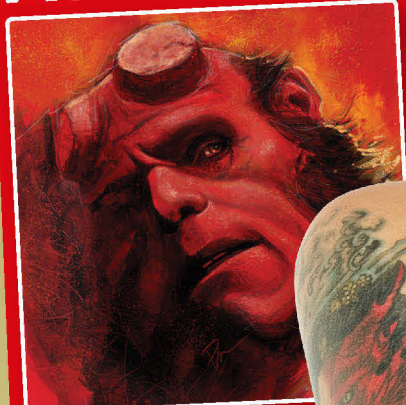


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I AM SPARTACUS

I know a guy—friend of a friend of a friend kind of thing—who wears the same t-shirt every day. It has a tattooed sugar skull design on it. It's not actually that same shirt, he has five of them all exactly the same and wears them in rotation. When he's at work, he wears a suit with a shirt, so it's not as bad as it may seem but when he's not at work, this is the shirt he wears.

Why? One evening, he met a girl he really liked at a tattoo show. She gave him her phone number and they agreed they would go out sometime but when he got home, he found he had lost the number and was thoroughly devastated. This friend of a friend (of a friend), he doesn't get out so much and has been single for so long, he may as well still live with his parents.

Anyway, he wears this shirt because it was the one he was wearing when they met and he is ever hopeful they might pass in the street and she will recognise him... and presumably, the rest of his life will play out like a scene from Snow White and everybody will live happily ever after. Poison apples and all.

I bumped into him again—at another tattoo show oddly enough, where he told me this story. First he asked me if I knew her (which I don't—or didn't think I did) and then he told me this story. He's a nice guy, so we sat down for a coffee and as he was telling me other stories of his life, I noticed many people walking by with similar t-shirts on.

The Gods can be mean creatures when they are bored. Why else would this be the exact moment that I should recognise the girl of his dreams walking behind him with another guy. Let's say it was a moment of supreme boredom for those Gods because the other guy was also wearing that very same sugar skull shirt.

What are the chances?

Which left me in a real dilemma. Should I tell him and point them out? I hate to see people waste their lives on dreams built on sand that moves beneath their feet. I leaned forwards and did that 'don't look now, but...' thing.

Of course, he turned around straight away



Brent Goudie

THIS FRIEND OF A FRIEND DOESN'T GET OUT SO MUCH AND HAS BEEN SINGLE FOR SO LONG, HE MAY AS WELL LIVE WITH HIS PARENTS



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and studied them.

“That’s not her.”

“It really is. I would stake my hair on it.”

“Nope. She was wearing a red dress. It’s definitely not her.”

Wow. Some people! I made my excuses to leave and wandered off pondering something I’ve suspected for a long time. People tend to assume that other people think exactly the same as they do, but this is not true at all and is the source of every single problem in the world.

It’s tough having a mind of your own in the jungle. Hold onto it. It might be all you ever have in your arsenal. ☐

// THERE IS
SOMETHING
GOING ON ...



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This month, Wayne Simmons meets Max Pniewski, tattooist and fretboard shredder.

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With bold and distinct linework, Loz Thomas draws geometrical shapes with perfection. Steven Kenny stands in awe.

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Sean Herman continues to bring us stories that mean something behind his tattooing - and this month hands in a peach!

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The Philippines is steeped in tattoo history. Permanent markings on skin were an integral part of the islands' indigenous tribes for hundreds of years,

long before the Spanish conquistadors arrived in the 16th century. Today, the country's tattoo landscape is drastically different. Barbara Pavone takes an extreme road trip.

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We couldn't let the passing of a milestone in a comic anniversary pass without mention... those Judge Dredd tattoo just keep on coming!

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TATCON TICKETS + ROOM!

Tatcon in Blackpool (18 - 20 August 2017) is making a real name for itself out there—if you're interested in seeing what all the fuss is about—and why wouldn't you—we have a major prize of a Weekend Pass (including the Friday) plus full B&B accommodation + evening meal—which leaves you with no excuse not to get a huge piece of work underway! For five runners-up we also have five pairs of tickets up for grabs. If you fancy your chances, head over to skindeep.co.uk/competitions and fill in your details with the comp name TATCON. Winners will be picked out of the hat in plenty of time for you to set the video recorder and wash your hair and get down there.

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Cork Rd, Waterford, Ireland
waterfordcitytattoo.com

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Northampton Saints Rugby Football Club
Franklin's Gardens, Weedon Rd,
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northamptoninternationaltattooconvention.com

YORK INTERNATIONAL TATTOO CONVENTION
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Huntington Rd, York YO32 9PX
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SOUTHAMPTON TATTOO FESTIVAL
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by
Ali Burke



A tattoo show can be a strange place—particularly up at the judging table—sometimes, the tattoos that win awards are not necessarily your favourites. Most times, you can be outvoted by the other judges but now and again, you can love something at a personal level for all the wrong reasons and have to put that aside in the name of technical ability.

Then there are the tattoos where you look at your fellow judges and whisper things like: “Wow. That’s the best thing

I’ve seen all day. Something special is going to have to come up to beat that.”

Which I believe where my exact words as we sat up there at GBTS. This image of Totoro (from the award winning Japanese cult classic *My Neighbour Totoro*—natch) ticked box after box of all of us.

Neat, clean, solid, fun. well placed... the list is long and comprehensive.

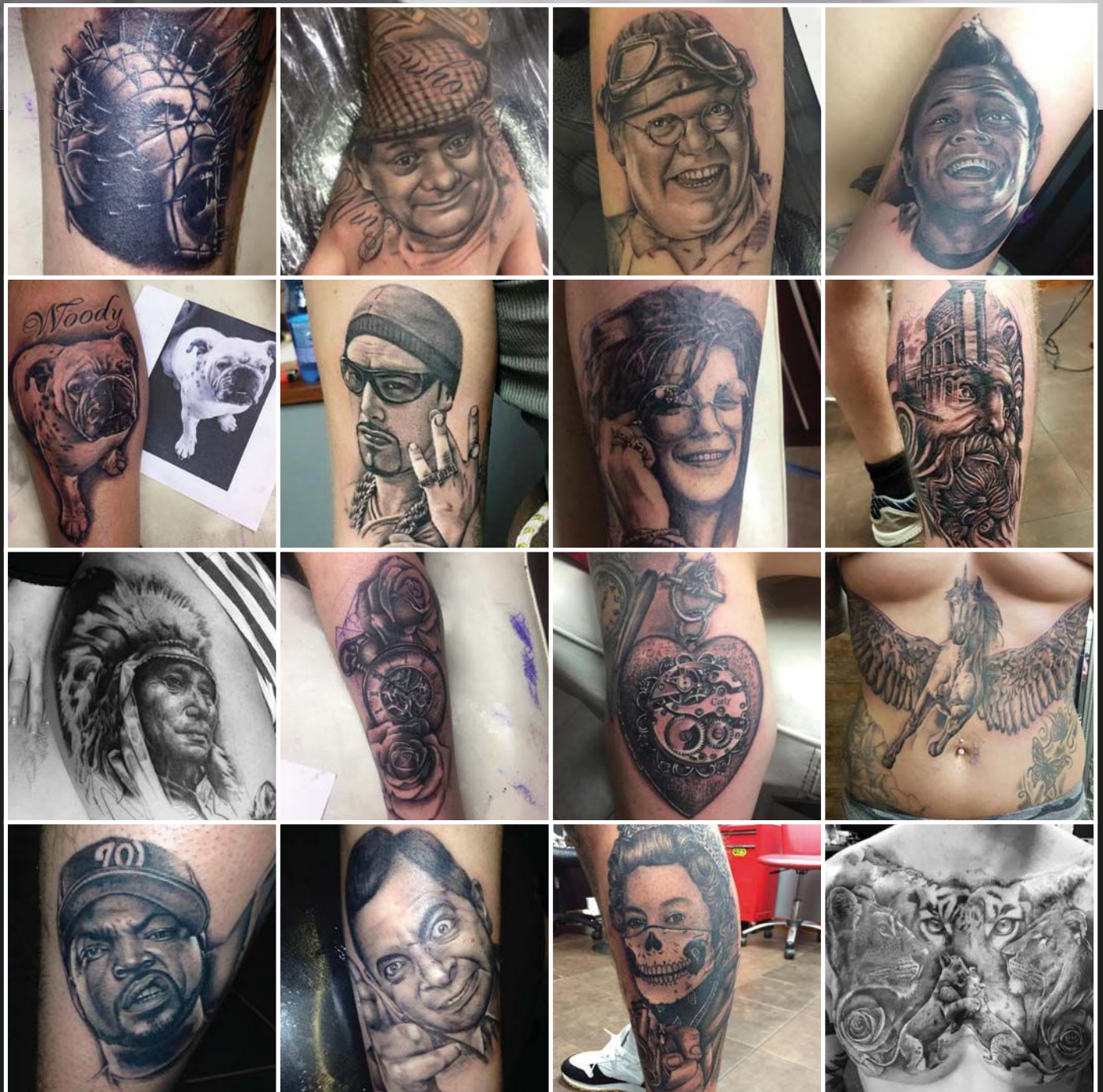
Kudos Ms. Burke... that’s a damn fine piece of work.

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AFTER HOURS

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What do tattoo artists do when they're not tattooing? In After Hours, Wayne Simmons talks to some of his favourite artists about the things they get up to when the studio lights go down. This month, he meets Max Pniewski, tattooist and guitar shredder

Back in the day, before Kurt Cobain came on the scene and sent me down a different path altogether, I was something of a metalhead. We're talking the late 80s here and a crowd of us at school were just getting into music properly—you know, as opposed to humming along to whatever junk they were spinning on Radio 1. We started off with hair metal, bands like Poison and Enuff Z'Nuff, before moving onto more progressive bands like King's X, Saigon Kick and Queensryche. Of course, none of these names will mean anything at all to our younger readers but for those of an age, folks who like me remember Kerrang! magazine when it was good and the awesomeness that was Tommy Vance's Friday Rock Show, those endorphins are probably exploding right now, yeah?

Max Pniewski is one such person. I first ran into Max at 2014's Tattoo & Toy where he was blasting out some of his trademark LEGOLISM ink. He's something of a veteran, no stranger to these pages or indeed the scene in general, having been tattooing for close to twenty years. Max runs Southmead in Bristol and recently



opened a new shop in his native Poland. Max is also a metalhead—in fact, I've spotted him at many gigs over the years. And like me, it's been in his blood for a long, long time. "From the time Mum brought me back from the hospital after giving birth," he laughs. His older brother was a bit of a rocker, blasting all the good stuff in his room as Max was learning how to walk. "I've been listening to Iron Maiden since that very day, to be honest."

Thus began a lifelong obsession with all things metal. Max has a particular fondness for Adrian Smith, Maiden's longstanding axeman and one of the most respected metal guitarists out there. But he got into other bands, too. "Testament, Slayer, Motorhead and Accept. Those were a few of my favourites." Of course, growing up in a small town in Poland, Max wasn't seeing too many metal bands rolling through town on tour so he wasn't being exposed to a lot of new music. "Also metal gigs were very, very underground," he adds. "I remember some good home grown Polish rock bands playing around, bands like Lady Pank or Perfect, but not so many metal bands. Standout gigs were always the Maiden



I'VE BEEN LISTENING TO IRON MAIDEN SINCE THE VERY DAY MUM BROUGHT ME BACK FROM THE HOSPITAL AFTER GIVING BIRTH

ones, though. It's more like theatre than the average metal gig—a massive production. I love to watch them live. I've seen them seven times already.”

Maiden, and particularly Adrian Smith's playing, inspired Max to pick up the guitar himself. His first guitar was fairly basic, as it is for most of us starting out. “A very cheap copy of the Fender Strat—a Squire made in China. When I think about it now, I'm wondering how I didn't give up, but, as I always say, determination and hard work can take you anywhere.” Back then, there was no Youtube to call up for guitar lessons. Aspiring shredders made do trading chords and licks with mates at school or trying to work out what their idols were doing on record. “It was the best way back then,” Max reckons. “You trained not only your guitar skills but also your ears. Now it's all much easier but I think it creates the ‘mechanical shredders’, as I call them. They have much less feeling when they move on to playing their own stuff.”

As for Max, no prizes for guessing the first song he learned to play. “Children Of The Damned by Iron Maiden of course,” he beams. “I'm always laughing because every-





WE WOULD PLAY IN VENUES HOLDING CLOSE TO A THOUSAND PEOPLE, ALL OF WHOM TREATED US LIKE THE REAL IRON MAIDEN



body talks about Malmsteen, Petrucci, Satriani or Vai,” some of the more famous shredders from that time period. “But if you focus on Adrian’s stuff, he is complete as a guitarist. An amazing composer and player. He puts so much feeling into his solos, there are no notes I would add or take away because they are just perfect. He could play two notes or two hundred notes, and it’s all amazing.”

Before long, Max was taking his first steps into performing himself, joining and forming bands in his native Poland. Phantasmagoria is one of the most notable bands he was in. Formed in 1997, according to Metal Archives, they’re described as a heavy thrash band. “Phan-

tasmagoria was a combination of Iron Maiden melody and Slayer’s aggression,” Max tells me. “That’s the closest I can compare it to. We were touring quite regular. Played a lot of gigs across Poland. I was also playing in various cover bands.” One of these was an Iron Maiden tribute band which, for Max, conjures up some of his best memories from that time. “We would play in venues holding close to a thousand people, all of whom treated us like the real Iron Maiden. It was an amazing experience.”

Sadly, it all came to an end, Phantasmagoria splitting in 2005. “It was natural thing,” Max reflects. “We just came to the stage where we wanted to sort our lives out, have families and all that adult stuff. It’s just very hard to do that while playing thrash metal in Poland.”

Max ended up moving to England where he focused mostly on his tattooing, but the passion for music never died. Soon, he was back on the stage, playing death metal this time, but in the end his passion for tattooing won out, being something he could make a living out of. “I would still play guitar to relax, to forget about tattoos for a couple of hours at a time. Like, every time I would get artist’s block, I’d go and shred for thirty minutes and I’d be ready to draw and design again pretty much straight away!”

The collector’s instinct has also remained, Max’s array



WE JUST CAME TO THE STAGE WHERE WE WANTED TO SORT OUR LIVES OUT, HAVE FAMILIES AND ALL THAT ADULT STUFF. IT'S JUST VERY HARD TO DO THAT WHILE PLAYING THRASH METAL IN POLAND

of axes building over the years as opposed to diminishing. "I have too many, Wayne," he laments. "A Dean Dime signature, a Yamaha Pacifica 821dx, a Schecter Omen 6, BC Rich Mockingbird, Gibson SG and an electro-acoustic." Safe to say, he loves all his children equally. The amp he's playing through is very impressive, if you're a fellow guitar geek. "A Peavey 5150 Van Halen Signature, plugged into an Orange cab. It's just the perfect set up for me," he says. "I don't want to change it at all."

And before very long, he'll be road testing that set-up: with this year marking the 20th anniversary of Phantasmagoria's formation, plans are afoot to put the band back



together. "It's the perfect time to start again," Max reckons. "This time with more focus on fun and less stress, if you know what I mean. We want to do a little tour of Poland, stopping at the cities we played our best gigs. People still ask for the band twelve years later, you know. It's an amazing feeling and I want to feel that buzz again!" ▣

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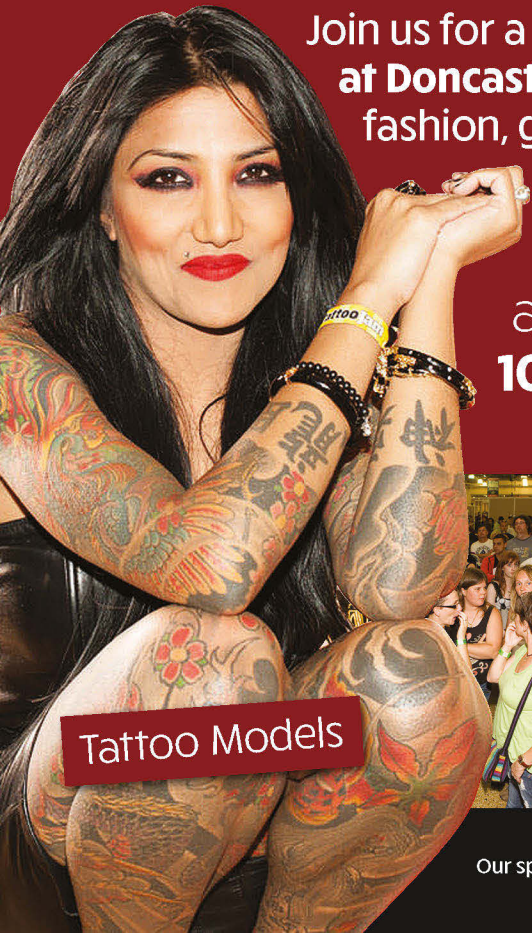
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THE DOTTED LINE

With bold and distinct linework, Loz Thomas draws geometrical shapes with perfection. Using dot shading to render his designs to life, human biology collides with animal representations; half human, half beast. Loz points his machine towards creating intricate roman sculptures, flourishing floral and spliced skulls. In his work the fragmented and ethereal converge to form pieces that echo dream like scenarios and bodily transcendence

HOW DID YOU BECOME A TATTOO ARTIST? AND WHAT GOT YOU INTERESTED IN THE PRACTICE OF TATTOOING?

My tattooing career came from just being nosey really! I stuck my head in a few studios looking to get tattooed and eventually spoke to one of the artists who did one of my first tattoos, and just asked him how he got into the industry and if he had any tips. After getting a few more tattoos and showing him my artwork I was offered an apprenticeship! Tattooing is something I've always admired and felt would be an ideal job for me. But it wasn't until I got my first tattoos that I considered trying to break into the industry.

HOW DID YOU LEARN TO TATTOO? WAS IT AN ORGANIC PROCESS OF LEARNING ON THE JOB? DID YOU STUDY ART OR WERE YOU SELF-TAUGHT?

I learnt by working 3-4 days in a studio and shadowing the artists I was surrounded by. It was tough at times but I enjoyed being in the environment so it didn't really feel like work to me. And especially as it got me out of my part-time job at a supermarket, I really had nothing to complain about. I studied art through school and college and it was always my main subject. Drawing has always been a hobby of mine, especially pen and linework drawing. I think that's why I take pride in my linework when it comes to tattooing, as clean lines were always my thing when drawing.

ARE YOU TATTOOED YOURSELF? IF SO, WHO DO YOU LET TATTOO YOU? AND WHAT SORT OF WORK DO YOU LIKE TO GET TATTOOED ON YOUR BODY?

I am tattooed. Not quite head to toe yet but I'm still fairly new to the game, I'm on my way. I've been tattooed so far by a number of friends who I've worked with or artists whose work I've admired for a long time. Personally I love the



I REALLY LOVE TO
DRAW FEMALE AND
ANIMAL FACES



I LEARNT FAST HOW DEEP OR SHALLOW TO PRESS THE NEEDLE AND IT'S A NICE REMINDER TO SEE WHERE I BEGAN

style I tattoo in; bold clean linework, subtle dotwork and geometric patterns. That's what I like to have on my own body, and I feel that's important for my work. I would hate to not be excited by the style of tattooing I do.

HAVE YOU EVER TATTOOED YOURSELF? IF SO, WHAT DID YOU TATTOO?

I have indeed. I did my first tattoo (that wasn't on pig skin) on my ankle; a small dagger from my early flash. I went super deep with the needle and the lines are all raised a little, but I love it because of that. It meant I learnt fast how deep or shallow to press the needle and it's a nice reminder to see where I began compared to where I am now!

WHAT INFLUENCES YOUR PRACTICE AS A TATTOOIST? ARE THERE ANY SPECIFIC ARTISTS, EITHER TATTOOISTS OR ART PRACTITIONERS, WHICH YOU PERSONALLY ADMIRE?

I don't really know what influences my designs. There's a lot of different objects and things I'll see in my daily life that I'll just think 'that'd make a cool drawing', I love harsh edges and parallel lines. But my inspiration for things comes quite randomly I would say! Artist wise, I would have to say Sarah Herzdame who works in Berlin. She has inspired me since apprenticing. Her linework

is literally flawless and her dotwork is so smooth. I love seeing her posts on Instagram. Outside of tattooing I've always found graffiti artists inspiring, and specifically the artist Mike Giant (the owner of Rebel 8). I used to sit and study his linework drawings when I was a bit younger.

HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE YOUR TATTOOING STYLE? DO YOU ENJOY COLOUR WORK OR ARE YOU MORE HYPED FOR BLACK AND GREY STUFF?

I guess my style is black work using lines and dot shading. I'm not a huge fan of colour work. I follow several amazing colour artists and find it mind blowing what they can do. But I don't plan to have many (if any) colour tattoos on myself and I have never enjoyed working with colour. That stems to way before tattooing.

HOW DOES SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES SUCH AS INSTAGRAM AFFECT YOUR PRACTICE? DO YOU YOURSELF LOOK AT OTHER TATTOOISTS INSTAGRAMS TO SEE WHAT'S GOING ON ELSEWHERE?

Instagram is obviously huge in the tattoo industry. I would say it's where 90% of your customers come from. I can't speak for what it was like before social media became a huge part of tattooing, but I think it's great for people to be able to browse such a wide variety of artists



ALTHOUGH TATTOOING RUBBER LIMBS IS A MAJOR PAIN, SEEING THE EXHIBITION ON THE NEWS WAS REALLY AMAZING FOR ME

and discover people they never would have found without it. Myself included! I use it just like anyone else, to find new people to get tattooed by!

DO YOU DRAW IN YOUR OWN TIME? WHAT SORT OF STUFF DO YOU LIKE TO MAKE?

I do! Most days on my train journey to and from the studio and then almost every evening preparing for the next days tattoos. Most of my drawings will be based on the customers ideas, but fortunately I get a lot of cool ideas come my way. I really love to draw female faces and animal faces. Plant life is also a good one as it suits dotwork really well. I've also always loved to draw knives and guns, something about the sharp edges and straight lines, it translates really well into a nice linework drawing I find.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT BEING A TATTOO ARTIST?

Being able to draw everyday doesn't feel like work to me in the slightest. So I guess that is my favourite part. But it's also really nice to meet new people everyday and give them something they can be proud of (hopefully) and show off for the rest of their life.

AND CONVERSELY, WHAT IS THE WORST PART OF BEING

A TATTOOIST? CAN IT BE THE CLIENTAL OR IS IT JUST HORRIBLE TATTOO IDEAS?

Fortunately I don't deal with many tricky customers or bad tattoo ideas. But realistically the worst part has got to be no-shows. They'll never not be annoying. It doesn't take much to let someone know you can't make it.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR FAVOURITE TATTOO YOU HAVE EVER DONE? WHY DO YOU LIKE IT SO MUCH?

Such a difficult question, there are a few in mind that stick out as ones I've been super proud of and happy with recently. A fox/forest chest piece being one. But I think my favourite tattoo ever is probably a ram's skull I did very, very early on. It was probably the first one I did that kicked off the style I tattoo in now.

WHAT MOMENT IN YOUR CAREER HAS BEEN THE MOST MEMORABLE?

The day I was able to quit my tedious part-time job to completely concentrate on my tattooing was a good day. Was a great feeling knowing I never had to stack shelves again and could hopefully spend all my time drawing and creating art!

OKAY, WHAT IS THE STRANGEST TATTOO YOU HAVE EVER



SEEING HOW FAR IT HAS COME OVER TIME IS INSPIRING FOR ME, AS THE LEVEL OF WORK IS ONLY GETTING BETTER



DONE? WAS IT CREEPY OR JUST PLAIN WEIRD?

I'm not sure if it's the strangest or coolest to be honest. But the lightning bolt breathing panda piece I did definitely comes to mind. That was a really fun one. Sometimes the stranger ideas make the best tattoos. I can't imagine there are many duplicates of that tattoo about!

I SEE YOUR WORK IS PART OF MATT LODDER'S TATTOO EXHIBITION 'TATTOO: BRITISH TATTOO ART REVEALED' AT THE NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM, CORNWALL. HOW DID THAT COME ABOUT? WHAT DID YOU SUBMIT TO THE EXHIBITION?

I was super surprised and humble to have been asked to create an arm for the exhibition! Especially as I'm only just in my second year of tattooing! I saw a lot of very heavy full arm/hand designs being done on the prosthetic limbs, so I thought I would keep mine looking quite minimal and clean. I did a statue face, as that's one of my favourite things to tattoo. And although tattooing rubber limbs is a major pain, seeing the exhibition on the news was really amazing for me.

HOW DO YOU FEEL THAT YOUR WORK IS NOW IN THE MUSEUM SPACE? DOES THIS CHANGE THE CONCEPT OF YOUR WORK?

It feels really surreal to think it's next to some work done by people I've been looking up to ever since I Was an ap-

prentice. It has made me feel like I'm on a good path to getting better and better at what I do.

HAS THE EXHIBITION INSPIRED YOU TO DELVE IN THE HISTORY OF TATTOOING AND USE THIS AS A FORM OF DEVELOPING YOUR TATTOOING PRACTICE?

I haven't been able to make it down to the actual exhibition as of yet which is a real shame. Hopefully soon. But I've always been fascinated by where tattooing has come from and where it is today. Seeing how far it has come over time is inspiring for me, as the level of work is only getting better.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACHIEVE IN YOUR CAREER AS A TATTOOIST?

The main goal is to carry on improving and hopefully creating tattoos for people for many years to come. That's the biggest achievement to me, seeing people excited to wear your artwork for the rest of their lives. As long as I can carry on doing what I'm doing I'm happy.

WHAT DOES TATTOOING MEAN TO YOU?

Tattooing for me means I get to express myself through my drawings and artwork daily, which is something I've wanted to do since a child. And it also means I can provide new ways for people to feel good about themselves and the skin they're in. ▣

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There's a great crossover between custom builds and the tattooed lifestyle—how did you get started?

There is and it's been going for years and will continue for even more years to come. I got into doing this because I have always been into classic cars from a young age and went to Kingston Upon Thames College and studied mechanics there and then went on to work on old British cars. Then roughly 6 years ago, I started working for another American car company but early last year they started to change their attitude towards customers and doing more modern cars, so I left and went on to start Wild & Sons doing the classic American cars and being all about the cars and customers.

Most of the cars that come to you—are they abandoned projects? Cars that people are reluctant to give up and

always meant to fix until finally, 20 years on, they give in?

The majority have been cars with emotional attachments to people who have decided the best place is for them to be in my hands or cars which I have seen needing rescuing which I have bought.

I guess most of your cars are already in the country, do you have much call to go further afield on rescue missions?

Some! We went to Germany earlier this year to rescue a 1935 Ford 5 window coupe.

Do you hire out cars for photo shoots and movie work?

Yes we do and also to charities for free of charge and sometimes for photo shoots free of charge depending on the shoot. and movies we rent out for a price which works for them.



Out of curiosity, how much does it cost to fill up a 5.7 litre Buick? These cars were certainly built for American fuel prices and not ours! I guess they are practical as show cars but daily drivers? Do people use them to get to work? Not to bad to fill up actually! Maybe £80-90 from empty but the Buick we have is a daily driver and the Trans Am which was on display at the Great British Tattoo show is now my daily driver. ▣

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Timeless Beauty

Beccy Rimmer's been wondering... what are the specifics that make a flawless tattoo?

Saschi McCormack makes, hands down, some of the cleanest tattoos I've ever had the pleasure of laying my eyes on. Through impeccable line-work and shading, and an original take on the traditional colour palette, his beautiful work shines bright in our crowded tattoo marketplace.

Glancing at his portfolio, it's clear that there are particular methods at work here – traditions and belief systems that I was eager to explore and share.

Here is a tattooist that, I believe, has a lot to say about (not just his own progression but) what it takes to execute the perfect tattoo. The rules of traditional tattooing have stood the test of time – let's acknowledge and appreciate why they are, and always will be, so important in tattoo execution.



Being in the comfort zone in any art form or career is a dangerous place to be

and started tattooing professionally in 2009. Shortly after that I moved to Ireland and 7 years later I opened my private studio in Dublin.

Let's get stuck in and talk about your work. Do you feel that further progression is on the cards or that you've reached a happy point in your career?

My focus has always been mainly traditional. For me, it's a timeless tattooing style that stands up to any other. I always try to bring a new twist to this traditional work, for example, I don't stick to just one-line weights and use colours that are not often used in the Americana traditional style. I believe being in the comfort zone in any art-form or career is a dangerous place to be and we should always look to progress. If you're perfect... be more perfect – you've gotta keep the fire burning.

Firstly, how long you have been tattooing?

I started a traditional apprenticeship in Germany in 2006

Your work is flawless and in my eyes, representative of 'the best tattoo'. What would you say makes 'a good tattoo'?



Ultimately tattooing is a visual art form and people get tattooed because they like how they look

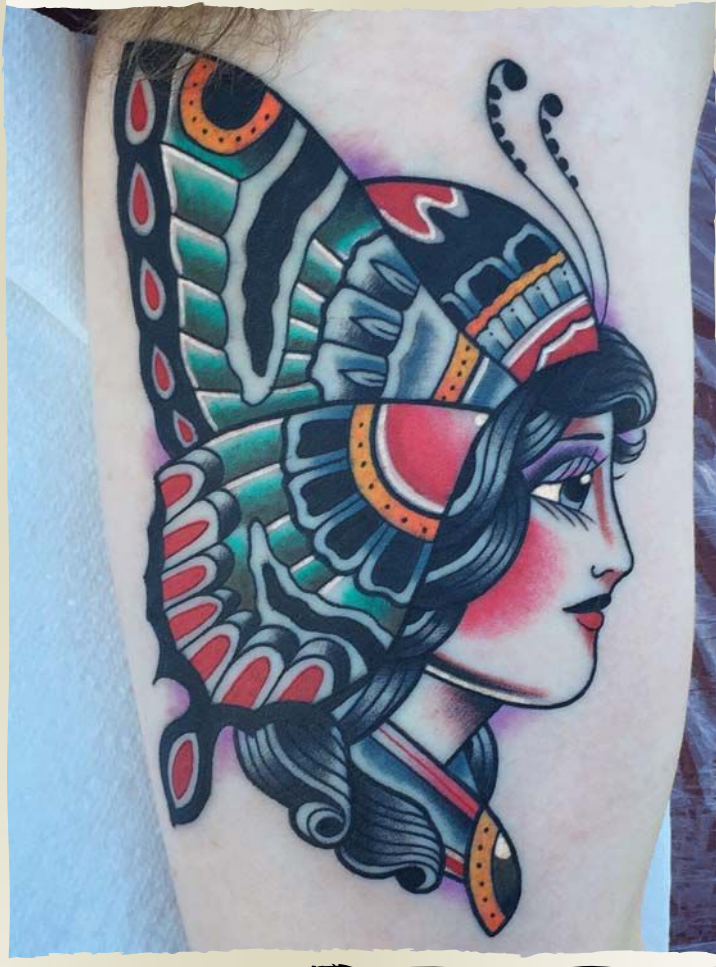
A good tattoo is the basis of strong lines, solid color and smooth shading along with good color blending. With that in mind you can make a good tattoo even if the design is not the most aesthetically pleasing. Placement also becomes a key component here and can add to a person's confidence in body image by contouring its position. If it's in a bad area that doesn't flow well then it's less likely to impact visually. The tattoo must have room to breathe. I usually allow a thumb space between each.

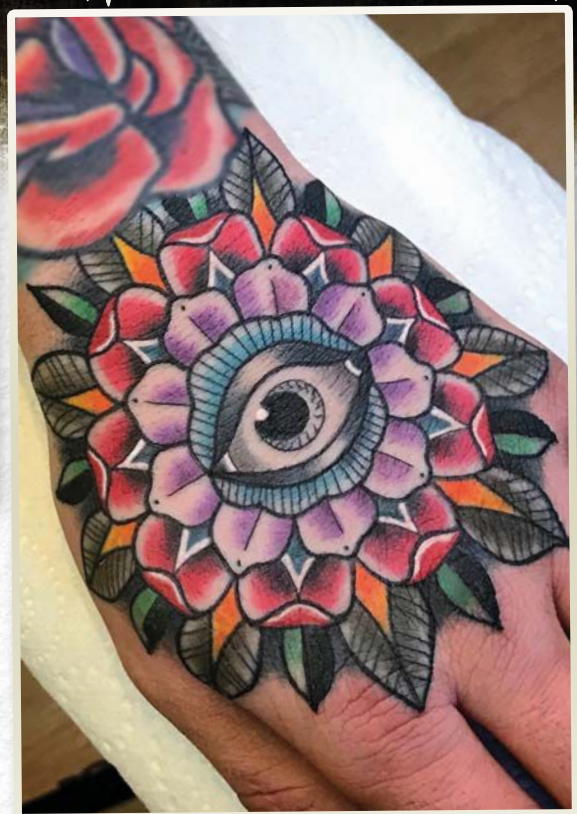
Do you think that the way a tattoo is executed has an impact on how good it is? What do you think of other contemporary tattoo styles?

Yes, for longevity purposes. The brighter the pigment and color, naturally it will fade quicker when sun hits it, but darker colors stand the test of time a little more. I've recently developed a range of colors with Rabbits Ink in Germany and they are 'dark traditional'. These traditional styles only ever interested me, but of course I respect various others and the process involved in making them happen.

What is the most important thing for you when creating a piece of work?

Environment. I believe the more comfortable the client is then the better it is for the tattooer. Also to make sure the size works. It can really be a key factor in making the overall outcome of the





*If you're perfect... be more perfect
- you've gotta keep the fire burning*

tattoo visually correct. You can do a small tattoo with intricate work but most likely won't last as long as that of a larger piece. For me, I like when a tattoo can be recognised from a distance.

Why do you think people get tattoos? What are their motivations?

Ultimately tattooing is a visual art form and people get tattooed because they like how they look. Memorial pieces and portraits can also offer meaningful tattoos that allow the individual to have a gentle reminder of its purpose.

What can we expect from you in the future?

At the moment I'm planning on heading back to Germany to open up another studio along with the motivation of competing in more international conventions.

I know we've had limited space to chat here, but what other industry topics do you think our readers should be exploring and thinking about in today's tattoo climate.

TV show. I really think that they give people a false perspective of what tattooing is about. A back piece that takes an hour on screen can actually take 2 or 3 sittings depending on style.

Thanks for your time and insight into your world. Is there anything else you want to add?

Recently a tattoo friend of mine was diagnosed with MS and I've been thinking quite a lot about how lucky I am to be tattooing. We should never take it or life for granted. ☐

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Just Shao tattooing a female customer with a 3D biomechanical tattoo.

Journey To the East

Mark Andrews speaks to a Shanghai based tattoo master who is attracting a steady stream of foreigners wanting to study from him. This is a wonderful story...

“Just Shao is a tattoo monk” says Daniel Whitford with a smile. Dan is the latest foreign tudi (student) to make the pilgrimage to an unassuming tattoo shop on Shanghai’s Xiangyang South Road to learn from this master. Just is perhaps the only tattooist in China to employ a 3D effect biomechanical style.

Were Just Shao, or Shao Gang as he is known in Chinese, to don robes he might well be mistaken for a monk but his Zen calling while spiritual is very much rooted in art. It has been a long journey for the 39 year old originally from Wuhan, a city of more than 10 million in the centre of China.

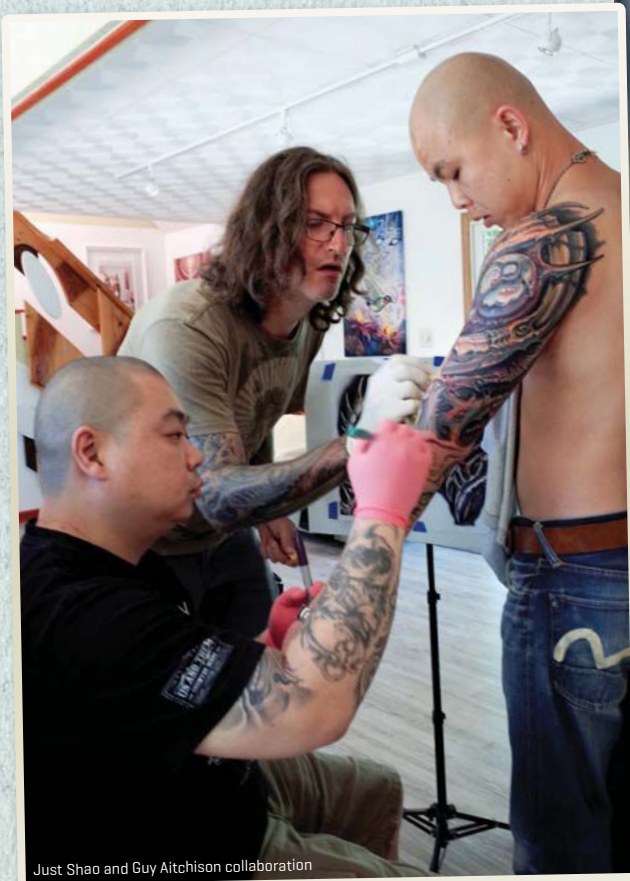
In his early career he was a punk musician and while at the time tattoos weren’t common in China they were popular amongst this group, who were far more open to western ideas. Since a child he has loved drawing and he found art his true calling. Just was one of the first group of people in modern China to learn to be a tattooist. At the beginning he learnt the basic knowledge from an American for a week but after that he studied by himself.

Just didn’t have the luxury of learning under a skilled master. With little information



Just Shao tattooing a female customer with a 3D biomechanical tattoo

available in China he looked overseas for inspiration from the Internet and magazines. “Honestly speaking when I started there were not many people in China tattooing and so it was impossible for a Chinese tattooist to influence me” explains Just. He soon, though, found his attention drawn to the works of renowned American tattooist Guy Aitchison. “It was his style and serious attitude towards tattooing. For me I felt I also wanted like



Just Shao and Guy Aitchison collaboration

him to take tattoos as firstly art and not just as work or a tool for earning money.” Today, 17 years later, Just’s story has come full circle. He is now the master with foreign students and is recognised by Guy for his prowess.

Over time Just has developed a philosophy towards tattooing that wouldn’t seem out of place in an Eastern religion’s search for enlightenment. As he explains to me there are five levels to being a tattooist. In his early career he never refused a customer as he needed to accumulate experience and was just happy the client was willing to let him work. At the second stage he wanted to design part of the tattoo so that the customer could have a unique piece. Following on from that he increased his artistic input to just asking the customer the theme or subject before creating it based on those requirements and with consultation. In the forth stage the artist develops everything himself without consultation based on a theme set by the customer. Complete mastery is where the customer provides the canvas and the tattooist does as he sees fit. “This is the highest peak of the mountain. It is the most difficult as you need to gain the customer’s total trust and is also only possible when you have sufficient knowledge of art” explains Just who is currently trying to accomplish this.

For Just, tattooing is a serious business. “It is not a fashion trend. You can’t have a tattoo



Just Shao selecting the inks to use for his tattooing session

IT WAS HIS STYLE AND SERIOUS ATTITUDE TOWARDS TATTOOING. FOR ME I FELT I ALSO WANTED LIKE HIM TO TAKE TATTOOS AS FIRSTLY ART AND NOT JUST AS WORK OR A TOOL FOR EARNING MONEY

when you’re young and erase it when you’re older. It is a serious thing and no matter what angle you look at art, it’s serious” he explains. Over time his attitude has matured along with his understanding of the meaning behind the art form.

“Tattooing is more meaningful when things are combined because you can keep them on the human body as a form of art. I think when you express a theme that has a spiritual connotation it is the best combination. When I was young I didn’t have these kinds of ideas but as I get older they are getting deeper and



deeper” says Just. His work now involves trying to express the beauty of human nature.

Today he is working on such a piece, it has a dream like quality with a Sci-Fiesque exploration of the human form. He tells me that it is all his idea based on research online; he wanted the long sleeve design to be mysterious and have a spooky quality about it from using abstract ideas and philosophy.

Instagram could almost have been developed with tattooists in mind and the very visual nature of the work lends itself to the platform. Just was a follower of Guy Aitchison on Instagram and over the years put comments and likes on Guy’s work. Then in

TATTOOING IS MORE MEANINGFUL WHEN THINGS ARE COMBINED BECAUSE YOU CAN KEEP THEM ON THE HUMAN BODY AS A FORM OF ART

2015 Guy returned the compliment with the comment “Your work is amazing.” Just was elated because for such a long time he had followed Guy from afar and he had been such a big influence from the start. He responded by asking Guy if they could meet. Guy though wanted more; he suggested they cooperate on a piece.

Even before Just set foot in the US, the pair had been working for weeks sending a design back and forth with the initial draft com-



Just Shao's latest class of students practising tattooing onto silicon



THIS IS THE HIGHEST PEAK OF THE MOUNTAIN. IT IS THE MOST DIFFICULT AS YOU NEED TO GAIN THE CUSTOMER'S TOTAL TRUST

ing from Just. On meeting there was little bullshit with them both quickly getting down to work. They spent a day and a half making big changes to the design. After completing the design phase, it took another two days to apply it to the customer's body. They inked the near full sleeve biomechanical piece on Just's friend.



Decorations and ornaments in the Zhen Cang tattoo shop in Shanghai

“He has extraordinary talent, after working with him I think his ideas are number one. Honestly I learnt a lot from him but most importantly his spirit or mentality. The kind of power he has is very different, not everyone can have it. I'm afraid I can't be like that, but I'll try my best” Just says with humility about Guy.

Changing the subject, I ask Just about his English name, he laughs telling me it is a funny thing and not really even a story. Back in 2004 he was working in a tattoo shop in Hong Kong. The two Americans who worked there couldn't ever remember his name and so started calling him 'Just King.' It struck him as strange, it had no real meaning and he had no idea why they called him that. After the Americans left he changed it to Just. “However Just is not a name but I learnt it means justice, so for me it turned into my logo or symbol” he explains. Today he puts it down to a suitable coincidence.

Whilst Just never had much opportunity to formally learn tattooing he now sees a steady



Photo by Zhen Cang

stream of students come to learn from him. It all began with an American, Oliver Wong. Oliver describes it as *yuan fen*, the Chinese concept of fate. Expressing an interest in tattooing, a friend introduced him to Just. However at the time Just had no interest in taking students and said he was too busy.

Oliver had just finished an MBA in Shanghai and had in the US worked at Morgan Stanley as a financial advisor. The 2008 financial crisis and the pollution he saw in China left him disillusioned with this path. "I had developed a distaste for a future as another cog in the multinational corporate machine" he says speaking from San Francisco.

Intrigued by Oliver's willingness to give up his previous life for tattooing, along with his persistence in showing his artwork, Just relented. The encounter ended up not just being life changing for Oliver, who now works as a tattooist back in the US, but also for Just. Zhen Cang, Just Shao's main studio, now offers courses once or twice a year to students wanting to learn the art.

Leo Zhen felt coming to learn under Just in Shanghai was his best option when changing careers from sushi chef to tattooist, despite having emigrated to Canada. "I couldn't find any style I liked in Canada and I couldn't find a class that was really well organised" he says. Leo became interested in tattoos back in 2010 and having majored in graphic design designed his first three tattoos by himself. The tattooist of the first two recommended Just when Leo was searching to study. "Many



Fifth and final session for the tattoo. Customer poses showing progress so far against original artwork on iPad

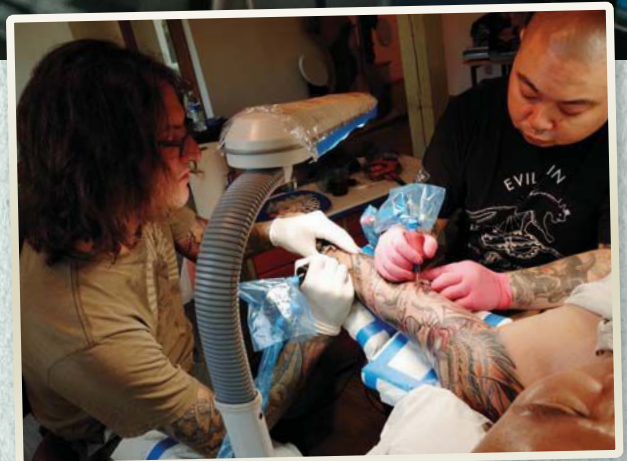
WHEN YOU EXPRESS HUMAN NATURE THROUGH ART YOU CAN COMMUNE WITH PEOPLE EASILY BUT I'M NOT TRYING TO TOUCH PEOPLE ALL THE TIME, FOREMOST I NEED TO BRING MEANING FOR MYSELF



artists only focus on one style they like and maybe never try to do other styles but Just Shao is not the same. He does all the styles, all the kinds of tattoo and he is trying to discover a new style himself” Leo continues.

Dan Whitford is the fifth foreign student to study under Just and unlike the ones before spoke no Chinese when he arrived. “I was attracted by the photorealism, the high level of execution, there’s no sloppy line work. It’s the depth he shows on a person, if he makes a Koi tattoo you see it and want to throw breadcrumbs at the fish,” Dan alludes going on to describe Just as the most successful artist he knows.

There is little difference between teaching Chinese and foreigners believes Just as it is about learning a skill. Despite not being able to speak much English there have been few problems with teaching Dan and where needed he has used Leo to interpret.



With his students Just hopes to instil in them a perfection in technique, the art however is up to them to discover and evolve. Leo is interested in the Japanese traditional style and is influenced by that. Dan on the other hand sees his style in a more psychedelic multi-perspective Daliesque way. Oliver, who started it all, has returned to the west yet has created a style heavily influenced by East Asian art.

“When you express human nature through art you can commune with people easily but I’m not trying to touch people all the time, foremost I need to bring meaning for myself” says Just. Art as he sees it is a way of expressing things like the spiritual state, affection and humanity and because tattoos are unerasable these thing when combined have a spiritual connotation that is more powerful. □

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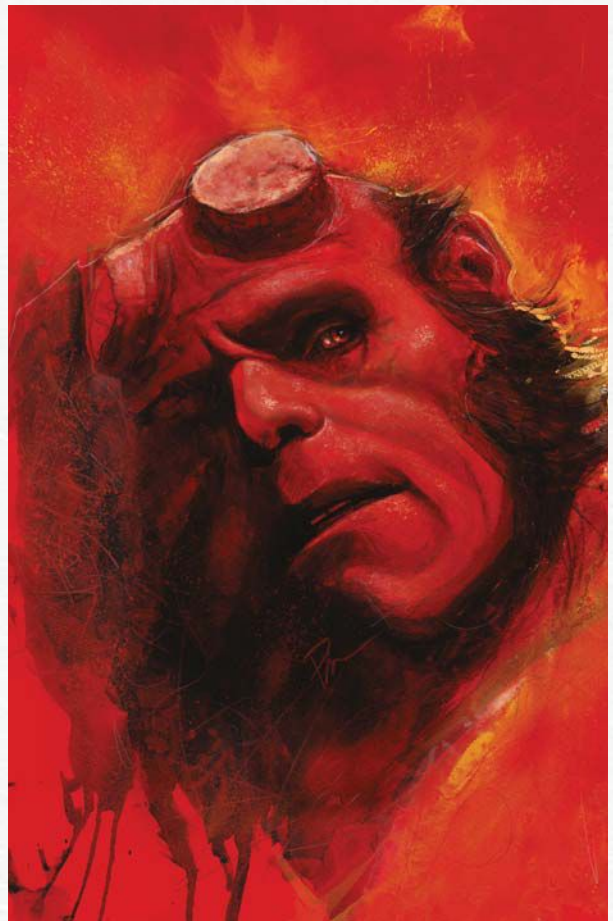
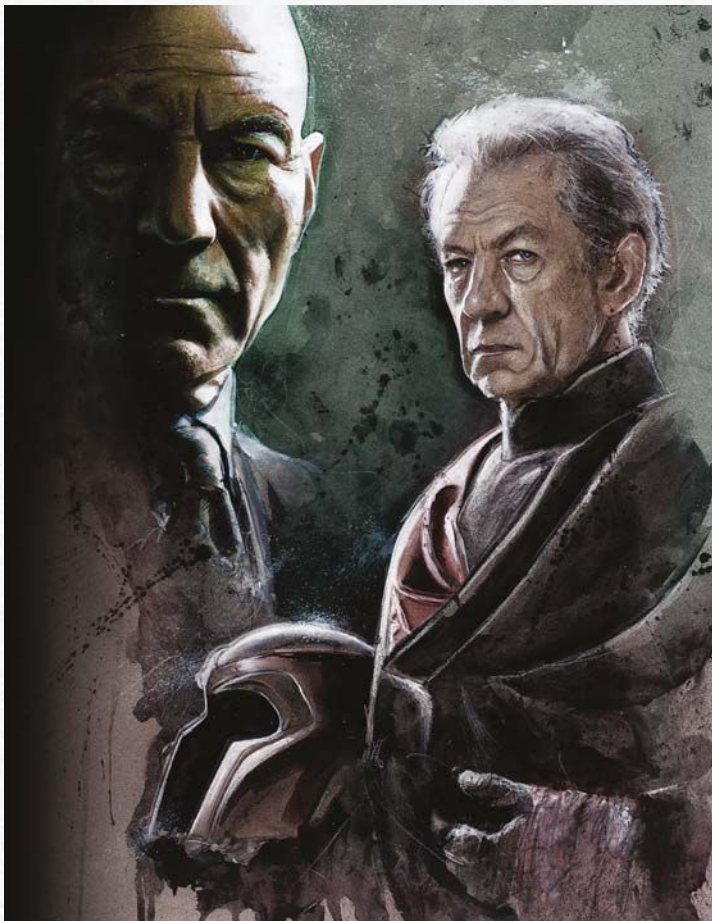
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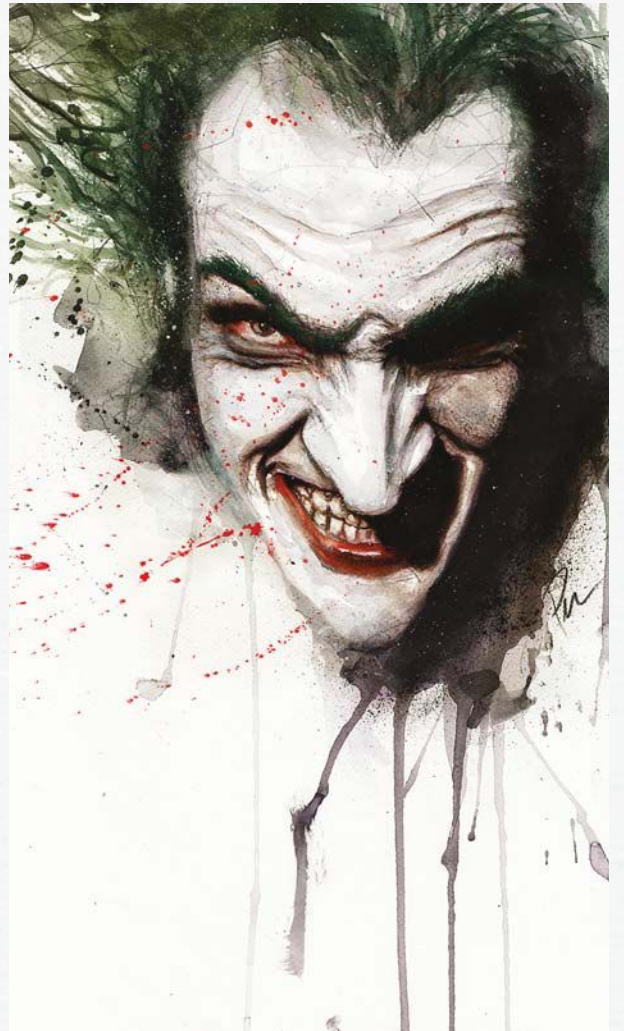
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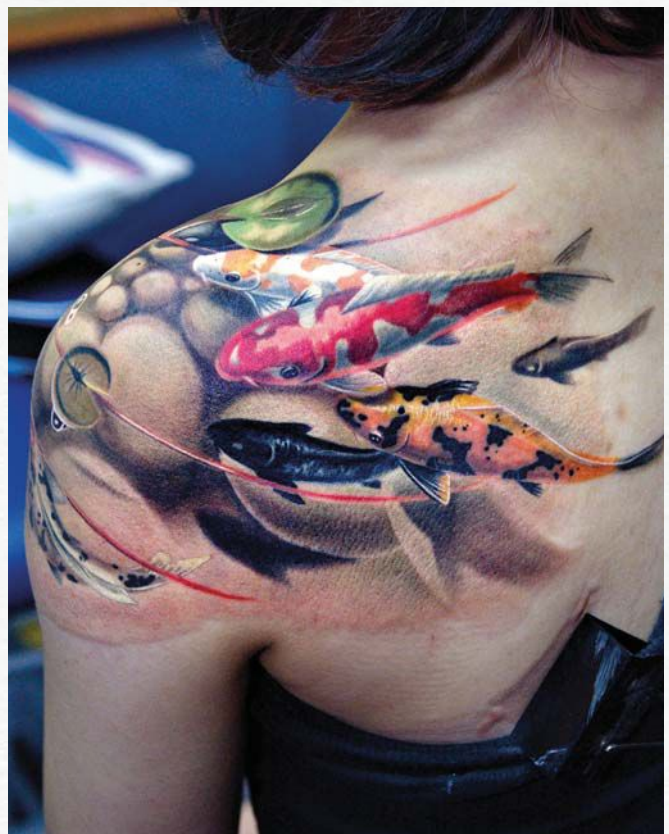
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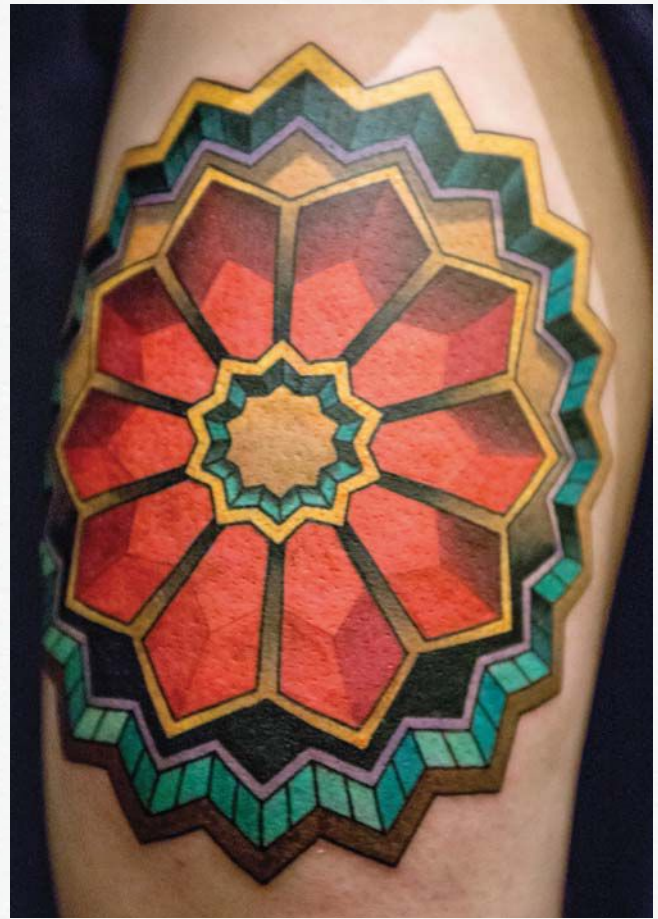
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SNAKE EYES

Sometimes, the cards just fall in your lap. When he's hung up his pen for the day, the boss can often be found surfing National Geographic... so when Nat Geo Wild knocked on the door to see if he was interested in sitting down with Simon Keys and Siouxsie Gillett to talk about their show, Snake City, there was only going to be one good answer...

channel.nationalgeographic.com/wild/snake-city

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Snakes are a peculiar kind of love. You have to go out of your way to love them if you live in the UK but if you happen to live in one of the many countries around the world that our serpentine friends like to call home, your choice to love them or not, isn't necessarily up to you. When they stage a home invasion in search of food and a room with a view, they can become, shall we say, 'problematic'.

Enter our intrepid heroes, Simon and Siouxsie. With a basic brief to save the lives of both people and snakes, it's TV gold. The fact that they

are both tattooed gives me carte blanche to profile their work here and this pleases me no end.

By now, we are well versed in the way a TV show is made. You film all day long sometimes for just five minutes of television, Kat Von D taught us this lesson well but still some viewers can't quite get their heads around the concept of editing. I wonder if that's something that affects them even more so—given that your snakes aren't coming to your door at a pre-arranged time but rather, you need to jump in the car, get to where they are and then actually find them:



THE SNAKES WILL FOLLOW THE SAME PATHS THEY HAVE ALWAYS FOLLOWED AND AS TIME MOVES ON, A HOUSE WILL APPEAR ON THE PATH, OR A SCHOOL

“Well, there’s nothing fake about the show that’s for sure. There’s nothing set-up and every reaction you see is a real reaction but there are other people who are snake catchers out there who don’t understand us and what we do. If we were on our own, we’d go in, catch the snake and move onto the next job just like they do but because we’re filming, there has to be a certain amount interaction between us and the clients otherwise there would be no TV show. We would never have got past the first episode, never mind the first season!”

Simon is still a working tattooist out in the world, but after 12 years you can hardly blame the man for taking a nice little detour into his other love... and catching a break along the way. Here’s the backstory from Simon:

“I’ve always kept snakes and I imported snakes—mostly venomous, but occasionally, somebody might want a python or similar. But if the question is how did I get into this, it’s all down to Steve Irwin really. I watched and learned. I found myself in South Africa and couldn’t

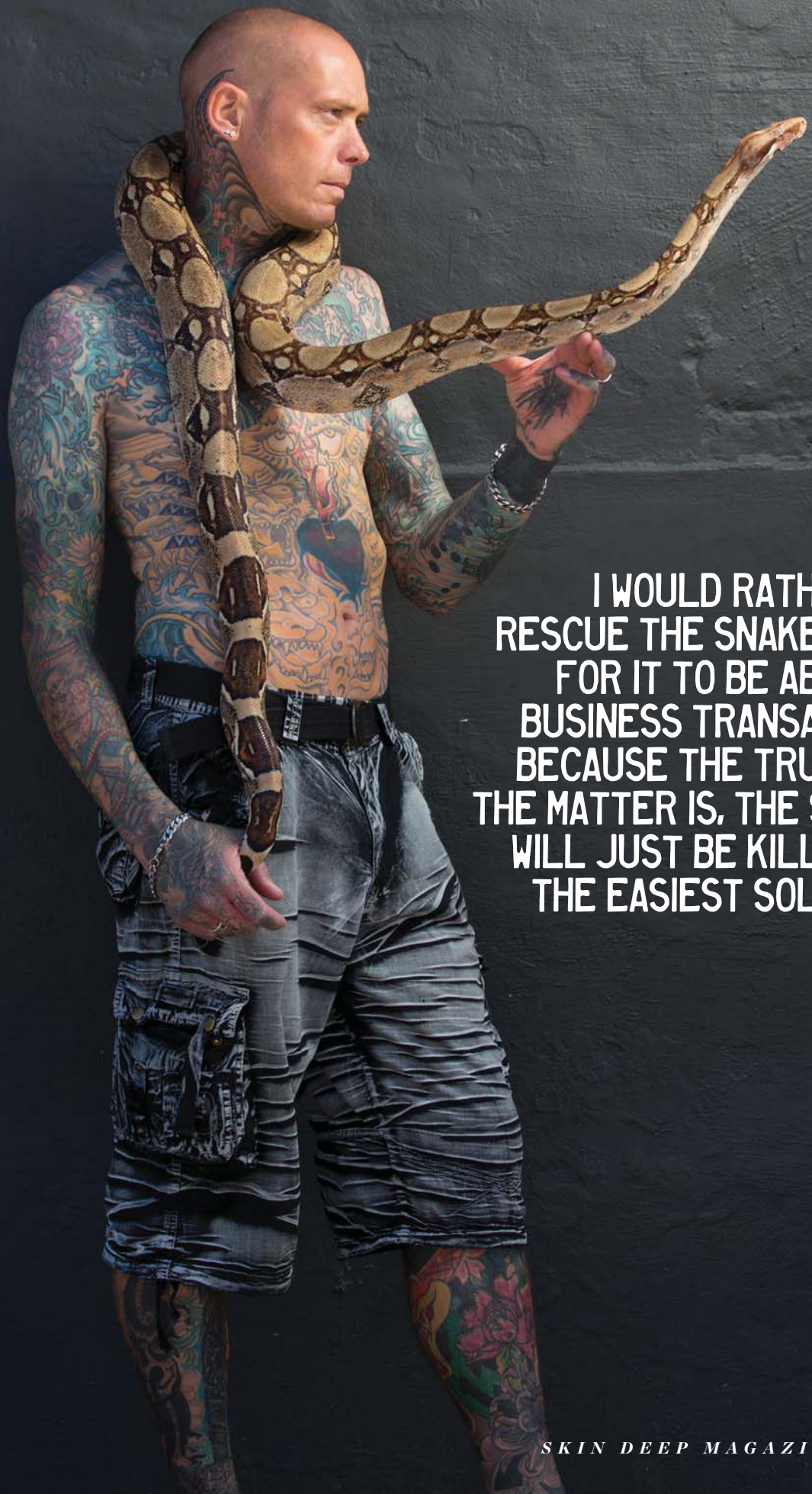
get a job but I ended up doing removals and with a little help from a park, I started working a couple of days a week and if a job came in, they would let me go take care of it and I would give them half the money. I was doing something like 90 callouts a month which is

a lot of snakes!

“Then one day, a film company opposite where I lived found out what I did and asked if I wanted to do a promo, which we did, but I didn’t hear anything back and just put it behind me. Three years later, one of those guys left and ended up with the production company we’re with now... and while we’re talking about it, I get a call about a cobra. So we grabbed some gear, went out to film and to cut a long story short, from that little scenario, they figured out that such a show might have decent legs and it got sold to Nat Geo Wild.”

“Fast forward a little more to when Siouxsie—who is a Herpetologist (look it up. Ed.) and me got together—the idea of the show has gained a little more momentum by now and as often happens with these kinds of things, it all came together in a matter of days... so then you have to figure out what to do with your house, your car, your animals and get on with getting on in 48 hours!”

I guess it’s only when you get to somewhere like South



I WOULD RATHER GO
RESCUE THE SNAKE THAN
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ONE OF THE GOOD THINGS ABOUT HAVING A PUBLIC PROFILE IS THAT YOU CAN REACH A LOT OF PEOPLE AND THEY WILL LISTEN

Africa, that you figure out why snakes have become a ‘problem’—a topic that Siouxsie is keen to pick up on.

“They get everywhere. Houses, schools, trucks... but it’s all about habitat destruction. The snakes will follow the same paths they have always followed and as time moves on, a house will appear on the path, or a school. That’s how it goes. I never actually thought we would ever be as busy as we are. Before I got there, I thought it would be a few weeks but it’s not. They’re everywhere.”

This is a ‘service’ people pay for, which I find a little peculiar as South Africa is not known for being the most affluent country in the world. Simon:

“If we get called out to a rural area, we wouldn’t charge. I would rather go rescue the snake than for it to be about a business transaction because the truth of the matter is, the snake will just be killed as the easiest solution and that’s not us at all. We aren’t the only guys in town—just the only ones with a show—but a callout is something like £30 which isn’t a lot when you’ve got your family up against a black mamba.”

“It’s been successful for everybody, which is great. We would love to get renewed for a season five because it’s great fun for the audience and the show is such an education for all of us. That’s what I like most about it.

“If it was good enough for Steve Irwin, it’s good enough for me!”

“Right now, to be able to film more episodes would be wonderful because we’re at a point at which the education can get more in-depth. With the first few, you have to cover the basics and get those messages home but the more you move on, the more you can assume your audience is still with you and really begin to elaborate and start to educate the viewers in a much deeper way.”

One of the questions that needs asking here is, when you turn up, are the tattoos ever more interesting than the snakes for people? Siouxsie:

“The kids love them. There was a kid who actually dressed up as Simon for Halloween out in the States; fake tattoos, fake snake around his neck—the whole deal. It’s great. It’s part of the package for us now and has made the show just that little bit different. Most shows of this nature work to a proven formula and for better or worse, what you’re selling is characters as much as the subject of the show. That goes for Kat Von D back in that day and it goes for us too. The tattoos have certainly helped mark us out on the show.”

Simon picks up:

“While the show is 100% about the snakes—and always



will be—as we’ve moved along, it’s also become about our lives. In the early days, I used to look stern in our photo shoots but now the world is ‘comfortable’ with me, it’s OK to smile and mess around and be ‘human’. When you’re smiling, it’s a lot more relatable for the audience but everybody is always learning with these things. Us, the production crew, the channel and that’s what makes it work and makes it interesting to be able to push forwards with great ideas.”

More coffee arrives—for me at least—and we flip through dozens upon dozens of images of snake rescues. On one hand, Snake City is exactly what it says it is, but it would be a shallow viewer in the extreme who couldn’t see the real difference Simon and Siouxsie make to people’s lives out there. If you can imagine walking into your house in the next five minutes to find a cobra sitting in the middle of the floor, well, you too would be grateful to have their number pinned up on the fridge.

As we’re scrolling through these images, we stumble onto some shots Siouxsie has of a beach. Not much shocks me anymore but this isn’t a PR shot of heavenly sands. These are shots of hundreds upon hundreds of plastic bottles simply thrown away. I drill some more and Siouxsie fills me in:

“In South Africa, we’re most definitely celebs—you

IF IT WAS GOOD ENOUGH FOR STEVE IRWIN, IT’S GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME

can’t avoid it because we’re on the TV—but we’d like to use the platform to do something bigger. One of the good things about having a public profile is that you can reach a lot of people and they will listen.

“There’s a beach we go to that is covered in what looks like millions of plastic bottles. That’s no exaggeration, it’s covered for at least two miles in plastic. One afternoon, Simon said he was going to dive for a few hours and decided to take a plastic bag to collect some of it but it was just a pointless exercise. It fixed nothing! You would need a year to make a difference!”

“Seriously,” adds Simon, “I reckon if you had a month and a hundred people working with you, you might be able to make a dent in it, but it’s just getting worse.”

Is this from people throwing things away?

“There’s a river that runs for miles and miles inland that feeds into the sea and therefore the beach. People throw their rubbish on the floor and the rain will pick it up and put it in the river—or they just throw it straight in there—and over time, this is where it ends up. I’m not talking regular rain but big storms that wash cars and even dead cows down there, but that’s the root of it. It’s



IF YOU HAD A MONTH AND A HUNDRED PEOPLE WORKING WITH YOU, YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO MAKE A DENT IN IT, BUT IT'S JUST GETTING WORSE

'out of sight and out of mind' for people."

Siouxsie has a plan though.

"If we go ahead with season five, what I'd like to do is a meet and greet where we'll sign everything and talk about anything, but the deal is that you have to come with us and pick this stuff up.

"To be able to change one thing in your lifetime is amazing. We're so lucky to be able to do what we do and neither of us would ever take that for granted, but to do something on this scale for the ocean..."

She leaves it hanging and it's just as well. We still have these pictures in front of us and there's not a lot more you can say aside from that. I think there comes a time, as I found—when you have a car, food in the fridge and Netflix on demand—when it all begins to feel a little hollow and the only way to fill that hole is to give something back to make you feel alive.

"Only by pulling together would you ever stand a chance of cleaning it up. It's mostly bottles but also hand cream jars,

flip-flops... you name it, if it's plastic it's down there somewhere. The end-game—and the only real-world solution—is to ban plastic. That two miles is not the only two miles. There's a little break and then it starts again a little further along. What you also have to remember is this is what's on top of the sand. It's also like this under the sand where the tide had buried it and when you're diving in the water, it's there too. Plastic bags, more bottles... it never ends.

"It has a huge impact on the wildlife. There was a scientist recently who cut open some dead birds—from different areas—and found all of them had plastic inside of them. The plastic breaks down in the waves into tiny micro-fibres, the birds pick them up thinking it's food and it sits inside the gut thinking it's full not being able to digest it and they starve to death. Krill eat it, the whales eat the krill and on and on it goes. Honestly, this is just the beginning because the repercussions haven't even begun. What you can see on the beach is just a fraction of the real story."

Sobering huh. I've probably run out of pages to carry our conversation on for much longer but I can put my pen down knowing that wherever this story of reptile rescues ends—and may it be long in the future because it's a wonderful show—the work of Simon and Siouxsie will continue whether there are cameras present or not.

All great human stories start with humans thinking a snake is somewhere it shouldn't be. ▣

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The Transformative Tattoo

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“I could totally jump out that window,” with a slight grin this thought went through my mind as I looked out the open window, a faint breeze blowing warm air in on a sweltering Phoenix night. My hands gripped the ornately framed window sill, and I felt the air invitingly blowing on my face. Without hesitation, I jumped. This story has a much happier ending than you may be thinking.

I was in Phoenix working at a tattoo convention. My life revolved around traveling, self medicating, and living a life like a chapter of “On the Road” on speed. I was in search of the great story to end all stories, thinking that if my life emulated some sort of Jack Kerouac meets Hunter S. Thompson lifestyle, I could truly feel something, anything. All I wanted was to feel, and to escape this solitary numbness that surrounded me. Like a moth to the flame, I dove into experiences unabashedly, with that small voice in the back of my head hoping that this time I wouldn’t come back. In the wake of those experiences, adventurous stories abound, involving enough alcohol to create blindness, and stories that sound like one would need to have been Lazarus to wake up to face life once more. Much to my dismay, I always awoke to another day.

Returning to my night on the balmy Phoenix landscape, after a long day tattooing on the convention floor I was invited to have a few casual drinks with friends back in their hotel rooms. I insisted, “You really don’t want to do that, I can be a handful.” Fast forward a few hours, copious amounts of alcohol, and I have decided that I am going to throw a television out of a third story window. Not my window, or my television, or my room of course, but those of the friends who unknowingly invited Dr. Jekyll to their party. I grabbed the television, certain it would accompany me on the plummet, but sure enough, it was chained to the entertainment centre where it sat. High class hotel measures. With the window in my blurred vision, I told the stunned room full of friends, “Screw it, I’m going out the window” and I jumped. Later I assured my



I GRABBED THE TELEVISION, BUT SURE ENOUGH, IT WAS CHAINED TO THE ENTERTAINMENT CENTRE...

friends that I knew about the second story roof that lay right out of sight, the roof that broke my fall, but the reality of it was that I didn't know, and I didn't care.

After seeing I was still alive and breathing on that roof, my good friend followed and we started an adventure of chaos and destruction. Running from security golf carts, ripping down light sconces and fixtures, jumping out more windows and landing in a hazy black out. When I came to, I was wandering through a neighbourhood, bare-foot and shirtless, knocking on the doors of homes, wondering if they were my hotel room. Someone called the police, reported a heavily tattooed man, thoroughly confused, wandering across their lawn. The police informed hotel security and up came their golf carts, giving me a chauffeured ride back to my room just in time for me to get a short nap, then back to work the convention the next day. This was unfortunately not that abnormal of a night for the ride I was on.

Years of this led to rock bottom, and a true realisation that I am not going to have many more journeys if something didn't change. Death, new life, and sobriety all led me to a point that I finally had a realisation: I needed to be serious about what I'm feeling and I need to talk to therapist about it in an open, and honest way.

I was really good at hiding how out of control my life was, even to the therapist I had been going to for four years already. I could twist a story about trashing hotel rooms into a hilarious romp, when really, I was isolated and anything but happy. I held my stepdad's hand as he died, and my wife's hand as our first daughter was born, and then with the death of my best friend, I truly realised I have to open up to someone.

I gave my therapist a big speech, expecting his eyebrows to furrow, surprised at the world I had hidden from him. Instead he said, "I've been waiting for this day, now let's get serious." Through time, work, and medication, I have been

able to get to a place I could have never been without therapy. He didn't say anything life changing, didn't drop any huge bombs, he just sat (and still does), listened, and said, "Totally, that makes sense...you're not alone." Those words, "You are not alone," that became the mantra I live by.

I am very open with my clients, they are already in a vulnerable state, trusting me to guide them through a painful experience. Once I got sober, I found myself apologising to them, feeling like I had let them down and not given the honest ex-





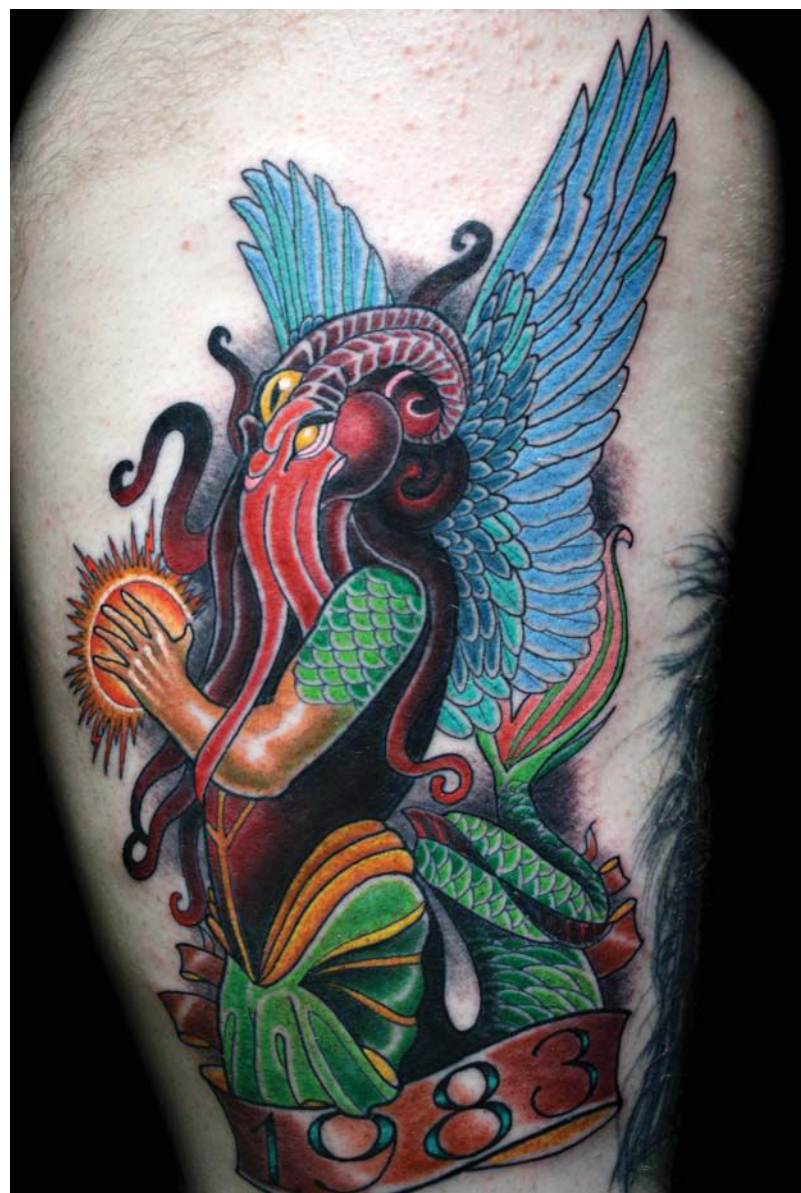
**SOMEONE CALLED THE POLICE,
REPORTED A HEAVILY TATTOOED
MAN, THOROUGHLY CONFUSED,
WANDERING ACROSS THEIR LAWN**

perience that I promised them. Most were kind enough to say, "It's fine, I had no clue, stop being so hard on yourself..." One client in particular, Rian Christopher, who was a therapist himself, went so far as to say that his time getting tattooed had become therapy for him. How, in what I viewed is my worst time, how could I have created a therapeutic environment? I have to remind myself, "you are not alone", and those experiences create a bond, one that can be deeper than we realise. Here's Rian's explanation.

FROM RIAN:

"When I was 15, I found a used copy of Carl Jung's *The Archetypes & the Collective Unconscious* at the Flea Market. After reading it, I had an epiphany that I knew what I wanted to do with my life. How could I help others if I wasn't well adjusted myself though? I was struggling with a feeling of disconnectedness due to being immersed in the culture of Catholic High School in Mobile, Alabama. These feelings manifested as various rebellious and self-destructive phases that were counterproductive to my self-growth. My only real outlet at this time was through listening to music.

Around this time in the late 90's I had friends starting to get tattooed illicitly from local parlours and the idea





THE TATTOOS I GOT WERE SUPERFICIAL AND LACKED SERIOUS MEANING TO ME. I ESSENTIALLY GOT THEM JUST FOR THE SAKE OF GETTING THEM...

started brewing in my head. I had always been fascinated by tattoos; my paternal Grandfather had an old faded tattoo on his forearm from his time in the Marines I would always stare at as a kid. Once I started college, I decided to follow through with it and got several small pieces. The tattoos I got were superficial and lacked serious meaning to me. I essentially got them just for the sake of getting them. Another rebellious act which didn't accomplish much for me.

As I was finishing up my Clinical Psychology Master's degree at USA, I decided I was ready to get a large piece. I saw that Sean could do realism and decided I needed to get a piece from him. It was an interpretation of Kali from my favourite photography book "Hotel LaChappelle." Going to a big piece from small pieces is such a massive difference in terms of how you cope with the physical and psychological difficulty of the experience. "Can I make it through this?", "Am I going to bitch out?", "There's no going back, did you make the right choice?" Getting tattooed by Sean was such a different experience than I had previously. The early tattoos I had were classic parlour experiences with the boys, I guess you would say. I didn't realise how much more to it there could be in terms of being guided through the process; I felt connected in a very meaningful way that was extremely cathartic in a way I hadn't felt before.

It didn't take long for me to become a regular client of Sean's. I began to map out current and past experiences from my life. Things that have inspired me (musicians such as Frank Zappa), childhood fears (Scary Stories) to abstractions from my dreams and meditation. Around this same time I became a practicing therapist. I had achieved the goal from my early teenage years, but it

became pretty obvious to myself again that as I was helping others enact change in their lives, I was still going through a huge amount of change myself that I needed to manage effectively. This included adjusting to my new career, people I was associating with, the relationship I was in, coping with major deaths in my family, and so on. Everyone has problems but it became to be an issue of "How do I get the help that I might need?" I was still continuing to use music as my therapy, but the idea of me, as a therapist, seeking therapy myself was fairly off putting as I had very negative experiences with therapists in the past. I felt like going back now would just be pointless and get me nowhere fast. There was no immediate revelation that my tattoo sessions were serving this very purpose for me at first. The benefits were more gradual as the relationship between Sean and I grew deeper. As the trust developed, I experienced greater feelings of accomplishment after sessions as well as a greater ability to practice mindfulness during the sessions. After being able to sit for around seven hours, many frustrating or difficult things in life seem mild in comparison. If I could choose to go through something so difficult on my own accord, then difficult things I don't choose in life are infi-

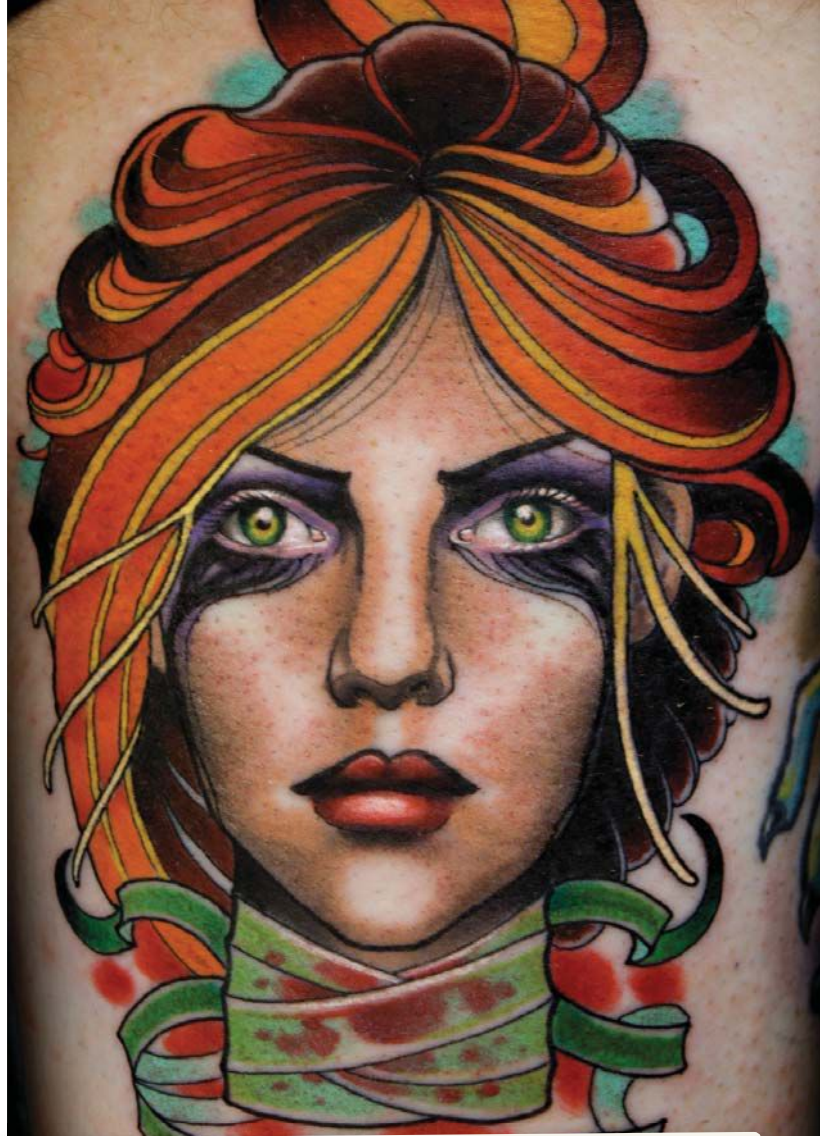


THErapy IS ABOUT OPENING UP THOSE DARK RECESSES WITH SOMEONE WE CAN TRUST, AND CREATING AN HONEST CONVERSATION

nitely more manageable.

Going through the transformation of permanently altering one's flesh isn't so different from psychotherapy. When I get tattooed I feel truly connected, not just to Sean as an artist, a friend and a tattooer, but most importantly, to the moment. Being tattooed by Sean has become a way for me to become self-actualised in my own terms. Over the years, I've grown to see Sean as a member of the same community of helping professionals that I'm in. This journey with him has helped me to celebrate great moments and difficult past experiences, while at the same time setting the stage for being more open with myself and others. This lifelong process has opened the door for meaningful change that felt unobtainable for me otherwise in the past. Nothing is permanent except for change, and continually getting tattooed as I grow as an individual is a constant reminder of this. I try to pass this positivity on to my clients, and after reading the other articles in this series, I realise that many others are passing this positivity on in their own ways."

Rian's words were enlightening for me to hear. After years I realised that therapy isn't about having an infallible guru directing you to enlightenment, or a doctor curing what ails you. Therapy isn't even about the therapist, which was obvious if Rian found therapy in my days posing as Barney from the Simpsons. Therapy is about open-



ing up those dark recesses with someone we can trust, and creating an honest conversation, exploring where we are on this ride of life. The most vital part of therapy is being reminded that "we are not alone". When we are open, vulnerable, and truthful about our thoughts and feelings, we are in a frightening, possibly painful place. Tattooing has a way of fast tracking these relationships. The intense pain of tattooing creates an open and honest environment, one that gives an opportunity to create real change in ourselves. The beauty of this ancient craft is that these painful, therapeutic moments of clarity are marked on our vessel for the rest of this ride of life. Through our tattooed markings we are forever reminded, "we are not alone." ▣



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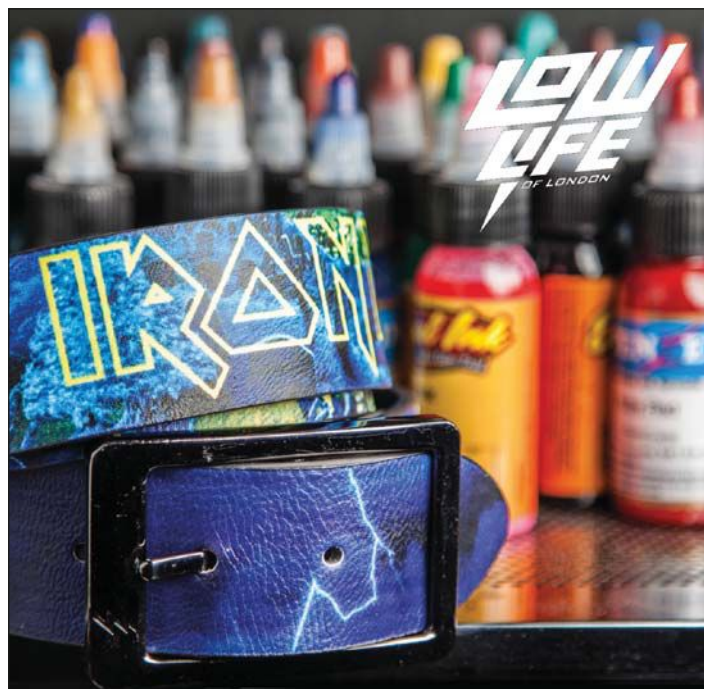
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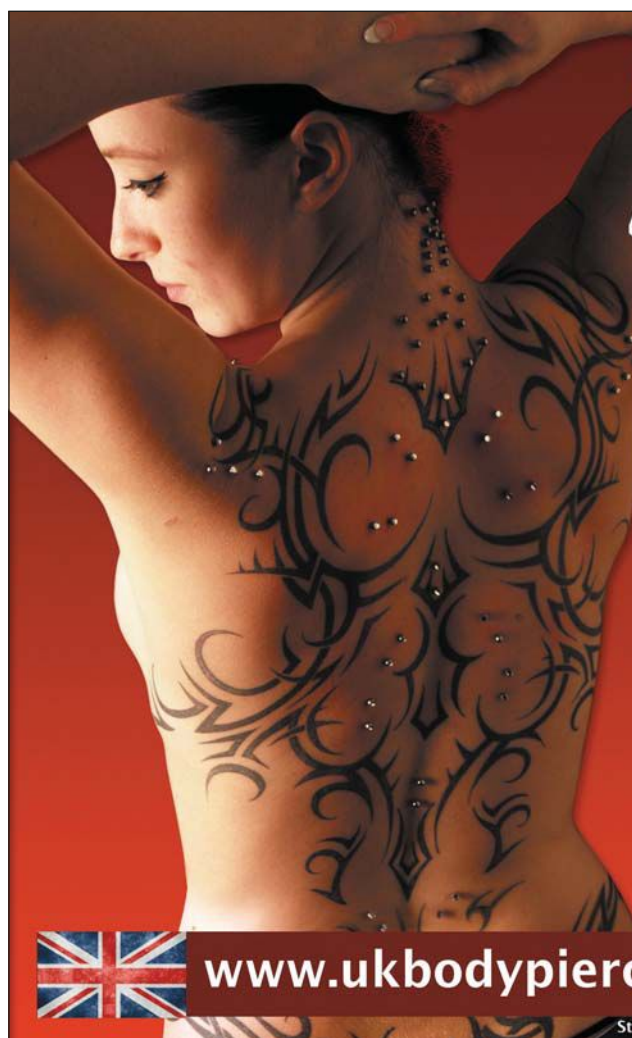
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WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

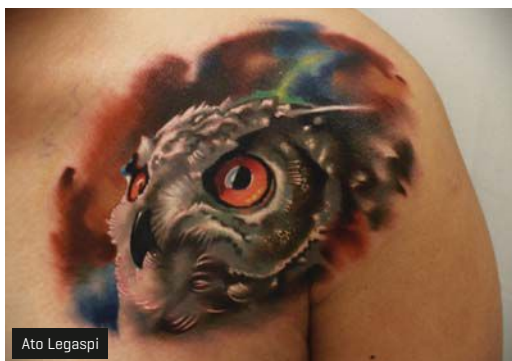
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The Philippines is steeped in tattoo history. Permanent markings on skin were an integral part of the islands' indigenous tribes for hundreds of years, long before the Spanish conquistadors arrived in the 16th century. Today, the country's tattoo landscape is drastically different. As tribe elders strive to keep centuries-old traditions alive, a new generation of artists is exploring fresh techniques and styles and driving a tattoo renaissance. Something we discovered first-hand when we dropped in on two exciting young talents on Luzon island

When the Spanish first arrived in the Philippines in 1521, they dubbed many of the country's inhabitants 'Pintados' (i.e. The Painted Ones or The Tattooed). A telling sign of just how prevalent tattooing was among its indigenous tribes. From headhunters getting tattooed for protection to women adorning their bodies for beauty, ink was a part of everyday life.

As the influence of the Church strengthened, however, traditional tattooing nearly became extinct by the 1700s. The Spanish were eventually replaced by the Americans, then came the Japanese and in between all of the cultural and religious changes, the Philippines' rich history of tattooing was at risk of disappearing forever.

Nowadays, while some Filipino artists have devoted



themselves to reviving these traditions, others have set their sights on bringing modern-day aesthetics and techniques to their native country. Artists like Ato Legaspi and Aaron Olaguivel, two immensely talented tattooers specializing in realism who are currently helping to shape the future of tattooing in the Philippines.

Introducing Ato Legaspi

Inspired to learn the art of tattooing after "seeing really nice detailed tattoos and wondering how the hell the artist did that," Ato Legaspi admits he "never intended to do tattoos for a living." But fate had other plans.

"I've always been fascinated by tattoos," he remembers. "I got my first tattoo at a very young age. A kid in town, he's a couple of years older than me, got a scorpion tattoo

TATTOOS ARE GETTING MORE AND MORE ACCEPTED BY THE FILIPINO SOCIETY



Ato Legaspi

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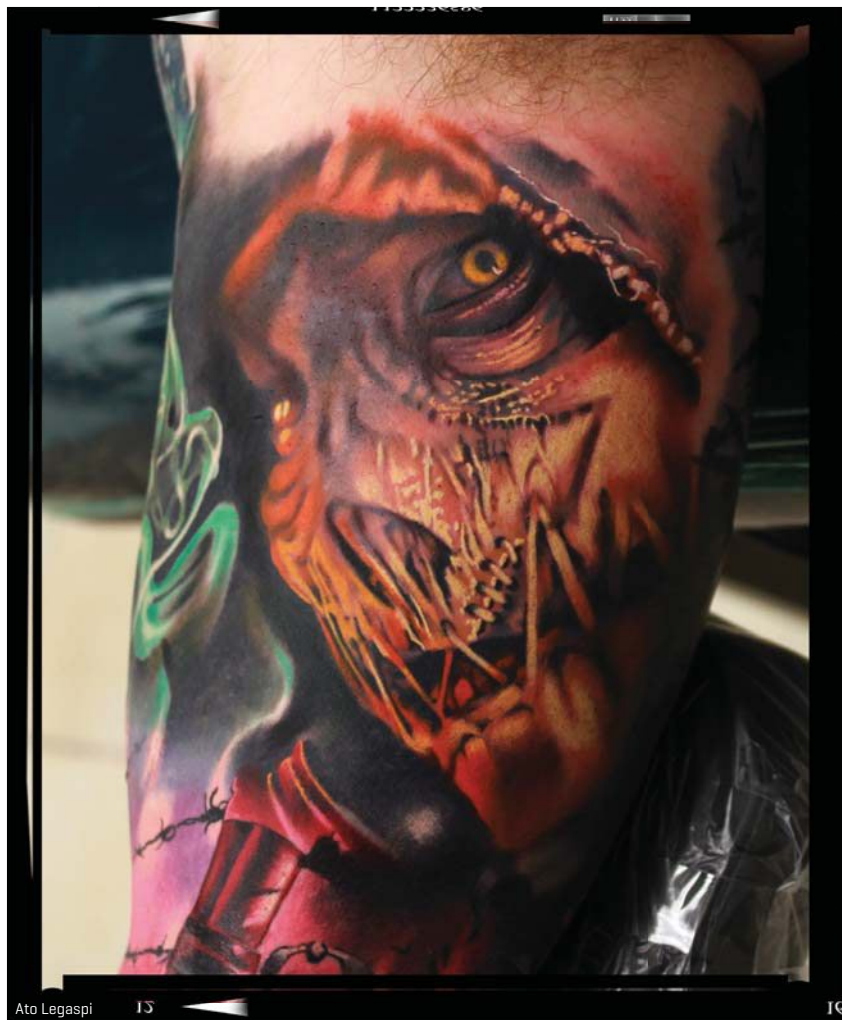
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on his forearm and I really thought it was badass, so my first tattoo was a scorpion, but way better than his!" he laughs. "At the same time, I was really into drawing and art. But it didn't really start until I was older and got a job and was able to buy a tattoo kit."

While "doing tattoos for fun, as a hobby, I got better and better and figured that this can't be free no more. I tried apprenticing under my tattoo artist because I think he's awesome, but I got turned down because he was already apprenticing someone else." So he went the self-taught route while continuing to get tattooed by his go-to artist and getting "lots of helpful tips" from him along the way.

In 2011, Legaspi opened up his own shop, Infernal Tattoo Gallery, located in Lucban on Luzon island (the Philippines' largest and most populous island). "The tattoo scene in the Philippines is very much alike to the North American one," he starts. "Tattoos are getting more and more accepted by the Filipino society. Now you walk around and you'll see lots of people have tattoos, at least small ones. They usually have all kinds of designs—different people have different tastes."

There is one big difference, however: "the price. Tattoos are way cheaper in the Philippines, that's why most good artists go abroad," he explains. Even so, over the past



Ato Legaspi

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Aaron Olaguivel

16

TATTOOS THESE DAYS LOOK WAY BETTER. PROBABLY THE BIGGEST REASON FOR THAT IS THAT WE HAVE BETTER EQUIPMENT, WHICH MAKES OUR JOBS A LOT EASIER

11 years, Legaspi has noticed major changes in the quality of work coming out of the Philippines. “Tattoos these days look way better,” he says. “Probably the biggest reason for that is that we have better equipment, which makes our jobs a lot easier.”

Back to Infernal Tattoo Gallery, Legaspi admits, “I didn’t hire any artists at my shop, I just work there alone, and I kinda like it that way. No hassle, no drama. I used to work in a shop where there were a lot of US artists and it was fun, yeah, but I tell you there was a lot of drama. I did learn lots of stuff from that shop—it made me the artist I am today—but it’s a good feeling being your own boss and it has a lot of advantages. You can stop tattooing whenever you feel tired and you want to call it

a day and you get to set your own standards.”

Choosing to focus on realism, new school and oriental traditional, Legaspi creates stellar work at his shop, as well as at Classic Professional Tattooing in Guam. A remote US island territory in Micronesia that he first visited out of sheer necessity.

“I’m a US immigrant, which means I can’t be outside of the US for long, so I decided to try Guam,” he explains. “It’s much closer to home. I went there without knowing anybody and used to stay in a hotel, then I met Edwin, another tattoo artist. He didn’t have a shop so we tattooed at his house and I gotta admit, I got comfortable there, but then realised that I was overstaying at his place, so I decided to go.”

“I met another artist named Soos and he was down to open a shop and so we did,” he continues. “We’ve had this shop running for almost three years now and yeah, it has ups and downs. There was one point that we had to close down the shop, but now it’s up and running again, so hopefully it stays that way.”

Compared to the Philippines, the tattoo scene in Guam is “more laid back and they are more into tribal and traditional tattoos. When I first did realism, people were freaking out, like they’d never seen tattoos like that,” says Legaspi. “It made it easy for me to put my name out there.”

When he’s not busy travelling and working, Legaspi, a self-professed “family guy,” can be

The Philippines 101

The Philippines is a Southeast Asian country made up of more than 7,000 islands full of lush jungle, impressive mountains and untouched tropical terrain. The country’s capital, Manila, has been nicknamed the ‘Pearl of the Orient’ and is located on the island of Luzon. Manila is home to over 1.78 million people and has, at different points throughout history, been occupied by the Spanish, Americans and Japanese.



Aaron Olaguivel



Ato Legaspi



Ato Legaspi

found spending time with his wife and kids and credits his four children as “the reason for me to stay focused on tattooing. My kids grew up with me being a tattoo artist and seeing their parents all tatted up is a normal thing for them. If they ever wanted to do tattoos, I’d be super happy,” he adds. “I’m actually trying to talk my oldest daughter into tattooing because she’s really good at drawing. Slowly, she’s getting into it.”

There’s also his interesting family of pets. A total of 11, to be exact, including a dog, iguana, three ball pythons and six axolotls. “I really like animals—they relieve my stress,” he says.

As for what’s next, Legaspi has quite “an exciting piece coming up. I have a backpiece project that we’re gonna start on pretty soon: a pirate ship being attacked by the Kraken, done in black and grey. Then I have a couple who both want three-quarter underwater-themed sleeves with the same background and everything, except one will have a sea turtle and the other one will have an octopus.”

“I’ve also been working on my wife’s leg,” he adds. “We went to Bali last year and she

really got into Indonesian culture, so she decided she wants a piece dedicated to it, like their statues and elephants. I’m really excited to finish it!”

Introducing Aaron Olaguivel

“When I saw a fresh tattoo and got a chance to witness how tattoos were done for the first time, I was instantly attracted to it,” says Aaron Olaguivel, the proud owner of Omom Tattoo Art Gallery in Pasay City, Manila.

His very first ink sighting was of a black and grey hannya mask—“What I liked about it was the illusion of a fading gradient”—then came his introduction to Paul Booth and Bob Tyrrell’s work and that was it. “I found realism tattoos incredibly amazing,” he remembers. “It gave me an urge to try to learn tattooing and since I was a Fine Arts student, I thought that it would help me pursue it.”

“It was 2012 when I decided and felt that I wanted to make a name for myself in the industry of tattooing,” continues Olaguivel. “I learned the very basics from a friend who already had some experience and, in 2012, I started to do realism tattoos. As a self-taught artist, it is very challenging to know the right techniques in colour, outline and shading,” he admits. “Luckily, I got to know great artists who do realism and they gave me a few hints.”

It’s now been six years since Olaguivel first began tattooing and one of the biggest shifts he’s noticed has been the increasing number of customers who “demand customised tattoos with intricate designs rather than pre-designed tattoos.” The overall outlook on ink in the Philip-



Aaron Olaguivel 13



Aaron Olaguivel 14

THANKS TO THE STEADY RISE OF FILIPINO ARTISTS, TATTOOS ARE SEEN AS A FORM OF ART AND HAVE BECOME STRIKINGLY MORE ACCEPTED

pines has also evolved.

First, “tattooing was a sign of rank and power among the native groups of the Philippines while in North America, tattooing was used to identify a seaman,” explains Olaguivel. Then they became “associated with criminal groups and prisoners.” And now, “thanks to the steady rise of Filipino artists, tattoos are seen as a form of art and have become strikingly more accepted. Filipinos have a demand for tattoos in all styles, but I think that the most popular is realism.”

Despite the country’s rich ink history, Olaguivel has chosen to focus on realism rather than a more traditional style and admits, “I actually did not base my work and inspiration on the tribal history of our country. However, I am proud that the Philippines are known to have a rich history in tattooing and that there are still great traditional tattoo artists like Whang-Od.”

Whang-Od

Whang-Od is the oldest tattoo artist in the Philippines. Born on February 17, 1917, she recently celebrated her 100th birthday and is the last living mambabatok (AKA traditional tattooist) from the Butbut tribe, a legendary group of warriors. Whang-Od has carried on the hand poked tattoo tradition for eight decades, using a spike of lime tree attached to a bamboo stick and wet charcoal as her tools. Several years ago, she began training her niece in the ancient artform.

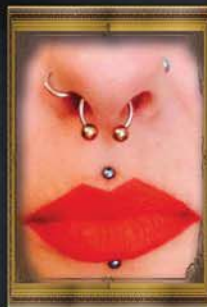
Earlier this year, in the second week of February, Olaguivel hit an impressive milestone in his career when he opened the doors to his own shop, Omom Tattoo Art Gallery. “My working station before was just in our living room and now I am renting a place located just beside our house,” he says. “Being a boss of my own business is a great advantage as I can manage my own time. I accept clients by appointment only—I don’t accept walk-ins—so I did not hire artists to work with me.”

In his downtime, Olaguivel can be found painting and drawing—“It was really my thing before I broke into the tattoo industry”—as well as raising his two kids. “There are times that I struggle with budgeting my time for the kids and work, but of course, they are my inspirations, as well as my wife and my mother,” he reveals. “They motivate me to always give my best with every project I have.”

If you’re already daydreaming about a trip to the Philippines, Olaguivel recommends making plenty of time to “experience the hospitality of the Filipinos, enjoy the beautiful islands and beaches, like the ones in Boracay and Palawan, and go shopping in the big malls or flea markets in Manila. And you’ll have to try Filipino food, such as Balut, Halo-Halo, Pancit, Sinigang, Adobo and more!” □

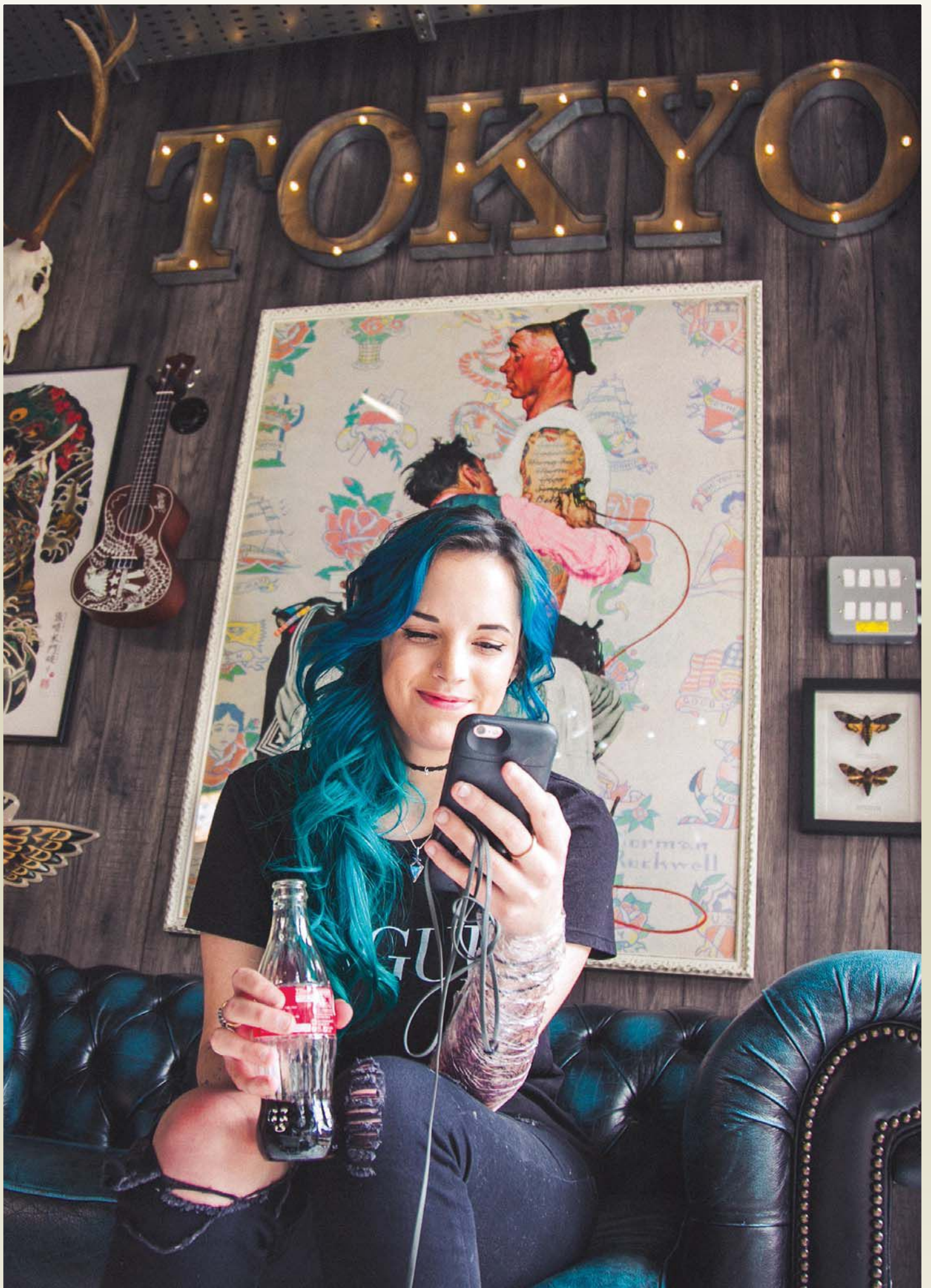


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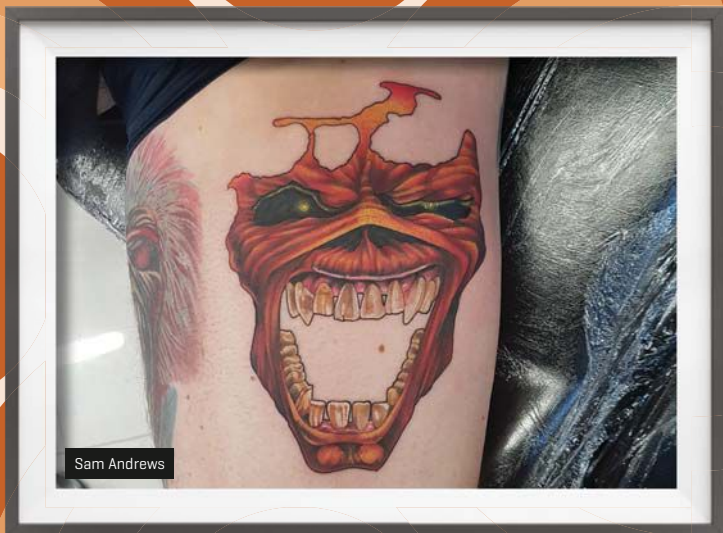
*Beccy Rimmer's tour of her favourite UK tattoo studios continues.
This month, we're off to the beautiful town of Cheltenham...*

When I learnt that Tokyotattoo and its humungous working space was home to just three resident artists, I was keen to explore more. Chatting to owner Deano, I learnt that the town-centre studio prided itself on an ability to attract some of world's best artists who come to 'guest-spot' from as far as Australia.

What that means for the people of Cheltenham and beyond is something quite special. Not only can they regularly get tattooed by UK-based LaVale, Russ Bishop and Sam Andrews, but from one week to the next they're offered the chance to receive work from well-known global names. For a client walking through the doors of Tokyotattoo, the kind of tattoo you can potentially leave with varies from one day to the next. Gloucestershire folk are wandering around with art-works on their bodies that would usual adorn people in, say, Istanbul, Amsterdam or Omsk... I think that's pretty damn cool.

Tokyotattoo is all about creating a good vibe for new and existing customers. "We have created a tattoo experience," tells Deano, and after stepping foot in the shop for the first time, it's clear what he's referring to. A welcoming atmosphere, incredible artists and (last but by no means least) an increasing tattoo clientele who just LOVE getting tattooed there. This forward-thinking appears to be creating a new breed of tattoo





Sam Andrews



LaVale



Russ Bishop

enthusiasts, a group of young, passionate individuals who return time and time again to expand their minds (and bodies) with tattoo styles developed by up-and-coming artists from around the world.

This month, I grabbed time with their three 'permanent' artists—who can be better equipped in giving us an insight into life at this UK unique hub of international tattoo art.

Introduce yourselves to our readers please.

LaVale: I'm an Italian artist with a fine-art background. I got into tattooing while attending an art academy in Milan and when I moved to London in 2010 I noticed the potential for a career in this industry. After a few

years of practicing and working on different styles, I decided to start mixing my fine-art background with tattooing. A passion for painting and watercolour became part of my work.

Sam Andrews: My name is Sam and I've been tattooing professionally now for about two and a half years. I specialise in geek-culture tattoos... lots of bright colours! Everything I do is bespoke to make sure you have a totally unique tattoo.

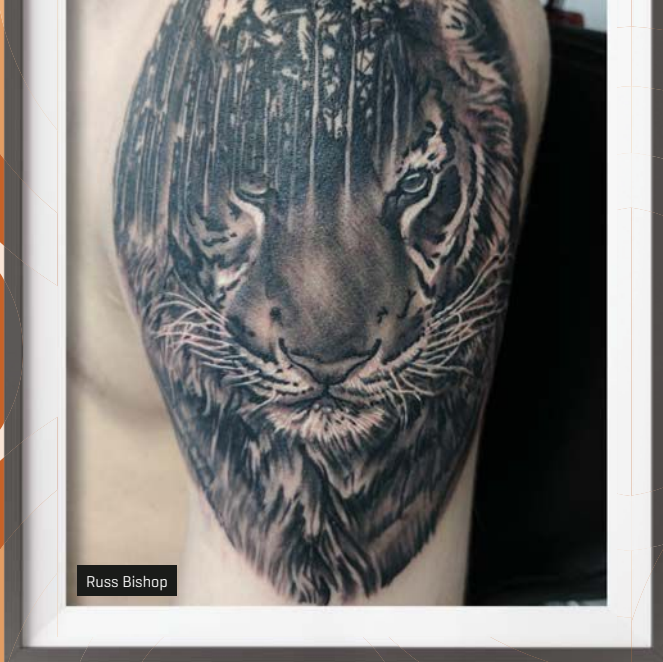
Russ Bishop: My name is Russ and I have been tattooing for over 20 years.

Why did you choose to work at Tokyotattoo? Did something in particular draw you there?

LaVale: I started here as a guest artist. From the first moment I walked into the studio, I felt at home. It's great to work in a fun environment and being so far from home that was essential for me.

Sam: I was offered a position here that began with a guest-spot and then went full-time shortly afterwards. The atmosphere is very friendly and welcoming and it didn't take me long to feel right at home.

Russ: I did a guest-spot 3 years ago and instantly liked Tokyo's fresh, professional approach. I was looking for a new challenge and I found it here. There has always been a friendly atmosphere in the studio. We get a lot of customers who enter our studio as nervous people looking to dip their toe in the multi-coloured ocean that is our craft. I believe the cleanliness and professional approach helps to relax the nerves of apprehensive clients and frequently will transform them into familiar regulars.



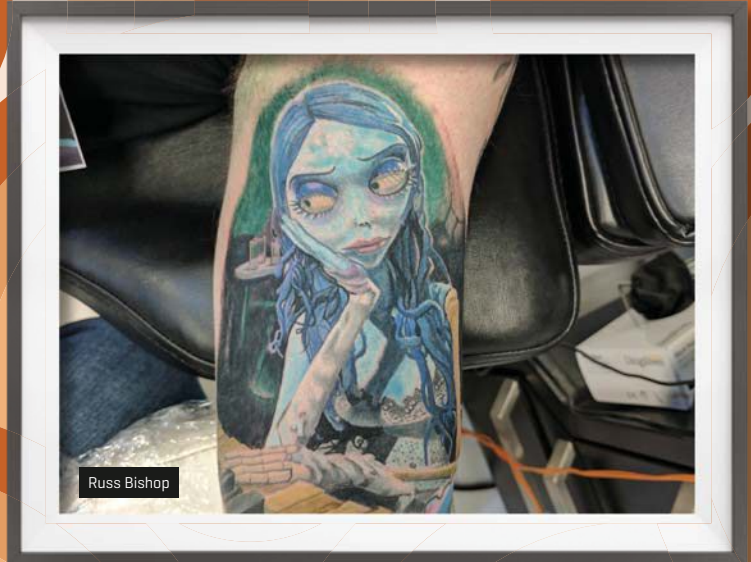
Russ Bishop



Sam Andrews



Sam Andrews



Russ Bishop

You regularly work alongside so many other guest artists. How do you find that?

Sam: We bring in such a variety of artists—awesome guests who push out dope work. I find it can inspire me to watch a guest doing what they do.

Russ: As a previous guest artist I can speak from experience what a large part of the ethos guests are. Many return for years and it's so cool to watch other tattooists grow, learn and improve each time they come back. I've been privileged to work with several world-class artists—that in turn keeps me pushing forward.

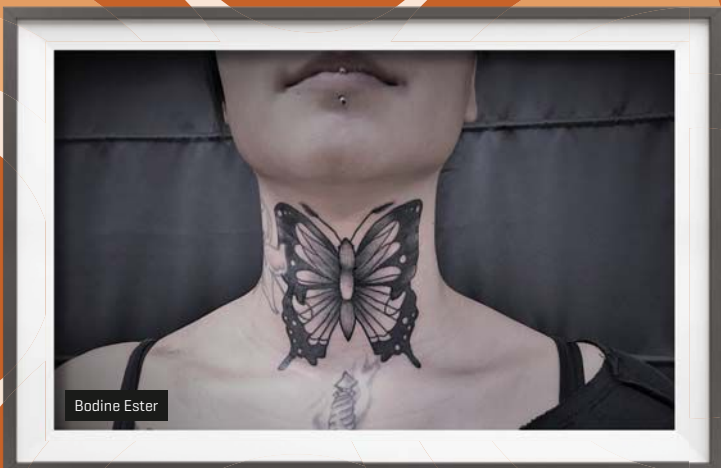
LaVale: Like most artists and creative people, I always have the need to see the work of others. We exchange techniques and thoughts about art and just get inspired from each other.

Do you feel part of a larger family here because of the way the studio is run?

LaVale: Yes—having guest artists at the studio is an opportunity to meet new friends.

Sam: I quickly felt like part of the family. It's great to know they have your back

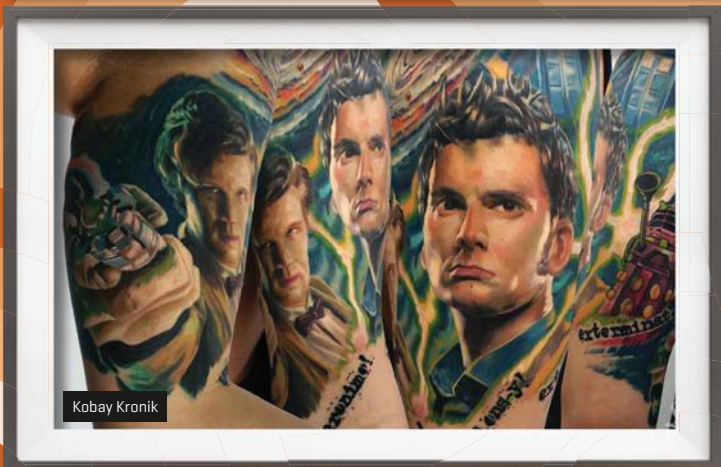
Russ: It's definitely a symbiotic relationship that has worked really well for me over the last 3 years. We try to socialise with each other every week and have certainly been in some states together at the early hours of the morning!



Bodine Ester



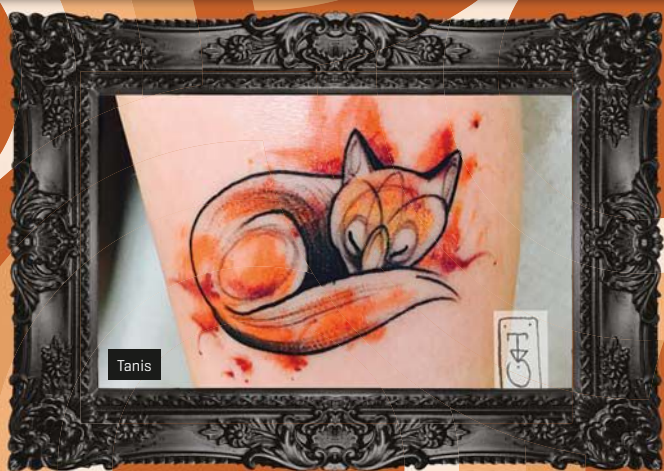
Federico Amaterasu



Kobay Kronik



Sophie Berridge



Tanis



Sweety J

I love Cheltenham and think it's such a lovely place to visit. How would you describe it to anyone thinking of visiting you for a tattoo?

LaVale: I love the little decorative streets of Montpellier... when walking through town you have the feeling of a big city but at the same time have the chance to relax and leave behind that busy and stressed feeling. That's what made me choose Cheltenham over London and here I am, proud of my decision, being part of a great team.

Russ: Cheltenham is a lovely picturesque town. It's had a great tattoo scene since the days of the Mantra Tattoo Convention. Clients are lucky to have a choice of some great artists working in Cheltenham. I'm from Birmingham which compared to Cheltenham is huge... so the scene is modest but healthy and growing.

Russ, as you know the town so well, give us a tip for next time I visit!

Russ: Cheltenham is a great place to come and visit with a bounty of great places to eat and drink. There are Michelin-star restaurants, beautiful brasseries and pretentious-as anything-wine bars! My wife and I like The Beehive pub—we even got married there! ▣

P9

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FORTY YEARS OF 2000AD

I was an avid comic reader as a kid. We're talking the late 70s/ early 80s when there were some great UK titles on shelves, and I read most of them. My favourite was Eagle. My dad read it when he was a kid and he was keen that I should give it a go when they revived it in 1982. And then there was 2000AD...

Words: Wayne Simmons · Images: As credited

Launched in 1977, 2000AD was a different breed of comic. This was a title that pushed the boundaries—more violent, more irreverent, more edgy than its peers. I remember being a little afraid of it, as a kid. I knew I was rebelling when reading 2000AD: it had a punk attitude, a fingers-to-dam-swagger that no other comic could boast.

“One of the things I love about 2000 AD is its irreverence, and I’m happy the satire is still prevalent today as it

was back then,” Matt Smith tells me. He’s been editor of the mag—or Tharg, if you’re in the know—since 2001 and, in that time, overseen some key moments in the comic’s history including both issue 2000 and now the 40th anniversary. “I feel it gives the comic its own unique flavour and it never becomes self-important—anything and everyone is ripe for satirising. There’s an anti-authoritarian attitude woven into the very DNA of the prog’s pages.”

It’s certainly in the art, some big hitters having worked



on the comic over the years— Dave Gibbons of *Watchmen* fame, for one. His work on the early Dan Dare strips lent a rough-hewn anarchistic flavour to what was originally a stuffy, tally-ho, Biggles-esque affair when Eagle ran it back in the 40s and 50s. And there are others.



Matt Smith

“I’m a big fan of Carlos Ezquerra,” Matt says. “It’s been a joy to work with him on so many Dredd and Strontium Dog stories. Henry Flint has produced some absolutely astonishing artwork on the likes of the Dredd/Aliens crossover or Shakara. Greg Staples has drawn some of the most iconic covers of my time on 2000 AD and his work on *Dark Justice* is breathtaking. And it’s been great to see the next generation of artists shine, like Leigh Gallagher on *Defoe* and *Kingmaker*, Tiernen Trevallion on *Absalom*, Mike Dowling on *Anderson* and Dom Reardon on *Caballistics, Inc.*”

One of my favourites is Colin MacNeil. The Scotsman has been drawing comics since 1986; I first noticed him on an early *Strontium Dog* strip. He’s been a regular with 2000AD ever since and definitely one of the ringleaders with regards to the mag’s counter-culture vibe. “Some-

times the fun is in taking the piss out of something, sometimes it’s about putting something in the art because I like that thing and sometimes I put something in just to wind people up or make them think,” he tells me. For Colin, having fun and having a dig at the elite is one and the same thing—which is the very essence of 2000AD, really. “If there’s one thing I’ve learned about The Establishment it’s that they do not want you to have fun.”

I met Colin six years ago at a comic con in Derry, Northern Ireland, and we talked of how drawing could be akin to method acting. Colin has an uncanny ability to evoke emotion from these ragtag antiheroes through his art. But how does he deal with a character like Judge Dredd who, on the surface, appears so deadpan and one dimensional?

“Dredd’s viewed as a fascist in an all-powerful police state. Is he though?” Colin asks. “To me, Dredd is essentially a decent man, quite moral in some respects. Everyone is equal in his eyes, whether they’re male, female, transgender, rich, poor, black, white, human, alien, mutant or whatever.” For Colin, Dredd’s blind dedication to an imperfect law presents some rather complex dilemmas for the character. “If you can understand the subtle nuances of his moral core, then he becomes a most fascinating character indeed. This is essentially what I keep in my head when I’m drawing Dredd. I try to empathise with

ONE OF THE THINGS I LOVE ABOUT 2000 AD IS ITS IRREVERENCE, AND I'M HAPPY THE SATIRE IS STILL PREVALENT TODAY



Ryan Brown Anderson



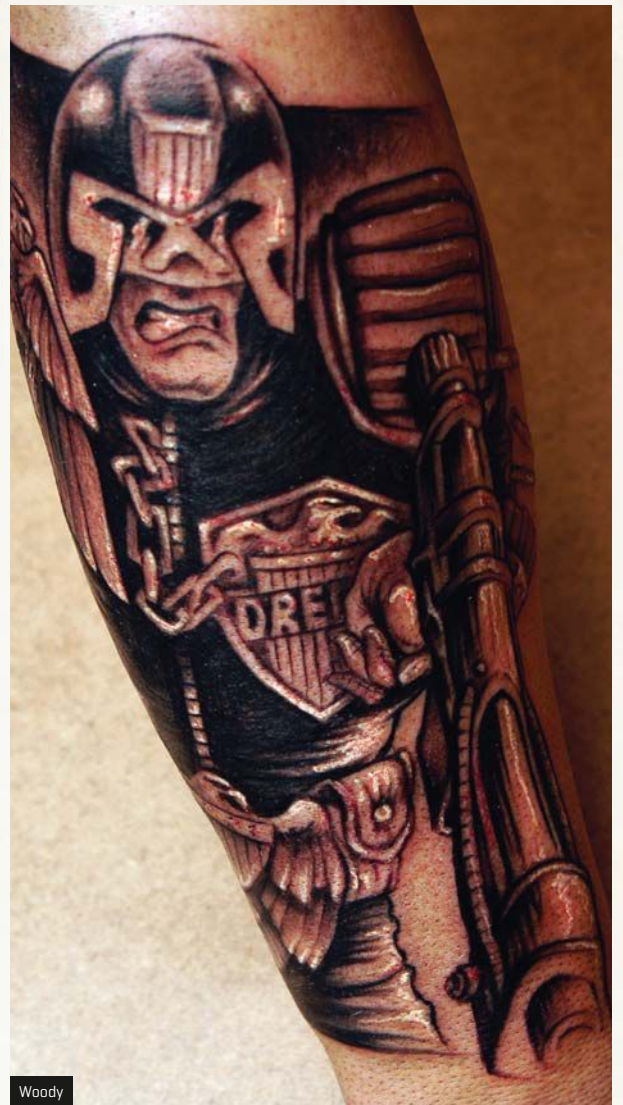
Ryan Brown



Lee RudeBoy Reynolds



Ryan Brown



Woody

SOMETIMES THE FUN IS IN TAKING THE PISS OUT OF SOMETHING, SOMETIMES IT'S ABOUT PUTTING SOMETHING IN THE ART BECAUSE I LIKE THAT THING

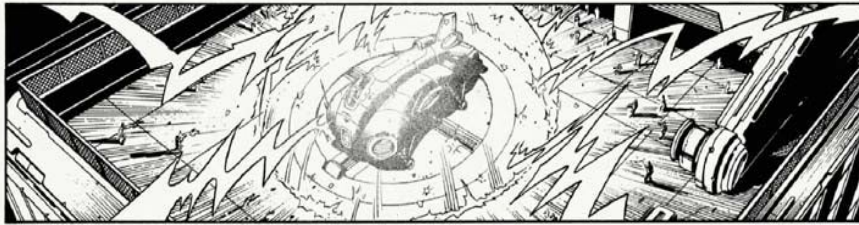
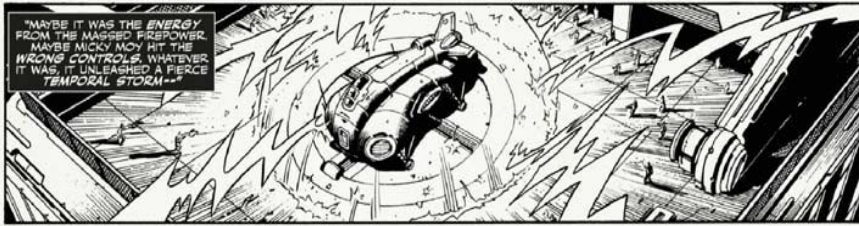
the character so that these subtleties somehow come through on the page.”

For Welshman, Dylan Teague, Dredd was always the main attraction. In fact it was ol’ Stoney Face that gave him his break—only in this case, we’re talking about a certain Mr Stallone. “I started on the short lived Judge Dredd: Lawman of the Future comic, based on the Sylvester Stallone movie,” he tells me. Back then, Dylan had been sending work into 2000AD editor-at-the-time, Steve MacManus. Steve had taken the young artist under his wing, offering feedback and encouragement. At the time, Dylan had been thinking about Art College. He’d been to an interview but wasn’t sure whether it was for him. “Steve suggested I take a year out to get into comics professionally. Well, it took about two years but I got there with Lawman of the Future.”

I first met Dylan at 2014’s Tattoo & Toy, co-produced by tattoo artist and ubergeek Chris Jones. I remember us chatting about how tattoo and geek culture were becoming more integrated. “Yeah, I think a lot of the imagery from comics lends itself really well to tattoo art, so there’s

a big overlap,” he says. One of the best things about working tattoo cons, Dylan tells me, is seeing some 2000AD related ink. It’s not the most commonly requested tattoo in the world. I did hunt down some for this piece and they are a marvel to behold—from Oz’s acrylic-esque profile shot and Drew Govan’s comicstrip effect to Dan Henk’s epic Dredd vs Death backpage. And then there was Issue 275’s Tattoo of the Month, Robert Sedgebeer’s cutsey take on ol’ Stoney Face. Dylan had the joy to see some of his own work immortalised in ink. “Indeed,” he laughs, “someone has one of my Dredd covers on their skin!”

Someone else I know from a shared passion for geekdom is fellow Northern Irishman, Ryan Brown. Ryan and I met back in 2008 when we were both signing books at Belfast Forbidden Planet. I was pimping my debut novel, Drop Dead Gorgeous, while Ryan was signing copies of The Dead, his first foray into comicbooks. Written by Alan Grant and illustrated by veterans Simon Bisley and Glenn Fabry, The Dead was published by Ryan’s own press, Beserker. Back then, this was a part-time gig, Ryan also running a martial arts shop. But when the shop closed down, Ryan decided he



Dylan Teague



Dylan Teague



Paul Davies

DREDD IS ESSENTIALLY A DECENT MAN, QUITE MORAL IN SOME RESPECTS. EVERYONE IS EQUAL IN HIS EYES...

needed to make comics a full-time concern. "Around that point, Simon Bisley asked me to colour his line art for the Tower Chronicles series, which gave me an income," he tells me. "I learned a lot that first year. I was working with one of the best artists out there and I had to work fast as pages kept flowing in." He had always wanted to do some cover work for 2000AD so he sent a sample to editor Matt, who liked it, so Ryan did another. "I sent him around eight samples, the last one featuring Dredd with smoke coming out of his lawgiver. Matt said, 'I'll take it', so that was my first cover."

To me, Ryan's art has a photorealistic feel, although he himself prefers 'believable'. It got me thinking about how these changes in style affect a comic with a heritage like 2000AD. Is it a bit like realism within the tattoo world, some viewing it as a threat to more traditional art? Matt Smith doesn't think so. "Part of the remit of an anthology is to give variety between the stories, so there's always room for black and white linework, painted pages or computer-coloured art. Most fans, I think, realise that the computer is just a tool, like the pen and the brush, and it

how it's utilised that's important. The energy and aesthetic is still there, it's just the methods have changed. The comic has to move with the times, it can't stay rooted in 1978."

While the artwork might change, some tropes remain the same—Mega City One still has that 80s cyberpunk vibe that it always had. Kneepads and mohawks are always in fashion! I wondered whether this was intentional. "It's like anything created in the 70s or 80s," Matt says. "It can't escape the vision of the future as perceived when it was originally created. 2000 AD was a post-atomic comic and a lot of its elements—mutants, post-apocalyptic landscapes—are rooted in that."

While rooted in the past, 2000AD is very much a mag looking to the future. Recent announcements at the 40th anniversary celebrations see the prog's publisher, Rebellion, broadening out the franchise with all kinds of goodies in store, including brand new board games and console games. In terms of the prog itself, it's business as usual, and for Matt/Tharg, that can mean only one thing: "More Thrill-power, of course!" ▣

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The Great British



Tattoo Show

2017

A look back—which isn't that far back at all—at the Great British Tattoo Show 2017 at Alexandra Palace

I've been to a lot of tattoo shows over the last year or so. A lot. Some have been wonderful and some not so much. This year's Great British Tattoo Show fell well and truly into the former category. I haven't had such a blast at one of our own shows for a long time.

The reasoning behind that could of course be I'm just miserable most of the time but I don't think so. No, this year's show was different in many tiny ways that, combined, went to make for a weekend that whipped by fast as lightning.

It was a show that simply clicked. Those working seemed to belong there. It's hard to explain but there was a sense of belonging—which in itself is odd because once again, we'd hit the four corners to find as many top flight artists you have possibly never heard of as we could most of whom had never met each other before.

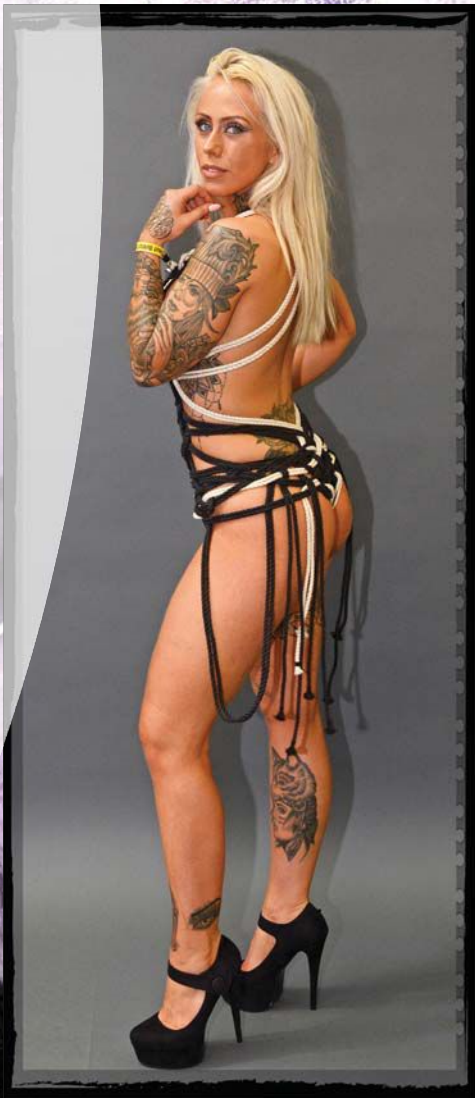


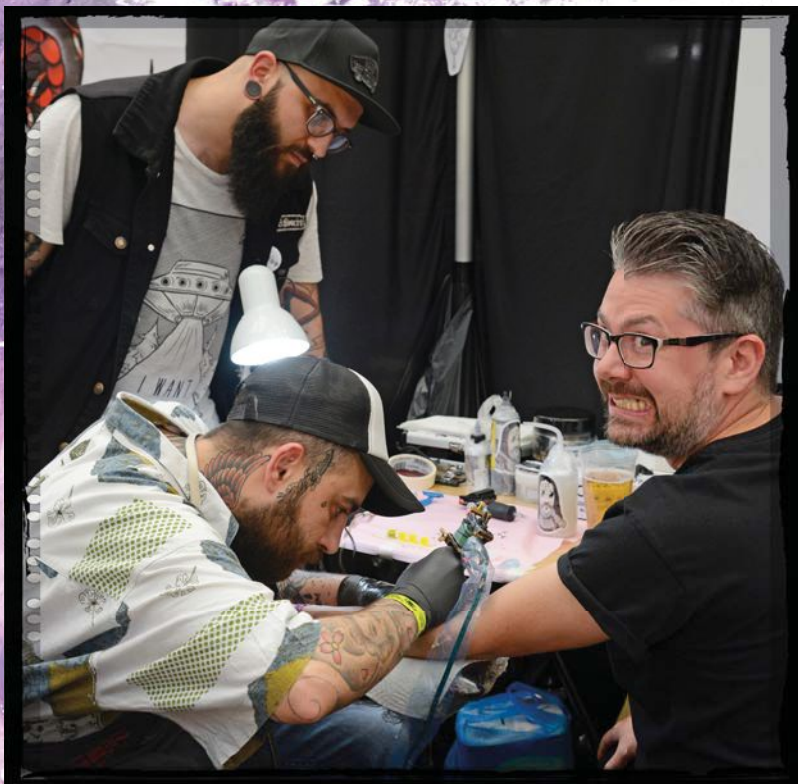
I guess the bottom line is that sometimes you can just find a chemistry that works and when you do, you roll with it. The more you roll with it, the more snow you pick up.

Having said that, there were also plenty of artists you would know. I make no secret of the fact that Noon is one of my favourite artists working in the world today and it was good to see him again. His style has changed a little over the last couple of years and I like it very much. Watch out for a feature from that corner very soon. Also in attendance, some friends from Seventh Sin in North Carolina (Kyle Patrick and Chris Toler—who took one of our skulls home) and some friends from show after show after show... this is a long and endless list but you know who you



When it's all over and the lights go down, the only thing that matters is how good that tattoo is on the client





Sometimes you can find a chemistry that works and when you do, you roll with it

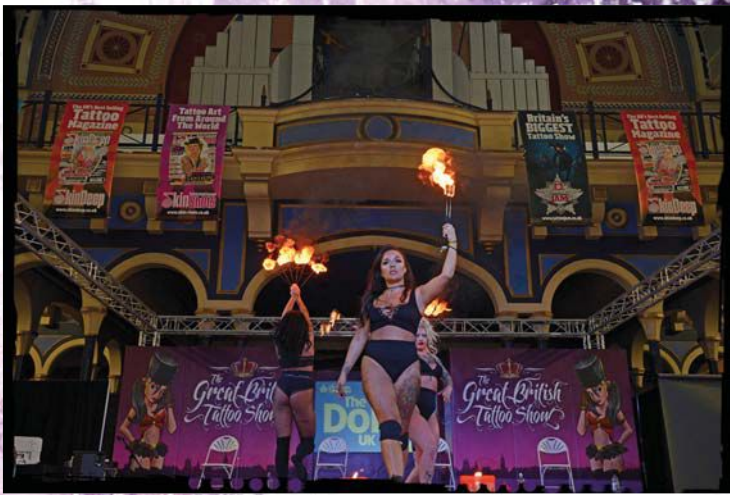
are because we have drunk coffee together.

Interestingly, over the last 12 months or so, there seems to have been an ever widening gap between those raising their game and those content to stay where they always have been. The difference is that even those happy to do what they have always done are great by standards of say, 10 years ago—but for those who have raised the bar, the standard is incredibly high and you don't have to travel far anymore either. I feel very safe saying that this was the case sitting up at the judging table. It's one thing walking around the floor seeing work being created and another thing entirely to see hundreds—one after the other—while trying to decide which is the best.

What was nice to see in a bizarre kind of way, is that I saw a lot

of tattoos in the making that never made it as far as the judges table—hopefully this means artists are preferring to finish their work in their own time rather than rush to enter a competition. I take my hat off to you. When it's all over and the lights go down, the only thing that matters is how good that tattoo is on the client.

For those not being worked on—as always—there was much entertainment to be had. Aside from the fire, the fashion and the dead animals (not quite sure how I feel about all of that), my favourite amongst all of this was the Unplugged stage. Who wouldn't thoroughly enjoy a drink (served by their boss no less) in a comfortable high backed chair watching a never ending parade of troubadours plying their wares... and the



RULE CHECK

A year or so back, we took the decision to only judge tattoos done at the show. There's a few reasons behind this but mostly we wanted the award winners to represent the quality of work at the show. This is well publicised when the artist has forms to fill in to enter in the first place but some still insist on entering old work - go figure. For the sake of being fair, we look at them all equally but if a tattoo comes along that is healed, it gets awarded a big fat zero for trying to buck the system. It's like a great song written for Eurovision 2015 being entered into the 2017 show. I honestly think it would be a smart thing for all shows - globally - to do this. It's good for the artists who work the show, good for the fans at the show and great for the industry in general. Worth a thought...

THE WINNERS

Ali Burke · Stallions and Galleons · **Best of Convention, Best of Saturday & Best Colour**
Martin Tay · The White Room Tattoo · **Best of Sunday & Best Neo-Traditional**
Matina · Sick Rose · **Best Blackwork**
Nicky · Tattoo Nicky · **Best Oriental**
Matty Friend · First Electric · **Best Traditional**
Mim Hennessy-Mann · Just Add Ink · **Best Avant Garde**
Chris Toler · Seventh Sin Tattoo Studio · **Best Black & Grey**
Yisis · The White Room Tattoo · **Best Realism**

THE RUNNERS-UP

Lele Tattoo · **Oriental**
Mikey Black · Elixir Ink · **Traditional**
Conio · Polifamous · **Blackwork**
Jordan Baker · Skin Kitchen · **Colour**
Nataliya · West London Ink · **Neo-Traditional**
Luigi Gala · Luigi Gala Tattoo · **Avant Garde**
Adam Thomas · Marked One · **Black and Grey**
Ivan Bor · Hammersmith Tattoo · **Realism**



This years show was different in many tiny ways that, combined, went to make for a weekend that whipped by fast as lightning

genius thing about such a stage, is it doesn't intrude on the working artists. I could take a lot more of this at many, many shows.

So, all of this is a really long way of going about saying 'I had a fucking great time this weekend. I hope you did too'. But that wouldn't be much of a review, even though it's all I actually have to say.

Next port of call for us: The tenth anniversary of Tattoo Jam from August 11-13 at Doncaster Racecourse. If I can write the same kind of things about that, it will have been a great year for tattoo fans all round.

Bring it.



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AN EYE IS UPON YOU

BEE HERE NOW

I grew up in a small Hertfordshire village, spent a decade and half living in central London and moved to Manchester ten years ago

It didn't have to be Manchester, I felt no particular affinity to the city, I just wanted to change my life and everything about it. Brighton seemed too obvious, Birmingham too concrete, Glasgow too far.

My mother had always been my anchor, my yoyo string, she'd kept me close to home.

When she died of cancer, there was no reason for me to stay, so I invented a reason to go. I would never have left the south if she hadn't left me first.

I often describe myself as 'a southerner adrift in the north'.

Bereavement is a strange state to inhabit, a push and pull of the desire for the familiar and a need for change. I had my mother's name, Denise, tattooed on my shin, packed up her rather revolting old, brown, zip-up cardigan, her ugly old childhood doll, and her one-time engagement ring and left everything and everyone else I had known and loved behind. It sounds maudlin, but it felt less so. I went back to university, met new friends, started the altered life I so desperately needed. The next decade passed almost as quickly and as imperceptibly as a cliché leaves the lips.

My children both have Northern accents, but I cling to my southern accent as though it is a life-raft.

I've succumbed to a little of the local dialect, but only for ease of communication, especially when buying bread products or trying not to be mistaken for 'posh'.

The bit I live in, Stretford, is a little bit crap, a victim of 1960s, bulldozery town

I COULDN'T MOVE BACK TO LONDON, EVEN IF I WANTED TO. I SIMPLY CAN'T AFFORD IT



Filipa Silva



PAULA HARDY KANGELOS
DiamondBetty

planning, but the crapness makes it cheap and the cheapness attracts interesting and pragmatic people, who seem to stick around. This makes for a proper community, a less-suffocating version of the village I left behind 23 years ago, only with more dog poo and Manchester United fans.

I couldn't move back to London, even if I wanted to. I simply can't afford it, I'm a south-to-north economic migrant, and besides, my son has lived here for more than half his life. My daughter is an actual Mancu-



Jon Potter

THE RESULTING SWARMS OF BEE TATTOOS ARE NOW VISIBLE VIA SOCIAL MEDIA, LOCAL AND EVEN NATIONAL NEWS

nian, born in St Mary's. She's never lived anywhere else.

Yet, somehow, I still thought of myself as a Londoner, even though I knew it sounded ridiculous. New buildings go up so fast and so often that I barely recognise once-familiar streets and my friends are, like me, largely priced out of the place we once called home.

When the Westminster terror attack happened, back in March, I felt affronted. How very dare they attack MY city? Not that it was a new experience, after all, I'd lived in London through the IRA years, and had been living only a short walk from the square mile during 7/7. Heck, even the cathedral-city-next-door to my little village had found itself a terrorist target, back in 1991.

I recognised Sadiq Khan's pragmatic attitude, living in a big, liberal city like London means attacks are always a possibility, and being prepared for them is an everyday necessity, a constant bubbling beneath the surface.

When the news of an attack in Manchester first broke, I didn't feel very much at all, my bomb-hardened inner Londoner felt numb.

Yet, as the following days unfolded, everything shifted. As the stories of the lost, the injured, the bereaved and those that were tasked with helping, or volunteered, were told, I realised how proud I am of this city and its people, and just how anchored I've become. It's been uncharacteristically sunny here, but it appears that Manchester has imperceptibly crept under my skin, like damp.

If my response to Westminster was 'HOW dare you?' my response to Manchester felt more, 'I dare YOU'. This city is not easily divided.

The worker bee emblem, seen on historic clock faces and modern litter bins alike, originated with Manchester's 19th century 'hive of industry' reputation, and whilst the old mills are now more likely to contain artist's studios or luxury flats than house factories, Manchester has somehow preserved its historic ability to pull together and work for a common goal.

And this admirable quality been mirrored in my other community, the tattoo community, who immediately set about raising funds in support of those so devastatingly affected—The Manchester Tattoo Appeal began here, initiated by Sam Barber, but spread rapidly around the country and beyond. The resulting swarms of bee tattoos are now visible via social media, local and even national news.

A personal bereavement brought me to Manchester, but it was the city's collective bereavement that made clear my reasons for staying. We do things differently here. ▣



The television will be revolutionised

I was recently part of a YouTube video for BBC Three called ‘Things Not To Say To People With Tattoos’. Their funny series is a light-hearted look at the questions the public repeatedly ask particular groups—i.e. the often annoying reactions to our ink that we rant about (sorry, I mean, intellectually and coherently explore) in the pages of this here mag.

This morning the online film had racked up over a million views and I’ve made it my personal mission to stay well clear of the YouTube comments section. Anyone au fait with vlogging will be familiar with the extent to which this can dangerous ground.

OK, OK, so I had one very quick scroll and luckily, one comment in particular has helpfully inspired this column, so—to that particular ignorant human being—thank you, thank you indeed. The statement in question claimed that everyone with tattoos must, in some way, have “mental issues”. In fact, any public article or video about tattooed people will be accompanied by a handful of opinions from others about the mental instability of the individuals being featured.

So, let’s openly explore this. As tattooed people, do we struggle with the world around us more so than others, and does that inspire us to ink those troubles on our skin? Let’s reflect...

Funny old thing this world we live in. We’re here for a short time and what a bumpy ride it is along the way. We collect memories, we lose people, we learn something new every day. Each step of the way we battle with our identities—what do I like? How do I want the world to perceive me and more importantly... how do I perceive myself? The old cliché of the rollercoaster couldn’t be more accurate. Some chapters of this story we soar, and in others, we hit rock bottom. We’re always being challenged to question the meaning of this ride and its purpose.

This lucky-dip known as life that’s bursting at the seams with language, ideas, places, meanings, creations, relationships, feelings, knowledge, learning, love and hate... it’s no easy thing to get your head around. I’d say that if you’ve mastered the art of living on



James Mullin

THE ONLINE FILM HAD RACKED UP OVER A MILLION VIEWS. I’VE MADE IT MY PERSONAL MISSION TO STAY WELL CLEAR OF THE YOUTUBE COMMENTS SECTION..



BECCY RIMMER
BeccyRimmer

this planet in complete understanding and harmony, hey—you’re one lucky fellow.

The rest of us—do we struggle mentally with this thing called life? Would I agree that a huge percentage of people on this planet have, as our vociferous friend put it, “mental issues”? Fuck yeah, we do. More of us than you’d imagine. For many of us, our brains access a different level of (I’m going to reward us and call it) intelligence which is unable to just accept and smile at that which we see around us. This existence is beautiful and complex enough to deserve our mental effort, our philosophies, our over-analysis.

The only difference with tattooed people is that we choose to play with images on our skin in order to explore these concepts—concepts that, believe me, most people around you are also reflecting upon. Call me crazy but I embrace this mental instability—I’ll take it over your numbing sanity any day. ▣



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