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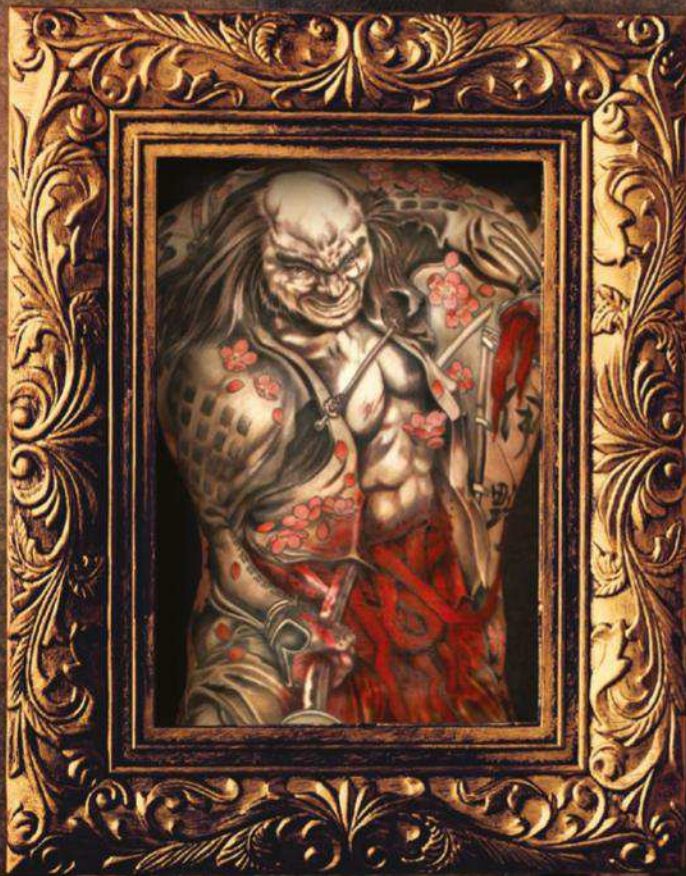
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The Museum of Tattoo Art?

Tattoo Art by Jess Yen

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Nothing in the Papers

Last week, I got asked to be part of a report on Sky News where the topic of conversation was Raheem Sterling's tattoo.

Doubtless, everybody in the country has read this story by now so I won't go over it again other than to state the core facts: Sterling is on the England World Cup squad and a couple of newspapers noticed he had a tattoo of an M16 on his right calf - the meaning of which is obvious to anybody with a brain. Mothers Against Guns came out and said he should be dropped from the team or have it lasered off... and on and on it went, based on

I HAD A WHOLE RAFT OF DAISY-CUTTING ANALOGIES SAVED UP BUT HERE THEY ARE, LYING ON THE FLOOR AT MY FEET



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it being a very poor message to football fans about guns.

For my first port of call, I was going to ask the lady from M.A.G. (who actually turned out to be quite cool about it and seemed to have been left holding the fort for something her boss had said) how many football fans had turned to Jesus and decided church was a good idea based on Beckham's tattoo but I

never got a chance. I had a whole raft of dai-sy-cutting analogies saved up but here they are, lying on the floor at my feet

Sensationalism is easy to stir up when you play to the lowest common denominator. There was a lot of talk from the Sterling/England camp taking the pressure off an issue that should never have been an issue in the first place but if it was me, I would have asked what the hell it had to do with anybody else anyway... but that's not how the game is played up at that level.

It's weird out there.

Anyway, this morning - as is my want when waiting for coffee to be as black as my soul - I scoured the papers for tattoo news. I try to do this at least a few times a week otherwise people like Sky News call up and catch me being very unprepared. I found a story on BBC Sport titled "World Cup 2018: Can you identify the player from their tattoo?"

Wow. How far we have come in a really short amount of time huh. Not so long ago, this quiz wouldn't exist. Us 'freaks' were never talked about in the newspapers, let alone identified by their tattoos. Meanwhile, over at the New York Post, Andrea Lee (UFC fighter) found herself defending her husband's swastika tattoo to social media - not a peaceful swastika either but one that could not reference anything else but the worst kind of swastika.

Meanwhile, back home again, The Independent ran a story on Ariana Grande's bee tattoo commemorating the victims of the Manchester Arena attack.

The way of the news regarding tattoos in 2018 is either fiercely positive or the crushingly negative - they really can't decide whether we are Angels or Demons... and maybe that's all we have left since being tattooed is not rebellion any more.

Did we get what we wanted here? As a tribe - for want of a better word - we are now talked about in the same breath as soft furnishings, stories about spiders that escaped from suburbia and appear next to adverts for supermarkets.

I have to be honest - I much preferred it when a tattoo meant you lived on the fringes but you can't stop progress.

Can you? ▣



Steven Mastyn

US 'FREAKS' WERE NEVER TALKED ABOUT IN THE NEWSPAPERS, LET ALONE IDENTIFIED BY THEIR TATTOOS.

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If life is a path, tattoos are the luminous marking points along the trail; they help us navigate our way when it gets dark.

Today I reached a tattoo milestone and got my face tattooed.

Despite my new markings being so tiny (two minuscule dots on my forehead) I am aware that no matter their size, face tattoos are a taboo. This week I await negative comments from those in my close network who don't agree with them.

My little marks were born by the hand of machine-free tattooist Lydia Amor who is based at Black Market Tattoos in Leicester. I've been tattooed by Lydia before and every time I see her I contemplate getting some small hand-poked face markings... the potential opinions of others always talk me out of it. This time, however, I chose to listen to my own voice over everyone else's.

Face tattoos are considered controversial because a) they are very visible so can affect your eligibility for certain employments and b) they can alter how you look on first glance quite distinctly. Any other women (or indeed men) out there who have considered or eventually gone through with the seemingly scary face tattoo may have heard the same as I did: "but you'll ruin your pretty face", "why would you want to do that?", "what does it mean though?".

Firstly, not all tattoos have an accessible meaning, they don't all represent an interest or memory. Some tattoos find their importance in the ritual itself and I believe that getting your face tattooed in the 21st century can stand for many different things. As I approach ten years of getting tattooed, this particular decision is a celebration for me. As I sat in the studio today and glanced around at the face tattoos of the other artists and heavily tattooed customers, I thought: after a decade-long vibrant tattoo journey I am now ready to join this tribe. I have given blood, sweat and tears to being tattooed. I deserve this. This face tattoo also marks other personal milestones this year for me – if life is a path, tattoos are the luminous marking



...I AWAIT NEGATIVE COMMENTS FROM THOSE IN MY CLOSE NETWORK WHO DON'T AGREE WITH THEM



REBECCA RIMMER
theanalogueblogger

points along the trail; they help us navigate our way when it gets dark.

Knowing I would receive "you'll regret it" and "you don't look as nice" opinions in the weeks that would follow just spurred me on more to take this leap. This is because, lastly (and most importantly) a face tattoo, for a woman especially, is an opportunity for her to claim ownership over her body, a body that no-one else can control. They are not entitled to her personal canvas, and also not entitled to tell her what to do with it. The whole point of getting any tattoo is that we shout an important message to the world – these are our canvases and we will decorate them however we want.

Us, these tattooed women, this emerging tribe, we are here to challenge your perceptions of beauty and gender, so you better get ready. ▣



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HIDDEN CHIN GIVEAWAY



We have three sets of beard oil & brush sets sitting on the desk here to give away to three people... preferably with beards. They're a company that sure thinks about beards A Lot. Take a look at this from their website:

"Beards are tactile things. When I concentrate and contemplate I tend to stroke mine with the outside of my index finger and thumb. It occurred to me that a brush that sat on my index finger, with bristles angled akin to where my finger stroked my beard, would be a very natural and

comfortable way of grooming my facial hair, stimulating the follicles, distributing oil along the hair shafts after manual beard oil application."

That's a lot of thought about facial hair. These guys are living that bearded life to the max and you know what... these products are excellent.

Head over to skindeep.co.uk/competitions and use BEARDS as your competition answer, fill in the boxes and we'll do the rest.

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This issue we're giving away a Memento Mori watch from the The Camden Watch Company. The boss has one and loves it—and if you were at GBTS, you'll have seen their entire range of products and probably love them too.

You can see their entire product line at camdenwatchcompany.com but what we have here for you is the brown strap version and she is beautiful.

We considered making it hard work for you to win one but damn it, we just want to spread the word about these timepieces—particularly this one.

Get your screen over to skindeep.co.uk/competitions and where it asks you for a competition answer, just type CAMDEN WATCH and in a few weeks, we'll pluck out a winner and get it in the mail for you.



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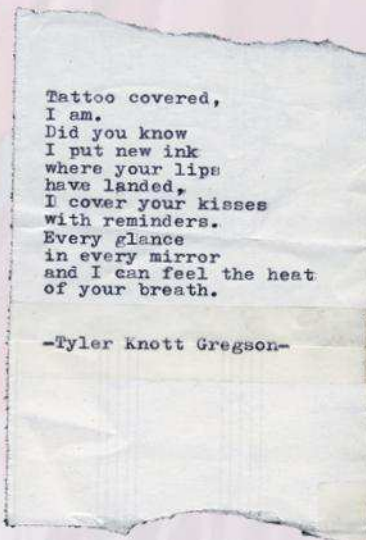
A scar on skin and a stamp on a scroll are two very similar things. Rebecca Rimmer talks tattoos and typewriters with the man who lives in the mountains...

The sleepy hills of Helena, Montana are a “hermit’s paradise” according to poet and photographer Tyler Knott Gregson. Residing in a place where there’s “not much else to do”, this particular wordsmith spends his days reflecting on life or, in his words, “I write stuff and photograph things and go places and see people”.

Through heart-warming typewriter words and moments poignantly captured through photography, Tyler explores the essence of the small things. His poetry conveys those unnoticed moments, the energy of something greater than ourselves, the way we are moved by love, life, death and everything in between.

As a fellow typewriter and tattoo enthusiast, I was excited to talk to Tyler about ink marks on paper and skin. What was his writing process? Did his creative outlook eventually find a way onto his own body? Like his type-written thoughts and haikus, did his scars tell stories?

Tyler Knott Gregson started writing poetry (“clearing the clutter of [his] brain”) at around aged 12—his passion for photography followed just a few years later. Today, twenty years or so down the line, his written pieces focus mainly on one subject, the thing he claims to be continually fascinated by... love. “Everything can be reduced down to love,” he tells me, “even hate, at the core, is love split into pieces.” When he sits down at one of his two main “workhorses”—a 1927 Remington Rand Seventeen and an Olivetti Lettera—his process is to dissect love, “analyse it, see it from a million an-



Tattoo covered,
I am.
Did you know
I put new ink
where your lips
have landed,
I cover your kisses
with reminders.
Every glance
in every mirror
and I can feel the heat
of your breath.

-Tyler Knott Gregson-

gles. I am still constantly amazed by it,” he confesses. These dissections, these reflections, are Tyler’s collections and he shares them every day in the form of hand-written haikus, typewriter poems and single photos.

He’s unable to list every single addition in his growing typewriter collection and I wondered... were his tattoos a growing family too? “I think I don’t necessary collect tattoos as much as the memories of the times I get them for,” he explains. “Tattoos are a massive part of who I am, how I feel, and how I show the world both.” He recounts his first

impulsive and badly-planned tattoo encounter as a university student, which left him with a scarred mark from a tattooist that “did a horrible job”. Just like life, our tattoo experiences aren’t always perfect, but they are experiences nonetheless: “the memory is one I’ll hang onto forever”. Several years and hundreds of tattoos later, Tyler reflects on his inkings as “visual reminders”, tokens to represent experiences and the people by his side throughout them. “Each tattoo is a diary of that day, that month that time of life,” just like his poetry.

Tyler agrees that there are so many reasons to love the habit of marking your skin in this way: “I love how tattooing forces you to step outside of yourself and what you think your tolerances and thresholds are. I love the idea that you are brave enough to permanently remind yourself of something, of a memory, of a time, good or bad. I love that it makes YOU into a



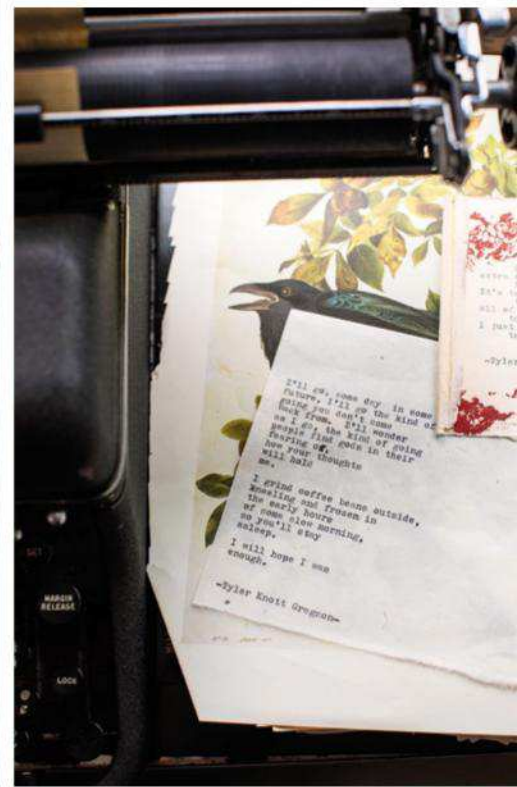
walking piece of art, art that says something different to everyone who sees you.”

Similarly, poetry fans all over the world are walking representations of his own work—he is regularly sent photos from his followers of their new tattoos, inspired by his words. “It never stops blowing my mind that there are people all over the planet walking around with poetry that my strange brain created,” he admits, “I don’t even really understand it. It’s beautiful and it’s shocking and it’s heart warming and it’s wonderful. People are such beautiful creatures, it’s an honour to be on their skin.” Tyler gets to experience what many tattooists feel every single day—to know his own creations have a place in the physical world—they aren’t just uploaded with a hashtag to a social media site, lost in the abyss that is the infinite scroll—they survive, they are touched, they live and die with human skin. In our ever-expanding social media-driven world, this makes me smile.

Discussions around how poetry has evolved in the digital 21st century are similar to those in the tattoo industry, and Tyler admits that social-platform-sharing has changed everything about the writing community: “I’ve seen a massive shift in attention spans over the years—people tend to gravitate towards the shorter poems, the ones they can read in half a second”. Like Tyler, some of my favourite pieces of his are the longer ones: “[they are] the ones that I pour out a whole lot of who I am and what I feel into,” he says. But like the world’s greatest tattooists, the inflictions of Instagram haven’t changed Tyler’s



commitment to an organic creative process: “I’ve never written for anyone BUT myself. I don’t think about where the words will land, or if they will land at all.” Like tattooing, typewriter poetry has found a home on platforms like Instagram and it’s easy to spot the artists and writers who create to gain followers, and those who create because their life and soul depends on it. Fellow typewriter geeks will observe that Tyler’s work remains in a league of its own, his words un-filtered and the result pure—his poetry speaks to so many and is printed and used all over the world. I tell him that just last month one of his pieces made an appearance at my friends’ wedding, a final note for all who witnessed their ceremony. Sharing this story



blows Tyler's mind a little: "living as a hermit on a hillside, I forget this sometimes, that people find your words in the strangest of places."

Just like powerful poetry that speaks loudly to a complicated world, tattoos can also bring together a community, and being inked allows you to feel part of this, part of something 'bigger': "tattoos make everyone with them feel like family," Tyler agrees, "[we're] like a tribe of people willing to push [ourselves] into something a lot of people won't." One of his recent projects brought individuals together internationally, through words and tattoo work. After writing a poem for 35 strangers across the world, each person went on to get one word (or in some cases, two) from the poem tattooed on their skin. "The poem is now broken into bits all over the planet," he says, "I got the very first word, MURMURATIONS, and my fiancé got the final word, WINGBEATS." I love the idea that so many people who have never met can be joined through words and their permanent marks—often it's the tiniest tattoos that have the greatest significance and tell the boldest stories. Speaking of small scale, Tyler's arms are adorned with little individual letters from his own typewriters, spotted on random limbs all over his body: "I let my artists put them wherever they wish, each time I get a tattoo—it's like being rained upon by letters."

So, how much does the typewriter really have in common with the tattoo machine? Well, when a tattooist begins work, the final outcome isn't always set in stone. Decisions are made along the way, challenges are encountered, and the artist finds himself creating in sync with a moving canvas. The art produced is final, un-edited, organic and real. The typewriter poet finds himself in a similar position—"you have to just open up, slow down, and type what you feel, because there's no correcting it. You have no idea what you're coming up with," describes Tyler.



For him, the typewriter is also a mechanism that "forces you to be present". As he explains this process, I realise that his typewriter creations on paper are perhaps more similar to tattoos than we realise, and when he describes his generated words as a snapshot of the moment of creation, "how I was feeling, thinking and living at that time," this unique and enlightening comparison is confirmed.

We started at the beginning and shall finish at the end. As well as contemplating life, Tyler's poetry speaks of what follows. He finds wonder in our mortality and the hope that can be found within it: "death and its cycles has always fascinated me. We fear it so deeply and struggle so much to see the beauty in starting over. I wonder why." His final words to me about impermanence solidify in my mind why we write and why we get tattooed. These impulses come from a desire to immortalise that which we love. They allow us to hold on to what we have, because soon it will be gone. □

REBEL INC.

Wayne Simmons talks with some of his favourite rebels within tattooing, artists doing something different with their inks. This month he meets Hollie May of Old Smithy Tattoo in Leek

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Web: oldsmithytattoo.com

It's not easy to cast Hollie May as a rebel. On the face of it, she's the very antithesis of the word—a mother of two who co-owns her studio with husband, Matt, she's everything the average person on the street may not expect a tattoo artist to be. There's no ego, no Rockstar attitude, no brashness. In fact, she's one of the most unassuming people I've ever had the pleasure of knowing.

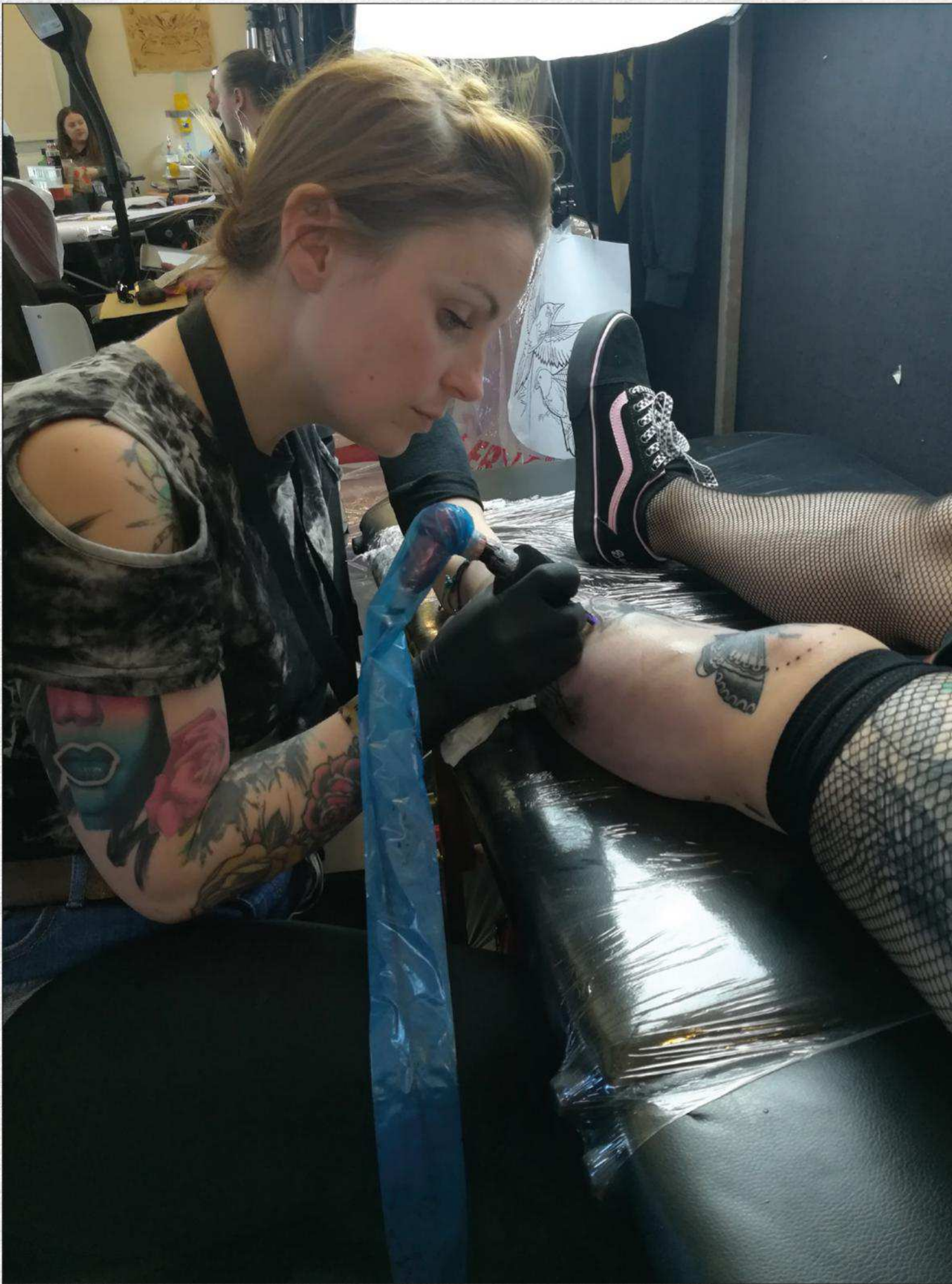
But then there's her art. Hollie's got an inimitable style that, by her own definition, is "not everyone's cup of tea" and, in true rebel style, she just doesn't care about that. "I am pretty stubborn," she tells me as we chat for the first time since meeting at Freeze a couple of years back. "And despite being aware that the sort of tattooing I do is not widely appreciated, I refuse to change what I do just to gain admiration."

It's not just what she does, it's how she does it, too. In the increasingly digitalised world we live in, Hollie remains delightfully old school. "I still don't use any kind of digital imagery, I use pen and paper and whilst there are obvious pros to going digital I see a lot of stuff looking the same and don't want to fall into that trap. I could alter what I do and appeal to a wider audience but surely that's not what art is about? Art is about expressing yourself and as long as I enjoy it and have customers who appreciate what I do, I will keep doing it."

**DESPITE BEING AWARE
THAT THE SORT OF
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GAIN ADMIRATION**









What Hollie does has become increasingly popular over the years with people travelling to her studio, Old Smithy Tattoo in Leek, from all across the country. And it's not just Hollie who is seeing success with a more left-field style of tattooing. More and more artists are emerging every day to create what has become known as the avant-garde movement. For Hollie, that's a good thing. "Anyone who goes against the grain, who has something different to offer, gets my respect. Obviously, as a tattooist, I can massively appreciate the skill in any kind of tattoo style but I'm definitely more excited by something that is different and unique." She cites some folks I've already had the pleasure of interviewing as artists she particularly admires—Josh Peacock and Nick Devine to name but two—along with other movers and shakers. "Paul Vander-Johnson is a favourite of mine, you can always tell one of his pieces. I also really like Merry Morgan and Noon to name a few, again all artists who have a recognised style. It's great to see and meet more artists doing something different and hopefully avant-garde will only get bigger and better and more accepted as a style."

Hollie's own little empire has seen some growth over the last year or so with a move to a bigger studio, the "graduation" of her apprentice, Bex Heath, and a new addition to the team in Mick Emery. For Hollie, it's not just important to have the right artists onboard but the right people, too. "Bex has gone from strength to strength, not only artistically but personally as well, which is inspiring in itself to be a part of. Mick is someone who we've known for some time. He's local to us and I've watched his work go from strength to strength. When we confirmed the move, and I knew for sure we had space, I contacted Mick. It was a big thing for us to do as we've been burned in the past and we are a very small close-knit team. Bex is more like family to us so bringing someone into that was scary, but Mick has the same values as us: he's family man with no ego who just enjoys tattooing."

AS A TATTOOIST, I CAN APPRECIATE THE SKILL IN ANY KIND OF TATTOO STYLE BUT I'M MORE EXCITED BY SOMETHING THAT IS DIFFERENT AND UNIQUE

For Hollie, having Mick onboard has really helped balance the studio out. Everyone has a different style and preference for what they like to do which means they're covering all bases for a working tattoo studio while allowing Hollie to concentrate more on honing her own style. "Bex is taking on anything and everything, building a well-rounded portfolio, which is something I believe any apprentice/new artist should do. She does particularly enjoy bright and bold cartoon-style work, so we shall see how that evolves. Mick loves doing his own spin on traditional and will continue doing that alongside progressing his black and grey and realism. I'd like to push my art in a few different directions this year, adding new elements along the way."

And then there's the community aspect of a studio—it's not all about Instagram and Facebook, a good studio is one that is prolific within its own locality and Old Smithy is certainly that as its recent Galactic Open Day will testify.

"We wanted to celebrate the opening of the new place. A customer of mine dresses as a Stormtrooper to raise money for charity, alongside her husband and a friend, and she offered their services to us. With Matt and Mick being big Star Wars geeks, it didn't take long before we'd come up with a theme for the open day. This gave us the opportunity to have Darth Vader and some Stormtroopers walk up through town on market day, which helped add a little fun." The march through town along with a day knocking out Star Wars flash for punters helped raise almost £700 for local charities Moorlands Dogs Rescue



IT'S AMAZING THE NUMBER OF PARENTS WHO SAY HOW NICE THE PLACE IS AND HOW MUCH THEY LOVE ALL THE ART ON THE WALLS

and The Beatrice Charity, as well as collecting for the local Foodbank. And it wasn't just about that day—moving forward, Old Smithy remains a drop-off point for local people to leave items for the Food Bank. “This is great as we are located in the centre of town and the main bank is a little out of the way for people.”

For Hollie, fostering these links is vitally important for any local business. “We’ve always been involved in the local community,” she tells me. “We sponsor the local Americana and Blues Festival that happens each year and participate in the Leek Totally Locally events which involve treasure hunts for the kids at Easter and Halloween. Kids go around the local shops spotting pictures and getting stamps on their map, and a treat from the treat box, before moving on to the next shop.”

Old Smithy is set up to be a family-friendly place with a separate entrance/ waiting area that children can come into with their parents. For Hollie, the hope is that this will help locals get past the old stigma of a tattoo parlour being somewhere dark or dirty. “In fact, it’s amazing the number of parents who say how nice the place is and how much they love all the art on the walls,” she tells me. “It helps break down those barriers that people with tattoos or people who work in a tattoo studio are scary but, no, we are just a normal family who run a local business and want to support the local community.”

Moving forward, the future looks bright for Hollie and her crew. She has her own personal goals as an artist, “trying to achieve perfection,” as she puts it, as well as looking at new and interesting ways of incorporating colour.



She would like to do more shows, particularly European shows where avant-garde is embraced more fully—one complaint Hollie has of the UK shows is their reluctance to have a specific category for the style. And then there’s the studio itself. “Most people will think it’s finished but I know Matt has a list as long as his arm of jobs he still needs to do. We have an upstairs that needs finishing, so we can look at potentially a piercer, laser removal and private tattoo rooms. We plan to have more guest artists and hopefully support Mick and Bex the best we can.”

With change comes new opportunities and exciting new possibilities but, true to form, Hollie is keeping her feet firmly on the ground. “The past few years really have been crazy and I honestly feel I lost myself for a bit. Being a very hands-on mother of two, moving studios has taken a lot of my time and head space up so, now the move is done, I’m hoping to have time to paint and create, do more conventions and guest spots, and really just focus on pushing my art.” □

You can catch Hollie at:

Staffordshire Tattoo Gathering [September 2nd]
Halloween Tattoo Bash [October 27/28]

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FEELS LIKE THE FIRST TIME

We don't often receive 'one-off' articles we can use around here, so when we do, it tends to be encouraged by putting our money where our mouth is. Anna Landini arrived at the office with a spotted handkerchief tied to the end of a stick along with an idea about 'your first time' and it's been so long since we wrote about the early stages of the tattoo journey, she won us over easily, and with style. Then we dressed it up with some random images that also deserved a public airing...

WORDS: ANNA LANDINI • IMAGES: AS CREDITED

I was sitting on a pretty uncomfortable chair, cheap beer under my fingertips, blankly staring at the guy singing at the Open Mic Night. He was a terrific guitar player, too bad his singing was kind of painful to one's ears. A friend of mine, hosting and playing a bit as well, had invited me that same morning—probably hoping I would not show up—so I could not really leave. He looked around hopefully, but realised I was the only one in the crowd. Occasionally, I smiled while trying to alienate myself, still looking as if I actually wanted to be there. So yes, I did show up and my claps awkwardly echoed in the empty room for a couple of hours before I managed to go back home and put an end to what had been a way too long and annoying day. The only delighted thought I had came from the feeling of clear cellophane wrapped around my arm and the picture of my new tattoo in my brain.

For someone who wishes to be covered in tattoos and only has a few, that is the most tender emotion in a miser-



able situation, especially if the inevitable rush of adrenaline that accompanies getting inked is not altogether gone.

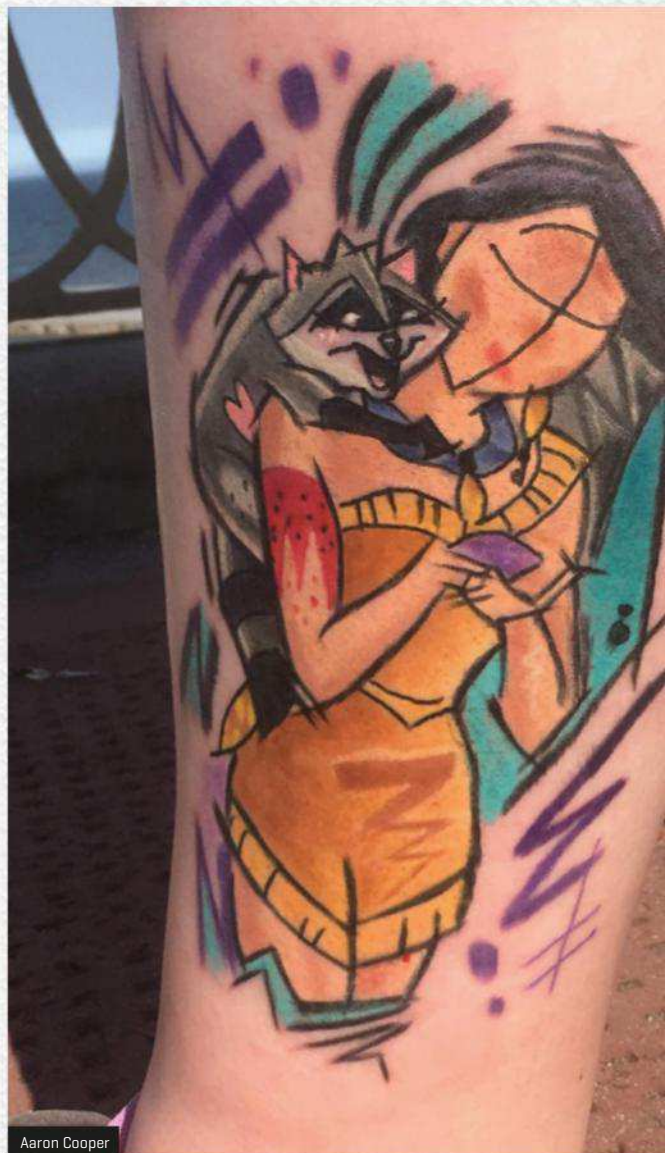
My seventh. Is it not intriguing how immensely a tattoo can distract you from the outside world? Well, I got distracted for a while and forgot about that poor guy. I looked down at it and started to think about that last February when my developing interest in tats began.

What always surprises me the most is how everybody out there, either publicly or privately talking about tattoos, seems so sure and bold about it, so lighthearted and impulsive. That, of course, was just the general impression an outsider gets by reading and listening and going to tattoo conventions without having any

first person experience: everybody is brave, everybody is ready to trust strangers and put themselves out there to be looked at. And there is a peculiar kind of love and passion without restrictions in it that is almost scary and most definitely impressive.



Mark Thompson



Aaron Cooper

THE ONLY DELIGHTED THOUGHT I HAD CAME FROM THE FEELING OF CLEAR CELLOPHANE WRAPPED AROUND MY ARM

But not everyone is born a rebel, not everyone is ready.

Getting your first tattoo is one of the most loud, wonderful and freeing things a messed up and timid eighteen-year-old can do, after years of being lawfully guided and shaped by their parents. Now, imagine being that kid. You know nothing about anything of the sort. Worst case scenario in your mind: the artist makes a mistake and you are going to be ashamed of it for the rest of your life, even if you laser it off. You do not realise how unlikely that is. Lots of reasoning is going on, uncertainties, projects, and deep deep impatience stands before you.

And yet, the day comes and you get tattooed. And you do because sometimes

that is the only way to speak your mind when you do not have the right words. Ah, what a voice for the introverts!

So, out of a brief break from your cowardice and your usual paralysing shyness, you do it. And now you just can't stop. And now you get it.

It is almost funny how pretty much nobody is talking about this side of tattoos enthusiasts. How maniacally you look after your first one, the billions of questions in your head. Oh, and when you look in the mirror and think This is mine? You pass a finger over it and study every detail, discover every tiny imperfection. And you look at it and you recognise yourself in it. You love that piece of skin as you have never loved it before. As if you suddenly are a proud

parent and that is probably exactly how it should be, because why shouldn't it? That young excitement so typical of the first one. Of course, it never stops being amazing or else one would not feel the urge of getting more and more, but that first one? That is one of a kind. You smile and think This is me.

Tattooed people often compare this need of ink to an addiction, which is not scientifically true, but could be sentimentally accurate. It could be compared to the same impulse that makes a writer write or a composer compose, the same calling of a believer towards their god.

It could seem a little too much, and maybe it is, but the core point is that some more than others do feel that, es-



Max Pniewski



Chris Straugheir

IS IT NOT INTRIGUING HOW IMMENSELY A TATTOO CAN DISTRACT YOU FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD?

pecially among the over-thinkers.

By getting your second, third and fourth design and so on you start noticing new things and rediscover the ones you already felt, e.g. the endorphins that spread throughout your body, without necessarily knowing that they are to blame for the curious mixture of excitement and, at the same time, calmness and relaxation; the buzz of the machine you always considered slightly alarming and that you learnt to grow so fond of. You get a hint of where it hurts and how much, you low-key start to register the style

you prefer, the fine line between what you love to see tattooed and what you want on you; how an artist works, who you thought was good and who actually is; the stencil on your body, the process, the ritual of sterilising and putting the needle in the machine, and linking the machine to the thing that makes it work and you realise that you do not really know the correct words to say it but you want to say it anyway, you want to learn, to understand.

Then you get inked some more and a sort of pattern emerges, an involuntary balance between the ones with a pro-

found meaning, with a story behind, and the ones you got because you like art and that day you felt like a canvas.

The gazillion photos you take from every possible angle to show your friends and family and the world, eventually. The calculated outfit you choose in the morning that allows you to show off your new tattoo with all the other ones slightly in the background, and to protect it, if needed. But maybe that's just me.

With tattooing trending so intensely over the last few years, it is hard not to spot a lyric on a wrist, a mandala tat-



WHAT ALWAYS SURPRISES ME THE MOST IS HOW EVERYBODY OUT THERE, EITHER PUBLICLY OR PRIVATELY TALKING ABOUT TATTOOS, SEEMS SO SURE AND BOLD ABOUT IT

too on a forearm, flowers on the prettiest legs, or a glorious sleeve attached to a man on the bus that makes you cringe so hard over it because you do not think it would suit you but you want one so bad. It is also very hard not to ask everyone about the story behind their tattoos, mainly because you are not always allowed to know, and sometimes just because there is no story. The temptation of getting a tattoo just to satisfy vanity is now stronger than ever, and frankly not even wrong. Everyone is entitled to do as they like with their own body. But as a consequence of this concept and because of all this recent popularity, people who are only just approaching the depths of this world can easily end up with mainstream pieces replicated over and over again (just think

of Hokusai's Great Wave off Kanagawa or the G key tattoo, not to mention the infinite sign), without even knowing of the vast possibilities and styles of different artists all around the globe. All this is more and more amplified by the huge impact of social media on every day life, constantly offering something new, more colourful, bigger, darker, more badass. Let alone the ridiculous amount of artists out there so good it does not even seem real. It can be confusing, almost overwhelming, but also inspiring. Most definitely expensive, but here is another thing you learn after a good amount of ink on you: cheap rarely means good.

So, after the fair and unfair thoughts that crossed my mind as I glanced at those fresh three new words on my arm, I got back to reality and stood

up to go and shake the singing guy's hand, thanking him for his great set. As he grabbed my hand with a smile, the sleeve of his shirt lifted a bit, showing what I later discovered to be one of the most gorgeous snails I have ever seen (which is quite easy if you think about it: snails are rather ugly—but I think I made my point). Precise, black, detailed. Instead of its shell there was a bunch of timber-framed houses lay on top of each other. It was so well done and beautiful it almost made me weep. On our way back to the bus stop he told me that the artist was this random Russian guy and his flash work was fantastic. I had no trouble believing that. But then our paths grew apart. I have a feeling we are going to meet again, so I didn't tell him he can't sing. □



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TATTOO STREET STYLE



Alice Snape is most likely known to you as the founder of Things & Ink [th-ink.co.uk]. Back in April, she released her first book, **Tattoo Street Style**—what better way to get to grips with its content than to hand the keys over for the backstory... let's get it on:

Tattoo Street Style

Alice Snape

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Heather Shuker



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Julia Romanovskaya



Heather Shuker

I've always been a people watcher, nosey some might say. But when I travel to a new city on holiday, my most favourite thing to do is find a little café and sit sipping a cup of coffee, watching the world go by. I like to spot differences—and similarities—from city to city, country to country. And I do it in my home city of London too, it feels quite decadent and delightful to spend an afternoon luxuriating in the pleasure of watching people pass me by. I love spying what a person has chosen to wear on that day, wondering why I might be drawn to that person's particular style, the way they walk, where they

might be on their way to, or who they're meeting—a first date or a job interview perhaps. And that's what made me fall in love with street style photography. It's a moment captured—it's a place, a person, at that exact point in time. And, as current as it seems right now, it is certain to become a little piece of history.

As a heavily tattooed woman, I also, of course, can't help but notice the ink on people's skin, perhaps watching how a pattern winds up a leg or arm, spying something poking out of a pair of jeans, a shirt sleeve or through a pair of tights. For those of us who are serious collectors, we know



Lisa Jane



Julia Romanovskaya



Julia Romanovskaya



Heather Shuker



Elena Mudd

there's no surprise in seeing a heavily tattooed woman in a classic mac or a business person in a suit, shirt and tie. But that doesn't mean I find it less fascinating—that classic style juxtaposed with heavily tattooed skin. I love it, and I love that it still has the ability to surprise—I know I am often told I don't look the "type". But isn't that their beauty? Tattoos have no type.

I know I feel much more confident in my own sartorial choices since I started getting tattooed. Where I once saw bodily imperfections, I now see beautiful designs, which have allowed me to make more confident decisions in how I choose to dress. I adore how they can elevate a simple outfit of jeans and a t-shirt

to a whole new level; making every outfit I wear that little bit more special. Of course, that isn't how everyone feels, so spotting how others choose to dress to either show off their ink, or hide it away, is endlessly fascinating. Which is exactly why I wanted to write a book all about it.

In my everyday life, I often wish I could stop someone in the street and find out more about them, their tattoos and their style—and writing a book all about tattoo street style gave me the opportunity to do just that. Combining my two greatest passions, Tattoo Street Style is a compendium of tattoos and fashion. It's a snapshot of eight of my favourite places around the world and its stylish



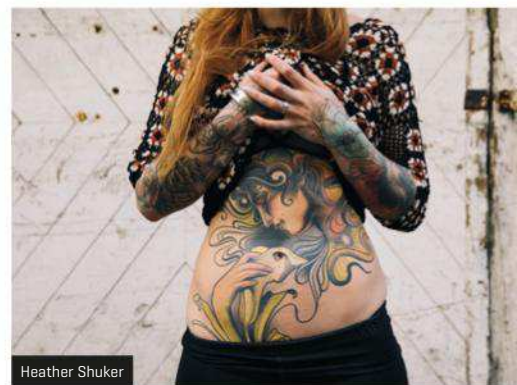
Julia Romanovskaya



Heather Shuker



Heather Shuker



Heather Shuker

inked inhabitants. It features eight cities that I have lived in, loved spending time in and dream of returning to. I love that it will immortalise this period in time—it's a snapshot of the tattoo world as we know it, right now. I love that one day, someone will look at it as a historical document, in the way that I have looked at old photos of tattooed women from the 1940s. It will be a document of the styles—both tattoo and fashion—that are around now. The time period that I fell in love with tattoos – and the tattoo world and the people in it.

It also introduces prominent figures from the tattoo industry, such as NYC's Cris Cleen, Amsterdam's Angelique Houtkamp, Berlin's Wendy Pham and London's Cally-

Jo—tattoo artists who showed me the mind-blowing potential of art on skin, they have welcomed me into their world—as I hope they will welcome readers of this book too. The book features strangers who I didn't know before I stopped them on the street. Tattoo convention goes in Brighton, shoppers on Brick Lane in London, tourists in LA and wanderers in Berlin. There's doctors, scientists and even aircraft fitters, but there's also people who have become my friends, lawyer Marisa Kakoulas in NYC and Doctor Matt Lodder in London. This book perfectly illustrates my point, that anyone can get tattooed—should they choose to. I hope it perfectly captures how you see the tattoo world, too.

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THREE TIDES

Reputed for his modern images done in the ukiyo-e style, the talented Japanese illustrator Mitomo Horihiro showed an identical care in the history of the tattoo culture since he got back behind the needles at the studio Three Tides, between the cities of Tokyo and Osaka. Very much concerned about keeping the pure authenticity of the wabori, the young tattooer went back to the roots of the craft in a radical way: he not only decided to work entirely by hand, but also to source his artistic inspiration to go straight back to two godfathers of traditional Japanese tattooing: Horiuno I and Horiuno II

@horihiro_mitomo · www.hiroshihirakawa.com · www.threetidestattoo.com



Japanese tattooing is known under different names (*irezumi, horimono, shisei...*), each one having its specific meaning, but you prefer the term *wabori*. Why?

Initially, it would be called *horimono*. But, with western tattooing arriving and in order to make a distinction with Japanese tattooing, we started in Japan to use the word *wabori*. For me, it is an *irezumi* born here and which consists to tattoo by hand after drawing the motif on the body. It has a certain popularity in the end of the Edo era (1603-1868) and the beginning of the Meiji era (1868-1912). It stays until the end of the Taisho era (1912-1926), until tattooers start to use the western electric machine imported from abroad. The rendering is not the same when the tattoo is done with this device. The differences are about the same between a Bic pen and a brush. It is possible to do straight regular lines with a pen when the thickness of the lines varies with a brush. It has a specific 'taste', that we call *aji* in Japan.

THE LINES THAT I DRAW ON PAPER WITH THIS TOOL ARE NOT REGULAR. THEY HAVE A PERSONALITY. IT'S THE SAME FOR TATTOOING

What do you mean by this idea of 'taste'?

It is a term we use for the food too in Japan. In the case of these images, when they are done with a machine, there is a linearity; everything is standard and flat, without originality. To the opposite, the ones produced by hand are all different, each one of them having its own specific variations and nuances. They have that 'taste', they have *aji*. Let's take an example with the pictures that I draw. I don't use a pen but a hude, a brush that I deep in ink. The lines that I draw on paper with this tool are not regu-



HE LEARNT FROM HIS MASTER AN UNCONVENTIONAL TECHNIQUE: THE ELECTRIC MACHINE TO TRACE THE LINES AND THE HAND TECHNIQUE KNOWN AS *TEBORI* TO DO THE SHADING

lar, they have a personality. It's the same for tattooing. In that matter, I want to draw directly on the body and not to use stencils – I consider it as a copy. Free-hand has also an other advantage, it's easier to adjust the design to the specific shapes of the body.

You did not always worked by hand, you learnt and started to tattoo with a machine. How did you develop your appreciation of this 'taste'?

One day I understood there were no difference between the old *wabori* and what I was doing. I couldn't exactly point it but I knew there was something. During a trip to New-York, I had the chance to meet Japanese tattooer Horizakura, from the Horitoshi family in Tokyo. He learnt from his master, Horitoshi I, an unconventional technique: the electric machine to trace the lines and the hand technique known as *tebori* to do the shading. When I looked very carefully at his work, the colours of his tattoos appeared much brighter. It appeared obvious to me: I had to use this technique.

How did your apprenticeship happen?

I learnt by looking a little bit at Shinji (Horizakura) while he was working, and then, once back in Japan, I studied on my own. It's a familiar process. I already experimented it when I started doing illustration; I'm a complete self-taught man. Thus, I wasn't really worried. I thought about going to see one master from which learn the technique,



but after a few researches I realised the artists I admired the most and from who I would have loved to learn, had passed away.

Who are they ?

There are two major books dealing with the topic of tattoo in Japan : *Bunshin Hyakushi* and *Irezumi Taikan*. They show the work of old timers active during the Meiji and the Taisho eras, like Horiuno I (1842-1927). When I first saw his drawings I thought they were a little bit childish, too simple, minimalist; I was not very much interested in them. I liked very much the *ukiyo-e* style, but when it is more mature, more detailed. Progressively, I understood their own true nature. These drawings were deliberately purified, simplified, in order to match the requirements of tattooing by hand. These drawings had been done to be tattooed. It is important to understand that it is not possi-



PROGRESSIVELY, I MADE A DISTINCTION. WITH TOO MANY COLOURS, THE PICTURE LOSES STRENGTH. THEREFORE I CHOSE TO REDUCE MY COLOUR PALETTE

ble to produce a detailed work using the tebori technique. Horiuno I, but also Horiuno II (1877- 1958), showed their ability to concentrate on what was the most important. In this way, their drawings would become references from which I could learn, before copying them. It's been a year now that I concentrate exclusively on studying the work of Horiuno I and Horiuno II.

How important are these tattooers in the history of Japanese tattooing ?

If you refer to the archives available today, and if you had to build a pyramid, Horiuno I would be at the top of it. He would be at the highest position in term of value. He was himself influenced by other tattoo masters of his time – Horikane and Horiiwa- but there are no archives available recording their work. You can find older archives than Horiuno I, but these are mainly coloured or modified pictures; it is difficult to have a clear idea of the rendering at that time. Moreover, we know that during his time, Horiuno I was the most renowned tattooer in the city of Edo (former Tokyo). He was born there, in the Kanda district. But Horiuno II is at a very high position in this pyramid too, and none of them ever used the electric machine.

By taking inspiration from these two tattooers, what is your goal ?

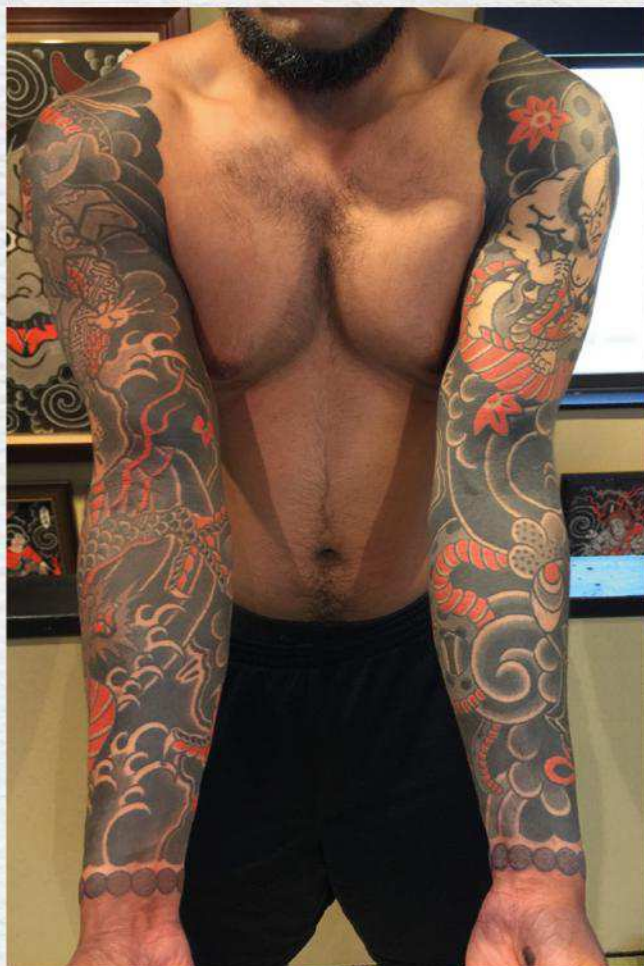
I want to use their style, to protect it, and strengthen it; but I want also to innovate and then do an even better tattoo. I still don't know what it will look like, I don't have a



clear vision yet of that goal, but I'm actually learning and growing. I take what I like the most from both of these two tattooers.

What are the strong points of their works ?

I like their backgrounds. They are solid, without *bokashi* (shading). It is particularly true with Horiuno I's work. Lately, Horiuno II will adopt very smooth shading. These black backgrounds are strongly highlighting the main subject. It gives more readability to the compositions too, in comparison with tattoos using more shading. The eyes are not solicited at the same time and at different places. Compositions are more balanced, I like it. In my opinion, Horiuno I was a better drawer. I prefer his style, stronger and not as pop as Horiuno II's, who lacks a bit of consistency too. It can be partly explained by the fact he's lacking experience. Horiuno II was 45 years old when he started



WHEN IT COMES TO WABORI, YOU HAVE TO DO THINGS BY YOURSELF. BUILDING YOUR OWN MATERIAL, MAKING YOUR OWN INK, WORKING BY HAND, THIS IS WABORI. IT IS A MATTER OF PASSION, OF HEART

tattooing. Horiuno I was in his twenties. His career spans over a period of more than 50 years. It is a great inspiration for me.

These tattoos use very few colours. How difficult was it for you, who shows strong colour skills in your illustrations ?

Only two colours were traditionally used in tattooing: black and red. When I started I used to do on skin what I was doing on paper. But I was not satisfied, the colours would not pop up as much as I would expect. Progressively, I made a distinction. With too many colours, the picture loses strength. Therefore I chose to reduce my colour palette.

You combine modern elements with the *ukiyo-e* style in your illustrations. Is it something that you would do, in



your wabori ?

I hate introducing modern motifs in tattooing, so we can say that the classic iconography of wabori is fixed. In an interview, Horiuno I says that he doesn't want to represent horrible or scarring things, like ghosts ; consequently, I don't do it either and I consider there should not be such things in *wabori*. The archives about these tattooers are very limited but I try to go over these limitations by developing my skills and my knowledge. We know, for example that, according to some of Horiuno I's sketchbooks, and even though I didn't have the opportunity to have it in my own hands, his drawings have been inspired from prints of Tsukioka Yoshitoshi (one of the most famous artist of the *ukiyo-e* movement) of the *Suikoden* (famous Chinese novel which sparked the explosion of tattoo in the 19th century in Edo). Therefore, I can suppose he did other drawings from this series that I can introduce in my work.

These tattooers had a different approach to their material, they would build their own tools.

I do the same and I use the same material. It is one of the specificities of my work. I use *nomi* –the sticks to which the needles are attached- as tall as the ones used by Horiuno II. I mix pigments myself and developed my own little secrets. I use old needles, they are 50 years old at the minimum. They are taller than the ones used for the electric machine, but they're identical to the ones used by Horiuno I. I sharp them by myself, something that I'm probably the only one to do. But, the way they're mounted on the *nomi* is probably different. It belongs to the artist's secrets and there is very little information available about these tools. But, I can still make suppositions.

How important this research of authenticity is important to you ?

It's a matter of pride. When it comes to *wabori*, you 'have to' do the things by yourself. Building your own material, making your own ink, working by hand, this is wabori. It is a matter of passion, of heart. □

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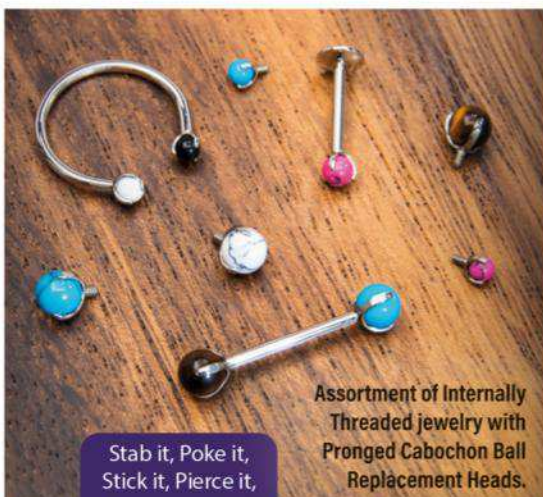
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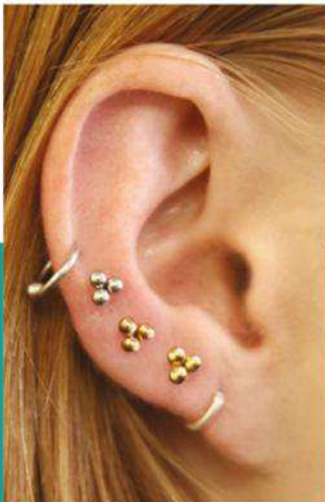
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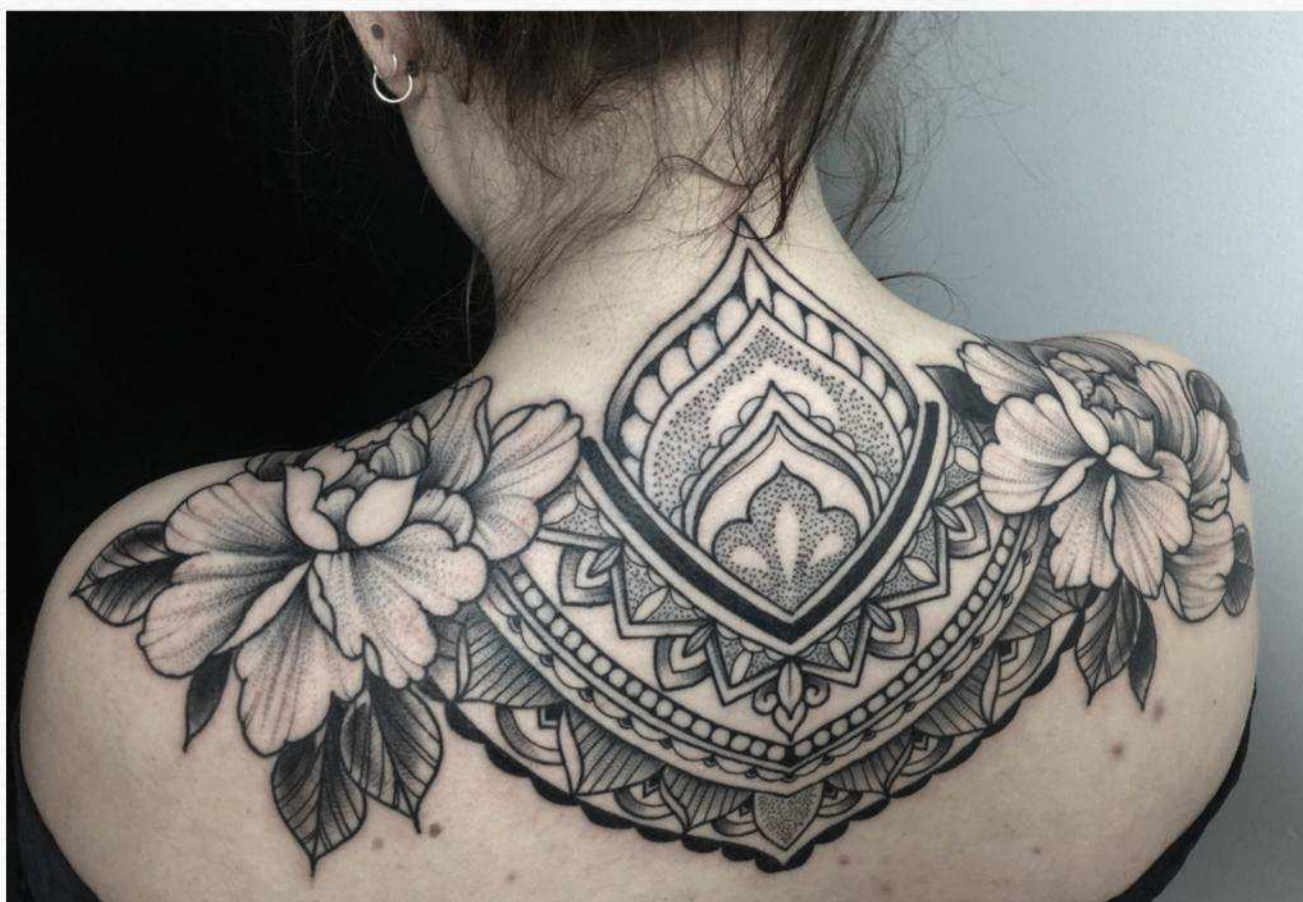


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Medieval Martyrs

A partially rusted sword forged from iron hangs heavy in the stranger's hand, it drags against the ground below, clinking as it bounces from one fallen soldier's armour to the next...

@xcjxtattooer

The unknown sword bearer deepens his soles into the muddy ground, pushing back on his heels, crumpling what was once left of the living grassy earth into the mixture of blood and sludge underneath. Other weary men stand their ground, looking up to a lit sky of a thousand burning arrows finishing an orchestrated arch. Each targeted hit produces a crescendo of piercing screams.

Our imagination is a powerful beast. It tears us from the monotony of everyday life and the burden of our responsibilities, injecting us headfirst into the brutal battlegrounds of men and orcs. It removes us from the daily grind and commute to work on the tube, whereby one shuffling passive-aggressive businessman to the next becomes a monstrous ghoulish figure with suitcases now full of loot and stolen gold. Much like the significance of words that we use to construct fabricated worlds, illustrations build a picture, a scene, a detailed clash, and a well-armoured warrior from very little.

We fill in the blanks so to speak, connecting one element of a drawing to the next, picturing what else might be happening beyond the printed page. The tattooist Christopher Jade is a gifted artist, who takes the printed illustration and transposes it to the skin. Flesh, now like paper, becomes the landscape of our imagination. His medieval soldiers embrace for a fight, sword and shield in hand ready for a conflict that has not yet materialised. It is a space that lies between skin and ink, the areas around a tattoo that we collectively imagine. His war torn figures

It seems our world has always been one of duality



do more than represent; they ignite our imagination, bringing fantasy into existence, reaching to the levers that halt the grinding gears of everyday life.

There is a dark medieval twist to much of your work, where did this inspiration come from?

I have always had a fascination with the duality of our universe and the medieval era; it is such a beautiful depiction of this phenomenon. The noblest and most beautiful of human creativity mixed with the darkest of human cruelty both simultaneously in co-existence. It seems our world has always been one of duality. A giant chasm melded so tightly together by the thinnest of threads. This indeed holds my attention and curiosity since I began doing art as a child. The style itself and the execution was forged by taking from comic books, illustrations and album art inspired by the greats such as Gustave Doré, Hieronymus Bosch and the like.



To be honest when I look into my imagination and see these pieces moving about, I don't ever imagine them in colour

What elements of medieval art and culture are you influenced by?

I believe that when you look into even the basic design of knight armour you see the duality I speak of. It is a culmination of elegance and savagery, purity and brutality, precision and chaos, heaven and hell. These elements were with us since the fall and will be with us till the end of humanity.

I can't help but relate much of your work to the Dark Souls video game series. Are you a fan?

To say I am a fan of Dark Souls is a small understatement. Up until recently I was unaware of this series of medieval masterpieces. I was introduced to these games during a trip through Europe where a friend in Paris suggested I try them. Little did I know they would become a source



and force of great inspiration and movement in my craft. Although I don't have much time to play these frustrating games I do spend a great deal of time researching the lore and studying the armour sets. I can spend around 2 to 3 hours alone just doing research on whatever characters I am about to bring to life. I believe it is very important to know the lore and try to get into the players point of view. In short: 'Praise the Sun'.

What other tattooists that you admire are working within this same fantasy genre?

To name a few: Rob Borbas (@grindesign_tattoo), the dude has revolutionised the craft beyond words. IZA (@zaliao_vario) she has always put out the most beautiful dark and accurate pieces. She has a pair of eyes like medieval lenses. Jăxâr (@jaxartattooer) the most unknown and underrated, Jăxâr is forever creating the gnarliest most creative mashups between the medieval and demonic. Another is David Tejero (@davidtejerotattoos) judging by his work I swear he lives in the dark ages and somehow travels between times!

Why only black and grey? Have you ever experimented with colour?

Colours always suggest some sort of light but a world without light, what would that look like? I'd like to think that the medieval era was very bleak and grey for many reasons. And to be honest when I look into my imagination and see these pieces moving about, I don't ever imagine them in colour. It is as if the muse of my imagination is telling me a story and I am just here to listen and convey. Black and grey has realness to it, an emotion that cannot be denied, and it translates so well into the ancient world.

Many of your otherworldly creatures are captured in motion; their mouths open ready to bite down and tear flesh. How do you go about achieving this aesthetic?

I take elements from reality and use them as the backbone of my imagination. Things are always more dynamic and real in movement, are they not? Sometimes I literally have to take a photo of my hand in order to know how to draw that hand position. I really love the idea of captur-





ing something so sinister in the act, as if the viewer was staring into their fate. I try to imagine what would be the last thing the victim would see before they met their end.

I notice that you use line shading in much of your work. Why is this particularly affective for the subject matter you tattoo?

I find engravings to be some of the purest of medieval art forms and I definitely sprinkle a bit of that energy into every piece. If you want to convey a time period then study the art from those time periods.

There is an element of witchcraft in much of your work. Can you tell me how this came to be?

As a child I was stricken with many weird unexplainable events where I was visited by dark figures and glowing beings. Even then I loved the stories of things that go bump in the night. As I got older and my fears became my source of inspiration, I found myself delving deeper into the religions, beliefs, people and organisations that seemed to seek out the darker corners of the universe. For this reason witchcraft, the occult and the like have always held such fascination in my mind. So much is unexplained, maybe even unexplainable! I have always adored things that are feared and people tend to fear what they do not understand... Thus creating even more mystery to the mysticism!

The undead grasp swords and shields ready for battle, with many wounded by pierced arrows. What sources do you use for inspiration with these characters?

As far as form and structure, I take from old depictions of the 'Wild West' and religious art (mostly Catholic); these often carry so much grim truth that it translates quite easily. Obviously I take from comic book art, video games, horror movies and music as well. But as for the true nature behind each piece I take from my own struggles with



I really love the idea of capturing something so sinister in the act, as if the viewer was staring into their fate

depression, suicidal thoughts, dread of others and the feeling of weariness. If you look closely most of these said knights or beasts have a sort of hunch or slouch to them that conveys years of sorrow and loss. Each arrow represents the failures, heartache and pain the outside world has inflicted on me. Though they are battle torn and weary they are still upright and moving forward. This is the relentless desire to fight on despite all the obstacles. Although they (myself) are rotting from the inside and falling apart on the outside they refuse to die or give up. This sense of being unbreakable is a human quality that I truly admire and wish to exemplify in my own life.





Each arrow represents the failures, heartache and pain the outside world has inflicted

Why do you think people are drawn to the iconography of death and dark magic?

We are cursed with the self-awareness of our fragile state of mortality. Some of us choose to embrace this as a part of life and others choose to pretend they will never see death. But we cannot run for long because of the truth that exists within us all. The duality of our being. The fibres that lay so deep in our flesh. Our souls are continually tortured by our mortal bodies until the day we take the eternal slumber. Soul and flesh, eternal and finite, pure and impure, forever clash in every conscious moment of existence. We are cursed with the awareness of our fragile state of mortality. Often without being aware, we are drawn to such things that emulate this struggle for us.

Who would you love to do a collaboration with?

I would love to collab with these guys: Tine DeFiore (@tinedefiore) because she's amazing and her insane linework coupled with my linework would be nuts to see! Laura Yahna (@the.girl.with.the.matchsticks) because



her take on black work is so unique and she is one of the most creative artists I know. She would bring so much life to a piece. Chad Lenjer (@challenjer) just magnificent skill and brilliant colour, it would be so interesting to see our styles harmonise.

What has been one of your favourite designs so far?

I love every piece I create so have many favourites. Funny thing is most of my favourite tattoos are some of the least liked by the public. People would probably never guess the ones that I hold dear. I would say my favourite to date would be an obscure armoured knight I did a while back on a calf. It isn't doing anything extraordinary, there is little to no obvious movement in the piece. Yet I find it to be my fondest piece.

What have you got planned for the future?

I plan to continue to travel heavily for the next 2-3 years. I also plan to do a South America tour spring of 2019 and an Asia tour in the fall of 2019. I have some other projects in the works such as a book and possibly a small t-shirt line.

What does tattooing mean to you?

Tattooing is a way to relate to the world around me. I love tattooing with all my flesh and soul. It has brought me so many rich experiences, from lifelong friends and family to world travels. What more can any man ask for in this life? I have made and continue to make many hard sacrifices to peruse a life in the tattooing trade and it has only blessed me all the more. You definitely get what you give and I have reaped so much good. ▣

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MODEL NAME:

Lady Lauren

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE:

This shoot took me out of my comfort zone and out of my studio. I hadn't had the opportunity to mix natural light with strobe for some time. Dan at Bewt Studios kindly offered me the use of his stunning ballroom space, so I figured I should attempt to put the lady into Lady Lauren. She nailed it of course...

CATCH HER ON INSTAGRAM:

www.instagram.com/ladylaurenbrock
www.instagram.com/bewtstudios





BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

Over the years, we've worked with Scott Cole a lot... and when I say 'a lot', so far, including this issue, we've created 82 covers together. Not bad considering we only publish 13 issues a year. Inevitably, there's always fantastic material left on the editing room floor, so we figured you might like to see some of it—and this really is the tip of a very large iceberg, but does feature some of our favourite shots from recent months

MODEL NAME:

Hollie Pryce-Jones

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE:

I was introduced to Hollie a couple of years back at the Great British Tattoo Show after show party. I knew right away that she'd be an awesome subject but it took until January of this year for her to finally show up - busy, busy and all that. I'm so stoked that she did, her shots are among my all time favourites. This shot was taken during our covergirl shoot for Skin Deep Issue 287.

CATCH HER ON INSTAGRAM:

www.instagram.com/hollieprycejones





MODEL NAME:

Siân

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE:

Siân is one of the most credible models I know and I'm fortunate that she calls me up whenever she gets new ink. I shot all 4 of her Skin Deep covers, 224, 247, 284 and most notably, issue 238 celebrating Skin Deep's 20th Anniversary. This is a shot from our latest shoot to show off her chest piece by artist Olly Streeter at La Familia, Newquay.

CATCH HER ON INSTAGRAM:

www.instagram.com/sianaltmodel

Choosing to do almost all of his talking with his cameras (currently Canon 5D MkIV's with a range of lenses), Mr Cole is a private person but that's not to say we don't often have some lengthy iMessage conversations in which we have got to know each other pretty damn well over the years. "I think readers would rather look at the images than hear anything I have to say" was his response when I said we should do an interview alongside but I can't let it go without a few questions:

I get questions about how to break into modelling daily and I guess you probably get twice as many, if not more. From our standpoint as a magazine, good tattoos are essential, though if you're DDG and super-pro, you might get away with it a little more. From my standpoint as

a human being, there is also a fine line between looking sultry and/or bloody miserable. Got anything you'd like to add to this cauldron of confusion out there?

You're not wrong. Years ago, the moody look seemed to be a prerequisite for all things alt model. It went hand in hand with dying your hair blue, getting your first tattoo and posing with a guitar against a brick wall. Photographers were as much to blame as anyone for flogging this look, there's no excuse for it nowadays though. An often overlooked part of modelling is facial expressions and whilst modelling genuinely is a skill, I'm not convinced that practice makes perfect when it comes to down to looking sultry, you've either got it or you haven't. If you could see a sequence of shots you'd see what a fine line it is to getting it right though, whatever the expression.

One of our main topics of conversation has always been the impact of the internet on photographic work. Those announcing to the world they are either writers, photographers, models etc and then not being able to back it up with work in the real-world rock the boat so hard, it's practically unnoticeable. Apparently this is called 'disruption' and internet tech is built to encourage it, but if I ask people to name a great tattoo website, they struggle. It's all built on movable clouds. Do you see a day yet when digital media will be more important than analogue - because it's not, no matter how many people say it out loud.

As a print magazine photographer, I think that day crept up on me years ago and I just became too busy to notice it as a result. Put it this way,





MODEL NAME:

Bibiana Atada

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE:

Bibiana made the trip from Zurich to shoot Skin Deep cover 282 and this is another shot from that set. She's a total pro and threw herself wholeheartedly into all the crazy shit that was floating around in my head at the time. Much of it will end up in my next book. She even showed up with a gift of Swiss chocolate, then discovered Toblerone was sold everywhere when she landed at Heathrow. Still it was a great icebreaker.

CATCH HER ON INSTAGRAM:

www.instagram.com/bibiana_atada

my first image submission to you, dropped into your inbox as a series of 1's and 0's and it was you guys that turned it into a physical copy. I suspect many magazines don't have the capacity or the inclination to deal with analogue submissions these days. I work almost exclusively in a digital medium so as far as the creation and transmission is concerned, yeah digital is super important to my business. Would I be happy if my work only appeared within the pages of a digital medium, I don't think so. If you were lucky enough to grow up in an era knowing how good it felt to buy your music on vinyl, you'll understand. My inbox is full of models telling me it's their dream to appear on the cover of a magazine so I don't think all is lost yet. Tattoo publishing online is a fucking mess right now though, hopefully someone like yourselves will come along and do it right and people will have to take notice.

A few years back, we ran a feature on your book. Any plans to go to that place again? For what it's worth, I think you should. I think your work, published and out in the world as an art book is important. It may not seem important now, but I suspect it will when we look back in twenty years time at what we've left behind.

'IntoXicated' was well received which really took me by surprise. 200 signed and numbered copies are out in the world gathering dust and I'm grateful for that.

The hardest part in producing a photo book is narrowing down the images to include. Those were some bloody long nights. A follow up to IntoXicated is in the making and I'm still assembling material for my written book, a warts n all tale of my career which began somewhat sober in motorsport in the early 90's, soaked itself in alcohol touring with bands over a ten year period in the noughties and mellowed into a comfortable well stocked office bar of tattooed girls which has so far spanned 7 years,

reaped 171 covers and 1 nervous breakdown. If I manage another twenty years, I hope I'll look back at my shots and say what the fuck was I thinking.

Time is the only measure we have of our ability as photographers.

In the spirit of 'being useful' to those who think they might like to work with you in the future, give us a brief outline about how they might go about that and what they can expect.

I'm always on the lookout for models so drop me an email scottcolephoto@gmail.com include a current head shot, a full length shot to show ink placement, a few closeups to show ink quality and a link to your portfolio/social network. I can't stress enough the importance of getting great ink if you want to be considered for a cover shoot. The bar has been well n truly raised. Selected models can expect a friendly welcome, drinks of every kind, snacks, great music and a relaxed yet focussed agenda for the day. You can read what models had to say about their experience at my website www.scottcolephoto.co.uk

📷 scottcolephoto





MODEL NAME:

Jo Crow

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE:

Jo answered a Models Wanted ad and I selected her based on her stunning torso piece by artist Alexis Vaatete of Vatican Studios in California. She travelled from Northern Ireland to shoot and featured as the covergirl of Skin Shots Issue 113

CATCH HER ON INSTAGRAM:

<https://www.instagram.com/jc08cut/>

KEEPIN' IT CLASSIC

American traditional will always be my favourite style, but after a while, one eagle starts to blend into another and there are only so many anchors you can look at. Enter Wisconsin-born, California-based artist Cole Strem. His work is a breath of fresh air, taking all the key elements of American traditional and blending them with subtle touches that are pure Strem to arrive at an exciting new take on the timeless aesthetic

It all started with a daisy. A small daisy tattooed on his mother's calf, which Milwaukee native Cole Strem couldn't quite believe "would never wash off!"

"According to my mom, before I could talk, I would trace that tattoo with my index finger," he recalls. "As I got older, she told me that Chicago Ed was the one who tattooed her back in the '80s and, later in my tattooing career, I was lucky enough to meet him. I showed him a picture of my mom's tattoo, he chuckled and said it was an old Lyle Tuttle design. How cool is that?"

Cool but not surprising when you learn just how artistic his family is. "My father was an instructor for painting and decorating at a local tech college and did taxidermy on the side," he reveals. "I'd sometimes tag along with him to his classes and side jobs and learn painting tricks and techniques."

"Meanwhile, my mother and stepfather—my parents divorced when I was two years old—are photographers. They would draw with me and we'd spend a lot of time



creating," he says. "They were always doing some sort of renovation on our house, so there were woodworking projects to do every weekend."

"Growing up, they'd have me in all sorts of different art classes, both in and out of school. Everything from cartooning to printmaking to still life sketching." There were also plenty of days that involved "sitting bored in class, drawing skulls and swords in my notebooks. That transitioned into doing ballpoint pen barbed wire bands and stars on my forearm. They were shaded and looked so badass," he laughs. "Later on, I advanced to sharpies because they wouldn't wash off so easily! I started doodling on my classmates—a lot of Ninja Turtles, race cars and basketball team logos. My friends would also often ask me to draw custom designs for them," he remembers.

But despite his penchant for (temporary) ink, a different form of artistic expression came calling: music. After high school, Strem first put his energy toward a summer course in graphic design and was eventually accepted into





COLE STREM ON... AMERICAN TRADITIONAL TATTOOS

While I was an apprentice, there was an artist at the shop who did clean, cool traditional tattoos. Kortez always painted and tattooed bright and bold designs. He would kick down knowledge and tattoo history lessons and he continues to inspire me to this day. It was him who turned me onto the American traditional style and helped shape my view of what a tattoo should look like.

The Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design. "I learned so much and still use the information while I'm designing tattoo layouts and for my paintings, but before I enrolled, I realised art school wasn't my thing," he admits.

"The kids were very snobby and pretentious and I just didn't fit in," he elaborates. "I remember we had to write a two-page essay about why we wanted to go to the art school and I wrote about how much I wanted to write and record music. I was the first one to hand in my paper, I walked out and never went back."

"As a teenager, I didn't take art as seriously as I do now," he adds. "Going to shows and seeing live bands made me want to play loud

and heavy music. Art was on the back burner for a few years."

Once again, his parents stepped in. This time, they suggested he try his luck in Los Angeles in an audio engineering program. "I'd never been to California and didn't know anyone there, so it was an exciting and scary time in my life. I packed up my Jeep Cherokee with everything I could fit in it and drove across the country with my stepfather to LA."

"I moved into a two bedroom dorm with another student and we hit it off right away. I met a few more guys who all lived in the same building and we began playing music together." After graduation, their side project kept going and they "continued playing in the band for the next seven years. But life happens, people have kids, get married and move on."

"We all started growing up and I realised music wasn't what it once was to me." Getting "a shitty tattoo kit" as a birthday gift from his wife was the inspiration he needed to switch gears. "I had no clue about any of it or even how to make the machine run, but I knew then and there that I'd have to find someone to help guide me in the right direction."

Unsurprisingly, he also had plenty of support from his mom and dad. "When I told them I was apprenticing to become a tattooer, I think they were excited that I wanted to have a career in a field that would keep me creating and exploring new areas of art. I'm very lucky to have such supportive and encouraging parents."

Tricks Of The Trade

With his sights set on tattooing, Stream knew he "needed to find an apprenticeship if I was going to make it happen, so I made a portfolio of old work and newer projects and I went around to tons of local shops, looking to see if anyone could help."

"It took a couple of years before anyone even took me seriously," he declares. It was during that time that he'd hang out at Madison Tattoo in North Hollywood, the shop where his wife was getting tattooed, and pester the apprentice, Franklin, with questions.

"When he started doing \$25 tattoos, I'd go in almost every week and let him practice on me," he says. "From there, I started hanging out at the shop more, drawing with everyone and soaking up everything I could. They saw how motivated and driven I was and when Franklin's apprenticeship was over, they offered the spot to me. I finally got my foot in



the door and had my chance!”

Then came the hard part. “I feel like I almost had to start over,” he explains. “I learned how to draw for tattooing, not just illustrating and sketching anymore. There were so many books at the shop to look through and flash for reference. I’d look through old designs and dissect them to see what made them so bold and strong, discovering what made a good tattoo and how they stood out.”

Now, he can’t see himself doing anything else. “I still have a deep passion for music and still play guitar when I can and not a day goes by that I don’t miss it, but I just don’t have the time. Tattooing and art consume my time and life altogether. I wish there were more hours in the day, yet, even if there were, there’s flash to be painted,” he laughs, pointing out that his primary mission is to “keep growing and learning as not only a tattooer, but an overall artist.”

Folk Meets Traditional

“I’ve been told I do ‘folk traditional,’ taking inspiration from vintage art and design,” says Strem of his style. “I love textures, details and shading and I try to take something with dynamics and add a simpler, softer touch. I love anything rusty, stained, weathered or torn. Old photographs, hand-painted signs, logos, Victorian filigree and Native American patterns, all of which heavily influence my tattoos. I’ve been big into South Western imagery lately and take inspiration from almost anywhere I can.”

“Sometimes, I get bored doing the same thing and notice my style evolving into newer directions, so I’m lucky to have clients who want me to do my thing for them, but, of course, every now and then you’ve gotta eat a shit sandwich and do an infinity symbol or a cover-up,” he laughs. “It’s a good reminder that it’s still a job at the end of the day. Tattooers are in this service to help people get what they want on them.”



A lesson he learned early on. “When I started at Ace of Hearts, I was very green. I was a third year tattooer with a lot to learn. It was great to get the experience as a walk-in tattooer. It helped me learn to hustle and turn out the best tattoos I could on the spot, ranging in all different styles.”

But after five years at the shop, he had a realisation. “I was the only one left from the old days and decided it was time for a change. I’d outgrown it. I needed to shake things up a bit. I knew some of the artists at Still Life Tattoo and was already friends with the owner, Tim Shelton. Although he didn’t have room for me, he made it happen.”

COLE STREM ON... LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA

It’s a fun place to live with lots going on. There’s a lot of tattooing history here and I love to be a part of that culture and continue to add to the tattoo scene out here. It’s close to the ocean and I love all of the marine life and how beautiful it is — inspiring, really. I also love that in the same state I can find mountains, wilderness, deserts and cacti, all within a few hours.



And once this chapter is done, he hopes to open his own shop because, “although it seems very stressful and like a lot of work, I’m always down to put too much on my plate. It helps motivate me to achieve things I didn’t think I could.”

“My wife owns a small boutique called Stay Adorned where she makes all kinds of neat things from jewellery to macrame, dream-catchers and home decor. We both share a love for antiques and would love to open a boutique/tattoo shop—the family business! We inspire each other to do our best and work

better together than we do apart,” he declares. “We both have strengths in different aspects, so it only makes sense to go into business together. It’s in our future plans.”

Taxidermy King

When he’s not tattooing, Strem is (obviously) playing guitar or “collecting vinyl records, hiking and taking pictures.” He also loves antiquing with his wife. “We’re huge fans of taxidermy, probably a bit too much! We’ve been told our home looks like a museum. We aren’t sure if that’s meant to be a compliment or not, but we take it as one!”

“My largest collection is definitely animal skulls. I recently found an African lion skull at an antique swap meet right here in Long Beach. You never know what treasures await when you go antiquing. I also collect clowns, vintage devils, kewpie dolls, any kind of tattooing-related items I can find, and I’m always on the hunt for frames and any kind of unusual items.”

Another surprising hobby? Writing a children’s book with his friend, Adam Beesley, which they self-published last April. Dubbed *The Headless Duckling*, it “started as a unique story he wrote for my wife and I as a wedding gift. When he presented it to us, he asked me if I would illustrate the book. The style we found and creatures we developed inspired my watercolour skills exponentially,” he says, adding, “We’re now in the process of creating promotional materials and setting up a schedule for book readings, signings and conventions in the near future.”

He’s also available for tours of Long Beach, if ever you find yourself in his neck of the woods. Which you really should. “Our first stop would be to get you a trim from the homie Billy McIntyre at Razorbacks Barber-shop,” he starts. “Then we can head to get you threaded up at Snake Oil Provisions. Since we got ya all dolled up, we might as well grab a bite to eat over at my buddy Chef Phil Pretty’s restaurant, Restauration, for one of the best burgers in town.”

“From there we can head to the beach for a stroll along the bike path to The Pike, home to the oldest tattoo shop on the West Coast, and you can’t come to Long Beach without checking out the Queen Mary. The ship has so much history and so many great ghost stories. To end the night, we’d head down to the Blind Donkey for a great whiskey and beer selection.” Excuse me while I book my flight... ☐

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Fandom tattoos: part one

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I have a confession to make. It's something that has been eating at me for so many years, something that I can no longer hide from the world: I am a FanBoy, neigh I say, I am obsessed with the original "Planet of the Apes" movies from the 1970's...

Yes, the Charlton Heston vehicle of apocalyptic destruction, is by far one of my favourite pieces of film. I can remember it so clearly, the first time I stumbled into the realm that is "Planet of the Apes". I was living through one of those endless summers you can only have when you are 12 years old. The days were longer then, or seemed to be (really, it's a scientific theory about the speeding up of time based on the amount of years lived, look it up). I was watching television on one of these everlasting days and stumbled into an AMC marathon of a movie I had never heard of. Roddy McDowell was the host, he was an actor I enjoyed because of my love for the film "Fright Night". I vividly remember his first sentence as a host, "Welcome to the Planet of the Apes." So began the rabbit hole into a film genre I love to this day.

I watched every single movie that day, all five of them in a



Pony Stephenson

row, with commercials, for over 10 hours. I don't think I even blinked in that time, I just soaked it all in. By the end of it I was left wishing I could watch it again, and lucky for me, they continued the marathon into the next day. Much to the dismay of those around me at the time, I was hooked, and it became all I wanted to talk about. I created theories tying the films together, my own story arcs, new ideas, all centred in this universe that had been created.

It's not until recently that I started to understand that this was fandom; though that may have been more obvious to those around me, like when I made my wife watch all 5 of the movies in a row when we started dating, or maybe because of my plethora of Planet of the Apes dolls —'figures' of course—comics, books, and even a vintage Mad Magazine with an Alfred E Neuman version of one of the titular characters I have surrounding me in my studio. This was my foray into the universe that is consid-



Sean Herman

ered “fandom”. I would never have thought or admitted that was what it was, not until recently.

What is “Fandom”? Buzz words are constantly introduced into our society, creating memes and trends that flip in an instant. The word “Fandom” was one of those buzz words for myself. Hearing it instantly brought up the old man idea, screaming, “You kids get off my lawn!” Just like many of us, I can get crotchety and immediately write off new ideas. With that bias in mind, I wanted to take a fresh perspective and truly learn about what this new subculture is, and the ideas behind it. Straight from Princeton University:

“Fandom is a term used to refer to a subculture composed of fans characterised by a feeling of sympathy and camaraderie with others who share a common interest.”

Fandom has interesting qualities that affect more culturally than one would imagine. Tattooists get referred to as ‘pirates’, artistically taking from different sources, living outside of your typical economic structures, and creating what they need. Fandom isn’t all that different in many ways. Categorically, culture gets broken up into ‘participatory’ culture and ‘consum-

er’ culture. Consumer culture is a form of capitalism in which the economy is focused on the selling of consumer goods and the spending of consumer money. For all intents and purposes, the United States of America would be considered a consumer culture. The opposing side is a Participatory Culture; this culture is one in which private individuals do not act as consumers only, but also as contributors or producers.

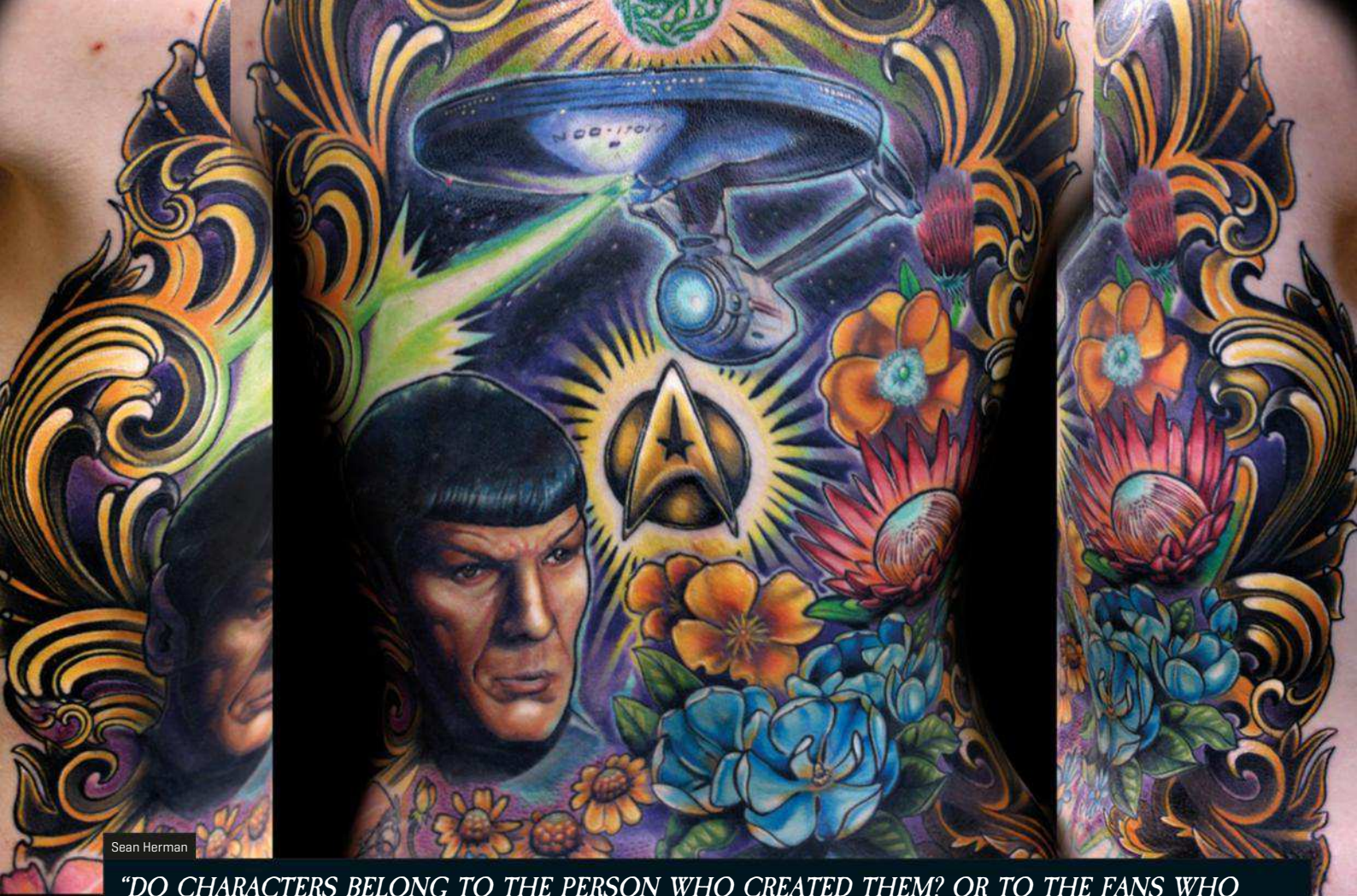
Surprisingly, fandom is considered a “participatory culture”, not a consumer one. Henry Jenkins defines a participatory culture more specifically as one that consists of the following:



1. Relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement
2. Strong support for creating and sharing one’s creations with others
3. Some type of informal mentorship in which the most experienced members pass along their knowledge to novices
4. Members who believe their contributions matter
5. Members who feel some degree of social connection with one another and care about other members’ opinions about their contributions



Pony Stephenson



Sean Herman

"DO CHARACTERS BELONG TO THE PERSON WHO CREATED THEM? OR TO THE FANS WHO LOVE THEM SO PASSIONATELY THAT THEY SPEND THEIR NIGHTS AND WEEKENDS LABOURING TO EXTEND THOSE CHARACTERS' LIVES, FOR FREE? THERE'S A DIVISION HERE, A GEOLOGICAL FAULT LINE, THAT LOOKS SMALL ON THE SURFACE BUT RUNS DEEP INTO OUR CULTURE, AND THE TECTONIC PLATES ARE ONLY MOVING FARTHER APART. IS ART ABOUT MAKING UP NEW THINGS OR ABOUT TRANSFORMING THE RAW MATERIAL THAT'S OUT THERE?"

HEIDI TANDY

Jenkins goes on to contrast participatory culture with consumer culture, proposing that fans 'poach' from popular media, appropriating ideas from the text and re-reading them in imaginative ways for their own uses. Much like the tattooing pirates of the early 20th century did, creating what is now iconic tattoo imagery out of icons of the popular culture at the time. Images such as the 'hot stuff devil' became synonymous with tattooing culture, recreating the idea it had once initially been created to represent. Would there really be much difference behind the history of our beloved iconic tattoo imagery and the fandom tattoos of modern day?

Researching further, I found an interesting idea about participatory culture as an action, one sent to throw a wrench in the mass media machine. One theory of popular culture holds that the corporate 'culture industry' (media producers such as TV networks, film studios, and the like) prioritise profit at the expense of quality, and that pop culture is a form of hegemony, used to spread dominant ideologies. One would easily see this in the Kanye/Kardashian world we are currently living in. However, the theory of participatory culture suggests that rather than being 'cultural dupes, social misfits, and mindless consumers,' media fans can be understood as 'active producers and manipulators of meaning'.

Fan interaction with media becomes a social activity, and this process allows fans to build their own communities in which they can express themselves. In doing so, they create spaces where they can critique prescriptive ideas of gender, sexuality, and other norms promoted in part by the media industry. With this, new icons and cultural norms are presumably created.

One of my favourite thoughts to come out of this research down the rabbit hole of fandom was the idea of fandom as an act of resistance. Taking again from the ideas of the tattooing pirates, artists and creators can take visual icons and images and re-write their script, creating something that may fit into new social mores, or one that is viewed more in the counter cultural sense. One example used was the idea of the expanded world of fan fiction. Many believe that the female dominated world of fan-fiction actually delves far deeper into the source material, moving past that which was created by its male dominated counterparts, landing in a new emotionally vulnerable experience.

Jenkins suggests that "fandom's very existence



Pony Stephenson



Sean Herman

represents a critique of conventional forms of consumer culture” while also providing “a space within which fans may articulate their specific concerns about sexuality, gender, racism, colonialism, militarism, and forced conformity”. These ideas are revolutionary because not only are fans creating new material based in the universes that they love, but they are able to create material that challenges the cultural norms, hierarchies, and stereotypes created by the original material. In a sense, fans get to rewrite the scripts, creating a universe that is far more inclusive and fresh than the one created by their male counterparts. Could fandom be far more life changing than I ever considered?

With the ever growing popularity of the fandom sub-culture, these visual recreations have made their way into tattooing. As discussed earlier, people are taking these recreated images that they are so connected to and forever marking them on their bodies. Many artists are now concentrating their artistic output on these ideas, with amazing painters and illustrators creating new worlds out of these already familiar ones. Pony Stephenson is taking it a step further and creating tattoos out of these new artistic endeavours. His tattoos are becoming a reflection of the culture beloved by society, and one that is continually being recreated by it, too.

I have been fortunate to call Pony a friend for over a decade now. At one point, we were part of a business partnership for a beautiful shop. Through the years I have watched his passions grow, and watched his work become more focused in one direction. Tattooing ideologies can be a difficult field to navigate, and tattooists can have a hard time finding where their passions and abilities to connect with their clients. It has been exciting and eye opening to watch Pony move into the direction of tattooing almost exclusively fandom content, and to begin to understand the emotional impact that connection can make for his clients.

Pony describes his reason for tattooing in the realm that he does.

“I love doing fandom tattoos because I can always re-



Sean Herman

late to the customers, whether it's being interested in the same fandoms or learning about a new world to immerse myself and work into. I really enjoy the conversation, I never have down time or small talk during our sessions. It's always stimulating. I continually seem to gain new perspective through the multitude of views individual fans have and bring to the table.

A lot of the fandoms I'm into are from my childhood. I grew up in the '80s and for me that decade represents the epitome of fandom culture. It's comforting, familiar.

“Indiana Jones, Disney, Star Wars, Ghost Busters, video games; those were the cornerstone in which my formative years were built. Dealing with anxiety for many years, I've found that doing these tattoos reconnects me to those times of carefree days. It re-centres me.

“I lived with my anxiety alone for many years. Too afraid to open up to anyone else. Through diving into these fandoms with my clients I've discovered how prevalent anxiety is and it has helped just knowing that I'm not alone. Connecting with my clients I've found that, for so many of us, Disney, Harry Potter and all the universes in-between can help alleviate, if not eliminate the day-to-



Tattoos on this page by Pony Stephenson



day stresses and anxiety today's society place on us.

“Another thing that I love about fandoms is the amount of collaborative effort from various artists it takes to get you one piece of pop culture domain. From the beginning stages of conceptualising, puppeteering, animating, composing. So many talents and minds coming together to bring a new world to life. For me as an artist, it's magical to be able to build off these worlds and bring something new and exciting to my clients.

“After tattooing for thirteen years, finding this new sub-culture of fandom tattooing has made me fall in love with what I do all over again.”

I loved that quote from Pony, ‘It re-centres me.’ Talking

to him, and other clients of mine, became an eye opening experience, changing my preconceived notions on these parts of popular culture, and introducing a new world into my lexicon of experience.

Next month we will be taking a closer examination at why people get tattoos based within these worlds of fandom, and how they tie to their own mental health and overall state of mind. We will talk with a few of my clients, Pony's clients, and others on why this culture is growing, and how it's helping change our society in a positive way.

You can find Pony at Bell Rose Tattoo, www.thebellrosetattoo.com or on Instagram @pony_tbr

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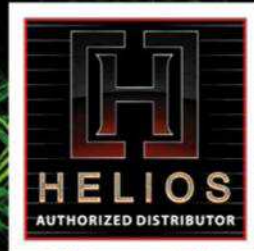
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OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

Nicky Connor chats to Italian artist Abes tattoo based at Off The Map Tattoo in Cervignano del Friuli and discovers how his journey into the world of tattooing all started

 abestattoo

Well, I could say that I've always had a passion for arts, starting with the engravings and etchings of the 1800's to the modern world of graffiti. I have always tried to get involved in art and I believe that with tattooing, I have found the most interesting key that keeps me connected with the art world. I also enjoy customising vans shoes and skateboards, but the rest of my time is dedicated to tattooing—when I go home, all I do is my housework.

When I was at school I studied to achieve a certificate as a graphic designer in advertising and soon after that I worked in a screen printer's. It was a truly educational experience, above all because it involved using computer programmes connected with graphic design. I think that everything that I have experienced up to now in addition to the study of design and graphics, is an integral part of my style. These days I still use Photoshop very much to



Words: Nicky Connor • Images: Abes Tattoo



I think that everything that I have experienced up to now in addition to the study of design and graphics, is an integral part of my style

speed up my work process, but for the rest of my designs, I still use markers and paper to draw.

I started tattooing around the end of 2013, in the same studio where I still work now: Alex De Pase's Off The Map Tattoo, a tattoo shop in Cervignano del Friuli in the north east tip of Italy. It's a small town located 120km away from Venice. I started there almost by chance, I went there for about eight years as a customer and I was inspired to tattoo by both the place and the studio. Gradually I realised that it was the environment and world that I wanted to be in, so I decided that my way in life was to be a tattooist. I spent many months in the studio and was always drawing, drawing and drawing. I have many different tattoo experiences since and I have also guest-spotted in several other tattoo shops, but the main studio I have always worked in is the same. My shop has four resident artists who do different styles, from realism, to ornamental, Japanese, new-school, black work and also lots of visiting international guest artists.

Off The Map tattoo are a chain of studios that have three locations: two in North America (one in Oregon,

one in Massachusetts) and one in Italy in Cervignano del Friuli. I work most of the time in this last location and it's also where I have had in the course of my career establish

myself work along-side the other artists who also work in this business. I have also had the opportunity to go to work in one of the other two locations, it was a really awesome experience.





I think that greatest inspiration for me is my father, he's not an artist and he's not part of the art world, but for me he's really one of the greatest inspirations that I follow in my life.

My other inspirations come from three places: the world of graphics, the world of etching and the world of graffiti. Although I have never participated in the skateboarding scene or in the graffiti world, I'm always fascinated by these two disciplines and have taken a lot of ideas from them. I'm inspired by techniques that contrast and are completely different, I like engraving work for the subjects (of my designs) and I like graffiti for the composition and for the ideas used in it.

I also try to find inspiration every day from whatever surrounds me. I also check out the online profiles and in person work of some artists that work in a totally different way to me. I think it's important to look at other tattooists who have different styles because, looking, observing and studying more and varied artists definitely helps your work grow.

In my work I create all kinds of tattoos, but I am striving to work only in



I think that greatest inspiration for me is my father, he's not an artist and he's not part of art world, but for me he's really one of the greatest inspirations that I follow in my life



I always try to understand what my client wants by talking extensively with them. I think dialogue is the key

my own style, so that one day I will actually be able to tattoo only the designs that I really want. I don't know what to call my own style other than black work. I hope to become more and more identified with my own style and my use of lines of different thickness and black blocks alternated with complete areas of open skin. Recently I have attempted to experiment a lot, by also trying to design pieces that are far away from my normal style. I'm usually quite static on my choice of starting subject and I have particular preferences such as skulls, gorillas and chrysanthemums. So, I'm trying to get out of my usual head space and try to create other designs with subjects that are different from my usual ones. I also endeavour to develop a more graphic impact with my tattoos and I am looking for a continuous personal evolution in my work. I think the tattoo artists that have influenced me the most belong mainly to the Spanish scene, both related to tattooing and writing. At the time being, I feel more prone to both following and being inspired by artists that have a similar style to me, as far as technique and ideas are concerned.

When working with a client I always try to unite with them on a

mental level, I look for a conceptual affinity and effectively reaching a mutually shared idea. I believe I always try to understand what my client wants by talking extensively with them. I think dialogue is the key to get across both my client's ideas and also what I want to focus on, until we reach a point of agreement with the design. I would definitely say that my process of creation is an individual conceptual artwork starting from a brainstorming of two individuals. For work I use social networks a lot, it represents the most powerful and important platform for me and my work. It is quite likely thanks to the outburst of social networking that I get 60% of my work, normally based on word-by-mouth.

I really cannot think of anything else I would be other than being a tattooist—I am totally serious. ▣





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mikaelajanepalermo.com
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“I was obsessed,” she tells me. “To the point where I enrolled in cartooning classes at the local art centre and wanted to become an animator. Being from a small city in Australia, that seemed like a total pipe dream that I had no idea how to pursue, so I started taking a different career path instead.” Still, that love for 90s cartoons remains with Mikaela today. She has a penchant for heavy line work and solid blocks of colour that has carried through to her own art. “My digital work definitely reflects that nostalgia, and it’s my way of paying homage to that era in animation.”

Of course, that’s only part of the story. Like many artists, including tattoo artists, Mikaela takes on a variety of commissions. Being open to different styles from the get-go has broadened her skillset to the point where, alongside the more cartoonish digital art she creates, Mikaela has become incredibly deft at portraiture.

“When I first started drawing,” she tells me, “I wanted to challenge myself. I had done tattoo flash-type stuff (and was terrible at it!), so I decided to pick what I found to be the most difficult style to emulate and strive to perfect it: portraiture. At the time, most non-male artists I knew were doing very typically ‘feminine’ art, and I wanted to set myself apart from that by focusing on black and white. Being predominantly self-taught, I never learned how to shade properly with pencil or paint, so stippling, initially, was sort of a cheat in my eyes. Until I got more detail-orientated with it.”

In terms of muses, Mikae-

la lists a diverse cast including Steak Mtn, Ben Brown, Heather Gabel, Grimoire, Steve Cohen, Jacob Bannon, Adnate and “a bunch of blackwork tattooers and local artist pals.” And then there’s the world of music and how it’s influenced her. “I think when I first started, my main inspiration was Jordan Buckley— an amazing artist who is also in one of my favorite bands, Every Time I Die. He did incredible black and white line work, and he had interesting shading techniques. I was super drawn to the way he combined his musical tastes with his art.”

With Mikaela, there’s a similar thing going on. Music is very much part of what she does creatively. “I grew up around the local punk rock scene—which I’m still active within. Punk rock, to me, has always been a celebration of the outcasts; a space where you can use your emotions as an art form, no matter how raw, weird, political and passionate they may be. I think those things combined make for brilliant art, whether it’s lyrically, musically or physically. It also taught me that there’s beauty in our weirdness and our perceived imperfections. While mainstream society may deem something brash or jarring, there are so many people out there that can understand you, and I feel like that sentiment carries over to how I approach my art as well.”

Speaking out for those who are marginalised within society is not just a theme within Mikaela’s art, it’s also the reason she does it. Back in August last year, Mikaela shared a picture of a balance book on Instagram, detailing the



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HAS ALWAYS BEEN A
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OUTCASTS**



WHILE MAINSTREAM SOCIETY MAY DEEM SOMETHING BRASH OR JARRING, THERE ARE SO MANY PEOPLE OUT THERE THAT CAN UNDERSTAND YOU

amount of money she had raised through her art for organisations working with refugees, trans people, victims of sexual assault and other vulnerable groups. For Mikaela, this is just part of who she is. “Since before I was born,

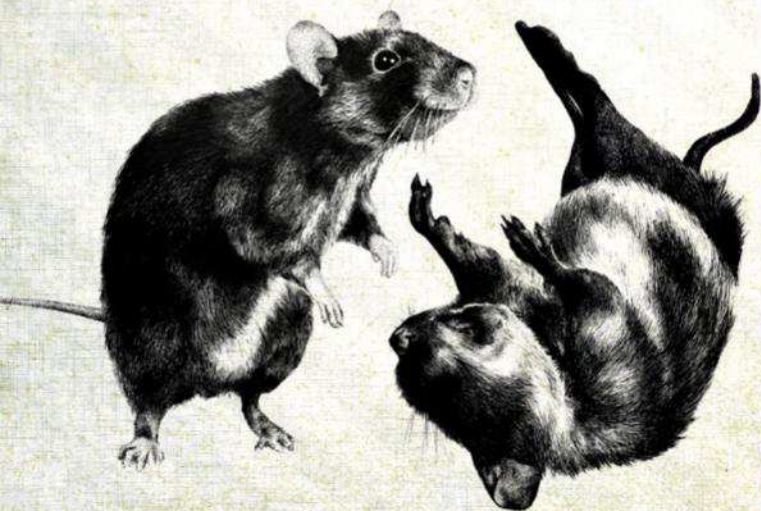
my mum worked with refugee children when they first arrived in Australia. It has been forever instilled in my brain that we should always help others who are considered minorities, less fortunate than us or just generally in need, before we look after ourselves.”

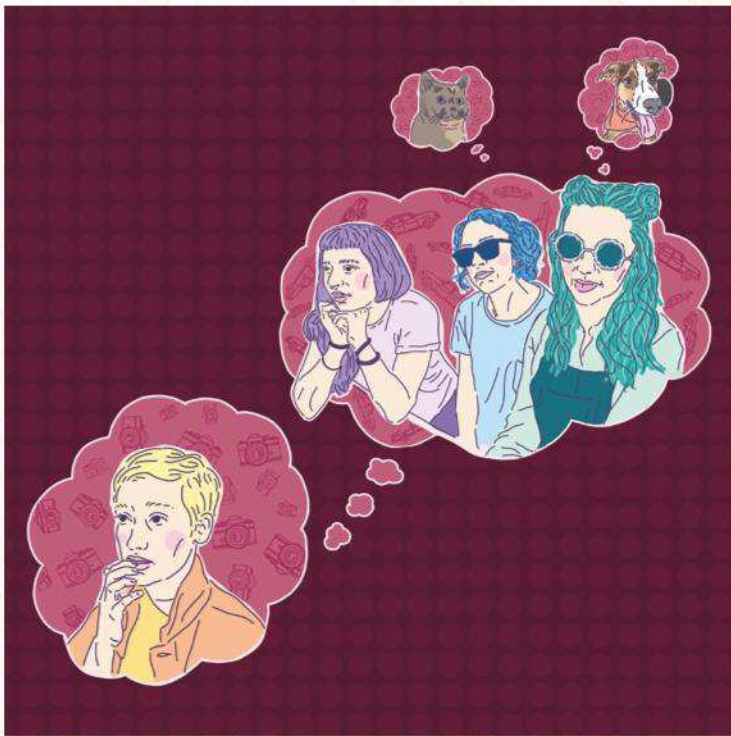
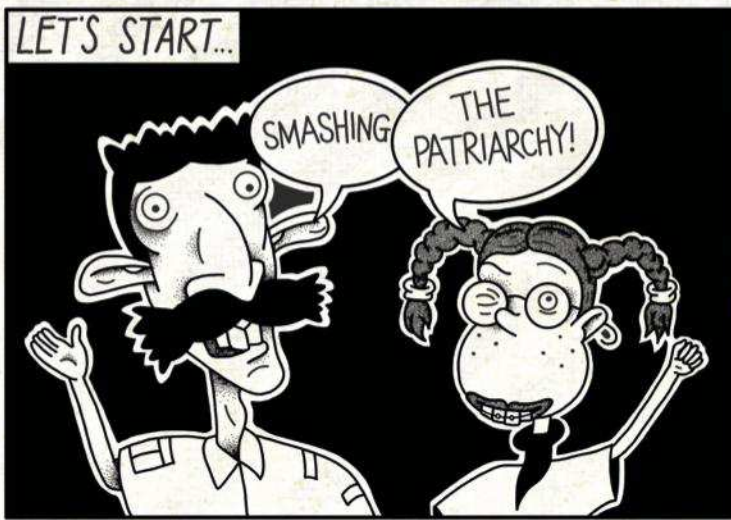
But it’s more than that—the causes Mikaela chooses to raise money for are all ones she can personally relate to. “My sister is gay,

I identify as queer and my partner is non-binary,” she explains, “so the LGBTQ+ community is very close to my heart and supports those closest to me. I consider myself an intersectional feminist, so sexual assault is another cause very close to my heart.”

And then there is a certain president of a certain place where Mikaela now finds herself living. Like many in America, and in particular those who had emigrated there, Mikaela now finds herself feeling like a stranger in her own home. “The Trump presidency definitely had an effect on why I decided to take action when I did, as oftentimes myself and those around me felt helpless and scared with the abundance of discriminatory laws being discussed or passed. I wanted to help and often the best way I knew how was to give money to non-profits who were directly supporting those who needed funding to make their work more accessible and impactful.”

We talk about tattoos, the very definition of wearing one’s heart on one’s sleeve. Mikaela has a lot of coverage, most of it hailing from Melbourne, Australia. “The two





artists that have worked on me the most are Ben Koopman and Terry James, but I've also pieces by Rachi Brains, Clare Clarity, Dan Smith and Jane Laver. A lot of my tattoos are visual representations of lyrics, and a lot of them are animals." She found her time in the chair with Rachi and Clare particularly special and cites them alongside other tattoo artists such as Alexis Hepburn, Emily Jane (Breadner) and Sam Rulz to be important influences on her own art. "Tattooing is such a male-dominated profession, so seeing them all kill it and have such unique and recognisable styles of their own is super inspiring."

Moving forward, Mikaela continues to raise her profile as a multimedia artist. Her t-shirt designs for punk rock band, Against Me!, will be available on their upcoming tours this year and she is working on some merch for a Chicago band called Sincere Engineer, alongside a variety of tour posters and fliers. She has also been working on various exhibitions with Gallery 1988 in Los Angeles for the past year and should have some pieces for show with them later this year. "Other than that," she says, "just trying to keep dotting away!" ▣

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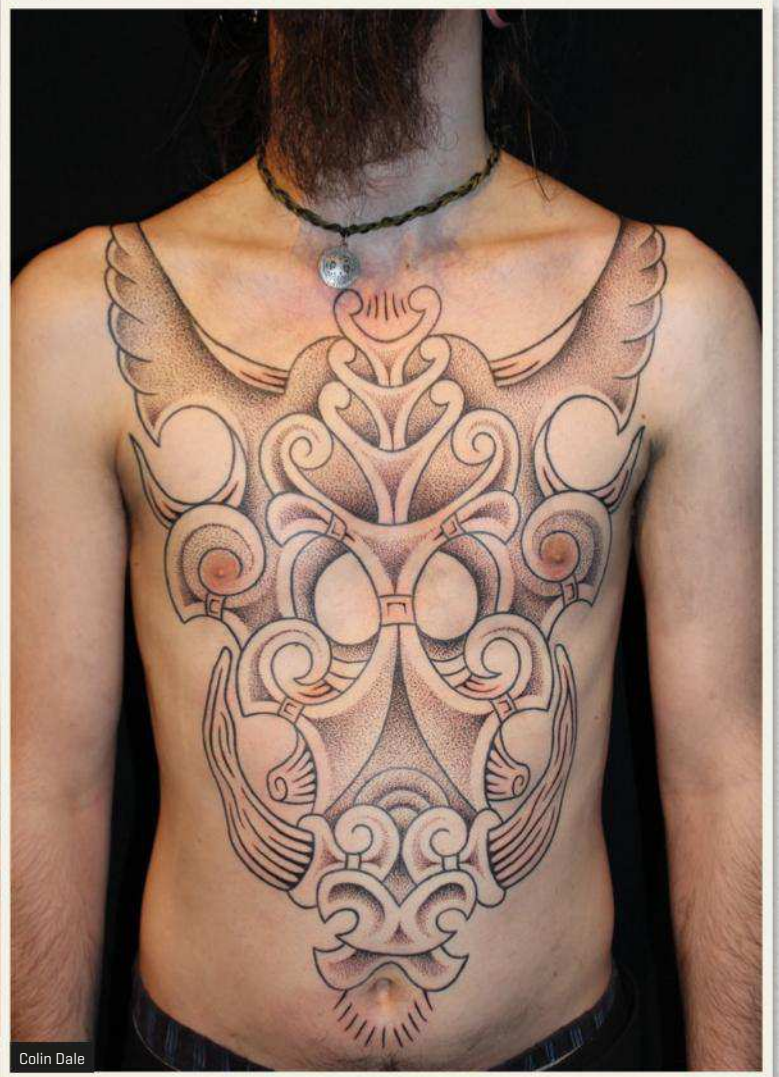
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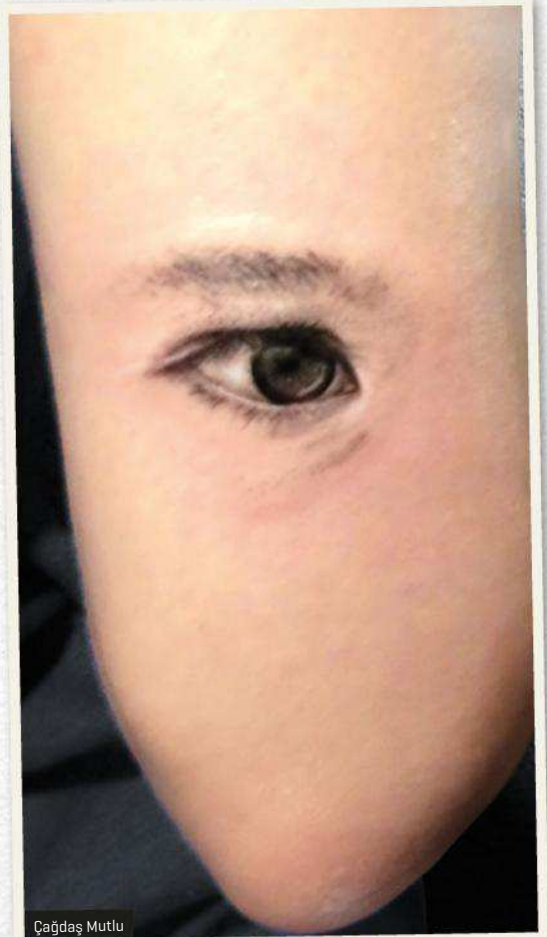
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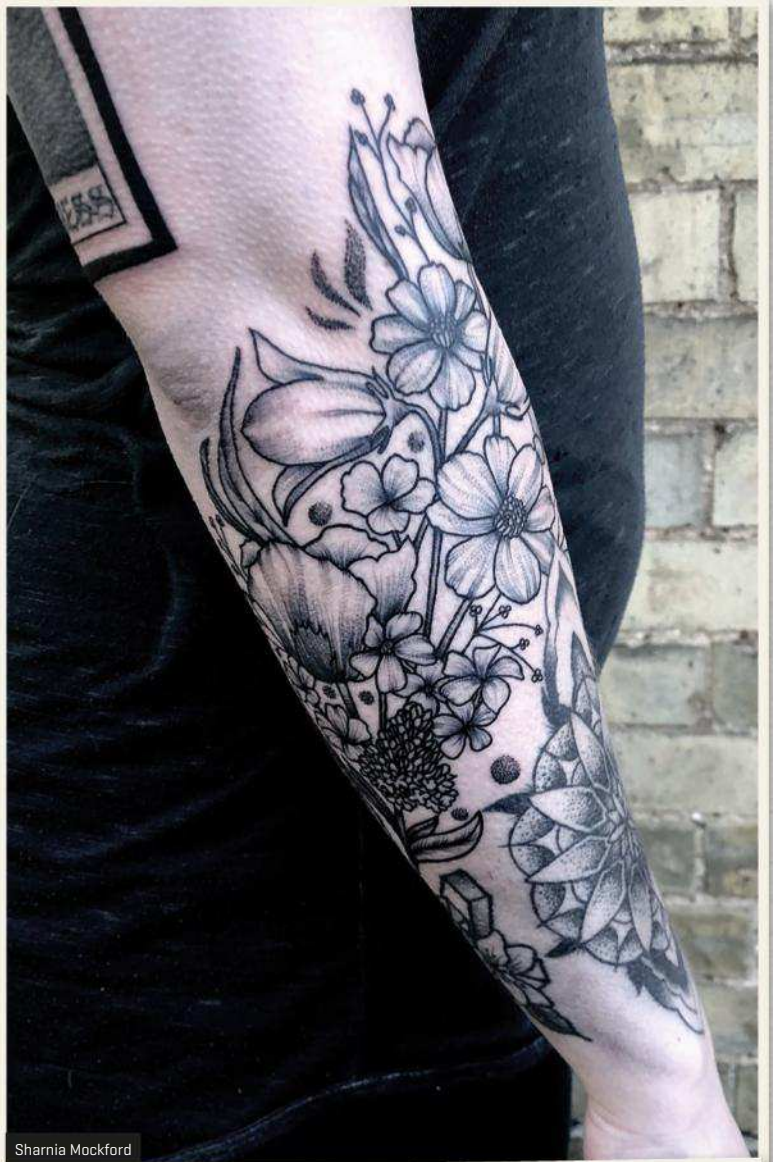
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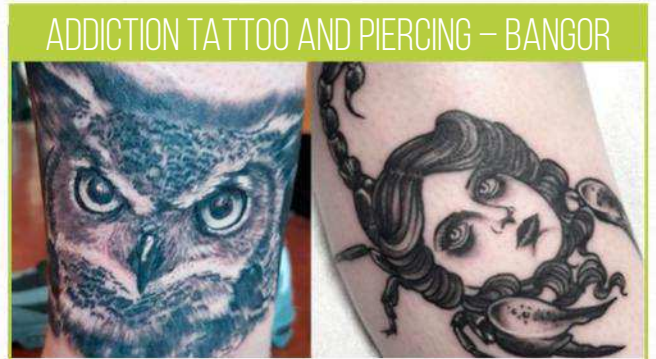
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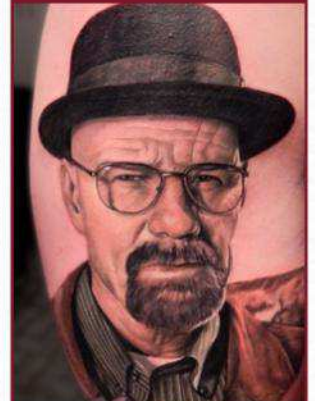


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by
Hokowhitu Sciascia



Hokowhitu Sciascia

I'm not the world's biggest fan of black & grey. It's not so much the medium itself as what the majority of people choose to do with it... and then a tattoo like this comes along and I think to myself... "yeah, that's how you do black n grey."

Given a canvas big enough, black & grey has the ability to lay waste to all contenders. There are two areas in which it can do this - in dark artwork as we see here from the hand of Hokowhitu Scias-

cia but it's also pretty handy for portraits too. In this case, there's nothing it isn't doing properly and it's so well thought out composition-wise, it's frightening.

That thing Paul Booth started all those years ago—it's still here, still growing and if you know where to look, it's better than ever.

We have a full on interview with Hokowhitu Sciascia next issue. Don't forget to tune in. ▣

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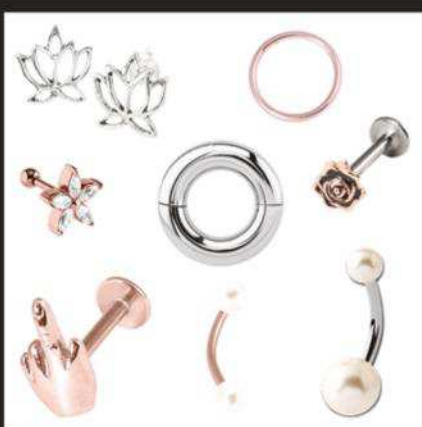
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