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ONE LINE, ONE COLOUR, ONE STYLE

OUT OF STEP
WHERE THE BIG NAMES COME TOGETHER

BEWARE THE THING!
HANDS OF INK



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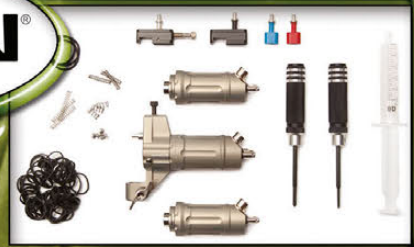
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WEIRD SCENES INSIDE THE GOLDMINE

I went to see *A Monster Calls* last week. When I booked the tickets online, I found a bunch of seats that didn't have anybody else sitting in close proximity and hoped for the best. Sometimes things stay that way and sometimes they don't.

This was one of those times when they don't and I found myself sitting next to a very large man who ate from 57 varieties of rustling bags like I grow my hair.

Non-stop and as if The Gods might take it all away if you don't stay vigilant.

In such circumstances, it's very hard for me to keep my mouth shut—not as hard as it was for him, but hard all the same. He wasn't alone either. It appeared to be a family outing and apples never fall too far from the tree, so what I had to my right was a Gang of Munchers.

You ever sat next to a Muncher trying to rustle a bag quietly because they know they should, but all you really get is prolonged rustling? It's a slow death that's for sure.

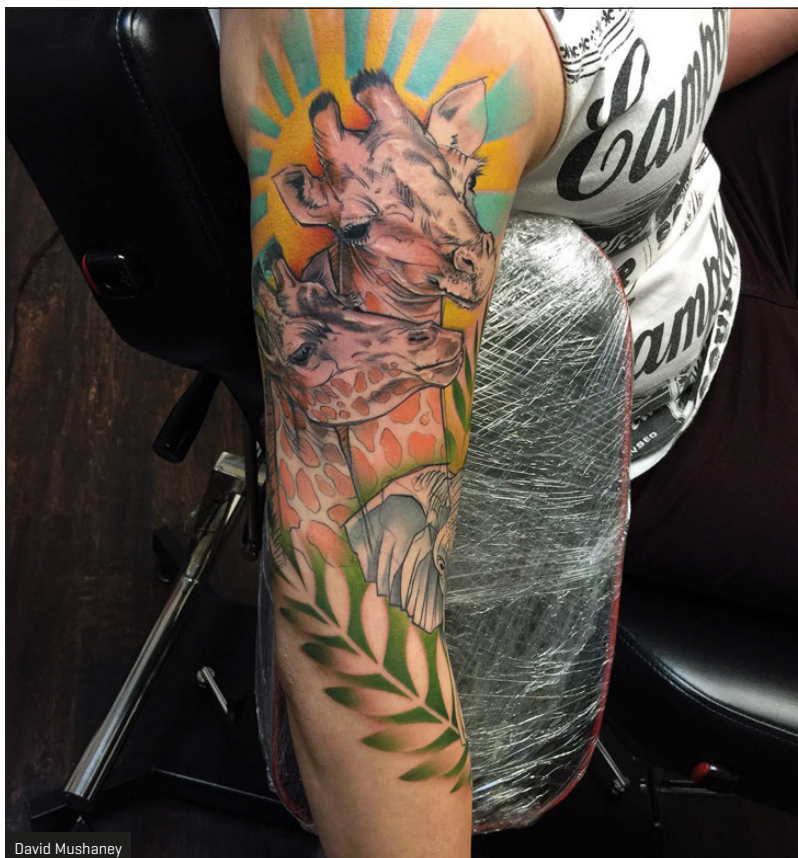
Anyway, this guy had a whole bunch of tattoos on the arm that was next to my arm. Somebody should figure that out at the cinema you know. There should be a website that explains how the arm-rest on the right belongs to the person on the left. I don't know if this is true, but it's my story so it is now.

So far as I could see in the semi-darkness of Liam Neeson being a tree, his forearm ink was a collection of spiders. I have nothing against spider tattoos. Some of my best friends have tattoos of spiders, but these were not good spiders. These spiders had been created with a chisel and the assistance Mjolnir.

I rolled my own sleeves up. There's only so much armrest politics one man can handle on a Saturday night.

"Hey" I whispered in his direction while Liam was rattling on about a prince.

The man looked at me, shocked that I had spoken out loud in the middle of the movie—or maybe it was because these days, Paul McKenna says you're not allowed to speak during the movie. I'm sure he mentions munching in his pre-movie speech but can't



David Mushaney

THESE SPIDERS HAD BEEN CREATED WITH A CHISEL AND THE ASSISTANCE MJOLNIR



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remember for sure.

"That's my armrest. Go sit somewhere else if you want one and take your food with you."

He leaned into me.

"What makes you think it's your armrest?"

"Ravens beat spiders every day of the week. Eat them for lunch buddy."

He didn't know what I was talking about so I pointed down at the ravens on my arm that were sitting next to his spiders—but right at that moment, the light Mr Neeson had been throwing at me to prove a point disappeared, leaving me with only one option.

I set the birds free and in seconds, all of the spiders were gone—and they didn't make a big noise about it either.

If ravens can eat quietly, why can't human beings? ▣

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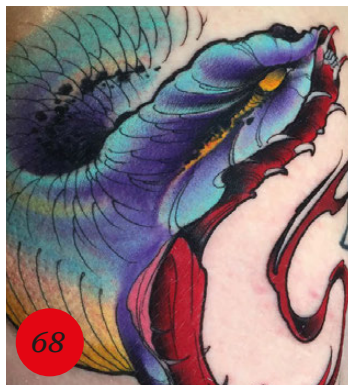
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Beccy Rimmer finds out why internationally renowned tattooists are creating art on fake body parts...

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What do tattoo artists and co. get up to when the studio lights go down? In this month's After Hours, Wayne Simmons talks to Abril Andrade Griffith, studio manager, artist and... cosplayer!

26 WALK THE LINE

Fine lines are hard enough to execute. Strip away colour and shading and you're left with absolutely no room for error. Tattooing with this in mind may seem ridiculously stressful, but it's exactly what Berlin-based artist Mo Ganji does every time he sits down to tattoo.

34 SIX GUNS LOADED

Gunnar is an artist that needs no introduction. Here, we lay-out part two of this sprawling but killer interview in which he sits down to empty a coffee pot with Sion Smith.

60 MADE OF SCARS

What motivates people to mark their bodies in unique ways? Beccy Rimmer speaks to an artist doing something quite different from those she normally features. Meet Leah Stanmore, one of the UK's leading scarification artists.

68 OUT OF STEP

In the big scheme of things among book publishers who work with tattoo artists, few are held in such high regard as Out Of Step Books. The most recent addition

to their ever growing library—Slithers and Scales—prompted a meeting of minds to rummage beneath the covers to see how the wheels of the machine move. Relax into some wonderful art as Jinxi Caddel and the boss browse through some serious pages of art.

74 HERE BE DRAGONS

Writing a book is not something you do sitting comfortably on your chair. When living in Japan, Nick Hurst got hit by his experience in the far East. But when it comes to explore the underworlds of the yakuza and irezumi, you never know where reality can bring you to.

80 THE TRANSFORMATIVE TATTOO

Sean Herman continues to bring us stories with meaning. We love it.

THE USUAL SUSPECTS

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THIS ISSUE'S CONTRIBUTORS

Pascal Bagot
Paula Hardy-Kangelos
Sean Herman
Barbara Pavone
Beccy Rimmer
Wayne Simmons
Paddy Vipond

COVER SHOT

Kamila Burzymowska

EDITOR

Sion Smith
editor@skindeep.co.uk
07841 999334

DESIGN

David Gamble
davidgamble@mac.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS & BACK ISSUES

Katy Cuffin
magazines@jazzpublishing.co.uk
01244 881888

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Justine Hart
production@skindeep.co.uk
01244 881888

ACCOUNTS & ADMIN MANAGER

Emma McCrindle
accounts@jazzpublishing.co.uk
01244 886009

ADMINISTRATION

Jan Schofield
jan@jazzpublishing.co.uk
01244 886019

CREDIT CONTROL

Louise Chamberlain-Jones
louise@jazzpublishing.co.uk
01244 886012

ADVERTISING MANAGER

Asson Kasonde
asson@jazzevents.co.uk
01244 886006

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

David Arthur
david.arthur@jazzpublishing.co.uk
01244 881888

EVENTS DIRECTOR

Shelley Bond
shelley@jazzevents.co.uk
01244 881888

MANAGING DIRECTOR

Stuart Mears
stuart@jazzpublishing.co.uk
01244 881888

DISTRIBUTION

Susan Saunders
susan.saunders@seymour.co.uk
0207 429 4073

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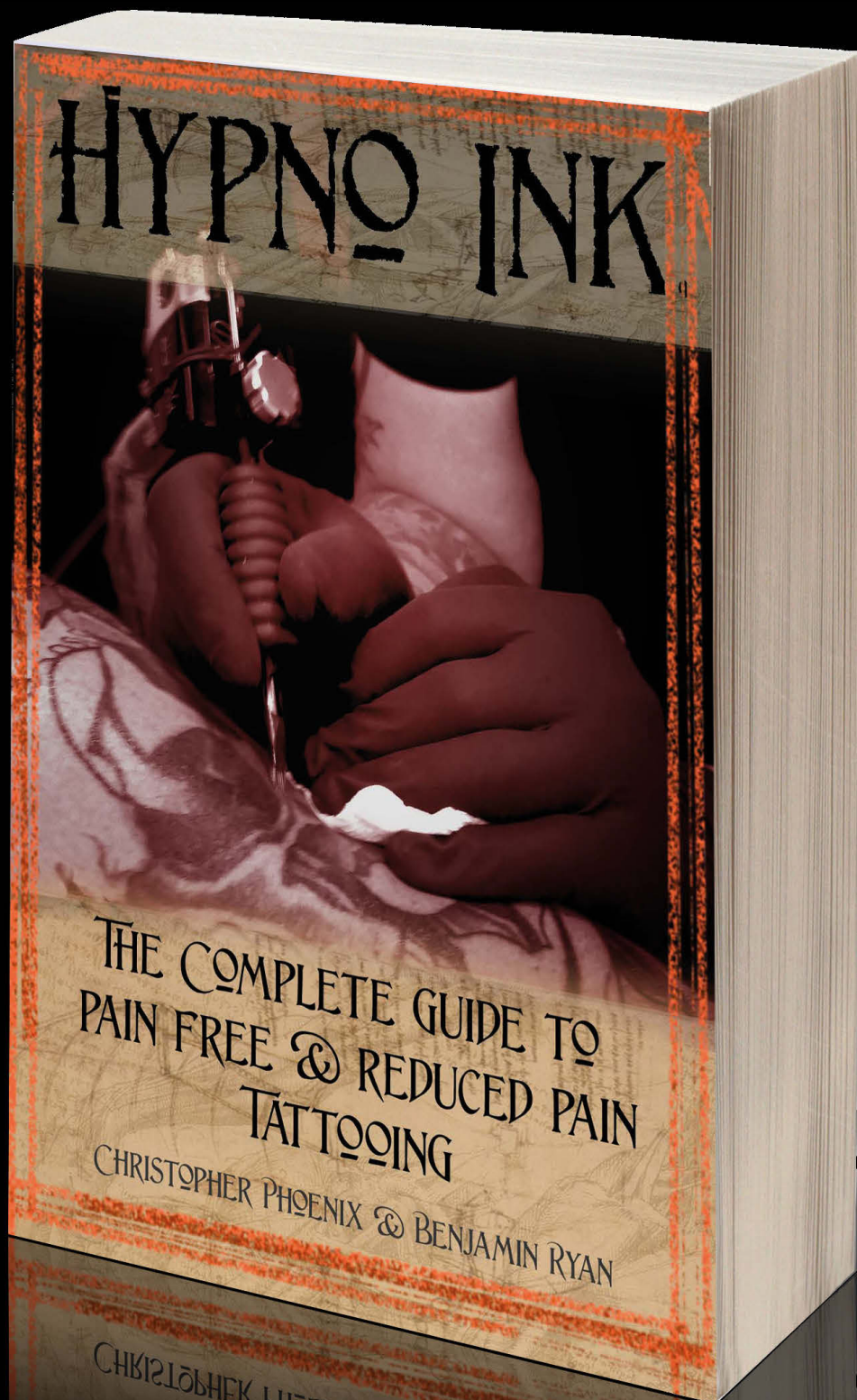
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HYPNO INKING GOES GLOBAL



Two hypnotists are getting global interest for enabling significantly reduced pain and even pain free tattooing through the use of hypnotism.

They have written a book on the subject and are preparing to teach these skills to tattoo artists around the world.

Pain management through hypnotherapy is a well-established practice and Hypnotherapists Benjamin Ryan (UK) and Christopher Phoenix (Australia) have been offering pain management to their clients for several years.

In the last couple of years they have been applying their hypnotism skills to enable tattooing with massively reduced levels of pain, and in many cases, with no pain at all.

Having now written an instructional book (*Hypno Ink. The Complete Guide To Pain Free and Reduced Pain Tattooing*—due for release in early 2017) they are preparing to spend the summer of 2017, teaching these skills to tattoo artists in Northern Europe, Australasia and the USA.

"Hypnosis is a really effective tool for changing perception, and the perception of pain is very responsive to these techniques. It is a common occurrence that our clients report that their Hypno Ink experience was completely pain free" says Christopher Phoenix.

"Some people are surprised to learn that hypnosis and body modification have a shared tribal root dating back thousands of years, but a lot of tattoo artists are already aware of this. Most think it's great that we're bringing these estranged siblings back together with a modern approach" Says Benjamin Ryan.

In speaking of his first Hypno Inking experience, Darren Ditton said "It went really well. It made it so that I could pull longer lines, safe in the knowledge that the client was not going to move about in the middle of it. I feel like we have got the tattoo done quicker. It's been really good"

Christopher Phoenix started moving into this line of work full time in 2015, as he started to get press from The Daily Mail Australia, Sunrise, Triple M Radio, and other national media.

Former Cradle of Filth keyboard player turned hypnotherapist Benjamin Ryan shared some of Christopher's press on social media, leading to the opportunity to begin trying his own techniques in this field.

They began collaborating on their book in 2016 and are looking forward to continuing their collaboration under the banner of Hypno Ink, in 2017.

To keep an eye on the book release, or course tour dates, stay connected at hypno.ink and [facebook.com/hypnoink](https://www.facebook.com/hypnoink)—there's also a YouTube video worth a look that you can find here: [youtube.com/watch?v=bYBrct6ANj4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYBrct6ANj4)



NEW STUDIO NEWS

Te Rangitu Netana, renowned Maori tattooist is delighted to announce the launch of his new private studio, based just outside of Colchester in the UK. He is currently taking bookings and is available for consultation.

Te Rangitu brings with him the perfect mix of current and modern style, but is also working mindfully with the respect for tradition he wishes to maintain and share across his industry.

For many years, Te Rangitu Netana has been practising Ta Moko /Maori Tribal Tattooing across the world. He has gained distinguished followers, from celebrities in Los Angeles to gaining approval from his own local

tribes in his home country, and his experiences have led to expert skill.

He is now based in the UK and is actively sharing both the story of Ta Moko and also delivering his exquisite and unique designs of tattoo. Practicing primarily across the South of England, he is going to continue to share his cultural traditions and develop unique customer relationships in the New Year.

You can find the studio at terangitu.com
0783 5833650

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DATING INK

There's a new website out in the world for those looking very specifically for tattooed relationships. datingink.com currently has over 10,000 members and with iOS and android apps to come very soon, it looks set to become one of the fastest growing British-born dating apps. The site is the brainchild of tattoo model Jemma Lucy and is making quite a buzz out in the world

'I never feel comfortable with my tattoos on show': your work stories

From being made to cover up to fielding intrusive questions, readers with body art speak of prejudice from employers and colleagues



© 15 Dec 2016 | 319

INK AT WORK

Last month, we noticed the big news sites were starting to treat tattoos with a little more dignity than they have in recent years. Over at the Guardian there's a particularly good page that looks into diversity and actually speaks to people with tattoos who are experiencing positive or negative comments at work. Admittedly, most of the comments are negative—or at least 'down-trodden'—but it's a good start to have people in the real world talking about it instead of writers making up theories. This page has an incredibly long link, so we've cut it down to something you can actually type in that looks like this: tinyurl.com/gqsowfq



APOLOGY

Last issue, in our Skin Shots supplement, we wrongly credited a tattoo and must put such a thing right. The image you see here was created by Rae Razael and not as previously stated by, er.... somebody else. Apologies all round.



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by

Léa Nahon and Köfi



I fall in love with tattoos easily. I fall out of love with them even faster, so when something hangs around in my head for more than a couple of days, it's going to be something I remember for a long time. Such is the case with this from one of my favourite artists in the world, Léa Nahon and her buddy Köfi at the newly opened L'Usine Tattoo in Belgium.

What's good about it? Hell, what's not

good about it. The controlled chaos, the masterclass in how to make one colour do the work of an entire colour palette, the skill of the actual art and the concept behind it... I could carry on but instinct tells me there will be as many who hate it as love it out there - and that's great because if it leaves you indifferent, your soul has left your body.

Beautiful.

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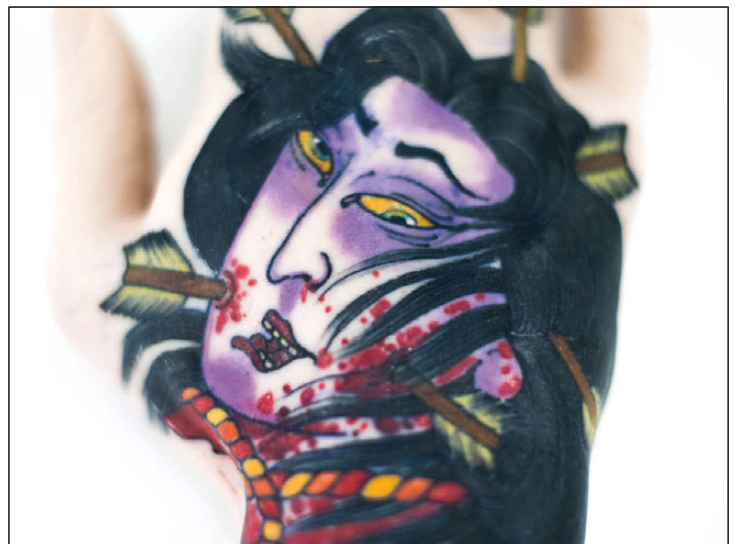
Laura Yahna, Caitlin Thomas, Fabz, Sasha Unisex, Guy Le Tatoer, Apro Lee, Sam Clark, Elric Gordon, Lauren Winzer, Matt Deverson, Mimsy, David Cote, Kim-anh Nguyen, Alvaro, Grace Neutral, Terry James, Rachie Rhatklor, Charlie Lacroix, Russell Winter, Mel Wink, Amy Unalome, Ly Aleister, Onnie O'Leary, Alexis Hepburn, Avalon Westcott

Fareed Kaviani is a Melbourne-based writer and owner of 'The Thing Gallery'. He's also just a dude who really, really loves tattoos. Last year, he launched an exhibition of tattooed silicone hands to raise money for two local charities in his area—it was a huge success and... the rest was history.

With 25 participating artists originally, his gallery now continues to regularly create tattooed silicone art for the world to see and buy. Chatting to Fareed for the first time, he tells me that inserting ink into a rubber-like object "wasn't exactly a walk in the park". I was keen to hear more about the journey and challenges of this innovative project.

One of the first questions on my lips is... why hands? "It was the easiest part of the body for me to make silicone casts from," admits Fareed. "I spent a good five months watching video tutorials, calling professionals and sourcing materials. When I was confident enough with the quality of the hands, I then sent them out to these exceptional tattooists to work on."

Like any artistic endeavour, the process wasn't without its chal-



I'VE STARTED DABBLING IN VARIOUS BODY PARTS, LIKE MY FACE AND PENIS, NATURALLY...

lenges. "Tattooing silicone can be difficult so all of the tattooists really put their heart, soul and sweat into this project." Fared tells me that silicone can be "precarious", but as time has gone on (a year to be exact), he has begun experimenting more. "I've started dabbling in various body parts, like my face and penis... naturally."

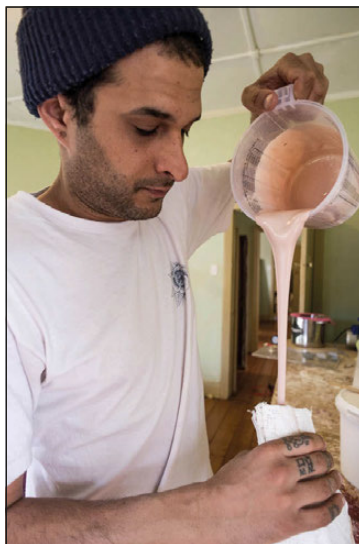
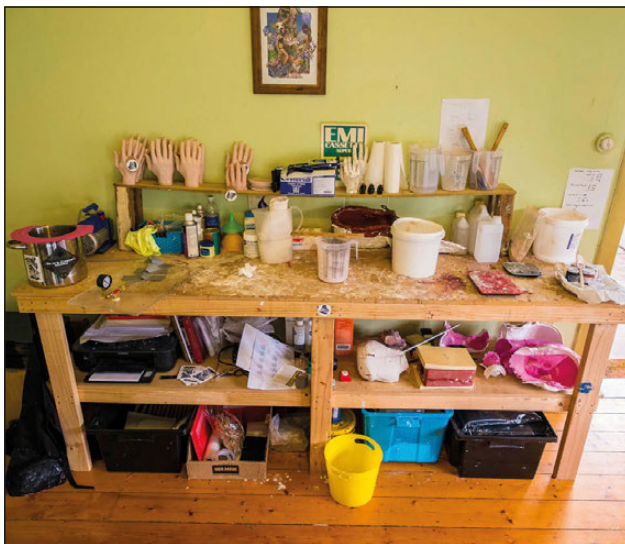
The original exhibition in February 2016 raised \$2,500 for the charities being fundraised for. The artists were recruited via Instagram and some of the world's most renowned artists jumped on board, with names like Guy Le

Tattooer and Sasha Unisex in the mix.

Keen to delve further into the philosophies of any public tattoo event, I ask Fared if he thinks tattoos are becoming more accepted as "art".

"I think tattoos are becoming a lot more commercialised. Capitalism has turned tattoos into a profane consumer commodity, and if galleries are a place for commodity art, then galleries are where we'll see more of tattoos."

That being said, tattooing's roots will always remain untouched, and Fared identifies that there are more in-



THIS INTERESTING PROJECT MIMICS OUR OWN INDIVIDUAL PROCESSES WITH TATTOOS THEMSELVES...

teresting tales to tell. “Spaces for sacred tattooing, ritualised, personal, and meaningful, still exist, and I’m desperate to start telling that story.”

As always, we conclude that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. “I’ve seen tattoos that are beautiful and tattoos that are not. I’ve seen fine art that is beautiful and some that is not,” says Fared. “I’m not a tattooist or fine artist, nor am I a critique. I’d need to make an informed opinion and that I cannot do right now.”

So what does the next year hold for The Thing Gal-

lery? Fared’s been commissioning new amazing names to work on silicone hands. He’s working on a new project with tattoo artist Hannah Pixie Snowdon that involves a full silicone mould of his own head (we can’t wait to see that!) The gallery has also been creating other tattoo-able silicone faces that will soon be available for purchase.

As expressive ideas move forward, new areas of our bodies are experimented with as potential canvases. This interesting project mimics our own individual processes with tattoos themselves. ▣

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AFTER HOURS

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All 'Angel of Death' cosplay pics taken by Tom Bonfield of Brass Ring Cosplay Photography

Hello, my name is Wayne and I'm a sci-fi geek.

There, I've said it. And it wasn't that hard, was it? But let's be honest, geekery is more of a badge of honour today than it would have been, say, twenty years ago. A true geek is someone who thinks outside the box, an innovator, a creator. And being a geek is cool.

The tattoo and geek worlds are more intertwined today than they ever have been. We interviewed Kat Wilson last month about her SFX work, much of it revolving around horror, and artists such as James Mullin, Chris Jones and Thom Bulman, all of whom I interviewed not too long ago for my Behind The Ink: Star Wars piece, are among many carving out a career specialising in sci-fi related ink, often working comic conventions. Here at Skin Deep, the boss-man even put out a trilogy of bookazines dedicated to sci-fi, horror and comic book tattoos and they literally flew off the shelves. We're all geeks now and it's all good.



Abril Andrade Griffith is a geek. She's also the manager and, along with husband, Matt Griffith, co-owner of 2 Dollar Pistol Tattoo in Chillicothe, Ohio, and an awesome artist in her own right. "It's just the both of us working together," she tells me as we meet via the sci-fi magic of interwebz. "I'm In charge of scheduling his appointments, customer service and payments. When I'm not talking to customers I work

in my art studio in the back room where I paint all day." Her artwork, as you can see, is glorious – ethereal, otherworldly, and, for me, a fellow geek, it's easy to see the anime and manga influences. She rhymes off a list of her favourites over the years. "My Neighbour Totoro, Spirited Away, Kiki's Delivery Service, Elfen Lied, Sailor Moon, Howl's Moving Castle, Kill la Kill, Chobits. I grew up watching Candy Candy every Sunday morning," she adds. "That series sparked my interest in anime and I haven't stopped watching."

And yet, painting isn't where her art ends. As the years have gone by, Abril's studio



IT'S AN AMAZING FEELING WHEN YOU WALK THROUGH A CONVENTION AND SEE OTHER COSPLAYERS. EVERYONE IS HAPPY, HAVING A GOOD TIME

at the back of the tattoo shop has become the workspace for another creative pursuit: cosplay. For the uninitiated, Abril explains exactly what that involves. "Cosplay is short for 'costume play'. It's a type of performance art, a way of expressing your love for a particular character. The characters may be inspired by video games, comics, books, movies, animation or even the cosplayer's own imagination." The aim of the game, Abril goes on to say, is to literally become the character, to embody them in every way. "Cosplay isn't just dressing up in fancy costumes.

It's bringing a character to life after months of research, design, prop-making, pattern-cutting and teaching yourself new things."

That latter part is the daddy when it comes to cosplay. Sure, you can buy an outfit right off the peg, but a true cosplayer wants to do a lot of the design work themselves, daunting though that sounds. Abril talks us through her first piece: "It was Mad Hatter from Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland*. My daughter and I love that movie. I created our top hats out of cereal boxes and covered them with store-bought fabric. It was the first time I had ever done anything like that. It took a little bit of research and a lot



THE TENTACLES WERE TRICKY. I SPENT MORE TIME ON THOSE THEN ANYTHING ELSE. I HAD THE BASIC KNOWLEDGE OF SEWING BUT I STILL DIDN'T KNOW HOW I WAS GOING TO PULL IT OFF AND CREATE EIGHT TENTACLES PER COSTUME

of hot glue. We watched the movie countless times to see the character's costume and other details and I tried my best to reproduce them."

It wasn't just the artistic side of it that appealed, there's also a huge community aspect with cosplay. "It's an amazing feeling when you walk through a convention and see other cosplayers," Abril says. "Everyone is happy, having a good time. It gives you the sense of belonging to a community of people with shared interests."

That first convention for Abril was nothing short of inspirational. She decided she would push herself even further, with her next piece, and create something even

bigger and more elaborate. "I am a Little Mermaid Fan and Ursula is one of my favourite villains of all time, so why not turn myself and my daughter into Ursulas?" she thought. But it wasn't without its challenges. "The tentacles were tricky. I spent more time on those than anything else. I had the basic knowledge of sewing thanks to my mother teaching me at a young age, but I still didn't know how I was going to pull it off and create eight tentacles per costume. I also didn't want the tentacles to be heavy since we would be walking around the convention for hours."

Bean-bag stuffing was the answer, perfect for filling the tentacles but still nice and light. After a lot of trial and error, and help from hubby, Matt, everything started falling into place. Lo and behold, this second outing made Abril's cosplay work from hereon into something of a family affair. "Our costumes were a hit, especially the young Ursula who stayed in character all day. I like to include my eight year old daughter, Lucy, in all the costumes I do now. It's something we do together and I couldn't see it happening without her."

For Abril, all of her art not only comes from the same



COSPLAY IS FOR EVERYONE. IT DOESN'T MATTER IF YOU HAVE A LOT OF EXPERIENCE CREATING COSTUMES OR YOU HAVE NEVER DONE IT BEFORE AND ARE JUST GETTING IN TO IT

place but, in many ways, employs the same skills. "One definitely compliments the other," she says. "I apply everything I know about painting, carving and sculpting to the creation of my costumes. From painting props, distressing dresses and even applying make-up, it's the same technique of blending colours I use." She still feels cosplay is accessible, regardless of whether you're an artist or not. "Cosplay is for everyone. It doesn't matter if you have a lot of experience creating costumes or you have never done it before and are just getting in to it. There is a huge community of people that love sharing ideas, tips and tutorials."

Cosplay will continue to be a big part of Abril's life,

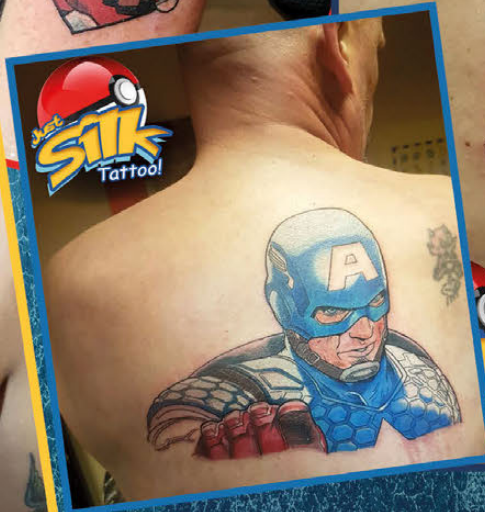
moving forward. She's busy with the tattoo shop and her art exhibitions, but her cosplay skills are also in demand, taking up half of her studio time. Her own pieces are becoming more intricate by the day with the latest, Angel of Death inspired by Hellboy The Golden Army, taking over six months to finish. "It was the most elaborate costume I have created so far. It took a lot of thinking and research to build nine foot articulated wings. I didn't use regular feathers. I cut and made each feather out of EVA foam, all individually glued in place."

For Abril, the bar just gets raised with each and every cosplay piece she creates and she's always looking forward to the next challenge. "I want to take it to the next level and build something bigger. I have a lot of ideas." ▣

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WALK THE LINE

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Fine lines are hard enough to execute. Strip away colour and shading and you're left with absolutely no room for error. The tiniest movement, the most imperceptible shake and your design will no longer be immaculate. Tattooing with this in mind may seem ridiculously stressful, but it's exactly what Berlin-based artist Mo Ganji does every time he sits down to tattoo one of his signature single line designs.

Starting his career in retail fashion, of all things, Mo Ganji only made the move to tattooing a few years ago, which makes his work all the more impressive. His tattoos are some of the finest out there and the fact that he hasn't spent decades perfecting his technique and honing in on his style is almost unbelievable. Add to that the unexpected surprise that Mo himself has never been tattooed and there was so much to talk about, we jumped right in.

"I'm fascinated by any kind of creative craft," says Ganji, an artist whose work I was instantly captivated by. "I was always painting, drawing and building stuff as far as I can remember. Using my hands to create something puts me in a peaceful state of mind. My 'head voice', or whatever you want to call it, is silent when I create."

"I started following the tattoo scene in 2013 and it didn't take long before I realised it's a form of art that could pay all the bills," recalls Ganji. "We live in a very superficial society where the average person would rather spend money on body jewellery than on a paint-

ing they could get for cheap from Ikea, which is somehow sad, isn't it?"

"I woke up one day, tired of what I was doing, and realised that I had all the skills to master the craft of tattooing. We grow up searching for our natural gift, but it's on our backs the entire time. All we need to do is stop and reach for it. Why don't we? Because we're taught that time is money. It's not. Time is life and I was hoping tattooing could give me back the time I needed to enjoy it."

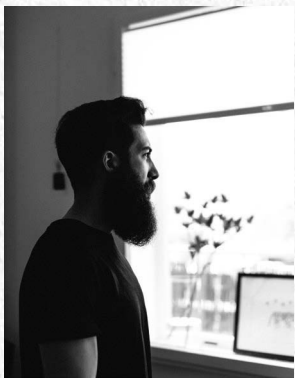
Prior to his eureka moment, Ganji traveled the world, working as a manager in the retail fashion industry. Although the correlation between retail management and tattooing may not be immediately obvious, "it was a good



Words: Barbara Pavone



I WOKE UP ONE DAY, TIRED OF WHAT I WAS DOING,
AND REALISED THAT I HAD ALL THE SKILLS TO
MASTER THE CRAFT OF TATTOOING



Mo Ganji On... Exploring Other Styles

In the beginning, I tried all kinds of stuff, including color, to gain experience. Sometimes, I do non-single line tattoos for friends, but in general, I love the simplicity of a naked line.

experience in terms of learning how to run an efficient international business," he explains. "I certainly do not regret it and it made my transition very easy because I only had the responsibility for one employee: myself."

"However, I must say, I would never go back," he adds. "I don't see myself working for someone ever again. I would rather starve to death. You end up working 50 hours a week for someone else's dream. If you realise your full potential, you can get anywhere you want."

To realise said potential, all one needs is dedication, and courage. "When I decided to start the tattoo thing, there was only a handful of people who truly believed in me," says Ganji. "The majority of people will give you

a million reasons as to why it won't work because they are scared to leave their comfort zone. Fear is what keeps the sheep from leaving the flock and it is the glue that keeps this society together."

Deciding that yes, he was indeed ready to master the art of tattooing, Ganji found himself relying on one specific trait and turning to one specific person. "One of my biggest strengths is my imagination," he declares. "I can visualise things very well; My mind works in pictures. I was following Valentin Hirsch, a local artist whose art I really appreciate, and I contacted him on Facebook and asked if I could talk to him about my situation. He invited me to his studio and after a three-hour conversation, he gave me the opportunity to get an idea of what tattooing really is. We became good friends and he supported me in every way he could."

The Power Of A Single Line

Today, tattoo collectors from around the world are seeking out Ganji for his unique single line style, which he describes as the



“result of countless nights of drawing. It was more of a desperate attempt to get things done rather than something I had in mind,” he reveals. “I was doodling till around 2am because I had an appointment the next day. The customer wanted a three-headed deer. I presented my final drawing, but he was more interested in the single line doodle in my folder,” he remembers. “He told me that he preferred the doodle to the ‘classic’ design I had made for him, then he came back with some friends who wanted single line tattoos as well.”

That was back in October 2014 and since then, Ganji has embraced the single line aesthetic wholeheartedly and made it his own. “What started as a doodle became my way of interpreting things,” he explains. “I worked day and night on developing a signature style that would stand out in the creative jungle. Something that would give me a fixed reference as an artist.”

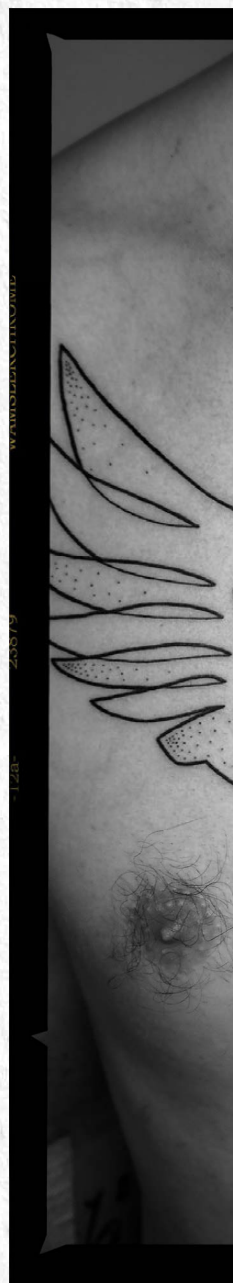
In a move as unique as his drawings, Ganji also offers to design and mail sketches to clients abroad. This means that fans who don’t

have the means to travel to Berlin for an appointment are still very much able to get their coveted Ganji originals.

“Once I have sent the design, I stop thinking about it,” he admits when asked if he ever worries about other artists not being able to do his work justice. “It’s like selling a painting to someone. You don’t care what nail they use to put it on the wall — it’s up to them to find the right tools to hang it up.”

So how do his single line creations come to life in the first place? “I have an image that I put in front of me, then I take a pen and a piece of paper, look at the image and start drawing without looking down on my line,” begins Ganji. “I don’t lift the pen till I think I’m done. It’s called blind continuous draw-

WE GROW UP SEARCHING FOR OUR NATURAL GIFT,
BUT IT’S ON OUR BACKS THE ENTIRE TIME. ALL WE
NEED TO DO IS STOP AND REACH FOR IT.



ing and it is a drawing exercise that improves eye-hand coordination. When I'm done with my blind drawing, I'll take my doodle and start to polish it by adding thick lines, straightening things up with a ruler, etc."

An all-around unique presence in the tattoo scene, Ganji also sets himself apart from many of his peers by asking for complete creative control — no exceptions. "I think total freedom is indispensable for an artist," he states. "You give a tattooist a very detailed description of what you want with lots of ref-

erence pictures and a ton of advice and he creates the tattoo you want or even copies a piece, but this would not satisfy me at all."

"When people book an appointment with me, they can tell me what they want and how they would like it to look, but at the end, it is up to me. I don't change my designs if customers don't like them because if I did, it wouldn't be my design anymore. This is difficult sometimes, but the majority of people respect this and they know how I work."

The Man Behind The Line

Despite the fact that Ganji traveled to over 40 countries as part of his previous gig, you won't find him working conventions or doing guest spots. Why? "I have a shy personality," he admits. "I love my studio and the atmosphere I created there. I don't see myself working at a convention with loud music and

I WORKED DAY AND NIGHT ON DEVELOPING A SIGNATURE STYLE THAT WOULD STAND OUT IN THE CREATIVE JUNGLE



hundreds of people walking by. I just love to be on my own. I also ask all my customers to show up alone to their appointment — the less distraction, the better.”

Then there’s the question of tattooing hands, feet and rib cages. Here too Ganji plays by his own rules, refusing to tattoo any of these notoriously tricky areas. “Hands and feet are basically poor skin that doesn’t reflect my work very well,” he says. “The main reason I don’t tattoo rib cages is because I know from experience that nine out of 10 customers can’t sit still. Tattooing a fine line on someone who flinches every time you put the needle on them is very stressful for both me and the customer. Why do something stressful when you can decide not to?”

If you’re starting to think that Ganji sounds like a real enigma, don’t worry, he’d likely agree with you. “I have to be honest, I don’t

IT’S LIKE SELLING A PAINTING TO SOMEONE. YOU DON’T CARE WHAT NAIL THEY USE TO PUT IT ON THE WALL — IT’S UP TO THEM TO FIND THE RIGHT TOOLS TO HANG IT UP

know much about the tattoo industry,” he confesses. “It seems to be very competitive with a very high interest in money. Money is essential in the system we live in, but sometimes it seems like people are willing to tattoo anything if the price is right.”

“It’s really hard to keep up in this high-speed society. It’s not just tough for tattooers, but for every artist out there,” he continues, elaborating on the challenges faced by tattoo artists in

Mo Ganji On... Visiting Germany

You would need to go to Berghain in Berlin on a Saturday night, close your eyes and dance till Monday morning — it’s a special place. Berlin [also] offers a very wide spectrum of styles and artists. It may be one of the most creative tattoo cities in the world.



TATTOOING A FINE LINE ON SOMEONE WHO FLINCHES EVERY TIME YOU PUT THE NEEDLE ON THEM IS VERY STRESSFUL FOR BOTH ME AND THE CUSTOMER. WHY DO SOMETHING STRESSFUL WHEN YOU CAN DECIDE NOT TO?

Mo Ganji On... His Favourite Hobbies

In general, I'm a very boring person. I played American football for eight years and spent lots of time with model making, painting little soldiers and tanks. Nowadays, I try to do little besides drawing and painting. I recently started meditating, which is something I really enjoy.

2016. "Today, you are a well-know artist. Tomorrow, they don't know who you are. Frida Kahlo said it well: 'Nothing is absolute. Everything changes, everything moves, everything revolves, everything flies and goes away.' This is something that I always have in mind."

Now, it's time for one last surprise from Ganji: he himself is not tattooed. "I have never faced any negative reactions from anyone," although some clients have been known to in-

quire about the lack of ink. "I tell them that I love my body as it is and I don't know why I should get a tattoo now. I try every new needle on myself without ink, just to see how it feels and who knows? Maybe I'll wake up one day and feel like getting a tattoo. I would call Valentin and he would probably talk me out of it!"

As we reach the end of our interview, I ask Ganji to pin 'traditional' art against tattoos. "A great piece of art is not perfect," he starts. "Ideally, it offends people or makes them review everything they know. Art can be anything from shit on a plate to a white piece of paper. It is a reflection of the attitude of the artist who tries to convey some sort of message."

"A perfect tattoo is a result of great craft skills and technique and is more or less a try to 'upgrade' the body. It doesn't necessarily have to have a message or some sort of meaning, but of course, tattoos can be art as well." □

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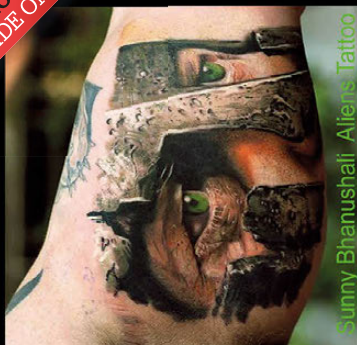


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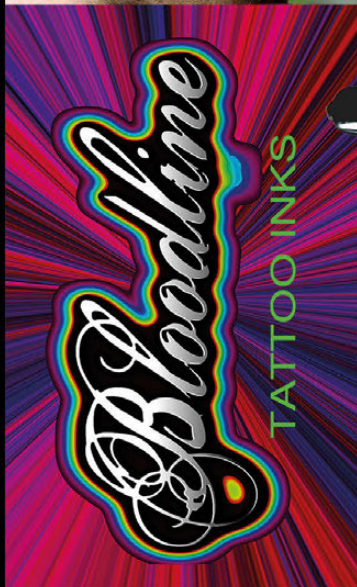
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C Analysis

Amount (ppm)	Amine	EC-No.	CAS-No.
---	Biphenyl-4-ylamine	202-177-1	119-90-4
---	Benzidine	202-199-1	119-93-7
---	4-Chloro-o-toluidine	202-411-6	838-88-0
---	2-Naphthylamine	202-080-4	120-71-8
---	o-Aminoazobenzene	202-591-2	101-14-4
---	5-Nitro-o-toluidine	202-765-8	95-80-7
---	4-Chloroaniline	203-401-0	90-04-0
---	4-Methoxy-m-phenylenediamine	210-406-1	60-09-3
---	4,4'-Methylenedianiline	202-974-4	293733-21-8
---	3,3'-Dichlorobenzidine	202-109-0	389-95-1

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Amount (ppm)	Amine	EC-No.	CAS-No.
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---	4,4'-Thioldianiline	205-370-9	95-88-1





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And so we continue with part two of our feature in which Sion Smith met up with Gunnar out in Virginia where, over a pot of coffee, they dug up the road less travelled and discovered there was a hell of a lot to talk about. Part one was last issue if you missed it. Pay attention:

So where were we? I remember: we left part one in the middle of an insane train of thought that we could somehow work offline to make things special again and that train was fuelled for me by how I perceive things to be out there right now, which is: Everybody is looking and clicking but nobody is seeing.

“Well we’re now inundated to the point of un-appreciation. You’re seeing work that’s of the highest calibre but you keep scrolling... next, next, next... there’s no actual study of them. Once upon a time, when you saw a stellar piece, you knew you had to study it to see what those people were doing but now you just keep on going to look at the next one.

“Some of the guys here were talking about a similar thing last night.

The fact that you have all these portrait artists doing the exact same face and it becomes some kind of race. ‘I can do it better than that guy...’ but how much better is it actually going to get? It’s still the same face done over and over again.

“Sometimes, you can see the same thing done ten times in the space of a month and that kind of thing makes me wonder too because it’s not as though only one picture of that person exists in the world...”

My own answer to this—having watched the ‘phase’ grow for years—is that either people are stopping at

the first image they find on google that will make a decent piece or what we’re seeing is actually tattoos of tattoos... there may have been an original some time back but then it’s become easier to tattoo the tattoo than the photograph.. and very likely, easy to ‘better’ it from that point too.

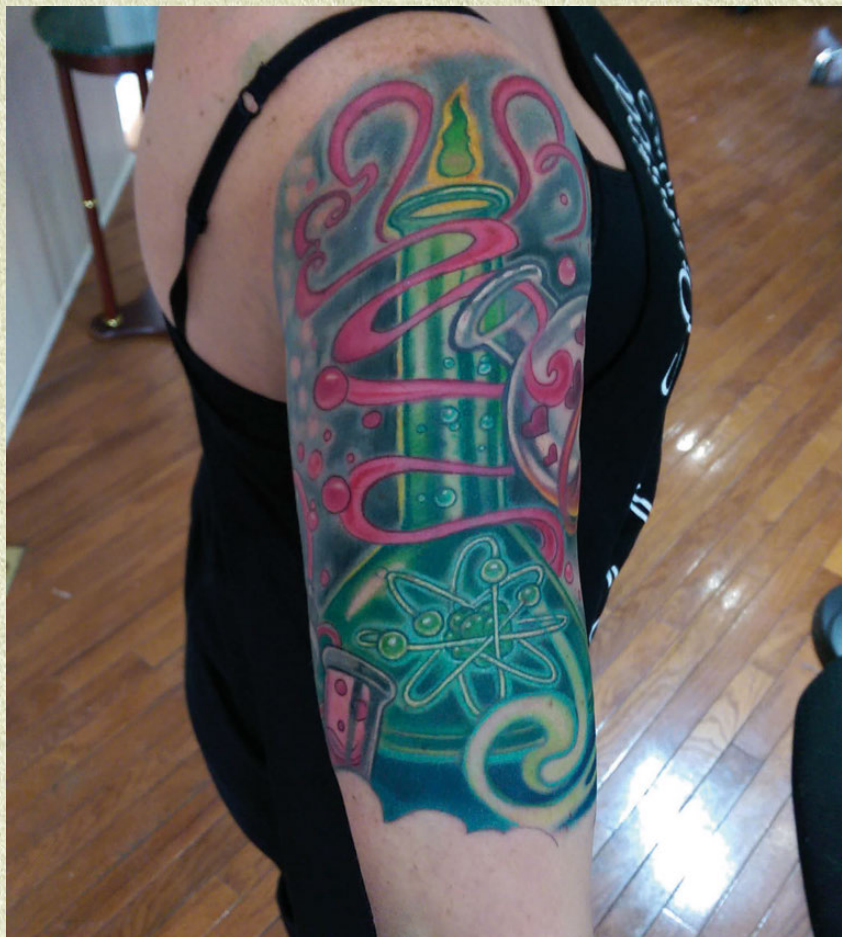
“Maybe. I wonder if some of that has to do with up and coming artists trying to emulate stuff for their clientele. That’s one of the things I’ll hear from artists currently. They will have spent a lifetime building a style and now people want ‘this watercolour thing’ or ‘this pixelated thing’ or whatever the new hip thing is. There was a time when you would go to an artist that specialised to get the best result possible but now you get this reaction of ‘what do you mean you don’t do portraits?’ and a lot of the guys can get forced out of their style just to survive and that’s probably the result of TV shows.”

Not being an avid TV chewer, I can’t recall if Gunnar has done InkMaster... I’m going to bring it up:

“No. I’ve been asked but I declined it. I see the benefits of it for people—it’s neat that these artists turn up at conventions now, they’ve become



Words: Sion Smith • Images: Gunnar



Some of the guys were talking about that last night—you have all these portrait artists doing the exact same face and it becomes some kind of race



JACK DAVIS
John Burton "Jack" Davis, Jr. (born 1924 and sadly died last summer) was an American cartoonist and illustrator, known for his advertising art, magazine covers, film posters, record album art and numerous comic book stories. He was one of the founding cartoonists for Mad magazine in 1952 and known for his cartoon characters who were characterised by extremely distorted anatomy, including big heads, skinny legs and extremely large feet. As a child, he adored listening to Bob Hope on the radio and tried to draw him, despite not knowing what Hope looked like.

stars in the industry and it gives a convention a good kick, but it doesn't seem to matter what the calibre of their work is. They are now a 'star' because of it. Things have changed massively. I closed myself off from the community a little to get things done and now that I'm trying to regain some notoriety, it's hard. You're swimming upriver almost. You can't just send twenty pictures to a magazine and hope to get an interview again, you're also competing with a million kids on Instagram too.

"Here's the thing, I spent a lot of time being a hot-shot tattoo artist guy in my head and went through that, burned a lot of bridges because I used to be really mouthy and opinionated about the state of the industry and where it was going but after a while, I just felt defeated. It didn't make a difference. People would go 'Hell yeah, everything you say is right!' and then talk shit about you behind your back with 'I don't know why he said that'. It's all fake, so I just quietened down and got on with my work."

The 'tornado syndrome' as I call it. I tell my story about how I see social media as being damaging to my actual job. When an artist such as—and I pull a random example from the sky—Jeff Gogue, posts something and in the next breath, somebody with less than a quarter of his talent posts something turns out to be 'more popular', we are not in a good place. I totally get that art is in the eye of the beholder but in a world that takes it seriously, you can't compare a drawing from one of my kids with that of Picasso—at that stage of



the game, you simply don't know what you're talking about.

"I can't even compete with some of these people because I have a very distinctive style, it's what I do, what I built."

But surely, that's the very point? You build a style of your own in order that you don't have to compete? In a world in which nobody does what you do, you're number one in a field of one which leaves you free to simply get on with getting better and pleasing yourself.

"You would think so. There was a spell where I would open a magazine and I would see copies of my work and at first it was kind of neat as an artist, but I was also kind of oblivious to it because I live most of the time in my own head just drawing at my desk or painting but I have friends who would write to me and tell me they just did a 'Gunnar piece'. What the hell does that even mean! Or I'd get, 'Did you see that guy who was doing your stuff?' and I wouldn't have a clue what they were talking about and I'd look and it would be crazy because I never thought I could inspire somebody enough for them to want to emulate it."

...and there are two places you can go when that happens right? 'At least it's done well' or 'What the fuck have you done to my art!'

"It never really bothered me to be honest. I found it flattering even if it was done



I would much rather own an original Disney piece of poster art than a cheap reproduction but they're both out there



BERNIE WRIGHTSON
Bernard Albert "Bernie" Wrightson is an American artist known for his horror illustrations and comic books. In 1968 he drew his first professional comic book story - *The Man Who Murdered Himself* - which appeared in *House of Mystery* No. 179. He continued to work on a variety of mystery and anthology titles for both DC and, a few years later, Marvel Comics. It was for Marvel's *Chamber of Darkness* and *Tower of Shadows* titles where he was first encouraged to slightly simplify his intricate pen-and-ink drawing, and where his lush brushwork, a hallmark of his comics inking in the 1970s, was first seen.

That's the one thing that does get to me—people who have built entire careers on emulating styles but never gave credit to where it came from

poorly—and people still send me pictures and tell me how stoked they were to get to 'do one of my pieces' and it's basically stolen right out of my portfolio, but then... at least the person I tattooed has the original. It's awesome to own an original. I would much rather own an original Disney piece of poster art than a cheap reproduction but they're both out there."

I guess it depends what you're happy with yourself as the consumer. To use a good example, adding some black and red does not make your piece 'trash polka'. If you look under the covers at Simone and Volko's work at Buena Vista, there are years of graphic design training under the hood. It's not something you can just say you 'do'.

"Actually—that's the one thing that does get to me. There are people who have built entire

careers on emulating styles but never gave credit to where it came from and that drives me crazy. I will always cite my influences any chance I get because I simply wouldn't be where I am if it weren't for them."

The odd thing about influences is that the more time ticks by, the less people know who the hell you're talking about. I 'suffer' from this a lot—though it's hardly suffering, it just makes it hard to explain some things when you're pointing in another direction as a reference point and the other person is scrolling through what happened two minutes ago.

"A lot of my influences come from nowhere near the tattoo world. Jack Davis is a huge influence on my work (*MAD* magazine—see box copy) and also Bernie Wrightson (*House of Mystery/Swamp* thing—see other box copy)..."

This part of our (so far, reasonably professional) interview now turns into two men brought up in the same time-frame ping-ponging nostalgia references back and forth at each other. I'll spare you the pain by cutting a chunk of it out, and drop you back in at a suitable place—pretend nothing happened here—but the last thing I was heard to mention was how cool it once was on a boring Sunday afternoon to sit in front of the TV



and know a Tex Avery cartoon could be found somewhere, which is how, as kids, we were all taught art by osmosis but that doesn't really happen anymore.

"Tex Avery was a big one for me too. There is a guy out there at the moment called Aaron Blaise. I follow him on YouTube and he's a cartoonist—works for Disney—Tex Avery was really into that 'squash and stretch' stuff, he does that kind of thing but it doesn't have that 'darkness' to it.

"That's what's missing for me. There was a real dark humour to animation once and when people ask me where I come up with my concepts, the answer is: all the informa-

tion was always there. I just drew it a little different.

"EC comics was dark but they were also playful. You were able to take humour and mix it with horror and create something fun. Bugs Bunny, Woody Woodpecker... it was all dark but now—and this in no bad thing—when I watch cartoons with my kids, it's moved into a weird space. There has to be a lot of mushrooms or acid going on. They have absolutely hallucinated at some point in their life to create this stuff."

Maybe the point we're both trying to make is that nobody gives a fuck who drew what anymore...

"Oh yeah, there are teams creating this material now and I think you also lose your identity when you work for those animation houses. There's a million guys used to create something rather than the one guy who style blankets the whole film."

Did you not ever consider pushing your own work in those ways?

"I actually wrote a children's book about ten years ago and every



I often thought about writing a book about how to fuck up your life and then snatch it back from the jaws of death. . .

year, I swear I'm going to do something more with it but this year I'm actually starting to study story-boarding because it's a different kind of education that I don't have but via the beauty of the internet, I can watch these tutorials and I'm trying to get back into that.

"When you're a self taught artist, you battle with ego and confidence a lot when you learn that way. You start to wonder if you're as good as 'that guy' and whether you're competent enough to do the job properly and I feel like... well, when I first started working in street shops and was developing my style,

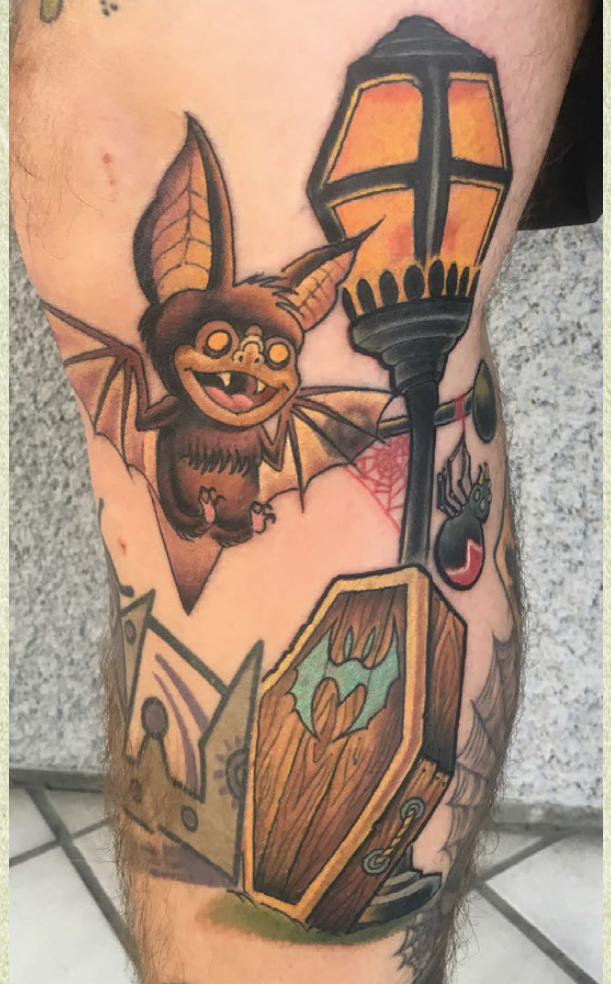


I could walk into any place and whatever you wanted, I could draw on the spot. I used to treat it as a test for myself. 'Give me a story and I'll give you what you want' kind of thing and man, I could draw really fast back then. I was super confident—and then life happened. I had a family I needed to take care of, which then takes you to a place of having to carve out that time to practice your craft instead of just doing it.

"When I opened my studio, when I finally got around to it, I found I became a professional juggler and not a professional artist at all. How many things can you throw in the air to deal with and still be able to create like you used to!"

The third coffee pot is going cold. That's always a good sign you should probably begin to bring things to a close, so where to next? Where do you go from here?

"I often thought about writing a book about how to fuck up your life and then snatch it back from the jaws of death. I built a career and then dropped off, then rebuilt a career and then dropped off. I tend to come in waves. It used to be a little 'safer' than it is now because you could disappear for a little while to



get your shit back together and people were excited to see you when you did turn up again, but now, it's a bit tougher—when you do turn up again, the audience can be a little younger, so sometimes, a lot of the time, they don't even know who you are and the people who once cared an awful lot grow up and got out of the scene because they too have also turned into professional jugglers of their own stuff.

“Here I am today at this show and there's maybe 1% of artists I've ever known here. You don't see the same people anymore, they just stop and disappear—they're probably juggling out there somewhere as well.

“And the timelines are getting shorter and shorter. If you think you're safe at 22, you're not because there's some kid of 18 whose gonna sneak up behind you and kick your ass. The secret to all of this is having no responsibilities. The hardest part is that people don't take into account how to stay relevant as they go forward.

“There might be the same amount of hours in a day for all of us, but when you're young and can fill twenty hours honing your craft that's great but when you start putting together something that looks like a life, those hours get watered down and filled with those other things you chose—and that's exactly what happens to all of us. No exception.

“For me though, that's the question I'm

dealing with right now when you ask what's next. I don't love the position I'm in currently but I'm unsure of where to take it. You can't walk away from art and I still have another twenty/twenty five years left in me, so there's still things I need to figure out. The floodgates are open and there's no telling what's going to happen next with regards to the industry—and I'm talking economically here. The bottom could fall out of it at any moment because of over-saturation.

“When I started in Columbus there were 14 studios in the whole county. Now, there's like 48 studios on a single street. It's so crowded and people don't care if it's me that shows up or a kid that's been tattooing for six months shows up, they don't care about the calibre. They just want the most amount of coverage for the least amount of money. They want to say that they're tattooed but they don't care about anything else—how do you compete with that?

“I think we have gotten to a new point where, as an artist, you have to become an entrepreneur and I've watched some illustrators also talk about this. We've gotten to this new phase where we live in a world of abundance and the answer is that, when you have your own style, you don't have to compete with all the other guys. What you have to do is compete for an audience that enjoys the work you do. So my job becomes to find the audience rather than compete for attention—and once you have that, it doesn't matter if they like other people too so long as they like what I do enough and will buy things occasionally.

“I honestly think that's the future for artists. You have your own personal gallery and you hope that you have enough people who enjoy what you do to keep it going. There's seven billion people out there—somebody has to like what you do enough to help you support it!” □

This has been one of the best, most revealing interviews I've ever had the pleasure to put together. Huge thanks to Gunnar for sitting with me for as long as he did. For everybody else... I hope you learned something.

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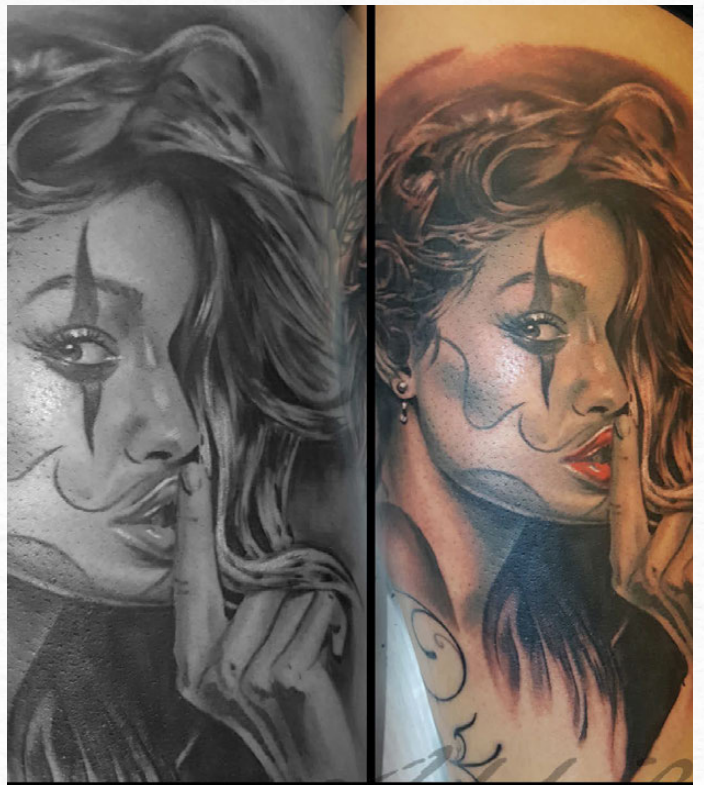
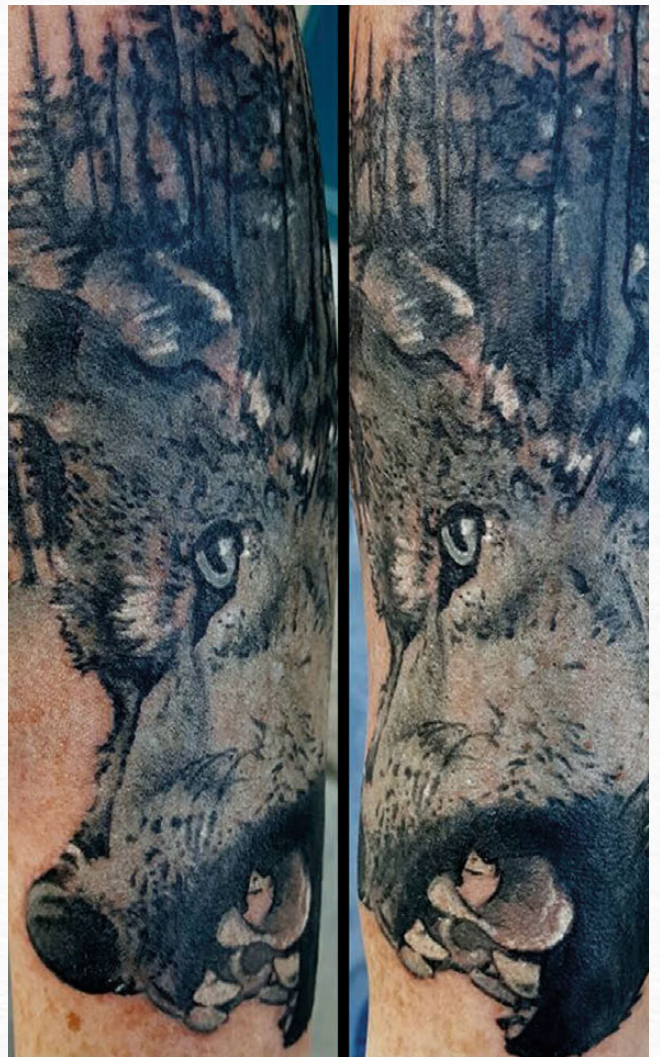


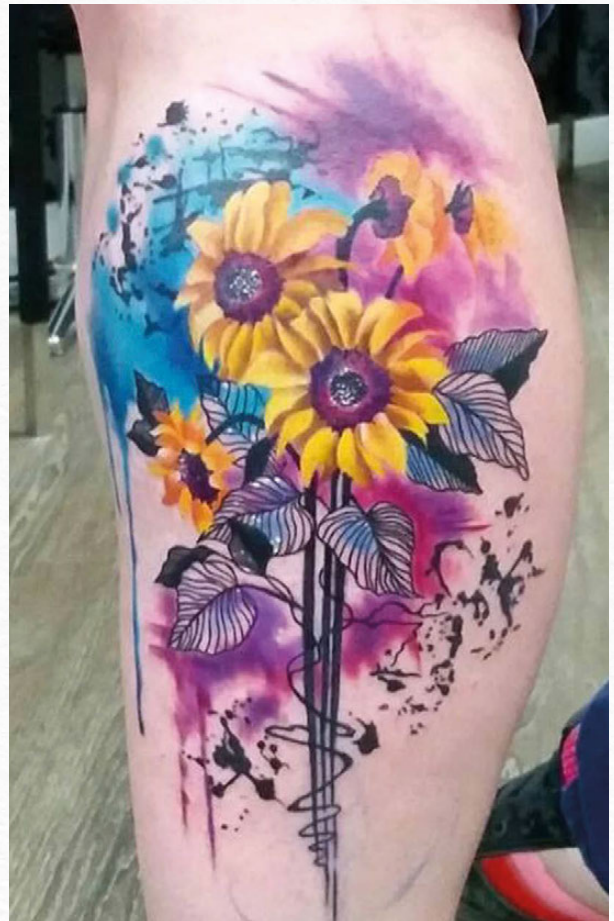
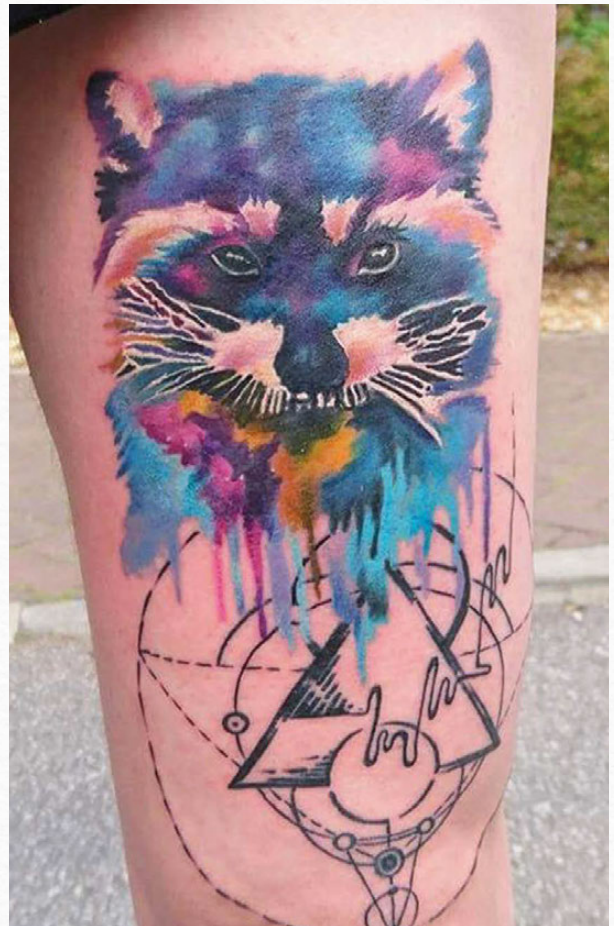
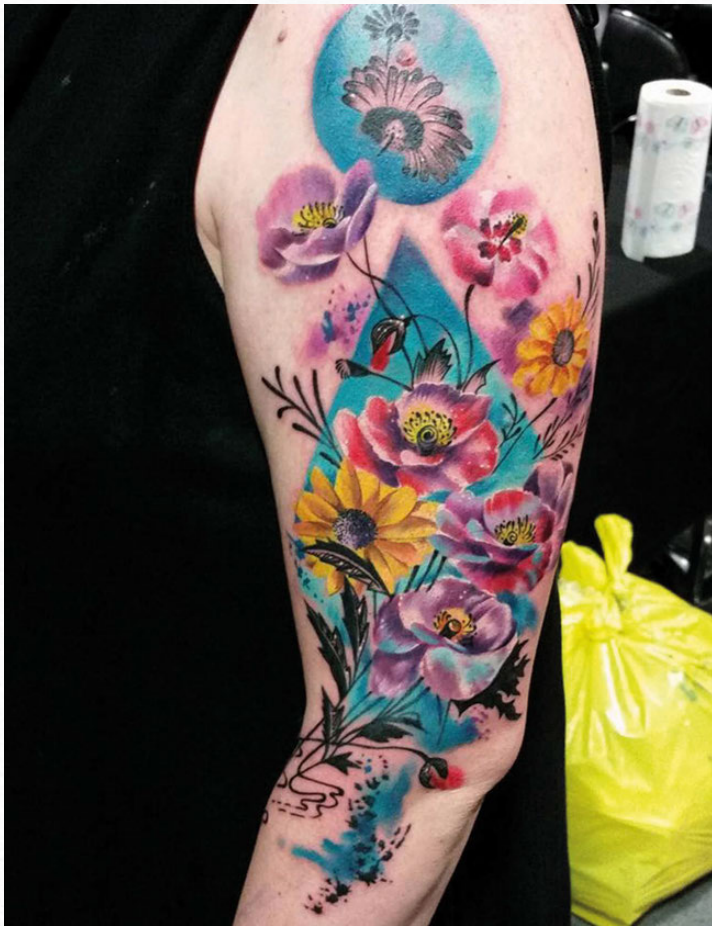
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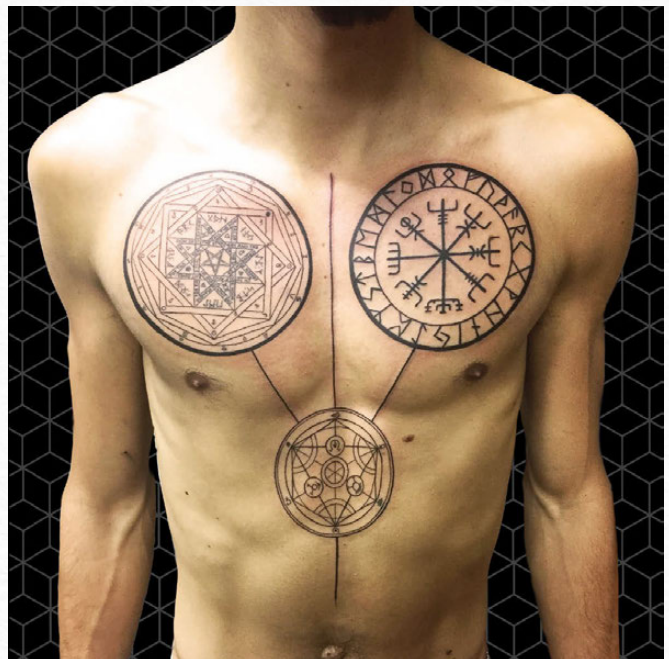
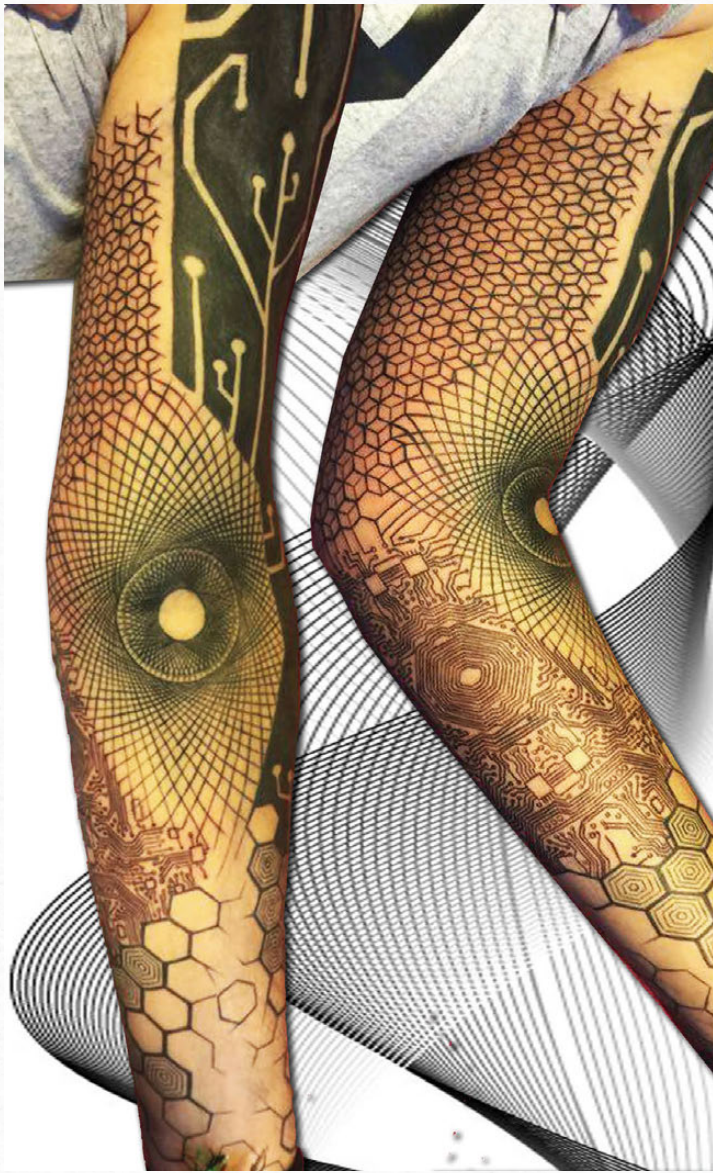
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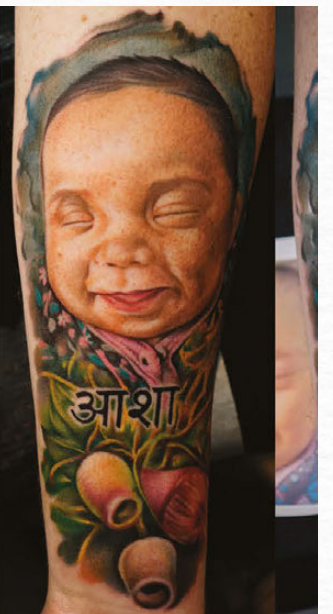


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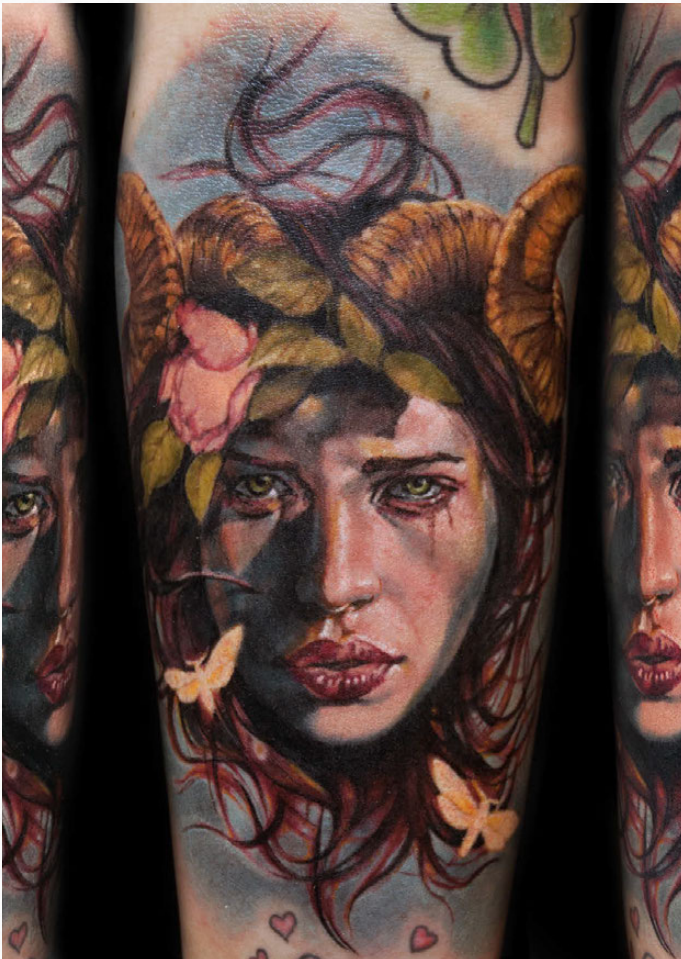


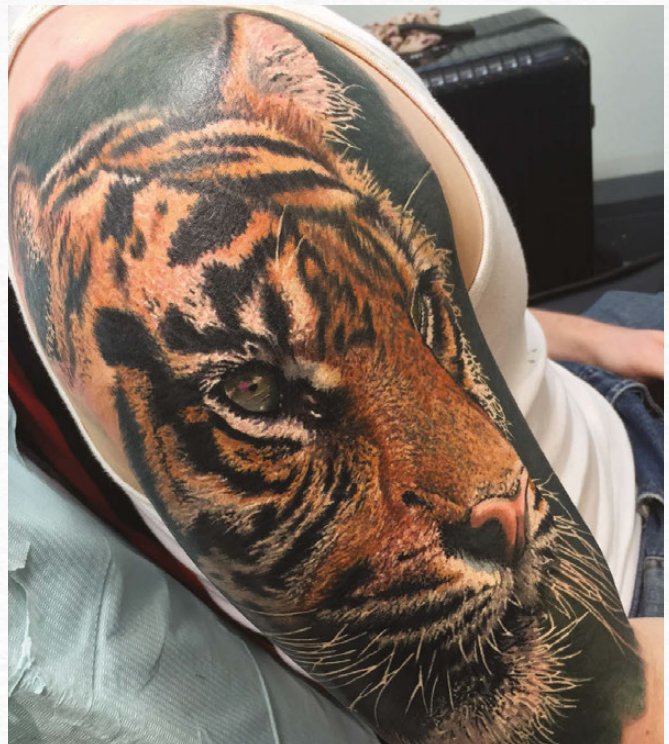
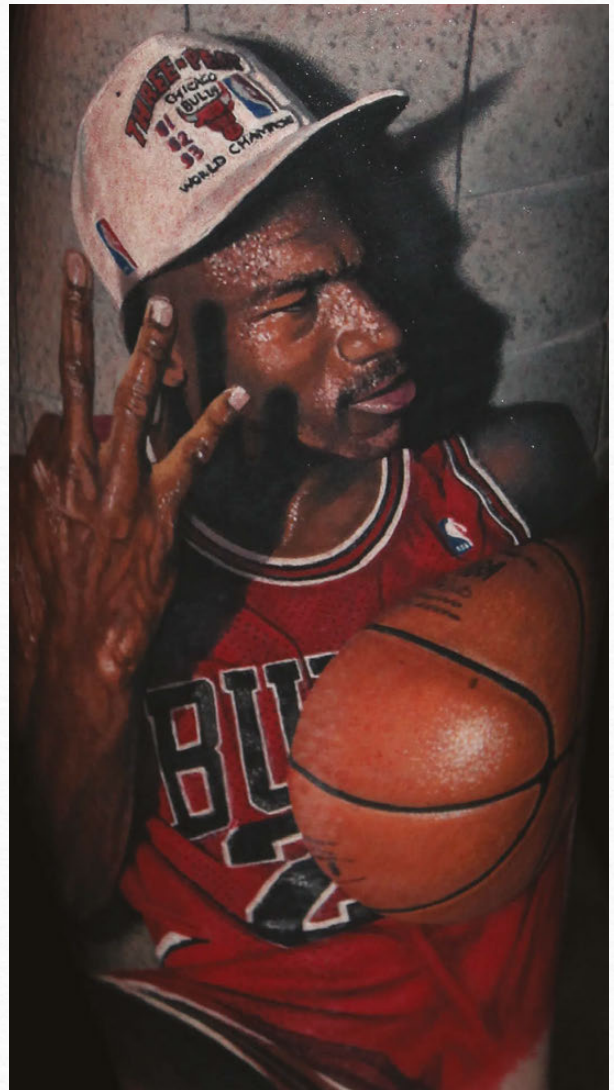
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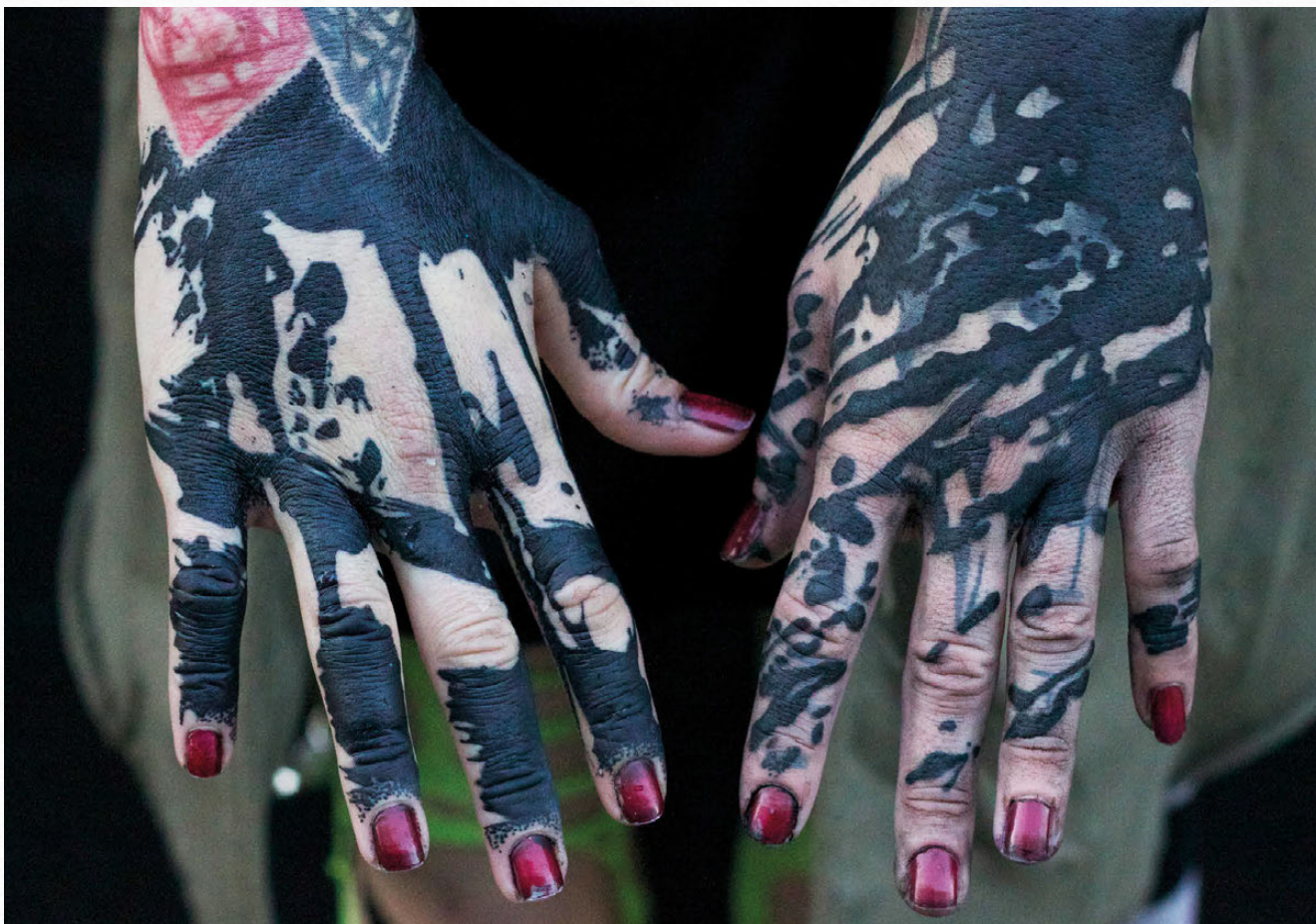


STEVE BUTCHER

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MADE OF SCARS

What motivates people to mark their bodies in unique ways? Beccy Rimmer speaks to an artist doing something quite different from those she normally features. Meet Leah Stanmore, one of the UK's leading scarification artists...

You will instantly notice that these magazine pages look quite dissimilar to others in this issue. For those not familiar with the skin-altering method of 'scarification', you'll be wondering why these tattoo photos look so unusual. That's because they are not tattoos.

Whilst some may think that scarification, the process of cutting into the skin to create raised scars, is a new trend, it is in fact one of the oldest forms of body modification. A sacred ritual in ancient tribes, these permanent scars represented much more than just their aesthetic form.

This intimate scarring process remains to gain the levels of popularity and acceptance that we see today with tattoos. Admittedly, scar art hasn't been something I have personally explored (or even written about) before.

A few months ago, I discovered one particular artist's work online and my jaw dropped. Leah Stanmore has been scarring skin for three years now. Specialising in detailed, intricate patterns, her perfectly-healed work is nothing short of flawless.

Drawing tattoos from a young age, inspired by her heavily-tattooed father, Leah's first encoun-





THE TRUTH IS THAT IT'S BEEN AROUND FOR MUCH LONGER THAN PEOPLE REALISE

ter of seeing this ritualistic scar process took place just six years ago, at a convention in Plymouth. “It just appealed to me,” she begins. “But from what I remember, everyone else there was either passing out or thought it was gross!”

Indeed, there is something about scarification that doesn't sit well with even some of toughest tattooed individuals. I wanted to investigate... were these two procedures really that different?

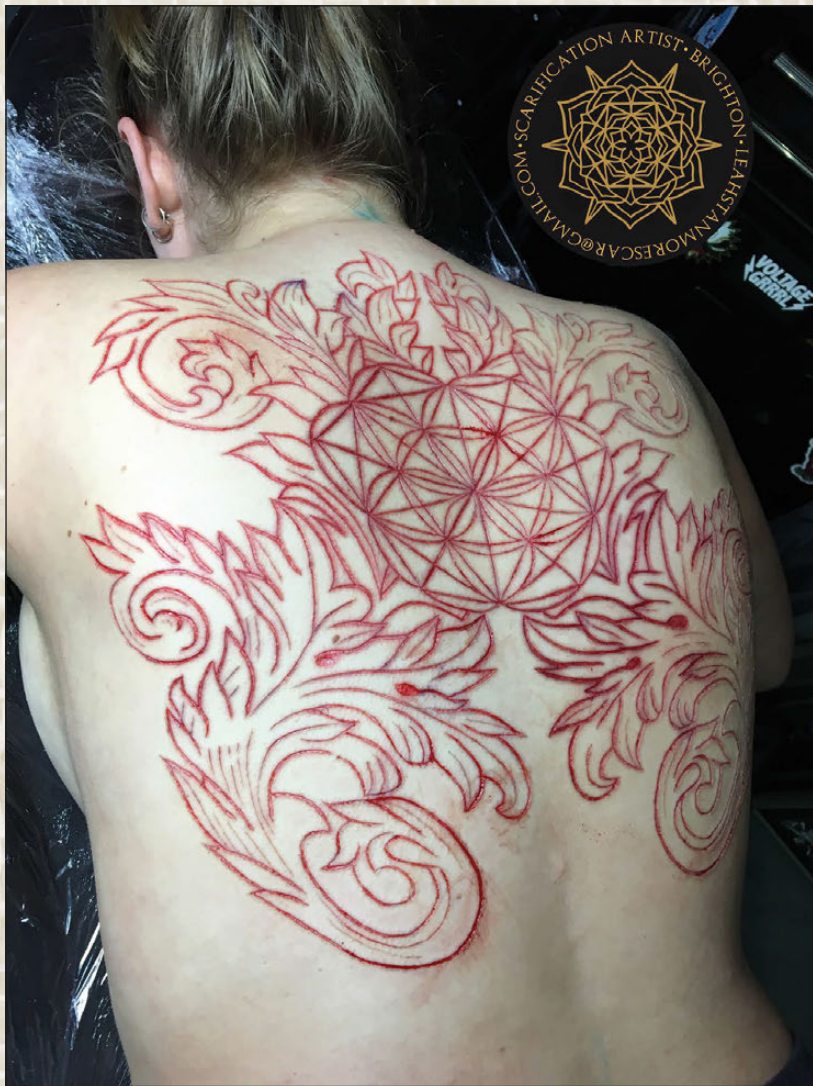
“No, I don't think they are,” admits Leah, “but unfortunately some people do turn their nose up at scarification. They think it's weird, all blood and gore, when the truth is that it's been around for much longer than people realise.”

In many cultures, scarification is a rite of passage, a “coming of age to show your part in the tribe”, describes Leah. “In some ancient practices, they would cut the skin and rub ash into it—it would heal with discolour and actually look a lot like a tattoo.”

As ink-wearers, we are all aware of the importance of the tattooing process itself. The pain, the struggle, the precious time with an artist, all contributes to us leaving with a strong connection to the pictures left permanently on our skin. A deeper (quite literally) and more substantial means, I wondered, did scarification give customers a more profound connection to the final product than tattooing?

“Definitely,” agrees Leah. “Tattoos are rad and I have so much admiration for the awesome artists that I know and their work, but I do think that a cutting can be much more unique for the person who wears it. In terms of my clients' motivations, some people actually want work by me because they don't want to be tattooed... they don't particularly like how tattoos look.”

Some may label scarification as “unnatural” but what could be more natural than something humans have been doing to their bodies for thousands of years? For Leah,



SOME PEOPLE ACTUALLY WANT WORK BY ME BECAUSE THEY DON'T WANT TO BE TATTOOED... THEY DON'T PARTICULARLY LIKE HOW TATTOOS LOOK

“it’s completely organic”. No ink, no jewellery, just “your body’s natural way of healing itself”. Many deem scarification weird, but as Leah rightly points out, “isn’t it also a bit weird to put ink or metal in your body?!”

As anticipated, Leah’s words made complete sense in my own head. I think for the majority of the general public, it’s no doubt simply a ‘squeamish’ thing. The literal cutting-off of strips of skin, the masses of blood, the exposed layers beneath the carving. Not a fan with the sort of people who feel faint watching *Casualty*.

No doubt many will also be concerned about the potential dangers of this skin intrusion. A myth I was keen for Leah to dispel. Putting client satisfaction, comfort and safety at the top of her list, Leah books out the entire day for one appointment, no matter the size of the piece.

“Having the whole day makes the experience nicer for my customers. We can take breaks, I can ensure they’ve

eaten well beforehand, we take our time. Sometimes pieces take longer than anticipated and I would never want a client to worry about this.”

Otherwise, a day in the life of Leah Stanmore resembles that of many tattooers. “I have a similar set-up. I clean the skin, prep the area, use a stencil.” A scarification piece begins with Leah “slightly scoring the lines just enough to open the skin”—this means she can then use topical spray to numb the area before the piece is properly begun, often making the experience hurt less than a tattoo. “The spray also constructs the capillaries so the area doesn’t bleed as much. I can then rest easy knowing that my client isn’t in too much discomfort.”

Then, it’s down to business. She works her way around the entire artwork, opening the cuts to a particular thickness and depth. “I don’t just cut two lines and then remove the skin,” Leah clarifies. “I just cut lightly and separate the



| JUST CUT LIGHTLY AND SEPARATE THE SKIN ENOUGH SO THAT I CAN MANIPULATE IT INTO DOING WHAT I WANT IT TO DO

skin enough so that I can manipulate it into doing what I want it to do. It's really interesting seeing the skin part."

The necessary aftercare is an absolutely vital part of the experience, "much more intense than with tattoos", admits Leah. Expect pain, expect blood and expect to focus on resting and keeping the new piece wrapped up for a week, washing approximately 4 times a day. "The idea is to not let it heal as quickly as a normal cut would," Leah explains, "so it's really important that the aftercare advice is followed correctly."

For some scarification pros, the post-procedure aim is to irritate the scar and avoid it healing for as long as possible, to make the visibility of the final piece "better". "There are different methods," confirms Leah, "and yes some people use things like citric acid to irritate their piece, but I tend to tell my clients to just stretch the skin around it and make sure it's clean. If they want to irritate

it more than that's up to them. I personally think that not everything will work for everyone, so my advice is just try to keep things simple, and clean."

In contrast to tattooing, skin healing can vary significantly from person to person. "I could do the same design, on the same area, on three different people, and I know for sure that each one would scar completely differently. But, that's what I like about it!" As with any attempt to alter our bodies, the importance lies in the safety of the procedure, the skill and experience of an artist like Leah, and the need to follow the correct aftercare advice.

Public opinion aside, I was also keen to know if there were any industry misconceptions that we could seek to eliminate. "There are people in the industry that don't think scarification should have a place at tattoo conventions," Leah tells me. "It is a real shame because we should all be working together. It all goes hand in hand.



THERE ARE PEOPLE IN THE INDUSTRY THAT DON'T THINK SCARIFICATION SHOULD HAVE A PLACE AT TATTOO CONVENTIONS — WE SHOULD ALL BE WORKING TOGETHER. IT ALL GOES HAND IN HAND. IT'S ALL BODY ART

It's all body art."

As always, the truth lies in the satisfaction of those now permanently adorned with Leah's scars. "My clients genuinely love how they look. As I said, each piece heals differently, some fade, some produce what we call "keloid scarring", but each person remains happy with their finished product. For them, it's completely unique. Nobody wears the same scar."

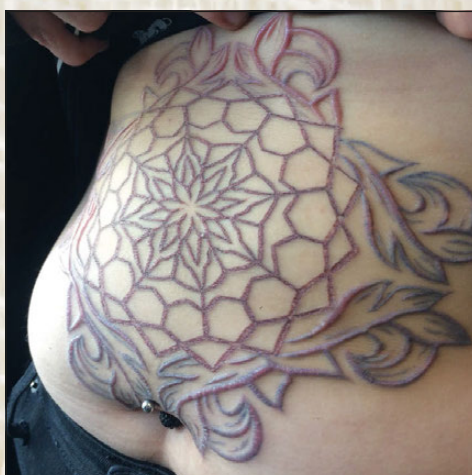
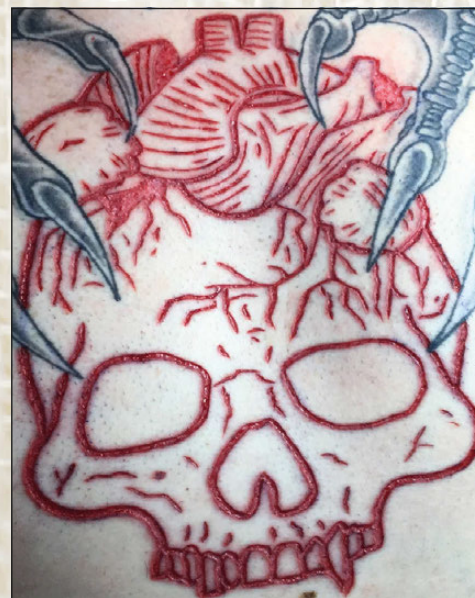
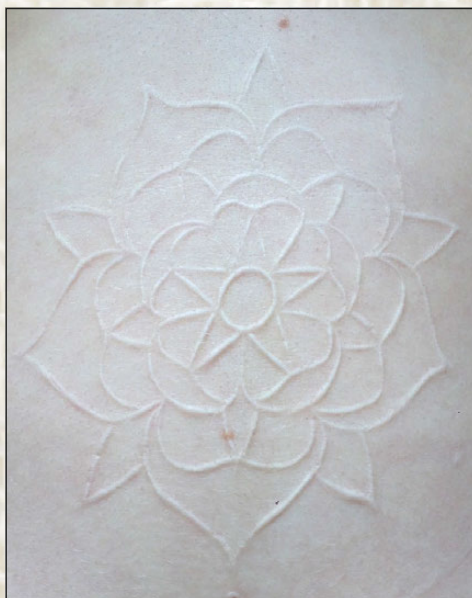
In the time she's been working, Leah's never had a client 'bail'. She calls this 'luck' but I'm sure their trust in her conscientious working attitude is not accidental. "Each and every one of my clients has been amazing. I've had one or two locals but most travel far, many from abroad."

One working day that stands out for Leah involved a body modification enthusiast who had taken the journey from Australia to Brighton to get a large back-piece from her. "She had been wanting it done since she was like fif-

teen," recounts Leah. "She got to the studio at 11am and didn't leave till 10pm. It was an insane day. She sat like an absolute rock and we had such a laugh whilst doing it."

"We still keep in contact and she sends me updates of how her back is healing. When we uploaded pictures of the finished piece on social media she got the best reaction from her friends and family. It was so nice to see people actually being accepting of this massive decision she had made."

She continues, "having people chose to come to me for work, out of all the other amazing scarification artists out there, is an amazing feeling. It's really rewarding knowing that they have picked something that I designed, and that they took the time to travel to me. I love doing this. It calms me down, it is my therapy. I'm very lucky to do what I do, and I can't imagine not. I'd love to change perceptions about how beautiful scarification can be."



I'D LOVE TO CHANGE PERCEPTIONS ABOUT HOW BEAUTIFUL SCARICATION CAN BE

Interestingly, Leah has less to say about the 11 hours creating this piece, and a whole lot more to say about her client and own philosophies and passions. She reflects on the feelings of her client's friends and family, her future relationship with this customer, her own emotional connection to the experience and her job in general.

Hearing Leah recount this memorable experience in a contemplative way makes me suddenly realise that this is where I find true beauty in her work. Continuously grateful for the bonds she's formed to those who wear her creations makes me feel honoured to have interviewed her. Underneath these two-dimensional (or in this case, three-dimensional) images and patterns, lies so much more. Stories and sensations hidden from sight that as writers we constantly seek to bring to the surface.

I've often debated before in my writing, what is the most poignant aspect of getting tattooed? Does the actual final piece hold more importance than the relationship you form with your artist? Is their fulfilment just as es-

sential as yours? No matter how gorgeous the eventual artwork, is there something more heartfelt going on beneath the surface of these scars?

When I first approached Leah to interview her, I never anticipated how deep of an emotional connection she would have to her craft. For every sentence about the nitty-gritty, the process, the aftercare, I feel like Leah could relay ten more on those invisible characteristics of scarification. The emotions, the connections, the fulfilment, the determination to change the future.

Like the motivations of our ancestors thousands of years ago, these scars represent so much more than what we see on the surface... not just for the wearer, but for the creator herself.

Leah Stanmore is based at two studios: Nine Lives and Deaths Door, both in Brighton, UK.

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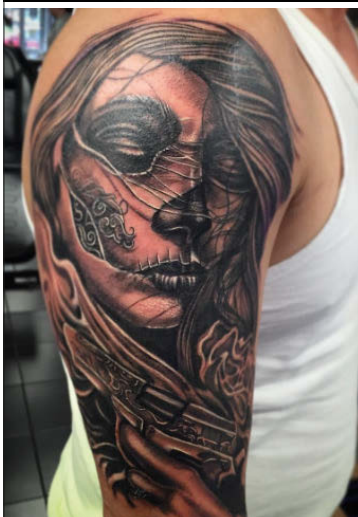
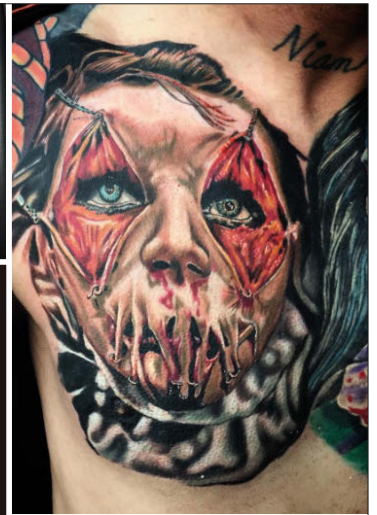


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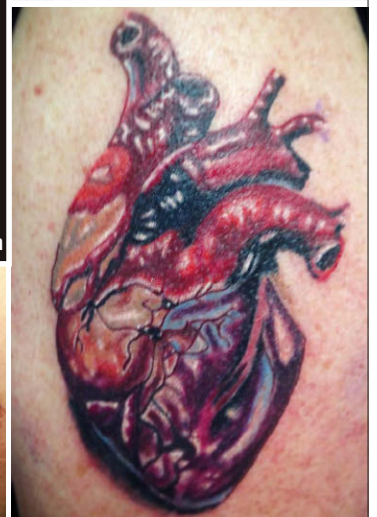
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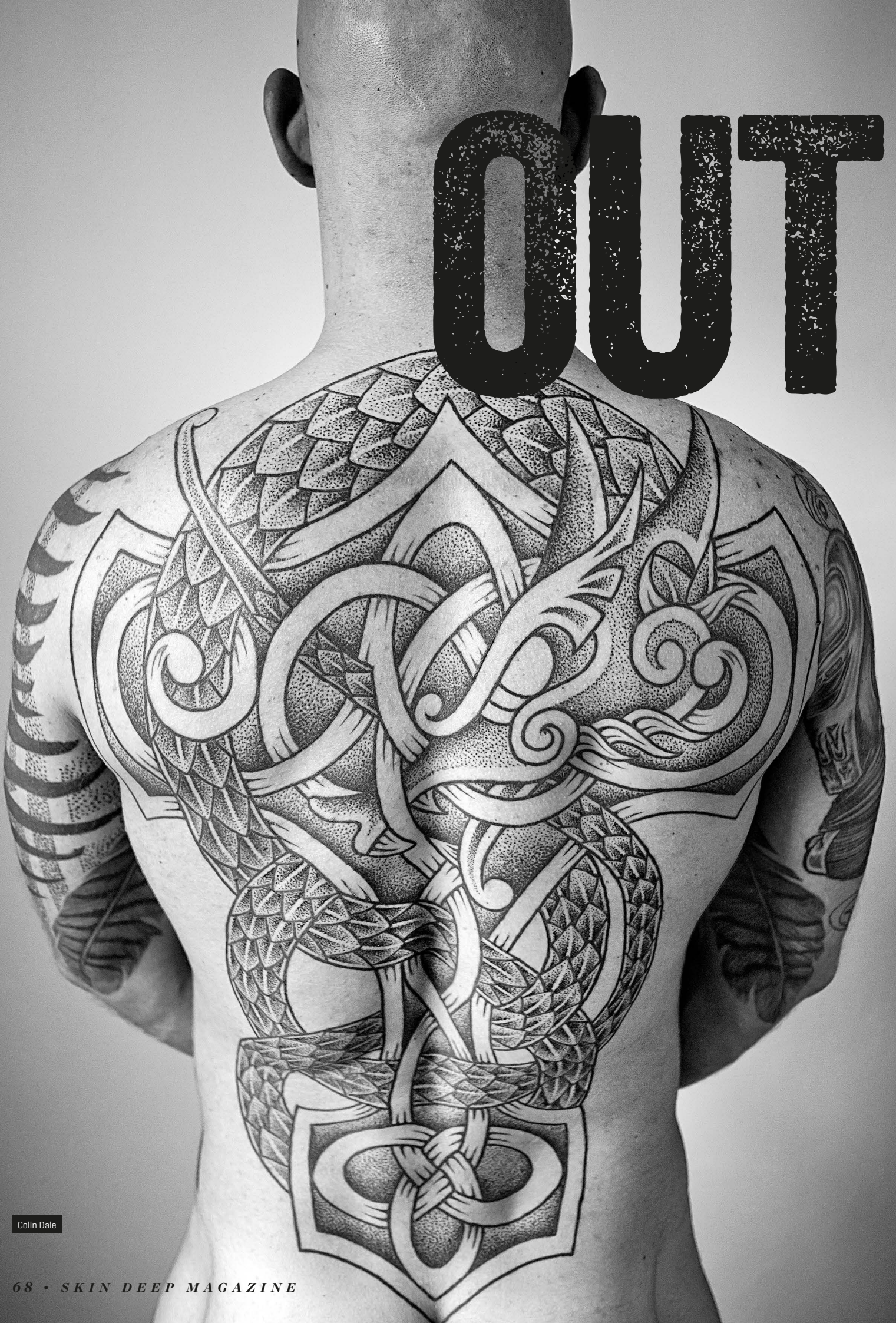
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OUT



Colin Dale

OUT OF STEP

In the big scheme of things among book publishers who work with tattoo artists, few are held in such high regard as Out Of Step Books. The most recent addition to their ever growing library—Slithers and Scales—prompted a meeting of minds to rummage beneath the covers to see how the wheels of the machine move. Relax into some wonderful art as Jinxi Caddel and the boss browse through some serious pages of art...

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Let's start at the beginning. Slithers and Scales is a book from your 'inspirational art' series—the fifth if got my sums right—is the series an annual affair or do you strike with it whenever you have a good idea?

It's funny, because I have never realised that the inspirational series is an annual affair, but when I look back at the chronology of the volumes, it appears that it is precisely that! We didn't really set out to create them each year, because we roll out the announcements and open the submissions for the projects whenever the idea feels right. If we decide that we have found a topic that will spark inspiration for the artists and there is enthusiasm in the air, we know that it's the 'right time', but perhaps this ends up occurring every year, nonetheless, without even trying to make that happen—which makes it extra fun!

There must be ideas you thought were great at the time but turned out to have no gas in the tank. I always like asking this question because people generally assume all you have to do to publish an art book is snap your fingers at some artists and it just falls together in your lap. Not so, I think!

You are so correct about that! There is so much more to these projects than one would ever suspect. It's a pretty daunting task at times, but we try to take each step in our stride and be very, very patient and always open to switching directions when we need to. We did start collecting

for one book that was going to focus on food-related tattoos and artwork, that we ended up halting production of shortly after we opened submissions. Sometimes you can just get a feeling for the enthusiasm level and interest from the artists and public, and in this case, everything seemed a little 'off', so we regrouped and came up with another focus that ended up being really fun and successful. Sometimes you can't force things and if you listen to your instinct, a better direction might present itself that ends up being even more inspiring.

There are some seriously talented artists on board all of your books. Is it an easier process these days? I guess the first must have been the most difficult but as you move forward and 'prove yourself' with the product, it must get easier to attract people that will make the books great and therefore sell well.

The level of talent that is out there in the tattoo and art worlds is seriously astounding nowadays, and we feel incredibly lucky to get to include so many of these artistic gems in our books. It's definitely easier today to cook up

THE LEVEL OF TALENT THAT IS OUT THERE IN THE TATTOO AND ART WORLDS IS SERIOUSLY ASTOUNDING—WE FEEL INCREDIBLY LUCKY TO GET TO INCLUDE SO MANY OF THESE ARTISTIC GEMS IN OUR BOOKS



Eric Kueh



Derek Turcotte



David Corden



Anthony Jenkins



a stellar list of artists, because there are so many amazing people to invite and include in the curation process. However, because there is always so much emerging talent, it's still pretty tricky trying to keep up with everyone and also make sure that we reach out to the artists who are new (or new to us) and have not been in our publications before. While we have a huge submission turnout, and are quite astounded at the number of people who submit their art to the book projects, we are still always networking and inviting people as the projects transpire. It's a lot of work, but always so worth it in the end!

The actual point of that question is, at some point (having done this myself) you will have to act as a gate-keeper and say 'no' to certain things because of space constraints or more disturbing reasons, such as receiving a submission that's not as good as you

SOMETIMES YOU CAN'T FORCE THINGS AND IF YOU LISTEN TO YOUR INSTINCT, A BETTER DIRECTION MIGHT PRESENT ITSELF THAT ENDS UP BEING EVEN MORE INSPIRING

thought it would be. Do you find that part difficult?

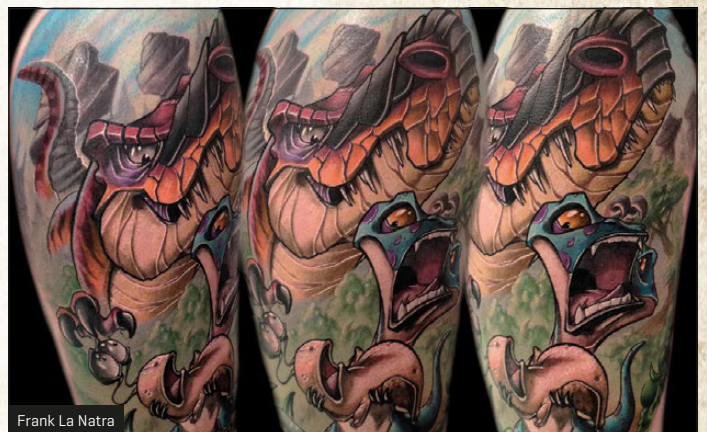
Oh yes, this definitely happens and it's really tricky to deal with, actually. We value and appreciate everyone who participates and submits to our projects, whether their work gets chosen for the books or not, so it's a delicate balance sometimes. Our Inspirational Art Series books get a tremendous amount of activity when it comes to submissions. For instance, for our "Feathers of Inspiration" book, we received an astounding 6,000+ submissions; and the "Slithers and Scales of Inspiration" book numbers were close to the same. So even though our



Darrin White



Jay Marceau



Frank La Natra

books are pretty large when they are all put together and printed (300-400 pages, on average), there are obviously a lot of pieces that don't make the cut. It is definitely necessary to act as a gatekeeper and the selection process can be quite challenging at times.

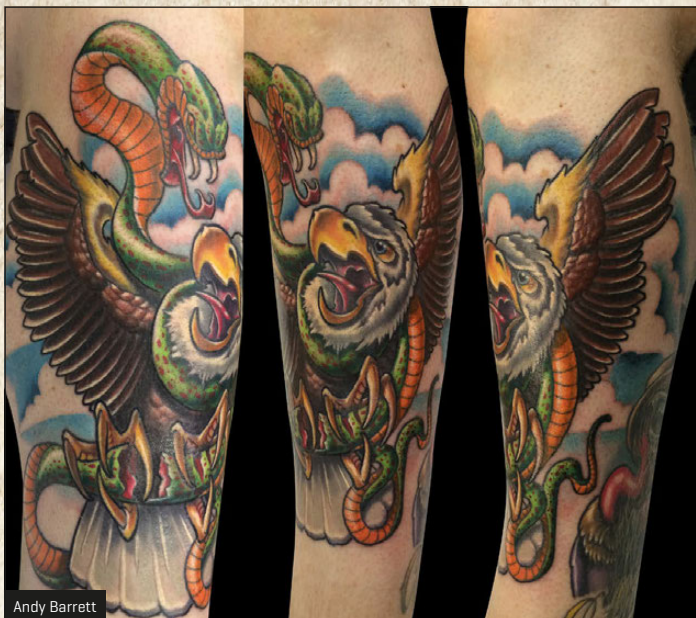
There's just the two of you running OOS right? Pretty much all hands on deck 24/7?

Oh yes, it's a super-busy venture, that's for sure. Steve and I run the day-to-day office work that includes submission processing, emailing, interacting with artists, running our social media pages, and all of the different steps that go into selecting, photo processing, editing, writing, and getting the books ready for layout and printing. We actually have some really amazing people who help us as at various times during the book-making process, outside of me and Steve. Robin Clarijs is a designer in Amsterdam and he does all of our graphic work and the cover-design duties when we are putting the books together and getting them ready for print. We also have a layout designer named Deepinder who works with us on the page designs and layout. And then we have two people who run our warehouse and do all of the packing, shipping, and order fulfilment. So in all, there are six of us that work to keep the whole company running. We are so grateful for each of them and couldn't do it without everyone playing their important roles.

IT'S DEFINITELY EASIER TODAY TO COOK UP A STELLAR LIST OF ARTISTS, BECAUSE THERE ARE SO MANY AMAZING PEOPLE TO INVITE AND INCLUDE IN THE CURATION PROCESS

When you and I first met, I think we were in Colorado at the Paradise show... maybe three or four years back. Is that normal for you? Do you spend a lot of time on the road with your books?

We try to hit as many conventions as we can, but it can sometimes be tricky when we have a submission deadline that coincides with shows. We always wish that we could attend more conventions, but on average, we try to bring the books to three or four shows each year; and it's usually somewhere on the West coast (in the United States), because traveling and/or shipping the books is so costly,



Andy Barrett



Vince Villalvazo

so we usually attend shows that are closer to home to keep that manageable.

Taking a little side-step here, tell me about the scholarship program that you run—its past, present and future. Then maybe that will help me understand why more people don't do it! Ha—it sounds like hard work.

For the last two years we have offered a \$500 scholarship to art students who apply through our website by writing an essay and providing samples from their portfolios. While we had some incredible applicants, and were able to choose two amazing and qualified people each time, we are pretty shocked that more people don't apply to it. Perhaps it's just that many of the artists who work with us have already been to school or are self-taught and are now busy working. I'm not really sure. We are debating on whether to do it again in 2017, so it may or may not remain a part of our arts education program.

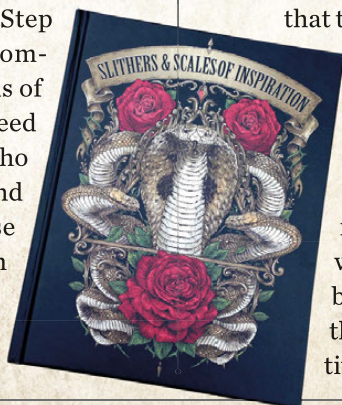
You also have a close affiliation with the DonorsChoose website too. That's such a wonderful idea. I don't know if we have anything like that over here but I'm going to find out! With that and the scholarship, it must leave a good taste in the mouth to see art working in such a positive way for the future.

Oh gosh, the arts education program through DonorsChoose has been SO incredible and worthwhile, and this will ALWAYS be a part of Out of Step Books and the goals that we have as a company. We have been able to help thousands of art students to get the supplies that they need and it's all because of the amazing people who participate in our books and the readers and artists who buy our publications. Because every artist can remember back to when they were first starting and looking for encouragement, direction, and sometimes just a place to create, I think that this



WE ALWAYS WISH THAT WE COULD ATTEND MORE CONVENTIONS, BUT ON AVERAGE, WE TRY TO BRING THE BOOKS TO THREE OR FOUR SHOWS EACH YEAR

program has a lot of special significance that resonates for everyone involved. We feel like this program is helping to keep the circle of creativity thriving, and believe that these kids who the program benefits will one day be the standout artists who submit to books like ours. It always feels great when you dedicate yourself to making something positive happen and then get to see it come to fruition. It's been an amazing experience and we are so grateful to each person who plays a part in making it all work! Every book that we create just helps to strengthen this program and that definitely keeps us motivated and inspired. ▣



To see exactly what Jinxi and Steve bring to the tattoo world, be sure to check out their full range of lovingly curated books at oosbooks.com.

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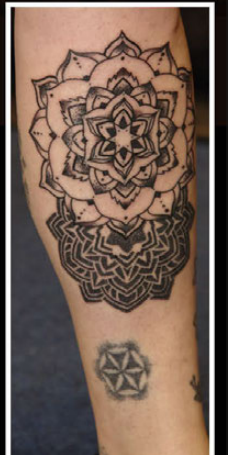
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Here be Dragons

Writing a book is not something you do sitting comfortably on your chair. Well, you can, but if you don't have enough imagination to create entire worlds and civilisations for your stories, you may find yourself doing what most writers do: observing the world around you and taking inspiration from it. Isn't reality stranger than fiction anyway? When living in Japan, Nick Hurst definitely got hit by his experience in the far East. But when it comes to exploring the underworld of the yakuza and irezumi, you never know where reality can take you.

www.nickhurst.co.uk

Nick Hurst is the author of the forthcoming thriller *Falling from the Floating World* which can be ordered at unbound.com/books/falling-from-the-floating-world

Words: Pascal Bagnot



六山

川



YOU ARE JUST ABOUT TO PUBLISH YOUR LATEST BOOK WHICH TAKES PLACE IN JAPAN. CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE PLOT?

Nick Hurst: It's a Tokyo-set thriller about an Englishman, Ray, who goes to Japan hoping to start his life afresh. Things begin well when he finds a job and a beautiful girlfriend, Tomoe, but then unravel when her father is found dead. Ray's reluctant to join the hunt for her father's killers but when Tomoe goes missing he's forced to act. He's quickly pulled into a perilous world of yakuza gangsters, corrupt politicians, tattooists and call-girls that echoes his dreams of Tokyo's feudal past. Soon he's not only searching for Tomoe but is fighting to save his own life.

HOW CONNECTED IS THE TATTOO TOPIC IN THIS PROJECT?

During the course of the story, one of the characters is forced to become an unlikely member of the yakuza. As part of this he's made to get a tattoo. There are only two scenes in which tattooing actually features but both they and the tattooist play a central part in the book. This is partly because they reveal clues that help unravel the plot, but also because (I hope) they are amongst the most captivating in the book.

DURING THE COURSE OF YOUR RESEARCH FOR THIS BOOK YOU DECIDED TO GET TATTOOED, WHY?

I'd thought on and off about having a tattoo since I was a teenager but never came up with anything I felt was per-

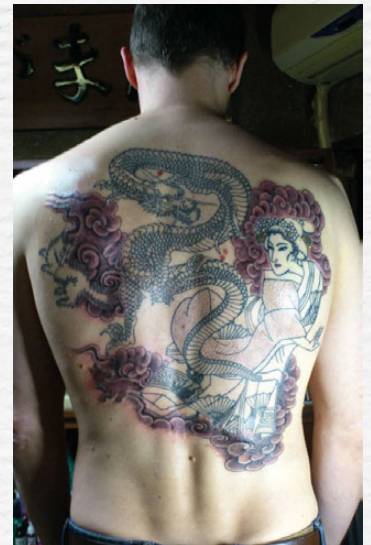
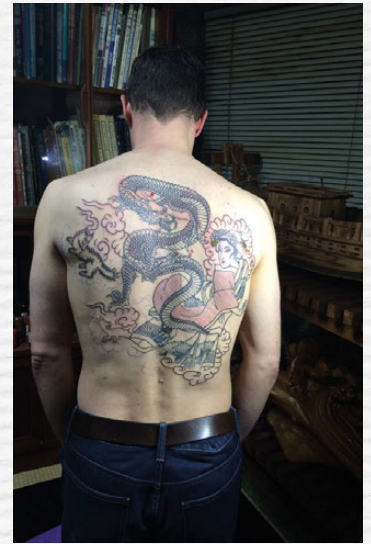
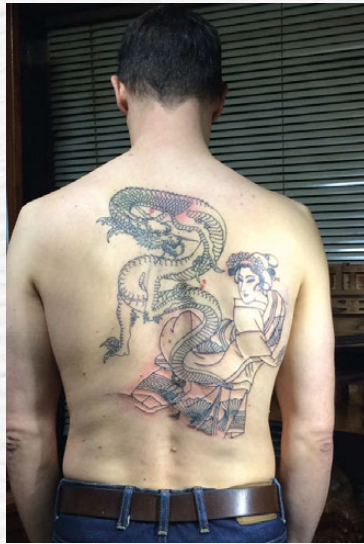
sonal enough to wear for the rest of my life. However, I was faintly aware of Japanese tattoos from when I'd first lived in Japan and when I found out about the connection with woodblock prints it made me think I'd found what I was looking for: it linked to my love of these prints and tied into a very personal project—my book. The fact I could mimic the tattoo the character in the story gets made it seem perfect—a bit like life imitating art imitating life (although hopefully not as pretentious as that sounds on the page!).

HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT THIS FIRST TATTOO?

Anyone who has one will know the experience of getting a first tattoo creates intense emotions and memories. The fact I was first tattooed in a completely alien environment (a traditional Japanese tattooist's studio) made mine especially strong. I hope that by including my experiences in the book I can convey them in a way that allows readers (and particularly tattoo fans) to live through them too.

HOW STRIKING WAS IT TO GET?

The first part of it—getting the outline to the dragon—was exciting and I couldn't have been happier at the end of the session. It was only after my second appointment that I questioned what I'd done—having initially had it in my head I might have a design take up about an A5 sized piece of skin I became very aware that most of my back



was going to be covered. But after recovering from the shock I couldn't wait for each new session to see the tattoo grow and look more incredible every week.

YOU CHOSE TO GET TATTOOED BY SENSEI HORITOKU IN TOKYO. HE'S NOT REALLY ONE OF THE EASIEST TRADITIONAL MASTER TO REACH, WHY DID YOU GO TO SEE HIM?

Originally I wanted to visit a traditional tattooist's studio just to understand the atmosphere so I could write a convincing scene. I did a lot of research to get a sense of the leading tattooists and their studios. Horitoku stood out because he seemed such an interesting character. In particular, his love of woodblock prints and the cultural background to Japanese tattoos, and his elusiveness and lack of interest in self-promotion appealed to me. But the most important thing was I loved his tattoos. When I visited his studio I already had it in my mind I might get something, and as soon as I looked at his flash I knew there was no going back.

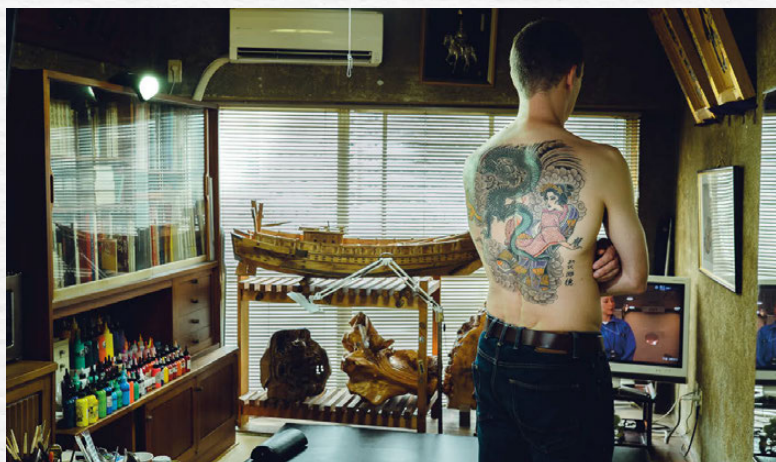
HOW DID YOU CHOOSE THE DESIGN?

In the story the character gets a tattoo that's based on the adventures happening in his life. I'd already written a first draft of the scene before I visited Horitoku and had

an idea of the tattoo I was going to include in the book. One of the motifs was a dragon and I thought I might get a small one too. Horitoku showed me a few designs and there was one I knew straight away I had to have—even though it was a lot bigger than in my plans. Then I saw the courtesan and the firefox and some backgrounds—and before I knew it I had the same tattoo as the character in the story covering the whole of my back...

WHAT DID YOU FIND DURING THE PROCESS OF GETTING TATTOOED YOU DIDN'T EXPECT?

There were 2 things. The first and most important was Horitoku. He had a bit of a reputation for being stern (/scary) and there are plenty of myths and rumours that make the idea of going to a traditional Japanese tattooist a little intimidating. I know that he had no time for moaners. Anyone he felt complained too much about the pain would be told to be quiet and if they didn't shut up he threw them out. However, he was just the loveliest person. I think he's mellowed considerably over the years but we got on well as people in any case. He liked the idea of the project—creating a tattoo based on the story in a thriller—and the fact it was a different challenge to the norm. The other thing was the pain—I hated the machine needles used for the outlines, particularly on sensitive



areas of my back. But I found the hand-poking process mostly quite relaxing and even fell asleep while I was being tattooed once.

AFTER THIS EXPERIENCE, WOULD YOU BE TEMPTED TO GO FURTHER THAN THE CHARACTER OF YOUR BOOK AND KEEP GETTING TATTOOED?

Yes! I actually got a top-up of a couple of maple leaves you can see Horitoku hand-poking in the trailer video for my book. My design doesn't fit into the traditional Japanese types of tattoo body coverage such as the arms and chest, or the full back and buttocks, so if I was to live in Japan again I'd be very tempted to fill in the gaps... but apart from thinking there's wasted 'canvas' space lying idle, I miss the sense of anticipation of what would come in the next session, and the excitement of looking in the mirror after Horitoku had called time for the day. So perhaps it's best I'm not living in Japan at the moment—I might get

carried away and I'm not sure my wife would appreciate the full bodysuit this could lead to if I went back.

DOES WRITING BOOKS OFTEN TAKE YOU FURTHER THAN YOU EXPECT?

I think it depends very much on the kind of books you write, but both of mine took me to very different places, geographically and culturally. The more you get exposed to these different worlds the more areas of interest open up and it's easy to find yourself doing the unexpected. There's probably also something about being out of your own social sphere that separates you from the normal constraints. This can be quite liberating but at the same time can lead you into doing slightly crazy things. I suppose it's similar to the kind of behaviour that leads to holiday romances, the difference being that you can pretend a romance didn't happen but there's no way to hide from a full-back tattoo or three years training with a kung fu master! ☐

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"To lose confidence in one's body is to lose confidence in oneself."

Simone de Beauvoir

*"The cosmos is within us. We are made of star-stuff.
We are a way for the universe to know itself."*

Carl Sagan



ART IS NOW TAKING A BACK SEAT TO THE PRIORITY OF POSITIVE SELF IMAGE, AND HOW WE TOGETHER CAN ACHIEVE THAT

Within the same year I watched my daughter be born into this world, I also held my step father's hand as he left this world. To watch one person's life end, with all their fears, pains, and hesitations, and another begin, free of all misconceptions and polarising viewpoints, completely changed my viewpoint on the life's we live. How do we go from bright vessels of stardust, to fearful creatures, living as though we could never measure up in our lives?

As I watch my daughter grow up, I begin to see the world she is seeing before her eyes. From an early age people around her attempt to put an emphasis on her "beauty", telling her she is "such a pretty girl". She looks sideways at them and says, "No, I'm Olivia Rose." As I turn and smile with pride at her ability to redirect this idea, pointing out how ridiculous it is to begin with, I start to become more fearful of the obstacles that will be thrown at her in this world. According to Kate Fox, poor body image begins at a very early age.

Fox says, "The latest surveys show very young girls are going on diets because they think they are fat and unattractive. In one American survey, 81% of

ten-year-old girls had already dieted at least once... they were already suffering from 'body-image distortion', estimating themselves to be larger than they really were."

She continues, "Among women over 18 looking at themselves in the mirror, research indicates that at least 80% are unhappy with what they see. Many will not even be seeing an accurate reflection. Most of us are aware of our society's emphasis on the importance of appearance, and we know what the socially sanctioned standards of beauty are. But not all of us accept or 'internalise' these standards: strong-minded individuals who reject current standards are more likely to have a positive body-image."

As a tattooist I get the honour of walking people through a new viewpoint of self body-image. Watching the world my daughter is growing up in, my treatment of my client has changed. Art is now taking a back seat to the priority of positive self image, and how we together can achieve that for them. One of these peo-



Leigh Rooks





“WE SELDOM REALISE, FOR EXAMPLE THAT OUR MOST PRIVATE THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS ARE NOT ACTUALLY OUR OWN. FOR WE THINK IN TERMS OF LANGUAGES AND IMAGES WHICH WE DID NOT INVENT, BUT WHICH WERE GIVEN TO US BY OUR SOCIETY.”

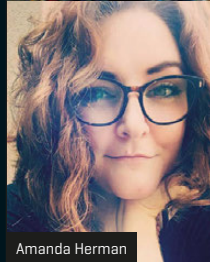
ALAN W. WATTS

ple I have been fortunate enough to tattoo is my wife, Amanda Herman. Here are Amanda’s thoughts on the matter, one that she will be able to speak much more eloquently on:

“Accentuating the beauty of any body is a privilege not only given to the proud and the brave, those that fit into the erroneous standard of conventional beauty, but an opportunity granted by the sleek contour of smooth lines and flowing colours of a well-placed piece of art on wondrous canvas, ever-ready for such adornment. Loving one’s body is a life-long process, and I believe empowerment comes kindly when we can take the idea of beauty from the inside and manifest that work, that imagination, that power, and that love, asking it to sit comfortably on our skin. We can dance in our creation, and I daresay this is our obligation.

“We are beauty in human form, and we dare not hide. So announce yourself in all your beauty, bursting from inside. Live through the lines.

“We are taught to dislike ourselves for the sake of the “sample



Amanda Herman

size.” I had a short-lived career in the modelling industry and, simultaneously, I had every internal reason to appreciate myself. My strong and able body could move in ways I had worked hard for it to comfortably execute, it could make

shapes I found beautiful and distinctly my own. It housed and protected the parts I was most proud of—my heart and my brain, holding the passions I dreamed every moment of pursuing, the intelligence and drive to gather information needed to project me forward, and the sensitivity that I am now aware is distinctly my own, driving my desire to affect those around me in a more positive way than just the common, passing niceties.

“I loved my size, while it seemed like everyone around me was telling me not to. I stretched past the 6-foot mark before I ever crossed over into my teen years. I was incredibly active, in shape, and a healthy 130 pounds, though my knees knocked bruises on each other and my hip bones poked straight through my specially-ordered, extra-long jeans. I was too skinny. I was ‘anorexic’. I was gross. I was too tall to walk in co-ed shows and I was too big to model in print. I was, both equally and opposing, too much and yet not enough, for the acceptedly judgmental society influenced by the culture, and the cultural view of beauty cus-



10 Harimate.

I YEARNED TO BE COMFORTABLE IN MY OWN SKIN BASICALLY, SO I MADE UP MY MIND THAT IT WAS TIME FOR EXTREME CHANGE AND TIME TO TAKE CHARGE

tomarily forced on a society.

“In my adult life, I’ve worn every shape from underweight to extra curvy, and I can honestly say, no size has ever been a reflection of the worth I believe I hold and the love I feel I deserve. The struggle each of us face with our own idea of beauty never really ends, as much as one can exclaim at an exhilarating volume that we are all beautiful, and it’s the societal standards that suck, thrusting our middle finger in the direction of whatever hypothetical demon we turn to with our blame.

“The story continues on through the betterment of our personal relationships with our skin, through the complete acceptance of our composition. When we start to look at one another as integral pieces of the world we wish we grew up in, containing all of the support and warmth we longed for when the cold tile of the bathroom floor seemed like the only place to belong. We are each a part of the whole: we make up the pieces of the very society we say we hate, yet we hold the power to alter the norm with every action we take, every single day. Once we begin to see each other as the perfect canvas that we all are, we immediately spark the revolution.”

Hearing the words of tattooist Paulo Su’lepe, that was where I fell in love with tattooing. Identity became something to take pride in, and was something that one could create. In Polynesian tattooing I found the ability to create an identity that can reflect not only the person we know we are, but the one we dream to be. The Māori also demonstrate this with the process of getting what is known as a ‘moko’.

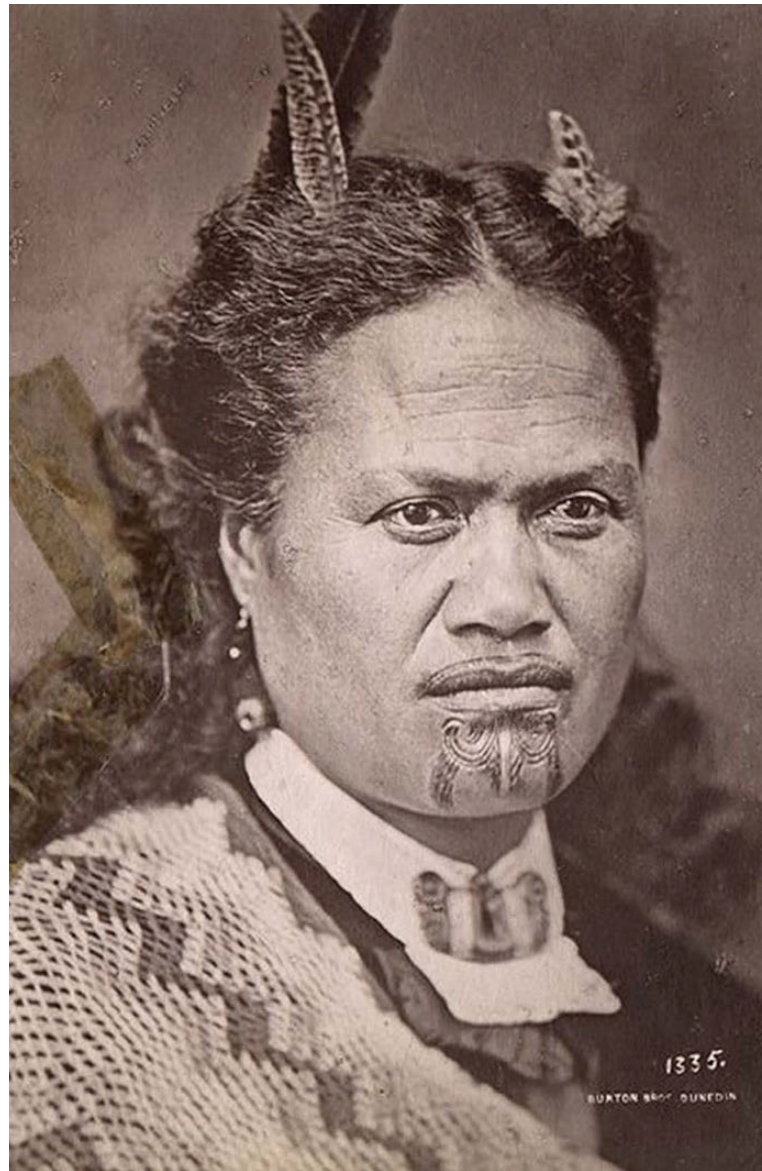
“A moko on the face is the ultimate statement of one’s identity as a Māori. The head is believed to be the most sacred part of the body. To wear the moko on the face is to bear an undeniable declaration of who you are.

“An ancient art form, its origin lies in West Polynesia. The intricate designs were chiseled into the skin using a tool called an uhi; ink was then smudged into the carved lines. Tā moko represents the wearer’s family heritage and social status—it is believed that the receiver visits a spiritual realm where they encounter their ancestors, returning as a new person.”

In receiving her Tā moko, Nanain Mahuta says,

“There were a number of milestones in my life, and it felt right to mark them in a way that is a positive statement about my identity, who I am, where I come from, and the contribution I want to continue to make. When I got it done, I felt incredibly calm. I felt like it had always been there.”

To create a positive statement about identity. What



better way is there to describe tattooing? Some clients have a way of reminding me of this, Leah Rooks is one of those clients. Leah’s words during our conversation while I was tattooing her gave me hope and inspiration for the world my daughter is growing up in. Leah has a passion and energy that is unapologetic and inspiring. Here are her thoughts.

“For the longest time I not only battled with the fear of what others thought of me, I was fighting a battle with myself. I was at this time extremely overweight and just really trying to find myself. I yearned to be comfortable in my own skin basically, so I made up my mind that it was time for extreme change and time to take charge. So I finally went and got the tattoo that I’d been wanting and it was all awesome from that moment on.

“I felt a sense of control over my life that I’d never felt before. The idea that I didn’t have control over my own body disappeared—with tattooing I had control over what went onto my skin and that gave me back some of that lost control. It bled back into other aspects of my life too and now I’m in a much more positive place than ever before.

“For instance, I mentioned about my struggle with being



I TAKE PRIDE IN KNOWING THAT I HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO HELP REMIND PEOPLE THAT THEY ARE BEAUTIFUL AND UNIQUE, JUST AS THEY WERE ON THAT DAY THEY WERE BORN, CREATED FROM THE STARDUST OF THE UNIVERSE



overweight. After receiving my tattoo and feeling absolutely liberated by the process, I felt an incredible rush of boosted self esteem. My tattoo was beautiful and I felt beautiful. It pushed me to improve my image even further. I went on to lose 160 pounds and am now heavily tattooed and happy.

“My decision to get tattooed put all of this in motion... empowered me to become the person that I am today. I’m constantly being complimented on how beautiful my body art is and the overall positive attention I receive is amazing. Of course there are still haters out there, but I’ve learned to overlook them for my own sanity because they don’t matter. I matter. That’s what’s most important. I love myself too much to live confined in the chains of judgment from others.”

Sitting at my chair, tattoo machine in hand, I take pride in knowing that I have the opportunity to help remind people that they are beautiful and unique, just as they were on that day they were born, created from the stardust of the universe. ▣



Tattoos and Piercing

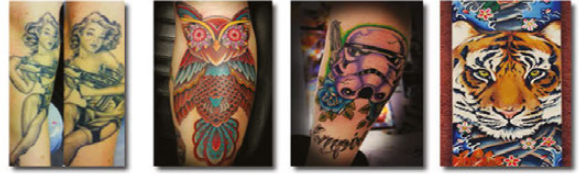


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VIVA LA REVOLUCION

A few months before the death of their revolutionary leader, Fidel Castro, I was able to visit the island of Cuba with a friend. The idea was to experience the country, with its communist history and anti-West tendencies, before globalisation and capitalism changed it forever.



Without getting too political, Cuba, like any country, has many positive and negative aspects. Its dedication to providing homes for its people means that homelessness does not exist; its investment in training doctors and nurses gives it one of the best healthcare systems in the world; and its limited industry has meant that much of the island remains beautifully natural and untouched.

Despite such fantastic achievements, there are still many areas where Cuban society can improve. In both its quality and quantity, food is one such area. Throughout my time in the capital city of Havana, I was not able to buy a single tomato, pepper, onion or potato. The internet

would be another area where Cuba lags behind much of the rest of the world. And though this situation is apparently changing, the reality for many Cubans is that they have to visit public WiFi spots around the cities—often carrying their laptops with them—in order to get online. And even then, what they are able to access is restricted by the government.

Despite its image as an island of anti-West and anti-American sentiment, it was surprising to see just how influential the USA has been. Even with a decades-old trade embargo preventing goods and people from moving between the two countries, clothing emblazoned with the US flag was common and the influence of US culture



was clearly visible within the modern Cuban music scene.

As much as the Cuban government would hate to admit it, I think the younger generation of Cuban citizens aspire to be a little more like their US cousins.

With the recent lifting of the embargo, relations between the USA and Cuba are improving, and the early signs are that the Cuban people are excited about what the future may hold. Among other things, the re-engagement of the two countries has coincided with a relaxation on Cuban laws surrounding private enterprise, allowing individuals to establish and expand their own businesses, in some cases for the very first time.

One such industry, hoping for a brighter future, is that of tattooing.

Though you wouldn't know it from the amount of people sporting ink on the street, until very recently, you could not legally become a tattoo artist in Cuba—and even now you have to be incredibly lucky to be awarded the necessary paperwork. Vice News reported that it existed in somewhat of a legal “grey area”, with an underground black market, fuelled by word of mouth, and being tolerated by the government. But with the growth in popularity of tattoos, the government recognised that individual

profits could be made, and soon began shutting down the artists' home-based-tattoo-parlours.

Following the near global trend, tattoos in Cuba went through a period of criminal association before becoming more tolerated, accepted, and then sought after. Writing on VanishingTattoo.com, Lars Krutak, the expert tattoo American anthropologist, writer and researcher said that as tattoos became more popular on the island during the 1980s, the government became more lenient, allowing artists to practice their trade as long as they joined government-run “artists associations”.

Despite government restrictions—for example outlawing the private ownership of an autoclave—the tattoo scene in Cuba slowly began to grow. Whilst many artists left the island to ply their trade abroad, away from government interference and with the ability to make greater profit, by 2005, Krutak believes there were “ten noted tattooists in Havana”, and the city had even hosted a number of “mini tattoo conventions” where artists could showcase their work.

Unable to advertise in the traditional sense of the word, and wary of how far the government were willing to tolerate their work, tattooing remained a minor industry driven by word of mouth, where artists trained themselves



and operated out of their own homes.

Krutak's interviews with the Havana-based artists echo what I discovered when I was there myself. If you wanted to find a tattoo parlour, you would have to go and stumble across one. And once you discovered it, you would find that the prices were surprisingly cheap. I was approached by one man who offered to do a piece on my arm, roughly the size of a smartphone, for no more than £20. And though the quality of the art was not the best I had ever seen, it was certainly not the worst either.

As with most equipment and technology in Cuba, the necessities for tattooing were refashioned and recycled. The embargo, and the shortages it has caused, has instilled a mentality that items should be used more than once as opposed to just thrown away. Acupuncture needles are said to be common, as is old hospital equipment. Those with contacts in other parts of Central or Northern America are able to "order" new equipment and ask friends and relatives to bring it with them when they visit.

Peruvian-born Cuban citizen, Naty Gabirela Gonzalez, writes that "like other phenomena that have taken long to reach the island owing to the information lag, tattoo art has not been extensively explored." It is because of this

limited knowledge, alongside the government's hesitancy in fully legalising and supporting the industry, that health and safety is not always adhered to. Gonzalez writes that "most of the time, neither the tattoo artist nor the person who gets a tattoo have any knowledge of the safety and sanitary requirements."

The lack of information on the subject and the lack of support from the government, then adds to the problem of gaining the material needed to tattoo in the first place. Not only is equipment near impossible to come by, even the basics are in short supply, gloves, ink, and magazines showcasing designs are not widely available on the island.

Gonzalez, and other advocates of fully legalising the trade, believe that the "solution is to offer a licence to tattoo artists, such that they can operate legally and are spared having to import their materials." This will allow the creativity of Cuban artists to flourish, improving the budding tattoo scene on the island, improving the health and safety for both artists and customers, and provide a source of tax income for the Cuban government. And though progress towards a more open economy is slow, it seems almost inevitable that Havana will be home to a safe and legal tattoo scene of its own at some point in the near future. □

LEGENDS OF THE HEAD HUNTER TATTOOISTS

Tattoo tourism is big business and nothing appeals more to the intrepid tattoo collector than receiving a traditional hand tapped tattoo from an indigenous tribal artist. Fade FX is the only westerner trained in the traditions of Iban hand tapped tattooing and learned the art while living and working in the heart of Borneo's rainforest. On her last visit to Borneo she met up with renowned hand tapped tattoo artist Jeremy Lo to discover the reality of tattoo tourism and uncover the truth behind its myths, misconceptions and legends.



The Iban people of the forests of Borneo are a tribe with a fierce reputation. Feared head hunters and warriors renowned for their bravery their heavily tattooed bodies were a symbol of their pride and commitment to protecting their tribe at any cost. With the advancement of the modern world and the shift from traditional beliefs to a Christian way of life many of the old ways have been lost but what remains are the startlingly beautiful hand tapped tattoos.

“Hand tapped tattooing is really easy; it’s just two sticks,” states Jeremy in his typically low key, casual manner.

I was sat with Jeremy outside an Orang Ulu longhouse which is a traditional Iban home. Jeremy taught himself

hand tapped tattooing at a time when the skills in this ancient art were being lost and I was fortunate enough for him to pass those skills onto me.

“It’s one stick with the needle to apply the ink, the other acts as a hammer and it’s just a matter of the size and weight of the stick depending on what part of the body you are working on. Just like a machine different parts need different set ups.”

Jeremy sticks out his arms clenching his fists simulating the hand tapped tattoo set up.

“This holds the needle and the other is the hammer and the voltage is your hands.”

It’s an extremely understated way to describe a very



technical and delicate procedure where success or failure of the tattoo is totally dependent on the artist's intuition, experience and feel for how the stick, needle and human skin combination will interact. In many ways it is the hands on instinctual approach that is a big part of the appeal of hand tapped tattooing.

"For the ink they used to use ash or burnt carbon from below the cooking pot. They'd scrape it off and mix with sugar cane water boiled down to the right texture."

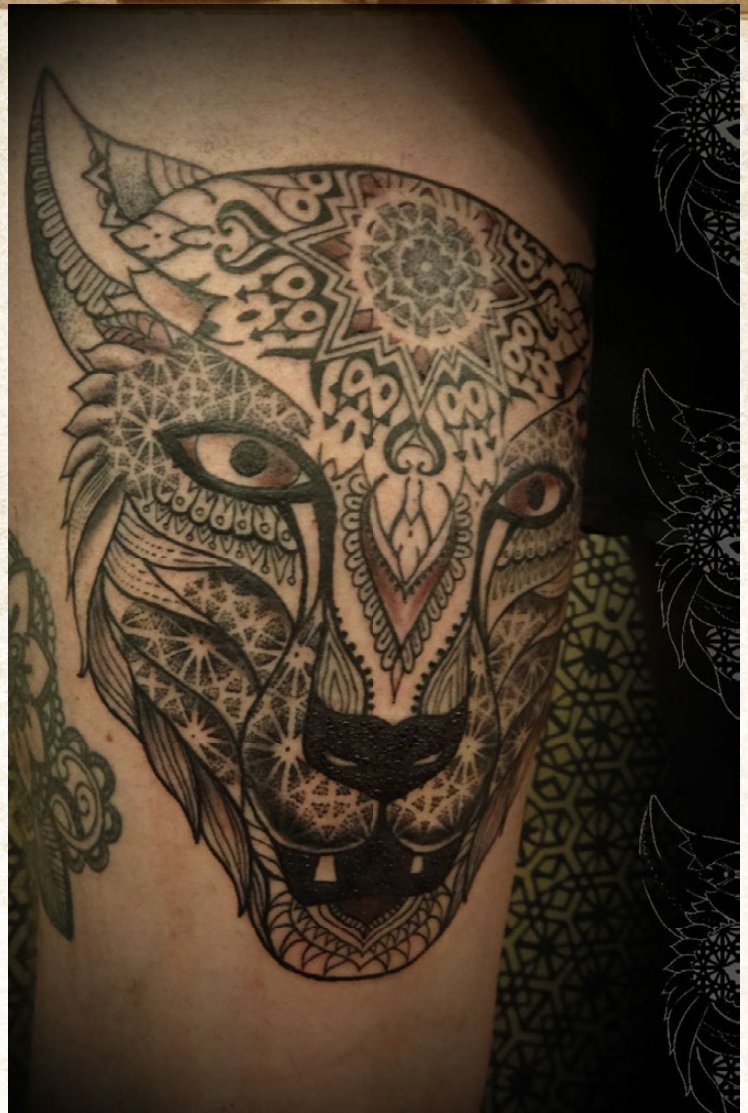
Much like the making of the tattoo tools the ink production is simple in theory but tricky in practice as making the ink too thick hampers application, too thin and it won't hold in the skin effectively. Much of the knowledge on how to prepare the best inks was lost as the elders in the Iban tribe turned away from their traditional beliefs and embraced Christianity. The Iban did not possess knowledge of writing until contact with out-

siders and there are no recipe books for making tattoo ink the old fashioned way. Jeremy had to learn by trial and error.

"I don't use traditional ink now. I've tried making it but I'm never happy with the results and it's hard work to make in bulk."

Jeremy's skill as a hand tapped tattooist is

The first western missionaries came to the North Borneo and the land of the Iban people back in the late nineteenth century. The stories they returned home with helped fuel the image of the noble savage and solidified the view that the jungle tribes needed civilising and taking away from their barbarous practices. This view of illiterate, feral, proto-humans equipped with nothing more than a spear, a loin cloth and the lust for human flesh stuck for decades until in the post war period European and American anthropologists work began to filter into mainstream society and the image of the savage was gradually reappraised. In an act of cultural over compensation the new age and hippy communities (along with eager academics, artists and authors) painted indigenous people as peaceful, children of nature who were custodians of knowledge and a way of life untainted by the greed and grind of industrial expansion. It is this romantic image of a pure spiritual way of life linked intrinsically to the land that gave Borneo's reemerging tattoo community a jump off point by which to sell their designs. Soon the tourists began to come wanting to connect with this myth and Borneo's tattoo community was happy to perpetuate the misconceptions and give the customer the meaningful experience they so desperately wanted.



in demand more than ever and it's no surprise he's turned to bottled ink to meet the needs of his customers who travel to Borneo from all over of the world.

Tattoo tourism is rapidly growing in Borneo with increasing numbers of tattoo hunters coming to the country to seek out an authentic tattoo experience. As tribal indigenous cultures continues to be reevaluated by successive generations of westerners the old images of fierce cannibal head hunters and noble savages are dropping away but what still remains in many tourists eyes is a romantic and simplistic view of the Iban and their culture; in particular their tattoo heritage.

"Tribal culture here in Borneo, back in the day people just wanted to get tattooed. It was aesthetics they just wanted to show off. It was just to show those in the other village that I have more tattoos than you, that I'm better than you."

For many westerners disillusioned with a post-industrial lifestyle of fast food, commercial culture and capitalist philosophies the Iban way of life appears more honest, down to earth and genuine and it is this desire for cultural authenticity which draws so many people to the Island to have ancient symbols inked into their skin. Sadly for many tattoo tourists not all is as authentic as it seems.

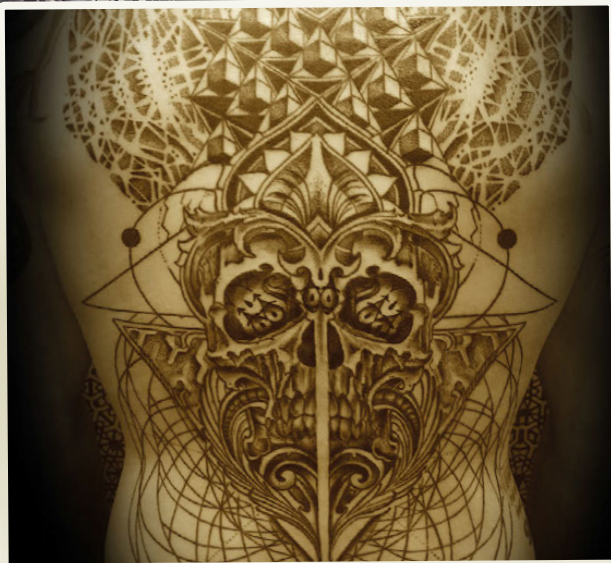
"The meanings of tribal tattooing in Borneo has changed and it's always changing. The meaning has changed because of

bullshit from tourists," Jeremy says with a wry smile before back tracking.

"Ok not bullshit from tourists but it's like this. Tourists come, they want to get a tattoo. They want to get a meaningful tattoo and tattoo artists made it up to make money," he smiles again aware he is breaking a trade secret and cracking a the myth of tribal tattoo tourism wide open.

"They made it all up to make money. It's like the most made up joke about Borneo tattooing is the spiral, Borneo life thing that symbolises your journey. Its starts because tourists want a story, they want a fantasy story to bring back to their country and of course tattoo artists just made up all the stories."

While many would be shocked at Jeremy's disclosure it is not surprising; any form of tourism is based on giving the customer a good experience. Much like the fantasy of Disney Land where people can indulge in a simpler more concrete experience unhampered by the complexities and intricacies of the real world Iban tattoo culture has



adapted to meet the demands of a market desperate for an authentic, exotic, cultural connection that they see lacking in their own humdrum community. Many people come to Borneo not looking for the reality but wanting to immerse themselves in the fantasy gained from films, literature, music and pulp spirituality longing for the dark romance of the rainforest, the clichés of an unspoiled culture and the yearning for a taste of what it is like to live a simpler more honest life. Through the experience of receiving a hand

tapped tattoo they feel connected to this fabricated myth and have something to show on their return home to prove to the world at large that they too are the real deal.

“Tattoo artists made up that this tattoo means protection, this tattoo means safe journey, whatever just to make money. The more you pay the more meaningful it is,” that wry smile spreads across his face again, “Its easy; just like that.”

Jeremy’s view of the heritage of Iban tribal tattooing is one that dispenses with the myths, lies and legends shelled out to rich tourists eager to culturally appropriate an ancient art form and absorb its meaning through the power of cold hard cash. His interpretation is far more honest, mundane and accurate.

“Back in the day tattoos meant I’ve got a bigger tattoo than you I can take more pain than you. That’s it; I’m a bad ass!” ▣



AN EYE IS UPON YOU

A TATTOOED FAIRY TALE

Once-upon-a-time, not so many years ago (about three really), a tattooed man, who rather understandably had a bit of a thing for tattooed women in general, started following a particular tattooed woman on Instagram

The Particular Tattooed Woman was under no pretensions, the Tattooed-Man had no doubt cast his Inter-Net far and wide and this Particular Tattooed Woman did not consider herself to be especially special. Just one little brightly coloured fish amongst the many brightly coloured fishes swimming the deep waters of the international tattoo-sea.

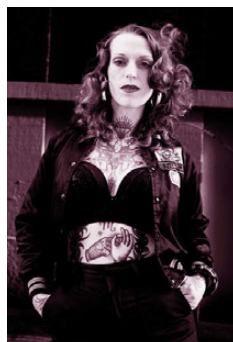
Still, one thing did set her apart, just a little—this Particular Tattooed Woman wrote a column for a monthly tattoo magazine. A real magazine, one printed onto real paper and held by real hands, sold all over the kingdom (and beyond it too).

The Real Magazine had a whole legion of loyal readers, and a great number of them tracked down the Particular Tattooed Woman online, following her along the densely decorated corridors of Instagram, or adding her as a friend on the seemingly Never-Ending Book of Many Faces. The Particular Tattooed Woman, already flattered by the attention of the loyal readers, was not at all perturbed by the new presence of the unknown Tattooed-Man, in fact, she barely noticed him at all, not even when his Face also took up a place in her virtual Book.

Would the Particular Tattooed Woman have noticed the Tattooed-Man sooner if the Unholy Trinity had been made complete and the Tattooed-Man had also feathered his social media bow using plumes of the Twittering Bird? Perhaps, but the Particular Tattooed Woman used Twitter only as weapon, armoury in the battle against the unspeakable horrors that lurked when a package was marked as 'out for delivery via Yodel', or as a sword to slay the myriad dragons populating customer service departments up and down the fair isle. Here, in the most bitter-tasting corner of the Internet, the Particular Tattooed Woman's eyes were most often blinded with fury, so noticing anyone at all was unlikely, and the Tattooed-Man did not tweet,



Adam White



PAULA HARDY KANGELOS
DiamondBetty

so there was nothing for the Particular Tattooed Woman to notice anyway.

Instead, the Tattooed-Man remained partially obscured by the filtered-light of the Insta-forest, making only occasional likes and the littlest of comments until a magical creature intervened. That magical creature would come to be known as the Weasel of Good Fortune.

It began on a dark evening in the early autumn time, when the Particular Tattooed Woman found herself entirely alone, walking in the gloom, having earlier that day received a decree from the insidious unseen monster known only as The Estate Agent, demanding she vacate her Castle-Flat as soon as the magical contract, The Lease, expired.

The Particular Tattooed Woman was



Dek Kent

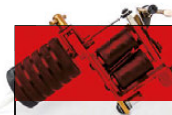
FINDING IT DISAPPOINTINGLY FULL OF NOTHING BUT BUILDERS RUBBLE, DESPAIR PREPARED TO CREEP INTO HER SOUL

heartbroken, and wished desperately for a Fairy Godmother who could solve the national housing crisis with a twinkly swipe of wand, or at least, some kind of small sign that the universe would realign favourably and that better days (and a new castle-flat) were still to come.

Presently, the Particular Tattooed Woman happened across the most magical of all magic-vessels, a big yellow skip, and finding her melancholia momentarily lifted by the hope that fills every skip in the land, she peeked inside. Finding it disappointingly full of nothing but builders rubble, despair once again prepared to creep into her soul, like the rising damp of too-long trousers greeting wet pavement. Then, amongst the concrete dust something momentarily glimmered, and the skip full of hope fought back the damp of despair long enough for the Particular Tattooed Woman to lean in for closer look, where she found what glittered was not diamonds, but instead a glass eye.

One of a pair of glass eyes, a pair of glass eyes glued into a rather haphazardly taxidermied creature of unspecified species, minus it's tail. And so the Particular Tattooed Woman did what had to be done, and dug the dead creature out of the rubble with her bare hands, shook off as much dust as possible and took it back to her soon-to-be-vacated castle-flat. There, she photographed the creature, and despite still not being stoatally (sic) sure of it's species, she published the photograph across all social media platforms with the caption 'If Life Gives You Weasels, make Weasel-ade.'

The Tattooed-Man must've been weasily pleased, because he wrote to the Particular Tattooed Woman shortly after, and began the second chapter of this story. A chapter that can be read in next month's Real Magazine.



CLASSIFIEDS

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

Electric Kicks Tattoo Studio.

We are a busy tattoo studio in Pontefract, just on the outskirts of Leeds in West Yorkshire. We are looking for one or two tattoo artists to join our team. You must have a varied portfolio with 3 years plus studio experience. No apprentices, drama or egos. The studio has been in business for 6 years and we are looking to expand. Please send artwork and resume to Sam at electric.kicks@hotmail.com

Hughes Tattoos has expanded

and we are looking for a permanent full time experienced tattoo artist. Preferably starting the beginning of February so please e-mail or call us for more info hughestattoos@hotmail.com We are based in Sawbridgeworth CM21 9JX [01279882330]

Studio Twenty Six in Maidstone Kent

are looking for another artist to join a busy creative team in the heart of kent, artist must have a good portfolio, client base would be awesome but we have a regular flow of work coming through, we are not looking for a short term artist someone who wants to grow with the studio, can do part time hours if required. Please email info@studio-26.co.uk for more details.

Artist wanted Sacred Steel Tattoo.

We are looking for a new tattoo artist to join our talented team. The right applicant must have a highly professional attitude, experience and a strong portfolio. If you are looking for a new studio get in touch on 0247 767 1150 or sacredsteeltattoo@gmail.com

The Tattooed Arms, Lincoln are looking for the right artist

to join their busy team. Experienced artists only, to work 3/4 days a week [to be discussed]. Guest artists would also be considered. Please contact us via www.TheTattooedArms.com or visit the shop to apply, must have a portfolio.

We are looking for an experienced tattooist

to join us here at Infinite Ink in Coventry. You must be ambitious and hard working as we are a very busy custom studio. You must have a good portfolio of your most recent work, including photos and drawings. Please contact Donna at infinite.ink@hotmail.co.uk. Facebook- https://m.facebook.com/infiniteinkcoventry. Instagram- infiniteink_coventry

New studio in Dumfries, Scotland area.

I'm looking for someone to join me in my studio on a permanent basis. You must be an experienced Tattoo Artist. Full time/Part Time hours are available. Must have a portfolio and be a good all-rounder with excellent customer service skills. Please email me on rejuvenation115@gmail.com or call 07495 808 366 or business number 01848 331313.

Artist Wanted: Black Lotus tattoo studio Liverpool

are looking for an artist to work in our busy established studio. Applicants must have experience and a strong portfolio, able to handle appointments and walk in clientele, and no drink, drug or ego problems. For more information please send us an email with some examples of your work and some info about yourself to black.lotusta2@hotmail.co.uk

Tattoo Artist Wanted at Ritual Art Tattoo, Rainham, Kent.

Applicants will be expected to have their own kit and a good tattoo portfolio with an individual style. You will be expected to begin tattooing immediately and work a 4 day week between 10:30-18:00 Tuesday-Saturday. TO APPLY: send an email titled "PICK ME!" to info@ritualarttattoo.com

TATTOO ARTIST WANTED, WOLVERHAMPTON AREA.

Our busy, up and coming professional studio is looking for a full time tattoo artist to join the team! We are looking for committed and enthusiastic artists, ideally looking for a black and grey or realism specialist, but we will consider all applicants with strong portfolios. No Drink, Drug or attitude problems. Send your portfolio to chris@cultofthesphynx.com

Space to rent for an experienced Body Piercer

at Inkerrmans Tattoo Studio in Crystal Palace. Must be willing to do all the piercings that come into the studio, & have own Client base. Good opportunity to build your own business. Contact Steve - inkerrmans@hotmail.com - 07851867578

The Black Rabbit Tattoo Collective - Artist Wanted:

We are a well established & busy studio in Newbury, Berkshire. Attractive rates for good artists. If you are interested, please email: blackrabbitcollective@live.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 is finding faith in small things...

We continually dedicate time and space to talking about big tattoos. Those life-changing masterpieces, those epic creations of art that often literally take our breath away. But what about their tiny counterparts?

As magazines, we strive to appreciate tattoos and their constant ability to break artistic boundaries. Present work seems to be more astounding each time we release a new issue. That's why we never run out of things to say!

Well, this week, I've gone and had a tiny tattoo. I'm sure its artist won't mind me admitting that this was a quick and simple tattoo. It didn't require significant design time, skin trauma, colour, shading or highlights. Now, I'm not suggesting that it didn't take skill to create, just that it's not going to win any upcoming industry awards.

As I began to write this column, I debated if it was OK for me to grant a whole page to this perfectly small addition to my body. It got me thinking... are tattoos too regularly defined by, not just their size but, the way they look in general?

Stupid question, right? They are works of art! How else can we converse about them, if not aesthetically? But what about the invisible relationships tattoos have with their wearers, the impact these seemingly trivial designs have on their clients? Should we be assigning space to those stories, no matter the (lack of) award-winning potential of the actual tattoo?

Over the years, as we get heavily tattooed, do we forget about our tiny old friends? It's how most of us start off, indeed. A quote from a favourite song, the initials of someone close who has passed... sound familiar? As we become ink geeks over time, as we are exposed to infinite unbelievable artists and mind-boggling tattoo styles, we begin to want bigger, better and more brilliant.

It felt weirdly nostalgic getting tattooed this week—the numbers '03.12.11' inked on my left arm would mark a 5 year anniversary with my boyfriend. I was reminded of that



Angharad Chappell

WHAT ABOUT THE INVISIBLE RELATIONSHIPS TATTOOS HAVE WITH THEIR WEARERS, THE IMPACT THESE SEEMINGLY TRIVIAL DESIGNS HAVE ON THEIR CLIENTS?



BECCY RIMMER
BeccyRimmer

tattoo virgin excitement again.

Imagine a convention competition that didn't just judge the tattoo's execution, but also customer connection and satisfaction in order to decide 'the best tattoo'.

We're an industry that's always moving forward. I'm not trying to suggest that we urgently need change, or that something is broken but... perhaps these tiny tattoos can help us re-find a certain something we may have lost along the way. ▣



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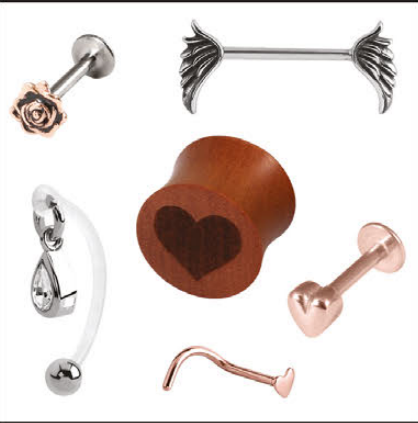


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