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AND THE
FAMILY BUSINESS

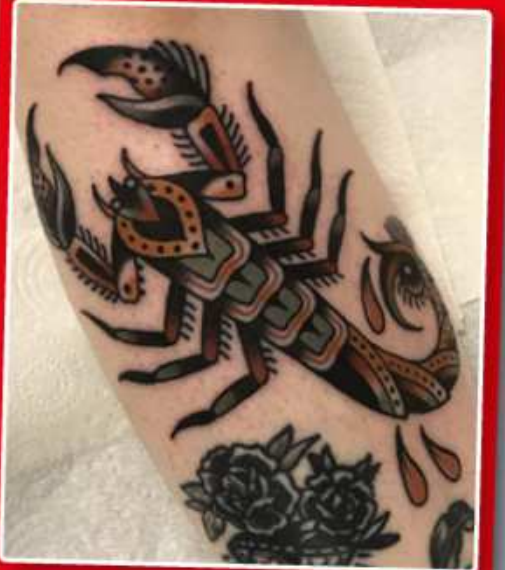
FADE FX MEETS
SHANGHAI KATE

INK MASTER 10 WINNER:
JOSH PAYNE

TATTOO & TAROT
AN INSPIRING MIX

SEAN HERMAN'S
TRANSFORMATIVE TATTOO

FREE INSIDE



10 PAGES OF PORTFOLIOS



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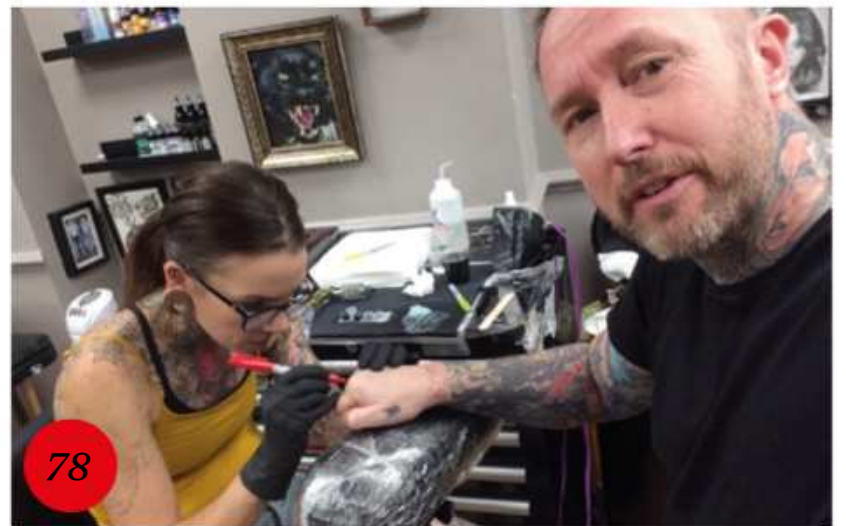
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Kamila Burzymowska
Rebecca Givens
Paula Hammond
Sean Herman
Steven Guichard-Kenny
Barbara Pavone
Dave Perry
Wayne Simmons

COVER SHOT
Scott Cole

EDITOR

Sion Smith
editor@skindeep.co.uk
07841 999334

DESIGN

David Gamble
davidgamble@mac.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS & BACK ISSUES

magazines@jazzpublishing.co.uk
01244 881888

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Justine Hart
production@skindeep.co.uk
01244 881888

CREDIT CONTROL

Emma McCrindle
accounts@jazzpublishing.co.uk
01244 886009

ADMINISTRATION

Jan Schofield
jan@jazzpublishing.co.uk
01244 886019

TATTOO ADVERTISING

Mark McCarthy
mark@jazzpublishing.co.uk
01244 886022

SKIN SHOTS LISTING SALES

Sarah Shawcross
sarah@skindeep.co.uk
01244 886029

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

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

EVENTS DIRECTOR

Shelley Bond
shelley@jazzevents.co.uk
01244 881888

MANAGING DIRECTOR

Stuart Mears
stuart@jazzpublishing.co.uk
01244 881888

DISTRIBUTION

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

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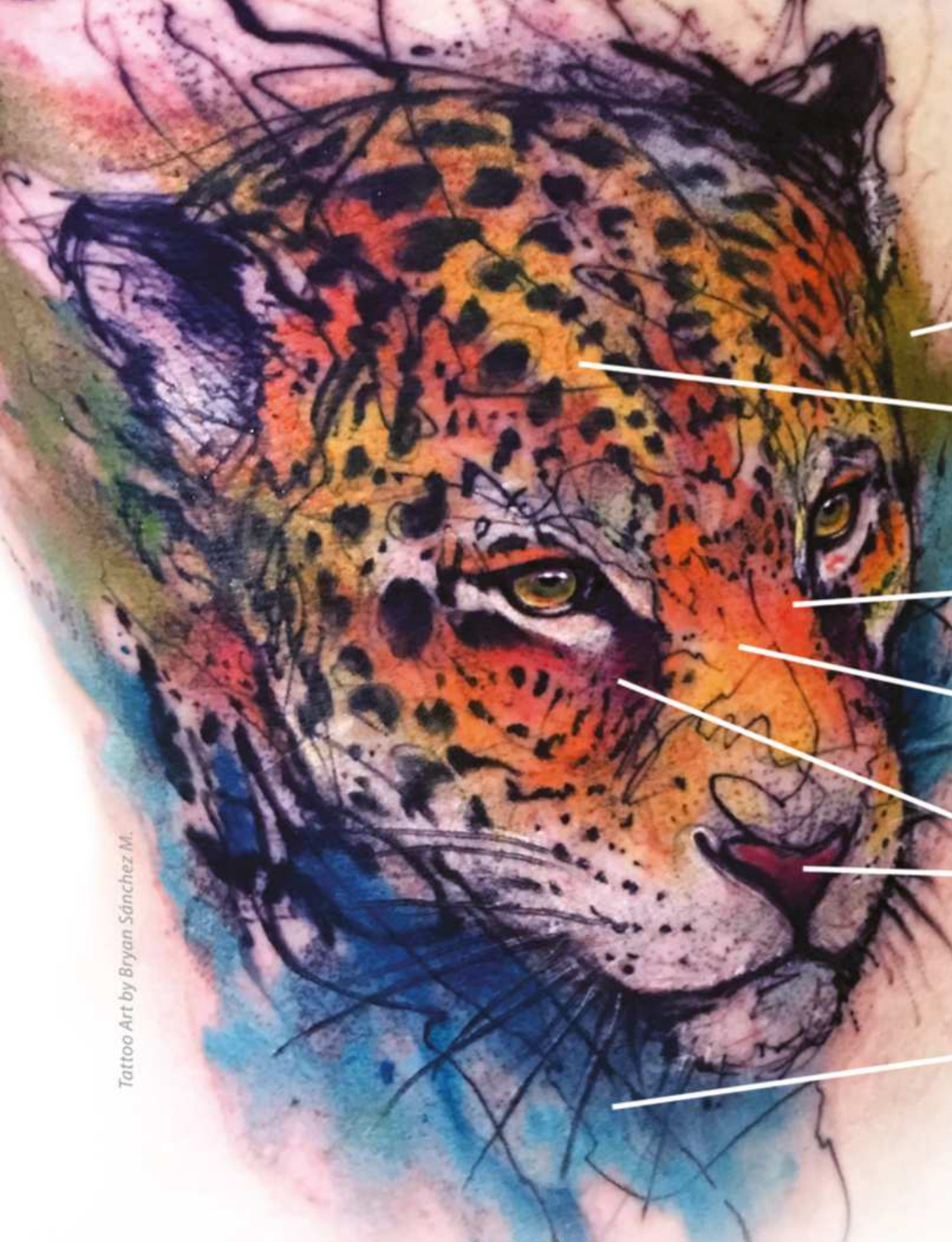
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Tattoo Art by Bryan Sánchez M.



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-  Tangerine
-  Bright Orange
-  Ruby Red
-  MIX Bermuda Blue & Turquoise Concentrate

BRYAN SÁNCHEZ M.

WATERCOLOUR INK SET



12
COLOR
INK SET

Bryan Sánchez M. has perfected a tattoo style that exhibits all the fluid grace of watercolour art. Working with Eternal Ink, Sánchez selected 12 extraordinary colours that smoothly transition from hue to hue without losing any of their bold, dynamic impact. Although each hue is based on an existing colour, Eternal Ink has reformulated and mixed this set of inks to a thinner, more fluid watercolour consistency. **AVAILABLE IN 1 OZ BOTTLE ONLY**

ALL 12 COLOURS IN THE BRYAN SÁNCHEZ M. SET ARE FORMULATED TO A THINNER INK CONSISTENCY

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- BSW03 Cotton Candy
- BSW04 Light Purple
- BSW05 Exhaust
- BSW06 Snowflake
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- BSW08 Deep Sea
- BSW09 Turquoise Concentrate
- BSW10 Avocado
- BSW11 Solid Gold
- BSW12 Bright Orange

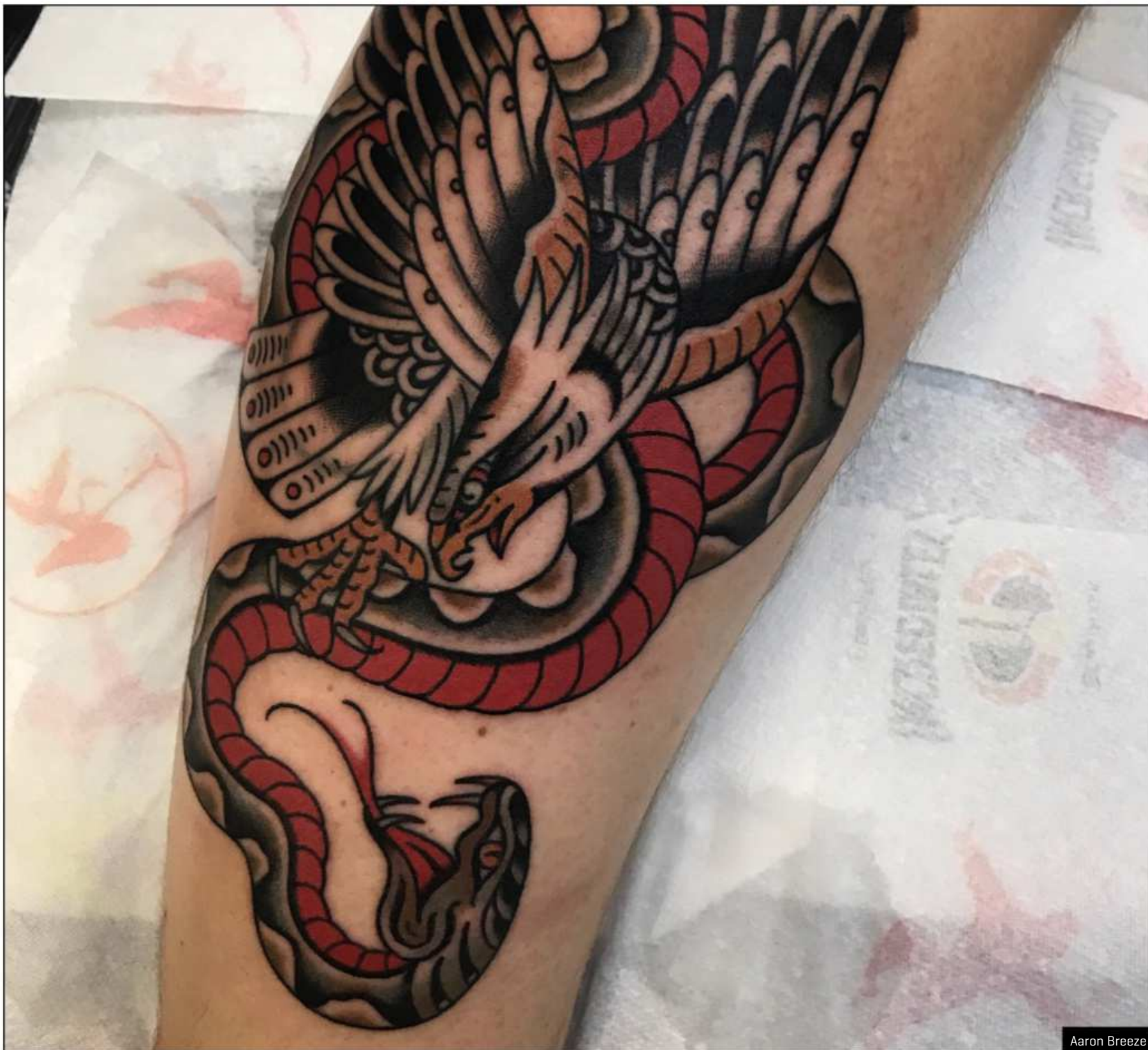
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SATURDAY NIGHT
& SUNDAY MORNING



Aaron Breeze

The make-up is running down your face

I was chewing over the article we ran last issue about tattooing being over-saturated. I tried to approach it from as many angles as possible to get a good grip on the situation.

First of all, newsagents are not particularly bothered about there being fifteen other newsagents in their town than there was ten years ago. Why should it bother tattooers?

The answer to that is that there are not the same amount of people who want to get tattooed as there are who want to buy a newspaper. It's made the client pool a lot

SOME PEOPLE WILL ALWAYS PAY FOR QUALITY AND SOME WILL WANT A TATTOO AT THE CHEAPEST PRICE POSSIBLE JUST TO BE 'TATTOOED'



SION SMITH • EDITOR
editor@skindeep.co.uk

smaller for all tattooers.

There are great newsagents out there. The staff know your name, count out your change, treat your kids well, wash their windows and aren't a complete dick when you find yourself having to hand over a Scottish currency note. There are also newsagents who do none of these things but people still shop

there because—generally speaking—most people don't give a damn.

They just want a newspaper.

It's not The Law to have clean windows or to know your name. That comes under the banner of pride and wanting to be a great newsagent.

Those guys are also the store owners that won't sell cigarettes, porn magazines and booze to anybody clearly underage just to put another pound in the cash register.

We could say exactly the same thing about tattooing. Some occupy that top-end where they will talk an eighteen year old out of having a tattoo on their hand when there are a million other places to put their first one. Some just want to bag up £50 and call it a good day at the coal-face.

Then I came in from another angle. Rock bands are not up in arms that there are too many bands out there... creating a world in which a shitty band is playing a venue they wanted to play on a certain night. They are not particularly vitriolic about some of these guys not being able to play their instruments either. They let them look stupid in their own time and eventually, that shitty band will get better or fade into obscurity.

Neil Gaiman doesn't take to the internet every time a crappy writer self-publishes a poorly written book.

Jesus... this list of analogies is endless.

People buy crap art, people support crap rock bands, people buy shitty books, shop at the Dirty Newsagents and they do these things all the time. Day in, day out.

Why should tattooing be exempt from the ways of the world?

And who is to say what's good and what's not in the first place anyway?

Those 'good guys' in the above scenarios—so far as I can tell—don't even look at all the things going on at the other end of the ladder because they're too busy getting on with their own career and being better tomorrow than they were yesterday to give a damn.

When it comes to tattooing, some people will always pay for quality and some will want a tattoo at the cheapest price possible just to be 'tattooed'—and I know this because if 2019 became the year of the free tattoo across the board, we would soon find out who



PEOPLE ARE IMPATIENT AND A LOT OF PEOPLE DON'T CARE SO LONG AS THEY GET THE THING THEY WANT

was busy and who wasn't... or at least we would until the people at the top end had no more time to give... then the process would ker-ching down the ladder until we are back where we are right now.

With people filling a gap in the market.

Why is there a gap in the market?

Because people are impatient and a lot of people don't care so long as they get the thing they want, in this case, a tattoo.

I guess that's what happens when you let all of the cats out of the bag.

There's no easy answer to the over-saturation question. I'm not sure it can be policed either because the rules of engagement of the modern world are that we are all equal and are all allowed to be valued for being what we are with no apology. For every right-wing party, there will be a left-wing party to balance the scales. You only have to look at the world throughout every day in history to know this is true.

All I'm left with is my answer to everything like this: "Get Good Ink" and if your ink turns out to be crap and wanders onto limbs on the other side of your body, don't come crying to me. Getting tattooed is not like shoe shopping and there's more than enough education and good advice out there for this not to happen anymore.

There is no excuse left under the sun for getting a bad tattoo.



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I have been thinking about the time I lied to my tattooist



Marcin Pawlus

I've told untruths, to not just my tattoo artist, but also in the past to my employer, my family and my friends. I'm referring to situations during which I've not quite felt 100% mentally, but have thought it better to explain my absence by sharing physical symptoms instead. When cancelling appointments or taking a sick day at work, it often feels easier and more acceptable to describe a physical illness than a mental one. Whilst it's my own decision to share whatever information I feel comfortable sharing, I know that I must never, ever, be made to feel like a visible impairment is more valid, important or 'real' than an invisible one.

Our mental state quite often dictates our physical capability. Sometimes, if I'm in a bad

**SITTING AND GETTING TATTOOED
REQUIRES ENDURANCE FROM BOTH THE
BODY AND THE MIND**



REBECCA GIVENS

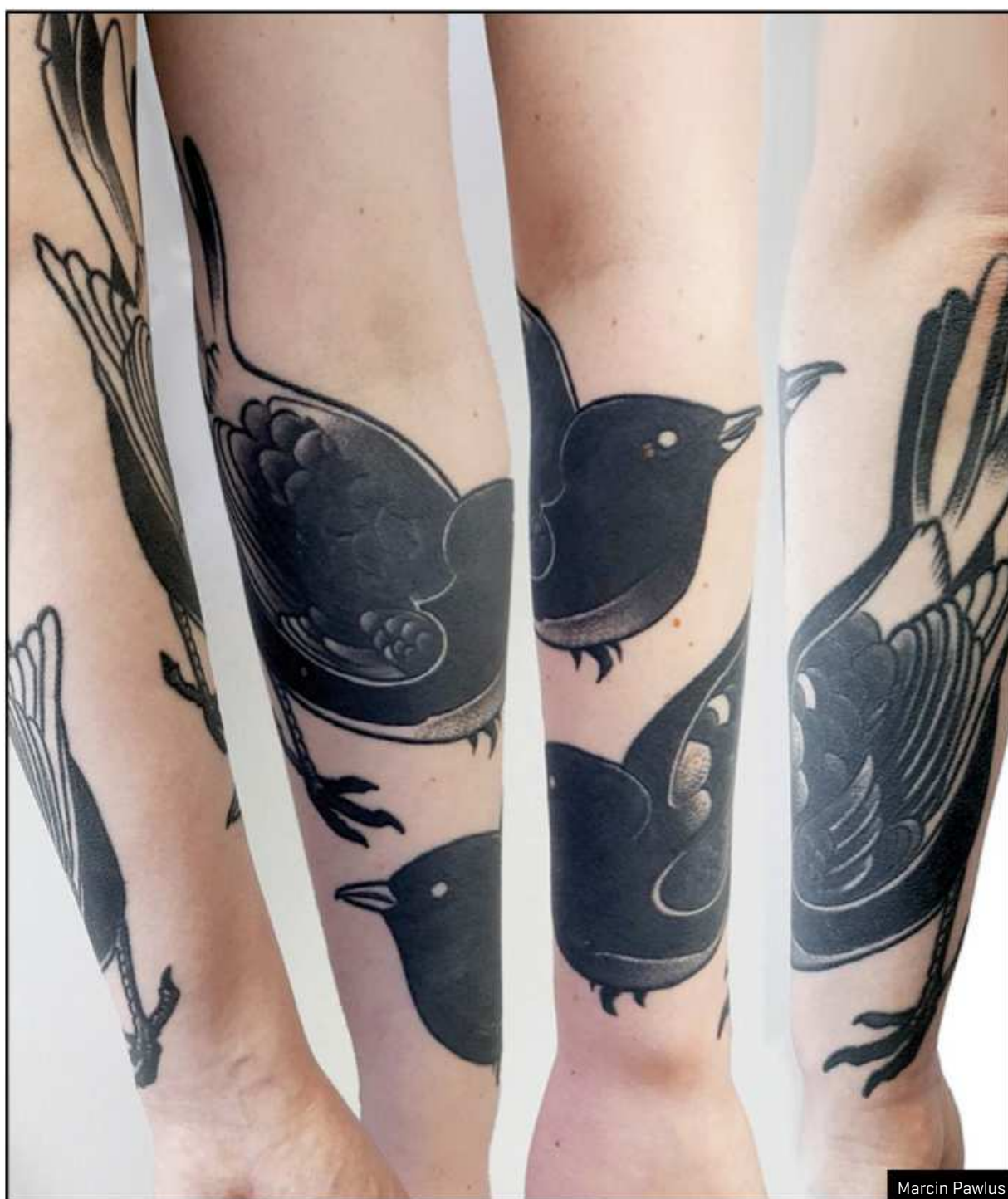
place in terms of my mental health, I know that the last thing I want to do is expose my body to the pain of receiving a new tattoo. Sitting and getting tattooed requires endurance from both the body and the mind—I know I have to feel prepared and ready for the challenge. If I am feeling low and vulnerable in terms of my emotions and mental strength, opting out of a pre-booked appointment, busy day at work, or important meeting can often feel like a vital move for my sanity and a chance to put my mental health and its improvement first. But as customers, when we

know how frustrating and financially crippling it can be for self-employed artists to lose custom at the last minute, sometimes we seek the best way to explain ourselves and end up telling fibs as a result. I've had days off work before and attributed these to having a bug, flu or stomach upset, because I've feared that I would be judged if I was to explain a low mental health state instead. In these circumstances, we are also very aware that we are letting people down by not showing up, and this second layer of anxious analysis (worrying they they're annoyed or upset with us) can make it even more difficult to explain ourselves coherently.

We have of course made such amazing progressions in terms of spreading awareness of mental health issues in the 21st century, especially in our welcoming and understanding industry, but there are still stigmas present. I know I won't be only person in the world that often feels it's easier to just pretend I am ill physically for fear of someone not understanding. Admittedly, these worries are often in our heads, and the tattooist or employer on the receiving end of the call might be more supportive than we realise when it comes to disclosing our mental health problems, but we are often afraid to find out.

Of course, it is never compulsory to share your problems in detail with strangers (or those close to you). Mental health issues are different for each person, complex and often very difficult to explain and diagnose—they don't make sense to us as the person experiencing them, never mind to someone else! You never have to divulge any specific information—if it is more comfortable for you to explain a physical symptom as a reason for cancelling an appointment (“I have a migraine today”) then it is 100% OK to say that and not feel bad about it. But some of us might wish that we could be a little bit more honest, wish we could utter something like “I'm quite challenged mentally today and can't imagine putting my body through this”, and not feel like this isn't a good enough reason for letting someone down.

Both physical health and mental health are



Marcin Pawlus

BOTH PHYSICAL HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH ARE EXTREMELY COMPLICATED SUBJECTS TO DISCUSS

extremely complicated subjects to discuss. What's considered 'good' and 'bad' health is different for each person—some people might find getting tattooed whilst mentally fragile a great pick-up, whilst others could find the trauma pushes them over the edge. Everyone is different.

Whether you're on the receiving end of someone's current problems, or you're the person doing the divulging, there are three important things to consistently stand by. Firstly, only share what you feel comfortable sharing, don't share what you don't. Secondly, never judge someone else by your own expectations or standards—we are all individual and you will never be able to walk in anyone's shoes but your own. Thirdly, and most importantly, mental health is—and will always be—just as important as physical health, and no-one in the world has the right to make you feel otherwise. □

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THE DAILY FIGHT



Tattoo clothing brand LifesInked has teamed up with mental health charity Mind and tattoo artist Nick Devine to spread awareness for a cause close to the hearts of many.

Nick's design 'The Daily Fight' was inspired by anxiety, and has now been printed on t-shirts, hoodies and crop tops in the hope that the artwork and products will connect with people and help raise money for Mind.

"We've worked with many tattooists before," says Jimmy from LifesInked, "but we wanted a new collaboration this time that could make a difference, one that could support a cause. After getting to know Nick, and knowing that he spoke openly and honestly about his own experiences, he was the first tattooist that came to mind, the one we wanted to create this design for this charity."

Jimmy has been talking directly to Mind throughout this process ("we wanted to make sure they were happy with this, and wanted to be able to help guide people requiring support in the right direction if they needed it") and a percentage of sales from the t-shirts will go directly to Mind.

Everything goes on sale 23rd September. You know what to do: lifesinked.com/mind.org.uk

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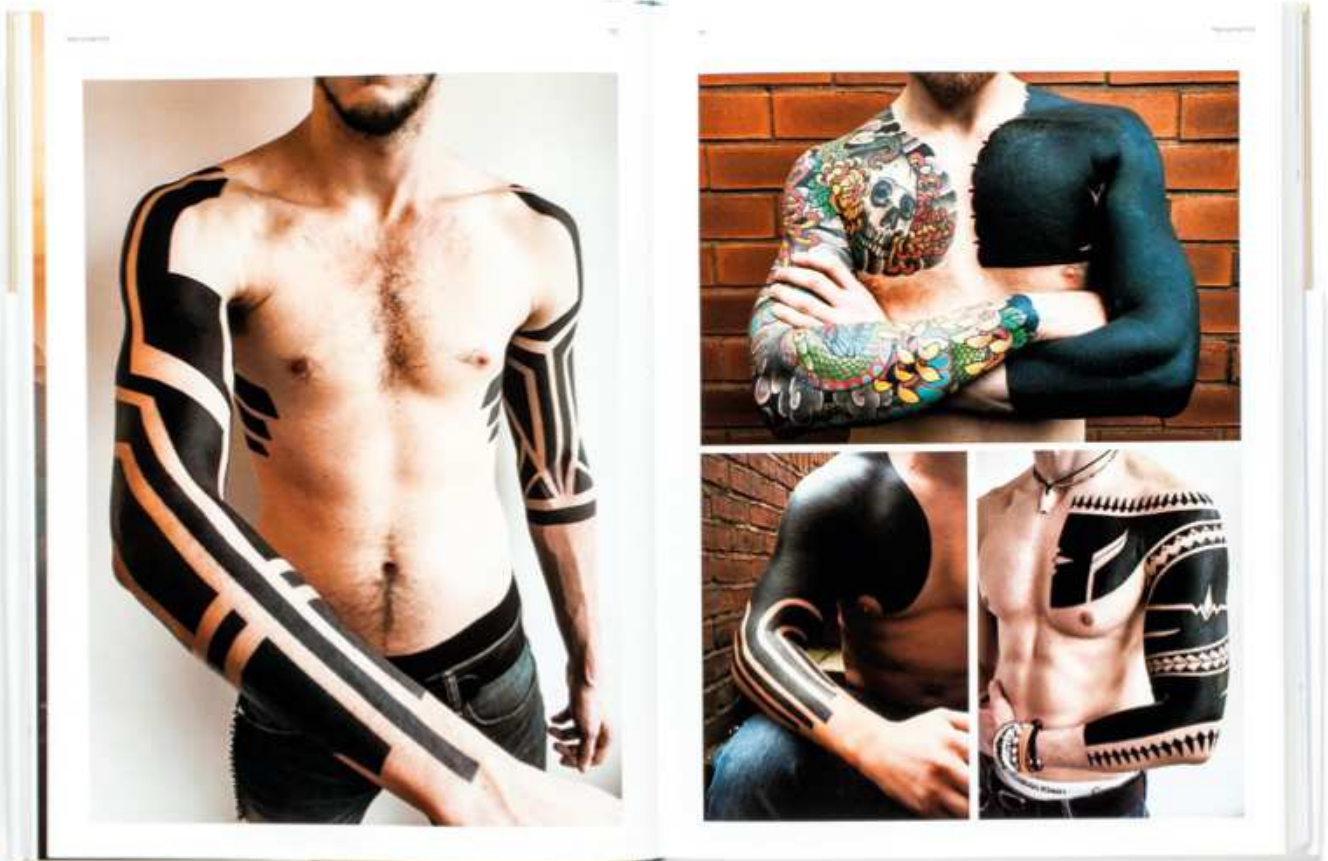
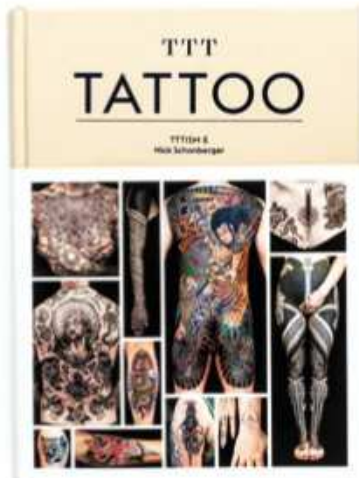
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REVIEW

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Tattoo books tend to fall into two categories for me. On one hand we have the books that deliver what's more or less the contents of my inbox on a weekly basis and on the other hand, there are those that have something valuable to say.

TTT Tattoo falls squarely—and very exactly—into the latter category.

It would be nice to say all tattoo books should be like this, but all tattoo books can't be because they don't have the sniper's eye of TTT's authors.

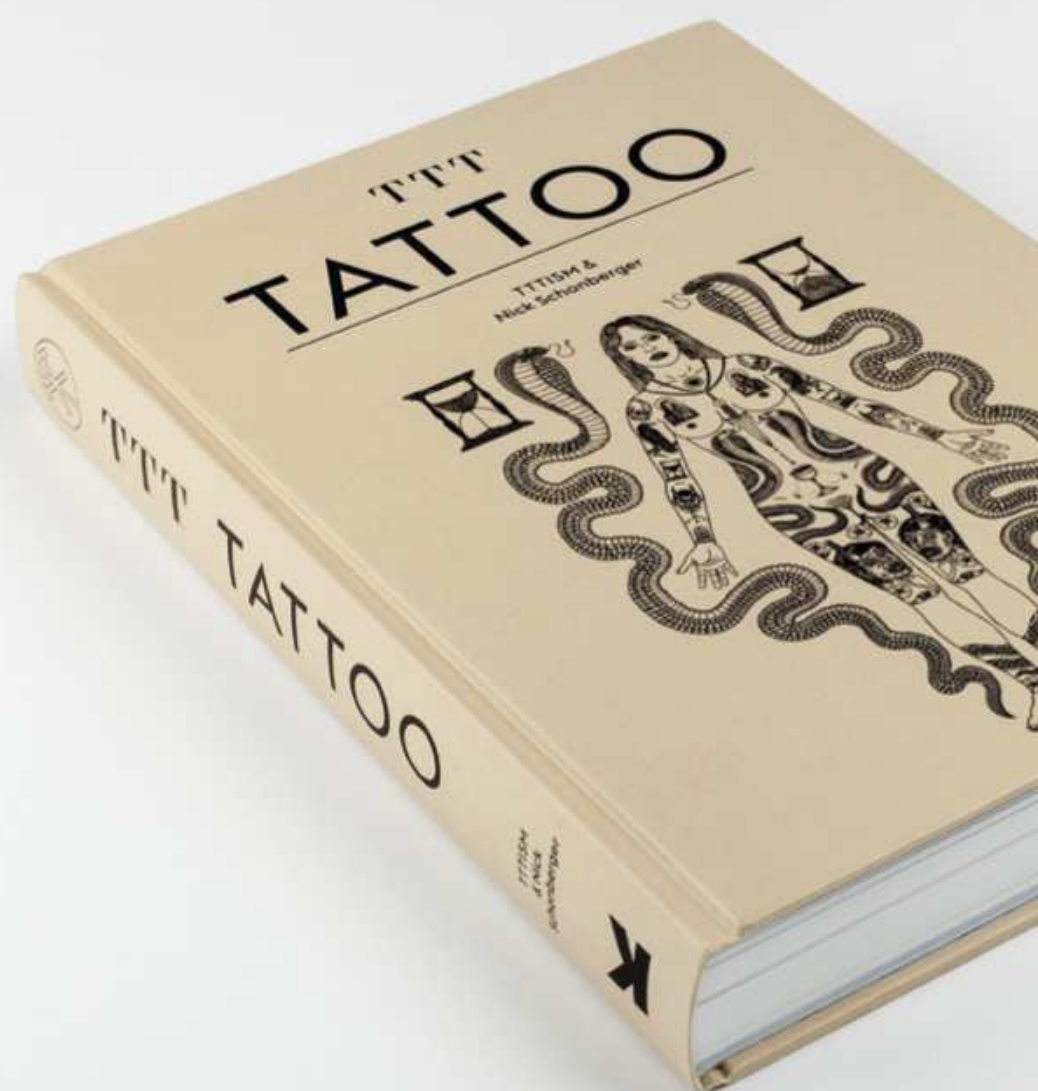
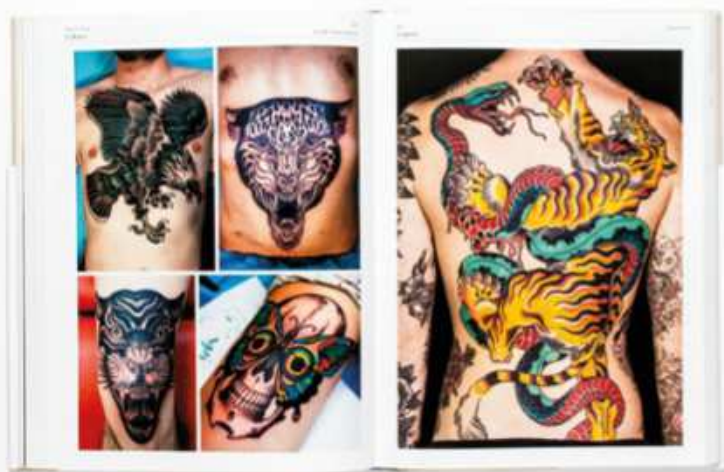
At five hundred (plus) pages, it's a beast of a thing but how could it ever be anything else.

To work to some kind of 'map' whilst looking at the global scene is a tough but necessary call here and the book works through a solid A-Z format tak-

ing in both individuals and studios (along with all who work in them) to achieve a staggering world-view of tattoo creatives working today.

If you didn't know we had hit a golden-era over these last few years, you will be left in no doubt after spending time amongst these pages.

It's pointless to even begin name-dropping those included because I would forever be missing out somebody important. It would be better if I were to say, whatever style of tattooing is your own particular poison, it is catered for right here



in this book by an artist working at the top of their game.

If you take into consideration that I have looked critically looked at tattoos every day for the last ten years of my life, perhaps the biggest compliment I can give the book, is to say I still find something new and exciting in it every time I pick it up.

This is your culture depicted in all its naked glory right here.

File under 'essential'. The £50 price tag is a mighty small price to pay for a book of this stature.

Sion Smith



Skin Salvation

The perfect balm for tattoo aftercare - Artist Recommended

Skin Salvation Intensive Moisturising Ointment is the new kid on the block for tattoo aftercare and is getting some rave reviews from respected artists across the country!

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lient for eczema and dermatitis, so it packs a heavy punch as far as deeply nourishing skincare goes, and those in the know see it as the perfect aid to healing newly tattooed skin.

How does it work so effectively? Well, to begin with, the ointment forms a protective but breathable barrier over fresh tattoos, encouraging tattoos to heal to the very highest standard, keeping the top layer of skin safe from

“Skin Salvation is by far the best suited product for tattoo aftercare on the market today! I have never seen tattoos heal as quick and bright.”

James Conway @jamesconwaytattoos

external irritants and reducing itchiness. The natural antimicrobial properties of beeswax helps this process,

At the same time, the organic and biodynamic ingredients nourish the skin, feeding the epidermis with naturally anti-inflammatory herbal extracts and the essential fatty acids and nutrients needed for regeneration and repair, thus accelerating the healing process while reducing the skin's inflammatory response.

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“I have been using your product and it is so good, not only for the tattoo healing process but also for treating skin problems! And the best thing of all is that it contains only natural ingredients which is very important for me and my clients. You are the best!”

Robbie Flaviani, professional tattoo artist, Barcelona

“I have used every major product and in comparison Skin Salvation is a notable winner. The product seems to work differently from standard tattoo aftercare. After recommending this product to customers, especially those who found their healing process to be more difficult than normal (due to dry skin, or a weaker immune system), the results were obvious: Skin Salvation works where other products have fallen short. The healing process of a tattoo is imperative to the survival of the colours and tones in a tattoo. The longer the healing process, the less likely that the bright colours and contrasts will survive. Skin Salvation accelerates the healing process ensuring that every colour stays intact.”

James Conway, professional tattoo artist, Belfast

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REBEL INC.

Wayne Simmons talks with some of his favourite rebels within tattooing, artists doing something different with their inks. This month he meets Mariñe Pérez, a truly unique artist from the Basque Country

 [marineperez](#)

It's not easy finding tattoo rebels to talk with every month.

Sure, there's plenty of them out there, dabbling in the darker arts, shall we say, but maybe that's the problem. Avant garde/surrealist/"new weird"... however you describe the more eclectic side of tattooing, it's clear it has become a lot more popular in recent years. Watercolour, blackwork, modern dotwork, all these somewhat alternative ways of laying down ink are mainstreaming. They're becoming genres all their own.

Lesser artists are copying pieces by more accomplished



I NEVER UNDERSTOOD WHY I SHOULD COPY AMERICAN TRADITIONAL OR ANY OTHER STYLE. I DON'T MEAN IT'S NOT A GOOD WAY TO LEARN, IT'S JUST NOT MY WAY AND NOT THE ONLY WAY







artists. Even the scratchers are having a go.

Bottom line: the rebels have been assimilated. The revolution is over.

Or is it?

Meet Mariñe Pérez, a 34 year old from Bilbao, Basque Country, in the North of Spain. A graduate of fine arts, she's been tattooing since 2012 and if there was one thing she was certain about when starting out it was that she would never be part of any genre.

"I never understood why I should copy American traditional or any other style," she tells me. "I don't mean it's not a good way to learn, it's just not my way and not the only way. I love traditional and I get a lot of inspiration from it, but I think there are many ways to learn and each person can find their own, all of them as valid as the others."

For Mariñe, tattooing is just an extension of her wider

art. She studied painting and illustration at university so, when tattooing presented itself, it seemed only natural to just treat skin like any other medium. "I tried to make the same art that I was doing on paper or canvas on the skin. Of course, in the beginning it was a disaster," she laughs, lamenting those courageous friends who lent her their skin back in the early, experimental days. "But little by little I found my way."

For Mariñe, the design and process of making a tattoo – or any piece of art, for that matter – is what is most important. Making the tattoo successful visually as both a piece of art in its own right and, even more importantly a piece of body art, is the endgame. "How the design looks on the body," she explains, "what the customer sees and what other people see. The shape and the composition are more important than the meaning for me. I say this



because sometimes customers come with really deep meanings that just don't work aesthetically. I think the design needs to be completely solid and clear, every part of it has to be there for a reason. Lines and colours need to work together within this compositional puzzle of balance and harmony. The motive for doing it, whatever reason that lies behind the tattoo, well, for me that's just something to drive the creative process."

Not that Mariñe is operating completely independently. Sure, her artwork defies genre labels – she's developed a style that's very much her own – but I still find some kind of reference point in there, something to grab hold of. For me, she's got this curious mix of old-time tribal – the cave painting side of things – and modern graffiti art going on; a blend, maybe, of what you might describe as the best of modern and the best of traditional tattooing. Mariñe does not deny any of this. "Yeah, I think my work can incorporate very different influences from the old and new times. I'm very interested in the primitive cultures and the way they created their icons and totems. The art which Inuit people created or the hieratic scale are some examples among many others and I think I try to capture some of those things in my drawings. Also, I take a lot from traditional tattooing, especially in the execution of the tattoo. Obviously I live in the modern times and I also love modern art and tattoos and I'm influenced by them, too, in many ways."

For me, the most standout feature of her work are the characters. Whether it's a cat or a rabbit or a bird she's



THE SHAPE AND THE COMPOSITION ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE MEANING FOR ME – SOMETIMES CUSTOMERS COME WITH REALLY DEEP MEANINGS THAT JUST DON'T WORK AESTHETICALLY

drawing, I get an instant sense of connection when looking at the piece. I ask what helps her decide the personality within each piece, whether it's by looking at the client and deciding what will suit them best, or if there is some other method going on.

"I don't know, I guess it's something that happens naturally within my process. When I'm creating a character, I just go with my intuition and that tells me if this is the expression I want or not. Maybe I look for something weird to bring out, something disturbing that grabs you in this moment and tells you something."

I can see the intuitive work in there, for sure. There's a definite mystical side to what Mariñe does, a delving into the shadows of the mind, an occultic vibe. I wonder if this is born out of a wider interest in such things, if there's something truly witchy going on here, and suddenly we're talking about Ouija boards.

"I never dared to play Ouija in my life, it was too scary," she laughs. "But yes, you are right, I have been always been attracted to the mysterious, the esoteric, all things dark. I don't know where this comes from. I guess these kinds of things have a lot of draw naturally because, as people, we're inherently curious and fearful."

When it all boils down, what inspires Mariñe most is



WHEN I'M CREATING A CHARACTER, I JUST GO WITH MY INTUITION AND THAT TELLS ME IF THIS IS THE EXPRESSION I WANT OR NOT

art. And not just the product of art, but its process, too. "I've been always fascinated by art in general and I get inspiration from very different periods and artists. It would be impossible to name all of them but, for example, there's the romantic medieval paintings, the great Bosch. The artistic movements in the 20th century like Surrealism and Dadaism. Otto Dix, Dubuffet, Claude Cahun. Street art. Postmodern or contemporary artists like Francis Bacon, Luis Gordillo, Louise Bourgeois and Ryan Hewett, among many, many others."

In the tattoo world, she gets a lot from other surrealists such as Jef Palumbo, Peter Aurisch, Marcin Surowiec, David Côte, Timur Lysenko and Bouits just to start with. "I could

name many other amazing tattoo artists that are breaking the limits and making amazing art on skin," she says.

Beyond that, Mariñe draws from the art that is in all things. The rhythm and creativity that flows through life itself and the magic of it all. She cites a wide range of things: human and animal behaviour, relationships, nature, religion, rituals, anthropology and just the daily bounce of modern living.

And music, of course.

"Yes, music is a fountain of inspiration," she enthuses. "It's something that gives us many pleasant moments, stimulates us and makes us feel." She tells me she likes dark music, then emotive music, before deciding she likes pretty much all music. "I think the music I like is kind of linked to the kind of art I like," she tells me. "How it feels."

And immediately I'm starting to see the links between all of the things Mariñe draws inspiration from, how one connects to the other to create and evolve the kind of art she herself puts out.

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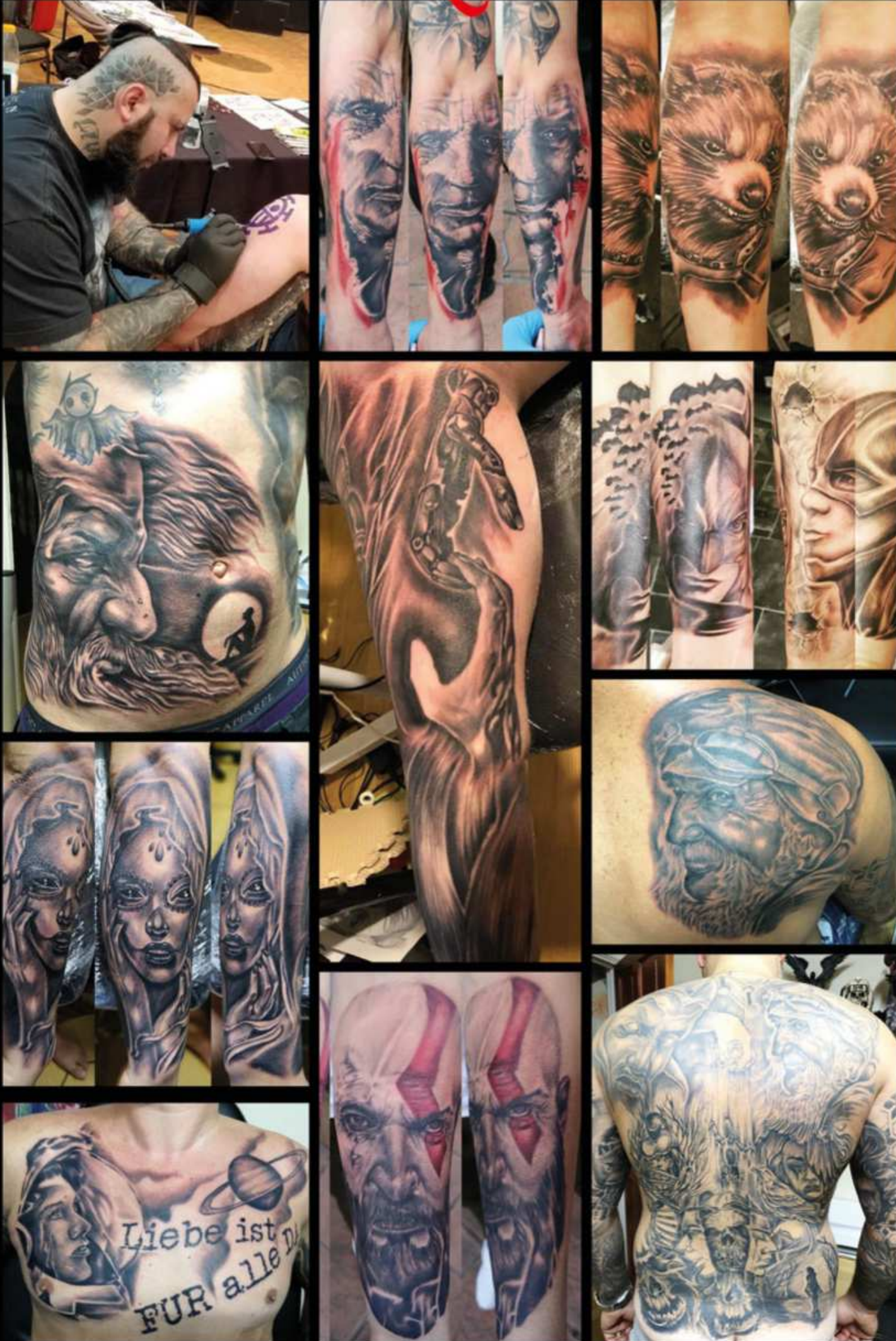


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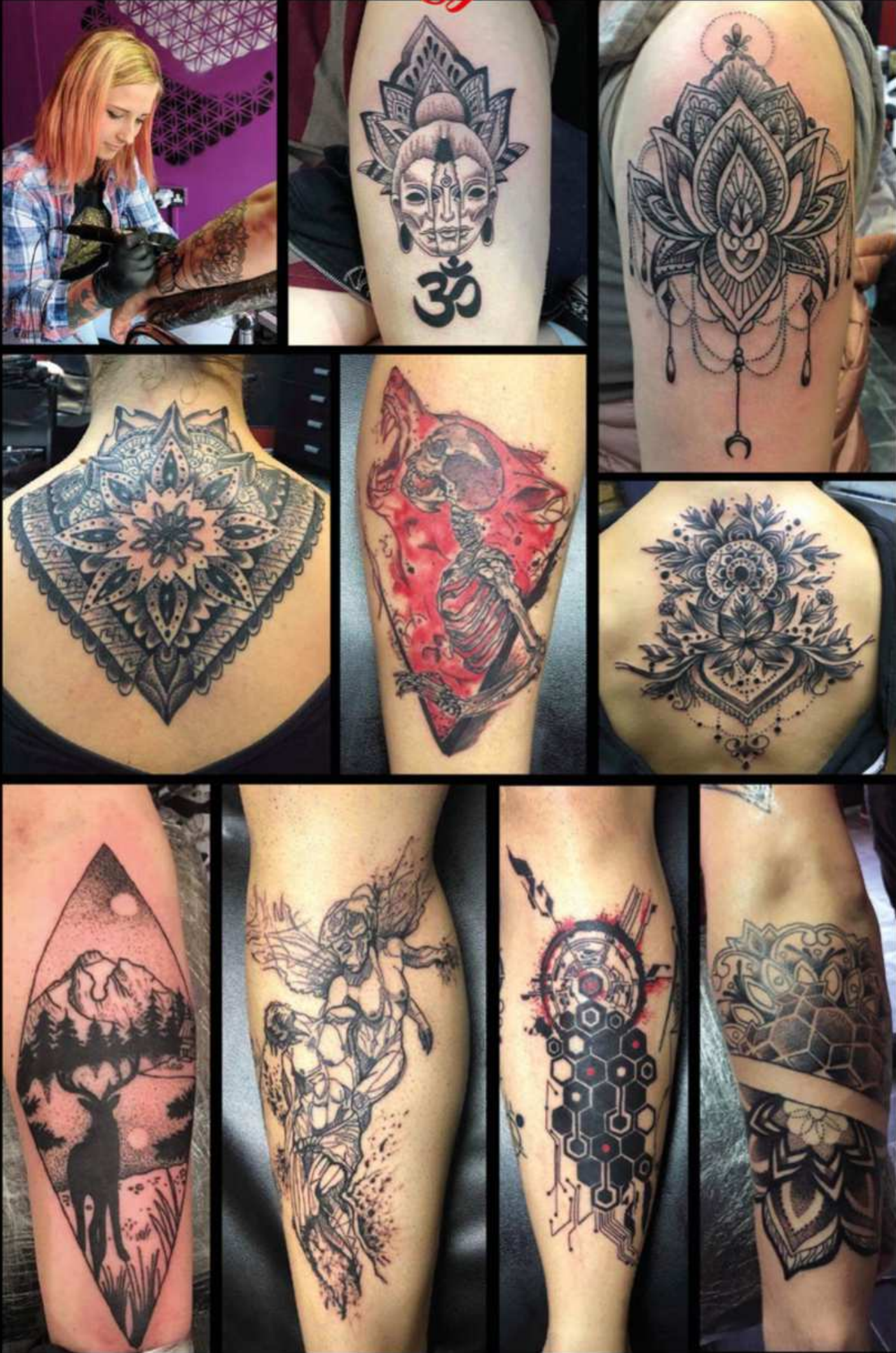
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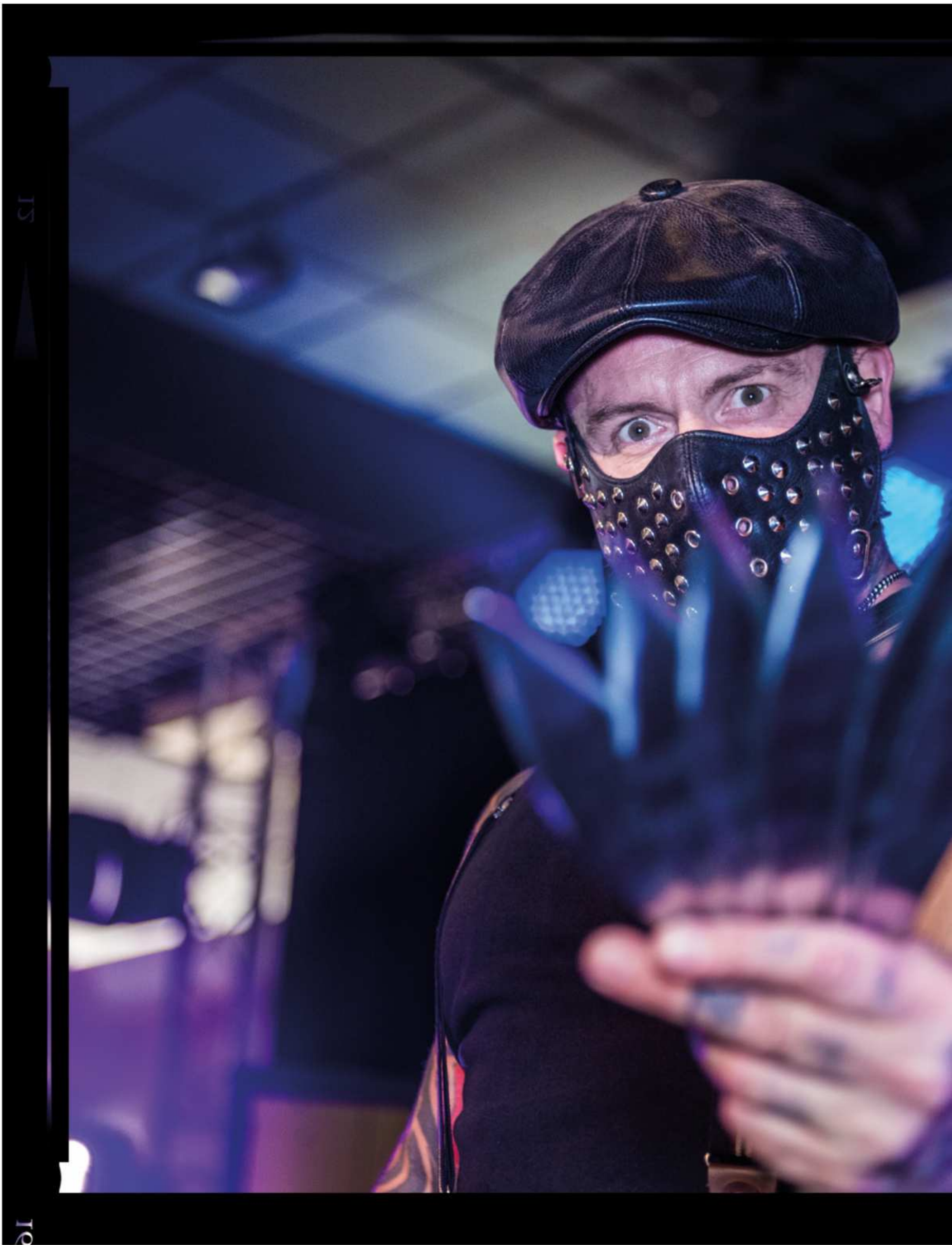


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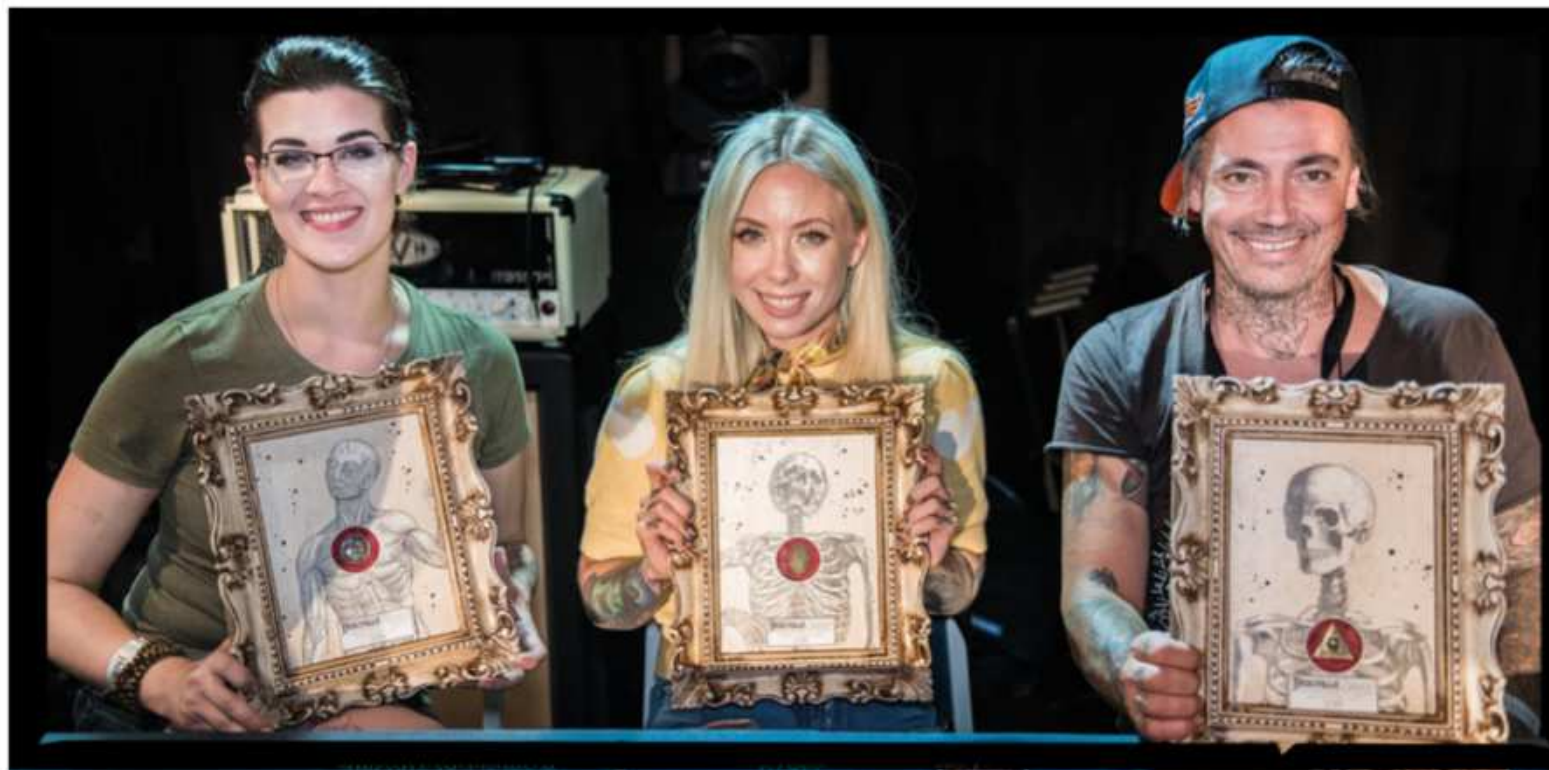
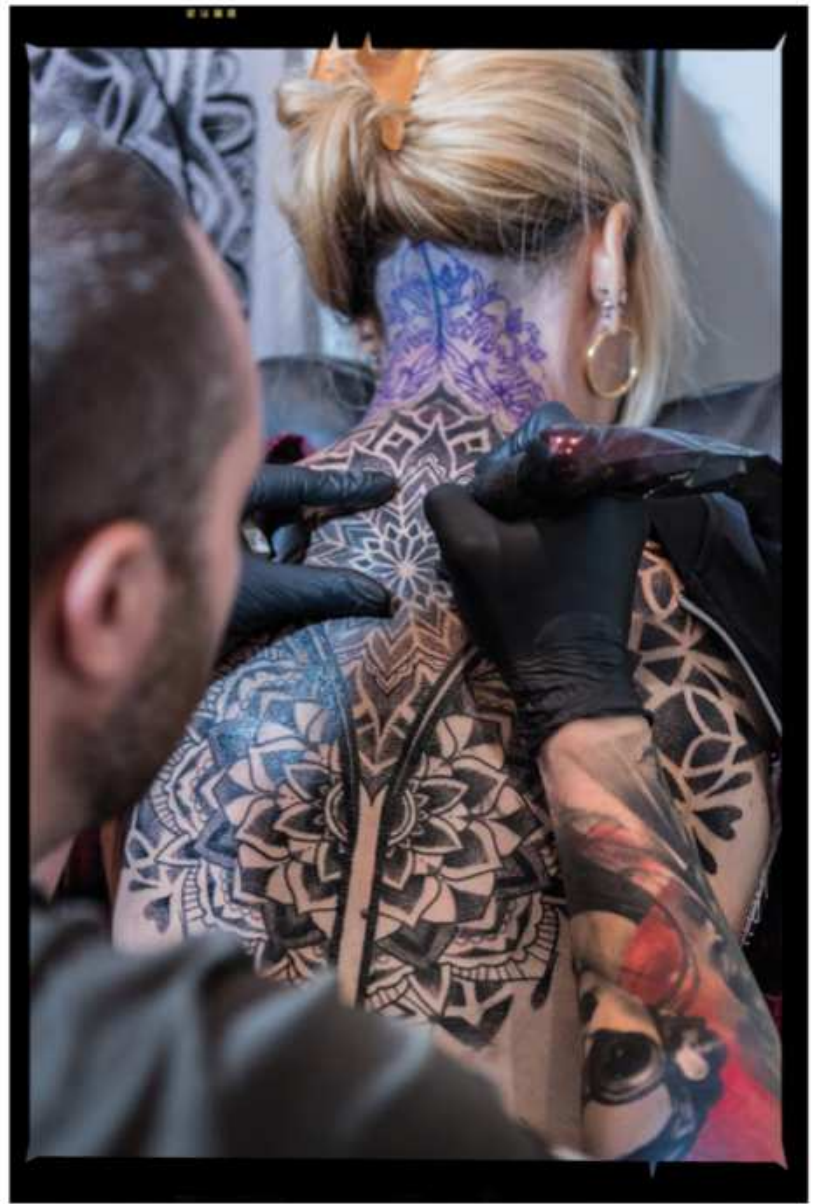
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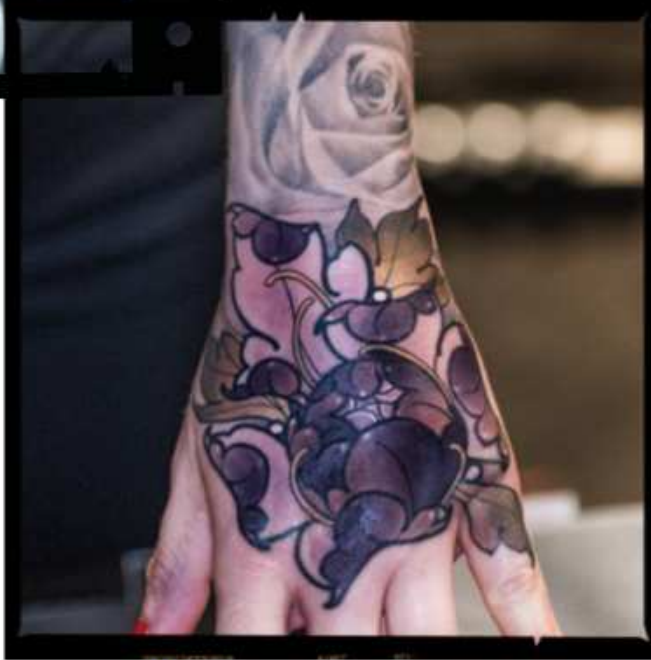


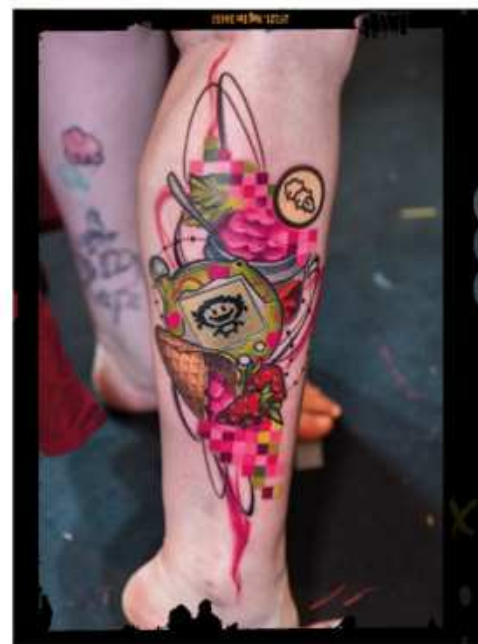
Our ever jet lagged European photographer, Kamila Burzymowska, sure has been busy lately... this issue, we take a look at the work from the Deauville Tattoo Festival a few weeks back. This is a great looking show and actually pretty easy to get to from the south coast as it's in Normandy.

With around 250 tattoo artists working—and a good split of international talent at that - it was also a pretty big show. 250 to 300 artists is actually becoming the norm these days and that's a really good sign if you thought tattooing might be peaking out...









HOUSE OF PAYNE

Most artists start tattooing as a means to get away from what they're doing. Not Josh Payne. As a student studying special effects, he picked up tattooing with the goal of making money to pay for school. He planned to eventually leave it behind, but things didn't exactly turn out that way. Fast forward to April 2018 and he was being crowned the winner of Ink Master Season 10

Josh Payne · Alchemist Art Studios
Cortland, New York
Instagram: JoshPayneTattoo

“I never had any intentions of tattooing,” declares Josh Payne. “It was a way to make some money and get some fun knowledge in the creative field. I have four brothers and not all of us would get money to go through school, so it was a good way to make money off kids and pay for college. It didn't look like a big career then,” he adds. “Not like what it is now. Now, it's everyone's dream career.”

The need to find a student job isn't anything exceptional, but out of all the options available, choosing tattooing as a part-time gig isn't exactly commonplace. “I don't do real well with order and structure,” he explains when I jokingly ask why he didn't consider working retail instead. “I always loved the freedom and fun of tattooing—it's very addicting. There is no way to put me in a 9 to 5 position. It just wouldn't happen.”

What did happen was that the more he tattooed, the more he got into it and, eventually, he forgot all about the special effects career he was initially pursuing. “Over time,

with tattooing, you start to market yourself,” he says. “I really like the one-on-one with a client—you create these incredible bonds and friendships. Special effects work is done behind closed doors in a room with a group of people. With tattooing, you're exposed to everyone in the world. It's amazing the people around the globe I can call friends. I could not ask for a better job!”

Despite the fact that he didn't finish his FX degree, Payne still likes to “sculpt and play with other mediums” and would “love to be consulted for a special effects project, but as an artist. With tattooing, I get paid to draw, travel and bullshit with people, but if someone from special effects wanted some cool creatures for a project, I'd be down for that. But tattooing is my life,” he adds quickly.

YOUNG PAYNE

Once the decision to tattoo full-time was made, Payne set out to teach himself the tricks of the trade, which proved to be both a blessing and a curse. “Oh man, I have always





JOSH PAYNE ON... RUNNING A STUDIO

I owned a shop for five years and I hated it for four and a half. I will never do it again. I am not organised, I don't have a business mind and it took away from my art. Anything that brings that much negativity into my job — why would I love it?

been a sponge, but there is also a wrong way of doing things. I spent years learning bad habits I later had to undo," he confesses. That being said, "you can learn all styles of tattooing from anyone in the world and I've always been open and receptive to learning from other people. I like to put myself out there to learn and that has proven very well in my career."

Along the way, he had a good dose of support from one very special woman: his mom. "I don't know if she loved the idea, but she always supported it," he laughs. "She actually received one of my first tattoos. I think she was the fourth one I ever did. She's been super rad. She has always supported me as an artist 100%, but me as tattoo artist, that's a different answer," he quips.

After honing his skills, Payne decided to run his own studio and, seven years ago, opened the doors to Ascend Gallery in Cortland, New York. Then, right before going to compete on Ink Master in January 2018, he sold it. "I wanted to build a community of artists where people could learn, grown, etc., but what I realised was that I am not the boss type," he explains. "I don't like the responsibilities of being an owner. I like just being an artist, so this summer I opened a private studio with Thom Bulman who was on Ink Master Season 9."

Alchemist Art Studios made its grand debut this past July and, despite his newfound fame, Payne decided to stay put in Cortland, which has a population of just under 19,000. "I couldn't possibly survive in the city," he laughs. "I don't like driving into a city even for the day. I hate cities. I like to go home and drive down a back road. I like to have no one around."



WINNING THE CROWN

Of all the artists who have competed on Ink Master over the years, only a handful can say that they've been crowned Ink Masters. That select group includes Payne who won the show's tenth season, dubbed Ink Master: Return of the Masters, when he competed as part of alum DJ Tambe's team. A feat he never expected to achieve.

"You put yourself out there for the show, you build yourself up to deal with all the challenges and you may love and hate many things that happen, but I was so caught off guard [by the win]," he admits. "I was really expecting to lose, even though I'm confident in my work. I just didn't expect it. The moment was wilder than anything I have ever dreamt of. It was really surreal."

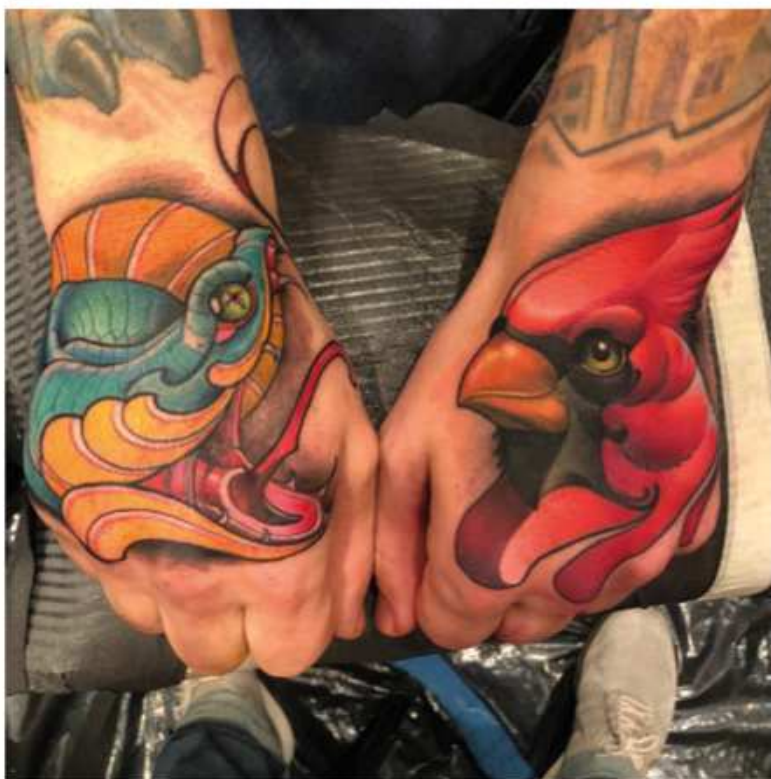
"The hardest part was physically surviving everything," he elaborates, recalling his stint in front of reality TV cameras. "That includes the length of time all the challenges needed. They do a good job of making it difficult to get through a day. There are long days, mental critiques, etc. I am mentally strong and it broke me down."

"I give my respect to anyone going through it," he adds. "So much respect. You definitely go in there and learn a lot about yourself. I also ended up getting really tight with people. You come away from the show with friendships—that alone was worth it!"

Which is something fans of the series may be surprised to hear. As it turns out, all of the artists "got along really well, but they don't show that as much. Sure, there were days we argued and complained, but overall it was a great experience."

JOSH PAYNE ON... HIS FAVOURITE TRAVELS

I love Italy. Some parts can be dirty and covered in graffiti, but I really love it. The people are awesome, the culture is amazing and I loved that you would just turn a corner and see the most gorgeous architecture and history. I also spent a month in Peru. The people there have absolutely nothing but will still give you the clothes off their backs. I'd love to dive the Great Barrier Reef or go to South Africa and dive with great whites.



JOSH PAYNE ON...NON-TATTOO HOBBIES

Oh man, there are times when I'm not tattooing in life?! [laughs] I'm always tattooing! But lately I really enjoy hanging with my dog, being on a motorcycle, being outdoors and being active.

In addition to building friendships, Payne also did a lot of growing on the show. "I was an already established artist, but I learned so much being there," he reveals. "I never expected to go in and walk out a better artist. I wish they would show more of that—how much everyone's art improves. It literally is a three-month intensive art boot camp and if you want to come out a better artist, then you are going to."

As for the fame that's blossomed out of the experience, he could do with a little less of that. "It almost makes it hard to do things," he says. "I have always attended conventions and the people are amazing and they just want to come and talk to you, but then you talk to lots of people and you also tattoo and it's exhausting. That is why I've recently taken some time off the road, so I can just breathe and enjoy the wave. I went into all of this to see how it would play out and I enjoyed it, but I'm going to keep my head down and keep tattooing."

Looking ahead, Payne admits that he's not sure what's next. "I'm just trying to figure that out," he says. "That is the million-dollar question for me right now. I am debating moving to an island, living in a tiny house and building a small studio. I like seeing how the other side of the world lives. Otherwise, nothing is really next—just keeping my head down. Any time you achieve a goal in life, it is not an ending but something that keeps making you move forward towards another step and another goal."

So who is Josh Payne summed up in just one line? "Oh man!" he laughs. "Josh Payne is losing his mind!" ▣

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Spirit of Evolution

If there's one industry in the world that refuses to stand still, it's tattooing. And when it comes to perfection of execution in the realm of black and grey, here is an artist leading the way. Master of gothic surrealism, Mumia, takes us inside his skull, where we unearth what tattooing means to him

“On a technical level, I create realistic black and grey tattoos. On a conceptual level, I'd say I like to work in an undefined territory between reality and fantasy, dreams and nightmares, where beauty and darkness coexist in harmony. Normally I define this as 'dark surrealism'. When I started tattooing, I knew the direction I wanted to take – I've always had a passion for monochrome, and black and white, in all forms of art and I've always been drawn to the dark and sinister... black and grey with a dark twist was the natural direction for me to take.

“I tend to incorporate a lot of old architectural and ornamental elements in my tattoos, morphing them with human and skeletal figures, creating surreal, haunting and intriguing characters. I like to work with a dark-hued range of black and grey tonal values that intensify the dramatic look of my work, but also serve the purpose of creating a long-lasting tattoo that will stand the trial of time. Contrast, flow, movement, depth and emotion are key elements that I try to incorporate in my tattooing, as well as a strong sense of visual identity that has the purpose to create a distinctive personal trademark.

“I get inspired by everything that surrounds me: art, nature, architecture, literature, graphic novels, video games. I get a lot of ideas when I'm traveling – I will find myself contemplating old architecture, graveyards, ironwork, relics from the past, then all of the sudden I'm visualising a crystal-clear face and tattoo compositions... the same happens when I am wandering in nature. I take a lot of photos travelling so I can use them for reference in tattooing. I am also very influenced by painters like Beksiński, Giger, Frazetta and Caravaggio, also comic artists like Philippe Druillet, Moebius, Giménez, Bilal and Kentaro Miura. The games Dark Souls and Bloodborne also inspire me a lot. All the alternative culture that I grew up with plays its role on my taste and approach. HP Lovecraft, dark fantasy, gothic, baroque and Victorian environ-



ments, set the tone for a lot my work, but I also love to work with nautical surrealism, post-apocalyptic and steampunk themes.

“I prefer to do large-scale work, such as sleeves, back and front pieces – you can really play with the composition of designs then

and how they adapt to the body’s anatomy. It is so rewarding to see the final result of so many sessions and hours of hard work... how all the elements flow, wrap and work together as a single element, to see how the tones settle down. This is the point where everything makes sense! I also like challenging and intricate pieces, when I can explore value, texture, and contrast to the max, but still keep it readable and balanced. Also, tattooing involves two things: the customer and the tattooer. It is crucial for both to stand on common ground for the process to be successful. I have a distinctive style, and normally that’s what’s my customers come for – they know what they’re going to get, so they are willing to give me a lot of creative freedom. They will give me some hints about the direction they want to go, and



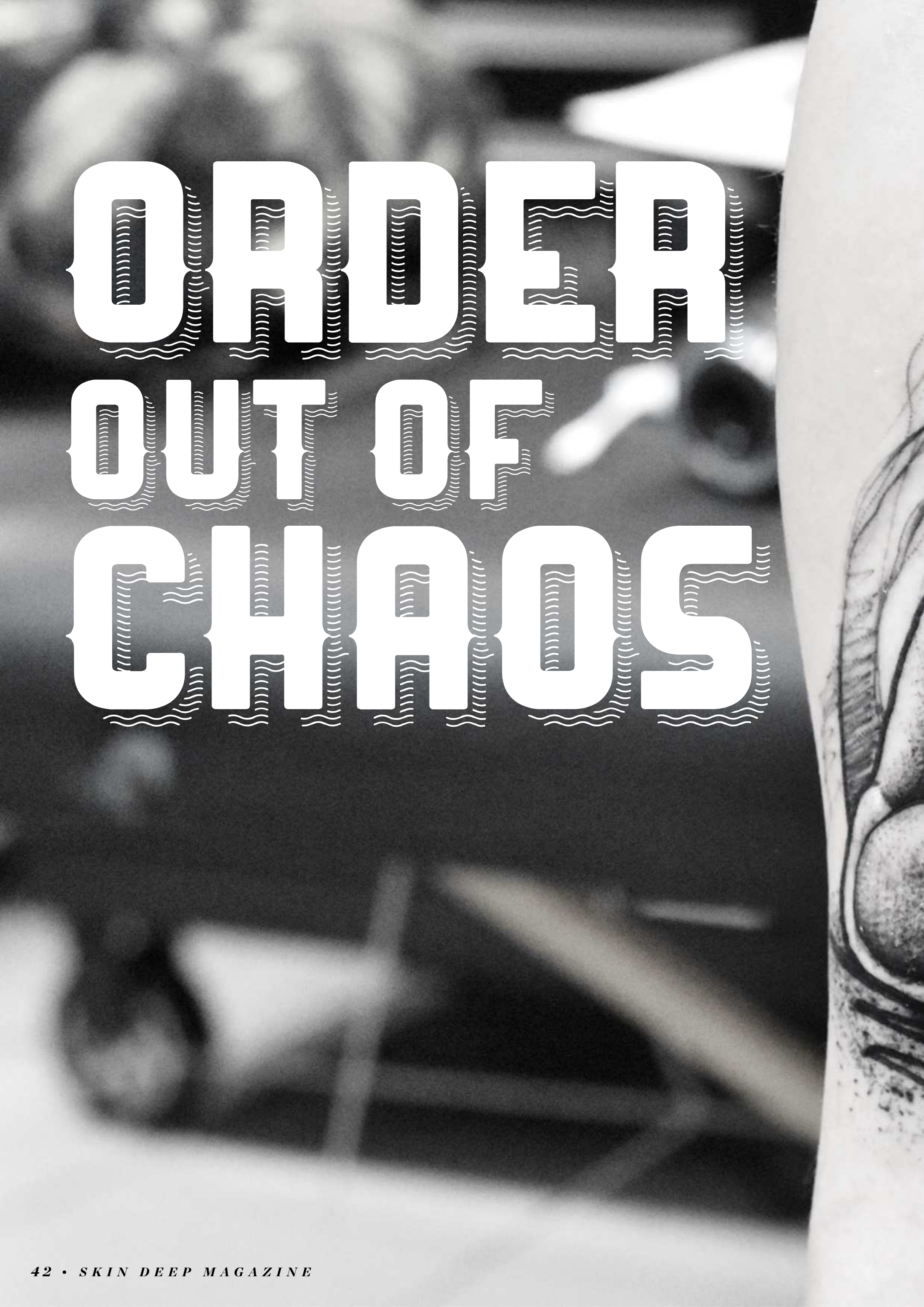
let me do my thing. I'm really grateful to have such amazing and dedicated customers.

"Tattooing is a constant process of evolution, every tattoo opens a door to new possibilities, a new approach. There is always room to improve and errors that we can learn from, and the best way to do that is to have a critical view and reflect on our own work. Since I am self-taught, I went through a lot of this trial and error – I can clearly see the evolution and different phases during my 8 years of tattooing, both in application and in the level of complexity of my designs. Since I create mainly large-scale work, customers return and I get the chance to see the healed results – my main concern is to have a solid and well-executed tattoo that will look good over time. Contrast, depth, and a good balance between sharpness and smoothness are things that I am constantly trying to opti-



mise. For the future, my main goal is to keep trying to push my level higher every day, to keep my flame and passion for tattooing burning strong." □

Mumia is based at
Copenhagen Noir, Denmark
mumia.tattoo.artist@gmail.com
Instagram @Mumia916



**ORDER
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@thehalfdecent

Obsessions can spark from anywhere. One minute your busy binge watching the latest critically acclaimed box set, to the next minute falling halfway down the YouTube rabbit hole, watching public freakouts or the best claw crane machine techniques to use in Japanese arcades

Words: Steven Guichard-Kenny



Luckily for us TheHalfDecent's initial obsession with graffiti led him to take up tattooing, a craft he has been committed to ever since. Moving from the wall to the body was a straightforward process for the tattooist, whose thick and sketchy linework translates flawlessly from hard brick to supple skin. An uncontrollable energy can be found in each of TheHalfDecent's designs, the artist using his tattoo machine in an attempt to fix and ground a rush of creativity to the head. Consequently, tattooing acts as a method of containment, trapping an idea via the permanence of the skin, where sketchy ink markings act as cage-like wires locking subjects in. The artist's commitment to tattooing is palpable, his work an ongoing attempt to control the uncontrollable.

TheHalfDecent is a pretty original tattooist's name, where does it originate from?

So the name TheHalfDecent is actually not just a made up name. My real last name, which is of Austrian decent, translates to 'half noble'. Having a background in graffiti

I always gravitated towards having an alias. Even though there is nothing illegal about the art of tattooing and murals, I still do like the idea of not everybody being able to type your name into Google and finding out everything about you with one click. I decided to change the words slightly because I thought The Half Decent had a better ring to it. Not only does it sound like a cool name in my eyes but it also teaches me humility. No matter how far my art may go, the name itself forces me to look at it on a lighter note. It may be good but it can always be better!

There is a clear graffiti aesthetic in your work, how has it influenced your tattoo work?

Graffiti was my first obsession for sure. I started doing graffiti around '06. Just your regular teenager being a dickhead and tagging stuff. I decided to drop out of art school after one year because I hated following the rules in which they enforced upon you. So I unintentionally ended up moving to Barcelona for three years which consisted of partying, fighting and vandalism. After living the fast life for some time I soon realised I should probably

start looking for something that can take me into a more positive direction. My roommate at the time (@woozmoon) was getting into tattooing and this sparked my interest. This was the first time where I had this feeling that if I just had the chance to learn this new craft it will give me some direction in life for the first time. Fast forward a few years and I ended up meeting my mentor (@stevesmack) in Toronto who gave me my introduction to it all. Graffiti still plays a huge part in my life but now I've just become better at being an adult on top of that.

Who was the first tattooist that inspired you to put down your spray cans and take up tattooing?

I don't think there was one particular person per se. It got to the point where I just felt in order to progress my artwork I needed to do something new. Tattooing from the outside looked to me as the ultimate canvas; it's so permanent. It's also personal, in the sense that once the piece has been created you have to let it go and probably never see it again. Graffiti is similar in a way, in that the

piece you painted might be painted over the next day. It teaches you to do it for the joy of it and nothing else. Although when I discovered Volko Merschky and Simone Pfaff's trash polka style it definitely inspired me to want to learn and find a style of my own.

There is great contrast in your work between clean, bold perfected lines and sketchy mark making, how did these two merge together?

When I first started tattooing I really focused on doing realism. I figured if I can sort of get the hang of the technical side of things in that department, shit would kind of fall into place afterwards. Soon I realised that realism pretty much means going on Google with the client, printing out the most high quality image of a lion you can find and then pretending to be a human photocopier and replicate it on skin. One day whilst working at a convention in Toronto I ended up doing five lions in three days! I'm not kidding. And that's when I started thinking "FUCK...This cannot be my future..." Shortly after I decided to go 'anti-

I FIGURED IF I CAN SORT OF GET THE HANG OF THE TECHNICAL SIDE OF REALISM, SHIT WOULD KIND OF FALL INTO PLACE AFTERWARDS





SHORTLY AFTER I DECIDED TO GO 'ANTI-REALISM' AND START THROWING THICK, BOLD, BLACK LINES OVER EVERYTHING.

realism' and start throwing thick, bold, black lines over everything. It was great! It gave me a sense of freedom from all this delicate and exact stuff I was doing before. I've come to realise there is no right way to do it, once you know the basics sometimes you have to just say fuck it and try something new to keep you inspired.

What tattooing techniques do you use to ensure these two work in practice with both complimenting the other?

A lot of my work is a combination of photographs with my more abstract work layered over the top. Essentially what I'm chasing is the perfect mix of order and chaos. I still do enjoy the technical aspect of realism; soft layering and getting lost in the small details. To balance it all out and keep myself from getting bored, I love pulling thick long lines. Smaller more sketchy lines allow me to add another

element and help guide the viewer's eyes over the piece in a more focused way. I generally finish a piece with sketch lines to give the impression that they were actually what mapped out the piece when you see the final result.

Many of your works are black and grey although some have a small burst of colour, how else have you experimented with colour in your work?

When I worked at a street shop and would do more walk-ins I would end up doing more colour pieces. I think it's important to be well versed in black and grey and colour. By no means am I an expert at colour but the basics should be there. Personally I prefer black and grey on myself, so I just do what I would want on myself. I can appreciate colour but I do think that black and grey has a more timeless feel to it. Things fade, but they all fade in harmony. Lately I've started adding hints of colour because it is easy to start



feeling kind of trapped in your style. People like placing people in little tiny boxes - "This is the style they do!" Every now and then it's nice to remind people that there is more. It's also crucial to remind yourself that adding something to your style here and there might help you discover something new. At the end of the day I don't think one is better than the other, it just comes down to preference.

Do you continue an art practice outside of your daily work? What does this work bring to your tattoo designs?

It seems that the older I get the more influences I seek. If I stick strictly to tattooing it starts to feel like homework after a while and I start to feel like my work is getting a little bit stale. I can get really obsessive about certain things (tattooing being one them), so I have to force myself to take little breaks here and there so I don't burn out. This

IT SEEMS THAT THE OLDER I GET THE MORE INFLUENCES I SEEK

is where other hobbies come into play. Graffiti will always be a huge go-to for me. Whether it's legal or illegal it always clears my head and gets the juices flowing again. I've been dabbling in photography more and more which has given me a ton of inspiration. The simple act of looking at the world through a lens is a completely new ball game; understanding light and composition, balancing what to include and what to leave out. These are all factors that are also relevant in tattooing so I find it actually helps my tattooing practice by stepping away from it and enjoying other forms of creativity.



THERE IS AN AWESOME AMOUNT OF INSPIRATION OUT THERE, BUT ON THE FLIP SIDE THERE IS AN AWFUL LOT OF PLAGIARISM

How have you developed your tattoo style over the course of your career so far?

It's the never ending chase for one's style! It's really easy to forget where you started from and to appreciate how far your style has actually come. The development is never ending really. Generally it goes something like this. I find an element I want to add. I add it. Get super pumped on the tattoo. After analysing it for fifteen minutes I then decide I should have done it all differently and get this feeling of wanting to change it. It's all about adding things you think you would enjoy tattooing, and then seeing if it's something you want to keep doing for a while. When you're tired of it, ditch it and start over.

How would you describe your tattoo style?

That's a hard question to answer because it changes constantly. What I am trying to achieve at the moment is a balance of discipline (Realism) and playfulness (Illustrative sketch style). This also seems to be a pretty good representation of what I'm trying to achieve in life as well, some days more successfully than others.



How can a tattooist make their work iconic?

In the age of social media it seems to me that the concept of 'style' is getting more and more diluted. There is an awesome amount of inspiration out there, but on the flip side there is an awful lot of plagiarism. I don't think I've been in the industry long enough to really see the full extent of this but even in the short time I've noticed that a lot of people lack originality and simply choose to copy. But on a positive note, this makes it a lot easier to stand out if you do find a style that you can call your own. If the intention is there to create something that contributes something new to the culture I think it can be iconic.

What does tattooing mean to you?

Tattooing for me means commitment. The commitment to learn the craft. The commitment of having your body marked until you give it back to the earth. The commitment of continuously striving to be the best artist you can be for the people that give you the opportunity to mark their bodies for life. It's a lifestyle that we are very fortunate of being able to live. With the ever-growing distractions found in today's society, tattooing allows one to slow down for a change and focus on the bigger picture. ▣

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AARON BREEZE

AARONBREEZETATTOO@GMAIL.COM
INSTAGRAM.COM/BREEZETATTOO

CHRIS BOWATER

INSTAGRAM.COM/CHRISBOWATERTATTOO
STUDIO46TATTOO@GMAIL.COM





DARYL WATSON

INSTAGRAM.COM/DARYLWATSONTATTOO
DWTBOOKING@HOTMAIL.COM

DEK KENT

INSTAGRAM.COM/DEKKENT
ELECTRICKICKSTATTOOSTUDIO.CO.UK





DELBOI

INSTAGRAM.COM/DELBOITATTOOS
DELBOITATTOOS@HOTMAIL.COM

KAT WILSON

[HTTP://HELLO-SAILOR.ORG](http://HELLO-SAILOR.ORG)
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GENERATION LANDSLIDE

Written by: Fade Manning and Emma Young.
Photos by: Meg Seidel and Michal Kosawoski

Fade FX meets the Godmother of tattooing, Shanghai Kate Hellenbrand in Austin, Texas

Brighton based geometric dot work specialist Fade FX is no stranger to the pages of Skin Deep. You may have seen her documentary, 'The Point of No Return' screened at conventions up and down the country, the result of a 2015 journey into the Borneo jungle with a lone cameraman. The film captures hand tapped tattooing techniques with a headhunter tribe shot against a backdrop of deforestation and ecocide.

Fade had been travelling to the region since 2008, her connection to the tribe enabled her to be one of the few outsiders to learn the artform from elders usually unwilling to reveal their secrets.

Summer 2018 has seen Fade hit the road, starting at the Great British Tattoo Show, London, and onto Tattoo Flash Fest, France then across the pond to The Northern Arizona Tattoo Convention.

With this under her belt came the trip's highlight: Fade flew to Austin, Texas to meet and record an interview with her idol, the legendary 'Shanghai' Kate Hellenbrand.

The dictionary outlines a heroine as 'A woman admired for her courage, outstanding achievements, or qualities', but the lesser known meaning (from mythology and folklore) is not wide of the mark, 'A woman of superhuman qualities and often semi-divine origin, in particular one whose deeds were the subject of myths.'

To bring the legend into the 21st Century, Kate's Instagram profile reads: 'Tattooing since 1971. Writer/Author/Lecturer/Adventurer-Explorer'.

Fade knew something of Kate's backstory from attending a convention seminar she gave in the Philippines, but wanted to hear her stories first hand and discuss the path she trail-blazed so brightly while struggling to attain equality in a profession ring fenced and often violently defended by men.

It's safe to say Kate's battles were not mere artistic differences of opinion, and once included bikers threatening to cut off her thumbs if she didn't stop tattooing.

The bikers lost the battle. At 75, she still tattoos and carved a furrow for all female tattoo artists to follow.

Kate speaks with a light Southern lilt as she describes the cultural climate surrounding tattooing when she started out in the 1960's.

"When I started tattooing civilians didn't get tattooed and women didn't get tattooed, it was strictly men and military men at that."

In fact there were very few tattoo shops and just a handful of dedicated







owners who came from the world of circus and sideshow where they worked as exhibitors if not as artists themselves.

Huck Spaulding and Paul Rogers who first coined the phrase 'irons' to name his own, self built tattoo machines, both came from carnival backgrounds and became Kate's mentors and compadres. She references these early industry giants with a debt of enormous gratitude.

While straight 1960's society busied itself frowning on this emerging art form as something low class and undesirable, a steady stream of 17 and 18 year old servicemen came fresh from boot camp, wanting little tattoos to assert their

masculinity and prove they were strong enough to serve.

Kate was acutely aware of her oddity as a tattooist and in particular as a female tattooist, a novelty that could be cleverly positioned and used to generate increased business by bustling street shops.

Being inked by a woman meant extra bragging rites for sailors back at base, who often hadn't even seen a woman in many months.

Then, in 1961 tattooing was made illegal throughout the 5 Boroughs of New York. Astonishingly this ban was not lifted until 1997.



Kate has a knack of recalling past obstacles with a zen-like rear view, the underground allure was even more enticing and meant she had privacy to develop her skills, away from the public eye.

Apprenticeships didn't exist, so learning the trade was by way of introduction only, you were 'brought in' under the wing of someone such as Huck, where you studied the vocabulary of tattooing and watched incessantly. From here, Kate's generation were largely self taught, learning tattoo history, making needles, mixing colour and drawing flash, a method she describes as 'fly by the seat of your pants' al-

though on reflection it had its own intuitive structure.

Kate found guidance and training in up-state New York outside of the ban's jurisdiction and in 1971 she curated an exhibition of tattoo works featuring Sailor Jerry and Paul Rogers at the Museum of National Folk Art.

The artists themselves had always known they were worthy of gallery and museum walls but the event signalled the beginning of appropriate recognition and in return Kate was assured open access to their wealth of knowledge and the supported trajectory of her career path.

Fade tells Kate she is a figure of history and respected as a pioneer in the industry. She asks how it feels having lived through this era, seeing the commercialisation of tattooing and what it has become today.

Of course Kate modestly declares she never feels like a pioneer or any kind of legend even though, in the light of her achievements she knows she is.

For decades she fought hard to elevate and evolve public perception of tattooing but as it become a product of mass consumption something of its original ethos has been lost.

"I'm not a fan of the commercialisation of tattooing now, its completely changed, once MTV started and musicians and sports stars started getting tattooed it blew the doors off of it. Television exposed it to a lot more people but it's also watered it down in some ways and made it..." Kate chooses her words very carefully here, "not as holy as it once was."

"It used to be, a very secret and very special thing, it still is, but people take segments of it, little tiny bits and think they know the whole picture. That is far from the truth."

Kate describes tattooing as a spiritual work, a work of energy and a marker of your life, that every tattoo is a memorial of whatever was happening to you at the moment, a memory.

"I like to call it a craft rather than a business or an industry," she states.

The word 'craft' undoubtedly has a certain magic to it, something that denotes time, devotion and practice and an inherent striving for perfection.

Something of worth in its own right beyond currency and transaction.

The 'value' of any artwork is subjective and the irony that Fade is interviewing Kate on Friday 13th, one of the more commercial dates in contemporary tattoo's calendar, is not lost on either, "No tattoo should ever be \$13" Kate says.

The conversation then turns to gender bias, to the eternal struggles against sexist attitudes and physical harassment, present in any profession but more statistically likely in a male dominated arena.

Fade asks her to share her experiences, "Oh my God!" she exclaims, her tone revealing there are far too many instances of this nature to reference in one interview.

But she remains consciously focused on the positive, affirming that her association with artistic giants like Sailor Jerry meant she had earned credibility and respect from those who truly mattered, whereas only "those of lesser caliber" would jump on her in an elevator and stick their tongue



down her throat or try to cut her out of the clientele flow.

“Little boys can be very petty” she says with the merest sign of worldly weariness. And now? Do women face the same challenges? Fade asks.

Again, Kate keeps the faith while never denying the truth, explaining that of course you hear accounts of women artists falling prey to sexualisation, to potential abuse and pressure to perform sexual favours in return for an opportunity to get into the industry, to what would be considered gate-keeping, of course there are unscrupulous exploiters and she saw this first hand many times throughout her career.

But now women are excelling, making their mark in the industry, demanding respect for what they do and no longer need permission to wear tattoos of their choosing.

Kate reminds us that much of what we take for granted was not always the case. She had always wanted a clipper ship on her upper arm, or ‘man spot’ as it was known and was turned down as this was considered an exclusively male tattoo in an exclusively male placement.

Eventually, after waiting 40 years she had the ship tattooed, it is her favourite.

Kate’s studio walls are dressed with memorabilia. Sailor Jerry’s navigation equipment, used while he travelled to

40 Pacific Islands, hold pride of place, but the most unique artefacts present are the tattoo machines he gifted to her, passed down and engraved with the inscription ‘For Kate’.

It came as an immense surprise and huge honour that Kate offered to tattoo Fade with Sailor Jerry’s own machine during her stay and Fade now wears Kate’s clipper ship as a ‘monumentalisation’, both of their time together and as a marker of the ascendancy of tattooing for women, a reminder of how far we have come.

Being tattooed by Kate herself, with a machine from the international tattoo archive is a hugely significant moment in Fade’s career. She counts her blessings slightly satirically noting it’s thanks to trailblazers such as Kate that she didn’t have to wait 40 years for it herself!

In context Kate points out that originally, globally, historically and anciently tattooing was actually always women’s work.

Men took it over when machines were invented, when it became a commercial entity, but before this it was considered a spiritual entity, a step in a person’s development and women were the best facilitators for this.

“We were the shamans,” she says. “We were and are the witch doctors of our cultures, we are the craft makers, we have always been the craft makers.”



Fade agrees citing The Nagaland people of North East India where the Queen tattoos the entire tribe. Borneo's history also outlines the tradition of a female practice, women tattooed other women.

Kate turns to reflect that after tattooing for 47 years she is now reaching the end of her career, meeting Fade has reignited her long life desire to travel to Borneo, Malaysia, Singapore, Bali and New Zealand.

"I'm very lucky I get to sit with whoever I want to visit," she says when asked who she'd like to work with in future.

"I love to watch other people work, there are so many and I'm lucky to have worked with all the greats. Filip Leu, Trevor Marshall, Leo Zulueta, Ed Hardy was a best friend, Zeke Owen... Jack Rudy works out of my shop several times a year, Robert Hernandez in Spain blows me away, there are so many geniuses."

It's hard to think of anyone else to learn from, although she never feels she knows everything, there is always more to discover. Kate knows the importance of documenting her history and now tours a lecture 'Voodoo To Vogue' which she describes as a global overview of tattoo history from the dawn of time to present day.

Sprinkled with with anecdotal experiences from her own career, it presents the origin and evidence of a his-

torically female craft, one of warrior women.

The lecture can be seen at conventions but as in 1971, Kate continues to educate new audiences beyond the converted and reach further frontiers in universities and art galleries.

She is also creating a Museum of tattooing with her new husband in Austin, Texas and has several books in progress, the companion to 'Voodoo To Vogue' and a compilation of letters and photographs from her lifelong friendships with the greats, 'Time of Giants'.

Another collection of photographs will appear in the New York Times and in typical modest fashion Kate only mentions her wide ranging, forthcoming autobiography last of all.

Having focused on Kate's enormous retrospective and ongoing achievements Fade asks probably the most difficult question, in the light of market saturation and passing trends, 'Where is tattooing headed next?'

One not uncommon, current evaluation shared by some industry figures is that there is nowhere left to go, it's as big as it's ever going to get, that we're witnessing the end of tattooing, it will die out.

But how?

Thousands of new people get tattooed every day and



the protectors of the craft have always been the artists themselves, Kate reminds us that Zeke Owen brought sterilisation to the industry to combat hepatitis, not any federal agency or health department.

As to where things are headed, Kate speaks with awe that she could never have predicted where things are already, Pointillism and Fade's own speciality Geometric work, photorealistic portraits that were never possible until technology advanced to produce fine needles, "We worked with needles like nails, now they're whisper thin!" 40 years ago these styles were never possible.

Of course the rise of robotics could mean future tattoos are programmed and applied by some kind of souped up cyborg, but both agree deducting human artistry and application from the process is not the way to go, "A tattoo has always been an exchange of energy, from me to you. A human craft" says Kate. "An experience, a memory, you won't get this with a robot."

Finally, Fade asks what message Kate would give to the millennial generation of tattoo artists.

"Respect your elders" she answers. "We paved the way, we've seen it all."

When you're in our presence keep your eyes and ears open and your mouth shut. You won't blow us away with

a know-it-all attitude. This is a craft that is age old and respectful, that needs to be respected."

"Tattooing is in our DNA. Stay curious. Stay patient. Tattooing is the love of life and everything in it, it encompasses every science and aspect of art. Have a great time with it."

The words of advice are ones of reverence, newcomers should know they're entering the service of something bigger than they are. Something timeless shared by all humanity's history.

Never one to forget wider anthropology and academic study Kate quotes Charles Darwin, who after travelling the world came to the conclusion that human beings share 4 traits,

"They all sing, they all dance, they all masquerade and they all tattoo."

It's clear tattoo culture holds Kate close to its sacred heart, a 20th century warrior woman and anarchist artist who fought, undeterred by lawmakers and Hell's Angels alike to safeguard and deliver tattooing back into female hands. She paved the way for artists like Fade and for generations to come, for all those who revere artistic excellence and learn the craft, but who always look toward the new. ▣

*Fade FX lives and tattoos in Brighton and Hove, UK www.fadefxtattoo.com @fadefxtattoo
Info on Kate's Lecture 'Voodoo To Vogue' can be found at www.shanghaikates.com*

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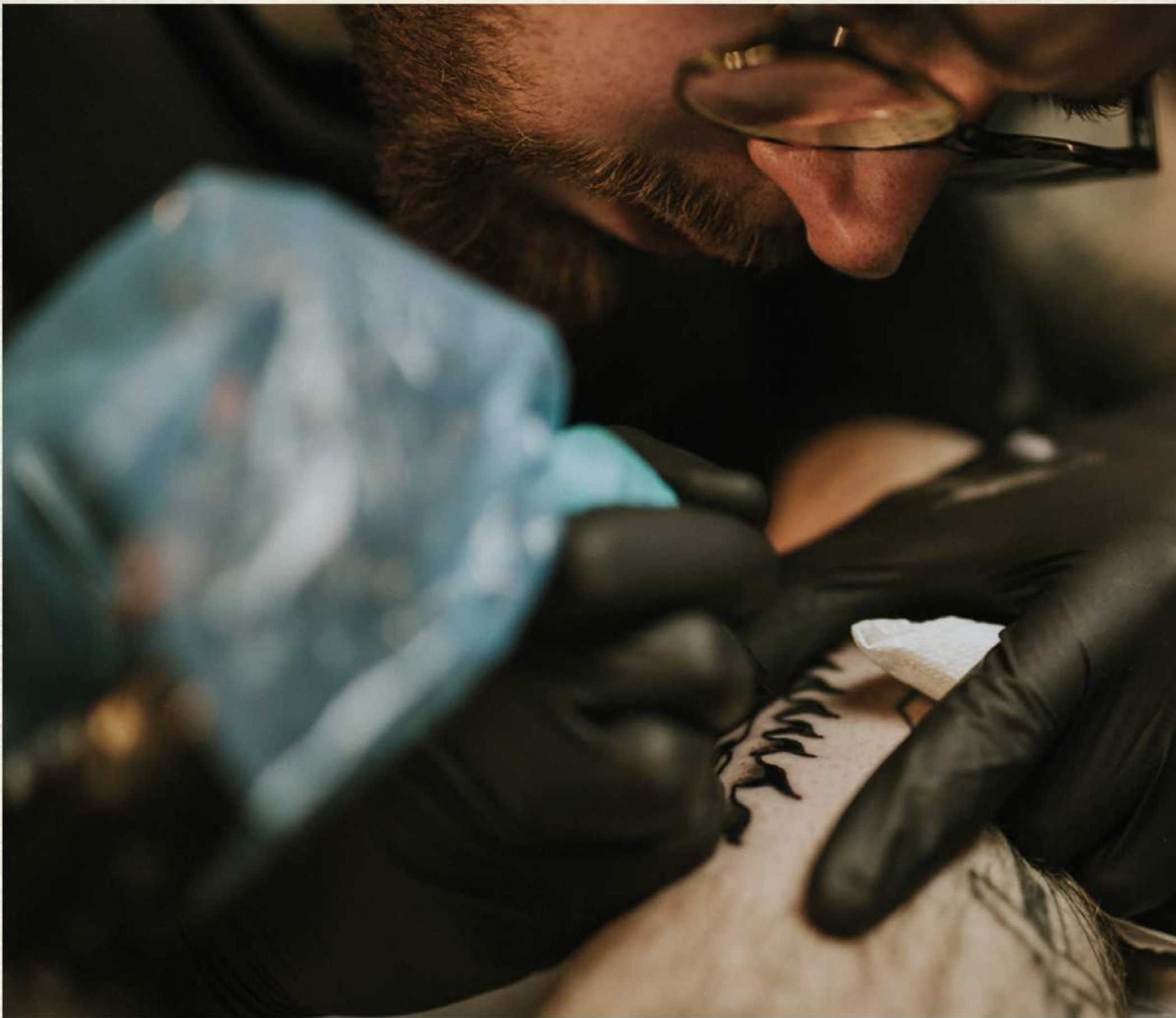
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Ink & Intuition

Wayne Simmons interviews MEGAMUNDEN, illustrator of the Tattoo Tarot

 [instagram.com/megamunden](https://www.instagram.com/megamunden)
megamunden.com



The set contains the 78 cards of the tarot deck, luxuriously packaged in a gift box. A 28-page booklet explains how to interpret the cards and conduct your own readings.

Publisher: Laurence King Publishing

ISBN: 9781786272058

Weight: 450 g

Dimensions: 161 x 110 x 53 mm

Tattoo and tarot make great bedfellows.

Some of the most famous tarot decks out there, such as the Marseilles style or Oswald Wirth tarot or indeed Pamela Coleman-Smith's iconic illustrations in the Rider Waite Smith deck, are not dissimilar in style to traditional tattoo flash. It's no surprise, then, to see some contemporary tarot decks, such as the Bonfire Tarot or Lana Zellner's Eight Coins' Tarot, riffing pretty heavily on this concept. Laurence King's Tattoo Tarot is the latest and arguably most authentic looking flash-inspired deck yet.

Laying all of my own cards on the table, I'll admit to being something of

a tarot nerd as well as tattoo nerd, having collected decks for over a decade. I've also some history with the occult in general, it being the focus of my dissertation at uni (a long, long time ago). Rather fittingly, this all came up during a conversation I had recently with Brazilian artist, Renan Batista, a fellow dabbler in the dark arts shall we say. The two of us got talking about the process of tattooing and both came to conclusion that this in itself is somewhat occultic: Renan described making a tattoo as 'the perfect alchemy', creating beautiful artwork, a tattoo to be treasured, out of the base metal of skin.

For Ollie Munden, aka the illustrator MEGAMUNDEN who worked on



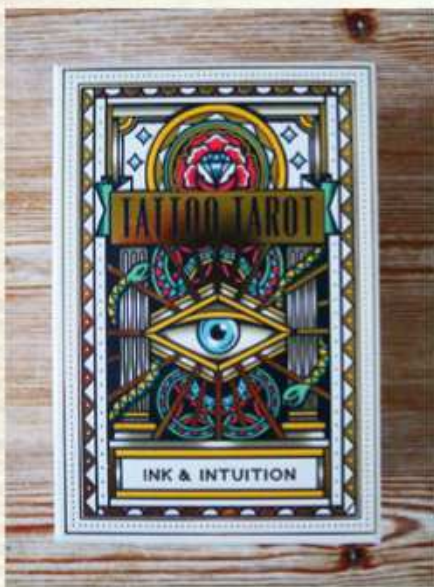
the Tattoo Tarot, none of this occultic mumbo jumbo resonates so much. His interest in the project is from a purely aesthetic point of view. His CV sees him move through several graphic design companies including the hugely successful ILOVEDUST, working with everyone from Nike and Red Bull to Microsoft Xbox.

“I didn’t know too much about tarot and by no means do I claim to be any kind of expert now,” he tells me. “Laurence King teamed me up with a professional tarot reader, Diana McMahon Collis, and we worked together on the project. She gave breakdowns of the meanings of each card, and then, looking closely at the iconography of the Marseille deck, I created tattoo style versions of each design. Diane vetted these and we collaborated on any tweaks that helped strengthen the legibility of the

We had our challenges, but together we created something everyone is happy with

read.” Ollie was primarily concerned with the tattoo side of things, wanting to ensure each card felt true to its old school, traditional roots. “We had our challenges, but together, and along with LK, we created something everyone is happy with.”

It wasn’t Ollie’s first project with Laurence King, or indeed his first tattoo-focused project. His work with ILOVEDUST involved a lot of travelling to the US, painting large murals for the likes of Camaro and fashion designer, Karl



I guess in general the tarot is considered as dealing in similarly recognisable and powerful imagery as tattooing deals in

Lagerfeld, as well as the Monaco Grand Prix. Ollie feels that American culture in general, their sports team iconography and tattoo styles, helped shaped his own style of art and he soon became known within the business world as the ‘tattoo’ guy.

“A Dutch company recommended me to Laurence King. They had told them that I was an illustrator that drew a lot of tattoo style artwork. The email came through asking if I’d be interested in doing a 100 page book of tattoo flash pieces that would be turned into a colouring book. I knew it would be an opportu-

nity to practice drawing tattoos over and over, which really appealed to me. I also knew Laurence King put out really nice quality books with special finishes and paper choices and this appealed, too.”

Ollie worked on the book before and after his day job at ILOVEDUST, burning the candle at both ends for the better part of a year. He teamed up with friend and co-worker, Johnny McCulloch. The Tattoo Colouring Book (Laurence King, 2013) was a success and Ollie and Johnny were asked to do a sequel, The Tattoo Flash Colouring



Book which saw release in 2017.

“I wanted to make this one a little different, a development from the first,” Ollie tells me. “I choose to focus on bold traditional tattoos and put my own twist on them; I based some of the pages on a US trip I had made so you’ll see little nods to different cities and landmarks in there.”

The Tattoo Tarot sees Ollie and Johnny work together in a similar way to how they worked on the two books, Ollie handling the artwork and illustration, Johnny dealing with the design and layout side of things. For Ollie, this was another chance to spin his passion for traditional tattoo flash in a completely different direction. Like me, he saw the tattoo and tarot as obvious bedfellows.

“I had actually been asked to take influence

To bring tattoo and tarot together made perfect sense, two reference pools of powerful imagery put together would surely work, right?

from the world of tarot before with other commissions, once for Stella Artois. I guess in general the tarot is considered as dealing in similarly recognisable and powerful imagery as tattooing deals in. So to bring tattoo and tarot together made perfect sense, two reference pools of powerful imagery put together would surely work right?”

It definitely worked for Ollie, empowering him to take his career as an artist to a completely new level. Since working on the Tattoo Tarot, Ollie has taken on an apprenticeship and is now working at Rock Steady Tattoo in Worthing, under the guidance of Leni and Laura Nikijuluw.

“It’s been a very big move for me as I’m no spring chicken,” he tells me. “I’m not old at 36 but I know many good tattooers, that I aspire to, came to it young. I hope my years of drawing on all kinds of surfaces and tackling many different kinds of design brief, and I guess learning to be self-disciplined, stands me in good stead to survive in the tattoo world.”

It’s interesting (as well as refreshing) how Ollie has chosen to go the traditional apprenticeship route in a time when many aspiring tattooists forgo such in favour of teaching themselves. In some ways, the apprenticeship model is not unlike the old occultic model of initiation, where secret traditions are passed on down a line from adept masters. For Ollie, it was just about doing things properly, as he saw it.

“It was Leni that approached me about the apprenticeship, and after sitting with him in his studio something about the whole scenario felt right. I’ve always felt nervous, I guess, being an illustrator that is inspired so much by tattoo style, stepping into the actual tattoo industry. With this in mind I wanted to treat it with respect and go through a proper apprenticeship. I’d want peers to feel I went about it the right way.”

The apprenticeship is part-time, Ollie still working at ILOVE-DUST for half the month, then the other half at Rock Steady. There’s no special treatment for Ollie. In fact he’s being put to work in a very traditional way.

“You’ll find me in the shop mopping each day I’m in. I set up for the other artists, take calls and generally get used to the daily running of a tattoo shop. I’ve not learned to make my own needles yet—I want to know everything there is to know about tattooing but I know that comes over time. To be honest, that’s a big realisation for me right now: the fact that I’m essentially starting my career all over again.”

Which in itself is so tarot—taking big steps in order to transform your life. Not only that, but Ollie’s inspiring others to do similar, his brother, Joshua Munden, having recently followed in his footsteps to join the Rock Steady team as a fellow apprentice.

Maybe some of that new age mumbo-jumbo rubbed off after all. ▣



INTO THE WILD

Freedom is the key to creativity, says Birmingham-based artist and tattooist Charlotte Timmons



For some of us, when the wild calls, we must answer. Charlotte Timmons has been navigating the tattooing jungle for 8 years, the last 4 of which have seen her set-up camp at the famous Modern Body Art in Birmingham. A permanent resident tattooer at a busy studio with regular international guest artists, Charlotte loves that she is frequently able to pack up tent, wave goodbye to the Midlands and hit the road. Taking her talents elsewhere has become an important part of her approach to art—many great artists would agree that being pushed out of your comfort zone mentally, physically and geographically can be the key to development. As a frequent travelling tattooist, Charlotte finds this “freedom in between commitments” essential for her work, and vital for the flow of creativity.

I DON'T FEEL MYSELF WHEN I DON'T MAKE ART... SOMETIMES DRAWING IS A VERY POSITIVE OUTLET FOR VERY NEGATIVE FEELINGS

There may be challenges along the way (Charlotte shudders to recount a series of unfortunate events that involve a failed power supply in New Zealand) but, of course, she agrees that the positive memories will always prevail: “as for my best experiences, there are too many to count”.

Every great artist is his or her biggest critic: “I feel like there is a lot of room for improvement [in my work]”, but Charlotte explains that this is an act that must be balanced: “I want to keep myself motivated enough to keep evolving and improving, but not pushing myself so far that I stop enjoying what I do because I am too critical of my work to be satisfied with it”. Focusing on creating

work off-skin has always been part of Charlotte’s approach—“it’s something I just have to make time for,” she says. “I don’t feel myself when I don’t make art... some-



I RESPECT MY CUSTOMERS AND REALISE THE WEIGHT OF THE COMMITMENT THEY'RE MAKING

times drawing is a very positive outlet for very negative feelings.”

As her art finds new directions on paper, she is able to filter these influences into her tattoo work—but despite this, artistic experimentations never take priority over the most important piece of the tattoo puzzle, the customer: “making a tattoo is a collaborative process... I respect my customers and realise the weight of the commitment they’re making.” Recently, Charlotte has been keen to take on the challenge of covering scars, something artists may often shy away from:

“I can report that they have all healed great, and I’m happy that people continue to trust me to do what I do.”

Charlotte’s work is clean, vibrant, enigmatic and in a word (OK, two words)... consistently flawless. She holds a firm eye on the development of each design, ensuring that ideas don’t run away with themselves, for



example: “trying to cram too many things into one tight space can look too busy... I will advise when I think there are too many ideas [from a customer] or if I think another artist would do a better job.”

Imagery wise (as well as architecture, art history and arts and crafts) Charlotte’s biggest inspiration is the natural world. In between travel and work commitments, she’s passionate about hiking, visiting nature reserves, keeping active and getting outside. It’s artists like her who remind us that the important work is often done outside of the tattoo shop. Speaking of which, Charlotte is currently making artwork for several charitable causes, and often donates work directly to organisations “where I hope it inspires the people who see it and makes them feel better,” she tells. “Research done by a neurobi-

RESEARCH DONE BY A NEUROBIOLOGIST IN LONDON SUGGESTED THAT LOOKING AT ART ACTUALLY RELEASES DOPAMINE IN THE BRAIN...

ologist in London suggested that looking at art actually releases dopamine in the brain, which is essentially our feel good hormone. I think art can make people’s lives a bit brighter, and I think it’s important to be mindful of what you can do to lift people who are in really awful situations up in whatever way you’re able to, even if it’s something small like giving them something pretty to look at. People only need a tiny bit of encouragement sometimes!”

Amen to that. ☐

Charlotte is planning to relocate to New York in the near future. To follow her tattoo work, she’s on Instagram @charlotte_eleanor88, or you can purchase prints and original art directly from her Etsy store: [etsy.com/uk/shop/CharlotteEleanorArt](https://www.etsy.com/uk/shop/CharlotteEleanorArt)



BACK FOR MOORE

THE RISE AND RISE OF FOREVER BOUND TATTOO STUDIO

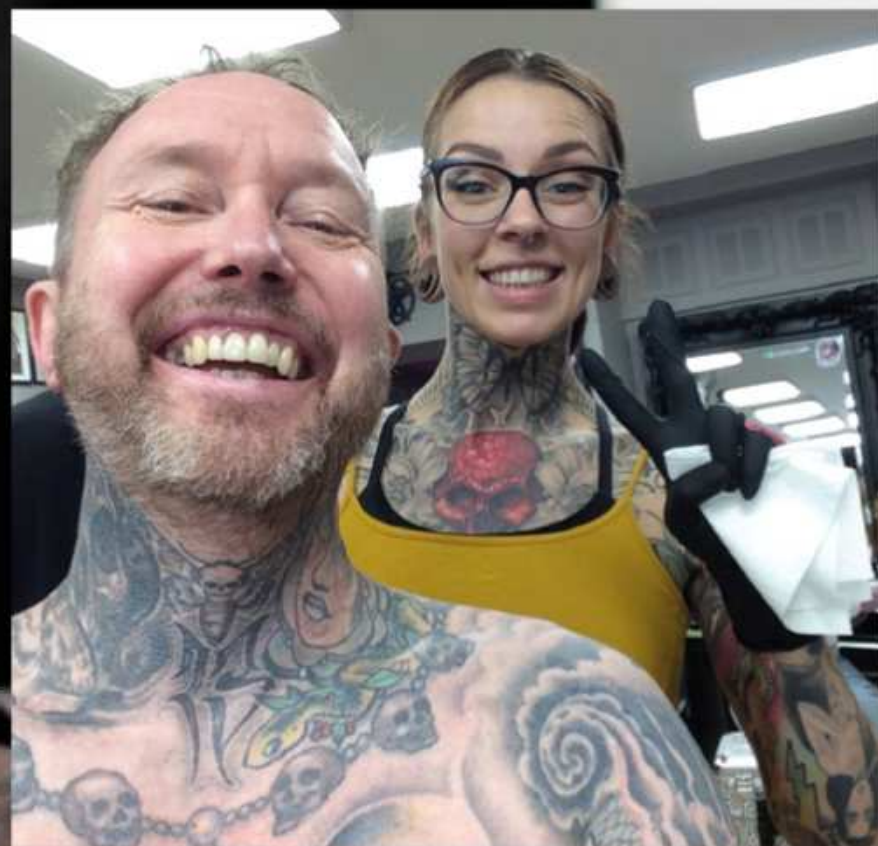
Since working alongside Toni Moore at The Great British Tattoo Show in 2014 I—Dave Perry of Revolver Tattoo Rooms—am fortunate enough to have also been tattooed by someone who I consider to be one of the UK's foremost female artists on a number of occasions at her Forever Bound studio in Bristol...

The last few years have been very hectic for Toni. Not only has she become a mother for the first time, to her beautiful daughter Indiana, but, after four years of hard work at her original studio, she has also now moved from her original site, tucked away in the backstreets of Clifton, to a much bigger, far higher profile, high street location, where she is now slowly slipping back into work alongside a team of extremely talented young tattooists.

I think it would be fair to say that things are going from strength to strength for one of the tattoo world's most glamorous artists. So, when I decided to get finally my hands tattooed a few months ago it seemed like the perfect opportunity to catch up with Toni, and find out just what has been going on since we last met:

So much has happened since you finished my back-piece. New family member, new studio, I thought it was about time we had a catch up. Let's begin with your personal life for a second. The last time I saw you was over two years ago, and you were newly pregnant with your daughter Indiana. How has motherhood been for you?

It's definitely been life changing. Having a baby is the most amazing experience but it has been a lot harder than I ever imagined. I have never felt so full of love and



GETTING BACK INTO WORK, AS I IMAGINE IT IS FOR EVERY MUM, HAS BEEN CHALLENGING BUT IT FEELS GOOD



I ALWAYS FIND CONVENTIONS A TOUGH ONE. I HAVE A LOVE/HATE RELATIONSHIP WITH THEM

so inspired to be the best momma I can be for her. She is incredible and it blows my mind that I grew a human!!

And how old is Indiana now?

She is 18 months old.

It must be hard to juggle your career along with your new family commitments?

100%. For ten years, my life was so focused on my tattooing career and my shop, but now I have had to step away and focus my attention to raising my daughter and learning to be her mum! That is more important to me right now.

I am so lucky that I have such a great team at the shop and they looked after it amazingly when I first had Indiana. It meant that I could spend time at home and not worry too much.

Getting back into work, as I imagine it is for every mum, has been challenging but it feels good to be back part time,

Pleased to hear it. And how about your other baby? How is Niles? (Toni's Boston Terrier)

Old and squinty!

As if things weren't tough enough you also decided to move home and move studio at around the same time. You don't do things by halves do you?

It hasn't been ideal, but it is what it is. We are renovating our home and my partner has started a new business. We aren't ones to sit back and take the easy route, you have to work hard for things you want to achieve in life. It's been tough but there are a lot of people out there that have it a damn sight harder than us!

How long was Forever Bound at its old address?

We worked from there for 4 years

Was it a case of outgrowing the previous building?

It was just time to move on. The shop at Chandos Road was a great starting point for the studio, but it was time for bigger and better.

So business has been good?

Yeah. I never imagined it would grow like this.

I must admit the new studio on White Ladies Road in Clifton certainly seems to have a lot more potential for growth...

The location is amazing. There is such a great mix of independent businesses along the road and we are only a few minutes' walk



from The Downs Park.

The studio itself is now much more of a street shop, although we very much still work on an appointment basis.

It wasn't my intention to take on such a prominent location on a busy street but I fell in love with the property and the location as soon as I saw it!

And of course you have plans for the downstairs area too?

Work has just begun on the basement level, which will have a much more private tattoo space (like Chandos Road). We will be offering piercing, in a newly refurbished room too. Hopefully this won't take too long to be completed.

I think the last time I was with you, you were pretty much flying solo, but now it seems like you have a wonderfully talented team working alongside you in the new studio. I think I counted five artists including yourself when I was up. Who are the new Forever Bound team?

My longest member is Alice SB. She was my apprentice shortly after I opened Forever Bound, but is now flying with her tattooing. She's doing better than I had ever hoped for, and in such a short space of time. Focusing on traditional work. She has such an amazing career ahead of her!

I STARE AT MY PHONE AND MY LAPTOP ENOUGH, I DON'T NEED TO STARE INTO A TABLET TOO...

Molly Rose is killing it with her black and grey work. I had tattooed her a few times whilst working in Bath and knew she would be a great addition to the shop. I never imagined what a great friend she would also turn into and I'm so happy she agreed to join us at Forever Bound. Her black and grey work goes from strength to strength and she is working on some truly beautiful pieces.

Joe Lumbard has an awesome take on traditional Japanese work. It's refreshing to see an artist developing his own style, instead of following what others are already doing. He also has a great ability to adapt to most styles, and has been working on some sick lettering.

Samantha Miles is our newest member. She has a passion for colour realism and portrait work. She also loves heavy metal, so how could I say no when she asked to work at the shop!

I have such a great and varied team. Everyone gets along so well, I couldn't have asked for a better crew!

And what about your plans for the future?

I plan for this move to be our forever home. I want to make sure my artists are happy and



love working at the shop, and that clients continue to come back.

We talked a little bit about convention work while you were tattooing me, and how neither of us have done a lot of it of late. Do you plan to get back on the road a little more in the months ahead or are your priorities more anchored in family and your business these days?

I always find conventions a tough one. I have a love/hate relationship with them. We will definitely be doing a couple UK ones as a studio next

year, which ones I'm not sure yet. But my family takes priority for me currently and I want to spend as much time with them as possible.

Tell me more about your artwork. What kind of work are you most enjoying taking on at the moment? And what would you like more of?

Very unintentionally, I have been doing more and more black and grey work. Stylised realism and lettering.

I have found it extremely hard to make time for my own artwork. I have done a few pencil drawings when I have had time, but looking after my daughter and running the shop takes up pretty much all of my time. I have to focus on that before I have the luxury of focusing on my artwork.

Do you still find time to paint?

I don't have time to paint at the moment either but I'm hoping to get back into it as soon as the new shop is settled. I'd like to get back into working with oil paints.

And I see you've resisted the pressure to switch to a tablet for sketching and designing...



I love drawing in pencil on paper, so why change it? I stare at my phone and my laptop enough, I don't need to stare into a tablet too.

But you do have a website, so you are kind moving into the 21st Century?

After 4 years I thought it was time we had a website! Ha!

And you still use your old D20 rotary. Would you say you are something of a creature of habit?

To be honest, after taking nearly a year out of tattooing to have Indiana, and then spending endlessly on moving studios, I haven't had the opportunity to buy any new machines for a while now. It's killing me and I can't wait to get my hands on something new!

And of course we have to talk about your own tattoos, what plans do you have for your own body? I see you have been lasering your right arm there...

Yes, although it's finding the time. I am starting my new sleeve with Sneaky Mitch at the end of the year, and I have a few more little pieces in the pipeline. There are so many talented artists out there but my space is so limited now, there may be some more lasering to be had!

How did you find the process? Painful?

The laser is horrible but worth it.

You used to do a lot of high profile photo-shoots and tattoo modelling back in your earlier days. Are there any pictures you look back on at all and cringe at? Would you ever do glamorous shoots with photographers again in the future? Or are those days behind you now?

Not at all. I have changed an awful lot since I did those shoots but that was me in my early 20s and it was fun, but I would like to do more in the future.

When was the last time you saw a copy of your chest tattoo (probably the most famous chest piece in the tattoo world) on someone else?

I've given up caring. Tim and I laugh about it now.

And finally, for anybody wanting to get tattooed by you, how long is your waiting list right now? And how is it best for people to get in touch?

As I'm only back in the studio part time, my diary gets pretty booked up. And I don't take on much new work. The best way is to email me, tonitattoo@hotmail.co.uk. □

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The SERPENTS of BIENVILLE

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Last month we discussed the power of social media, including the science behind dopamine loops and the addictive response created. The numbers associated with social media usage can be staggering, and can make us feel as if we live in an apocalyptic time

Here's a quick rundown on those statistics from last month. As of 2018, the total worldwide population is 7.6 billion people, with 3.1 billion people—roughly one-third of the global population—using social media. Every 15 seconds there is a new user to social media. On Instagram, over 95 million photos are uploaded every day, receiving 4.2 billion Likes per day. More than 40 billion photos have been shared on Instagram so far. Facebook has 6 new profiles created every second, and Facebook now sees 8 billion average daily video views from 500 million users. If compared to the size of a country, Twitter would be the 12th largest in the world. Social media is a growing creature, one that is also financially beneficial, even down to some independent business owners. The quick pace that my career grew, along with the careers of many other tattooers, was largely to do with this same internet creature. With the freedom of creating independent business, the other



side of that coin also holds danger. With social media creating Dopamine Loops and the need for constant validation, this can take a psychological toll on those involved, including the tattooers that use it as an everyday part of their career. Is it all doom and gloom, or could an idea we touched on last month be the key to unlock a positive usage of social media, and a way to look at the world in general? That key could be Dunbar's number.

To refresh you from last month, in 1990, British anthropologist Robin Dunbar proposed a suggested cognitive limit to the number of people with whom one can keep stable social relationships; these are relationships in which an individual knows who each person is and how each person relates to every other person in their circle. Dunbar's study used the average human brain size, and extrapolating from the results of primates, Dunbar proposed that humans can comfortably maintain only 150 stable relationships. This number has been studied and challenged over the



THE QUICK PACE THAT MY CAREER GREW, ALONG WITH THE CAREERS OF MANY OTHER TATTOOERS, WAS LARGELY TO DO WITH THIS SAME INTERNET CREATURE

years, especially with the introduction of social media to our modern world. Could the key to the mass frenzy of the human condition and group-think be focusing down to small communities, instead of numbers that we truly can't comprehend? What if we changed our focus from an obtuse, unrealistic number of "likes", to the personal interaction with an individual? Let's look at how social media has changed the lives of individuals from one on one interactions.

Doctors thought Deborah Kogan's 4-year-old son, Leo, had a strep infection, but when his face swelled to unrecognisable proportions, Kogan had no clue where to turn. Within a few minutes of posting a photo of the sick child on Facebook, Kogan received a phone call from a social media contact, urging her to rush the boy to the hospital. The Facebook friend's son had had a rare autoimmune disorder called Kawasaki Disease, and she was convinced that Leo had the same thing. Kogan was tempted to ignore

this warning, then two doctors in her social network contacted her with the same thought. At the hospital, Leo was diagnosed with Kawasaki Disease, and although he suffered liver and heart damage, his life was spared.

An Australian woman looked to a mothers' Facebook group for help identifying a red lump on her toddler's

head. The photo the woman posted did not look alarming, just a little swelling behind the ear. Her friends urged her to take 21-month-old Gracie to the hospital immediately. Some group members had correctly pegged the swelling as mastoiditis, an infection that can lead to hearing loss, meningitis or even a brain abscess. At the hospital, Gracie had surgery, with doctors drilling into her skull to relieve swelling pressure. She made a full recovery.

Across the world, another toddler named Grace was also saved when her picture was posted on Facebook, but her parents didn't even know she was sick. Michele Freeman uploaded







COULD THE KEY TO THE MASS FRENZY OF THE HUMAN CONDITION AND GROUP-THINK BE FOCUSING DOWN TO SMALL COMMUNITIES, INSTEAD OF NUMBERS THAT WE TRULY CAN'T COMPREHEND?

an everyday snapshot of her daughter, and a friend who was a paediatric nurse noticed something odd about the child's eyes. One of the child's eyes reflected red light, as is common in flash photos, while the other eye looked white. Warned by her friend, Freeman had her daughter examined, and Grace was diagnosed with retinoblastoma, a form of cancer. She lost her vision in the affected eye, but the cancer was treated before it could spread.

Mary Evelyn knew her son would have spina bifida before he was born. She joined some online groups for parents of such children, thinking that this would help her family adjust. After bringing the baby home from the hospital, Evelyn noticed that he took long pauses between breaths while he slept. Her paediatrician said it was normal, but she was uneasy. So Evelyn posted about the issue online, and was urged to take a video to show medical professionals. She did, and the video got the baby

admitted to the hospital, where he was later diagnosed with obstructive sleep apnea and eventually needed a tracheotomy.

Here is one last case where a woman says that social media saved her life. Natalie Embry's condition is so rare, it affects only 1 in 10 million. After more than 30 years and trying to diagnosis it, Facebook is what helped lead her to it. Over the years Natalie felt like there was something wrong, that her body wasn't acting correctly. Doctor after doctor would examine her, but a diagnosis was always something they couldn't find. When Natalie joined Facebook she started seeing pictures that looked like her, and hearing stories that seemed all too familiar. She felt, in her words, like she was looking at "a tribe that I (she) definitely belonged to." This lead her to her diagnosis of Lipodystrophy, a rare metabolic disorder that causes improper storage of fat.



I FEEL AS THOUGH I HEAR THE SAME CAUTIONARY TALE FROM DIFFERENT TATTOOERS AND CLIENTS ABOUT AFOREMENTIONED "INSTA-FAMOUS" MONSTER WITHIN THE TATTOO COMMUNITY

Embry connected with a woman through a closed Facebook group, learning she was in the same state as her, and they were the only two people in Indiana living with the disease.

"Because of my Facebook friend I got into this doctor and I wouldn't be here today if it weren't for what I had learned on that Facebook page," Embry says.

Social media, Facebook in particular, helped Embry find a group she could connect to that knew what she was going through, and ultimately led her to a doctor that could properly diagnose it. Rare diseases such as Embry's can create a feeling of isolation for those suffering through them, but with social media, Embry found a community that changed her life. That small community of similar people made all the difference.

When looking back at the theory of Dunbar's Number we are presented with this idea that humans thrive on a limited number of interactions. We have seen that there are cases around the world where those limited numbers of people, those small tightly knit communities, are found online. Not only did these communities help the participants feel accepted, but in many cases, saved their lives. Could this be the key to breaking up the poisons of mindless Dopamine loops, intentional communities that

do something we all need: to talk, to communicate. We long for that human connection, in essence, it is the one thing we need most in life.

According to Ginny Graves, "crowdsourcing" and "crowdfunding" on social media allows people to collectively accomplish a goal. A mother was able to find a kidney donor for her sick child by posting a video on her Facebook page. Planethunters.org, a science social media site, have discovered new planets via crowdsourcing. Crowdrise, a social network devoted to crowdsourcing volunteers and crowdfunding charity projects, raised \$845,989 in the 18 days following Hurricane Sandy. Pencils of Promise used social media for crowd funding, which has helped the non-profit build 329 schools and educate 33,000 children.

Humanity has a habit of creating faceless monsters to take the blame for our own actions. We create the corporate boogey man that is taking all our tax money, or political group that is trying to destroy our way of life. Social media has become one of those boogey men, creating the antagonists monsters that are the "insta-famous" and the "trolls" that rip them down.

I feel as though I hear the same cautionary tale from different tattooers and clients about aforementioned "insta-famous" monster within the tattoo community.



YOUR CLIENT MAY HAVE FOUND YOU ON SOCIAL MEDIA, OR MAY HAVE HEARD ABOUT YOU FROM THEIR BARBER, BUT THEY ARE HERE NOW

From the outside it looks as if the focus is on numbers, followers and likes; a self-centred viewpoint. Yet from the inside, many are in a search for validation and a feeling of being seen for the hard work they put into everything, and being part of a community of people. As human beings we can only comprehend so much, and it starts to make sense why zen masters for thousands of years have said to focus on the present, it's all we have, but it's also all we can really know. We can only truly process the now, and the person in front of us in that moment. Social media can become a monster of incomprehensible numbers, feeding self hate and doubt, clouding our vision of the opportunities truly in front of us. When we step back we can see that it also gives us an opportunity to add members to our small communities from across the world; but just as with any power, it can come at a cost if it goes unchecked.

We live in a time where the world is at our finger tips. We carry devices that contain all the information we could ever imagine, devices just sitting in our pockets. We can look at works of art, and see tattoos from tattooists in real time, as they are finished, from the bustling streets of London, to the mountains of Kentucky. We have the opportunity for true interaction within a community of people, that as we learned earlier, could save our lives. Humanity has a way of taking beautiful ideas

and then running amuck. Everything has to be bigger, faster, tougher, newer, brighter, prettier, more and more, until we have completely destroyed everything that we knew and loved. Will the end of our tattoo community be at our own hands?

No, tattooing is greater than you or me.

I have heard for years about the pending tattoo apocalypse, "the end is nigh" has been said for almost as long as the patent for Samuel O'Reilly's Tattoo Machine. What if we just slowed that train down, stopped for a second, and looked at the people in the chair across from us. If we truly stopped and looked, opened up and understood the brevity of the ancient practice we are graced with being a part of, maybe we could avert that apocalypse, and remind ourselves that the only thing that matters is the tattoo we are doing at that moment. Your client may have found you on social media, or may have heard about you from their barber, but they are here now. They are not a "like", a "view", or whatever dopamine interaction, they are the real thing. The greatest part of tattooing is that it hurts like hell, and that throws our mind into what really matters, the now. No matter how it all turns out, I am grateful to social media for the career I have, but in the end, that career is only because of the person that is sitting in the chair across from me. ▣

perfect skin

*Take Liam Howlett of The Prodigy, Mo Coppoletta of The Family Business, add Doom-Head's Richard Brake, a splash of ink, a dash of body modification, and blend well. The result is **Perfect Skin**: a film about art, obsession, and the fine line between creativity and madness.*



Kevin Chicken is the man behind the movie which premiered at London's FrightFest this summer. It also takes London as its backdrop, following the tale of a young Polish woman, Katia (Natalia Kostrzewa) and an ageing tattoo artist, Bob (Richard Brake), who is looking for the perfect canvas on which to create his final masterpiece.

What follows is not what you expect. None of the characters are black-and-white, good or bad. Katia isn't an innocent. Bob isn't a monster. In fact one of the highlights of the

film is the way that both characters evolve while remaining utterly believable. "When I first read the script", Richard Brake says, "I was struck by Bob's complexities. It could have been so easy to see Bob as some crazy psychopath, but he's not. Then I met Kevin and he felt exactly the same. Kevin really wanted to make a very psychologically complex, character driven film, like early Hitchcock or those late '60s British thrillers like Peeping Tom. I did a lot of work creating the character before shooting—I always do—then I just fully trusted Kevin to mould the film and performance. I think so much of a performance depends on the director. That's why I love working with talented people like Kevin and Rob Zombie. I feel safe with them."

Perfect Skin is a film in which the psychological aspects of the story take centre stage. Think Psycho, Frenzy, Whatever Happened to Baby Jane—all very dark films but all

Kevin really wanted to make a very psychologically complex, character driven film, like early Hitchcock or those late '60s British thrillers like Peeping Tom



character-led and reliant on strong, central performances. Thankfully, it never descends into torture-porn. Kevin:

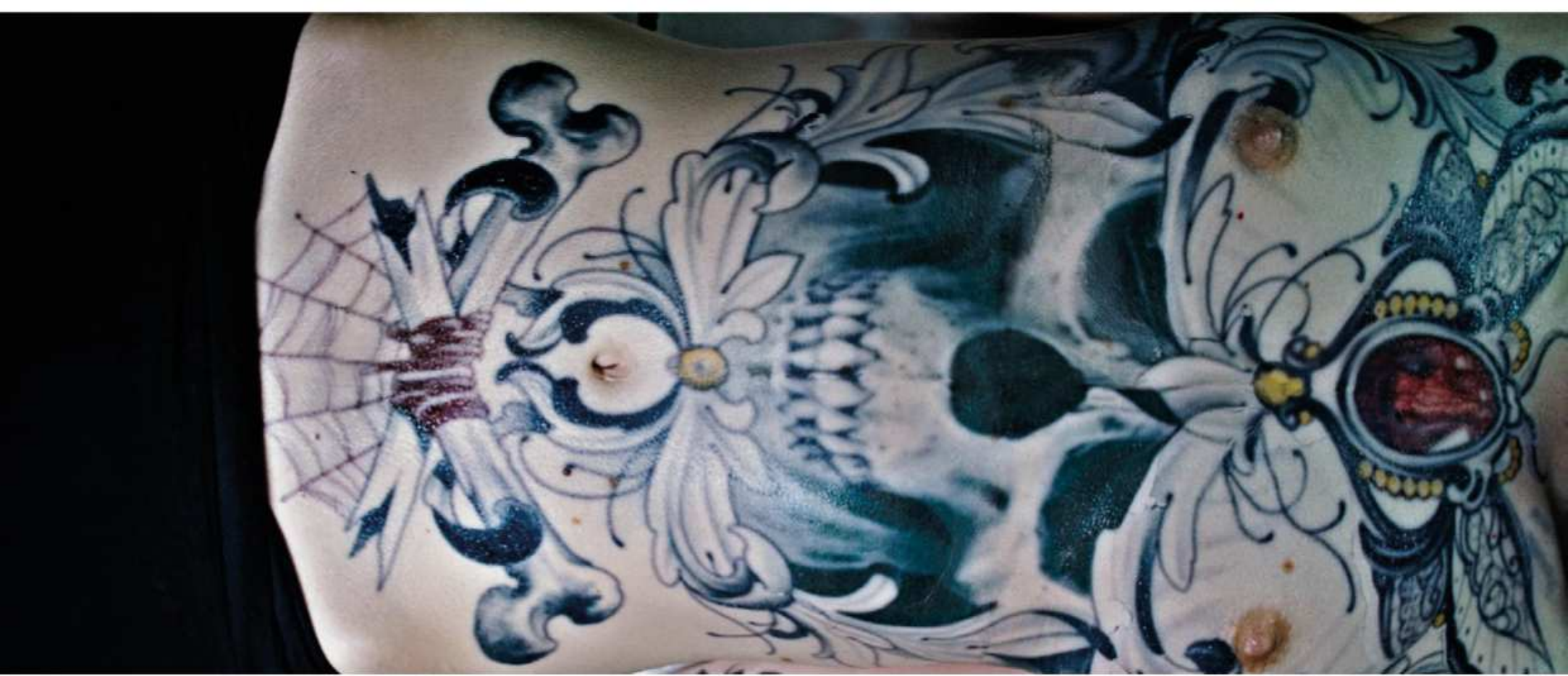
“It was really important to all of us involved in *Perfect Skin* that it never became that or had the usual ‘horror’ passive female lead. It’s easy to create shocks and shoot gore. It’s much harder to create completely real and believable characters in a genre film, but I believe that’s what we have achieved. I wanted the audience to follow characters that are complex and allow them to have a level of sympathy and understanding for Bob’s obsession. To do that, we had to create completely rounded and interesting characters. That was there, in part, in the script but the incredible talent of the two leads and the chemistry between them really brought Bob and Katia to life. Although we tried to shoot in order, it took incredible focus from Natalia

and Richard to keep their characters pitch-perfect for every scene. The way that Richard keeps the viewers sympathy throughout and Natalia’s transformation from a selfish user to a warrior-survivor were the highlights of the filming process to me.”

The Creative Spark

The spark of inspiration that became *Perfect Skin* was a late-night documentary about

A simple way I’ve always described it is a retelling of the Frankenstein story. Both are about obsession but instead of being about science this one is about art



extreme body modification. As horror fan, Kevin was used to viewing visceral scenes, but for some reason this imagery burnt itself into his subconscious. It also threw up some interesting questions: about beauty, about creating art through pain, and about how society views tattooing. Why, for instance, is it acceptable to have plastic surgery that we know doesn't look real or natural, but, when it comes to people choosing to turn their bodies into works of art, they're often seen as somehow damaged.

"I think", Kevin comments, "that all stories come about from the author asking 'what if' and that's how this film started: what if a tattoo artist had an obsession about finding a

perfect blank canvas to create his greatest work and this obsession becoming a reality. A simple way I've always described it is a retelling of the Frankenstein story. Both are about obsession but instead of being about science this one is about art."

The film is tense and visually striking, with a muted palette chosen both as a reflection of Bob's mood and to enhance the impact of the art. "Tattooing is as much of a star of the film as our two lead actors. The only way we can hold the viewers' sympathy for Bob is for us to see the beauty in his creation. There are moments in the film where I really want people to go 'wow she looks amazing' and be able to see what Bob sees."

The tattoos themselves— which definitely do evoke that 'wow' moment Kevin hoped for—were created by The Family Business, headed up by Mo Coppoletta and a team

Tattooing is as much of a star of the film as our two lead actors



comprised of Diletta Lembo, Ricky Williams, Fredy Ricca and Fredrik Reinel. And the relationship between Kevin and Mo added a heap of creative fuel to the fire.

From their initial meeting it was clear that Mo had a real grasp, not only of the story but of the character of Bob. It was his idea that Bob's masterpiece should have a melancholic, Memento Mori style to reflect the mindset of a man who is coming to terms with his own mortality. As the film was based in London, Mo also suggested that Katia's body suit should have London-Victoriana vibe. The Family Business studio even makes an appearance onscreen with all the tattoo parlour shots taking place in Mo's Exmouth Market shop.

Learning To Fake It

Richard Brake, is no stranger to ink. His Doom-Head character is a popular tattoo

subject. He sports quite a collection of his own ink too. "I have my kids name's tattooed onto me. One is on my lower back, and the other on my forearm. I also have a lyrics to a Cure song spread across the top half of my back. I'm more into words than pictures, I guess. It was a stroke of luck I chose a very obscure old English font for the forearm tattoo. It's impossible to make out that it says 'Henry'. So it rarely gets covered up by make up artists when I'm filming. It just looks like some crazy gothic writing. Kind of fits a lot of the characters I play. We even used it in Perfect Skin."

However, learning to look at home behind a tattoo needle was a whole new challenge. "It's such an incredible art and skill. I have so much respect for tattoo artists. I had about three weeks to prepare, so I spent a lot of time shadowing and learning from the artists



at Mo Coppoletta's Family Business in London. I could not have done it without them. They were very patient with the skinny actor hanging around their shop, day after day, asking stupid questions. I learned as much as I could. I completely immersed myself in it, practicing daily—without a needle of course. No one in their right mind would let me near

I learned as much as I could. I completely immersed myself in it, practicing daily—without a needle of course. No one in their right mind would let me near them with a needle!

them with a needle! I really wanted to make sure I looked authentic. Like someone who had been doing this work his whole life. Not easy in three weeks. But I couldn't have done it without those guys at Family Business. I hope the pros out there who watch the film aren't disappointed."

For many of us, art and obsession are a fine line. Have the guys ever felt themselves drifting into obsession? Kevin: "I think you have to be obsessed to be a first time director and get a feature financed and made in this country. It's taken around six years from the initial idea. We got there in the end, just don't check my cellar, you don't know who or what you'll find down there!" Richard? "Everyday. Honestly. Everyday. It's a curse and a blessing! But I wouldn't want to live any other way." ▣



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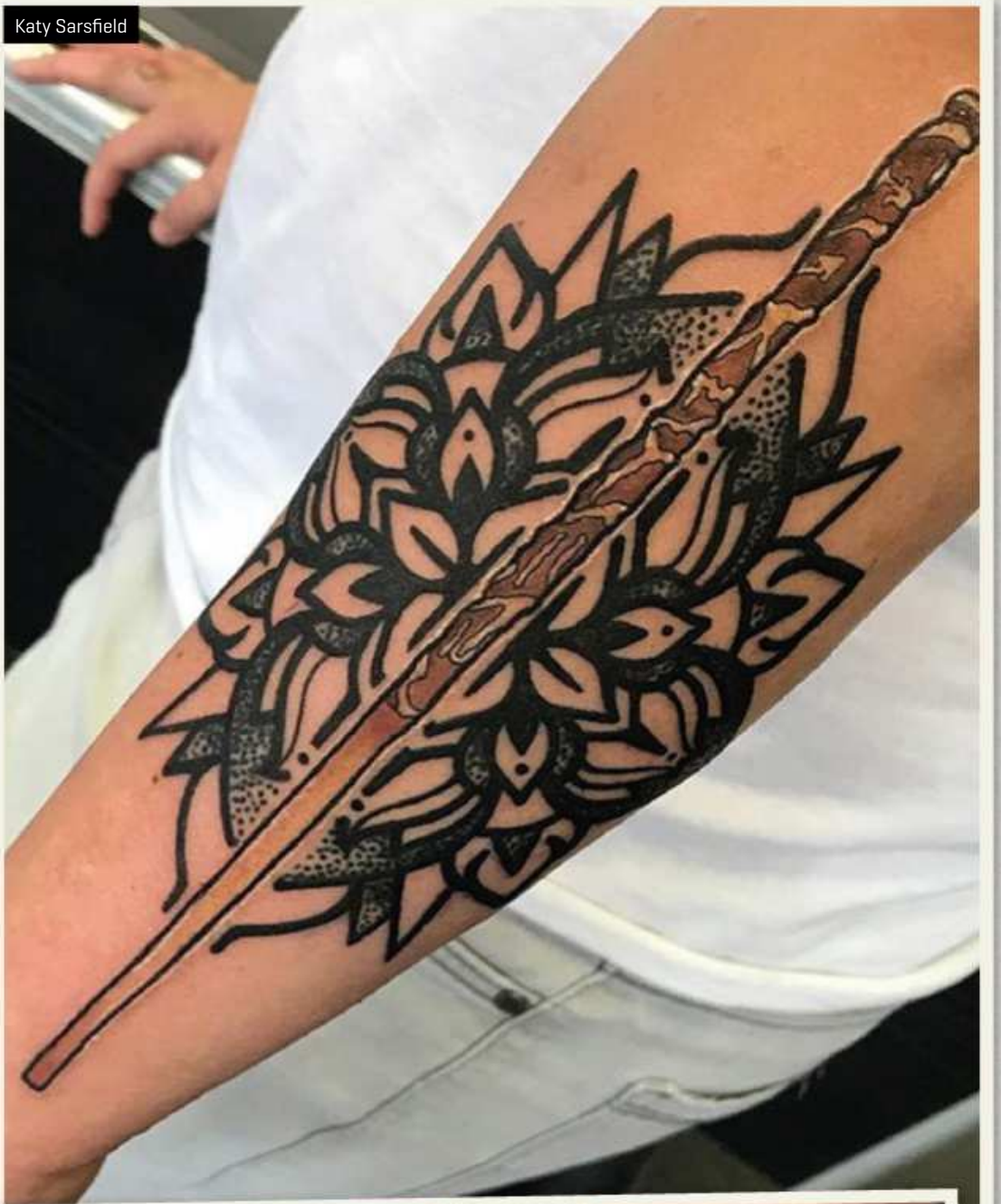
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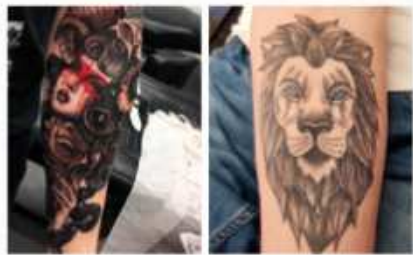
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