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2018
CALENDAR



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ROBERT BORBAS

FLUSH THE FASHION
JULIA REHME

THE NATURE OF THINGS
JESSICA MACH

ON THE ROAD:
BRUSSELS & FLORENCE!

THE SLIGHTLY SURREAL
AARON HODGES

MAYONAIZE
SCRIPT DONE RIGHT



13 PAGES OF PORTFOLIOS



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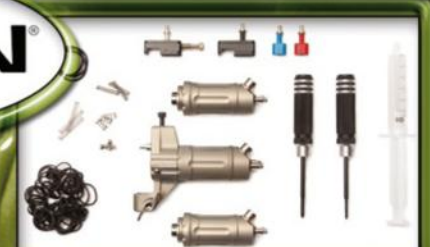


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NOTES TO SELF

“I have become a Paladin of Seriousness.”

I found this sentence in the notes folder on my phone, but I don't know if I thought of it myself or if I stole it. I'm going to say I thought of it myself because I know what a Paladin is and I don't think many people do. I may even get it tattooed on myself somewhere but I think I would get it put together by somebody like Mayonaize (go find him inside the mag somewhere) and then if I changed my mind about how 'serious' I actually wanted to be for the rest of my life, it wouldn't really matter what it said.

Then again, I also found this in my notes folder and I wish I could remember who I wrote it about so that I can stay out of her way in future:

“She had a deep, throaty, genuine laugh, like that sound a dog makes just before it throws up.”

Anyway, we appear to have come to the end of another year - more or less anyway. There's a calendar in the magazine which means 2018 is certainly very close. I shall be taking the whole of December off again to try and get a grip on the world. What this means is, I'm not taking any more planes, trains or automobiles to tattoo shows, getting tattooed, looking at tattoos or trying to decide who has made the best tattoo. It's important to step back now and again because it's easy to forget you're a writer when you're in the middle of an industry like this.

Truth be told, if you can afford to do it - financially and time-wise - I highly recommend downing tools for an extended period of time whatever it is you do. It's only by not doing the thing you want to be doing forever that you get to figure out whether you're actually doing it or not. In that very same notes folder on my phone, I also found this:

“It's a real shame that all the people who know how to be great are too busy managing their social media to get off their arse and actually do it.”

It's hard work trying to keep focussed on the world you intended to create when the world is so noisy. It's even hard work to ap-



Kostas Tzikalagias

SHE HAD A DEEP, THROATY, GENUINE LAUGH, LIKE THAT SOUND A DOG MAKES JUST BEFORE IT THROWS UP



SION SMITH · EDITOR
 editor@skindeep.co.uk
 mrsionsmith
 @skindeep_uk
 skindeepmag

preciate the things you already have never mind the things you think you want.

When was the last time you sat down with yourself, checked yourself over and looked at all the art you've collected on your body, appreciating it as much today as you did the day you walked out of the studio with a smile on your face? I know the answer to this. The answer is you never did. I know this because I know people.

So there you go - the last issue of the year. I hope you had a great 2017 and next year, let's all get even better tattoos than we did this year because damnit, I don't think I want to be a Paladin of Seriousness anymore. ▣

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16



36



24



60



90

10 REBEL INK

Wayne Simmons talks with some of his favourite rebels within tattooing, artists doing something different with their inks. This month he meets Aaron Hodges.

16 THE NATURE OF THINGS

Beccy Rimmer—always drawn to tattooers who have clearly dedicated their craft towards focusing on just one type of imagery—meets Jessica Mach. The natural world has spoken... and she is speaking back.

24 FLORENCE TATTOO CONVENTION

It's the tenth year at the Florence Tattoo Convention—one of the bosses favourite shows in the whole world—and according to him, it just gets better with every passing year.

30 CLOUDBUSTING

Traditional tattoo imagery has well and

truly breached the public consciousness. Maybe Ed Hardy deserves some credit for that, his clothing label having pushed his own defiantly old school flash into mainstream fashion, many other brands, clothing and otherwise, following...

36 WRITING ON THE WALL

Who could have known that Mayonaize, while looking for some space from his daily work, would also become a famous graffiti artist?

60 FLUSH THE FASHION

German tattooist Julia Rehme works in her studio Noia in Berlin. Originally trained as a fashion designer and with a passion for abstract painting, her design uses contrasting elements and graphic shapes. Come see.

68 AFRAID OF THE DARK

Robert Borbas. We don't need to say anything more than this.

76 THE TRANSFORMATIVE TATTOO

Sean Herman continues his quest to heal the world. This month, he takes on The Big One.

84 PLAYING WITH FIRE

As tattoos continue to weave their way into all walks of life, the culinary world has seen an explosion of ink in its kitchens, from local pubs right up to Michelin-starred restaurants. This month, we meet up with New York-based chef Brad Willits to get his take on foodie ink and talk all things delicious..

90 BRUSSELS TATTOO CONVENTION

One of the finest shows in the world gets the Skin Deep photographic treatment.

THE USUAL SUSPECTS

06 SLEEVE NOTES
98 WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE

THIS ISSUE'S CONTRIBUTORS

Pascal Bagot
Kamila Burzymowska
Nicky Connor
Sean Herman
Steven Kenny
Barbara Pavone
Beccy Rimmer
Wayne Simmons

COVER SHOT

Scott Cole

EDITOR

Sion Smith
editor@skindeep.co.uk
07841 999334

DESIGN

David Gamble
davidgamble@mac.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS & BACK ISSUES

magazines@jazzpublishing.co.uk
01244 881888

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Justine Hart
production@skindeep.co.uk
01244 881888

ACCOUNTS & ADMIN MANAGER

Emma McCrindle
accounts@jazzpublishing.co.uk
01244 886009

ADMINISTRATION

Jan Schofield
jan@jazzpublishing.co.uk
01244 886019

CREDIT CONTROL

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

ADVERTISING MANAGER

Mark McCarthy
mark@jazzpublishing.co.uk
01244 886022

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

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

EVENTS DIRECTOR

Shelley Bond
shelley@jazzevents.co.uk
01244 881888

MANAGING DIRECTOR

Stuart Mears
stuart@jazzpublishing.co.uk
01244 881888

DISTRIBUTION

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

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UPSIDE DOWN - A ZINE WORTH ITS SALT...

We've always got space here for tattoo philosophers—those of us who can't switch off from thinking about how we get inked and why. One of those fellow tattoo geeks is Italy-based blogger Ilaria Pauletti. She's here to tell you about why she's turning the tattoo world upside down...

"I like to think of myself as being an enthusiast of life, and likewise, an enthusiast of tattoos. Today a tattoo might not last forever, but the memory of its experience does. The tattoo is a final result, shown to the eyes of everyone, but it actually is a very intimate act.

I fell in love with tattoos many years ago. Fast forward to the present day and right now I get to interview my favourite artists! Writing and sharing my own passion with tattoos has given me the opportunity to know the hidden pearls of this world.

In my regular job, I work 8 hours a day at a computer and recently technology has made me want to step back and use paper again. So, I wanted to create an independent project that would share passion beyond digital, besides the number of likes, beyond the appearance that sometimes society imposes and with which we

exclude ourselves."

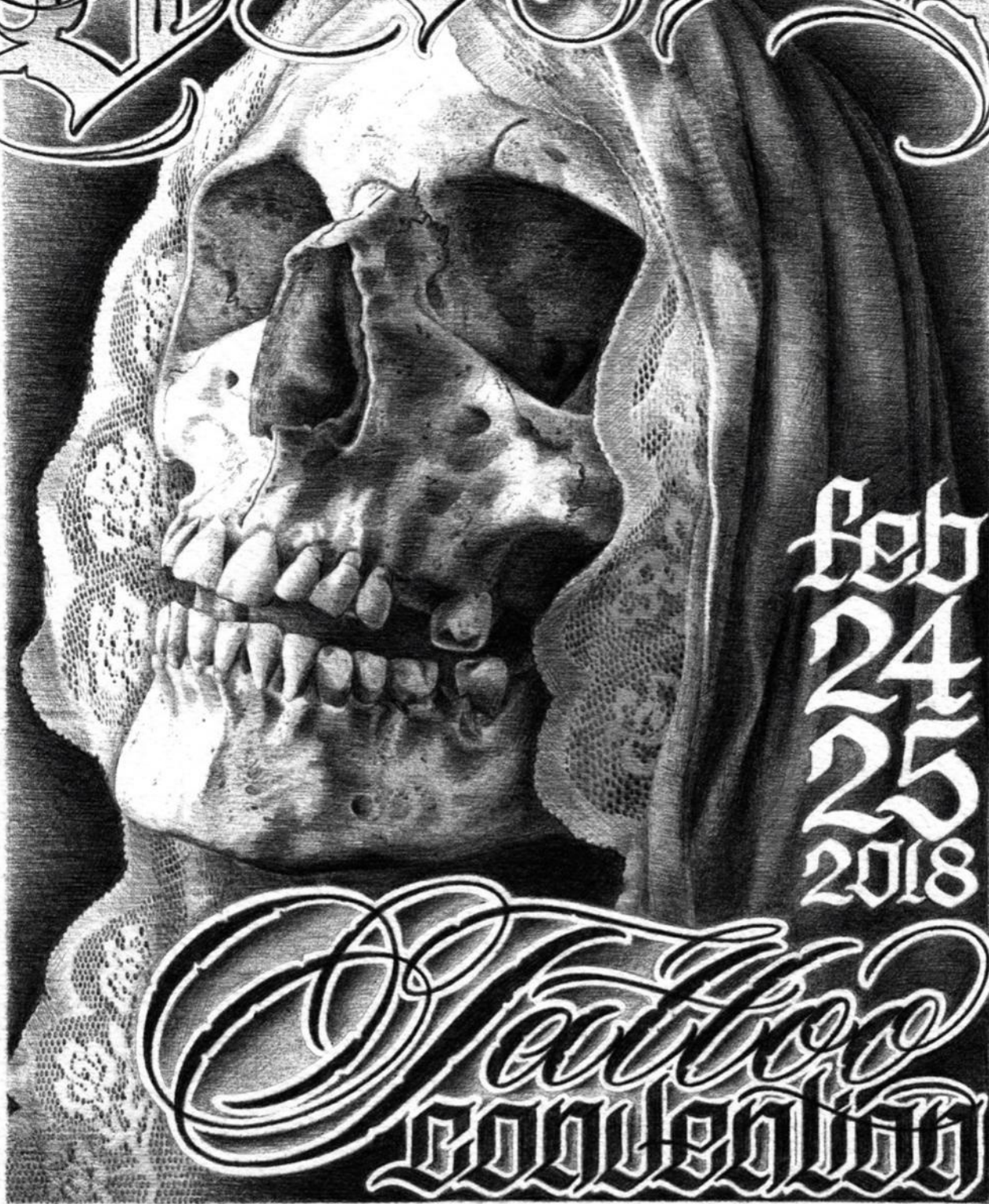
The Upside Down Zine sees 22 internationally renowned artists speak about their personal tattoo perspectives. They don't talk about their work or style but about the tattoos and experiences on their own skin. You can read 22 introspective, beautiful and significant stories and paths. Some explore very delicate topics, such as self-acceptance, others are more carefree, but all equally genuine. You can purchase a copy of Upside Down Vol. 1 at upside-down-zine.big-cartel.com—check it out. We love seeing tattoo lovers bringing extraordinary work to the table.

#upside-down-zine

📍 [ilariapauletti](https://www.instagram.com/ilariapauletti)



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by
Alice Totemica



As ever, do any of us need a reason to love something when the only thing you can want to say about it is 'that's really cool'. I love this with all of my heart simply for the story it tells. I bumped into Alice at the Florence Tattoo Convention and had the opportunity to take a look at some of her latest work too—you can find that over in the supplement somewhere, but I wanted to fish this one out and give it some space all of its own.

You can write your own story into this if you like, the original brief will only ever be known by two people and you

know what... I don't want to know what the brief was. This is more than good enough for me.

Knowing there are people out in the world who can make us all happy with their talent is enough for me and it should sure as hell be enough for you.




Which brings me to this: From next issue onwards, if you see something online—or even in the flesh—that you think deserves a page all of its own here, let us know and we'll see what we can do. It has to be original and a one of a kind custom design but throw some things our way and let's see what gives.

ALICE TOTEMICA

instagram.com/totemica
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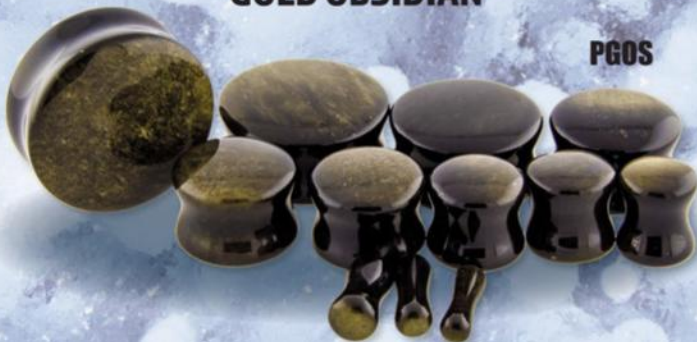
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REBEL INC.

Wayne Simmons talks with some of his favourite rebels within tattooing, artists doing something different with their inks. This month he meets Aaron Hodges of Hidden Coast Tattoo in California

aaronhodgesart.com [f hiddencoasttattoo](https://www.facebook.com/hiddencoasttattoo) [@aaronhodgesart](https://www.instagram.com/aaronhodgesart)

Aaron Hodges is his own man. Working out of his own studio, Hidden Coast Tattoo, recently opened in Sebastopol California, you could be forgiven for describing his work as American traditional.

But look again and you might see something else going on, something that, for me at least, raises the bar in terms of the tone and quality and, most importantly, individuality of the art he's putting out.

Aaron's a humble guy, wary of overselling himself, but when I push him on the matter, he opens up about what's really going. "You've used the word 'surrealism.' Others have used that word, too, when describing the work I do," he concedes, "so I can see that there is a common trend there. Personally, I'd describe my tattoos as visual story-telling based within a traditional style. I like to give the viewer clues as to what my tattoos are about so that they'll spend more time studying each tattoo rather than just passing over it because they are so familiar with the image."

He throws out a variety of influences, from the renaissance painters, Rembrandt and Caravaggio, whom he credits for the darkness and mystery of his work, to traditional masters like Sailor Jerry and George Burchett. He works on canvas as well as skin, so it's only natural for him to be drinking up a lot from the wider world of art as well as the tattoo community—and that sure as

**YOU'VE USED THE
WORD 'SURREALISM'.
OTHERS HAVE USED
THAT WORD, TOO,
WHEN DESCRIBING THE
WORK I DO...**







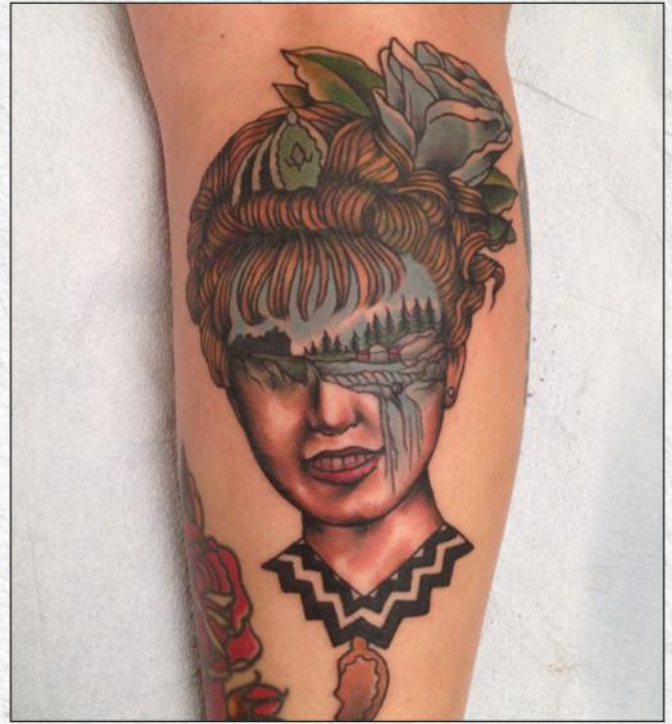
...PERSONALLY, I'D DESCRIBE MY TATTOOS AS VISUAL STORY-TELLING BASED WITHIN A TRADITIONAL STYLE

hell shows within his work. "I guess I just take all of those influences, as well as many others, try to capture some of the same feelings I get when viewing their work and put it into my own," he says.

For Aaron, this is quite a natural thing to be doing as a tattoo artist. He feels that today tattooing is more populated than ever with artists like himself who try to push the boundaries, who perhaps work within other mediums besides skin. "I mean, there is always room to critique what's happening out there," he says, "but as a whole,

tattooers seem to be pushing the medium into all sorts of places right now. Some definitely tend to work better than others but as long as people are continuing to grow as artists, it keeps it really exciting. You never know where it will end up or what we'll be talking about next."

That all said, at the end of the day, Aaron's not too concerned about genres or styles within the industry or even what category his own work falls into. "I find myself in my own spot, really," he shrugs. "I build my tattoos in a traditional way, so I definitely seem to fit into that group of tat-

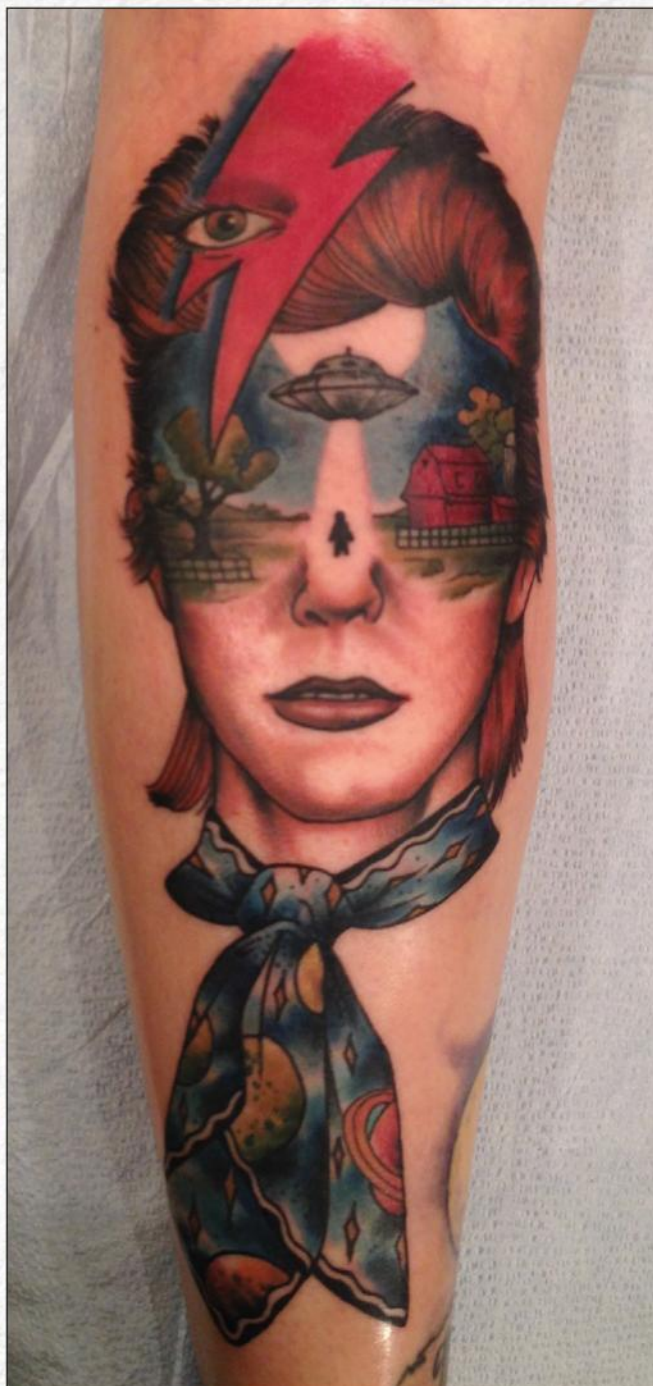


AS A WHOLE, TATTOOERS SEEM TO BE PUSHING THE MEDIUM INTO ALL SORTS OF PLACES RIGHT NOW

tooers, but I also have a common interest with tattooers who specialise in all different styles. And that's what is really great about tattooing right now. There is room for everyone in it."

This is only possible, of course, when you have clients who are receptive to getting your work on their skin, and, for Aaron, that too has been a natural evolution. He feels the internet has had a big role to play in laying the groundwork in that regard, opening the client's mind to

the many possibilities out there when it comes to contemporary tattooing. "I think it really informs the client of what they can expect before getting a tattoo from me so there is already a level of trust built in before we meet." For Aaron, then, the challenge is to inspire the client as much as they inspire him, to build upon that trust and help it blossom into an awesome tattoo concept. "I try to listen a lot. Whether it's through a consultation in person



TAKING A CHANCE AND GETTING A DESIGN THAT ISN'T AS COMMON AS, SAY, A ROSE CAN TAKE A LITTLE COURAGE, I GUESS

or through email, I ask a lot of questions and listen. This allows me to explore their ideas and do some homework as far as researching the subject matter and maybe even share something with them about that image or concept that they didn't already know."

For me, the quality of his work speaks for itself but I guess, especially among fans of old-school and traditional flash, there are going to be those who just want a traditional rose instead of anything surreal within a tattoo and I'm wondering how Aaron deals with a conversation that ends up there. "I do think you have to have a more open mind to get some of the tattoos I create, without a doubt,"

he admits. "Taking a chance and getting a design that isn't as common as, say, a rose can take a little courage, I guess, for people, but I tend to stay fairly busy. I think a lot of people want something different compared to what's popular or safe."

As for that guy who just wants a rose.

"At the end of the day, if someone wanted a rose, I would be more than happy to do just a rose. I love tattooing in all forms and it can be a real challenge to use only one image as your subject and really make something great."

Yep, he's his own man like I said.

And all the better for it.

MY WISHLIST FOR CHRISTMAS

DEAR SANTA...







The NATURE of THINGS

I, Beccy Rimmer, am always drawn to tattooers who have clearly dedicated their craft towards focusing on just one type of imagery. For Jessica Mach, the natural world has spoken... and she is speaking back

 [jessica.mach](#) **Vegan Cookbook:** [amzn.to/2zWBhD4](#)

One of my favourite past-times is drooling over botanical and nature-inspired tattoos. One artist that contributes to such ubiquitous drooling is Jessica Mach. After a decade of tattooing, of experimenting with many different tattoo styles, today she's settled on a tattoo approach that, for her, is "home". Her work brings together chunky, bold black outlines and delicate, realistic intricacies. This complex contrast results in a beautiful style, crafted by Jessica and representative of the beautiful inconsistency of nature itself.

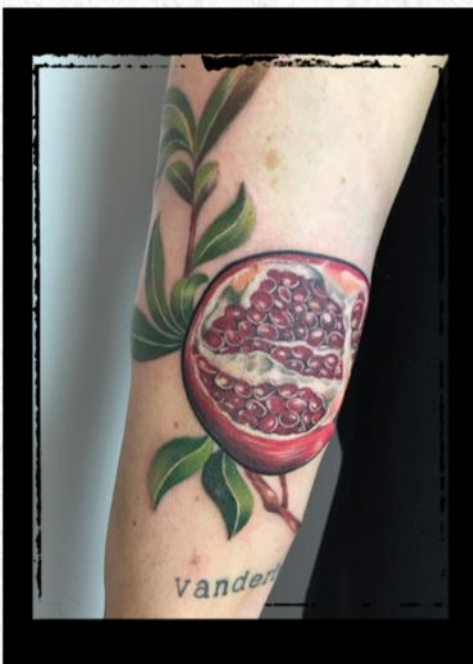
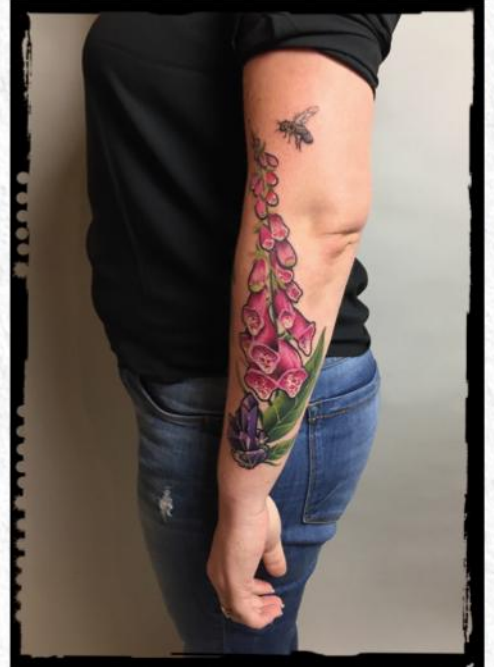
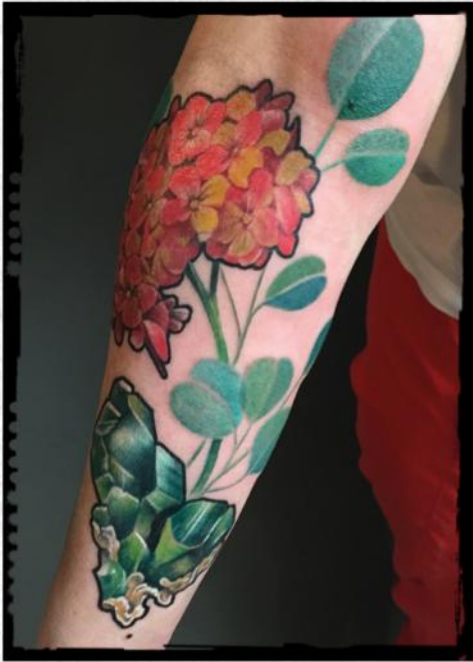
From day one, the Berlin-based tattooist was drawn to themes of nature: "I think we all have a deep connection with Mother Nature," she tells me, "she is the best artist—she invented perfect shapes, unbelievable colour



and magical details." Despite living in a big city, Jessica finds inspiration in the most unlikely corners, and dedicates her free time to trekking in the countryside. Her striking tattoos are clearly evidence of a creative mind that's constantly taken by the shapes and textures of the world—"I am infused with inspiration as soon as I'm outside the house!"

Five years ago, Jessica became vegan and says this just enhanced her already strong connection to all living things. Whether it's sharing her own exciting vegan recipes or creating a botanical

tattoo, she feels that these two approaches allow her to not just understand but "worship" that which grows on our planet, "plant, or animal". "I just have one wish," she says, "that people could get back to being close to our nature, that they could regain the empathy given to us at





I THINK WE ALL HAVE A DEEP CONNECTION WITH MOTHER NATURE... SHE IS THE BEST ARTIST

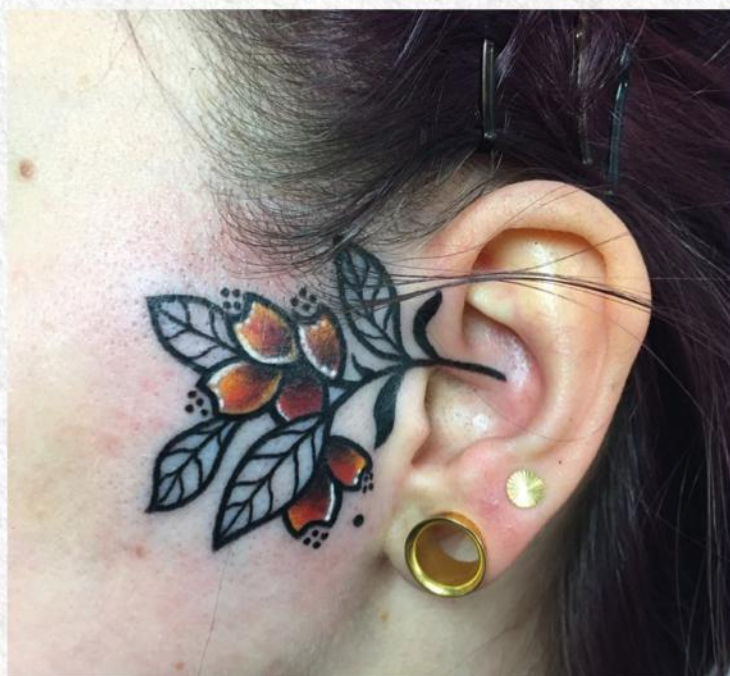
birth.” Last year, she also released a vegan cookbook with her partner, Peter Aurisch (Laauma—Real Food Is Something You Share) that had beautifully-designed pages filled with her own illustrations.

For Jessica, every single tattoo created utilises a different process. Unlike many other tattooists today, Jessica doesn't overly prepare for any tattoo session. She gathers pictures and reference materials for each appointment and lets those discussions in person with her customer completely guide the result. “It's all about the person getting the tattoo done,” she explains—their body shape, character, mood at the time and conversations together inspire the final design.

Understanding the contours of the human figure is key for every single one of Jessica's tattoos, and this focus is evident in her work—branches and leaves stretch around

the sides of the body and decorate their wearer as if they were a rock. “If it's a plant, for example, I let it grow on the body part,” she tells, “using the natural given lines and forms. Movement and progression is clearly very important for her—in both the process and the journey of her artistry over time. Because of this, Jessica also doesn't allow her creations to become stagnant. She us all too aware—like many tattooists today—of certain imagery that might grow in sudden popularity, and the effect this can have on the artist's process and approach. “I don't tattoo animals anymore,” she admits, “there was a time when every second request I got was for a fox or a wolf. I love them, no question about that, but if you do the same animal more than five times, there's not the same feeling... it's not as special.”

One of the features of Jessica's work that makes it so



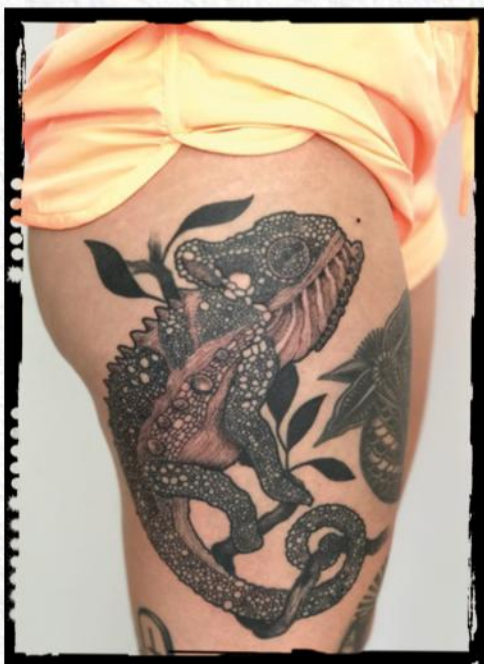
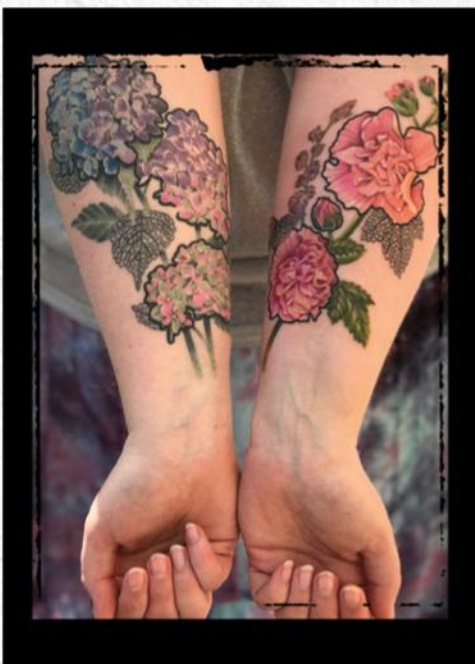
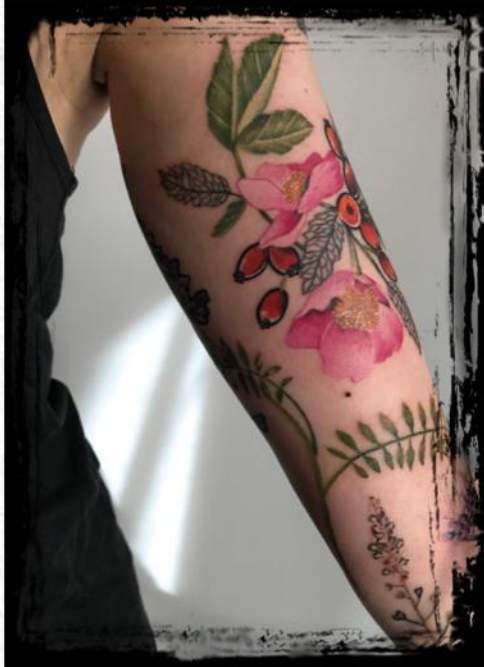
IF YOU DO THE SAME ANIMAL MORE THAN FIVE TIMES, THERE'S NOT THE SAME FEELING... IT'S NOT AS SPECIAL

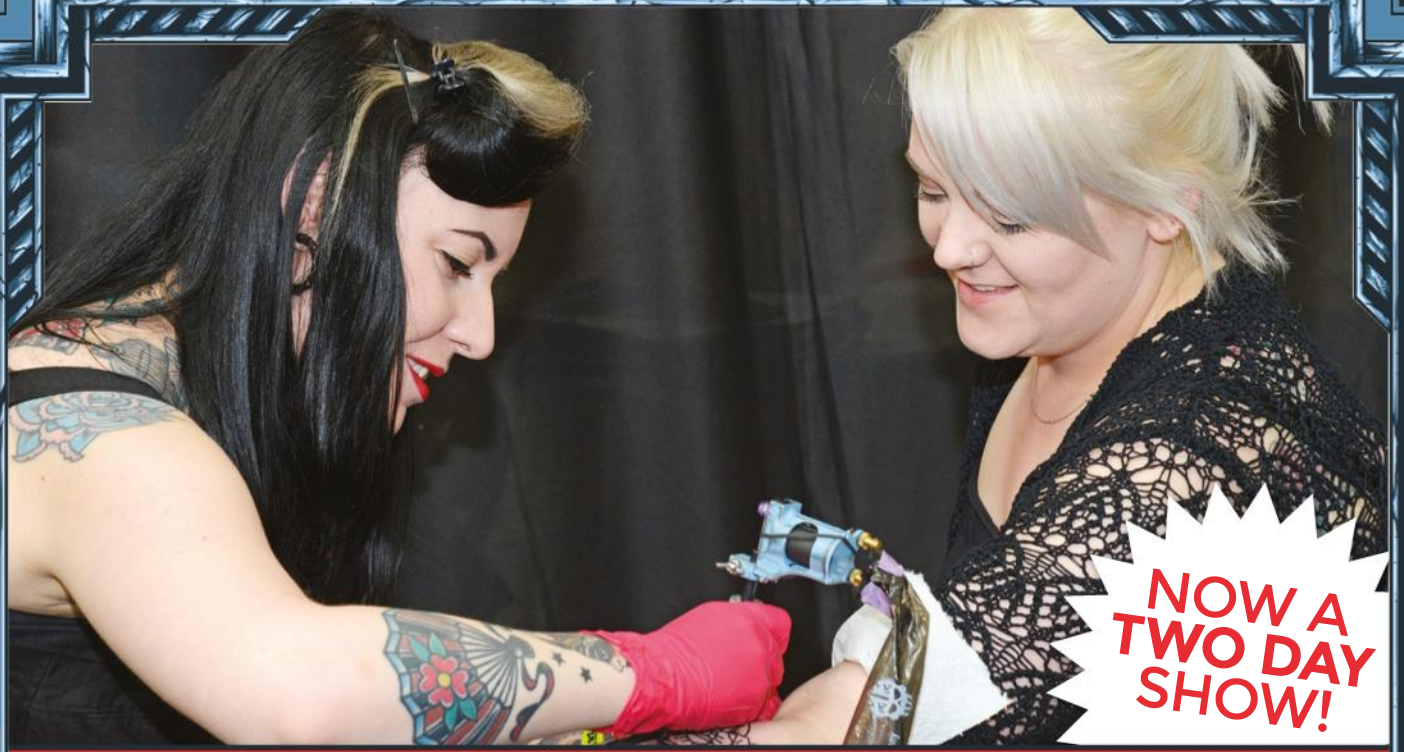
unique is her use of a thick, black outline. Something consistent, striking and solid always brings together the limitless colours, shapes and patterns in each of her tattoos. This is the long-term result of her original tattoo training and a love for what she calls nodding towards “the old rules” of creating a good, solid, long-life tattoo. “The bold line that you find in most of the first-developed and long-used tattoo styles, holds the objects, says Jessica, “it gives a contrast to the skin tone and keeps the picture clear, even if some of brighter colours or details disappear after time”. Lots of tattoos today utilise black only: “black is the new thing,” she confirms, “but I will never understand how people can live without colours!”

Jessica's day-to-day inspirations include photography

as a means for collecting tattoo ideas, networking with guest artists from all over the world, but also—poignantly—“having a calm life,” she says, “a life without the digital show-off of what seems to be necessary for so many other people today.”

Exploring and hearing about Jessica's work has been full of learning, knowledge and inspiration for me—even in my final words of our interview is she able to pass on a nugget of wisdom that we can all take away, no matter our interests. I end by asking about her plans for the future, with an aim to share international guest-spots or bigger ambitions for her career. “I just try to live for the moment,” she replies, “and I am just happy where I am right now.” □





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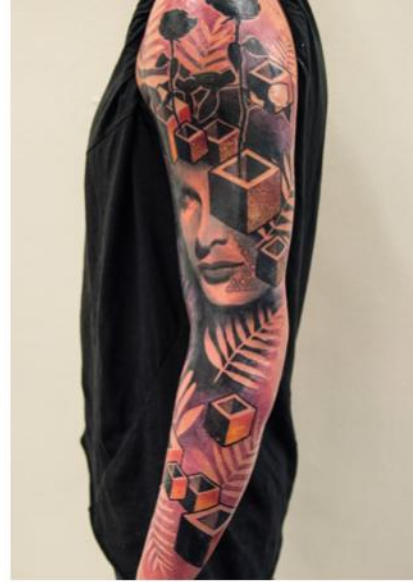
FLORENCE TATTOO CONVENTION 2017



It's the tenth year at the Florence Tattoo Convention—one of the bosses favourite shows in the whole world—and it just gets better with every passing year...

A decade of shows in no mean feat. I know because we have done it ourselves—a lot of shows hit their tenth year this year and not everybody made it that far. Some are miles ahead in terms of years but from where I'm standing very few deliver a show on the level that Florence has across the last four years I've been here.

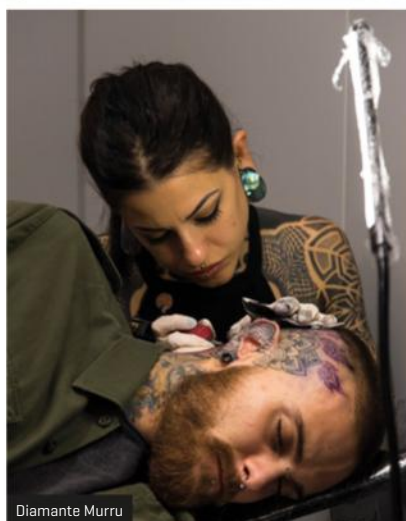
It adds up to over 160,000 visitors. That's a lot of people for a tattoo show whose numbers have increased year on year and doesn't necessarily play to the tune of the mainstream. There is a lot of 'tribal' work going on here, there always has been and hopefully there always will be because it sure as hell isn't the kind of tribal you'll be seeing at the gym. Japanese, Thai and Indonesian of



Mumia



Body painting show



Diamante Murru



Zsolt Gomori

THE WINNERS SATURDAY

Traditional

- 1) Fulvio Vaccarone, Dark Ink
- 2) Alan Ferioli, Stay Gold & Milano City Ink

Tribal

- 1) Riccardo Pini, Nexus Tattoo Studio
- 2) Marco Manzo, Tribal Tattoo Studio

Other style

- 1) Cristian Casas, Casas ink
- 2) Jenna Kerr, Devil in the Details

Best of Day

- 1) Evgeny Kopanov, Vivo Tattoo



Dave Paulo



Zsolt Gomori

the highest calibre are a standard here and it's wonderful.

I've never known three days of wall to wall tattooing to whip by so fast—and they're not short days either. 12 noon until 3 in the morning is a long time to be packing them in. It does give a visitor plenty of time however to spend a couple of hours here and there soaking up what Florence has to offer with

some new found friends and still dedicate 10-12 hours to the reason you're there.

And there are dozens of reasons it works so well. The catering is so good, you don't even need to leave the building to feed yourself. The layout of the floor is so bizarre, it's like wandering through a maze lined with talent. I have the worst sense of direction in the world—all you need to do is ask anybody who has ever



The Good Fellas Tattoo



Ajarn Matthieu



MH Seminar



HAN_NYA Brigade Exhibition



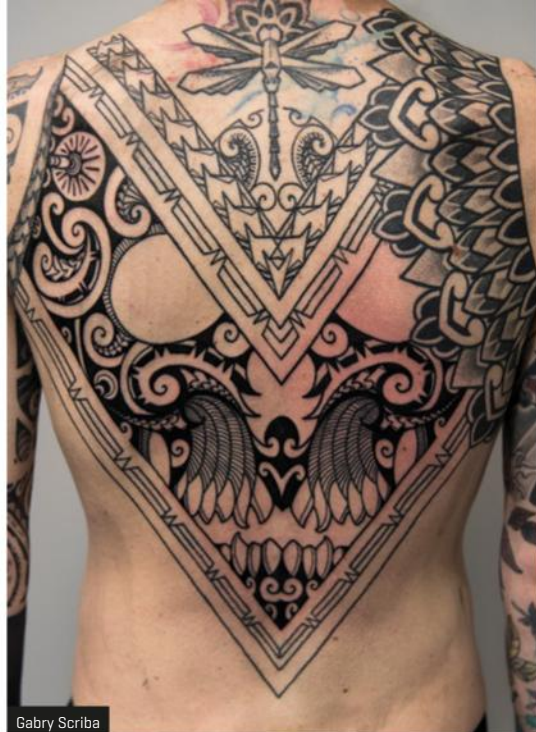
Ventoforato Tatuaggi

been away with me—but even Bear Grylls would struggle to get from one point to another here without making a wrong turn. This is no bad thing. Every time I walk in the building it's like turning up somewhere new over and over. Sometimes you bump into Michael Huszar playing host to a willing audience eager to learn. Sometimes you stand and watch Randy Engelhard for half an hour. Most times, you

stand and watch somebody you've never heard of in your life lay waste to the competition and you spend all the time that you're sitting with a coffee watching one of the many buskers in the venue, why these people are not well known outside of their native towns. I have always suspected it's because their names don't immediately drip off the tongue if you have to make an effort to remember it but the only



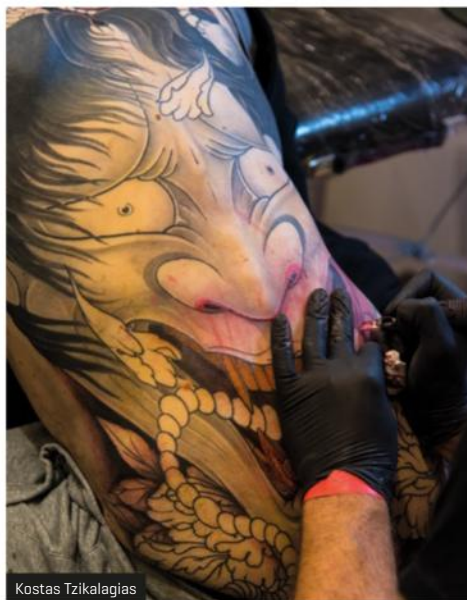
Genziana Tattoo



Gabry Scriba



Laura Fiorini



Kostas Tzikalagias

THE WINNERS • SUNDAY

Realistic

- 1) Sasha O'Kharin, Blackout Tattoo Collective
- 2) Zsolt Gomori Art, Zsolt Gomori

Oriental

- 1) Enrico Horien Nicoli, Horien Tattoo
- 2) Garba Inkiostro Mancino

New tribal

- 1) Alex Santucci, Kosta Dorika
- 2) Simone Matulli, La Bottega di Simone Matulli

Best in show

Theodor Brezetos,
Teo Tattoo

people missing out on that front are those who don't make that effort.

One of the bigger stand-out points at this show is the amount of work that goes on behind the scenes to build the art exhibition. Hannya Brigade were looking great on the floor, last year I came across an artist

called BUE2530 whose brilliant work was on show here again and probably my favourite part was seeing the work of my buddy Otto D'Ambra on display. You can look and marvel at it all you want online but there's nothing quite like seeing it on the flesh.

There have to be at least 15 different mini



Best of show winner



Photo Florence Tattoo Convention



Photo Florence Tattoo Convention



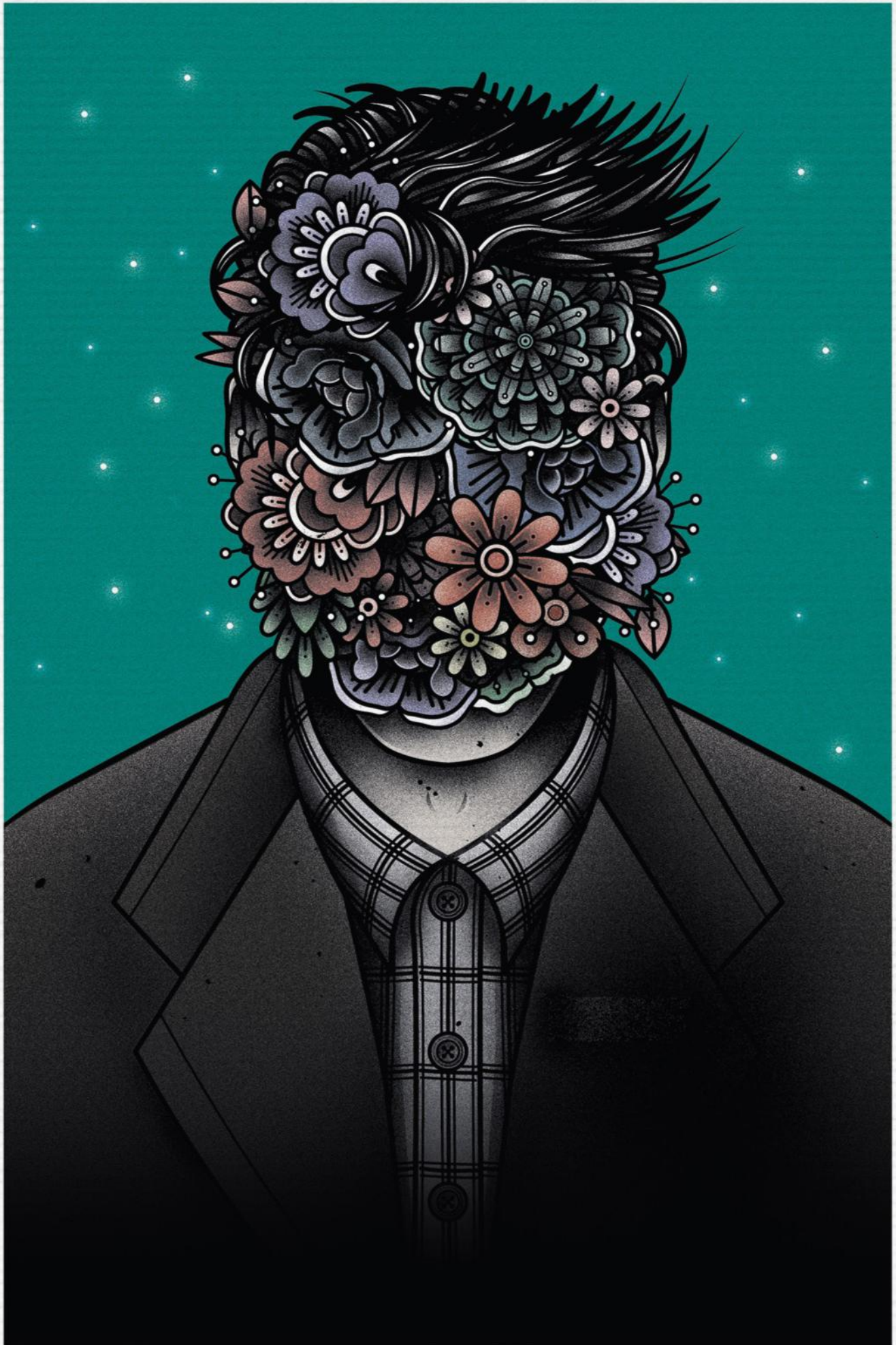
Photo Florence Tattoo Convention

exhibitions here—not a single one of which is dull. That's also quite a feat because it's not always that way out in the world.

Push comes to shove though, this is a tattoo show. Food, art, lovely people, old friends, new friends and outside, more culture than you can take in even if you moved here for a

month. All of it would mean nothing if the show itself were not of the highest calibre. Come and find out for yourself—next year, treat yourself. Holiday around it. Get some new ink. Soak up the atmosphere.

160,000 people across ten years have not been wrong. ▣



Cloud Busting

Traditional tattoo imagery has well and truly breached the public consciousness. Maybe Ed Hardy deserves some credit for that, his clothing label having pushed his own defiantly old school flash into mainstream fashion, many other brands, clothing and otherwise, following...

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Maybe it's to do with the reality shows and tattooed celebs, the Beckham's and the TOWIE's and the whoever's continually pushing the boundaries of what is acceptable in terms of coverage to the point where companies like Tesco are now accepting even the most public of tattoos within their dress code. Or maybe it's to do with skateboarding and BMX culture, perhaps overtaking music in recent years to become the number one cheerleader of tattoos within the quasi-corporate paradox that is 'alternative lifestyle' branding. Either way, today this traditionally low brow art form we all celebrate, formerly relegated to the fringes of music and art and fashion, is now officially mainstream—whether we like it or not.

In a way, Chris Weiss is a product of this evolution. The Cologne-based illustrator and Graphic Designer cut his teeth working for WeThePeople BMX, getting the freedom he needed to hone his style before starting up his own company, Black Cloud.

"Well, it's more of an alter ego, really, than a company," he corrects me. "I'm a freelance artist and I didn't want

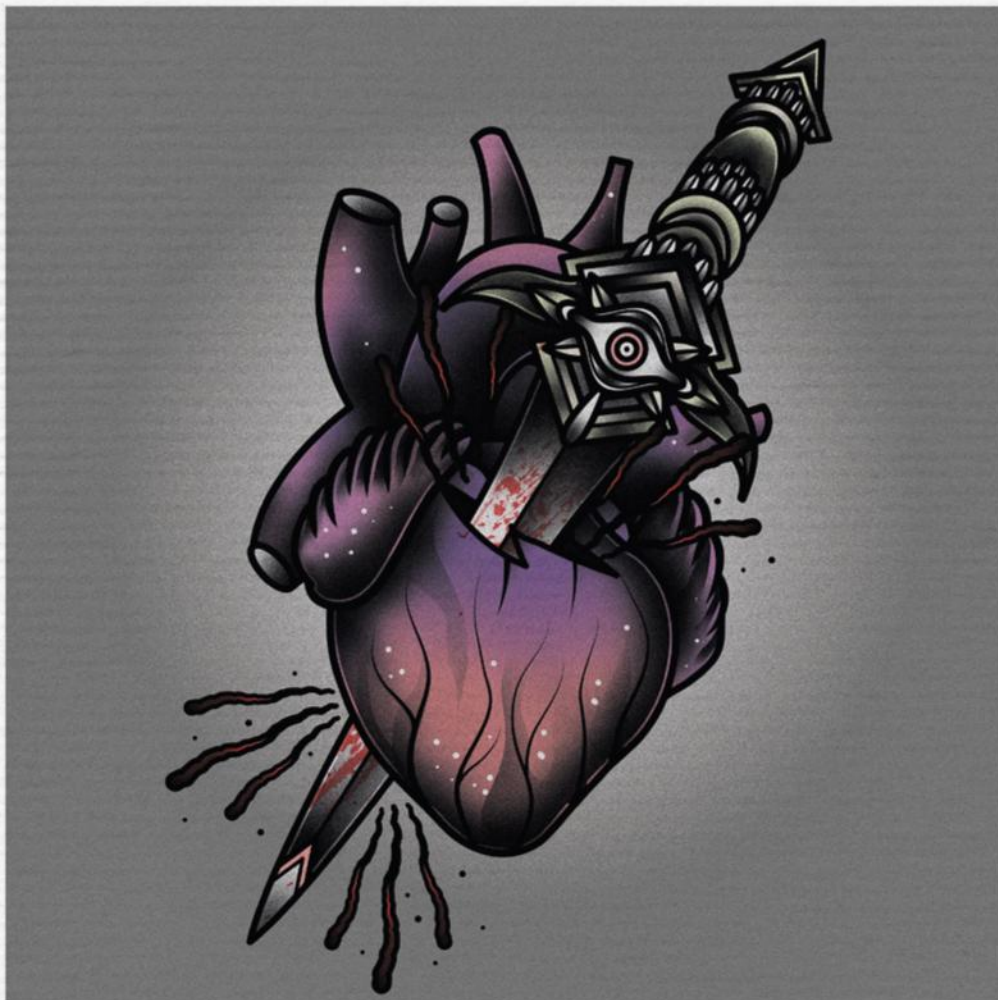


to put my real name on it when I first started out."

He goes on to tell me that Black Cloud has always been about music, much of the work he does under its banner for bands, local as well as some bigger national and international artists. And yet it was within fashion that I first came across Chris's work, the ominously named Darker Half Cult Clothing to be precise. I noticed the brand mentioned within a magazine, googled the name and found the designs and vibe of what Chris was doing over there to be very appealing. And the music link is still there. "Here's a fun fact," Chris smiles, "I started Darker Half first as a tumblr page to sell my old band shirts. I created a logo for it and since I liked it that much, I decided to hook up with my friend Sebastian over at Endor Designs to release some shirts and posters with our artwork on it."

At first, the real drive behind the label was to act as a recycling centre of sorts. Artwork they would offer out to clients would sometimes get turned down or put aside for other reasons and it seemed wrong to let those designs go to waste. But the label took off, DHC apparel selling

We're not sure what direction to push the label in the future. We both definitely want to try out new things



If you put pressure on something like this, it just doesn't work

all over the world, rather aptly attracting something of a cult following for its edgy yet clean designs. It helped the guys kickstart other projects, using the profits to set up a screenprint shop in the back of their office so they could print to their dark hearts' content.

"We're taking a creative break from DHC at the moment because Sebastian got a part-time job at an agency and is very busy with commercial projects for Endor and I have a decent amount of projects going on as well," Chris

tells me. "We're not sure what direction to push the label in the future. We both definitely want to try out new things. I mean, there must always be room for creativity. If you put pressure on something like this, it just doesn't work."

One of the most striking things about Chris' art in general is the minimal use of colour. It lends a clean and sharp simplicity to his work which falls nicely into line not only with traditional, but also the blackwork trend of tattooing that has suddenly become massive. It also helps to foster the darkness Chris is going for, both in terms of tone and execution. "The name 'Black Cloud' comes from a song by my favourite band, Converge," he explains, "and all of

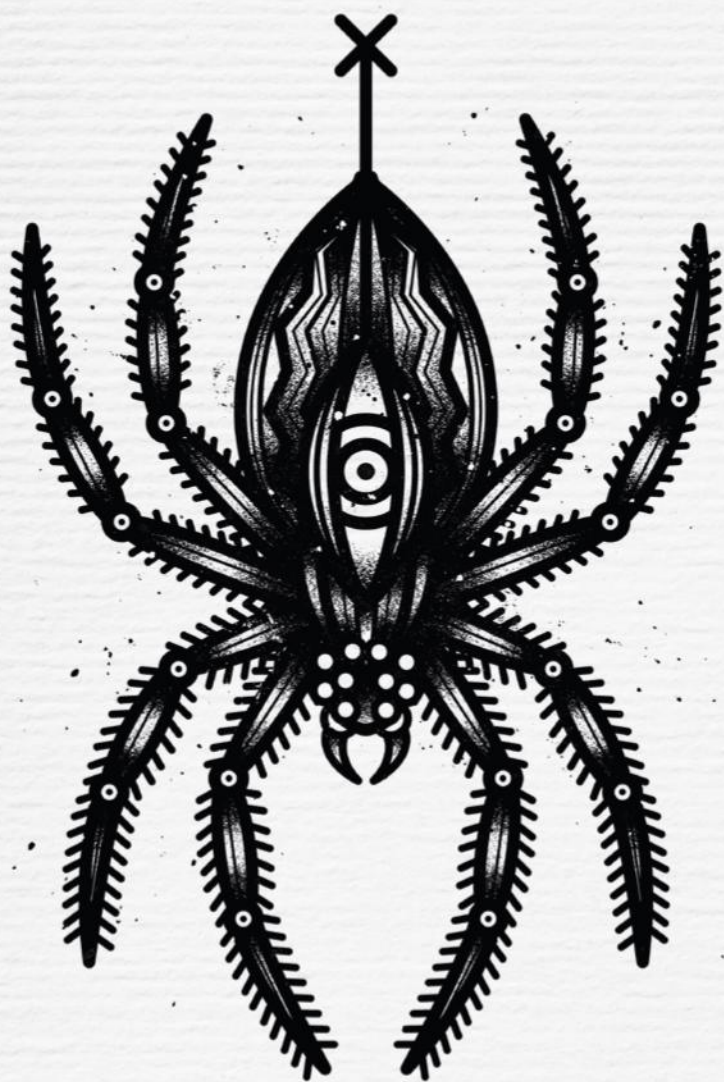


their music is very dark and negative. I'm very attracted to dark stuff, there's a sadness and heaviness to my artwork which colour doesn't convey so much, so I try to use it very sparingly."

And then there's that flash-style quality to his work, the use of script and phrasing, which is particularly effective within his DHC work. "I always try to attach a hidden or sometimes visible phrase to the design," he tells me. "I think these phrases are the bridge between the visible and the deeper intention. Sometimes it's obvious so I leave it out. Sometimes I like text in the artwork and so I put it in there to push the message."

Your client wants this and you have to deliver because it's your job

Of course, like all artists, Chris draws upon many influences. He cites a wide variety of artists and painters including Florian Schommer, Mike Giant, Alfons Mucha and M.C. Escher. But it isn't long before we're talking about tattoos again and the artists he rates within our world. "Thomas Hooper, Paul Dobleman, Bob Geerts and many more. When I first started to get tattooed almost 15 years ago I wasn't much into traditional stuff, I liked graphic and Japanese tattoos. Over the years, the stuff I got tattooed



became more and more simple, and that's what I like about traditional designs. They are minimalistic, it's easy to translate them, they are timeless and classic."

Hearing Chris speak about tattoo art, it's only natural to wonder if he's ever thought about taking the leap and trying out that medium for himself. "Not yet," he says, "but I want to try it out sometime, just to get to know how it works and have maybe the ability to put some pieces on skin." For Chris, it's a romantic notion, being a tattoo artist, the idea of being free to do what you want to do, creatively, and get paid for it, but he's not convinced that's the bare bones reality of it. "You need to be so flexible in terms of style and skills, so the whole thing is more a service than doing your own thing. Your client wants this and you have to deliver because it's your job. I think there's every chance it could get boring if I was doing that every day—especially if I'm not in the right mood."

Moving forward, Chris wants to continue this natural evolution that's defined his work to date, to always keep trying new things and challenging himself to be the best he can be and most importantly to keep the music in there. "I'm trying out new stuff at the moment," he tells me. "Some of it includes experimenting a bit more with colour."

But hopefully not too much colour, I hear you thinking. ▣



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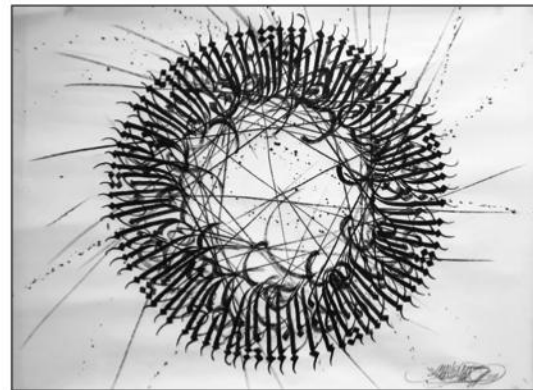
WRITING ON THE WALL

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Who could have known that this New-Zealand tattooer, while looking for some space from his daily work, would become a famous graffiti artist? In turn, inspiring people inspired others to ask for their bodies what he was doing on walls and this paved the way for a new unexpected development in his career. Life is full of possibilities, right? We just need to find new boards to write on



I JUST DEVELOPED A TECHNIQUE WHERE I COULD BASICALLY DO THE SAME THING THAT I DID WITH A MARKER ON SOMEONE'S SKIN



Your work as a graffiti artist has left a huge mark and watching your Instagram account is very impressive! Did you start as a graffiti artist before tattooing?

No, I tattooed first. I'm from New-Zealand. I was originally painting houses before moving to Australia to work as a tattooer. It took me a couple of years to get an apprenticeship. Then I wanted to find some air and that's when the graffiti came in. I was getting stressed, because tattooing is very personal, very important—you're right here with this person and you can't fuck it up. So I looked for something that was a little bit less personal and important, and I found graffiti. I'm self taught. I was looking for a hobby, something I could go outside and walk around and do something that was art related because I wanted to get better at tattooing. I watched a graffiti documentary—'Style Wars', made in the 70's, about the birth of graffiti in New York—and it inspired me. It was what I was looking for. I started in 2005. Then at some point I realised I needed a good tag and the tag was where the lettering came from. I started studying the tags, I discovered LA style gangster chicano writing and then that was sort of the birth of my interest in calligraphy.



Doing letters, was it something you felt already close to?

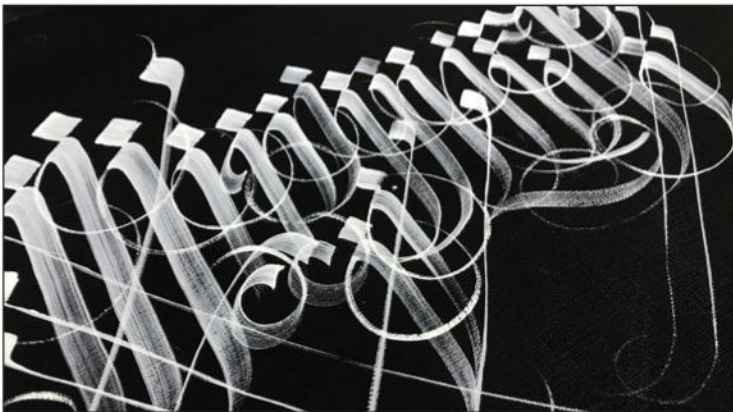
I started gravitating towards neo-traditional sort of stuff and Japanese style and then I started at the studio to be 'the guy that did script'. Everyone that came to the shop saw I had a knack for drawing cursive script, so I was doing all of that. Every day would be either roses, snakes, skulls, or birds and then script in between.



It seems today you're mostly concentrating on lettering, what happened?

People asked for tattoos of what I was painting, more than what I was drawing so, I had to figure out a way of translating my brush technique to tattoos. The style of drawing was closely related to script, with a graffiti style to it. I just developed a technique where I could basically do the same thing that I did with a marker on someone's skin. And I've gone on from there. Actually the first time I did it was here in Japan (this interview took place at Three Tides Studio in Tokyo) where I pretended to the client: 'Yeah, yeah, sure I can do it, I've done that before'. And then I had to do this dragging technique by basically drag the machine, the needles across the skin like would a marker, and shape the letters like this without outlining. That was the beginning of now.





How do you work to get these shapes with letters?

The client sometimes comes in with one word, like ‘patience’ to get tattooed over and over again, and this creates a different dynamic and more of a geometric idea. Because whether you’ve got letters or something else, you repeat those, so the shapes and the strikes become almost like their own form of sacred geometry. But if you have a phrase that is like eight words long—like a bible verse that I recently had, you don’t get a repetition of letter shapes and strikes. This is a different aesthetic that you get inside these mandalas. So it’s always down to the client. I love it when they ask me to write this and this because the letters dictate the overall aesthetic of the piece. If there are a lot of ‘R’, ‘K’ and ‘J’ it looks different to a one who has a lot of ‘O’, ‘L’ and ‘T’.

Is it meant to be understandable?

It’s not about the phrase but about the overall aesthetic. It’s meant to be decorative, to make your eyes happy. People tend to get really strange phrases though because it’s very hard to read. And I think this is one of the reasons why people come to me, it’s because they want to get something a little bit out there, or something private. They know what it says and only they know. Not even me when it’s finished because now I can’t remember! . Sometimes when I do these ones I can’t fit the whole word at the end and I never rearrange the spacing to accommodate the phrase. Sometimes I have to cut the word, just to fit the circle, but what I say is that it’s not about what it says, it’s about the way it looks.

Did you try to replicate the brush aesthetic you have in graffiti in tattooing?

The cleaner style translates well into tattooing. When it starts to get too messy... that’s why I stopped that ‘shuji’ (brush painting) style tattooing, I hate to feel like my work is clumsy. I think that it has actually influenced the way I paint now. First the painting influenced the way I tattooed, now it’s the opposite.

Do you consider yourself a typographic artist?

I have a bunch of different styles that I can do. From sort of cursive flowing scripts to, I guess, gangster looking beats or the crazy flowing style... You need to have different styles, you can’t just be on one thing. But it happens that one style is popular at one time. You try to stay inside the request of the client but then move your style further forward, always because otherwise you ended up getting

I HAD TO DO THIS DRAGGING TECHNIQUE BY BASICALLY DRAG THE MACHINE, THE NEEDLES ACROSS THE SKIN LIKE WOULD A MARKER, AND SHAPE THE LETTERS LIKE THIS WITHOUT OUTLINING

IT'S NOT ABOUT THE PHRASE BUT ABOUT THE OVERALL AESTHETIC. IT'S MEANT TO BE DECORATIVE, TO MAKE YOUR EYES HAPPY



stuck and still. Each day I'm doing a letter slightly different. Every time I tattoo or paint, the letters are changing, I'm refining the style and finding new ways to do certain letters. In my mind it's always a different script but I think I've been concentrating on this specific style for maybe two years.

Which script do you use?

I like MY letters that I created myself. For a long time I had the whole alphabet except a few letters—'J' and 'Q'. I love letters, I love doing lettering, and even if it's really tight super clean beautiful script for some memorial tattoo or whatever I just try to enjoy what I do. I do everything free hand and I generally expect my clients to come in for whatever counts as 'my style'. Sometimes I have to adapt to that. I think it's definitely the way the body moves, and where it is on the body that dictates the style to a certain extent. There are certain areas where you can't do a circle, nor a straight line. But the bones of the style, the bones of the letter form is still the same.

Still, your work is very impressive for its precision.

When it comes to a tattoo that's very important. The precision is something that people mention a lot because they're always surprised that I can keep things so symmetrically straight. There's no aesthetic that I try to conform to and say: "Hey, this is the essence of it". It's all about getting loose, having fun and making sure that what you do feels good and you're not thinking about it too much. As soon as you're going to think about it too much, it's when you're going to make a mistake. It becomes unnatural, contrived. And people don't like things that are contrived.

How do you split your time between tattooing and graffiti?

That's the hard part. I don't go out at night and do illegal pieces anymore. It's not that I don't have time because I always made time for it, but I just don't have that fire in me to go and break the law and run around at night doing shit like that when I can go to some beautiful studio, paint a mural for some people in a nice environment. I prefer to do that. Commissions, working in my studio on canvas... this is more enjoyable for me now. Recently I've become really busy with tattooing. Before I was busier with painting. I just take it as it comes. I'm not so much financially motivated but if something's gonna pay me better, I'll do it.





How do you explain how you got so much attention from your graffiti work?

Just from painting, from being consistent. I was obsessed with spray painting, with graffiti. I would go out 4 nights a week, and do sometimes throw ups which is the chromed filled in big pieces that just say “Mayo”. Then I would do rooftops, track sides, etc, and between spots I would do what we call bombing, tagging.



How did this calligraphy aesthetic come into being though?

Using a spray can on a wall, I couldn't really emulate the shape that I wanted to make, so I decided to evolve to the brush. The can has overspray and the brush behaves on its own, it got finer lines and textures that I enjoyed using, I could control it better. I used a round brush and that was my first sort of style that people started to recognise. I was doing a little bit of stuff with markers and this Japanese artist Usugrow came to Australia and I watched him paint with a flat brush. I was like: “I can't do this flat brush stuff, but I can do the round brush”. I guess I was pretty wild and I like to get really loose with my movements and the round brush really suited that. So I became sort of known for this really hieratic, almost rhythmic round brush style. Then I got sick of doing it and it didn't translate so well in tattooing, but I remembered the flat brush. I started to try the shapes I made and that was what made it easier for me to tattoo on people. I can just use a marker and pretend to brush on your skin and then just tattoo that shape straight on to you.

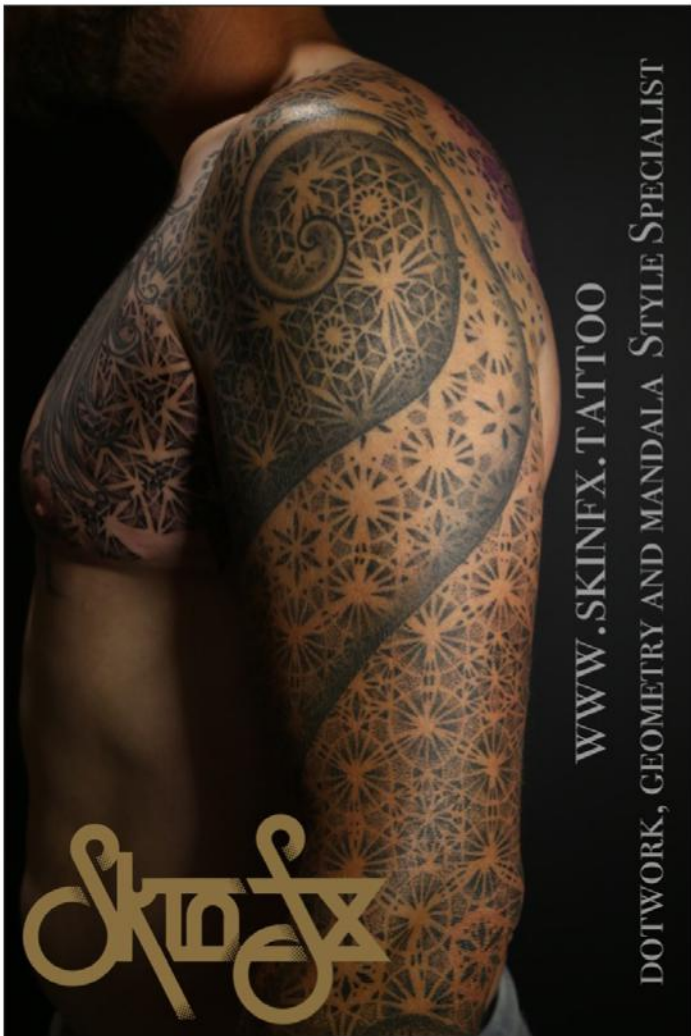


What about these tattoos ‘self made’ that you have?

That was one you can tell by the style, that's fucking old, 2005 I probably got that! The main aspect was that... I felt that people were looking at me like: ‘It must have been a fucked up life to be all tattooed like that’. But I haven't. I had a great life, I got a really good start and had a very generous family even though I was adopted—that's what the ‘Born Lucky’ tattoo around my neck refers to. The self made meaning was I chose to be like this. By the time I was 18, I had stomach, half back, wrist, and a half sleeve tattooed. So I was getting tattooed for 3 years before I was allowed to. It was not common in New Zealand or Australia but I wanted to commit to tattooing and not to have an option of getting out being a tattooist. I'm now 36 with a 16 year career as a tattooer. □




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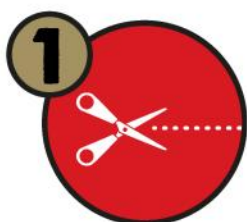
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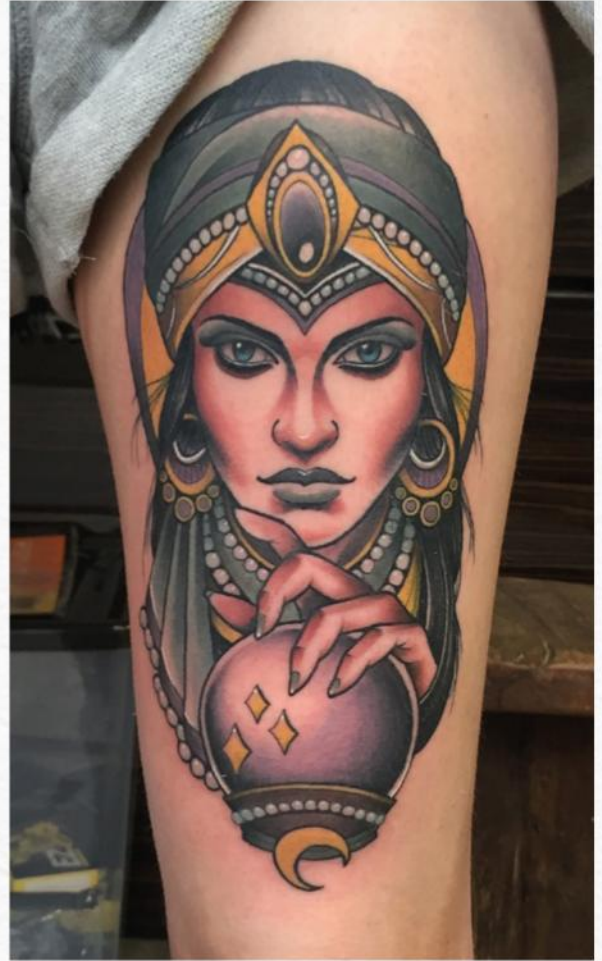


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INSTAGRAM.COM/TOTEMICA
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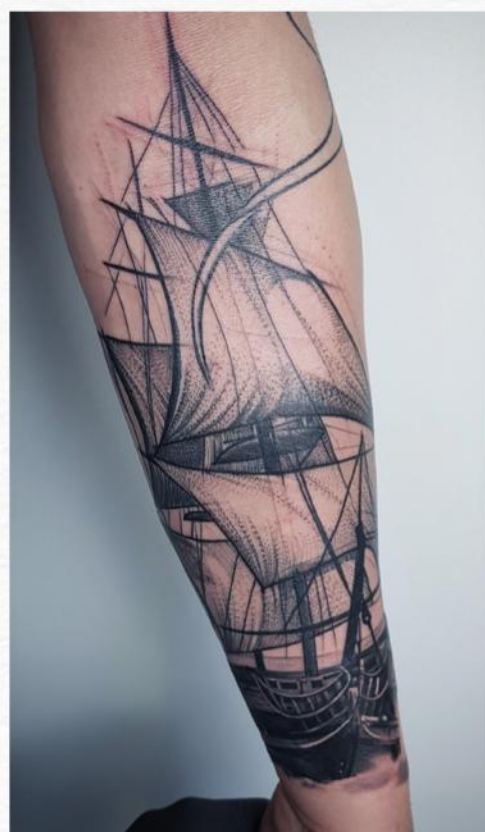
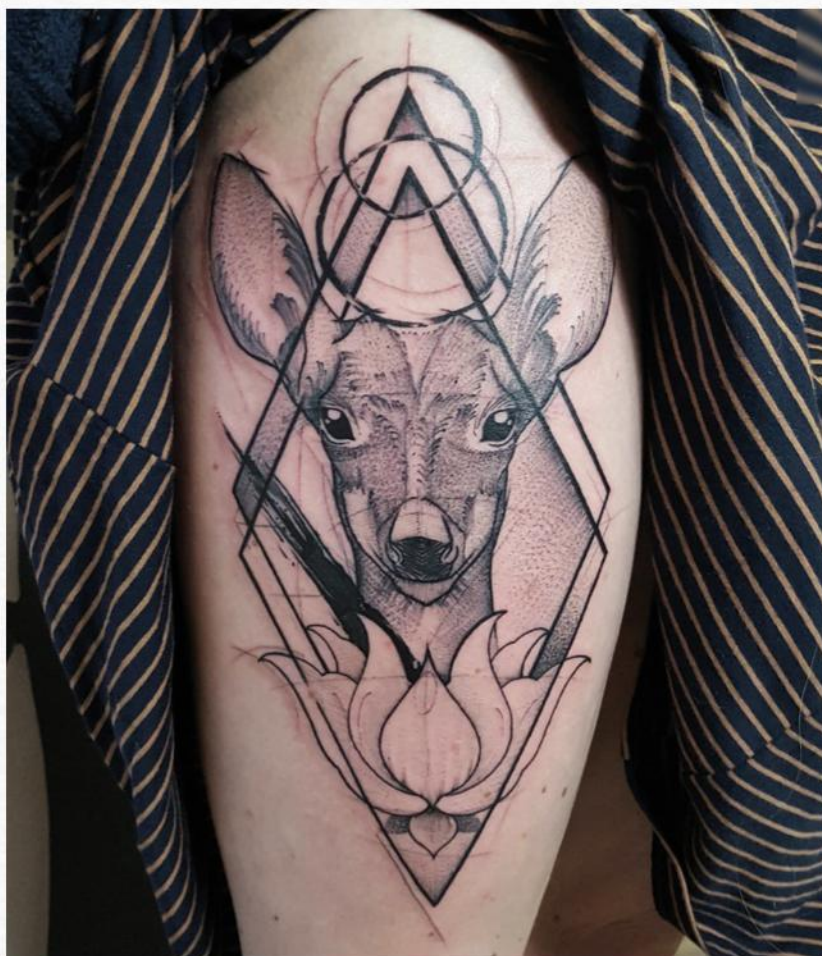


ALTER SCHWAN

ALTER-SCHWAN.DE
INSTAGRAM.COM/ALTER_SCHWAN

ANTHONY BATE

INSTAGRAM.COM/ANTBATETATTOOS
ANTBATETATTOOS@GMAIL.COM





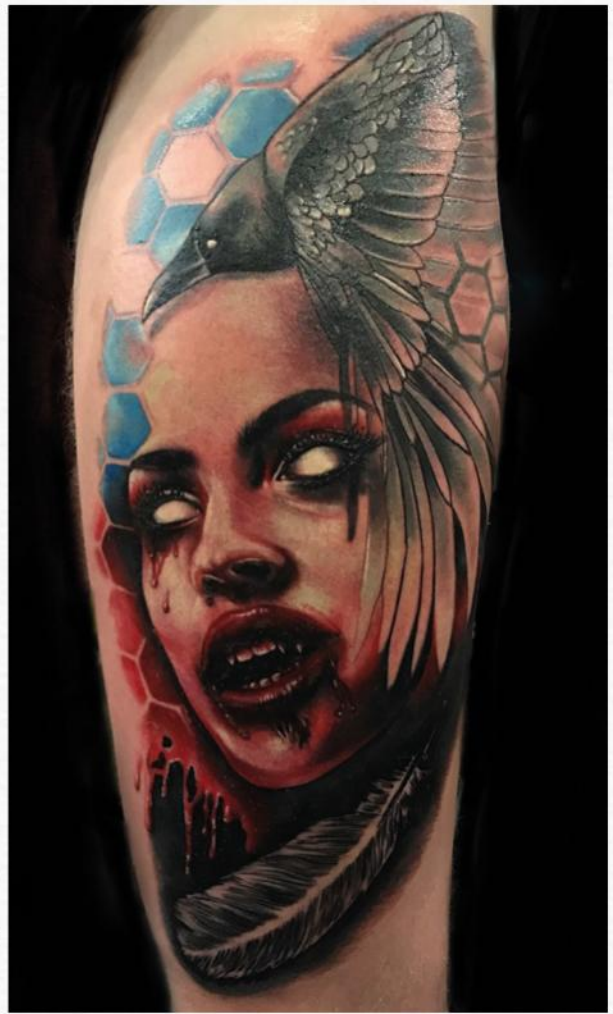
BRENDAN JONES

INSTAGRAM.COM/BREN3000
BREN3000TATTOO@YAHOO.COM

BRENT GOUDIE

BRENTGOUDIE.CO.UK
BOOKINGS@BRENTGOUDIE.CO.UK





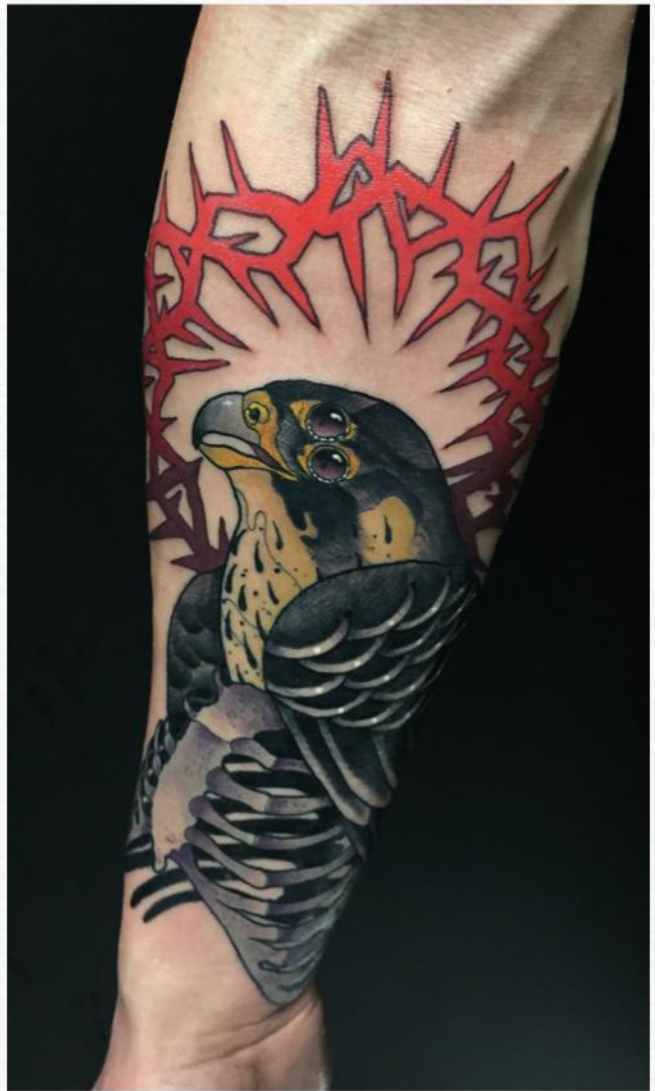
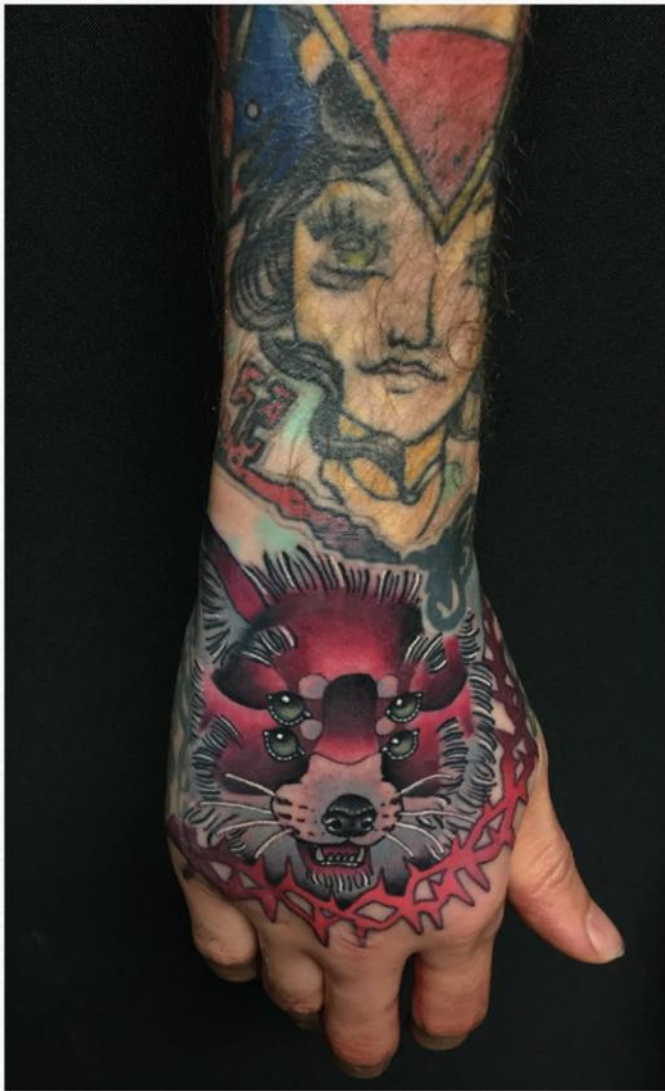
BRIGI FUZES

BRIGI@DIAMONDHEARTTATTOO.COM
INSTAGRAM.COM/BRIGI_FUZES_TATTOO

CHRIS MORRIS

INSTAGRAM.COM/CHISMORRISTATTOOS
CHISMORRISTATTOOS@GMAIL.COM



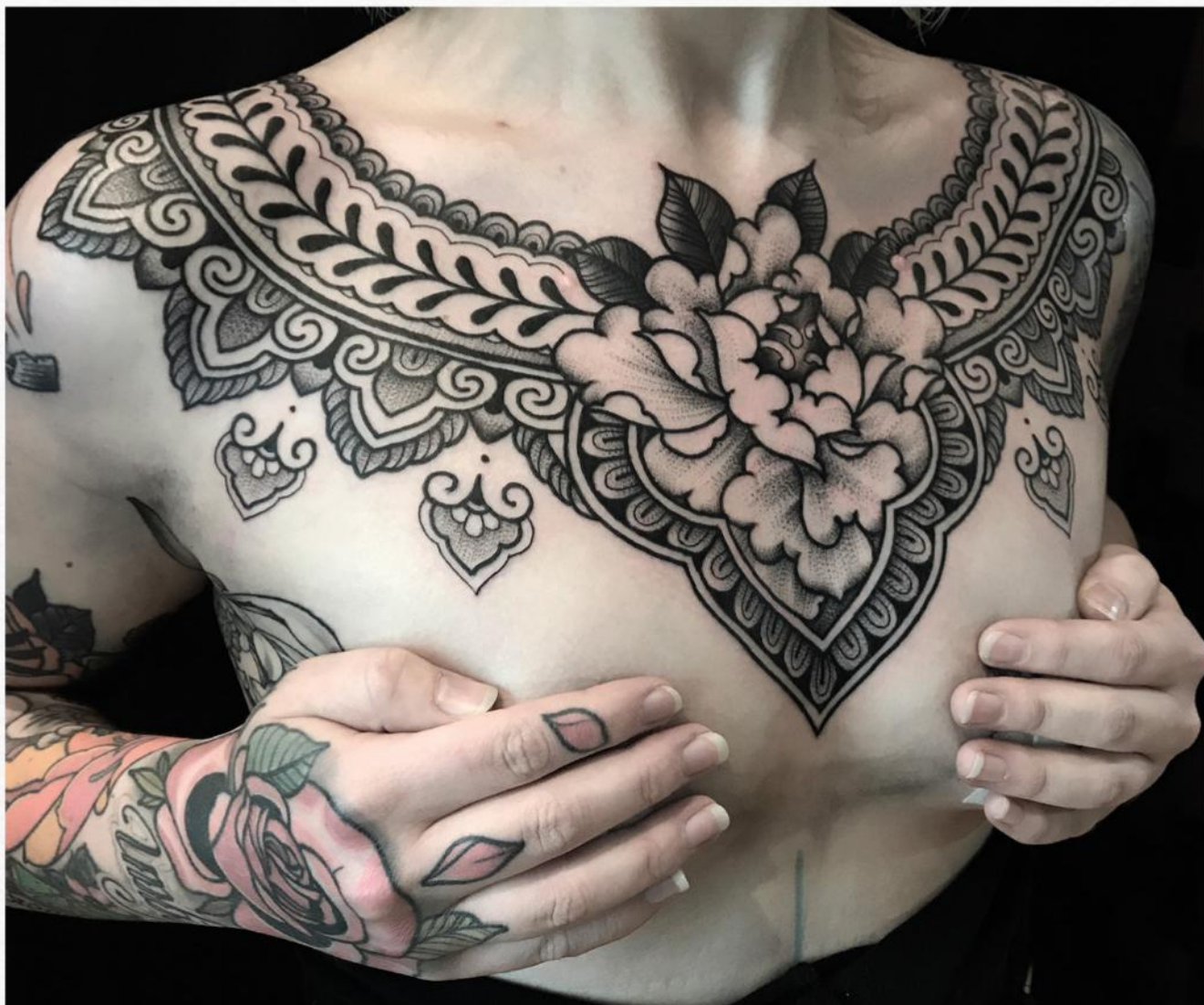


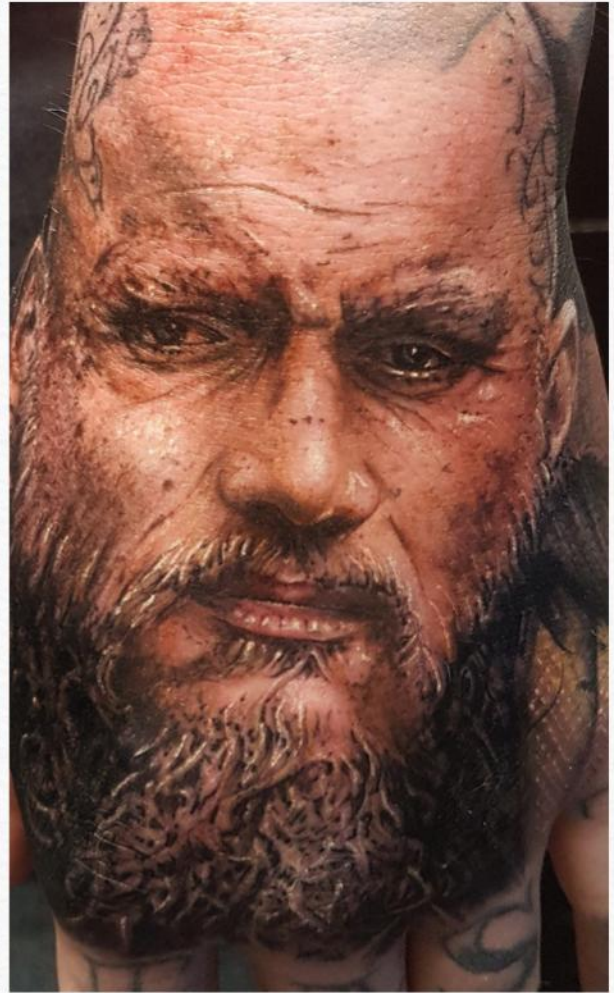
IGOR PUENTE

INSTAGRAM.COM/IGORPUENTE
IGORPUENTETATTOO@GMAIL.COM

JACK PEPIETTE

INSTAGRAM.COM/JACKPEPIETTE
JACKPEPIETTE@GMAIL.COM





PAUL OWEN

NAUGHTYNEEDLES.CO.UK
PKNEEDLES@YAHOO.CO.UK

RICHARD GUY

INSTAGRAM.COM/RICHARDARTISTGUY
RICHARD_GUY@HOTMAIL.CO.UK





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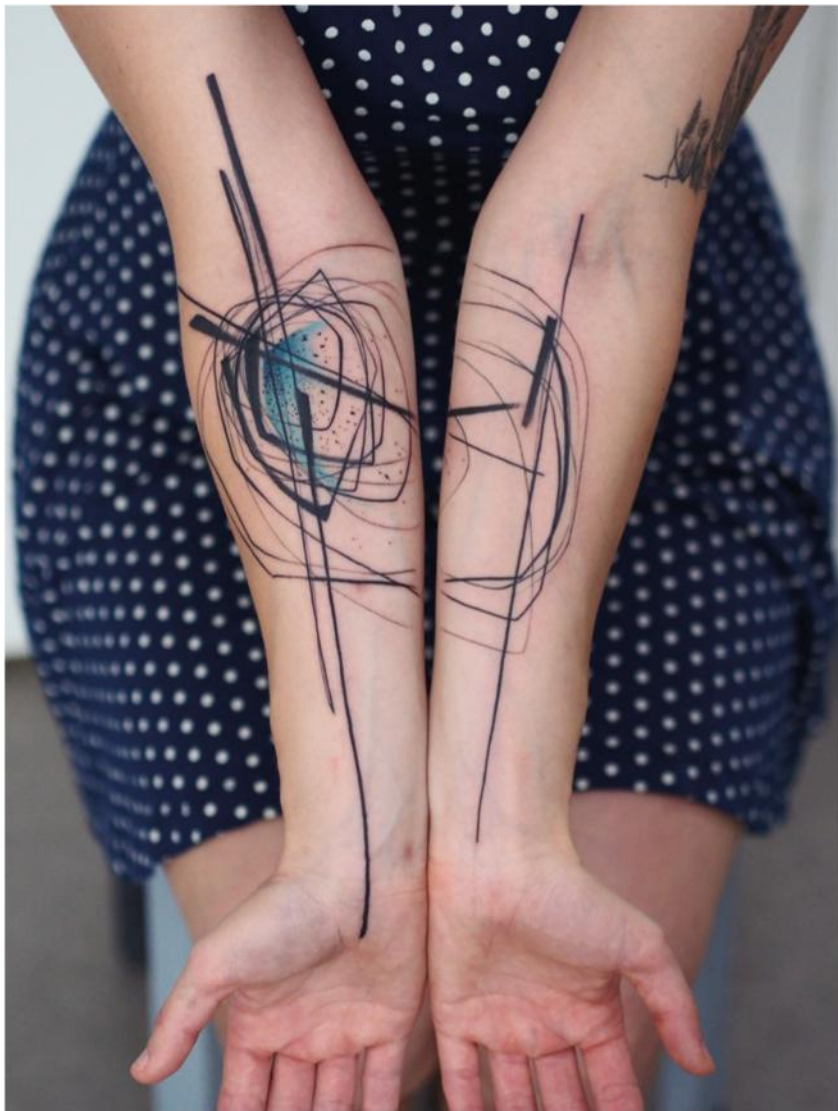


Flush the fashion

German tattooist Julia Rehme works in her studio Noia in Berlin. Originally trained as a fashion designer and with a passion for abstract painting, her design uses contrasting elements and graphic shapes. It was the experience of having her first tattoo that sparked Julia's interest in the trade.

design@juliarehme.com · www.juliarehme.com · www.noia.com





IN THE BEGINNING:

“I studied fashion design in Hanover, after my graduation I decided to leave that city and move on for new experiences. I moved to Berlin in 2009 with the idea of working as a fashion designer or as an illustrator, because it’s a very inspiring city full of art and artists from different fields and full of inspiration. During my studies, I had the opportunity to try many different art techniques like screen print and etching. I was interested in fashion illustration and the experimental aspects of fashion and inspired by Japanese designers like Rei Kawakubo and Issey Miyake.

“I decided to get my first tattoo and this is how the idea of learning to be a tattooist developed. I first thought about getting a tattoo for myself after a painful breakup. After dealing with this volcano of emotions I felt like I wanted to mark it somewhere on my body, leave it behind and move on. The tattooing process

To me tattooing means connecting your inside world with the outside world.

itself helped me to go through this experience.

“To me tattooing means connecting your inside world with the outside world. The fact that getting tattooed causes pain made me accept it in the same way because I went through this experience to modify a part of my body. It took away all the doubts I had before and made me accept the transformation. It’s a philosophy that all the experiences of your life will form you to the person who you actually are.

“About 7 years ago I went to a tattoo shop and showed them my work, my drawings and asked if they wanted an apprentice and they accepted me. So that is when I started to learn. Then for two years I worked in Berlin Ink and also Toe Loop, then I decided to have my own shop. I am happy with how the studio has developed, I do not want to make it bigger because it takes a lot of organisation having a studio and I want to find more time for painting. I am doing a lot of painting and want to find maybe another space that is part of Noïa but just for painting, exhibitions and collaborations with artists from other art fields.”

DEVELOPING STYLE

“Choosing tattooing was not a decision against fashion, I felt personally that I liked the moment of getting my tattoo and it was quite important. I realised that tattooing can be more important for the customer than fashion. I like the permanence and the connection to the client, tattoos can have a big meaning for somebody.

“As I mentioned before my previous work process was defined by experimental, unconventional ways of creating fashion without following trends. This is the only way to create something new and shape your own artistic voice. As a fashion designer, this can mean you destroy or disassemble a piece of a garment and put it together in a new way or work with a square piece of cloth and try to create a wearable shape from it. By observing and analysing why you like it and what you like about you define your aesthetic sense.

“I can find many parallels to my artistic way as both a painter and tattoo artist. My artistic process is defined by a mix of intuitive work flow and analyzing and observing my work. My art is a reflection of my experiences and starts where words end. It’s my own interpretation of the world, how I deal with it, it’s a mirror of my deepest thoughts, fears, and emotions.



I realised that tattooing can be more important for the customer than fashion. I like the permanence and the connection to the client

“In developing my style I think there are still influences from fashion design. I did a lot of fashion illustration when I studied, and the technique of using brushes and water colour is based in fashion illustration and from there it developed more and more abstract. When I started tattooing in the beginning of course I had to just practice and do any kind of tattoos because I need the practice. I still went to art courses after my studies. I was always interested in abstract art because it is very timeless and I like to create something that leaves room for interpretation. I think that once I arrived at the abstract style I can't go back to figurative drawing and animals again. I sometimes still have theses in my designs but my work is getting more and more abstract.”

INSPIRATIONS

“Studying fashion gave me an awareness of the body. Finding the right composition on the body and the right placement for a tattoo is very important. For my style, it is not important that a lot of skin is coloured or tattooed, it is more important to find the right placement. I started working with placing the designs over a few parts of the body and I think that comes from my fashion background and I developed my own aesthetic through fashion design and this is something that I still use.

“I like working with asymmetry and contrasts in shape and colour and this is something that I did when I studied fashion design. I was influenced by artists from Japan who were very experimental and that is where I got my inspiration from trying to find new ways to create new shapes and compositions and this something I still try to do. Nature itself is an excellent source of visual inspiration, whether it is a cellular structure, a leaf or a huge rock. Experiencing nature is always good for body and soul and to expand one's perspective in general. I observe a lot.

“Books often serve as a source of inspiration, however, not only nature books with photos or old books with science graphical drawings. Over

the years I have collected books from different fields, which serve as sources of inspiration, such as painting, photography, illustration, street art, print-graphics.

“I admire for example Kitty Sabatier’s works, she is a French artist and designer. To me her artworks have a great harmony and a balance of darkness, elegance, powerful energy and fragility. She uses mainly water-colour and ink. Each step during the artistic process is irreversible which shows her great talent and ability of painting.

“There are many other artists I admire but it’s more important for me to mention that music has a big influence on my work. I love to listen to electronic music (experimental, ambient, techno) and also classic or neoclassical music. Composers like Philip Glass, Nils Frahm, Max Richter, Tim Hecker, Erik Satie. These genres of music often work with repetitive structures and patterns, experimental sounds creating a certain atmosphere. This sound and the associations in terms of shapes, rhythm and colours build a great source of inspiration for my work. I transport the atmosphere and emotion on paper or canvas.

“Especially the abstract, that is not tangible and non-objective both in music and in the visual arts is so interesting, because it is unfathomable and unlimited. I can describe something by using lines and shapes and there still remains room for interpretation.

“Because my work appeals to many people, it’s meaningful for me that it is understood on a certain level, as they can perceive and read what I create, regardless of verbal or body language.

“For me tattooing wouldn’t be enough. I need to express myself in painting. Without thinking about a customer’s idea. But shaping my style and way of artistic expression in painting builds a way to express myself in an artistic way related to tattoos. Sometimes I think I created my own language and people who understand and like it want to get one of my tattoos.”

MOTIVATIONS

‘As my work develops both in my paintings and my tattooing it will be more abstract and a bit darker. My designs get more and more minimal, so also both ways in the designs themselves and



Studying fashion gave me an awareness of the body. Finding the right composition on the body and the right placement for a tattoo is very important

Over the years I have collected books from different fields, which serve as sources of inspiration, such as painting, photography, illustration, street art, print graphics

also the colour pallet I use. By reducing the colour I can create a stronger look, I want to create powerful designs with depths and strength on the other hand sensitivity for composition, details and line-work. Colour sometimes disturbs or distracts from the focus. The movement of the lines or brushstrokes is more important and more interesting to me than using colour.

“Using limited elements supports the aesthetic I want to create. The base is always black. If I use colour I like accents of colours to create a stronger expression or softness to balance it. By reducing the elements of my designs their expression gets stronger, also more elegant and mysterious. I think the reason for this is connected to where I take my inspirations from, especially the style of music. It’s a special kind of atmosphere which inspires me.

“Sometimes I try to observe myself and take a step back and see where the process is going and if there is a continuation somehow, I can still see that the work that I did three years ago is still recognisable as mine. There is a hand print in the whole process.”

FUTURE PLANS

“Working with like-minded artists is very inspiring, sometimes I see Martin’s work and get inspired by that. The shapes and the darkness inspire me a lot. Sometimes Lina’s work because it is very free and dynamic. I think it is good for everyone that works here to get inspiration from each other.

“I am planning an exhibition and a collaboration combining my idea of love for music and abstract painting. I am thinking about an extra atelier. I love both parts of my job, the creative part and freedom while painting but also the craft of tattooing and being in the studio with my great colleagues and customers, I met so many interesting people. So I hope combining those two fields will last in the future.” ▣



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AFRAID OF THE DARK?

What really scares you? The consequence of our natural habitat being fucked up with every passing day or the potential for nuclear fallout because of a war of words on Twitter? Or is your fear something more unnatural? Like the wicked creatures and nightmarish goblins that haunt the deeper recesses of your imagination? Róbert Borbás perfects the latter in his ghoulish imagery recreated on the flesh and perhaps the beauty of Borbás's work is that it allows one to wear their demons on their sleeve instead of dwelling in their nightmares...

@grindesign_tattoo

Your work is astounding in regards to the detail you put into every single tattoo you create. What led you to work in such intricate detail? What sort of tattooing processes do you use to ensure such intricacy?

To be honest, it was not really intentional in the beginning. When I started tattooing five years ago I was thinking I should try out as many styles as possible. I had my neo-traditional era, some sort of realism etc, but I had a couple of requests where people were referencing the designs I made for bands. Those designs were closer to illustrations than actual tattoo designs so they needed some rework. My colleagues were not impressed that I tried to put such a high amount of detail into such a small amount of space. Not to mention the healing and ageing of the tattoo. So I tried to simplify some bits.

For the essence of a good tattoo is contrast. That's what I still struggle with, to find the balance between simple and detailed bits of a composition or even a palm sized small piece. Lately I started to use grey-wash and I'm trying out new techniques. It's funny to be discussing this because I was the one who was kind of against the whole grey-wash thing (laughs). But seeing 2-3 year old pieces, which were way too black, made me understand that I needed to use more tones, to make longer lasting tattoos.



In your work I see reference and inspiration to old historical illustrations of witchcraft and demonology. What sort of imagery has inspired your creative practice? Are there any sources that might seem surprising to us?

First of all fun fact, I spent almost 8 years in a catholic school in North Hungary. Despite the fact that organised religions in general are everything I do not agree with, those 8 years were the most amazing in my life. Not just the era where I met my best friends I could still count on after almost 20 years but the education level was super high. My point is that we were studying a lot about Christian iconography, the Old and New Testament; the Old Testament is crazy, full of amazing imagery, it's a massive source of inspiration!

When you live in this, when you go to church and talk with priests you get a better understanding of the positive and negative sides of religion. For me, one positive side was the mind-blowing symbolism and the work of great artists inspired by the Catholic Church. As with everything, Christianity also has another side, which I also find super interesting i.e. atheist views, occultism, etc. So many interesting layers of inspiration that you can go back to time and time again.

To name some absolute idols who where picturing the good and negative



sides of religion are Gustave Doré, Albrecht Dürer, Hendrik Goltzius and many more. Some contemporary artists I love are Aaron Horkey, Brandon Holt or my friend Richey Beckett. To be honest even on social media I try to follow as many illustrators and painters as possible. Same thing applies with geeky stuff (laughs). Comics, movies, novels are a massive inspiration!

Why do you have a fascination in the darker and creepier recesses of fantasy? And why do you choose to work with this type of imagery?

I did not choose this at all. I was always into this kind of stuff. You have to do what suits you, follow your instinct! When people meet me usually they are like, “wow this guy is actually a happy, positive dude” but when you really have a deeper conversation with me I think it makes sense why I draw stuff like this. For me tattooing is like screaming out every single bit of sadness or misery. So once again, I did not choose this route.

Metal is the first genre of music I listened to. My dad showed me Iron Maiden and that was it! Eddy is the creepiest, yet coolest thing in metal iconography. When I saw the cover of *The Number of The Beast* it was obvious that I wanted to work on tees, album covers, and tattoos that belonged to this subculture.

In your opinion why do people like to be tattooed with these sorts of images? What is the appeal? And is there a big market for people that want such haunting tattoos?

I hate the word ‘market’. It has nothing personal about

it, and tattooing is a super personal thing in my opinion. What we could call ‘market’ is the equipment you use or magazines you buy to be up-to-date with tattooing. But answering the question, of course there are huge amounts of people who are into this sort of grim imagery. Sometimes you would be surprised by how different kinds of people are getting these really dark tattoos. I have had a huge variety of customers already, from a video game tester to an FBI agent. People like to expose their fears sometimes, which makes them stronger if they are facing them. I’m the same. Sorry to say this, but mostly these people are more open-minded in general. I have had a lot of conversations about tattoos, especially the dark kind of tattoos, with people who are really not into them. They always have a conclusion that a tattooed person, or a person tattooed with dark imagery on them, is some kind of freak or emotionally unstable. And you know what? After some discussions I have to admit they are sort of right. Everybody has their own demons, and tattooing is a way of fighting them. It always breaks my heart when I cover scars caused by self-harm but at the same time I’m really delighted and happy that I can help make those scars disappear.

Does music have a creative influence in your tattooing practice? Can sound, which isn’t physical per se, have an affect in the physical impact of tattooing?

Absolutely! I’m a huge music nerd and I love loads of different genres. Mostly metal off course, but I’m a massive fan of darker, mostly complicated electronic music as well. For work I love to listen to some ambient stuff or



doom. These really put me in the zone; all the tones and vibrations give a sense of flow when tattooing. And flow is super important in tattooing! I highly recommend OM or Sleep for example, best working music ever. Also the latest BELL WITCH release is incredible, along side with the new record of Primitive Man. These bands are the manifestations of the sound of misery. Nowadays we live such dark days and these bands are picturing it perfectly. Also music is some kind of gateway for me, from the non-physical to the physical. Such a cool cycle...since when you make music with physical instruments it becomes a non-physical form, then you listen to it and it makes you do something which is all kinds of physical, visible and hopefully inspiring.

Are you inspired by board games such as Dungeons and Dragons, or fantasy video games such as Skyrim or Dark Souls? If so, how?

It might be surprising but besides that fact I love a lot of fantasy painters, artists, and concept artists, I was never really into board games. I play some video games of course, but due to lack of time I can't really get into complicated games like Skyrim or The Witcher. What I have been playing the most lately is Skate 3 (laughs). An old but amazing game! It's perfect to switch off your brain and cruise in the city with your skateboard. I really do love God of War as well. How it pictures Greek mythology is just insane.





I notice on your Instagram you have made a reactive shout out against comments made on an image of a tattoo you created, which was a devilish creature located at the side of a client's face. Why did you feel you needed to do this?

After hundreds of negative comments it was pretty obvious I needed to edit the caption. I get it, it's really extreme, it's his face but that's the point. It's HIS face. His body and his temple. Social media is amazing but people love to judge or just troll. When I made this piece I told Viktor - my client - that this is probably the edgiest, most extreme piece I have ever done, my followers know that I do dark stuff but this could get viral and some people who are not into the tattoo scene are going to comment negatively. My statement that he is a tattooist was just a heads up that people don't need to worry about his life, he has a career, a place to work, and in addition the other side of his face was already done by Lipa when I tattooed him (laughs).

Is the face still a site of trepidation for tattooists?

I don't think so. People are pushing the limits of tolerance, so doing something like this in 2017 is extreme, but you see so many crazy things around you anyway. Tattooing became an art form and the clients are our canvases, which you should respect as much as you can. I only tattoo faces if the client already has massive coverage, and we are able to come up with ideas together to make the design fit him/her. If a facial tattoo is well done and composed I think there is nothing wrong about it. It's extreme, but it's a part of your body you can transform as you wish.

Can we move contemporary culture forward in regards to accepting the face as an open and creative space where clients can be tattooed? Or is the face still a no go zone for many tattooists and clients?

Probably a no go zone for a lot of tattooists and even more of a no go zone for clients. Mostly the people I have met with massive face tattoos are tattooists with a good living standard and client base, so they are more or less going to tattoo for a lifetime. Obviously for them it's not going to be an issue to get a job as a tattooist. Clients who have other kinds of day jobs are a more complicated case.

A majority of your work is large scale in nature. What are the advantages and what are some of the pitfalls in working at this scale?

Doing large work is nothing but the best way of expressing yourself. The amount of space on a torso or a sleeve gives you the possibility to tell a story, picture a moment with motion and emotion. If you have to do a symmetrical palm size piece, which is mostly line work based, you cannot make a mistake. Coming up with a general large-scale idea can be easy, but to evolve it into the final form can take a couple of hours for me. Sometimes I think about a project for days and scribble super general ideas I have in mind then build it up part-by-part.

After it's all done you can make the best part - giving it a twist and putting your own touch to the whole concept. This is what I love the most about large-scale stuff - the process. What is the hardest for me is to follow the shape of a body perfectly and not getting distorted elements in the composition.

I am a massive fan of horror movies, captivated by the feeling of being scared. It is obvious to see that the horror genre is also a major influence in your work, which films have captivated you most? And which ones have had a dramatic impact in your work?

I do not consider myself a massive horror fan but I do like horror movies. For me movies like *Martyrs* or *High Tension* mean horror. I also love the classic Romero movies as well. Lately to find a good, entertaining and unique horror movie is almost impossible, so I kind of give up searching for them. From time to time my friends recommend me really good ones. I really liked *RAW*. Loved the topic and how entertaining the whole storyline was whilst being gruesome but still with



lots of black humour. The movie I love most in this genre is *The Witch*. It's a disappointment for someone who is thinking this movie is going to be full of action and loads of jump scares, but if you want to check out how human misery looks like on the screen *The Witch* is a perfect example.

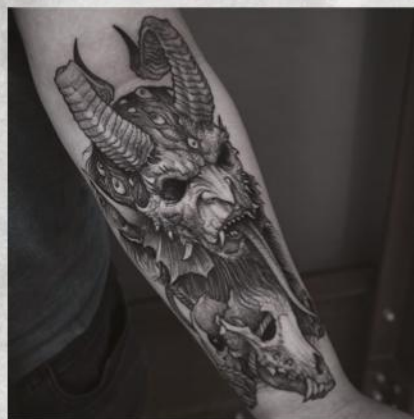
What other tattooists are making work in this genre that you particularly admire?

I don't think I'm a horror tattooist and it might surprise you but I mostly follow traditional, oriental tattooists. Of course I love the work of Lipa (@_lipa_), an example of someone who does pretty dark stuff. When it comes to dark and blasphemous Derek Noble (@dereknoble36) is my idol! His style is everything I love about tattooing and his illustrations are mind-blowing!

If you could pick anyone to team up with, who would that be? And what sort of piece would you like to create with them?

Oh what a hard question. It would be an honour to do a collaboration with Filip Leu (@filipleu) for example. I am doing a collaboration next summer with Victor Portugal (@victorportugal). I think his style is completely different than mine but still the elements and topics he uses have a lot in common with my stuff. I'm really looking forward to this collab, it's going to be an interesting and dark one (laughs).

When I was young I was terrified by the dark and by my imagination, which often ran away from me, creating creatures that populated the sinister corners of my bedroom. Were you scared of monsters when you were little?



If so, which ones? Have these nightmarish creatures reappeared in your tattoo designs?

I cannot really recall. When I was younger I was not afraid of the dark but the older I get the more uncomfortable I feel (laughs). Sometimes some creatures in my tattoos are from my dreams. They are mostly human beings mixed with animals. I'm really attracted to nature; I think it's more powerful than anything

else. Nature always amazes me but can also be super scary!

Are you still scared of monsters today? Or do your contemporary monsters take different forms?

Death has always scared me, that's why I try to have a better understanding of it. Lots of my friends told me that I picture death way too much, but every time I draw something that is death related I have this conclusion that death in general is also the meaning of life. You work and live yourself to death. In fact it's not a negative thing at all. It could be a celebration of an end of a route, an end of an era.

What are you working on at the moment? And, what do you hope to try out?

Besides tattooing I work on illustrations for a German post-metal band called Red Apollo. It's been in the works for a while and one part is done, but still needs a lot of work on the backside of the layout. I would really like to get back to doing more illustrations, and finally after all these years put together my first book, including sketches, tattoos, and some studies for my tattoo work. ▣

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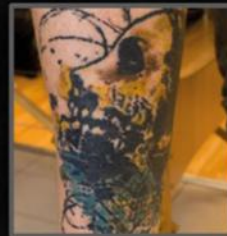
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*“There is no death, daughter. People die only when we forget them,’
my mother explained shortly before she left me. ‘If you can remember
me, I will be with you always.’”*

Isabel Allende, *Eva Luna*



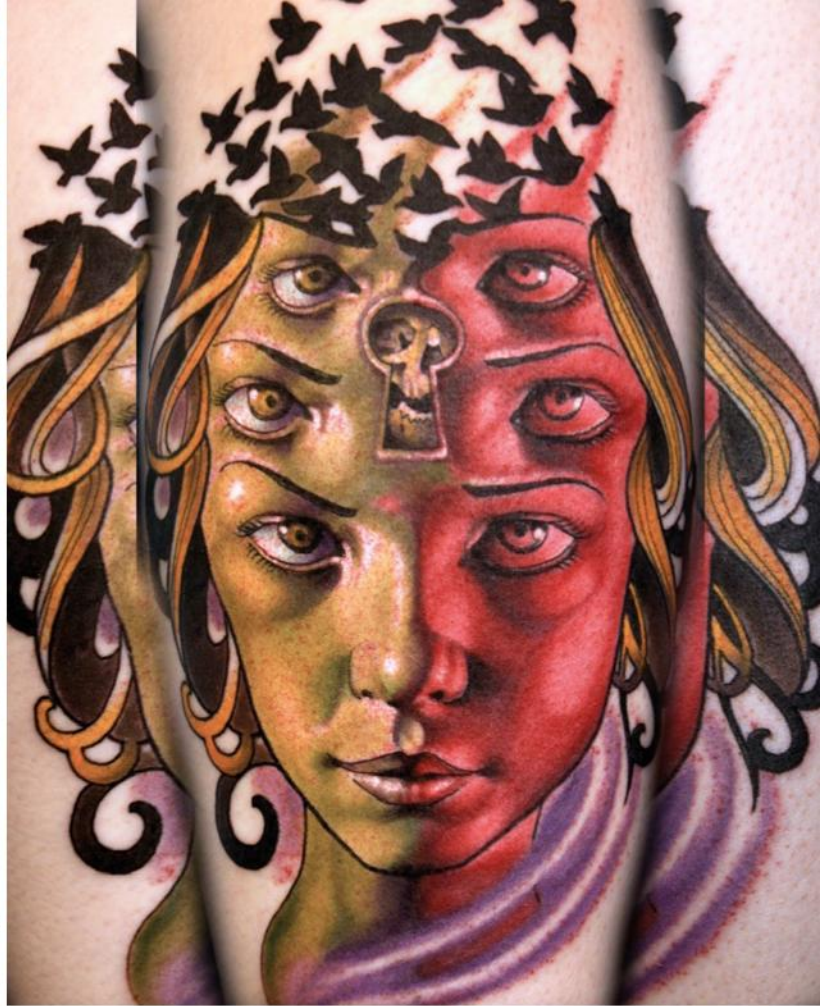
I can still recall my first funeral, clear as day. Images are burned into my mind, but not ones you would expect. Gary, the man who cooked dinners for the congregation of the church I worked for as a teenager, had passed away, and those that loved him chose to remember him in a unique way. As I walked through the doors for the memorial, the first thing I was confronted with was a large picture of Gary on an easel. In the picture, Gary was in a leisure suit, sporting a huge smile, with his arms up in a gleeful shrugging position. The photo looked less like a memorial tattoo, and more like the theme song for a 1970's TV sitcom.

Above the photo was a huge banner with the words, "Gary's Home Going" on it. The images are all incredibly memorable, not just for jovial nature, but also because his family made a conscious effort as to how he will be remembered. What happened to me that day was exactly what they wanted, they wanted that specific memory of Gary to be burned in your mind, so that when you thought of him, you thought of that picture and a smile was instantly produced. When my mother died a few years ago, I was honoured to write her obituary and speak at her funeral. I realised the amazing opportunity to create a way that she would be remembered; not as a woman facing difficulties and hardships in life, but as a writer, creator, and artist. We were able to remind the world who she was, and how she could be carried with us. Could that same action be accomplished with the ink and blood of a tattoo?

"Humans make art to remember and be remembered," said Caius. "Art is their weapon against forgetting."
Melissa Grey, The Girl at Midnight



When thinking about the idea of honouring our loved ones through remembrance, the visual I automatically see is inspired by Jorge R. Gutierrez's film "The Book of Life". The afterlife is more like a city, one that is huge and expansive, though seeming underground. The streets are decorated with strung up lights and candles, with the people all being skeletons, dancing and celebrating the life they lived. When the main character is guided through this realm, he is reunited with his loved ones, while also meeting the family he had heard so many tales about. This introduction to Dia de los Muertos demonstrates that this rich Mexican tradition is rooted in a beautiful idea that is universal, the need to remember those we



have loved, and how their lives help add to the strength of the life we are living. Frances Ann Day explains this tradition in her piece “Latina and Latino Voices in Literature”.

Day states, “On October 31, All Hallows Eve, the children make a children’s altar to invite the angelitos (spirits of dead children) to come back for a visit. November 1 is All Saints Day, and the adult spirits will come to visit. November 2 is All Souls Day, when families go to the cemetery to decorate the graves and tombs of their relatives. The three-day fiesta is filled with marigolds, the flowers of the dead; muertos (the bread of the dead); sugar skulls; cardboard skeletons; tissue paper decorations; fruit and nuts; incense, and other traditional foods and decorations.”



The notion that our loved ones come back to visit us can create a beautiful sense of solace, but what about keeping them with us altogether? Through the traditions of tattooing do we have to ability to keep those loved ones with us, wearing their love and our memories as an amulet in our skin, protecting us from the challenges presented in the Land of the Living?

Over the years I have had the honour of creating memorial tattoos for scores of people, creating representations of everything from cherished family pets that have passed away, to objects representing them like keys, to portraits of loved ones, to even a portrait of Don Knotts.

This particular piece was meaningful to me, as I had the honor of tattooing it on my close friend and amazing tattooer, Gabe Smith. Gabe's father loved "The Andy Griffith Show" and Don Knotts in particular, with Gabe's memories being filled with watching hours of the show, Knott's character embodying the life his father loved.

When death happens and the ones we have loved so strongly are forcibly taken from our lives, we search for a sense of understanding in a time where our lack of control is made painfully obvious. I was fortunate to create a piece for my client David based in this idea.

We created a piece showing the unified collective conscience that we are living in, showing that, as Alan Watts says, "(we are) the Universe experiencing itself". With an added keyhole in the forehead, and a skull looking back through it, we showed that in death we have the chance to find this purpose. Storytelling has a way of sharing that purpose, and helping create the visual representations, the amulets we wear in our skin.

Often, those stories that filled the lives of those left behind after a loved one passes help to create a theme that can run throughout various pieces, a visualisation that can illicit the emotion that we miss so greatly in our departed loves. The Ducote family is one who has a beautiful idea of their father being represented by a





cardinal, with each family member getting a piece with a personalised variation on the theme.

Taking it a step further, the Shelton family had an idea of their deceased father and husband being embodied by a heron majestically gazing into the banks of the Southern rivers that he so loved.

When we can capture that feeling of how our lives were forever changed by these incredible people, that is when the honour created by the art of tattooing shines bright, and when something altogether new is forged. The tattooist's life can be changed in these creation processes, but what happens when the ones getting the pieces are the people we are faced with remembering?

Early in my career I was fortunate to have my first incredibly devoted client. He was in his early 50's and it was apparent that his life had been at a crossroads where he



was trying to create change. He was trying to mold his life into the one he so desperately wanted to live. With every piece we seemed to be helping him grow into someone he could love, but then out of nowhere, it stopped. He missed a few appointments, and then our communications grew silent. It wasn't until a few months later that I learned he had made the choice to end his life. Those tattoos never saw the dawn of a new age, they were his representation of an end. This may be one of the hardest concepts that I have ever grappled with as a tattooist. Since then, I have had several clients pass away. One client lived about a year or so after we finished his piece that was a representation of the memorial "Raising the flag on Iwo Jima" by Joe Rosenthal.

His life was ended by a boat accident. Another client

lived for a few months after we tattooed his Albert Einstein on him, passing away unexpectedly of a heart attack.

But one client changed my life forever after he became one of my closest friends, and his death has left me with a hole in my heart that will never be filled. That man was Jason Reeder.

In 2007 I was at a point in my career that I could have only dreamed of. I was traveling around the world, tattooing at conventions, doing guest spots, and creating work that I loved. That year I was contacted by Jason Reeder to tattoo both sides of his neck. His references were art created by the incredible Basil Gogos, and after a long phone conversation about skateboarding, punk rock and hardcore, I knew that we were going to be friends. I tattooed Jason for years, I watched him go from working for UPS



to becoming one of the most sought after tattooists in the country. Jason was encouraged by the woman who later became his wife, a wonderful friend of mine named Tasha, to pursue tattooing, which he did with every inch of his being. His passion and dedication were unmatched, but under this was a pain that could never fully be understood.

With every stage of his life I would receive a phone call from Jason, asking for advice; but he always knew the right answers, and sometimes I think his pursuit of advice was to make me feel good. Jason did something that was very rare in my life, Jason saw me, and he always let me know who I was. This is past encouragement, and the word “support” doesn’t do it justice. Our phone calls grew longer and more regular through the years, until finally I spoke with him more than I did with anyone else, outside of my wife. Those calls also began to reflect the dark space our lives were in, a space that had nothing to do with our surroundings, and everything to do with our struggles with the reality we shared. I was happily married, to an incredible woman, we had just welcomed our first daughter into the world, my career was growing more everyday, and I was suffering with depression. I was numb to my surroundings, a fact I was scared to share with my wife out of fear she would think it had anything to do with us, which it didn’t. I began to withdraw, I stopped working at tattoo conventions, and I drank heavily every day for six years. In the end, I was isolating myself from the world around me. My comrade in this pain, though, was Jason. We spent those phone conversations drinking to all hours of the night, dredging through treacherous waters, balancing dangerously close to an edge that eventually would be taken out from under us.

I found sobriety in July of 2014, and came to terms with the demons I had been grappling with. Depression, sleep disorders, and alcoholism had all clouded my vision and made reality something that I struggled to see. After many long nights, and tearful conversations, I received a phone

call that would change my life forever. On the morning of August 28th, 2014, Jason had ended the struggle with this life, and nothing would ever be the same. With Jason’s death there was a hole in my heart that will never be filled. That pain, coupled with the deaths of six more people that were close to me in the course of only a few years, led to the creation of the Serpents of Bienville. Jason reminded me that I was never alone, and through all that mourning I learned that is all we want or need to know, that we aren’t solitary in our human experience. After delivering Jason’s funeral service, I was honoured to get a tattoo by Jason’s friend Lil Chico. The piece was a small caricature of Jason. Going back to the idea of Dia de los Muertos, this tattoo helps serve as a guide in this Land of the Living, to remind me of our one purpose, we are not alone. Those memories of our loved ones etched with needles and carbon in our flesh demonstrate that as long we remember, we have the ability to visualise our connection and see that we are never truly alone, and that tattoo can transform the idea of remembrance into a creation of our new life, one in honour to those we have lost, using the tools they forged to continue to make our way in this Land of the Living. ▣



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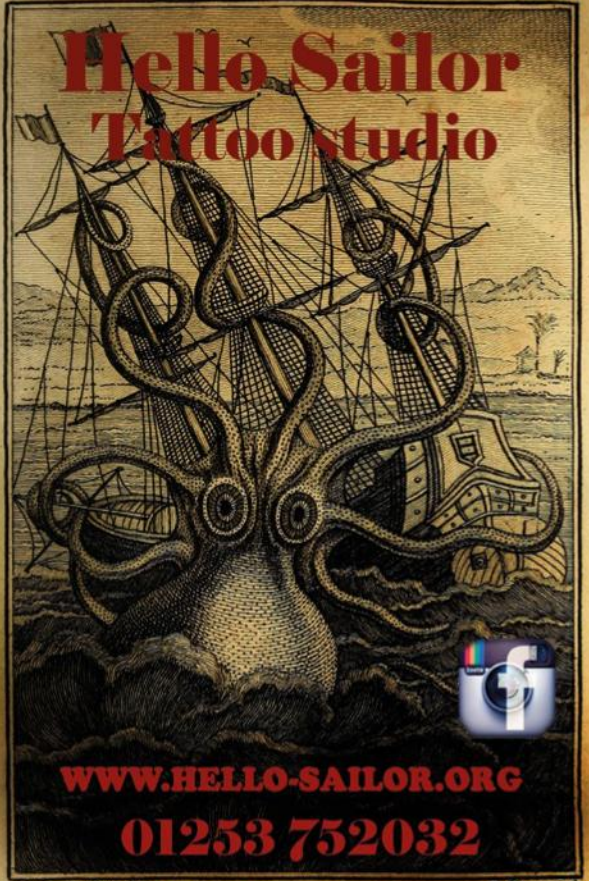
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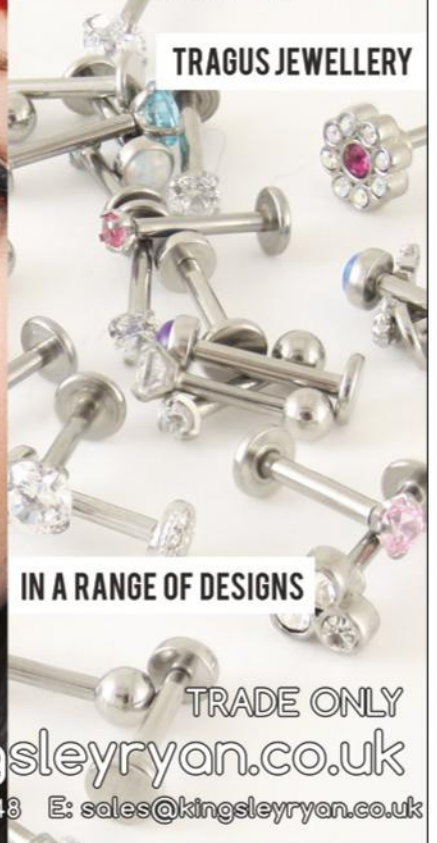


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PLAYING WITH FIRE

As tattoos continue to weave their way into all walks of life, the culinary world has seen an explosion of ink in its kitchens, from local pubs right up to Michelin-starred restaurants. That being said, there seems to be a serious divide on one front: chef-centric designs. While some choose to proudly pay tribute to their profession, others have dubbed tattoos depicting ingredients, knives and various tools of the trade cliché. This month, we meet up with New York-based chef Brad Willits to get his take on foodie ink and talk all things delicious

www.camperdownelm.com @willitsbrad

“**T**he whole food cliché, ahh, I think that might be a little ridiculous,” declares chef Brad Willits who’s been cooking since his teens and, earlier this year, opened his inaugural restaurant, Camperdown Elm, in Brooklyn.

“My first tattoo was a damn pig! I got it for other reasons aside from just being a chef. Most people who see my tattoos think I’m a farmer or a vegetarian,” he laughs. “But it was inspired by several things. First, was my dad. He passed away in 2009 and he is my main inspiration.”

“Also, when I was the chef de cuisine at this place in Vero Beach, Florida, I worked with a couple of farms, mainly Osceola Farms. There was a guy named Kevin O’Dare, one of the coolest and most genuine people you could ever meet, and he would grow whatever I asked him to. I would spend a lot of time out there at the farm—there’s nothing really like it.”

“My tattoos are of a bunch of vegetables, fruits and flowers,” he continues, working his way through his foodie sleeve. “Oh, and the pig! The artist who did them was named Scooter. He had the gentle touch,





If we are using a piece of corn, we are using the whole damn corn: the husk for oil, the cob for stock, the corn for whatever...



I guess—ha! I can't remember his real name, but the name of the shop was Scooter's Skin Art. Oh, and there was a bar next to it!"

MUNCHIES AND COGNAC

Despite coming from a family with a big passion for food—Willits' dad actually owned his own restaurant—it was the budding young chef's friends (combined with a repeat case of "MUNCHIES!!!") that pushed him to start cooking.

"I was about 16 or so and my buddies would always ask me to cook them food from their parents' refrigerators at two or three in the morning," he remembers. "My buddy's mom was a triathlete and always had fresh food and a ton of cognac around. I remember my dad using cognac a lot at his restaurant, so I would make this chicken scallopini at three in the morning and I mastered that damn dish!" he laughs. "That is, until we got caught using up all of his mom's cognac."

"But, even then, I remember this feeling of making people happy and making myself happy," he adds. "They were my friends, my biggest fans and the biggest assholes!"

From there, Willits moved into a professional kitchen, picking up a summer gig at his dad's restaurant. Dubbing that time in his life "super weird," he recalls how his

"parents were freshly divorced and had both remarried and all I wanted to do was skateboard, play guitar, golf and baseball. When I would visit my dad on the west coast of Florida, he'd ask me what I wanted to do and just ended up taking me to work with him."

"I'd still bring my skateboard, golf clubs and a guitar, but when it's summer in Florida, your ass can't hang outside all day without dying from a heat stroke, so I'd head back to the restaurant," he says. "I still remember the smell of the kitchen—it was the best smell! Well, aside from my grandparents' house during dinner."

But despite the massive influence the family business had on a young Willits, he's confident he would have crossed paths with food regardless. "I would still cook," he admits. "I'm one of those people that can't really sit still for too long. I get bored really easily. I love doing things with my hands and using my brain through passion and art. It's just how I'm wired, I guess!"

Choosing to pursue his dream full-time when he was just 19, Willits started working as a busboy until, one day, they "asked me to work in the kitchen three days a week to cover one of the guy's days off. I worked my ass off and, eventually, joined the kitchen



staff full-time.”

“I did not go to school—thank God!” he laughs. “I just worked for a lot of badass chefs. Some well-known, some not. I worked in an all-French kitchen for a few years and it was there that they made it very clear to me how to run a kitchen with culture and respect for your staff.”

Moving around the country and working with different types of ingredients proved to be the key to gaining as much valuable experience as possible. “I wanted to learn about different city cultures and their respective food scenes,” he explains. “Growing up in Florida, we always talked about getting out of there. Don’t get me wrong, I love Florida and its beaches, but I also love New York City and Brooklyn. It’s all about the ride and how you get there.”

All that travel soon proved to be “both exhausting and rewarding. I find inspiration everywhere—the market, the ocean, parks, art, new friends, old friends, colleagues, chefs, music—and I love continuous change,” but repeatedly uprooting your entire life isn’t sustainable and, in 2013, Willits decided to set up shop in New York.

“I ended up in New York because who doesn’t want to live here?” he jokes. “No, actually, I was living in Baltimore and my best

friends—the guys I used to cook the cognac chicken for—lived in New York City. I used to take the train in almost every Sunday and Monday and absolutely fell in love with the city, especially Brooklyn.”

RUNNING THE SHOW

“It’s always been my dream to own a restaurant,” says Willits who, in June 2017, opened his first solo project, Camperdown Elm, in Brooklyn. “It’s small things like being able to take everything I’ve learned, put it on a plate and not have to get approval. But the toughest thing is that everyone is watching. Everyone! It’s fucking New York! My mentors, my friends, my family, the neighbourhood—I don’t want to let anyone down, especially myself.”

Asked to compare his adoptive home to his native Florida, Willits admits, the two “don’t compare at all! New York City is one of the greatest food cities in the world, maybe even the best. At least, I think it is. But there are definitely some things I love about Florida, like the fish. There are a lot more species of fish.”

“I grew up fishing, butchering, cooking and making ceviches and there are fish that chefs here in New York are just starting to use that we’ve been using for a while in Florida,” he adds. “I’ve always wanted to own a restau-

TATTOOED CHEFS 101

As the *Village Voice*’s Keith Wagstaff pointed out in 2010 in a feature dubbed *Kitchen Ink*, “you can trace the origins of the chef-as-outlaw archetype roughly to the year 2000, when Anthony Bourdain released his surprise hit *Kitchen Confidential*... and where misfits go, so do tattoos.” TV and celebrity followed and today, Bourdain is no longer the only inked chef in the spotlight. Others on the small screen include *MasterChef* judges Graham Elliot and Aarón Sanchez, both of whom have graced these very pages.

CAMPERDOWN ELM

When it's summer in Florida, your ass can't hang outside all day without dying from a heat stroke, so I'd head back to the restaurant



KNIVES & INK

Tattoos have become so synonymous with chefs that, in 2016, Bloomsbury published an entire book dedicated to them. *Knives & Ink: Chefs and the Stories Behind Their Tattoos* highlights the work of over 65 chefs from all walks of life — like Mandy Lamb, who cooks on a fishing boat in Alaska, and Dominique Crenn, who runs Atelier Crenn, a two Michelin-starred restaurant in San Francisco — and shows just how prevalent ink has become in today's kitchens.

rant in Florida—I hope to one day—but I think it's pretty rad to open my first place in Brooklyn. I've been here for five years and it's become my home!"

"I do miss traveling," he goes on to admit, "however, I feel like I'm in the best city in the world." What's more, he's been able to keep the excitement of travel alive through his cooking. "If you look at our menus, we change out our dishes pretty often," he says. "It's not because we get tired of it, but because I was inspired by the market, because of a song, or really just whatever jumps into my mind!"

And that's not all that makes Camperdown Elm unique. There's also the long list of sustainable practices the restaurant has proudly adopted. "It's pretty simple," starts Willits. "If we are using a piece of corn, we are using the whole damn corn: the husk for oil, the cob for stock, the corn for whatever. If we use striped bass, we are using the collars, the heads, the skin, the bones."

They're also serving unfiltered tap water. "The tap water actually tastes amazing!" he laughs. "We almost installed one of those filtering machines, but then we had the water tested and it's fucking great! It's as local and

sustainable as you can get."

What's more, "my business partner and I also scouted out some old reclaimed wood from Williamsburg that's almost 200 years old for the interiors of the restaurant, including the bar shelves. We sanded, painted, stained and filled in all of the damn holes. It's super beautiful!"

Looking ahead, Willits says he's focused on "making sure that my little restaurant is taken care of and staffed properly and everyone is happy working there. Then I plan on taking a vacation to Tokyo for a few weeks this January and maybe Paris for a few weeks with one of my best buddies who is an amazing chef in Los Angeles. After that, hopefully another restaurant! I really want to do a raw seafood restaurant, but we will see." There are also "a bunch of other tattoo pieces I want to get, I just don't have a lot of time on my hands these days. Hopefully, I will be able to get some more this winter!"

Which brings up to the end of our chat and the million-dollar question: Who is Brad Willits, really? "Brad Willits is a fucking weirdo that gets it done splendidly, rain or shine," he laughs. "A proud Floridian? A pretty good dude!" ▣

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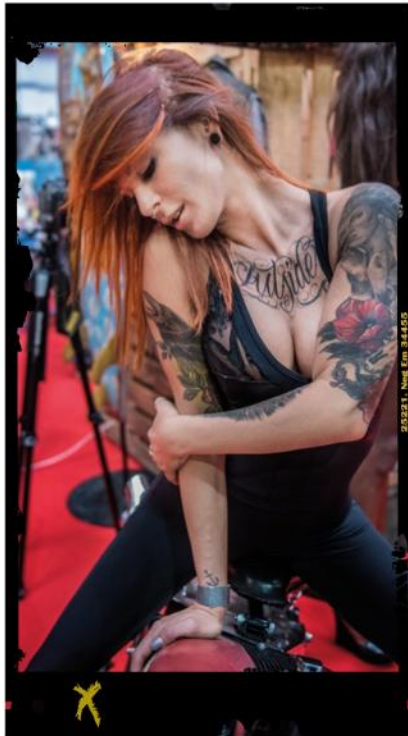
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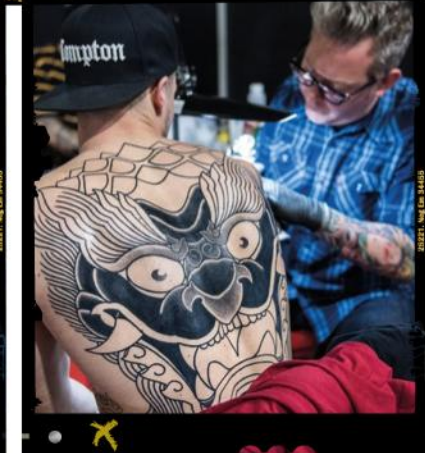
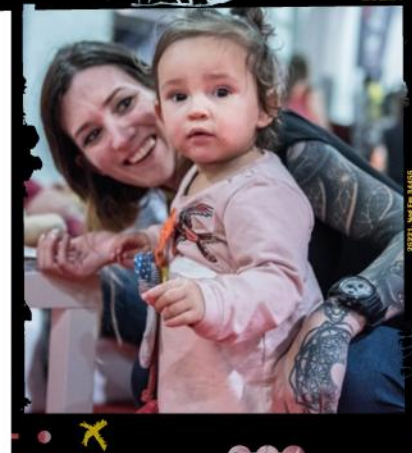
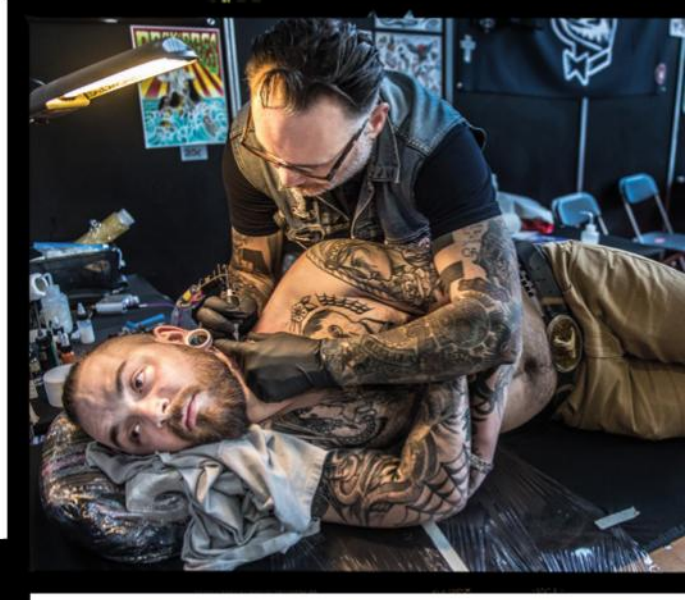
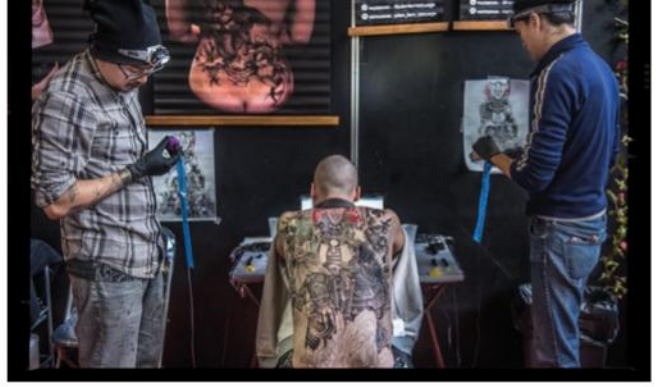
Scenes from the **BRUSSELS TATTOO CONVENTION**

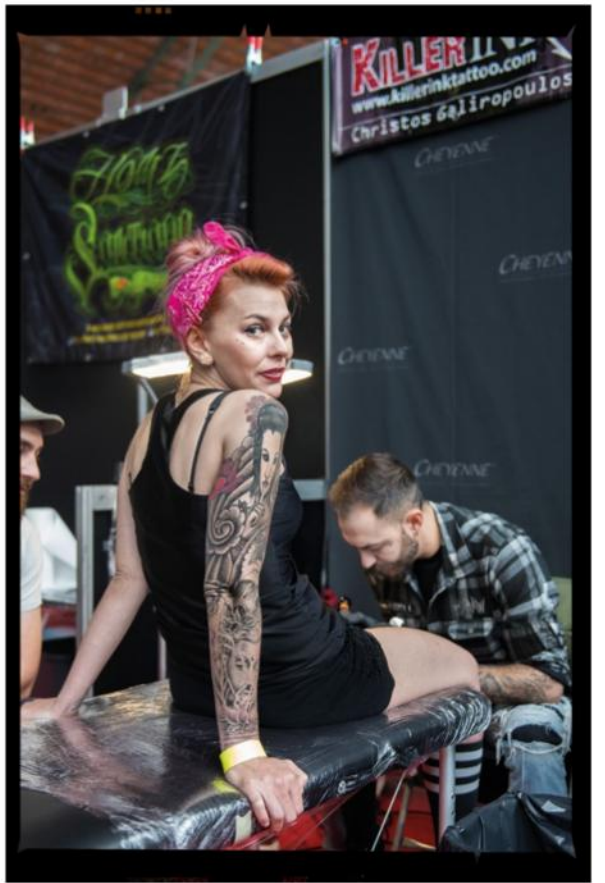
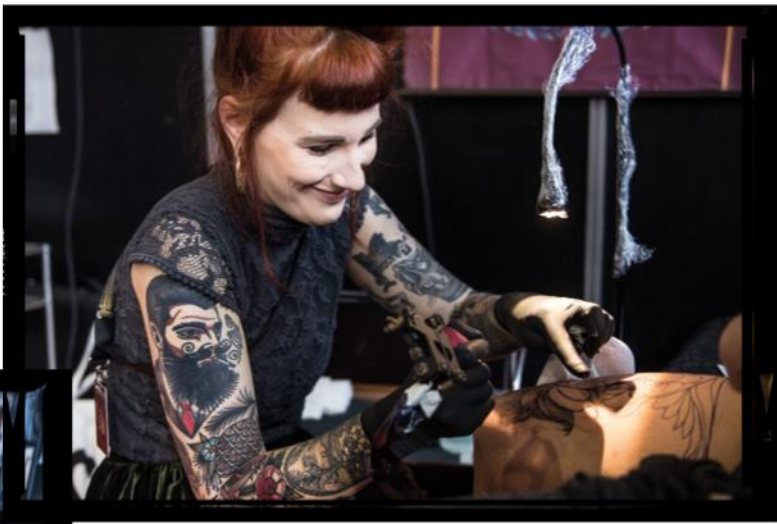
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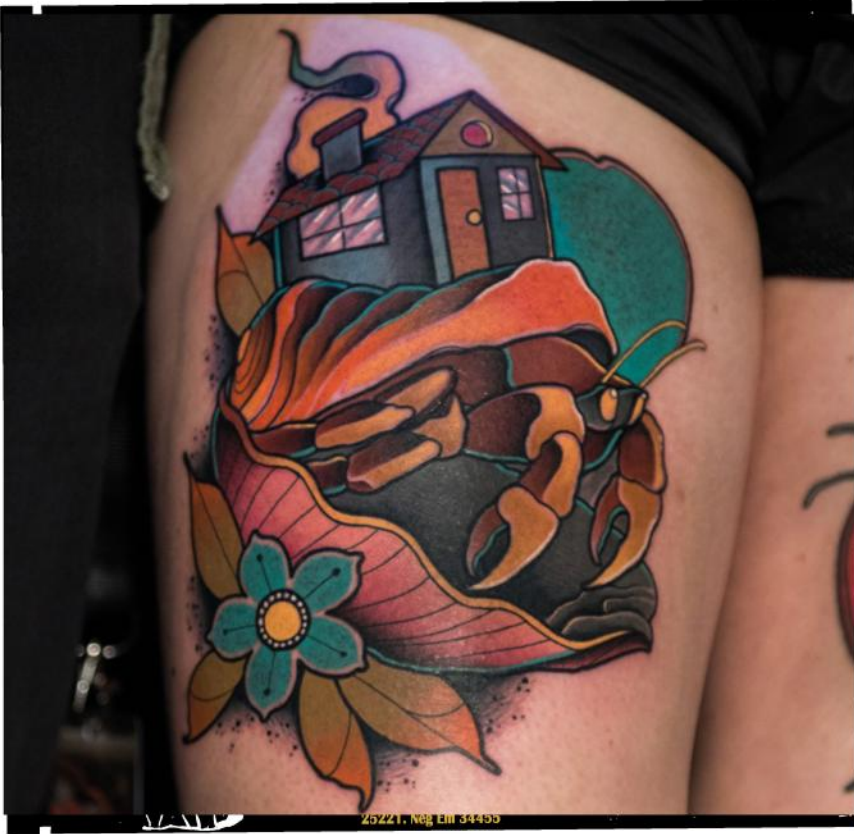
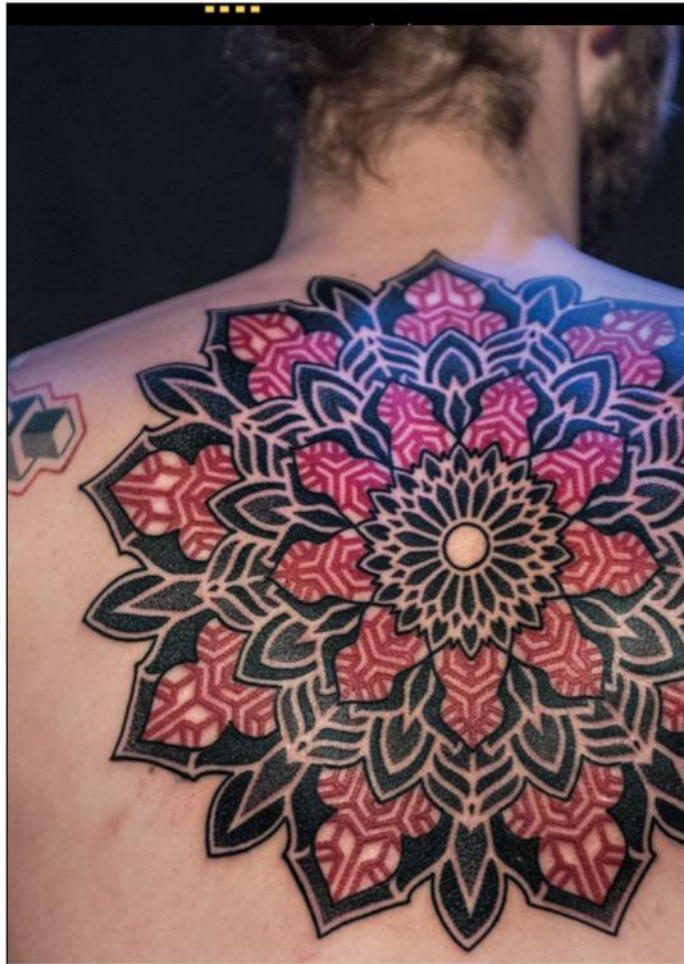
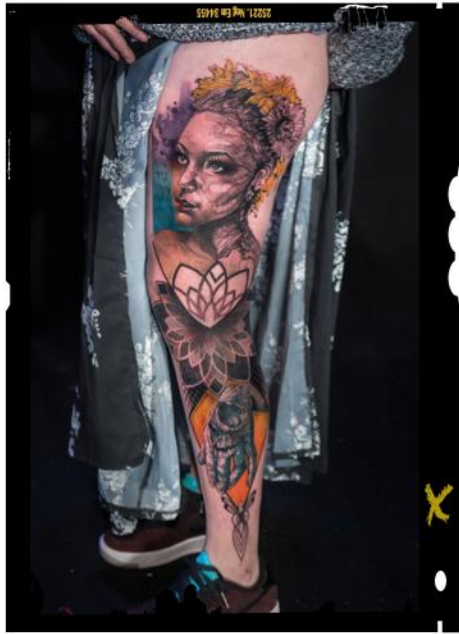
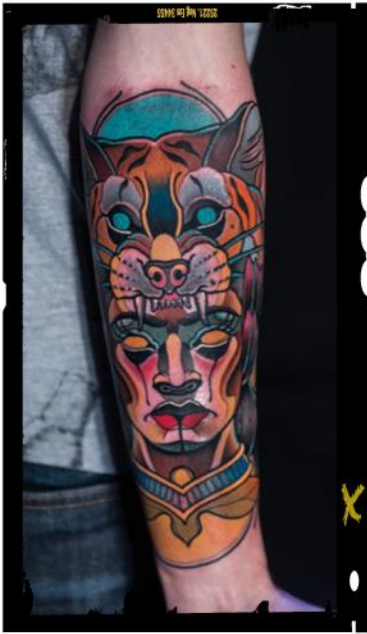


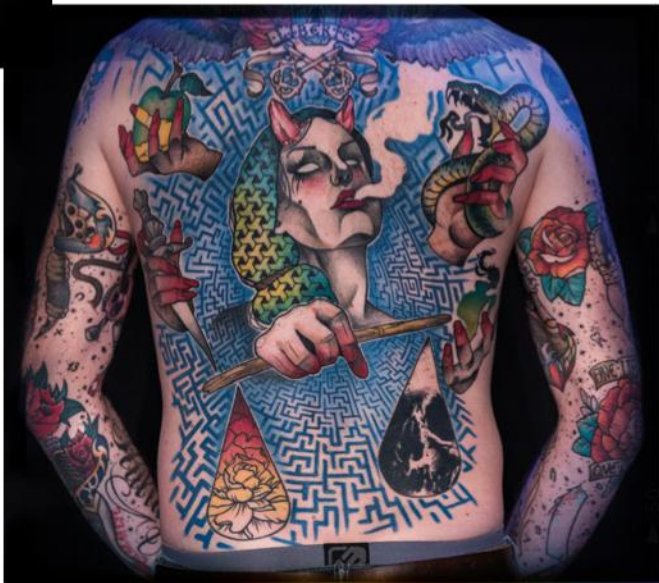
The Brussels Tattoo Convention is one of the most highly regarded shows in the world. Sticking out amongst most others for all the right reasons (superb artist lists, great entertainment, ability to crank it up from year to year), 2017 was no exception. While the boss was in Florence doing his thing over there, we left it to Kamila Burzymowska to take care of business in Brussels like only she can!

Feast your eyes upon nothing but a good time... and next year, make an effort to get out there. You won't be disappointed.











REVIEW

NOCTURNES

JEAN-LUC NAVETTE

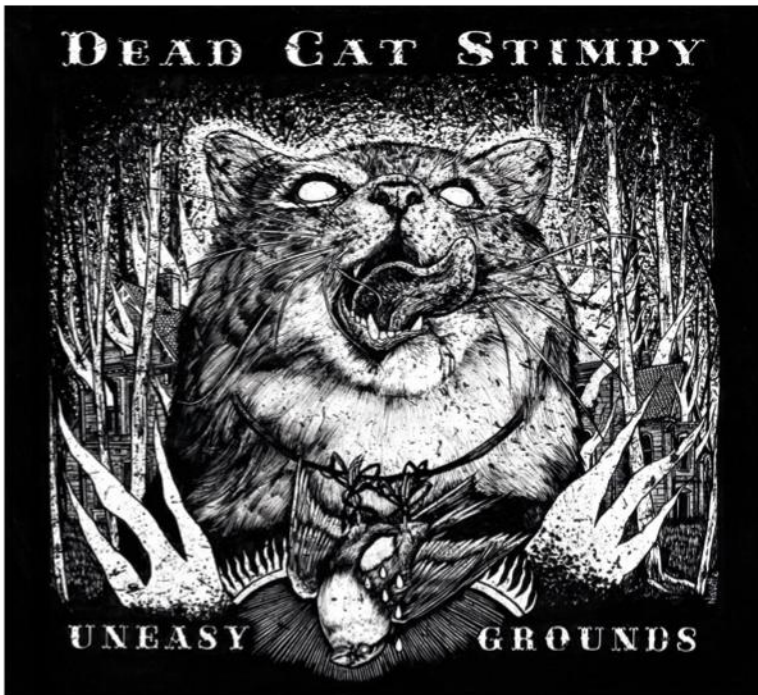
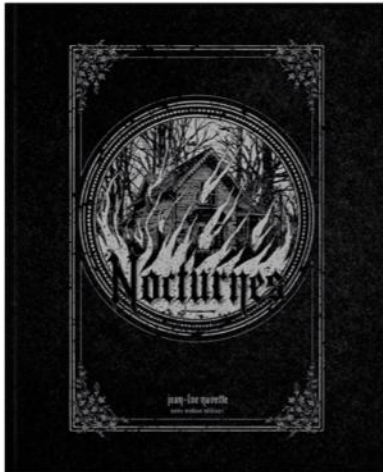
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A few issues back, we ran an extensive feature interview with Jean-Luc Navette in which he talked about this very book and how it came into being. Having your hands on it however is a very different experience. Coming to *Nocturnes* without a clue of what to expect would be much like walking into an iron bar, knocking yourself out and waking up in another world—a black and white world at that.

Eye-less men, moths, flies, intricate symbology that may or may not be influenced by long forgotten grimoires... these are Jean-Luc's trademarks but it's only when seen together in a collection such as this that you can get your head around just how much work he has

done and how much of that work has pushed tattoo art forward as a bi-product.

Some of my favourite items here are those that appear to be artwork for bands that shouldn't exist but are in fact very much alive and active in the world. I mean, I have my finger very much on a music pulse but some of these bands are new to me—or at least they were. *Dead Cat Stimpy*, *Jim Jones* and the *Righteous Mind*, *Slim Wild Boar & His Forsaken Shadow*—all very much worth investi-



gating. They all worked with Jean-Luc for a reason so their subject matter shouldn't be too much of a surprise if you go looking.

As with all great art books, every time I open *Nocturnes*, I find myself at a page I am certain I have never seen before... a man with a horse's head playing a banjo? Of course—I remember now, I have seen this before (the graphic is for *The Dad Horse Experience*) but this is a large part of what makes Jean-Luc's work unique. Turn the page and your brain

is forced into a different gear... and so on and so on, until your mind of so full of things you have never witnessed before, it has to abandon everything it has seen in order to cope.

Very few books have an intrinsic value to me anymore. There are too many on the shelves to care about them all—if anybody has been following me online, you'll know that I've been giving thousands away this year. This one however is a Super-Keeper—it sits between two books from Taschen on Dante and Michelangelo. There's nothing worse than an ex-book-addict for telling you what you should do, but when it comes to art books, this is a serious piece of work that repeatedly demands your attention.

SION SMITH



Exactly how powerful are tattoos?

I've always been a bit of a crystal geek. I own upwards of thirty different pieces. I love the infinite variety of colours, shapes and shades, the fact that no two crystals are the same. It also warms my heart to know that today's somewhat crazy and material-driven world can still find the capacity to believe in an invisible power.

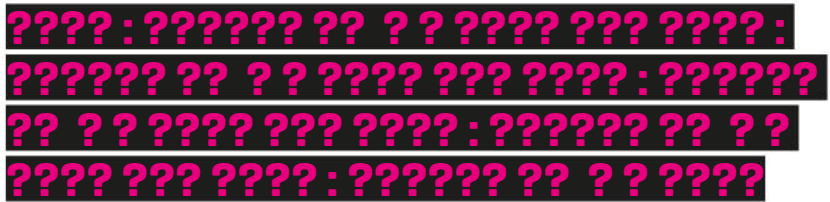
This month, I acquired a new item in my collection: a vibrant, lilac amethyst tattoo by UK-based Holly Astral, that now sits comfortably on my wrist. My physical collection is home to four amethysts. It's definitely one of my favourite crystals, representing spiritual growth, something I'm constantly focusing on within myself. Amethysts can heal stress and restore balance, calm, relaxation and peace.

Today, I read the line in one of my crystal books that amethyst can help you "detach yourself from conflict and negativity". In this sentence structure is my own belief summarised - the phrase "detach yourself" implies direct action required from the person. The power lies in our own aims rather than that of the stone's.

For many indigenous people all over the world, crystals are living things. They were formed by the earth, in the earth, and are intrinsically connected to its energy. If you believe in evolution, like I do, the concept that we've grown from this home gives us a powerful connection to everything around us. 2,000 million years ago we were nothing, a simple bubbling cell perhaps, clinging to live, but this natural world has allowed us, encouraged us, to grow very carefully into what we are today. How can we not be connected to its power, its spirit?

As I glance down at my arm, I wonder - do tattoos have the same energy? Born on our bodies, they are part of our life-span, 'till death do us part. They were created with our own personal energy and will live and die with it too. How can there not be invisible ways in which we are connected to our tattoos?

I've always been a practical witch. I know



BECCY RIMMER
BeccyRimmer

that crystals, spells, herbs, places, people, words, songs only have power because we believe they do, and I think the same can be said for our ink. The energy produced in our mind when we give power to something, is what in turn makes the universe change. I think if we stopped to realise how powerful we are more often, and what we're doing with that power in 2017, the world would be a very different place. ▣

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