape? We recruited Vince Yue, owner of The Company Tattoo, to help show us the way...*

“I think Hong Kong is divided into two main types of people, but they both love to stare at you when you walk along the street with a lot of tattoos on your body,” says Vince Yue, immediately making it clear that the blasé attitude most of us in Europe and North America hold toward tattoos has not yet permeated the entire world, despite the rise in conventions, artists and, of course, the Internet.

“The younger population loves getting tattooed, as they think tattoos are cool, charming and a kind of fashion, but middle aged and older people have kept their traditional mindset that having tattoos is mostly for bad persons or even gangsters. The mass media in the past just educated them wrongly,” continues Yue whose first reaction to ink wasn’t all that different from his elders’.

“The first time I saw a tattoo was when I was 14,” he remembers. “I was working in a restaurant that was owned by my dad. I felt scared because the tattoo I saw was of a dragon done in a really traditional style, just like the gangsters had.”



*I felt scared because the tattoo I saw was of a dragon done in a really traditional style, just like the gangsters had*

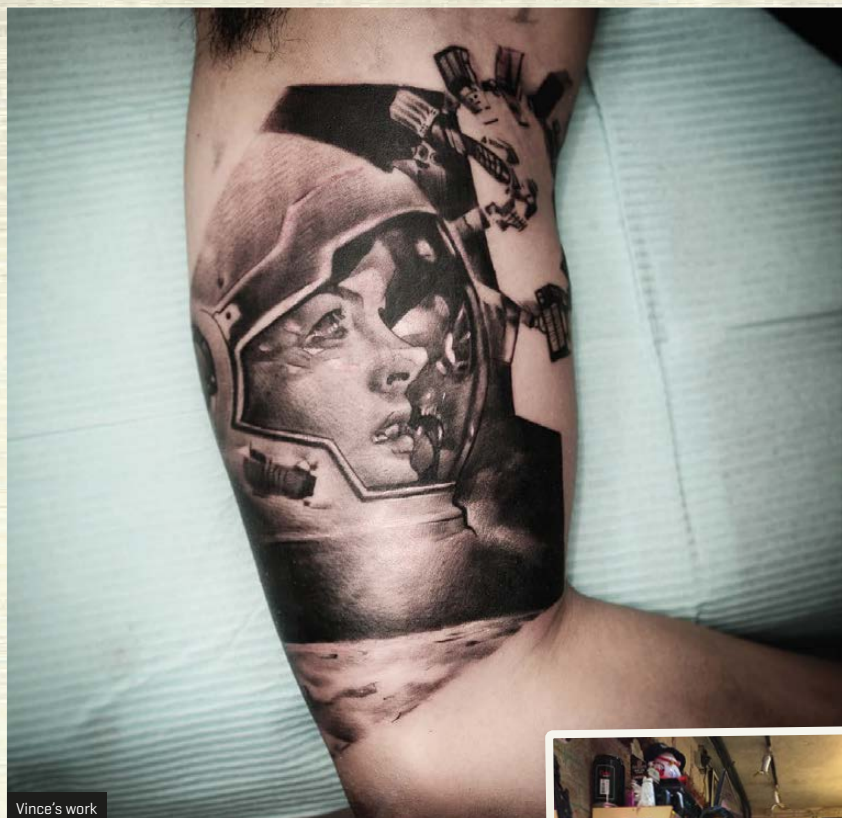
er than he had imagined. Following his decision to learn to tattoo, Yue was faced with one obstacle after another.

“Learning to tattoo was totally difficult for me when I started my career,” he says. “The Internet wasn’t that convenient back in those days and secondly, being an apprentice, I had no money. I was very assiduous and kept working day after day and learning as much as I could, but with no salary, I couldn’t have my own machine and tools to practice with. All the tools I practiced with were from my senior.”

That fear eventually morphed into intrigue and soon, Yue found himself growing his own collection before eventually deciding to pick up a machine.

“I was a collector before I decided to become a tattooist and the reason why I wanted to change was that I liked drawing and designing the graphics,” explains Yue. “I wanted to put it all on my body. While drafting the idea for a tattoo, there was a thought that came to my mind: ‘Why not try to be a tattooist?’”

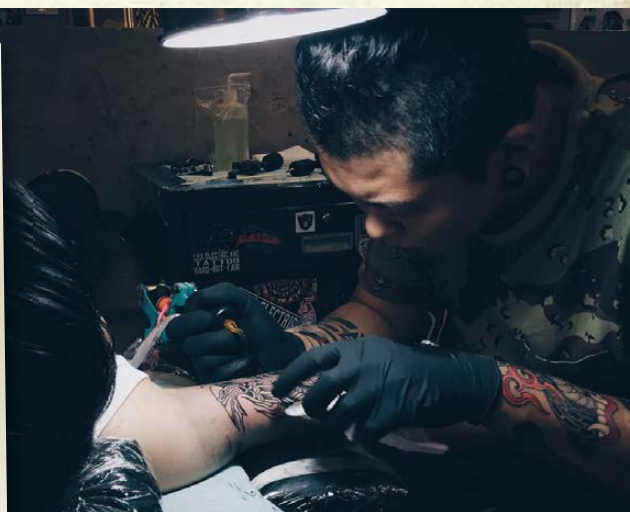
The pursuit of his dream, however, turned out to be riddled with obstacles and hard-



Vince's work



Vince Yue, Tattooer



*To run a shop you need a lot of knowledge and experience. I still have quite a lot to learn about tattooing and operating a shop*

**Hong Kong**

Hong Kong—or, if you want to get technical about it, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China—is an autonomous territory found on the southern coast of China. It consists of three regions—Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and the New Territories—and is home to around 7.2 million people, making it one of the most densely populated places in the world.

“When I decided to become a tattooist in 2006, I started searching for a tattoo shop that would allow an apprenticeship. Luckily, I met my teacher, but there was already an apprentice and I was dropped onto the waiting list. I just kept waiting and texting the shop to keep reminding them every month and finally I got my apprenticeship in 2007.” But that wasn’t even close to the end of it.

“I was a receptionist at the very beginning for a year and a half. I tattooed a few of my friends at that time, but I [had no chance] to improve. I was feeling depressed about it. I met a friend called Wai at a tattoo convention and he introduced me to Tattoo Temple in 2008. Another big downfall was that Tattoo Temple did not need a tattooist at that time. They asked me to learn piercing, so that

I could stay there and learn to tattoo as well.”

“So I kept working on piercing while tattooing on the side and I was doing quite well with piercing,” he recalls. “After that, I met 47 who is the apprentice of a famous tattooist called Siu Lung (Little Dragon). I kept in touch with 47 and one time he asked me whether I was interested in joining them on a trip to New York, so that I could watch his teacher working at Last Rites, the shop owned by Paul Booth. I went and learned as much as I could.”

“I came back to Hong Kong in October 2009 and started tattooing at my friend’s studio. One day, I got a call from Gabe Shum, owner of Freedom Tattoo and the president of the Hong Kong Tattoo Convention, who asked me to join the Shanghai Tattoo Convention.



Jamie's work



Jamie Kam, tattooer



Dave Ryo Lau, tattooer

*As the trend of getting tattooed has just started up in Hong Kong, the culture of getting tattooed is not fully accepted by Hong Kong people*

He asked me to work at his shop the day after we came back to Hong Kong and I worked there for a couple of years until I opened my own shop."

**WELCOME TO THE COMPANY TATTOO**

Yue went on to open The Company Tattoo in Mong Kok, a lively neighbourhood in the western part of Hong Kong's Kowloon Peninsula, and, believe it or not, did so as the result of becoming a parent.

"The Company Tattoo started when my first daughter was born," he says. "I wanted more time for my family, so I needed a stable working area. I started thinking about the idea of becoming a shop owner. At first, I thought owning a shop would give me a better working environment that was more well

organised and that I would feel comfortable and joyful working in every day."

"Conversely, it was absolutely vice versa," he admits. "It is really a big difference from what I imagined. To run a shop you need a lot of knowledge and experience. I still have quite a lot to learn about tattooing and operating a shop."

"I think the biggest sacrifice for me to choose tattooing as a career was time," he continues. "While you are learning, or even working, you will spend nearly all of your time thinking about how to do a better tattoo, as there are so many factors that affect the quality of tattoos."

"Most of my knowledge was developed by experiencing faults. I think the most difficult part for me was the after healing part. Sometimes,



Dave's work



James' work



James Lau, tattooer

*The biggest sacrifice for me to choose tattooing as a career was time*

**Mong Kok**  
Travel to the Kowloon Peninsula, which forms the southern part of Hong Kong, ask a local where to go and you'll likely be pointed in the direction of Mong Kok. Dubbed the busiest district in the world by Guinness World Records, Kowloon is a lively area packed with a mix of old and new architecture housing countless shops, restaurants, bars and clubs.

tattoos look pretty when we have just finished them, but they become damaged after they heal, so it's all about the technique and skills used to balance the quality of tattoo and skin."

When it comes to mastering said skills, time really is the only answer. "I have been tattooing since 2007, so nearly nine years, and I am aware my works are becoming more sharp with better shading and layering. The outcome after healing is better, even though there are a lot more details than in the past. There's not much damage after they're healed and I am really happy with that."

**THE RISE OF HONG KONG INK**

Despite the looks of wonder, admiration and potential apprehension your tattoos are likely to draw in Hong Kong, tattoo culture is slowly becoming more and more embraced.

"Working as a tattooer in Hong Kong makes

me feel great and stable," says Yue. "Tattooing can bring me freedom and a stable income. The best thing about working as a tattooer is Hong Kong isn't highly competitive in this occupation. The hardest part is the cultural background of Hong Kong. As the trend of getting tattooed has just started up in Hong Kong, the culture of getting tattooed is not fully accepted by Hong Kong people."

As for what you're most likely to see on those bold enough to be tattooed, Yue says, "I think there is no main trend or specific style that's most popular in Hong Kong presently because the Internet is so well developed nowadays. People can easily read tattoo-related articles and see works from around the world, so it is all about personal interest."

Visit The Company Tattoo and you'll find four amazing artists, each specializing in their own unique style. In addition to Yue,



Jelena Chu, the apprentice



Jun, the apprentice



Vince's work



*There is no main trend or specific style that's most popular in Hong Kong presently because the Internet is so well developed nowadays*

who has a penchant for realistic black and grey works, there's "James, a young guy who, after graduating school, was introduced to me by his friend who was working at Company before. He's mainly doing dot work and black work tattoos. Dave was my client before. He was a designer with good artistic sense and he was willing to give up everything to learn tattooing. Jamie worked at Tattoo Temple before—he's a really a good guy. The reason we work well together is all about our friendship and respect for each other."

It is this strong bond that ensures "the atmosphere inside The Company Tattoo is more like family rather than just a company. We all love and are passionate about tattooing and care about each other. We like to chat and discuss tattoos all day long. We have guest artists who come visit our shop and work with us and we like to take them out and go see Hong

Kong! We always welcome worldwide guests to come visit, discuss and share with us."

If you happen to ask for a little tour along with your new tattoo, be prepared for Yue to "take you downstairs around my shop, as Mong Kok is the most popular and crowded place in Hong Kong. You can get or eat whatever you want there—Mong Kok is a small paradise in Hong Kong. For a party, I recommend going to Lan Kwai Fong because you can drink and chill there."

Looking forward to the year ahead, Yue "hopes everyone will be happy and joyful working at The Company Tattoo and that we can keep our passion and harmony working together. We are very simple: We just want to enjoy tattooing and working as a family." Because if there is one thing Yue and his fellow artists want the world to know, it's that "The Company Tattoo is passionate". ▣

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# MY BODY MY PASSPORT

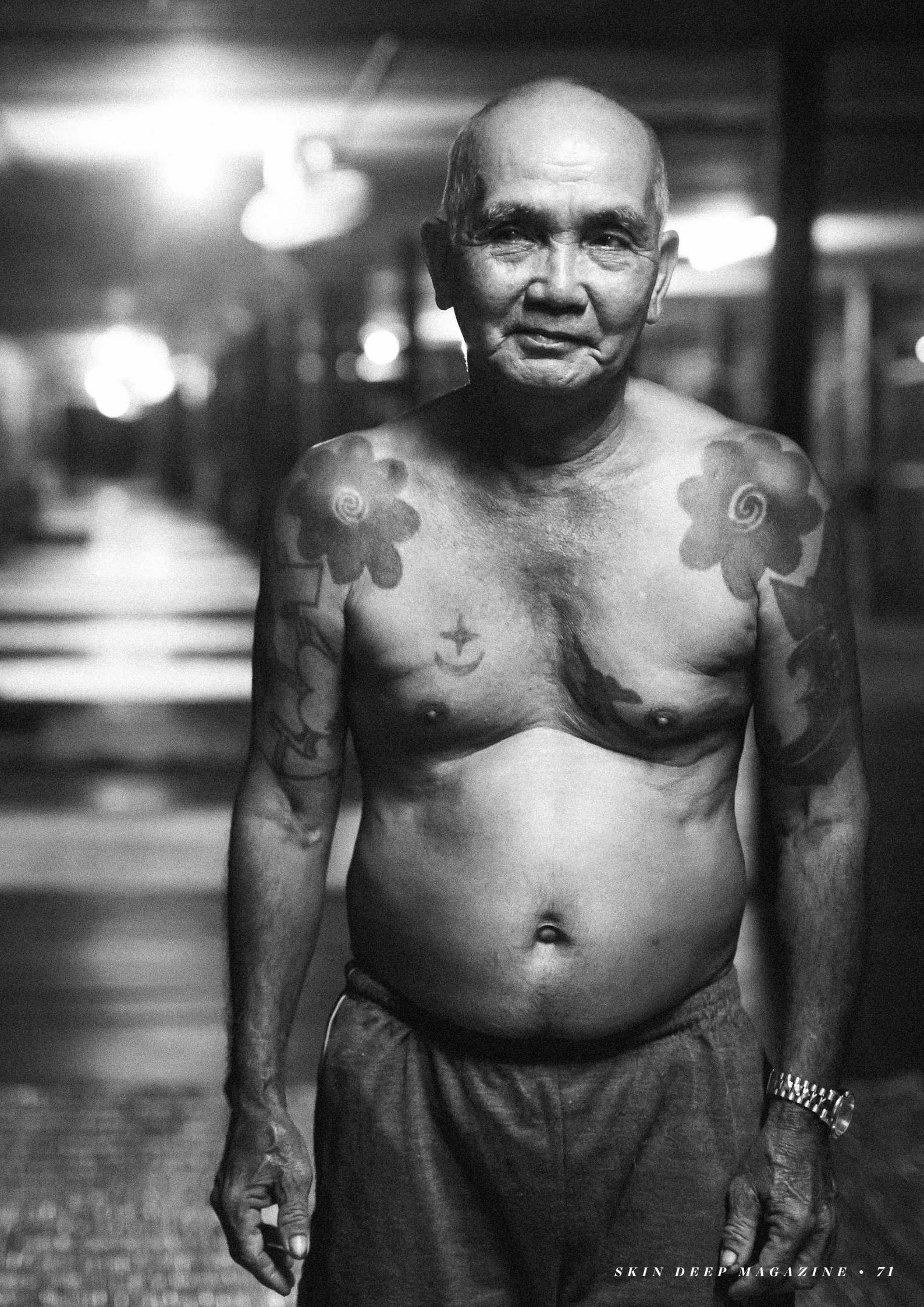
*Continuing our look at tattooing on the other side of the world, this month we dig a little deeper into the lives of Borneo's pirates, head hunters, lumberjacks, planters and tireless travellers. The island's Iban tribe is reviving the tattoo tradition in order to recover their identity, lost in the limbo of history. Here, we meet the elders, whose armours of patang or kelingai—tattoos in the local language—represent roadmaps as much as a spiritual protections*

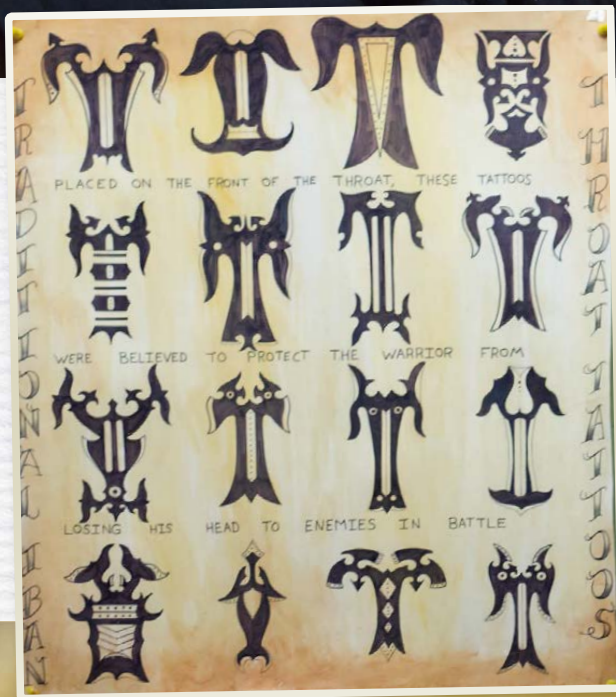


**T**he tropical night has fallen over the dense jungle as our canoe touches the sand bank. At this hour, only the python's whistles, the sound of the wind, the tinkling of glasses filled with langkao—the local rice alcohol—, the squeaking of Filipino fags, and stories of days gone by, may break the silence. The members of the Iban ethnic group traditionally live in longhouses, big wooden houses on stilts which stretch along a mutual corridor and shelter about 25 families. Some of them are only accessible via the river, since there is either no road or the existing road is regularly blocked by mudslides.

Each longhouse has a representative, called a tuai rumah, who gives their name to the village. Here, 'US' is not the acronym for the United States, it rather means Ulu Skrang, the zone above the river Skrang. For administrative convenience after independence, the Malaysian government gathered several tribes under the Iban name, which comprises at least seven sub-groups, each with their own dialect, including the Skrang.

Ibans, also called the Sea Skrang, represent a third of the population of the state of Sarawak. From Java and the Chinese Yunnan, Ibans arrived during the 16th Century via Kalimantan, a now Indonesian province south of Borneo. Faithful to their reputation of being fierce conquerors, they quickly dominated the other tribes of the fourth largest island in the world, and at the same time, adopted and adapted their various tattooing traditions.





Sat on a braided straw mattress in Mejong’s longhouse, a four hour jeep drive from Kuching, Maja, an old man with very clear blue eyes tells us stories. Villagers call him “Apai Jantai”, Father of Jantai. At the end of World War II he was sent by the government in the neighbouring State of Sabah and then to the protectorate of the Sultanate of Brunei to work as a lumberjack. It was the only conceivable job for the men of Sarawak.

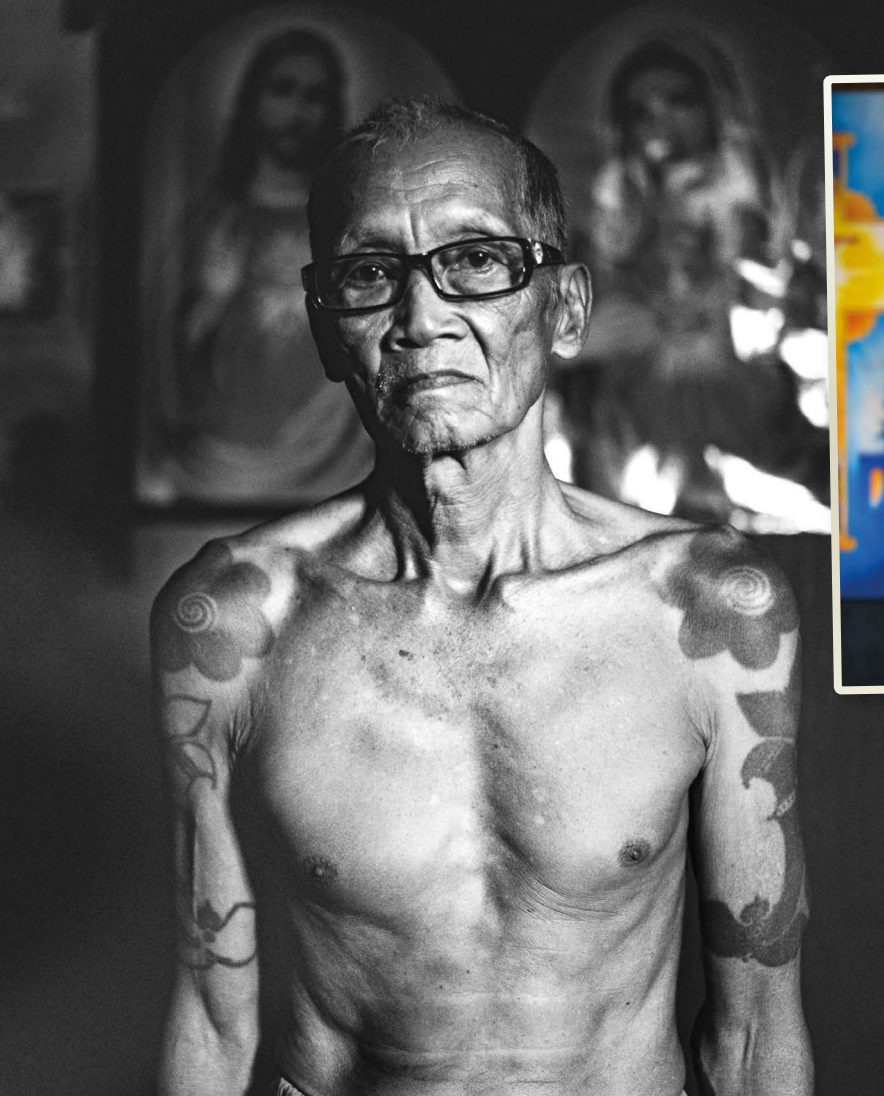
“Pepper did not make enough money because our village did not have the means to go and sell it to the merchants on the coast” he explains. Whole generations of men hit the road for ten to fifteen years, for 500 to 1000 RM (120-240\$) a year, cutting down trees with machetes in Sabah, breaking their backs in Brunei’s petrol ports, or within the machinery of Singapore’s gas industry for the most daring.

They came back every three years roughly, to visit their parents, get married and have children. Meanwhile, the women worked in the fields, the pepper, rice and rubber tree plantations. They brought up children and made their own mattresses and clothes. Every time the men came back, they had more and more tattoos.

Traditionally, young Ibans began their collections with a couple of bungai terung tattoos, one on each shoulder. These were inspired by a local eggplant flower, called brinjal. The tattoo symbolised the passage to adulthood, respect of the moral values of the village, and signalled the young man’s departure for the belajai, the initiation journey. These tattoos were opportunely placed by the straps of the wicker bag the young Iban was going to carry during his expedition to “discover the world”.

For a few months or a few years, he would walk from longhouse to





longhouse, offer a hand for everyday chores, refine his knowledge of his own culture, listen to the elders, and in return he received tattoos. During the 20th century this *belajai* turned into a temping pilgrimage from job to job, perpetuating the quest for social prestige. The more a man accumulated tattoos, the more he became desirable in the eyes of the women of the community. His marks were the symbols of surmounted obstacles and accumulated riches.

His body would become a journal of his travels and achievements. His tattoos became a road book, a passport, a strong sign of identification, which allows Ibans to recognise each other. On Maja's arm, reads a phrase "Salamat kasih semua urang" which means "Thank you everybody", tattooed in the city of Julau. A memory of all of the places he has visited, tattoos are exchanged for an animal or human skull, an amulet or a knife.

Metal has a high value, as a basis to make weapons and tools, but it is also offered to the artists so their soul does not soften and they remain hard inside themselves. Strength is needed to tattoo whole bodies on the floor, with just two sticks. "Four people were tattooing my back simultaneously for over ten hours. Not with ink but with candle soot. I drank a lot of *langkao* to endure the pain" Maja recalls.

On his back you can see the tree of life, the story of his existence. At the top, there are two *ketam belakang*, a pattern inspired by the shape of a crab, which—to him—represents a rebate plane, the tool of woodwork, a symbol of his years as a lumberjack. On his arm, he has a pattern called *ketam lengan*. In the middle of his back is a *buah engkabang*, a maple seed falling like a helicopter, the fruit from which Ibans extract butter and oil. At the bottom, four flowers complete the pattern in an aesthetic fashion.





On his chest, Maja wears a small star... it's an aeroplane, he explains. "The first time I saw one flying over the jungle, it was a very mysterious object for us so I had it tattooed, in order not to forget." A great part of Iban beliefs and practices are linked to a free interpretation of the environment. In some villages, elders still listen to bird songs to help them make decisions on a daily basis, and make amulets with what they're inspired by in the jungle, stones and fruits being gifts from the deities.

For Rimong, 70, the star among the flowers on his back represents a precise emotion. "Because I loved looking at stars in the evening with friends. It's a memory that fills me with joy." For the tattooer as much as for the tattooed, the meaning of each piece gives ample room to personal interpretation. On his arm, Rimong wears a tuang, an imaginary creature from his dreams.

The tattoos are an echo of the Ibans' spiritual beliefs, the patterns being inspired by the power of animals, plants and humans. Before tattooing, it was traditional to sacrifice a chicken to appease the spirits and ask for the gods' consent. Women of the community respected the same ritual before weaving a pua kumbu, the sacred textile used to wrap the heads freshly brought back by victorious warriors and by shamans before invocatory ceremonies. With the ngajat, a ritual dance, the pua kumbu is another strong piece of Iban heritage.

Like the traditional tattooer invoking the spirits to be guided



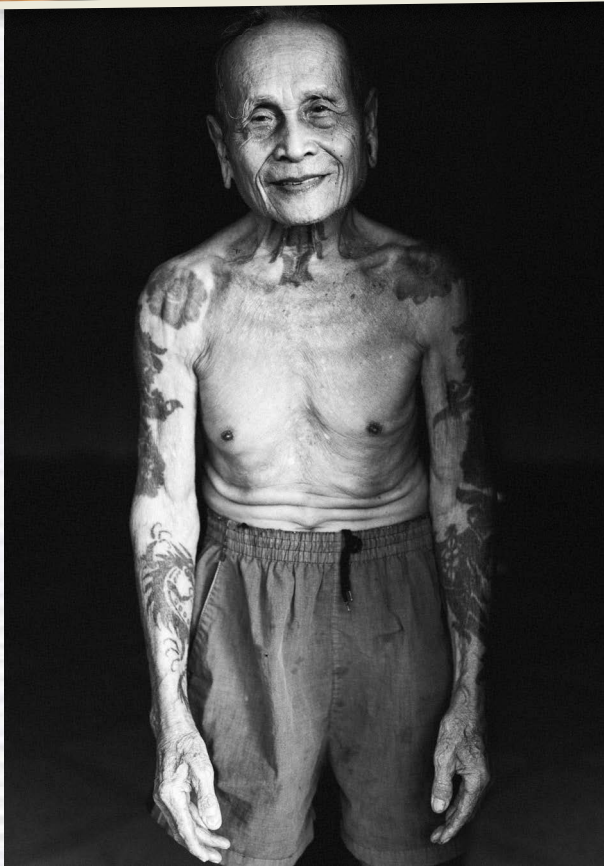
in the realisation of a pattern, Iban women wove images that their ancestors showed them in dreams. It was the *kayau indu*, the “women’s war”, practiced for generations while men were cutting the heads off their enemies, to attract the gods’ favours during fights against other tribes and for the harvest of rice. The best weavers were thanked for their essential contribution to the well-being of the community with a tattoo on their fingers, or a *pala tumpa*, a circular tattoo on the forearms. However, Iban women wearing traditional tattoos have almost disappeared today.

Also rare now is the *tegulun*, a tattoo applied on the fingers of victorious head hunters, and the only one to necessitate a religious ceremony. In spite of the peace treaties of 1874 and 1924 between the Dayak tribes, head hunting reappeared sporadically, to eventually disappear at the beginning of the 1970s.

A more common tattoo is the *Ukir rekong*, which is an allegory of a scorpion or a dragon on the throat, a symbol of strength based on the power of these animals. It protects the necks of warriors against the blades of rival tribes, while the back of the neck is protected by long hair. A good number of men also share the motif of the fishing hook on the arm or the leg, a reminder of their activity as fishermen.

This whole tradition of tattooing was jeopardised when the Christian missionaries ventured into the jungle to impose the di-





vine word in these villages. In the kitchens, the gaudy portraits of Jesus and the Virgin Mary in 3D have become the only authorised decoration. The forced Christianisation that started in the 1960s created a deep breach in these communities.

Today, 80 to 90% of the long house inhabitants are converted, some of them become priests, and most of them go to church on Sundays. A church can be found in each minuscule hamlet by the soccer field. In the long house Lenga Entalau, the missionaries arrived late, only 15 years ago, but they made up for lost time with brutal measures.

All the elders were forced to burn their relics, amulets, remedies and skull-trophies, or to throw them in the river. Some of them became ill at the sight of the burning, as if their soul was consumed at the same time as their precious goods. Some resisted passively, hiding their last skull in a plastic bag at the back of a shed, or entrusting the objects charged with black magic to a son gone to live in the city.

Bryan did not give in. 97 years old and covered with tattoos, he worships seven deities, messengers between men and Petara, the supreme god, as well as various spirits and ghosts. His tattoos protect him against strokes of bad luck. He is convinced of this since he heard a story during World War II. In 1940, some Ibans were enrolled in the British colonial army, where they formed the majority troops assigned to the protection of the coast of Borneo against a Japanese landing.

**FURTHER READING**

*'Iban culture and traditions: the pillars of the community's strength'*, by Steven Beti Anom, a work of reference on the history of this people.

*'Panjamon: une expérience de la vie sauvage'*, by Jean-Yves Domalain, The travel diary of a French naturalist who lived in an Iban tribe at the end of the 1960s. Even though he was married to an Iban woman, tattooed and accepted by the community, he had to escape to save his life, poisoned by the village's shaman.

*'Sarawak'* (1957) and *'Life in a Longhouse'* (1962) by Hedda Morrison, a German photographer known for her pictures of the Beijing of the '30s and '40s, and of the Sarawak of the '50s and '60s. She lived in this region of Borneo for twenty years, and her photography missions in the district of Kuching granted her a rare access to numerous communities.



This was a waste of time, since the imperial army occupied the island and gave the locals a hard time, starved, tortured and massacred them. A lot of them escaped into the jungle. At the end of the conflict, in collaboration with the Allies, they set up a guerrilla movement to chase the occupying forces: it was called the Borneo Project. Japanese soldiers dropped like flies under the hits of poisoned blowguns. Bryan was one of those rangers in charge of holding the line against the Japanese, who never managed to reach Ulu Skrang. “One day, an Iban regiment fell into a Japanese trap. The only survivors are those who had kept their amulets and had not converted to Christianity,” he asserts.

Today, the young generation has distanced itself from institutionalised religion and a minority is starting to be interested in their ancestry. This minority thinks that a degree is not enough to prove one’s social worth. Facing constant attacks against native culture by religious people who want to model their soul, by politicians who want to suppress their idiosyncrasy, by business men who devastate their forests with bulldozers—and globalisation sweeping away everything in its path, the Iban tattoo is becoming a part of the culture again. More a community than a ritual, more a sign of defiance against the times than a sign of appeasement destined to the gods, adapted to the taste of foreign visitors and sometimes void of its spiritual substance, tattoos remain an important ethnic identification mark in the face of a terribly uniform world. ▣





# INK ON WHEELS

*It's a bitterly cold December day in Newham Leisure Centre but that's not going to dampen the spirits of the hollering crowd. Five women clad in leopard print circle the track at full speed, stopping only to knock their opponents to the ground with a loud thump. The Neanderdolls, one of London Rockin Rollers' three intraleague teams, are putting their arch rivals, the Voodoo Skull Crushers, through their paces. It's a whirlwind of bruises, ink and attitude.*

Since its rebirth in Austin, Texas, over a decade ago, roller derby has transformed from camp, alternative entertainment to the fastest growing women's sport in the world. No longer do fist fights break out on track and the fishnets and trash talking appear to be a thing of the past. Make no mistake; roller derby is a real sport with real athletes. The dedication to fitness and training these women commit to would put a professional soccer player to shame. I should know, I spent many years circling the track as my alter ego, Marilyn Monroadkill. A slipped disc and a broken ankle ended the love affair and these days my position is confined to that of spectator. Luckily for me, watching is almost as fun as playing.

For those of you unfamiliar with the sport, it consists of five girls on each team skating around an oval track in two minute jams. One skater on each team, known as the jammer and displaying a star on her helmet, tries to lap the other team's skaters. Starting with the jammer's second pass through the opposition, her team gets a point for each opponent she passed. The other skaters, the blockers, use their hips, shoulders and rear ends to stop the opposing jammer, while trying to assist their own jammer through the pack. It was created in the 1930s in the US but its popularity had faded by the 1970s. It re-emerged



in Texas in 2001 and its popularity has skyrocketed. It's tough and yes, the girls do get hurt. But they also have a lot of fun. Bruises are worn as trophies and are part and parcel of life as a roller girl.

Although Roller Derby is now a serious sport, that's not to say the skaters take themselves too seriously. Most still skate under a derby name, or moniker, like the humorous Pauline Foul'er and the fearsome Fonda Kaos. War paint is worn by many skaters and I'm happy to report that ink is still very much synonymous with the sport. Of the forty odd roller girls skating at Newham, at least half of them sport tats, many of them related to their team or the sport itself.

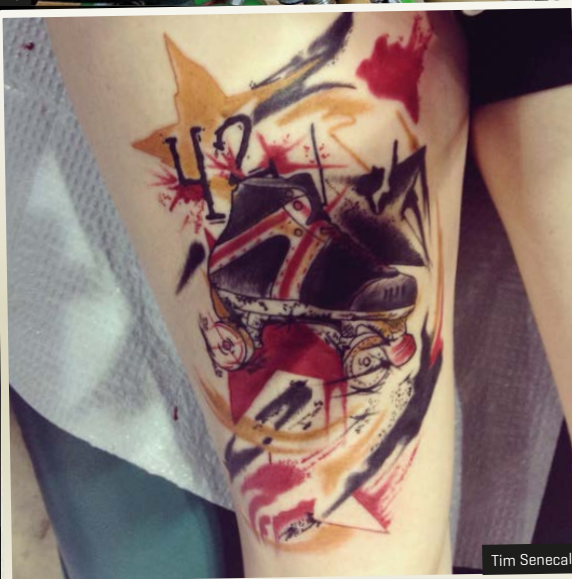
But what's the link between derby and ink? "I think there is a strong correlation between tattoos and derby



Mrs Robinson from Aroostock Roller Derby



Psychone



Tim Senecal



SCERD by jcphtographykent.co.uk

because they both kind of stand for being a bit fearless or just having big balls. Derby attracts people who aren't interested in fitting into a cookie cutter image and tattoos are the ultimate way to express yourself. It's like peanut butter and jelly. They are just beautiful together," says 41 year old Heather Elby, also known as Mizza Murzia, a skater with the Lincolnshire Bomber Roller Girls. Mizza's one of several roller girls skating for the Bombers at this year's Tattoo Freeze. The convention, taking place in January, each year, has been showcasing the sport as part of its entertainment since its launch in 2010. It's a highlight of the UK convention calendar, not only for its stellar roster of artists, but for the unadulterated adrenalin filled action provided by these deadly dames on wheels. Mizza's got several tattoos including insects, music, binary, flowers and Barbie. She also sports a cartoon image of herself riding a bomb backwards in her derby kit. "The tattoo of me riding the bomb is my "Bomber" tattoo. I got that to celebrate my

derby career....The reason I am riding the bomb backwards is because everything I do in my life is ass backwards and I have a blast doing it. She's based on a photo of me that I gave my tattoo artist. I wanted her to have a mental smile because I get called mental quite a bit..." she tells me.

She's not the only one with a team tattoo. "My first one was 'Derby or Die' written along my forearm. My second and favourite one is also on my forearm and it's the Haribo boy riding a bomb. This tattoo represents my skate name and my team," Mizza's teammate Arry'Bo tells me. Derby or die is a common refrain from skaters and one I've seen branded onto the skin of several roller girls over the years (Roller Derby Till I Die was also the name of the Extreme Sport's channel documentary on the sport). It's truly representative of the blood, sweat, tears and devotion that the sport commands. Unlike other sports and hobbies, derby has the habit of taking over skaters' lives completely and a permanent reminder of their complete commitment in the



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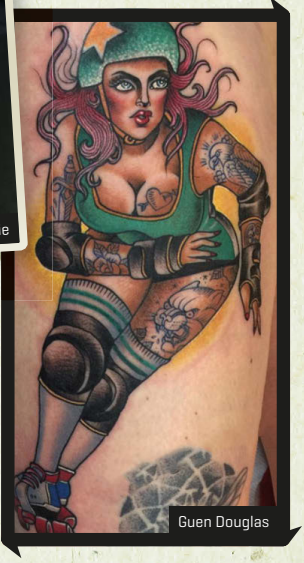
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form of a tattoo has become de rigeuer. Toughness on the track isn't limited to taking hits and extreme fitness, it seeps into everyday life. For most mere mortals, getting inked is a little sore and leaves us a little tender. We're usually in need of some TLC afterwards, or, at the very least, a few pints down the nearest pub. But for A-Cute Injury, a jammer with the Big Bucks High Rollers from High Wycombe, no such luxury is allowed. Cutie, as she's known to her team, will get inked on the morning of Tattoo Freeze and then hit the track that afternoon, taking on Mizza, Arry'bo and the rest of the Lincolnshire Bombers. "A few people probably think I'm a bit bonkers having a tattoo before I skate... It's pretty standard for me really... I had both my knees tattooed by Simon at Paradise Tattoo where I live in High Wycombe, then trained that evening ...I've skated after a number of the tattoos. I guess I've just built up a tolerance I have a high pain threshold and the adrenaline is good....by the time I skate today I'll have had time to eat well, and

rest so I'll be raring to go..." For me, tattoos and derby are intrinsically linked—I discovered the sport through a Skin Deep article back in 2009. Having newly moved to London from Dublin, I was looking for a UK based tattoo artist. Through that one issue, I discovered the Islington based artist Mo Coppoletta, who would become my go-to artist, and, rather unexpectedly, roller derby. A reader interview with Jackie 'Jack Attack' Mason, a founding member of the London Rockin' Rollers, caught my interest and determined how I would spent much of my first four years in London. Jackie is today not only a derby icon (she has represented her country at the roller derby world cup), she's also one of the most in-demand tattoo artists on the derby scene. Based in Hertfordshire, Jackie has noticed a big increase in skaters getting tattoos over the last few years and she has quickly gained recognition for her skate inspired work. "The most popular derby related tattoos are either a variation of a skate or a pin up style roller girl. I've mostly done these. But



Gary Erskine



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Erin Rafferty

I've also done logos and team names/skate names in script or scrolls or in hearts," she tells me. "Some skaters just get so passionate about derby that they feel the need to get a derby/skate related tattoo to mark their journey through this amazing sport. I tattooed a lady that previously had no tattoos that then got a derby themed tattoo every time she reached another milestone in her team! Anyone that plays derby or is a fan of derby will tell you that it takes over everything!"

She's right—it's not just the players; even the fans have derby related ink. "Tattooing my team's super fan Bob is pretty fun. He's got a few derby tattoos now. The pin up style ones. He pretty much let's me do my own thing too which is kinda fun," says Jackie. Bob Hodges, the undisputed number one fan of the London Rockin Rollers, has been following the team since its infancy. He's travelled from Finland to France and even

to Canada and Texas, where the Roller Derby World cup took place. What inspires such devotion? Bob was a blank canvas when he discovered roller derby in 2009. "I had wanted to get some ink but had never been able to fix my mind on something that I wanted as a permanent feature. After discovering derby, my tattoo desire/ envy started to reach a critical state," he says. His first, the handy work of Jackie, was a 'Neanderdoll' tattoo on his left arm, a pinup style leopard clad lady in roller skates. He has since added several and plans are afoot for more. "Jackie and I had talked a bit and I produced a sort of storyboard with a number of themes. On my right arm she designed a jammer's head in profile with a leopard skin panty (helmet cover) that's inside an ace of spades." Bob's permanent and ever-lasting tributes to his favourite team are testament to his roller derby devotion.

Back in Newham, the whistle blows and the skaters hug. The Neanderdolls are victorious. □

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## BEHIND THE INK

# HEROES AND VILLAINS

*Heroes. They've been the stuff of legends since the beginning of time itself. Yet last time we checked, Bonnie Tyler was still holding out for one. And what of their evil counterparts, those dastardly, moustachioed villains? Wayne Simmons dons a cape and pulls some underpants over his treads for this month's Behind The Ink*

**T**he concept of good vs evil has been a staple within tattoo art for a very long time. You see it within old school traditional work where they approach ink in a sort of dualistic fashion—the ol' love/hate on the knuckles, for example. And I guess if you've had a rough patch, wrestling with your inner demons so to speak, a devil/angel tattoo can be as good a way as any to celebrate making it out the other end, as well as an ever-present reminder that it could creep back up on you again and bite you on the ass.

These days, of course, as many artists move away from those old school motifs, the concept of good vs evil gets played out in a more realistic fashion. But have the rules of engagement changed any?

"Tattoos have come a long way and people are now appreciating the artwork involved; putting a lot more thought into what they get and trusting their tattooist to do something awesome," Matt King tells me. Based at Studio Ink in Westbury, he's a relatively new kid

on the block and one of many to draw my eye at Tattoo Freeze. And, having cleaned up at this year's Frome Tattoo Convention, his edgy blend of new school and surrealism has clearly turned a few more heads. For Matt, this concept of dualism we've been talking about is still very much present within tattooing, especially within larger pieces. But it's more for artistic reasons than any kind of

moral balancing act. "Bringing both the good and evil sides together within a sleeve, for example, makes for a more dynamic setup and can really help with the flow of the tattoo. That's the way I feel when looking at art. It doesn't matter what the subject is, I'm just attracted to the aesthetics and love anything that has a creative edge to it."

David Brace agrees. Known as Brasso to his mates, he's been steadily building a bit of a rep for himself among the punters at Ink Me in Cannock—especially with his realism work. "Nowadays, tattooing has developed so much that people can literally have whatever they want on their skin," he tells



Matt King



All work this page Matt King

me, “and since the Marvel and DC films, people just want to get tattooed because they love the characters.” He reckons the dualistic approach is simply down to tradition, maybe even peer pressure: people are kind of just conditioned to balance one thing out with another. “Like yin and yang.”

A self-confessed comic book nerd, Brasso’s noticed the lines between good and evil blurring with the growing popularity of badasses such as The Punisher and Deadpool. “I think people can relate to the bitter frustration within these characters, their violent sense of justice.” Yet, for

**TATTOOS HAVE COME A LONG WAY AND PEOPLE ARE NOW APPRECIATING THE ARTWORK INVOLVED; PUTTING A LOT MORE THOUGHT INTO WHAT THEY GET AND TRUSTING THEIR TATTOOIST TO DO SOMETHING AWESOME**

Matt King

Brasso, the modern day villain is more likely to be in a suit and tie rather than behind a mask. “People who are sly,” he explains. “Evil but hiding in plain sight. Which in my opinion is even more sinister.”

For Tony Sklepik, co-owner of Sanitarium in Edmonton, it’s more of a nostalgic trip and not much at all to do with the old school motifs of good vs evil. “If someone gets a Batman tattoo, for example, it’s generally because they’ve been a huge batman fan since childhood. They connect with the subject matter on a deeper level than most; it’s something they feel played a



All work this page David Brace

part in what kind of a person they grew up to be.”

For Tony, the amorality of some of the newer characters helps keep things fresh. “If every movie, TV show, video game and comic had a clean cut good guy pitted against a hardcore evil bastard, they’d get boring very fast. Any good story teller is going to realise that in order for people to be emotionally invested in the story they are telling, they have to identify with at least one of the characters, and that’s not going to be the same one for all of us.”

Tony reckons we all have our dark sides, and that’s what makes some of the more

## SINCE THE MARVEL AND DC FILMS, PEOPLE JUST WANT TO GET TATTOOED BECAUSE THEY LOVE THE CHARACTERS

David Brace

ambivalent heroes, such as Walt in *Breaking Bad*, more engaging. “We’ve all either done something ‘bad’ or at least thought about doing something ‘bad’ at some point in time. The fact that we realise it’s wrong is what makes us inherently ‘good’ and that’s why we can all identify with the nobility of the hero. But, personally, I like the anti-heroes. The underdogs. *Spawn* was a huge one for me as a kid, *Hellboy*, *Batman*, *Punisher*, those types of ‘heroes’ are the ones I always gravitated towards.”

Getting a tattoo of a villain, then, can be a way for us to be the villain without actually being the villain. “Like getting a Joker



All work on this page Tony Sklepici

tattoo because it's fun as hell to think about blowing up buildings and causing carnage. But very few of us would actually go out and do it."

The concept of good versus evil is not just the stuff of sci-fi and fantasy. Everyday life has its own acts of heroism and villainy, and the experience of such can also inspire new ink. "People refer to friends and family that have passed as their heroes, so I have done pieces relating to that," Matt tells me, referencing a spitfire and poppies tattoo he did for a client whose granddad was in the RAF during the war.

Brasso had a similar experience with a

**IF SOMEONE GETS  
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CHILDHOOD...**

Tony Sklepici

black and grey portrait he worked on recently. "It was a tattoo of the client's grandad and after I did it, he looked at it and just said 'hero'. Then he and his nan, who wasn't a fan of tattoos at first, both cried."

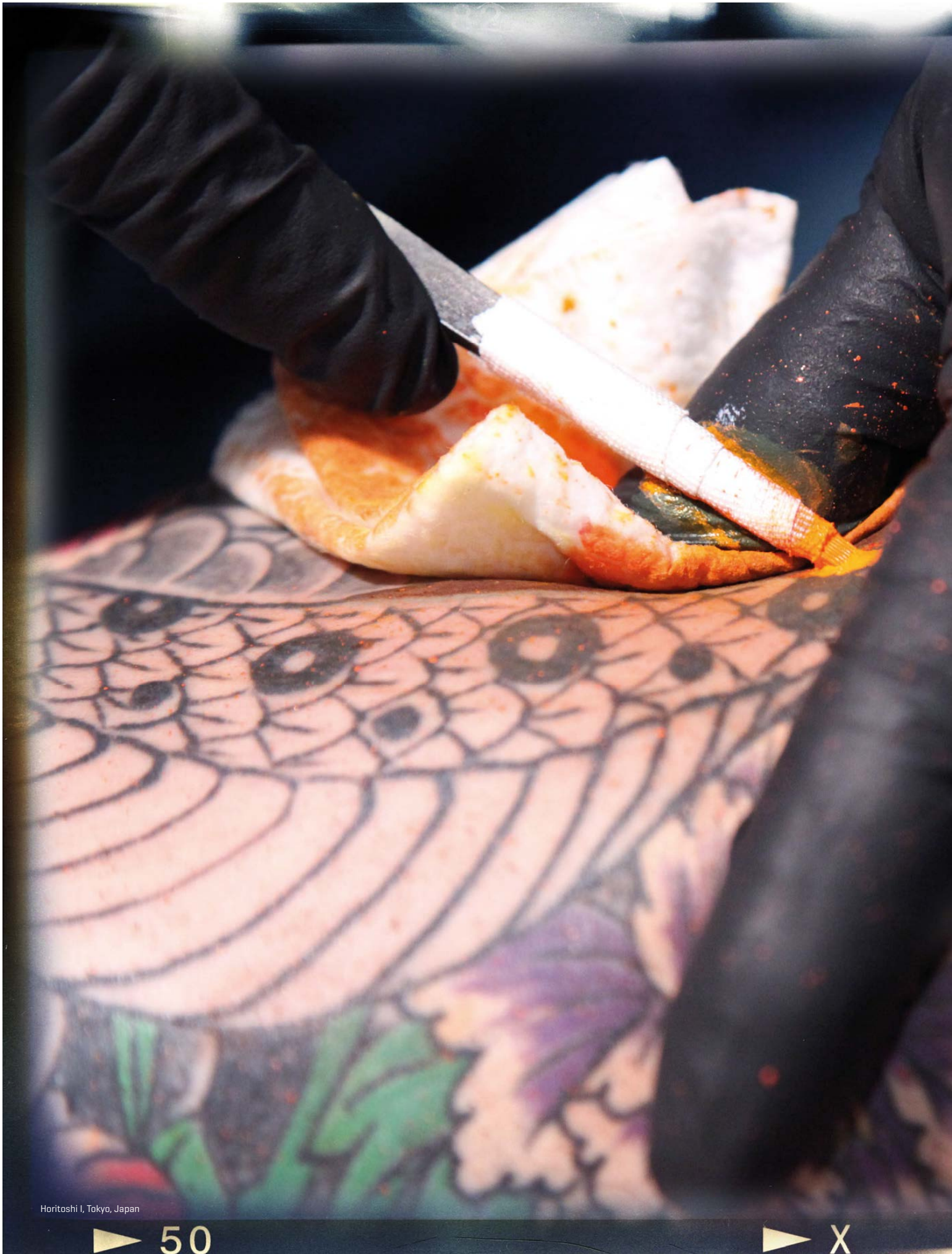
And that's it in a nutshell, right? The bottom line is always how good the tattoo is; how it succeeds as a piece of art; what reaction it garners from its wearer and those they show it to.

Tony agrees. "I think ultimately, the majority of my clients, along with myself," he says, "just want a piece that they can look at and go: 'Damn, that looks cool.'"

In other words, forget your damn moral relativism and just go and get some killer ink. ▣







Horitoshi I, Tokyo, Japan

▶ 50

▶ X



# MILAN TATTOO CONVENTION 2016

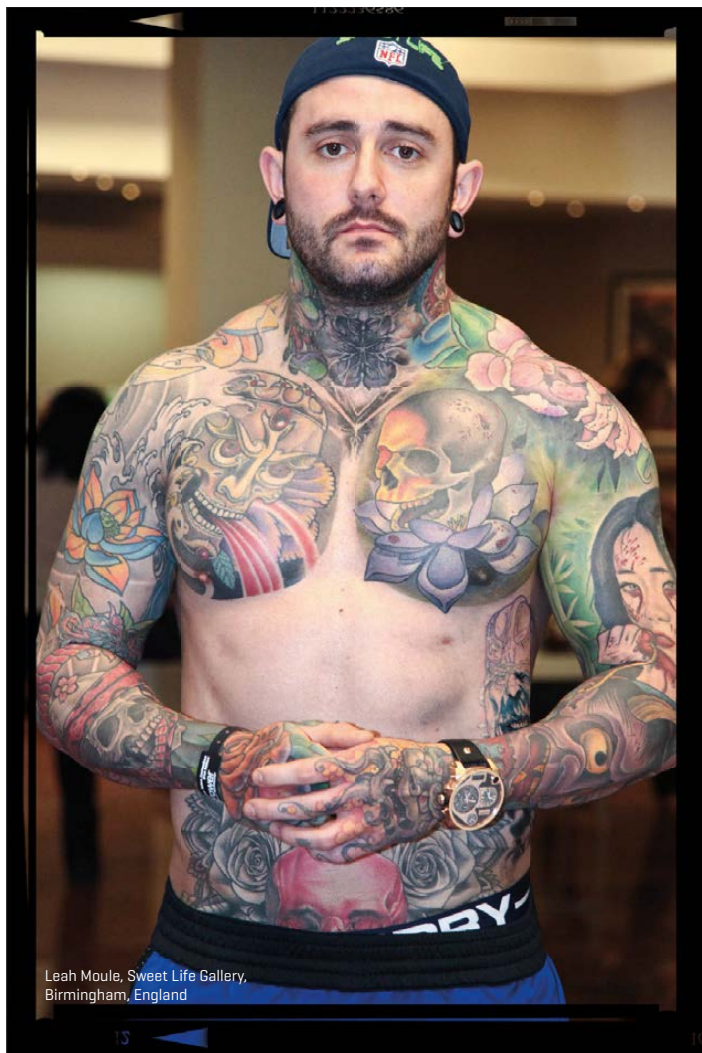
*After celebrating its 20th anniversary last year, the Milan Tattoo Convention confirmed its vitality across the weekend of 5-7th February and is already thinking forward with some exciting news for the 2017 edition*



**F**ew conventions can pretend to have such a long history and after twenty years the passion is still a powerful motivation for its organisers, explains Ago: “We do our best to bring the best tattoo artists and to keep being one of the best tattoo conventions in the world.” As a result, the show receives ever increasing attention and in 2015, 15,000 visitors came to the convention—more than in 2014. This year, 320 tattoo artists made it to the capital of Lombardy, with a show still settled in the various rooms of the Ata Quark Hotel, in the close suburb of the city’s historical centre.

This enthusiasm reflects the general interest for tattooing in the peninsula. If we refer to some of the official numbers, tattooed people represent a huge 16% of the

**“WE DO OUR BEST TO BRING THE BEST TATTOO ARTISTS AND TO KEEP BEING ONE OF THE BEST TATTOO CONVENTIONS IN THE WORLD”**



Leah Moule, Sweet Life Gallery, Birmingham, England



Amar Goucem, Dragon Tattoo, Eindhoven, Netherlands



Amar Goucem, Dragon Tattoo, Eindhoven, Netherlands

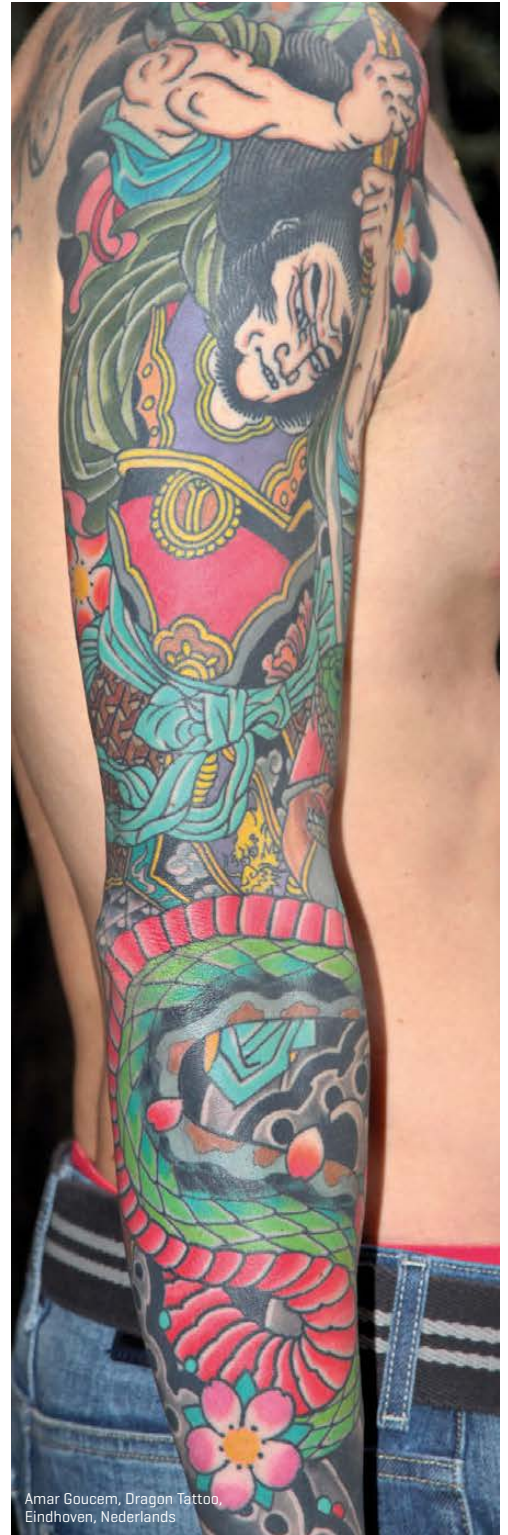
**“TODAY, MANY THINGS HAVE CHANGED AND I HAVE A LOT OF CUSTOMERS, ESPECIALLY WOMEN, OF MORE THAN 70 YEARS OLD”**

Italian population. With people from 35 to 44 years representing a third of it, in what is the oldest population in Europe, this appetite also shows that it goes along with a change of mindset.

“When I started ten years ago, people looked at you like an outlaw. Today, many things have changed and I have a lot of cus-

tomers, especially women, of more than 70 years old. The vision of regular people is no more connected to a certain kind of people,” recalls Ago.

Firmly represented with about 60 tattoo artists, the Italian tattoo scene shows a great talent among a solid selection coming from very different backgrounds, expressing itself in many different styles: old-school, new-school, Japanese, geometric, mosaic and even abstract. In the favourite discipline of Italian tattoo artists (realism), the great Giovanni Speranza, Alex de Pase and Michele Agostini



all recall the prestigious heritage of Italian artists and the determination to push forward the limits of excellence, but there is also a strong Eastern Europe scene represented here by top artists like Tomek Major Dvorniak (R'n'R Tattoo, Warsaw), Tofi Torfinski (Ink-Ognito) and Denis Sivak (L.O.V.E Machine).

Between the new challengers of those like Jay Freestyle and the established names of Roberto Hernandez (Vitamin Tattoo Shop, Spain) and Senju Horimatsu, the selection of artists certainly displays an exhaustive panorama of contemporary tattooing. In the

## **IN THE MIZAR ROOM, JAPANESE TATTOO ADDICTS COULD WANDER EYES WIDE OPEN IN A DREAM STATE...**

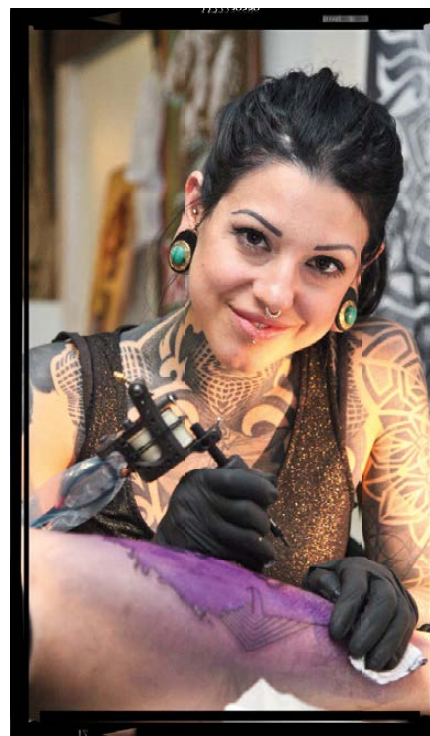
Mizar room, Japanese tattoo addicts could wander eyes wide open in a dream state, watching the amazing works done by Crez (AdrenalInk, Italy), Amar Goucem (Dragon Tattoo Studio, Netherlands) and more specifically the Horitoshi Family (Horiyamato, Toshihide, Horimasa and Horibudi D), who come every year—a loyalty that honours the



Diego Brandi



Stizzo, Best of Times, Milan, Italy



**“WE’RE HERE BECAUSE SOME PEOPLE DID A VERY GOOD JOB BEFORE US AND WE MUST SAY THANKS TO THEM...”**

respect of the organisers to old-timers and the keepers of tradition.

“We’re here because some people did a very good job before us and we must say thanks to them. That’s why we have both new artists and also very old traditional artists like Franco Cecconi, (one of the first Italian tattoo artists, from Rome), or Horitoshi I. With 50 years of tattooing, he’s one of the masterpieces of this convention.”

Tattoo contests were every day (Best of Show was won on Sunday by Jay Freestyle, who was also winner of the Best of Avant Garde) and pole-dancers, paintings, exhibitions entertained the people during these three days of ink, blood, pleasure and pain.

At the peak of the event on Sunday, it was, as usual, packed to capacity and walking through the alleys of the biggest hotel in town was a demanding quest requesting much patience and contortion. A regular niggle for the organisers but one that will soon find a solution as next year as the convention will change its location into a bigger venue, closer to the city centre, with even more artists. □

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AN EYE IS UPON YOU

## ATTENTION, YOUNG LADIES

*Last month I told you all about my peculiar three days - it went like this: On Sunday, I had the immense privilege of being a competition judge at the first convention of the year, Telford's Tattoo Freeze...*

**O**n the following Monday, 75 miles away in Cheshire, I met 3 charming young chaps who recognised me from the show. On Tuesday, a stranger in the street showed me his penis. The third event is not related to the first two, but nonetheless, it felt like the universe was willing me to connect the dots. You can read about my Sunday and Monday in Skin Deep issue 261

Today, I'm going to tell you about Tuesday.

It's been quite a while since a random stranger showed me his tackle, but as a woman of almost 40, I grew up in what was probably the peak era of 'flashing', the 1980s. Living in a rural village and having to walk three miles up a dirt track to school and back was akin to running the pervert gauntlet, according to local legend. Rumour insisted that every tree had a potential 'dirty old man' behind it but despite being extra vigilant, I didn't actually see any random penii (is that really the plural? Ed.) in the bushes. Instead, they popped up in other unexpected places, the ladies changing room at my local baths, sitting on a park bench, travelling on the tube and most alarmingly, attached to a completely naked man who grabbed me from behind and asked me if I was 'buzzing' and who I sternly, but politely told off until he eventually ran away down an alleyway.

That was in 2002 and since then times have certainly changed. Now, the most likely place for an unsolicited penis to appear is in your online inbox. We no longer warn school girls about the dangers lurking behind bushes, instead we heed them to be wary of what is behind the screen name. I've also changed, I'm not a vulnerable teenager in stripy tights, I'm an extensively tattooed middle aged woman who prides herself on being pretty bad ass. Most of the time I feel pretty invincible, even in slippers and reading spectacles, so I was



Sven Groenewald



PAULA HARDY KANGELOS  
DiamondBetty

**I'M NOT A VULNERABLE  
TEENAGER IN STRIPY TIGHTS,  
I'M AN EXTENSIVELY TATTOOED  
MIDDLE AGED WOMAN WHO  
PRIDES HERSELF ON BEING  
PRETTY BAD ASS**

actually rather shaken up by my recent retro-in-a-bad-way experience.

To some extent I wear my tattoos like a shield, but I see them as more of a protective amulet than suit of armour. My tattoos don't protect my squishy human insides, or at least, they don't if you are near enough to see them properly. If you pay close attention you might be able to read them like a story book, a list of likes, or a family photo album,





Sven Groenewald

**LIKE THOSE SINGLE-IMAGE  
LARGE POSTERS CREATED  
FROM HUNDREDS OF TINY  
PHOTOGRAPHS, AT A DISTANCE  
THE TATTOOED BODY CAN BE  
RECEIVED RATHER DIFFERENTLY...**

perhaps all three-in-one. Even a tattoo chosen purely for aesthetics or decided by artist rather than owner has revelations to make, stories of influences and inspirations, world outlook and personal disposition. To be visibly tattooed is to accept a narrowing of options with trust and optimism, to believe in art for art's sake and to welcome pattern or colour or form into our every day (and to pay for the privilege with time, blood and cash). It puts our hearts on our sleeves, metaphorically, poetically, and sometimes literally.

Like those single-image large posters created from hundreds of tiny photographs, at a distance the tattooed body can be received rather differently, a multi-hued stop sign instead of an open book. Lazy stereotyping is perpetuated by sensationalist journalists and tattooed people are portrayed like strange insects with brightly coloured outsides and poisonous insides. In reality, most tattooed people are probably more like those benevolent all-mouth-and-no-trousers bugs that only masquerade as toxic.

Still, at least the tattooed-people-are-dangerous myth has it uses (extra space on public transport) unlike another pervasive myth; that tattooed people (and particularly tattooed women) are 'doing it for attention'.

Don't get me wrong, tattoos do attract attention, and sometimes that attention is flattering - like being asked to judge tattoo shows, or write magazine columns, or when you are (politely and respectfully) approached by fellow tattoo fans in coffee shops, but attention is not my driver for choosing a tattooed life. My motivations are far simpler, I like tattoos, and I do it because I can, and not because I want strangers to take sneaky pictures of the back of my legs while I'm using an ATM. That's just creepy.

I firmly believe that no one 'asks for it' by dressing a certain way, but nonetheless I'm looking forward to ditching my snow boots, high visibility cycling jacket and knitted balaclava and showing some skin, I feel safer that way. □

Whether you're looking for an additional artist for your studio, a house manager or are selling an established business lock, stock and two smoking barrels, these free streamlined classifieds ought to get the ball rolling. Send your needs to Jazz Publishing, 1 Marcher Court, Sealand Road, Chester CH1 6BS, or email them into: editor@skindeep.co.uk

**ARTISTS WANTED!** In Sawbridgeworth, Hertfordshire. We are looking for a full time tattoo artist and apprentice to work alongside us in our small but busy studio. Interviews will be held for these positions on 5th and 6th of April, by appointment only. A strong portfolio and ability to do custom work is a must. If you are interested give us a call on 01279 882330.

**The Living Art Collective** have space available for an experienced artist to work in our Bournemouth based tattoo studio. Great opportunity for a quality artist to join and established studio with good rates and its own client base. www.living-art-collective.com www.facebook.com/livingartcollective Please send Portfolios to lovelivingartcollective@gmail.com and we will be in touch. Sorry No Apprentices

**Abody tattoo** is a established studio based in Leicester city centre. We currently have a vacancy for a tattooist for immediate start. Must be capable of doing quality custom work, must have studio experience and a great portfolio of tattoo work. Please view our site www.abody.co.uk and check us out. Please apply on 01162621500 or email abody@abody.co.uk

**Artists required** - Terrys Tattoo Studio in Glasgow is now under new management and we are looking to rebuild our team. Really busy street shop that sees lots of walk ins and has a very loyal and steady client base. Get in touch with Natalie at hello@terrystattooostudio.com or see us on www.facebook.com/terrystattooostudio.com

**Experienced Tattoo Artist required** to join the team at Electric Vintage Tattoo, Bath. Please provide a comprehensive portfolio of your work and examples of artwork. This is a very busy custom tattoo studio with an excellent regional reputation and long waiting lists. Preferable for applicants to be competent in most tattoo styles but all specialisms will be considered. We are also looking for a walk-in artist to cover the busy summer season on a 6 month initial contract. We also have opportunities available for regular guest artists throughout the year. Check out our work and studio at www.electricvintagetattoo.com and Facebook page 'Electric Vintage

Tattoo'. No attitudes, drink or drug problems please. Must be honest and hardworking. Please contact sara@electricvintagetattoo.com in the first instance.

**Black Tulip are looking for a strong all round artist** to join them in their studio in Taunton, Somerset. Contact in the first instance: blacktuliptaunton@hotmail.com 01823 327016

**Inkpot Galleria (Stafford, UK)** is looking for another full-time member to join our busy studio. Realism, black/grey artist required. No drama or egos please. Professional portfolio must be shown. Contact Sarah Fox at inkpotgalleria@hotmail.co.uk for more details

**Monumental Ink is looking for another great artist** to join our team in Colchester, Essex! We are fast growing within the industry, boasting a professional, high quality 2,500 square foot purpose-built studio. We have a great customer base and friendly team. Applicants must have excellent skills. Also, a polite and friendly attitude is essential. Please send your portfolio to monumentalink@hotmail.co.uk

**Gilded Cage tattoo studio in Brighton is looking for an experienced tattooist** to work 3 days a week from February 2016. Please email portfolios and CVs to gildedcagetattooostudio@gmail.com

**TATTOO ARTIST WANTED - HUDDERSFIELD** We are looking for a full time tattoo artist to join our team in our Huddersfield centre based studio. Artist must have a strong portfolio, no drink, drugs or attitude. For all inquiries please email diamondsndusters@gmail.com

**Steel Beauty is looking for a tattooist** to join our friendly team in Gants hill, Essex 3-5 days a week. Minimum 5 years experience with a considerable up to date portfolio. Should be proficient in custom work as well as walk-in flash work. Must be reliable with a good attitude. To arrange an interview contact the team @ steelbeauty@hotmail.com

All details correct at time of going to press. Adverts cannot be taken over the phone. Please include your full studio details even if they are not to accompany the wording.



## This month Beccy Rimmer has been thinking about her new tattoo and why it reminds her of home...

**I**n January I received a tattoo of epic proportions that I had been looking forward to having for a long time. My new bright and colourful tattoo of Blackpool was designed and executed by the wonderful Keely Rutherford at Jolie Rouge in London.

Her artistic style encompasses everything that reminds me of my childhood in a seaside resort. A kid sees Blackpool as pink candy-floss, flashing, glittering lights, vivid plastic colours and never-ending sunny days.

A couple of weeks after I'd travelled to London to get my brand new tattoo addition, I was contacted by a local paper in Blackpool who wanted to feature my new ink.

The 'story' got picked up by a national news agency and before I knew it, my 83-year-old nana was running across Blackpool in the rain at 3pm trying to find a copy of The Daily Star which had apparently printed a picture of my scabby, red calf.

I hadn't thought about writing about the tattoo in this column (the damn thing was getting too much of an ego already), until my nana said to me, "are you going to write about all of this in your column, for that magazine?"

Fair enough. I'm sure I could dedicate a few lines' worth of space considering why I actually got this tattoo, and why a seaside town in the North of England was worth putting on my body forever.

What is Blackpool, to me? Hmm.

It's the day I rode The Big One 12 times in a row with my brother because my dad wangled free tickets. It's the day I left school early with my friend Matthew and we walked for miles and sat watching the sea waves crash against the cold sand.

It's long days with my dad... playing slot machines, swimming till my skin went wrinkly, eating three Happy Meals in a row, sneaking into cinema screens, watching The Illuminations from the backseat of his car.

It's working at my friend's dad's rock factory one summer—sticky fingers from wrapping fudge, stomachs sore from laughing and bodies buzzing with the smell of sugar.



Keely Rutherford

**I'M SURE COULD DEDICATE A FEW LINES' WORTH OF SPACE CONSIDERING WHY I ACTUALLY GOT THIS TATTOO...**



**BECCY RIMMER**  
BeccyRimmer

It's waiting at my dad's garage for him to finish work—the strong scent of diesel, pine wood walls and sea air, memorising his handwriting as he signed invoices.

It's when the bright lights of Blackpool town were the closest thing my dad had to a fixed home, and so we spent every waking second exploring them.

It's returning to the same place, 20 years later: driving down the same streets, feeling the spray of the same sea, and basking in a warm familiarity.

It's playing on the slot machines with your old man 20 years down the line, this time till 6am as you both don't know when to stop. Not because it's addictive, but because you realise it actually was, and is, the most wonderful and precious thing in the world, and unlike the ink, you won't have it forever. ☐





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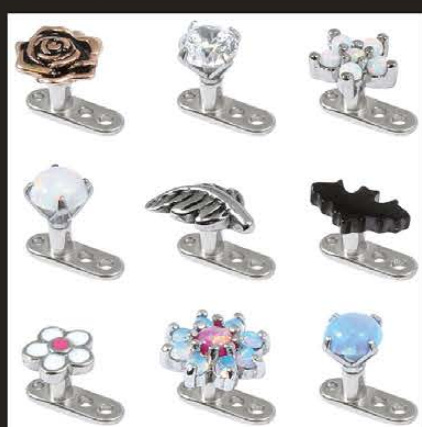
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